Review Essay/Essai bibliographique

Riley, Alexander, W.S.F. Pickering and William Watts Miller. eds. *Durkheim, The Durkheimians and the Arts*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn, Durkheim Press/Berghahn Books, 2013. 309 pp.

Despite the omnivorous appetite of sociology to investigate multiple facets of social reality, including itself, the domain of art has retained much of its pristine purity in the sociological curriculum. How come this benign neglect, asks Alexander Riley in the editorial introduction to a wake–up call not heard since Robert Nisbet's *Sociology as Art Form?* Amidst Jeremiadic lamentations, the finger is pointed at "the Durkheimian tradition's failure to address art in any substantive way." Yet, the editors of this volume have accepted a brave challenge, of going to that tradition itself — the classic domain of positivism — to find "one of the most compelling intersections between sociological thought and art to date" (5)

It is initially a daunting task. The image we have of Durkheim, and most of the common photographs available, are those of a very cerebral, intensely serious academic, a workaholic at Bordeaux and at the Sorbonne. Although he lived in a France that was an art capital of the world, a center of both high culture and popular culture, it is hard to imagine Durkheim either going to the Louvre, or to the Salon des Indépendants (where avant garde artists exhibited), much less to Montmartre to enjoy the popular culture of cabaret settings at the Folies Bergères, the Moulin de la Galette, and particularly, Aristide Bruant's Le Mirliton. Yet, that was a milieu of modernity, on the fringe of respectability, with a nascent bohemian culture that attracted, in Durkheim's lifetime and up to the end of the Third Republic, not only high culture artists such as Debussy and Satie, but also daring entertainers in the 1920s like Joséphine Baker dancing bare–breast with a background of ostrich feathers, mixed with leftist reformers attracted to a working class clientele favored by Bruant, and artistically depicted by Toulouse–Lautrec. Somehow, it is hard to see Durkheim going to Montmartre with fellow staid republican academics to observe "rau-

cous musical performances, popularized dances in loose and licentious social milieus that each establishment cultivated.[1]

But might this not have happened to his nephew Marcel Mauss? As a "mental experiment" is it not possible to think of jovial and inquisitive Mauss and his erstwhile friend Henri Hubert having, before 1914, gone to see what cabaret culture, as a form of modern art milieu, was like? Whether or not such an event did happen has left no trace, and certainly not in the meagre Section Seven, "Sociologie Esthétique" in the *Année Sociologique* which reviewed works of art, with Hubert a major contributor. So what makes this volume intellectually exciting?

The triumvirate editors have put together an imaginative set of authors, representing different generations, who have already made important contributions to recent Durheimiana. In what may be seen as the re-institutionalization of Durkheim, William Watts Miller and particularly W.S.F. Pickering have played key roles in establishing a lively foyer at Oxford, with a variety of conferences and quality publications of the Durkheim Press and a journal of publications, Durkheimian Studies/ Études Durkheimiennes. So it is appropriate that these two are given to open this volume.

Miller, following his probing *A Durkheimian Quest: Solidarity and the Sacred* (2012), boldly seeks in Durkheim's last work, *The Elemental Forms of Religious Life (*Miller's terminology in lieu of *Elementary*) a "total aesthetics" in which music, hymns, drama, face–masks, hairstyles, feasts, festivals and whatnots are fused together in a great collective event (17). It is the setting of collective effervescence which brings to a head the elemental rites of religion which are critical to generating the energies that are at the heart of religion. In drawing together the "total aesthetics" in *The Elemental Forms*, Miller proposes that a general Durkheimian theory of art is not about art as beauty, but about power and energy. The notion of *collective effervescence* takes Miller to a rapid consideration of aesthetics in various forms, concretely and abstractly.

W.S.F. Pickering, who has plumbed the religious matrix of Durkheim at great depth better than anybody else, first notes Durkheim's ambivalence to art. In describing and interpreting the rituals of the Arunta of Australia, art is favorably viewed as an integral part of religion (44), and beyond that, art and play are useful in restoring the energy of the quotidian. But, elsewhere, particularly in his lectures and writings on educa-

1. The citation is from an entry at the exhibit, "Cheap Thrills: the Highs and Lows of Cabaret Culture in Paris, 1881–1939," February 18–May12, exh. Perkins Library, Duke University Durham, NC (February–August 2014), Alexis M. Clark, Kathryn Desplanque, Emilie–Anne Luse, and Laura Moure Cecchini, curators.

tion, art was viewed by Durkheim negatively, as detracting from the human condition of *l'existence sérieuse.* Pickering sees Durkheim's modal anti–art commitment as stemming in part from the iconoclastic tradition of Judaism, that was transmitted in his home but also in his own personality, one of serious demeanor, eventually working himself to death and perfectly in tune with the high moral standards of the *République des professeurs.* Tacitly, in establishing one pillar of the sociological tradition, Durkheim saw work + moral rectitude as the center of *la vie sérieuse;* arts and leisure activities (from avant–garde art to cabaret popular culture) as *la vie légère* (49). Unfortunately, while Durkheim might have discerned art as a foil — if not erstwhile foe — to *la vie sérieuse,* he did not give it sustained attention, which might well have opened up a new sociological vista on modernity. Pickering closes by noting that junior members of the *équipe,* starting with Mauss (who, after World War I, was the titular head of the tradition), did not share Durkheim's antipathy (54), but does not probe further than a gentle "the debate between the moral and the aesthetical is by no means foreclosed" (55).

Durkheim's unwitting discovery of the "sacred" in the Australian ethnographic data of Spencer and Gillen offered him a tool of far–reaching theoretical importance in uncovering the dynamics of social organization. But this elixir did not go beyond the sparkle of "collective effervescence" half way through the *Formes Élémentaires.* Perhaps because Durkheim, in the short period of life before he became a civilian victim of World War I, had more pressing matters than to systematize a theory of art, the sacred, and social organization, around the poles of sacralization and secularization. It could also be due to the disarray of the Durkheimian School, which lost in the war some of the most promising members with special theoretical promise in the arts and religion (like Hertz, Gelly and André Durkheim), that the mantle of Durkheim fell on his first student and nephew, Marcel Mauss. Although intellectually gifted *sans pareil,* Mauss was poor in organizational skills and ultimately failed in holding the Durkheimian center together.

Before picking up Mauss, however, one may note sparks of the original Durkheimian tradition in new ventures covered in this volume. Here I would place Jean–Louis Fabiani adroitly using Durkheimian tools to uncover the artistic–political interface of major cultural festivals in France, such as the film festival at Cannes and the theater festival at Avignon. His analysis of popular festivals, despite its great condensation, is oriented to mitigating reading *The Forms* as an ideological support of (LeBon) crowd psychology. Donald Nielsen for his contribution ("Dostoevsky in the Mirror of Durkheim") contrasts the perspective of Dostoevsky and Durkheim — who never met — on key problems of modernity, such

as the corrosion of egoism. Nielsen brings together the effects of egoism coming into Russian mentality as nihilism with Durkheim's idea of anomie. Both, in the loosened social fabric of modernity, can ultimately lead to a pathological outcome: suicide. Nielsen provides a refresher course in discussing Dostoeveky's view of guilt and responsibility, and the idea of suffering and redemption; but more related to the volume is his discussion of the delirious reception of Dostoevesky's 1881 speech at the dedication of the Pushkin memorial. The event, Nielsen notes, "was a veritable collective effervescence, a promise of cultural renewal and the future transformation of Russian thought and sentiment" (112). Perhaps both Durkheimian scholars and Vladimir Putin would separately benefit from seeing that speech reproduced!

Another fresh and imaginative piece is presented by Sarah Dayne in her article on popular music, with its focus of a 1939 essay by Maurice Halbwachs, looking at Kansas City jazz. Halbwachs, incidentally, was one of the most creative of Durkheim's students, in economic sociology, cognitive sociology, social pathology, and early translator of Weber into French. In this later and complex essay on music, Halbwachs deepens his analysis of the role of language in memory, extending his earlier writing on the social framing of memory which had taken him close to a structural analysis of thought; Daynes, in this background look at Halbwachs, notes that "language is what orders and provides the very structure of thought" (158). With jazz musicians (encountered in his visit to America), Halbwachs turned his attention away from social frameworks to communication based on a shared language. "How do we make music?" seems like an innocent question, but Halbwachs takes us beyond the language of musical theory to the social world in which music is created (162). In Kansas City, music was very much a collective enterprise, attracting musicians from all over the United States, including many African–American musicians who could not read music and therefore had to play by ear. In the early part of the century, Kansas City jazz took roots in African–American music: "call and response sections, unwritten music, head arrangements, and a twelve–bar blues structure" (163). In the absence of written music, playing by ear, the playing of complex music that demands some degree of virtuosity, requires a shared language between musicians, one which gives place to interpretation: citing jazz trumpeteer Wynton Marsalis, "a jazz musician needs to know what other musicians mean when "they're talking to you."" As Dayne follows the evolution of jazz to hip–hop and reggae, covering a vast amount of popular culture, she emphasizes reinterpretation as a creative process, including that both Kansas City jazz and especially the blues

make extensive use of double–entendre by which seemingly innocuous songs will, to insiders, express much more than is explicitly said (172).

Reflecting a renaissance in the appreciation of Mauss[2], a good many of the contributions deal directly with his interesting but rather scant contributions. Michèle Richman's essay, "Marcel Mauss on Art and Aesthetics: the Politics of Division, Isolation and Totality" — following on from her brilliant monograph *Sacred Revolutions: Durkheim and the Collège de Sociologie* — is a long chapter devoted to Mauss's writings on art and aesthetics, which have never been collected into a single volume. Her essay may be seen as the making of a catalogue raisonné of Mauss's aesthetics. Perhaps one can even treat Mauss as opening a sort of "revisionism" in the Durkheimian tradition, although that may better be used, as discussed later, with some who studied with Mauss and came to prominence (or notoriety) in the tumultuous interwar years.

Undoubtedly one of the most gifted of Mauss's many students was Claude Lévi–Strauss, the architect who made structural anthropology a leading post–war mode of exploring deep and binary structures of human thought buried deep in the culture of society. In the early 1950s, he was instrumental in reintroducing Mauss to a post–war generation. Esoteric as his La Pensée Sauvage might seem, his tie with Durkheim's structural approach to solidarity also shows in The Elementary Forms of Kinship, and just as much in demonstrating that "primitivism" does not differentiate Western and non–Western human beings. The essay in this volume of Stephan Moebius and Frithjof Nengesser looks at just a couple of Lévi–Strauss's important structuralist debts to Durkheim and especially to Mauss in the specifics of "the savage mind" (179). The classification theory of Durkheim and Mauss, and Mauss's later seminal notion of "the total social fact" as a methodological research directive are extensively discussed, along with the Durkheimian critique of Malinowski's utilitarian or functionalist derivation of social institutions.

Although they note differences between the "younger" member of the distinguished lineage and his forebears, one can still see visible traces of the tradition, at least in the field of art. Without considering what has remained of it in contemporary French sociology (especially with the passing of Philippe Besnard and Raymond Boudon but with a new spark at Bordeaux, Matthieu Béra), the editors have chosen to end the volume with materials from the bleak autumn days of the Third Republic in the

2. See Marcel Fournier, *Marcel Mauss: A Biography.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006; Wendy James and N.J. Allen, eds., *Marcel Mauss. A Centenary Tribute*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1998; "Special issue on Marcel Mauss: A Living Inspiration", guest editors Keith Hart and Wendy James, *Journal of Classical Sociology,* February 2014: 14 (1).

late 1930s which preceded the harsh winter of the Nazi occupation in the early 1940s. The *pièces de résistance* in the volume are two figures, Michel Leiris and Roger Bataille, who picked up on Durkheim's trail of the sacred and carried it into what to an unsuspecting sociologist may seem like a "twilight zone", occupied by what editor Riley has elsewhere dubbed "renegade Durkheimians"[3].

Leiris (1901–1990) is well suited as the subject for centerpiece in this volume. He was no "ordinary" sociologist, as Riley shows us in his essay "Sex, Death, the Other and Art: The Search for the Mythic in the Work of Michel Leiris." He followed courses of Mauss, but also studied philosophy and literature, came under the influence of André Breton and the Surrealist movement, and had a decisive encounter with the sacred while taking part in the epochal African ethnographic expedition of Marcel Griaule (212). He was a prolific and respected writer, but Riley notes Leiris could not refrain from violating orthodox ethnographic writing, and thereby invoking criticism by establishment academics, including his former teacher Mauss, for doing the work of a poet (213).

Riley emphasizes Leiris seeking to develop an anthropological literature of *ek–statis,* a new kind of sociology of the extra–mundane, outside of orthodox sociology but dealing with an interstitial space joining social science, literature, and psychoanalysis. Leiris noted in his notebooks on the sacred, this new sociological writing is "through sexual encounter, and especially sexual encounter, real or imaginary with the Other" (214). The emphasis on eroticism and sexual encounters could well qualify Leiris as a "renegade" Durkheimian, as Riley also indicates Leiris" continuing ties to Mauss (and Hertz). So, in writing about the spectacle of the *corrida* that he witnessed, Leiris viewed it as a kind of Maussian total social fact: a sporting event, a work of art, and a sacrifice similar to religious rites classified as such. Drawing from Hertz's structural analysis of the left hand, the "impure sacred", more and more asserts itself as the *tauromachy (*bull fighting) goes on through ritualized stages of *tercio de varas*, to the *tercio de banderillas*, and finally, the *tercio de muerte* with the return of the right hand. Riley also tells us that Leiris saw literary and ethnographic writing as itself being a kind of artistic bull–fighting, implying great risk, if not the risk of actual death, having witnessed the death of a kindred renegade, Colette Peignot (221), who led a passionate life seeking to transgress societal norms no matter what the cost with Leiris' friend, Bataille.

3. Alexander T. Riley, ""Renegade Durkheimianism" and the Transgressive left sacred", pp. 274–301 in Jeffrey C. Alexander and Philip Smith, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Durkheim.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

The last subject to be treated in this volume is Georges Bataille (1897–1962), a highly complex, talented, prolific writer, novelist, who could write on Lascaux and the birth of art as easily as he could on sin, sex, and eroticism. Although the influence of Mauss and his reading of *The Elementary Forms* put him in some contact with the original Durkheimian tradition, equally, if not more powerful influences, came from his involvement with Breton and Surrealism, Nietzsche, and André Gide, and their ultimate predecessors, the Comte de Lautréamont (the young author of *Les Chants de Maldoror* which became a sort of Book of Revelation for the Surrealists) and the Marquis de Sade. To dress such a turbulent person as Bataille into proper sociological attire is practically impossible, though Riley has previously (2005) done a fairly good attempt of introducing him to an Anglo–Saxon social science audience.

Before tackling the essays in the present volume that focus on Bataille, one should be aware of how to consider him as a "renegade" Durkheimian (an apt appellation that Bataille's individualism would undoubtedly reject). Earlier we have noted that Durkheim "discovered" the sacred in the collective rituals of the Australians. The forces generated in the emotions of the assembly provided a "collective effervescence" that lifted those gathered above the quotidian, into an encounter with the sacred. Durkheim was familiar with a view of the Godhead (the sacred) having not only the shining quality of "purity", of enhancing the collectivity, but also, in a dark or "impure" image, of destruction, of malevolence. The former is what Durkheim saw as the road for sociology to follow in its quest for "the good society." But the "sacred–impure" is also attractive, as a force in the underside of society. It was attractive for some poets and writers and for some who sought to radically undo the organized social world. In France, at least, the utter destruction of World War I and its pre–war respectability, made Surrealism and psychoanalysis (with a dose of Marxism) more attractive trails than adherence to an orthodox Durkheimian republican tradition. And the 1930s in Europe combined years of economic depression with political decay into a new *fin–de–siècle* ethos. That seemed to perfectly suit Bataille.

Of the two chapters allotted to Bataille, I found Claudine Frank's "Acéphale/Parsifal contra Wagner" focused, engaging, and informative. As a sort of bonus, although Bataille did write on art (ranging from the cave paintings of Lascaux to the impressionist Manet), it is only in her essay that one finds artistic sketches, not by Bataille himself but by a fellow member (Jacques Chavy) of a secret society. That radical organization, *Acéphale*, which published a journal for two years with the same name, was created by Bataille to directly explore to the fullest sacrifice and eroticism. It had "consultants" well known in the Paris intellectual

world of the last years of the French Third Republic, like Leiris and Roger Caillois, and the only woman allowed, Laure (Colette Peignot, Bataille's anguished lover). It was an extension of the short–lived *Collège de Sociologie* also organized by Bataille, Leiris and Caillois, which had public discussions on various archaic themes of rituals, including Mauss' *The Gift*. *Acéphale,* Frank informs the reader, was "a secret knighthood that paradoxically defied the military spirit in the cultural and sociological imagination" (266). Drawing on the theme of sacrifice (a cornerstone of Mauss' sociology of religion), the "renegade" aspect of Bataille made the endeavor of the secret society to have a human sacrifice of one of its members, apparently its leader, Bataille himself. That project was never consummated.

Frank deftly navigates through the thick trail of ancient myths and rituals that Richard Wagner drew upon for his opera Parcifal. That Wagner's music became approved by the Nazi regime made anti–Parcifal an objective of Bataille's organization, with fascism a prime target as one manifestation of late capitalism. If the terrifying youth of Hitler thrived on the myths that created Parcifal, Bataille and the mythic *Acéphale* would turn primitivism and paganism against the staged aestheticism of the opera, and in the process recuperate heroic "tragedy" from nationalism and militarism (278). Freely drawing on Durkheim and Mauss, *Acéphale* sought "to harness the dynamogenic force of the Durkheimian sacred" (279). Frank's ensuing discussion of the theatrical presentations of Bataille, drawing from a great variety of myths and rituals, encoated in violence, illuminates how Bataille sought for his secret society to be a radical avant–garde ordre, not just "a lunatic knighthood" (289). It did not succeed; at least short–term as Hitler's Germany crushed France in 1940, bringing to an end Bataille's exoteric *Collège de Sociologie* and his esoteric radical *Acéphale.*

The volume ends without an editorial summation regarding the future of the sociology of art. It has well covered an important canonical trail from Durkheim, one that is familiar to American audiences. One might well wish that in the editorial introduction at least passing mention might be made of four interwar volumes that constitute the *Annales Sociologiques (1935–1942)* which doggedly followed the original Durkheim tradition of the AS. Its section "Esthétique" was headed by Charles Lalo (1877–1953), who, unlike the "renegades", became professor at the Sorbonne in 1933, and sought to develop art as related to the aesthetics of social life. Perhaps the editors will be encouraged to present a follow–up volume, on the intersection of art thought and social change in our late stage of modernity.

Echoing Bill Pickering's earlier statement about the debate between the moral and the aesthetic in society, one can perhaps draw a lesson from where the trail of the sacred might lead after the liberation of the "collective conscience." For Durkheim, it was the hope of the renewal of republican democracy, of social solidarity and social inclusion. For Leiris and particularly Bataille, the trail of sacredness, sacrifice, sexual liberation, ending in death and violence were means of ending a decadent civilization. Structurally, it brought them far closer to the hated Nazis than they realized. Ironically, their sacred *Collège de Sociologie* and its inner *Acéphale* may be viewed as a return of "The Sorcerer's Apprentice", rendered in verse in Goethe's 1797 ballad, *Zauberlehling*. Adapted to the sociology of art, when the old sorcerer (Durkheim) departed from his workshop, one apprentice (Bataille) sought to enchant a broom to do the work that the old sorcerer had laid out by switching to a magic broom. But lacking the wisdom and knowledge of the master, the "apprentice" cannot stop the broom, and the floor is awash.

I will let readers look up full details of this old tale, and judge whether it fits one of the traditions in the sociology of art. It might not in today's sociology, but on the other hand, the "other" tradition has entered in more of everyday life.

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