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Introduction: the new Durkheim

What does Durkheim mean for social science and social theory today?

This is a deceptively simple question. One way to attempt an answer is to put a deconstructive twist on the standard sociological literature about the production of culture and knowledge. It is commonplace within that field to suggest that authors produce texts to send messages to others. As participants in intellectual markets, writers strive to meet collegial expectations and hope to gain recognition in exchange (Collins this volume; Hagstrom 1965; Lamont 1987). Yet when an author's work has staying power beyond its immediate context, this being the very quality that distinguishes a truly great contribution, something much more intriguing happens. Readings proliferate that are unintended and unpredictable, with determinations that go far beyond those that could have been consciously anticipated by the maker of the original text. Time reverses the direction of influence. New contexts of interpretation come to rewrite texts as authors and theories are re-narrated for present relevance. Next, these critical interventions are themselves reworked and rethought. Eventually a layered field of immense dialogic activity is formed as words, ideas, their underlying structures of feeling and analytic choices accumulate and attach to the classical bedrock. It is precisely this sequential accretion of complexity and controversy that marks out the proper and full domain for inquiry into a great scholar. Because foundational texts and subsequent commentaries alike should be understood as social facts as well as a hermeneutic practice, we must give due attention to both scholarly intents and intellectual contexts. In thinking through questions about Durkheim and his legacy, we come to engage with others. These relate less to the cultural and intellectual preoccupations of other ages and more to those of our own.

So it is that this collected volume stands testament not only to Durkheim's posthumously evolving, and increasingly better understood, intellectual portfolio, but to current, pressing social and intellectual concerns. A marking stone that appears midway between the centennials of Durkheim's

first (1893) and last (1912) major books, the *Cambridge Companion to Durkheim* captures not only the great French thinker's current incarnation, but also the challenges engaging contemporary social theory and the society in which it is circumscribed.

The many Durkheims and their fates

In the contribution that forms the next chapter of this volume, Marcel Fournier remarks on the enduring mystery of Durkheim as man and mind. Although he gave us clues and traces, we are left with a biography that is curiously elusive. The real "who" of Durkheim slips through our fingers. Socialist, positivist, establishment figure, Jew and, of course, sociologist – Durkheim was all of these but cannot be reduced to their sum, their boundaries, or even their dialogue. Durkheim's biography is a terrain that produces its own surplus. Much the same can be said for his thought, which exhibits a tension between promises of consistency and evidence of fragmentation. So it is that Philippe Besnard (this volume) demonstrates that Durkheim slips through the formalist intellectual grids that many have tried to impose on his conceptual universe. His concepts and typologies exhibit tantalizing geometries, but these never quite run in parallel, so we end up trying to hammer round pegs into square holes. Even at the level of the individual word or phrase it seems impossible to fix Durkheim's intent. As Karen Fields documents (this volume), Durkheim's carefully chosen vocabulary and expression is often intrinsically multivalent. This has thrown down a formidable challenge to translators for the past century, forcing them to make the toughest of interpretative choices. They have wrestled with Durkheim's thinking in the full knowledge that they do violence to its subtleties even as they attempt to be faithful unto it. If we can find this ambivalence in lived biography, in conceptual schemas and in the printed words of original text, it should come as no surprise that we can trace non-Euclidian contradictions in the vectors of Durkheim interpretations as these have arced through the last century and headed off towards new and uncharted vanishing points. Let's review this geometry and history.

Gathering up the scholarly missives left behind by earlier generations of Durkheim's admirers, one notes with irony that the great advocate of the social fact as an objective, external, ontologically unavoidable thing was unable to fix in hard stone his own interpretation. Durkheim the social scientist intended his texts to be closed, definitive and "writerly" in Barthes' (1975) terms. Yet, the tangled webs of Durkheim exegesis have demonstrated time and time again that his writings are open, suggestive and "readerly." As Karen Fields (this volume) illustrates, Durkheim's style, particularly in

The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1912) is one of surprising complexity and literary creativity. Although highlighted in the problematic of translation, interpretative choices also confront native readers. Such textual qualities assisted a more sociological process in which Durkheim metamorphosed into a totem, a symbol whose diverse interpretations lay not only in his texts or volitions but also in less personal, more collective institutional and cultural determinations. It is precisely because he was blown hither and thither like a feather in the social, cultural, and theoretical winds of other epochs and agendas, precisely because he was readerly and not writerly, that Durkheim has passed down to us such a diverse, rewarding and ultimately surprising intellectual inheritance.

Even Durkheim's immediate survivors in France found themselves in possession of an ambiguous legacy. Alexander outlines the great tensions in Durkheim's early and middle period writings in this volume. It should not be surprising, then, that the disciples of *Année sociologique* pursued contradictory lines of inquiry that careened between more symbolic and more structural, more radical and more conservative lines of analysis. Notwithstanding the productivity of these scholars, and the fact that they were in positions of real influence, new followers of Durkheimian sociology were hard to recruit after the First World War. As Randall Collins remarks in this volume, Durkheim was stigmatized as a member of the "old guard." He became a lightning rod for dissatisfaction with centrist Third Republican politics and normativizing neo-Kantian philosophy. Zygmunt Bauman's contribution to this book demonstrates this line of interpretation continuing to resonate today, albeit with a postmodern shift in sensibility that exhibits the anxieties of our era.

Yet, as Alexander Riley elaborates in this volume, at the very same time that Durkheim was reviled as an Establishment figure, he became, perhaps unwittingly, the founder of a politically radical and intellectually iconoclastic school of surprising originality and scope. Ideas about the "impure sacred" were taken from *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) (hereafter *Elementary Forms*) – where they make only a brief, inconsistent but provocative appearance – as well as from the work of Durkheim's student Robert Hertz. These were elaborated by members of the Parisian *Collège de sociologie* and alchemized into a transgressive sociology that added a shot of Nietzschean spirit to the already heady cocktail of Durkheimian symbolic and ritual theory. In the hands of such social thinkers as Georges Bataille and Rogers Caillois, this saw the non-rational, erotic, existential, evil and unconscious deployed in an insistent effort to push back the restrictive limits on human experience imposed by the rationalization of modern life. Despite inauspicious beginnings – the *Collège* folded after scarcely two years – this

inter-war curiosity was subsequently tessellated with textual and semiotic understandings of culture within the broader, more rigorous and more significant mosaic of post-structural and post-Marxist thought. We return to this pattern of influence later.

Meanwhile, a very different Durkheim was taking shape within the English speaking world. Barely 300 miles from Paris, in the oak paneled halls of Oxford and Cambridge, Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard, and Myer-Fortes took Durkheim to be the pioneering advocate of a new scientific theory of institutions. In this scenario, Durkheim was neither Republican priest nor bohemian prophet, but a rigorous academic whose collectivistic visions order and resolute acknowledgment of the functional demands imposed by intertwined organizations provided the key for robust but rather deterministic interpretations of such exotic puzzles as kinship systems, sorcery, and sacrifice. Pivotal to this view were Durkheim's early and middle period works. While we now see the complexity and ambiguity of these writings (Alexander this volume), it was the social-structural emphasis of *The Division of Labor in Society* ([1893] 1964) (hereafter *Division of Labor*), the functionalist and positivist methodology of *The Rules of Sociological Method* ([1895] 1966) (hereafter *Rules*), the objectivism and determinism of *Suicide* ([1897] 1966) that struck Durkheim's anthropological observers in the 1930s and 1940s. Read in this way, these books provided an intellectual Erector Set with which the girders, nuts, and bolts of both field observation and armchair-anthropological erudition could be bolted together into more complex and determined articulations, each component playing its role in the stability of an edifice that was at once empirical account and theoretical armature. Only towards the end of this golden age do we see signs of change. The interpretative revisions that informed Evans-Pritchard's *Nuer Religion* (1956) already indicated a move towards a more hermeneutic rather than functionalist understanding of belief systems.

Some three thousand miles to the west, Talcott Parsons was busily converting Durkheim into a pillar of what came eventually to be known as action theory. Less interested at this stage of his career in determining functions than in institutionalizing morality, Parsons saw Durkheim through a Weberian lens as a perceptive theorist of normatively driven human agency and an interpreter of the cultural underpinnings of social life. Parsons ([1937] 1968) drew upon *Elementary Forms* as much as upon the *Division of Labor* in this early effort to demonstrate the centrality of non-rational components in social life and social action. In so doing, his project can be subtly distinguished from the British anthropologists with their interest in gathering objective social facts and explaining social order. Yet when another American, Robert Merton (1968 [1938]), presented his Durkheimian theory

that deviance resulted from dynamic tensions between social means and individual ends, he was indebted less to the Durkheim of Parsons, his teacher, than to a Durkheim similar to that of the British anthropologists. This was a figure who highlighted the divisions of social labor and their intersection with social structure in patterns of integration, opportunity, and anomie.

Looking back at the first half of the twentieth century, then, we can see a set of distinctions emerging. These were to become consolidated in the second half as ground rules, or codes, for interpreting and identifying a "real" Durkheim. They marked out a cultural Durkheim (Parsons) from a more structural Durkheim (British anthropology, Merton) and a conservative Durkheim (Third Republic critics) from a radical Durkheim (the *Collège de sociologie*). Arguments for each of these positions have been repeatedly made on the basis of published and unpublished writings, in intellectual histories, and in the details of Durkheim's life. Because we refer to these in the remaining discussion they need only be briefly summarized here. Structural Durkheimianism highlights the submerged morphological forces, legal constraints, and abstract *conscience collective* (collective consciousness/conscience) that narrate the *Division of Labor*, the mechanistic interactions and associations that animate *Suicide*, and the functional determinism and epistemological collectivism suggested by *Rules*. The conservative Durkheim talks about stability, legitimacy, democratic law, and social conformity, not only as empirical realities but also as ideals for the construction of a good society. Radical Durkheimianism points to creativity, effervescence, the need to explode routinization via passionate association and transcendent ritual, and to the ethical imperative to overcome the pathological division of labor with socialism and solidarity. Cultural Durkheimianism takes off from the symbolic classifications, rituals, and discussions of the soul and solidaristic passions that animate the later works, most notably the *Elementary Forms*.

In the second half of the twentieth century, "new" interpretations of Durkheim by both advocates and critics invariably took off from one or more of these positions. We can read this history very much as a case of new wine being poured into old bottles. Although each new argument had distinctive qualities of vintage and intellectual *terroir*, and might have involved a little creative blending, all were made from the same four grape varieties – the same four Durkheims. The fifties and sixties saw a more structural Parsons (1966) give centrality to Durkheim's evolutionary model of social development, moving back to *Division of Labor* and away from *Elementary Forms*. This Durkheim-via-later-Parsons illuminates the transition to modernity in terms of differentiation, value generalization, and growing social system complexity. These shifts in Parsons' reading meant that a structural and

conservative Durkheim overshadowed the cultural and radical Durkheim during the mid-century period in the United States. Ironically, this move was taking place just as British social anthropology began to shift towards a more cultural approach to Durkheim. Despite possibilities for convergence, the two interpretative projects crossed like ships in the night – there was no substantial interchange.

Parsons' later understanding formed the basis for modernization theory (e.g. Levy 1952; Smelser 1959, and Eisenstadt 1963) and reached its apotheosis of structural determinism and democratic conservatism in the writings of Niklas Luhmann (1982). Alongside this structural Durkheim there developed an equally cautious cultural one. W. Lloyd Warner ([1959] 1975) treated modern American life as a cosmologically patterned and ritually integrated mass tribe organized around a cult of the dead. It was an approach without great subtlety, but it did at least get the cultural Durkheim onto the agenda as a resource for explaining life in "advanced" societies. A much more sophisticated and more critical extension of Durkheim's later work unfolded under Parsons' influence. Robert Bellah (1972) interpreted America as organized, and challenged, by a tightly integrated civil religion. Edward Shils (1975) illuminated the sacred centers of mass societies, emphasizing how once peripheral groups had become incorporated through education and majestic secular rituals and how ideas of sacrality were pivotal to the legitimacy of core social institutions.

Exciting as this movement was, it had trouble uncoupling the cultural Durkheim from his structural and conservative avatars. The belief that societal evolution led to universalism and value generalization was implicit within the cultural frames developed by Bellah and Shils. So dysfunctions and social exclusion were framed as the relics of tradition or as incomplete institutionalization rather than being imminent to modernity or the binary logic of cultural codes. A retrieval of Durkheim's sustained critique of anomie, perhaps filtered through Merton's reading of the ironies and dysfunctions of the American value system, might have allowed this line of thinking to become a more hard hitting indictment of the present. The necessary connections connecting the periphery to anomie or civil religion to exclusion were never made.

This missed opportunity created an unsurpassed intellectual vulnerability to radical critique. Produced in the afterglow of postwar high modernity, these affirmative readings of structural and cultural Durkheim and their sociological elaborations in empirical research were attacked and discredited, even as they reached their fullest elaboration during the turbulent, contentious decades of the sixties and seventies. For the rebellious intellectuals of that time, as had once been the case for their counterparts in 1920s

and 1930s France, Durkheim had become a kind of Goliath against whom various Davids could bid for glory. Or, to switch metaphorical reference, Durkheim now seemed a lumbering anachronism whose proper home was in some Jurassic Park of intellectual dinosaurs.

Blind to the possibility of a radical Durkheim, self-proclaimed conflict theorists read Durkheim through Parsons and then indicted them both. Durkheim became synonymous with theoretical functionalism, with amoral conservatism, with Kantian abstraction and with methodological dead ends. And so it was that, in Charles Tilly's (1981) infamous condemnation, the French founder was declared "useless" for a historical sociology that needed to explore conflict and change. Critical theorists pointed to the manner in which the empirical claims of Durkheimian sociologists often outstripped their theoretical mandate, particularly when themes of social consensus were at play. Railing against "normative functionalism" (in effect an analytic fusion of the cultural, structural and conservative Durkheims), David Lockwood (1964) pointed out that societies seemed to cohere without overarching values, not because of them, and that Durkheim had hopelessly confounded social integration (cultural consensus) and system integration (social order), a criticism that Michael Mann (1970) and Jürgen Habermas (1986) later picked up. Early efforts towards a cultural Durkheimianism were shown to be severely flawed by virtue of their functionalist strain. Steven Lukes (1975) attacked Durkheimian understandings of ritual, suggesting that integrative effects were poorly measured and unevenly distributed and had more to do with cognitive-ideological than affective-moral force. A new and often avowedly anti-Durkheimian approach to ritual as conflict emerged, theorizing a sphere of contestation in which sponsors struggled to engage audiences and establish hegemonic meanings (e.g. Bourdieu 1990: 200-70; Lincoln 1989).

During the same period, and in a remarkably parallel process, the rising tide of "microsociology" condemned a structural Durkheim. Their exclusive focus on everyday life, face-to-face interaction and conversation demanded, in effect, a "collectivist" and "determinist" ancestor to oppose. This Durkheim could be understood for all practical purposes as denying human creativity and agency and as holding positivist certainties about the transparency of social facts that were, at best, sociologically naïve. Even constructively intended efforts, such as Goffman's micro theories of interaction rituals (1967), had the effect of pushing contemporary sociology off its Durkheimian tracks. In Goffman's case, it is yet another story of missed opportunities, at least so far as the cultural Durkheim was concerned. Despite a creative reading of Durkheim as a theorist of embodied face-to-face encounters, and despite insisting from time to time on the sacred nature

of the individual, Goffman's work seemed to demonstrate that moral sentiments and social emotions were merely emergent properties of individual level behaviors. "Agency" was restored but at the expense of the moral humanism and cultural complexity that had characterized Durkheim's ritual work. In its place, Goffman and his later Durkheimian followers, such as Collins (1975), posited a mechanistic and often cynical model of human interaction and emotion, one that failed to theorize a cultural realm that could regulate, and not only fall prey to or emerge from, moral calculus, bodily display and emotional need. Nevertheless, this line of work did make fruitful connections between ritual theory and pragmatism, echoes of which can be seen in this volume in the discussions by Collins, Jones, and Bellah on the relationship between behavior, emotion, cognition, and belief.

Microsociology, then, failed to mount a sustained engagement with the cultural Durkheim's theory of ritual action. In the case of critical theory, it was the radical Durkheim who tragically fell by the wayside. The dominance in Anglo-American circles of an anti-cultural Marxism rather than a pro-cultural, Nietzschean critical theory had led to a fatal blind spot in the Left's interpretation of Durkheim's legacy. To understand how these alternative Durkheim traditions have come to be rediscovered, we need to turn back towards France and trace another of Durkheim's posthumous intellectual journeys.

Durkheim's latent force

In the desert there are certain plants whose seeds might lie dormant for decades, awaiting a propitious moment to release their latent energy and make the sands bloom. Even as the conservative and structural Durkheims withered under scorching criticism, the re-growth of cultural and radical Durkheims was underway. Furtive and hardly recognized at first, this intellectual quickening was to represent the full flowering of themes discretely seeded by Durkheim in the *Elementary Forms*. Indeed, the full extent of their connection to that masterwork has only recently become visible. To truly understand Durkheim's legacy for contemporary cultural theory and cultural sociology, it is necessary to step away from our review of Durkheimian sociology as it has been commonly understood and review this largely silent alternative history.

In *Elementary Forms*, Durkheim had surprised even the most long-standing students of his sociology by proclaiming: "There is one region of nature where the formula of idealism applies almost to the letter: This is the social kingdom" (1912: 326 our translation). In society, Durkheim had come to believe, "the idea is the reality." It is only in order to "express our

own ideas to ourselves" that we need to "fix them on material things which symbolize them." But here the "part of matter is reduced to a minimum" (1912: 326). Responding to criticism that his earlier sociology had conceptualized an external "physical constraint [as] the most important thing for social life," Durkheim remonstrated, perhaps a little disingenuously, that he had "... never considered it more than the material and apparent expression of a profound and interior fact that is entirely ideal: this is moral authority" (1912: 298, note 2). Durkheim's vision in the *Elementary Forms* was of a shared cultural system that is internalized within each individual. It trumps the material base by superimposing upon it a universe of arbitrary but deeply meaningful signs, myths and determinations of action. He wrote:

The whole social environment appears to us as if inhabited with forces that, in reality, exist only in our consciousness. One knows that the flag, in itself, is nothing but a scrap of cloth for the soldier. Human blood is simply an organic liquid, yet even today we cannot see it flowing without experiencing a violent emotion that its physico-chemical properties cannot explain. From a physical point of view man is nothing more than a system of cells . . . A cancelled postage stamp can be worth a fortune; it is obvious that this value is in no way tied to its natural properties . . . Collective representations very often attribute to the things to which they are attached properties which do not exist in any form or degree. Out of the commonest object they can make a very powerful and very sacred being. Yet, although purely ideal, the powers which have been conferred in this way work as if they were real. They determine the conduct of men with the same inevitability as physical forces. (Durkheim 1912: 325-6)

Durkheim began to develop these new, profoundly cultural ideas during the middle and late 1890s, even as he was completing *Suicide* (1897), the last book of the trilogy that has long formed a central building block for social-structural sociology. He elaborated this new perspective in the courses of public lectures he offered in Paris during the first decade of the twentieth century. There is good evidence to suggest that the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure followed these Paris lectures, and that in some significant part he built on them to develop his structural linguistics (Alexander 1988b, Collins this volume, Jakobson 1990: 88). In his new science of semiotics, Saussure (1959) suggested that social communication is organized by a system of symbolic signs whose complex internal structure could be likened to a spoken language. Social objects should be seen as signifieds which cannot be separated from cultural signifiers. The symbolic meaning of objects is not objective – not set by their structural location in society or their material facticity or their utility; it is established, rather, by the relation of signifieds to one another inside the broader symbolic system. Reconfiguring in this

linguistic manner Durkheim's later sociological ideas, semiotics became one of the dominant intellectual forces of the twentieth century. In the hands of the linguist Roman Jakobson (1990) and the ethnographer Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966), semiotics formed the basis for the "structural" approach in anthropology, whose theories of interwoven and binary cultural codes provided an alternative to the British functionalist legacy. Under structuralism's influence, the literary critic Roland Barthes ([1957] 1973; [1964] 1984; 1975) developed semiotics into a flow-blown theory of social discourse and myth in everyday life, which he called "socio-logic" to distinguish it from the reductionism of a purely institutionally oriented sociology.

It was at this point, from the 1950s to the 1970s, that new forms of cultural social analysis uncovered for the first time the cultural coding of social life. In the French case, this current merged with that of the radical Durkheim. As this had been inflected by Bataille and the *Collège de sociologie*, the path of inheritance was only slightly less disguised than in the case of cultural Durkheim (Riley this volume). The emphasis in this French convergence was on the tensions between system and anti-system in cultural life. Baudrillard, Lyotard, Kristeva, and others elaborated theses whose lineage extended back to a "left sacred" – ideas about dread, productive excess, transgression, death, eroticism, and embodied experience. They pointed in various ways to confrontations between reason and its limits, not only those imposed by the individual, unconscious, and irrational, but by the polluting discourses about evil that shadow every ethical system and by the contradictions and gaps inherent in the act of classification itself. Michel Foucault (e.g. [1961] 1967), of course, was to make this dark counterpoint central to his life's work. He brought discourse back into the heart of social science with his historical investigations into the simultaneously liberating and repressive structures of symbolic thought, and he explained how organizational powers routinized and controlled the expressions of the sacred even as these threatened to escape discourse. Jacques Derrida (1978) developed a systematic method of reading culture that contextualized structures of discourse and opened them up to creative reconfiguration. Even while affirming the binding influence of already existing representational forms, Derrida insisted on their instability and inevitable productive excess at the margins of meaning. For Derrida, transgression was the shadow of the code, just as for Foucault the *cogito* must produce and depend upon the "unthought."

The blooming of this line of French philosophy-cum-social theory paralleled, but also stimulated, the rebirth of the near dormant Anglo-American cultural Durkheim. As notions of discourse, code, and myth were revived in Western intellectual life, it was only a matter of time before the cultural Durkheim's core vocabulary of ritual, symbol, and the sacred was

rediscovered. Tied to a more realist, less ideological vision of social life, the cultural Durkheim was decoupled from the structural and conservative Durkheims who had been the dominant incarnation since the 1940s. And so, with the assistance of French structuralism, particularly Lévi-Strauss' writings from the mid-1950s onwards, British and American anthropologists of the 1960s came to break new soil and cultivate their own Durkheimian paddocks. Mary Douglas (1966) demonstrated how symbolic classification creates moral boundaries and powerful forces of purity and pollution, even if her later "grid/group" model of social life was haunted by the ghost of structural Durkheimianism. Victor Turner (1974; [1969] 1977) connected planes of symbolic classification to boundary-bursting ritual processes that were at once radical, communal, resistant, existentially meaningful, and intimate. Unknown to him, this revisited the terrain of the *Collège de sociologie* some thirty years after its demise. Clifford Geertz (1975) insisted, against institutional social science, that ideology, religion, politics, and stratification can be studied as cultural systems, and he produced a series of exemplary interpretative studies of ritual-like performances in secular social life. The resulting fusion of Durkheimian socio-logics with hermeneutic and narrative sensibilities was to open the floodgates in ways that Geertz and other pioneering figures of the 1960s, such as Bellah (Alexander and Sherwood 2002), could scarcely have imagined.

These new intellectual movements created what was eventually hailed as the "cultural turn" in the human sciences. It is hardly an exaggeration to suggest that this change in understanding shifted the very ground for theoretical and empirical analysis across a myriad of disciplines, from philosophy (Rorty 1980; Habermas 1993) and literary studies (Hartman 1987; Brooks 1984) to the social sciences (Hunt 1989; Moscovici 1993). The aftershocks of this earthquake are still being experienced and interpreted today.

For some time, this revolution in the human sciences was speaking "Durkheim" without uttering his name. Foucault hardly mentioned Durkheim, though he widely acknowledged the structural frame. Lévi-Strauss claimed his work was anti-Durkheimian, while openly linking it to that of Marcel Mauss, Durkheim's nephew and most revered student, and to their jointly written essay, *Primitive Classification* ([1902] 1963), which adumbrated in a rather constrained manner some of the ideas later to be cut loose in *Elementary Forms* (see Smith 2001: 76–7, 102). Derrida claimed to be refuting Saussure, and indirectly Durkheim, even while he developed a more subtle program that deconstructed his own claim by demonstrating the pervasive influence of sign systems and their ability to elide and transcend individual subjectivities. Turner traced his roots to Durkheim's nemesis, Van Gennep, and scarcely mentions Durkheim even as he

systematically incorporates virtually every major theme of Durkheim's later work. Geertz scarcely mentioned Durkheim, and Douglas openly deplored him even though her own teachers in British Anthropology had revered him and her own work represents a profoundly original elaboration of the *Division of Labor* as seen through the more cultural lens of the *Elementary Forms*.

As this brief recounting suggests, the cultural turn owes everything to Durkheim. It built almost entirely upon his legacy, which his direct and indirect disciples distributed over an extraordinary range of disciplines and channeled through an immensity of new kinds of intellectual forms. Why, then, has the debt been such a well kept secret? In some part it reflects the anxiety of influence (Bloom 1975). But much more is involved. The problem, at once scholarly and historical, was that the sociological significance of Durkheim's later, more cultural theory had never been properly understood. Durkheim himself did not do anything to help. Committed to the identity of sociology with natural science, he was inclined, as we suggested earlier, to present his ideas as "writerly," not as changing and developing, but as unified, definitive and coherent. That *Elementary Forms* presented itself primarily as interpretation of symbolism and totemistic ritual in pre-modern life made it even easier for students of modern society to avoid the implications of Durkheim's later symbolic turn. We have already suggested a number of other contingencies that conspired to keep cultural Durkheim on the margins of the gazetteer of twentieth-century cultural theory, when in truth he was the Rome from and to which all roads led. Durkheim's immediate students were themselves divided over his legacy, and the master's premature death, during the First World War, prevented him from ever adjudicating these divisions himself. In the interwar period, as we mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, Durkheimians began to lose control over the reading of their teacher's work. What ensued were the struggles over interpreting and practicing Durkheimian sociology that we have documented here. For much of this time negative views of Durkheim were to predominate. Fear of symbolic contagion led scholars to disguise or misrecognize their debt in ways both intended and unconscious. It is remarkable how often we find the homage to Durkheim refracted into an acknowledgment of the contribution of one or other of his direct or indirect followers, typically Saussure, Mauss or Bataille.

It took new developments in Durkheim scholarship to reveal that these pioneers of the cultural turn were really speaking a Durkheimian prose that was unnoticed because it had become second nature. It is fitting that this comparatively recent discovery was one that their own enthusiasm for the cultural turn did much to excite. The notion that Durkheim's thinking went through phases from materialism to idealism had been noticed first by Parsons in

1937. Yet the insight was so overlaid by Parsons' particular theoretical interest in action theory that it failed in its strictly exegetical task. It was not until the English theorist Steven Lukes' scholarly and panoramic biography, *Émile Durkheim: His Life and Work* (1972), that Durkheim scholars could develop a firm bibliographical hold on the scope of Durkheim's writings from beginning to end. One clear implication of this material was that Durkheim believed himself to have experienced a *coupure* (break) sometime during the later 1890s, at the very time when he was finishing the last of his first three major works (see Fournier this volume, Alexander this volume, and Jones this volume). Following upon Lukes, in 1975 a group of French scholars, led by Philippe Besnard, launched *Les Etudes Durkheimiennes*, which became the vehicle for publishing a series of previously unknown documents demonstrating that, within Durkheim's own research team, there was not only enthusiastic recognition but also intense disagreement about the master's turn toward religion in his later work (Besnard 1979). In 1981, Bernard Lacroix published *Durkheim et le politique*, which highlighted Durkheim's highly ambivalent emotional links to his father's traditional Jewish faith and, while highly speculative, uncovered more historical evidence that a new attitude toward religion emerged in Durkheim's later work. In the second volume of *Theoretical Logic in Sociology* (1982), Alexander demonstrated this shift using internal textual evidence, suggesting, through detailed hermeneutical reconstruction, that Durkheim's theoretical legacy to the social sciences would have to be fundamentally reconceived.¹ While this argument for Durkheim's cultural shift has not, by any means, received universal confirmation within Durkheim scholarship, over the last two decades the language of the early versus the late Durkheim, and the reading of his development as productively shifting to the religious-cum-cultural, does seem to have become increasingly hegemonic, as has a growing awareness of his influence, at once profound and furtive, on both French and Anglophone cultural theory.

The tide began to turn in the 1980s, slowly at first but with gathering speed into the 1990s (e.g. Alexander 1988a; 1988b). Concepts like ritual, symbolism, representation, morality, and solidarity began to appear alongside discussions of discourse, difference, structure, and meaning, and the Durkheimian roots of a newly cultural sociology became not only increasingly evident but increasingly acknowledged, as one scholar after another read with pleasure and astonishment the *Elementary Forms*, as if for the first time. This enthusiasm was tempered by a realism that avoided earlier tendencies to link the cultural Durkheim with conservatism and to separate meaning from organization and power. A new emphasis was given to struggle, contestation, social division, and inequality, now considered within a framework where culture was not simply an instrumental and external

environment for action but also a source of motivation that worked through emotions, classification, and collective action. As the "late Durkheim" came to be seen as the source of a major stream in cultural sociology (Alexander 1988b, 2003a; Smith 2001, ch. 5; Alexander and Smith 1996a), an enormous range of new empirical topics came into view that explicitly extended Durkheim's relevance in new and often unanticipated directions. War and violence (Wagner-Pacifici 1986; Smith 1991); race and ethnicity (Jacobs 1996; Rappaport 1997); technology and environmentalism (Alexander and Smith 1996b; Douglas and Wildavsky 1982); money and economic life (Zelizer 1979); democratic transitions (Edles 1988; Chan 1999; Ku 1999) and democratic legitimacy (Alexander 1988c; Rosati 2002); nationalism and collective identity (Tiryakian 1988; Giesen 1998; Spillman 1997); cultural traumas and collective memory (Alexander et al. 2004; Connerton 1989; Eyerman 2001; Giesen 2004; Schwartz 2000); crime and justice (Garland 1990; Smith 1996, 2003) – these are only the most prominent studies bringing Durkheim visibly to the center of the cultural analysis of social process today.

How to read this volume

Although this new, more cultural Durkheim is becoming dominant, the field of interpretation retains its tensions and disagreements. This volume captures both the new hegemony and the continuing debate, providing a window on the scholarship and the theorizing that are Durkheimian sociology today.

Lewis Coser (1992) once suggested that if an introduction systematically catalogues the contents of a volume, it appeals to intellectual laziness. There is a need, however, to sensitize the reader to some common themes and latent debates that might go unnoticed, but which run beneath the textual surfaces of the following chapters. In this way, readers can be provoked and challenged to look more deeply, rather than encouraged to skip the detail and settle for a big picture gloss.

Reviewing the contributions as a whole, we can detect some emphases and interests that would not have been present if this collection had been published thirty years ago. We find an increased attention to the legacy of Durkheim's students, and growing appreciation of the Durkheim school's collective contribution to the formation of a Durkheimian sociology (see chapters by Collins, Fournier, Riley). There is awareness, for example, that Durkheim's *Elementary Forms* was presaged in some respects by Hertz ([1907]1960) as well as by Durkheim's own work with Mauss on *Primitive Classification* (1963 [1903]). This approach replaces the vision of Durkheim as a heroic intellectual surrounded by dependent students with an image in

which he is the axis for a system of intellectual exchange. Such a revised model has as its ancillary a stronger focus on the proximate *intellectual* environment in which Durkheim worked (Collins, Fournier, Jones), with this displacing to some extent an earlier scholarly interest in the *political* contexts shaping his ideas.

Ideas of ritual, symbolism and the sacred, of course, are widespread in the collection, and so it is no surprise that the theme of solidarity finds a prominent place, whether coupled to conventional ritual action and strong emotional ties (Bellah, Friedland, Tiryakian) or in a more diffuse institutionalization (Cladis, Grusky). What does seem to be new is the treatment of these themes. In several cases they are elaborated within the context of a sociology of the body. Whether as collective representation, totem, locus of experience or as brute material fact, the body is becoming increasingly central to treatments of Durkheim's cultural sociology (Bellah, Friedland, Riley, Shilling). We mentioned earlier that the idea of Durkheim's thinking undergoing a radical shift during his career has become established in recent years. This volume bears testament to such a claim, even if our contributors differ in fixing the origins and timing of any such shift (Alexander, Collins, Fournier, Jones). Clarifying and debating such points of detail is usually an indicator that a new paradigm has been institutionalized. Finally there seems to be a growing interest in micro- and meso-Durkheimianisms, approaches that conceive face-to-face interactions, social networks, and institutions (Bellah, Collins, Grusky, Jones) as the foundations of social life rather than some over-arching totality known as society.

Conspicuous by their absence are some old debates and themes. Attacks on and defenses of structural functional and conservative Durkheims seem to be passé, although it might well be said that Bauman reworks these themes in a creative and postmodern spirit. Durkheim's contributions to positivism, statistical research methods, and the social fact also fail to attract the attention of our contributors in any substantial way – a telling indicator of the rise of a more hermeneutic and cultural Durkheim during the 1990s.

These presences and absences are notable, yet we would suggest that the more interesting possibilities for contemporary Durkheim scholarship can be found by digging beneath any surface agreement on themes and unearthing instead the divergent theoretical logics just below. Analytically reconstructing these virtual and latent debates provides a window into possible future directions. The first concerns whether analytic and causal primacy should be given to social action or to symbol systems in explaining outcomes such as solidarity, collective action, or even intellectual production. Put in purely late-Durkheimian terms, this issue is all about the relationship between collective representations and ritual behavior. Expressed in the context of major

fault lines within cultural sociology, it is a more local specification of the broader distinction between approaches that draw on the pragmatist and network traditions (Collins 1975, Swidler 1986) and those emerging from semiotics and hermeneutics (Alexander 2003a, Sahlins 1976, Sewell 1980). Whereas the former stress how practical action and patterns of human association give rise to group norms, beliefs and solidarities, the latter perspective looks more strongly to cultural systems as motivating and constraining behavior.

The very existence of this debate testifies to a deep ambiguity in the interpretation of Durkheim's oeuvre. All would agree that Durkheim's later work pointed to the intricate connection between embodied practical actions, on the one hand, and systems of ideas on the other (for a detailed discussion see Shilling this volume). Rituals in his formulation both express and reinforce collective representations and solidaristic emotions. Yet in subsequent scholarship this precarious balance has been decided one way or the other. For some, actions give rise to beliefs. Randall Collins (1975, 1998), for example, has built on Goffman in arguing that solidarity is built up from mutually satisfactory exchanges between individuals. Similarly David Kertzer and others have asserted that rituals generate collective action and collective identity in the absence of prior overarching cultural agreement or any clear understanding of their purpose among practitioners (Kertzer 1989, cf. Schwartz 2000: 64). According to this logic, rituals are a form of practical action that persists without a systematic cultural foundation.

This formulation has the merit of avoiding idealism and reified visions of culture, but can easily tend towards reductionism of one kind or another. For example, it flirts with a kind of biological reductionism wherein intense embodied experiences of a pre-social entity, developed in coordinated actions with others give rise to pro-social emotions that produce culture, identity and solidarity in turn. Here patterns of shared meaning are simply an aggregate of multiple encounters; we have no need for semiotics or for complex theories of ideology to understand what culture is, what it does or why people should want to come together in the first place. As a result, our attention shifts from decoding culture as text to cataloguing interaction settings, gestures, and hard-wired emotional responses. Another form of reductionism emerging from pragmatism is towards rational choice models and exchange, with individuals standing somehow outside of culture and using it strategically to shape paths of ritual and symbolic action. Within this pattern, motivations for action become thin and, indeed, rather un-Durkheimian, for the idea that action is subject to some kind of internalized moral constraint, the residue of a collective conscience, becomes unsustainable. It is entirely symptomatic and instructive that Goffman's own work exhibits both of these

reductionist traits. In its quest to anchor a pragmatic reading of Durkheim, it careens endlessly around like a pinball in a machine whose solenoids are (1) assertions that there is an overarching moral order or imperative anchored in the self and in behavioral codes (e.g. the sacred nature of the individual), (2) demonstrations of how individuals reflexively and strategically orient to this moral order, and (3) analogies drawn from ethology that are superimposed on human behavior to reflect upon these strategies and behaviors.

The alternate position is to read Durkheim as a proto-theorist of cultural codes and their practical application. Here, collective representations such as totems, taboos, myths, sacred spaces, and objects, classifications and moral obligations are understood as a meta-text that shapes the concrete practices – the social performances (see below) – of social life. Although reinforced by both ritual and everyday life, these are always in some part prior to concrete action and cannot be reduced to its product. Not only do they constitute an ontologically autonomous “social fact” but they also form the internal reservoir of motivations, emotions, cognitions, and dispositions that bring people together so that they may interact in the first place. Rather than purely textual, or purely instrumental, this reading of Durkheim gestures toward a “cultural pragmatics” (Alexander 2003b; Alexander 2004; Alexander and Mast forthcoming).

What is remarkable about this volume is the way that it documents the number of Durkheim-relevant topics each of these positions can address. In other words, rather than just contending accounts of well chewed over topics like ritual, we find scattered in this text “pragmatist/network” explanations and “idealist” explanations for human evolution, social theory production, social theory content, group identification and social dramas. It might be useful to indicate some of the ways that the contributions to this volume exemplify this fundamental division. We turn first to works which see action leading to meaning. Randall Collins (this volume) claims he will use Durkheim’s sociology to explain Durkheim’s sociology. In his reading, this means accounting for Durkheim’s intellectual product and subsequent readings of this legacy through a network theory of knowledge. For Collins the *Année sociologique* was akin to a social movement whose intellectual vitality and creativity arose from intense exchanges of “idea-emblems” within its network and with other networks with which it intersected at its margins. Intellectual commitments arose as a result of these exchanges, not as a precondition for them. Durkheim and his students didn’t write and talk about the sacred because they cared about it – rather they came to care about it because of all that writing and talking activity.

The famous scenes towards the beginning of Stanley Kubrick’s film 2001: *A Space Odyssey* are entitled “The Dawn of Man.” Here our simian ancestors

are depicted as struck with awe and terror by a mysterious and sacred obelisk. We see them bang bones and rocks together in a collective frenzy. They gibber, grunt and scream to each other, clearly excited by the percussive and vocal energy. At the close of the sequence an ape throws a femur into the air, and, as it spins, we cut to a shot of a slowly revolving space station. The howling monkey noises are replaced by soothing tones of *The Blue Danube* courtesy of Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Such is human progress. Kubrick was engaging in myth-making activity with this film. Yet he may have stumbled on some kind of truth in his account of human evolution, for Robert Bellah's chapter brings his striking images to mind. According to Bellah, the "doing" of ritual preceded the possibility for any complex cultural system. Repetition and rhythm involving the sensory and motor systems provided the foundation for trust and intersubjectivity, these in turn leading to synergistic and evolutionary elaborations of the cerebral cortex and the symbol systems that we call culture. Within this perspective, then, we see an argument with a resemblance to Collins', only here meaning is emerging from action over a very *longue durée*. David Grusky and Gabriela Galescu make a similar point with respect to yet another context, that of occupational solidarities and identities. According to them, we need to look at intermediary groups and patterns of association within labor markets, rather than at aggregate classes and ideologies, if we are to understand such ties between work and culture as class consciousness. The resulting call for a "micro-level agenda" that explores "local social organization" is entirely consistent with Collins' understanding that proximate social networks and affiliations are determinate of ideal commitments and beliefs. Robert Alun Jones provides an account of Durkheim's theory production as well as a reading of his theory that is in line with this logic. He argues that understanding ritual as a "positive" social force can be traced to a series of intellectual exchanges and debates on religion that crisscrossed the Channel. Moreover, he sees Durkheim as intellectually indebted to Jamesian pragmatism, albeit in a coded way. According to Jones, "Durkheim insisted that religious experience and practice were far more important than ideas and doctrines, for the reality on which religion depends is not the result of metaphysical speculation but concrete social action" (Jones p. 94 below). This position echoes that of Collins on the interpretation of Durkheim, although it has a vision of theory formation that weights contexts other than face-to-face contact. In this case a textually mediated academic debate over the interpretation of totemism provided the proximate environment within which knowledge was produced.

Somewhat opposed to this position are essays that give priority to cultural systems. Chris Shilling provides a twist on this theme by suggesting that the

body – an irreducible *point de départ* for pragmatic and interaction theory – is always already social as well as material. Through an analysis of totemism and the concept of *homo duplex* in Durkheim, Shilling shows that the body is a crucial medium “through which the symbolic order of the clan is reproduced” (p. 215). This cultural system is, however, irreducible to the body or to individual experience. It is this very transcendence that allows humans to escape the material constraint of the individual body and enter into social life as full subjects in the collectivity. Such a theme is further developed in a psychoanalytic direction by Roger Friedland who argues that Durkheim had an understanding of the interplay between the body, libido and symbolic that is in many ways as complex as that of Freud or Lacan. Although there might be an organic nucleus, society spins meanings around this core with such thickness and multi-valency that the body, sexual activity and desire can be more properly understood as expressions in an increasingly auto-referential cultural system. Friedland identifies the *Collège de sociologie* as a research tradition that picked up on the potential for synergy between the psychoanalytic and Durkheimian traditions. Alexander Riley also considers this grouping as pivotal. His treatment challenges the assertions of Collins on knowledge formation. While paying due attention to the intellectual, associational and political contexts of Durkheimian thinking, Riley suggests that a more transcendental obsession with ultimate concerns, mystery and annihilation propelled the *Collège de sociologie* on its mission as much as any material and immediate determination. Moreover, although efforts were made to ground ideas in individual experience, the sacred was experienced and analyzed by the group in ways that were already textually and theoretically mediated. Despite the efforts of the group to encounter the sacred in its raw state, it always came to them cooked. That their conceptions of the sacred were mediated by theory and myth rather than by patterns of interpersonal association suggests a much stronger autonomy for culture than Collins would permit.

Edward Tiryakian's contribution to this volume points to the fact that the solidarity that emerged in the United States after September 11 was not simply the result of a collective effervescence resulting from increased face-to-face contact, but rather was founded on a narrative of national tragedy, heroism and vengeance in which sacred symbols were a precondition for mobilization. Tiryakian does not elaborate on the role of the media, but it seems clear from his account that this is a cultural forum that plays a significant role in shaping and amplifying cultural forces even if it acts at a distance. Not only did it report “facts” to distant citizens, it also served as a myth-engine for contemporary America. These myths then enabled the kind of everyday ritual actions that might give rise to solidarity, such as displaying

a flag and participating in remembrance activities. The rise of the mass media and its ability to set agendas, propagate symbolic frames, and generate emotional excitement through, for example, media events (Dayan and Katz 1990) presents a significant challenge to the interactionist/pragmatist tradition. It suggests that we can generate emotional energy and solidarity without reliance on face-to-face contact or "real" social networks.

Writing on the Nuer of the Sudan from a broadly structural Durkheimian perspective, Evans-Pritchard (1940) observed processes of group fission and fusion taking place in response to demographic and political shifts. These were accompanied by a re-writing of the genealogy of the clans and their fictive relationships to mythical ancestors. Such post-facto accounts were functional in that they helped to justify emerging social relationships. Taken as a whole, and with a certain pinch of salt, the distinction we have traced here can be understood in a similar way, with contributions attempting to construct what Malinowski once called a "mythical charter." As the camp of the Cultural Durkheim has grown it has become unwieldy and less able to patch up tensions among its members. A new competition has ensued to write the Durkheimian lineage and appropriate its gods. Earlier in this chapter, we identified four understandings of Durkheim. It seems as if a fifth is emerging even as some of the others wither and fade from relevance. The cultural Durkheim is being split into two moieties, the semiotic and the interactional/pragmatic, with each telling stories and constructing histories to lay out symbolic boundaries and to make sense of their current situation.

What makes a reading of the *Cambridge Companion to Durkheim* fascinating is that we can trace this struggle, myth making and fracturing in each essay. It can be detected in efforts to reconstruct Durkheim's "true" intentions, to map out lines of influence and to specify current relevance. Understood in one way, these essays are contributions to a common, solidaristic project of Durkheim scholarship. At the same time, however, they are part of a war of position. To be able to read the dialogue of these centrifugal and centripetal forces into essays that share a common concern with meaning, ritual, emotion and symbolism is to participate in a powerful intellectual drama whose dénouement we must impatiently await.

We can deal with the second latent debate within the *Cambridge Companion to Durkheim* more briefly, since we have already looked at some of this territory. This is a normative dispute, which revolves around the moral evaluation of Durkheimian theory and its relationship to concepts like freedom, emancipation, justice and democracy. The contestation has two interlocking dimensions. Q1: Can Durkheim provide tools for understanding social contestation, inequality and injustice today? Q2: If so, exactly what kind of good society did he advocate? During the twentieth century this

dialogue usually took the form of neo-Marxists pointing to the problems of systems theory (Q1) and to Durkheim's political conservatism (Q2), and answering in the negative. Durkheim's supporters usually retorted by elaborations of functionalist theory to account for social "bads" (Q1, e.g. Merton) and by pointing to his Dreyfusard and socialist sympathies (Q2, e.g. Bellah 1972, Gane 1992). As Zygmunt Bauman's essay (this volume) demonstrates, the terms of debate have now shifted, and we have moved beyond the clash of left and right. The subtlety of his transition to a post-Marxist idiom does not prevent Bauman from stepping into the fray with twin barrels blazing. In effect, he recasts the narrative of the Conservative Durkheim in the mould of his distinctive postmodern ethical theory. Bauman reads Durkheim as a modernist legislator hell-bent on establishing repressive control and regulation under the hegemonic sign of "society." His social theories established a fictive ontology that could be deployed against such unruly anti-modern concepts as free will and contingency, replacing them with a mandate for managerial and legislative intervention and the demand that the individual submit to the needs of society.

This argument – that Durkheim is not only useless for understanding inequality, but also the advocate of a repressive philosophy intolerant of chance, difference and cultural vitality – is confronted indirectly in several of the essays. Consider Grusky and Galescu's contribution. They argue that Durkheim has a theory of class and labor inequality that is in many ways superior to those that have emerged from the Marxist and Weberian traditions. Not least, they suggest, this theory is actually more attentive to the categories of lived experience, solidarity, and diverse labor subjectivities than those more rational and objectivist models that have traditionally been advanced in the name of social emancipation. Alexander's interpretative reconstruction of the inner development of Durkheim's early and middle work supports Grusky and Galescu's more empirically oriented argument. Describing Durkheim's ideological position as equivalent to democratic "socialism with a human face," Alexander finds Durkheim engaged in a sustained argument with the Marxists of his own day. His ambition was to conceptualize social control in a manner that was more respectful of autonomy and subjectivity. Durkheim, then, might be read as the founding father of some of the most morally aware and emancipatory social theory of our time. Writing from a more communitarian perspective, Mark Cladis looks to Durkheim's writings and finds there the basis for a social and moral philosophy for our challenging times. According to Cladis, there are profound similarities between Durkheim's position and those of radical cultural critics such as Cornell West. Solidarity, difference, tolerance, justice, and individuality were all central themes for Durkheim; his ambition was not to eliminate these, but rather

to encourage a society where they could be mutually reinforcing. Far from encouraging a Brave New World of regulation and conformity, Durkheim was in fact an advocate of moral pluralism and human dignity.

Challenging the repressive hypothesis from a very different angle, Alexander Riley shows how a tradition of libertarian radicalism also emerged from the *Année sociologique*. In its incarnation at the *Collège de sociologie*, this transgressive sociology elaborates the kind of alternative moral universe that Bauman advocates: existentially aware, anti-authoritarian, and supportive of individuality and spontaneity. Further down the track, this tradition of the "left sacred" was to give rise to analytical positions that made room for the marginal, ambivalent and chaotic (Kristeva and Clement 1998; Barthes 1975; Derrida 1978) or documented and critiqued in detail the very processes of regimentation and normative control that Bauman deplors (Foucault 1967, 1991). In a related spirit Roger Friedland locates *etotics* and desire at the core of Durkheim's understanding of the social contract. In this provocative reading, order is not imposed from above as a dull and authoritarian gardening exercise but rather emerges from the irrepressible eruption of primal libidinal forces. These are channeled into a multiplicity and proliferation of licit and illicit sexualities and are sublimated in turn into religious myth and practice. For Friedland, Durkheim is the master-theorist of such creative excesses and their pro-social consequences rather than the partisan advocate of social rules, social facts, and social norms as tools for optimal regulation and control.

Other new directions

While the contributions to this volume have taken up several of the most important themes for contemporary Durkheimian thought, no single collection could hope to encompass fully a legacy of such scope and depth. Before concluding this introduction, we would like to briefly acknowledge two further areas where Durkheimian sociology is making its presence felt in innovative ways.

The first of these relates to the study of social regulation in the context of deviance, crime, law and punishment. Elaborations of such themes can be found in the *Rules*, the *Division of Labor*, *Suicide* and also lesser known but substantial works such as *Moral Education* (Durkheim 1973) and the essay on *Two Laws of Penal Evolution* (1973). Despite this scattered treatment, Durkheim's thoughts have given birth to research traditions that continue to have energy and force to this day. Most obviously, Durkheim's anomie theory, filtered through Merton (1968) and the Chicago School, has meshed with the agendas in criminology and psychology to generate a body of

cumulative knowledge of a broadly positivist cast that seems ready to generate important middle range theory over the next few years. Although citation to Durkheim has become increasingly rare or purely ceremonial in this literature, his emphasis on deviance as an objective social fact generated by other social facts has fed, for example, into the current crop of innovative studies of neighborhood ecology and social disorganization as well as the continuing literature on themes of mental health and suicide. A second track into the study of deviance initiated by Durkheim also looks to be going strong. This takes its cue from his insistence on deviance as "normal" or functionally necessary and has resulted in a focus on the recognition and regulation of outsiders. The interest here, in contrast to the line coming out of anomie theory, is on social and cultural process as constructing deviance rather than on objective patterns of offending. Whether openly acknowledged or not, Durkheim was an influence at the dawn of research on the media and crime, on moral panics and moral regulation and on labeling theory (see, e.g. Ben Yehuda 1985; Erikson 1966). More recent work in this genre has thrown the functionalist supercargo overboard and compensated with extra ballast from contemporary cultural theory and, indeed, the *Elementary Forms*. This has enabled analytic attention to be shifted to the contingent ritual, semiotic and narrative processes that underpin the identification and control of evil (Thompson 1998) and away from problematic discussions of social stability and societal needs. The result has been an interdisciplinary literature with ties to anthropology, cultural studies, the new cultural history, and media studies, as well as sociology.

Most interesting and promising of all has been a newfound appreciation of the importance of Durkheim's model for the study not of deviance, but of criminal justice. His approach runs counter to the dominant trends in criminological theory and is being increasingly perceived as relevant to the understanding of both process and outcomes. To understand the significance of Durkheim's thinking here, it is necessary to realize that within social theory, law and punishment have been understood primarily as subordinated to bureaucratic rationality or as expressions of a political logic. Michel Foucault's work has become emblematic precisely because it combines these traits. For the Foucault (1974) of *Discipline and Punish*, criminal justice today is a forum in which new forms of power work through order, routine, and control. These have decisively replaced earlier, more colorful judicial and punitive activities that involved ritual and symbolism. Culture persists, but only as a set of dried out, secular codes for the administration of a rationalized power. Likewise, Habermas (1989: 174-9) takes the law to be an increasingly abstract force within social life that is progressively decoupled from the inputs of religion or civil society. Although the law has some utopian

potential as a sphere of linguistically and normatively mediated communicative activity (Habermas 1996), Habermas tends to view legal codes as either entirely procedural or as tied to the "colonization of the lifeworld," one of the means through which the impersonal bureaucratic state has come to regulate social life in civil and private spheres. This scenario has its roots in Weber's (1978) understanding of legal history as an evolutionary movement from prophecy towards formal rationalization, with codification and professionalization stripping the administration of criminal justice of substantive value inputs. For Weber the law has become "a rational technical apparatus which is continually transformable in the light of expediential considerations and devoid of all sacredness of content" (1978: 895).

Within this theoretical landscape, Durkheim's position is distinctive precisely because of his insistence that societal evolution has layered administrative complexity onto an emotional and cultural foundation rather than replacing it. To be sure, societal differentiation has seen the collective conscience shift and penal codes change. Yet, however technologically and procedurally mediated, and however "graduated in intensity" (1968: 48), punishment remains for Durkheim an expressive action that has normative inputs, just as even the most rational of legal systems reflects some underlying collective conscience. Durkheimian scholarship on law and justice has traditionally drawn on part 1, and especially chapter 2, of the *Division of Labor* and been concerned with documenting or developing theories of legal evolution, engaging in a comparative and rather abstract analysis of legal systems or working through the implications of the generic assertion that the law reflects morality or the collective conscience (Cotterrell 1999; Luhmann 1985). The rebirth of a cultural Durkheim which we have related here has seen a new form of scholarship emerge that draws inspiration from cultural anthropology and the new cultural history. Equally pivotal has been a shift in textual influences taken from within Durkheim's own oeuvre. Subtle changes in emphasis have emerged with the movement away from the *Division of Labor* and its concern to tie sanctions to morphology and function, towards *Moral Education* where greater attention is given to punishment as performative and demonstrative, and on to the *Elementary Forms*. Here we find the rudiments of a truly semiotic model in which arbitrary religious codes rather than functional needs for solidarity sit at the heart of primitive taboos and ritualized atonements. The resulting literature has been set free to explore more concretely the ways in which culture-structures and cultural process can be central to both the actual practices of social control and the symbolic logics underpinning the formation of law. In this recent Durkheim-inspired scholarship there has been a shift away from abstraction and generality towards more grounded, concrete analyses of criminal justice as ritualized expression,

public dramatization and cultural code. It can be treated as a text that is also informed by, but not reducible to, the forms of power, interests and rationality at play in particular settings (Garland 1990). And so the last few years have witnessed an explosion of studies indicating how even today the sacred and profane, ritual and moral boundaries underpin (to mention only some representative studies and topics) the social meanings of punishment technologies (Smith 2003) and organizations such as the police (Reiner 1995); penal processes such as executions (Smith 1996) and reintegrative shaming (Scheff 1990); the formation of legal codes and the concept of the legal subject (Carlsson and Hoff 2000; Hammond 1996); and the legal protections surrounding collective representations such as national constitutions (Hammond 1989) and flags (Welch and Bryan 1996). Far richer in a hermeneutic sense than the Durkheimian legal scholarship that has gone before it, such work promises to refashion our understanding of law and criminal justice in fundamental ways over the next decades, much as the "discovery" of culturally constructed deviance has done since the 1960s.

This recent turn toward the dramaturgy and iconography of legal and penal processes implicitly evokes the other area of recent Durkheim-inspired work we wish to take up here. When David Garland emphasizes the continuing symbolic and affective dimensions of punishment, he often cites its ritual function (Garland 1990: 21ff; n.d.). In doing so, as we have suggested, he evokes the late Durkheim and extends his "religious sociology" into modern life. Yet, in these same late-Durkheimian studies, Garland (1990: 253-68) also conceptualizes modern punishments as "performances."

Is there a difference that matters between conceptualizing individual and collective action as ritual or as performance? That the two terms seem to alternate freely in Garland's analysis is itself revealing. Garland aims to evoke the affective and symbolic (cultural Durkheim) yet to be responsive, as well, to modern social and cultural differentiation (structural Durkheim). For it is indeed a fact that, in complex societies, those who decide upon punishment are separated by office and organization from those who inflict it, and that both of these agents are differentiated from the victims of punishment and the public audience who observes it. These separations have consequences for the analysis of symbolic action: one cannot necessarily predict that the culturally-inspired decision to punish, or the actual application of punishment, will produce on the audience and the victim anything like a ritual effect. Certainly, penal agents write scripts that aim to display the act of punishing in a manner that will powerfully evoke the moral background structures of society. But the distance and impersonality of the punishment process, and the fragmentation of audiences for these punishments, may neutralize or even reverse the agents' intended effects (e.g. Smith 1996).

The increasing, postmodern awareness of such contingencies has stimulated a discernable theoretical movement from ritual to performance studies in recent years. When Durkheim wrote *Elementary Forms*, he provocatively insisted that his analysis of Australian Aborigines could be directly applied to symbolic processes in modern life (see Alexander 1982 and this volume, below). The references in *Elementary Forms* to contemporary symbolic processes – especially book II, chapter 7, “The Origins of the Totemic Principle, or Mana” (e.g. Durkheim 1995: 210–12) – consistently demonstrate homologous ritual effects in simple and complex societies. As we have suggested earlier in this introduction, this Durkheimian provocation triggered an earthquake in twentieth-century social thought that eventually transformed contemporary social science. Yet, to insist on homology between simple and complex societies is both not enough and too much. Certainly modern social action remains symbolic; symbols continue to purify and pollute; and these “religious processes” construct deep solidarities that mark the foundations of social structure. In simple and complex societies, however, these structures and processes unfold in very different ways.

Since Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* ([1872] 1956), social theorists have tried to capture this difference in terms of an aesthetic model drawn from theatre and drama. Theatre, after all, can create ritual-like experiences, yet it works to evoke such effects in a contrived, ratiocinative way. In the same manner, the “rituals” of modern and postmodern societies – whether formal state occasions (Shils and Young [1956] 1975) or more open-ended and ephemeral media events (Dayan and Katz 1990) – can be seen as social dramas whose effects depend on their ability to achieve an aesthetically powerful theatrical form.

If we return to *Elementary Forms* with these observations in mind, we can discern some brief but significant indications that Durkheim was not himself insensitive to the fact that rituals have a performative dimension. Most broadly, of course, the very idea of rituals indicates attention to place, setting, timing, and interaction, not only to abstract beliefs. This emphasis is a distinctive but not sufficiently remarked upon element of Durkheim’s famous definition of church: “A society whose members are united because they *imagine* in the same ways the sacred world and its relationship with the profane world, *and* because they *translate* this shared representation in identical practices” (1912: 60. This and the following quotes from the *Elementary Forms* are our translation). It is necessary, then, not only that people believe in a set of ideas but that they have the ability to enact them. That such translating practices involve an aesthetic dimension is clear from the emphasis Durkheim places on imagination. Beliefs about the sacred and profane involve active fantasy and creativity, not only cognitive assertions about

belief. This reference to the creative and artistic element is also evident in Durkheim's insistence, at a later point in *Elementary Forms*, that elementary religious life depends on "figurative representations of the totem" and that the "imagination represents with figures borrowed, with a few exceptions, from either the animal kingdom or vegetable kingdom" (1912: 268, 270). The creative practices that translate the sacred into such a figurative but concrete form can only be theatrical. We are not surprised, then, to see Durkheim writing several pages later that "imagining religious things" is accomplished because a sacred "force can be attached to words spoken, to gestures made" and that "the voice and movements can serve as its vehicle, and, by their mediation it can produce its effects" (1912: 286).

This line of Durkheim's thinking reaches its logical conclusion in his discussion of the positive cult and representative rites. While insisting that "religious thought is something altogether different from a system of fictions," he asserts, at the same time, that "between society, as it is objectively, and the sacred things that represent it symbolically, there is a considerable distance" (1912: 544). This can be overcome only through imaginative and creative effort: "It is necessary for the impressions actually experienced by men and which are the primary materials for this construction, to be interpreted, developed, and transformed until they become unrecognizable. So the world of religious things is . . . a partly imaginary world which for this reason lends itself obediently to the free creations of the spirit" (1912: 545).

Durkheim illustrates this process of practical aesthetic translation, which involves imaginative interpreting, elaborating, and transforming, by reconstructing Spencer and Gillen's account of the Warramunga's Intichiuma ceremony. Implicitly evoking his earlier reference to words spoken and gestures made, to voices and movement, Durkheim suggests that "the rite consists uniquely of remembering the past and in rendering it present, as it were, by means of a true dramatic performance" (1912: 531). His description of the rite continues in a manner that elaborates this understanding.

The celebrant is in no way considered as an incarnation of the ancestor which he represents, he is an actor playing a role . . . They put into action the mythical history of the ancestor Thallaualla . . . The movement that recurs more frequently consists of a sort of violent rhythmic trembling of the entire body, because the ancestor did this in mythical times to scatter the seeds of life which were inside him. The actors have their skin covered with a down that, as a result of this shaking, becomes detached and flies away. This is a way of representing the flight of the mystical germs and their dispersion through space . . . The place where the ceremony unfolds . . . is a conventional stage. The place where the events took place that are the theme of the rite are represented

by designs. Sometimes these designs are made on the bodies of the actors . . . In other cases it is in the earth that the image is traced. On the ground, previously watered down and covered in red ochre, are traced curved lines made from a series of white points, which symbolize a river or a mountain. This is the beginning of scenery . . . These ceremonies . . . are dramas, albeit plays of a particular kind . . . These dramas are rites. (1912: 531-4)

Yet, even as he adumbrates contemporary theories of social performance, Durkheim expresses misgivings about the constructed, contingent, indeed performative aspects of this ritual event. Despite "the duality of the ancestor and the celebrant" (1912: 535), Durkheim now insists that representative rites are successful only if the celebrant actually copies the ancestor's original actions. Only if "the gestures he makes are those the ancestor made in the same circumstances," can there be "a sense [that] the hero occupies the stage" (1912: 535). But it is this "sense" that is at question from a performative point of view. It depends on actor skillfulness and audience response. Yet Durkheim concludes, in seeming contradiction of his earlier position, that the celebrant "does not play the ancestral personage, as an actor would do," Rather, "he is that person" (1912: 535).

We can understand this slippage from the contingencies of performance to the security of ontological ritual if we understand Durkheim's deeper anxiety. When "certain people are charged with representing ancestors with whom they have no mythical tie of descent" (1912: 535) he warns, rites can become "dramatic performances in the literal sense." In fact, this is just what happened in the Emu's Intichiuma ceremony, the single instance that Durkheim highlights where "it seems as if the theatre of the ceremony is *artificially* arranged" (1912: 535 italics added). With this pejorative phrasing, it becomes crystal clear that Durkheim views the theatrical metaphor as threatening his project of religious sociology. To allow contrivance into ritual theory, he fears, would allow play and entertainment to undermine the tight, more authentic connection between symbolic action and *la vie sérieuse*. "We have already shown that these are closely related to dramatic performances . . . Not only do they employ the same procedures as true drama, they also chase after the same goal . . . They make men forget the real world and transport them to another where their imaginations can be more at ease; they entertain. Sometimes they even have the outward appearance of recreation: we see the assistants laughing and openly having fun" (1912: 543).

A related danger is that representative rites, and what Durkheim now calls "the collective recreations," are "so close to each other that one passes from one genre to the other without loss of continuity" (1912: 543). This situation can be associated with "the slackening of the tie that attaches to the history

of the tribe the events and personages represented" so that the rites "take on an unreal air and the corresponding ceremonies change their nature. In this way we gradually enter into the domain of pure fantasy and move from commemorative rite to vulgar corroboree, a simple public celebration that has nothing to do with religion any more . . ." (1912: 544). Or to put it bluntly, "when a rite serves no purpose but to entertain it is no longer a rite" (1912: 546).

No doubt Durkheim was also worried that the theatrical analogy would make symbolic actors seem less sincere and, in this way, undermine his democratic-republican argument that social and political authority can, and should, be sustained by deeply meaningful symbolic action and not primarily by coercive forms of structural power or debased populist sentiments. From a normative perspective, of course, distinguishing clearly between instrumental and contrived action, on the one hand, and moral and sincere action, on the other, makes a great deal of sense (e.g. Habermas 1987). From the perspective of empirical analysis, however, there is a danger. Building a fire-wall between such ideal-types prevents recognizing both as dimensions of every symbolic act. In real life, they are always analytically differentiated yet empirically intertwined. In contrast with the ideal world postulated by normative theory, the aesthetic and the contrived enter into the heart of symbolic action. To conceptualize their interrelation with sacred symbolism and moral concerns is essential if one wishes to theorize the complex and contingent possibilities for creating solidarity in modern symbolic life.

It has taken most of the last century to develop Durkheim's early premonitions about performativity, and it has depended upon leaving behind his rather straight-laced, if normatively understandable, ideological concerns. Even in the recent postwar period, such influential late-Durkheimian thinkers as Shils and Young ([1956] 1975) and Bellah (1970: 168-89) still conceptualized ritual in a way that separated it from the contingencies of complex performance, implicitly suggesting an either/or approach to social action, i.e. that it was instrumental or symbolic, authentic or artificial. Critical theory, whether of Marxist or existential provenance, echoed this dichotomizing tendency in a more pessimistic way.

Yet, during this same period, a new and more complex approach to symbolic action was being developed. Kenneth Burke (1965) suggested that action should be viewed neither as instrumental nor as ritualized but as performative. Drawing upon the Cambridge classicists who had followed up Nietzsche's link between ritual and Greek drama, Burke's "dramaturgical" theory laid out the theatrical elements of social action. Taking a cue from Burke and Durkheim, Erving Goffman (1956) elaborated a pragmatic approach to the staging of face-to-face interaction, and Clifford Geertz

(1973; 1980) developed a more semiotic model of collective performance. Victor Turner (1974) went on to create an impressionistic but highly innovative theory of "social drama," and it was only a matter of time before he teamed up with the dramatist Richard Schechner to declare rituals only theatre by another name (Turner 1982; 1987).

On this basis of this collaboration, Schechner (1976; 1977; 1987; 2002) eventually created "performance studies," the interdisciplinary field that bridges theatre, film, literature, and the social sciences. While the empirical complexities of contemporary social performance, and the sociological concepts for framing them, have only begun to be worked out, it seems that, in his early and ambivalent effort, Durkheim had the basic idea right. Ritual can be understood as performance if the elements that rituals seem "naturally" to combine are analytically broken down. As one line of current thinking suggests, performances are composed of background representations, foregrounded scripts, actors, means of symbolic production, social power, *mise-en-scène*, and audience (see Alexander 2003b, 2003c, forthcoming; Alexander and Mast forthcoming). When these elements are fused – for example, when the "celebrant," or actor, really does seem to be the ancestor he is portraying – then symbolic action has verisimilitude and can take on a ritual-like form. When these various performative elements are not brought together in such a "felicitous" way (Austin 1957), when they are de-fused, performances seem artificial and contrived.

Fused performances are rituals because they are utterly convincing, and Durkheim was right to attribute to such symbolic action the capacity for exercising social authority. De-fused performances fail in their suasive effort, and they are both cause and effect of social conflict and dissent. Critics and audiences laugh at performances that are intended to make them cry; citizen-publics are ironic and dismissive when authorities would have them be attentive and sincere. The further we move away from the comforts and simplicity of smaller and more traditional societies – the very societies upon whose elementary forms Durkheim rested his theoretical case – the harder it is to make rituals stick. Symbolic actions often seem "artificially set up," but not always. This variation is what justifies the continuing relevance of ritual-performance theory today.

The new Durkheim: calling cards and tarot cards

This text does not mark the end of Durkheim, nor even the beginning of an end. Rather, as Churchill might have said, it is the end of the beginning. Classics are hard to understand, and, as we have explained in this introduction, they come to be approached variously in contexts determined

by time, place, politics and intellectual history. It is fair to say that it took almost three-quarters of the last century to start to discover what Durkheim, at his best, was really going on about. Once this understanding had been attained, and once the broader historical context had shifted, there ensued a tremendous outpouring of new work. This volume joins other recent edited collections indicating that the center of gravity has decisively shifted from the early and middle Durkheim to the late.² We expect it will not be the last. With this new Durkheim securely enthroned, the intellectual agenda has been altered for Durkheim's second hundred years. In Durkheim's first century, the concepts that occupied scholarly debates were structure, function, method, social fact, anomie, suicide, law, socialism, and the division of labor. These are now residual: they were the beginning. We are now at the end of the beginning, and a second set of concepts has come to the fore: ritual, collective representations and discourse, the sacred, solidarity, collective conscience, democracy, and interaction. From these openings there are developing a new set of Durkheimian concerns that are many and various, concerns about performance, justice, regulation, transgression, evil, memory, networks, civil society, morality, punishment, body, practice, difference, emotion, and narrative.

As these lists suggest, the field of themes and correspondences to be worked through is opening upwards, to the kind of productive excess celebrated by Bataille, rather than spiraling downwards to entropy. We are at the end of the beginning rather than the beginning of the end, entering a phase that will witness the construction, not reduction, of complexity from the interplay of these new concepts. We cannot soothsay what talismanic hands will be dealt from these signifiers, or how, in our lifetimes, such collective representations will be played out. The *Cambridge Companion to Durkheim* is not a tarot pack. For all that, it does offer new and diverse accounts of where Durkheim has left his calling card and where he will be visiting next. Perceptive readers will put together their own itineraries.

NOTES

- 1 We have taken the liberty of reprinting for this volume a revised version of the article in which Alexander summarized this argument.
- 2 Two collections of essays on Durkheim appeared in English in the early postwar period – an original collection by Wolff (1960) and a compilation of previously published material by Nisbet (1965). Only after these publications, however, did there occur the scholarly renaissance upon which most contemporary Durkheim interpretation rests. In terms of this recent scholarship, the most important ongoing source has been the journal *Durkheimian Studies / Etudes Durkheimiennes*. This pivotal publication first appeared in 1977 in Paris as *Etudes Durkheimiennes*, under the leadership of the late Philippe Besnard. In 1989, Robert Alun

Jones took over as editor, and the journal moved to America. In 1995, the location and editorial board changed hands again, moving to the Oxford Centre for Durkheimian Studies, under the editorial board of W. S. F. Pickering, Kenneth Thompson, William Watts Miller, and Mike Gain. These editors and their associates have engaged in a prolific publishing agenda since the early 1990s that has done much to demonstrate the continuing relevance of Durkheim for social science (e.g. Allen, Pickering, and Watts Miller 1998; Pickering 1999; Pickering and Watts-Miller 1993; for a fuller listing consult the comprehensive bibliography, this volume). These efforts, many of which build upon mini-conferences held at the Oxford Centre, offer independent confirmation of the patterns we find in this volume. There is clearly less interest in writing about Durkheim as a positivist, functionalist, and conservative than in establishing his status as a prescient cultural theorist and democratic moral philosopher. (It is unfortunate that, although quite recent, several of these publications are out of print or are available only as pdf downloads from their publishers.) Aside from England, the other centre of gravity for edited volumes of Durkheim scholarship has been France, where there have been recent collections of original essays (Besnard et al. 1993, Cuin 1997, Borlandi and Cherkaoui 2000), marking the centenaries of *The Division of Labor in Society*, *The Rules of Sociological Method* and *Suicide*. These have been targeted to specific themes rather than to considerations of Durkheim's work in general. Taken as a whole, the recently published French and English volumes emphasize Durkheim scholarship rather than Durkheimian scholarship and Durkheimian sociology. If we were to paint with a broad brush, the emphasis tends to be on the detailed interpretation and understanding of Durkheim rather than opening out his scholarship to wider agendas and landscapes in social and cultural theory. The Cambridge Companion contains works of both stripes. We have included Durkheim scholars engaged in textual and biographical exegesis (the first section of this book) and outsiders who wish to apply, test, and expand Durkheim's ideas in broader theoretical and empirical arenas (the subsequent sections). We see this heterogeneity as a fundamental and necessary characteristic of the ongoing wave of Durkheimian renewal and critique.

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