In the Name of All that is Holy: Classification and the Sacred

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Introduction

In this paper I explore certain aspects of the notion of the 'sacred' in the work of three French thinkers: Emile Durkheim, long regarded as one of the 'founding fathers' of sociology; Georges Dumézil, historian of comparative religion, and Georges Bataille, philosopher of eroticism and excess. A common thread in the thought of these – in other ways extremely diverse – writers is an intense engagement with the relation between what they see as the *primary* demarcation of entities throughout the universe between the sacred and the profane and the *secondary* development of all other classificatory schema, whether within 'scientific activity' – as normally understood – or in everyday life. My aim in this paper is firstly to re-examine their arguments in the light of more recent interdisciplinary contributions towards an understanding of the operation of classification systems, and secondly to attempt to demonstrate ways in which a 'rehabilitation' of the sacred – both the notion itself and its attendant metaphors – might serve to animate and deepen such interdisciplinary discussions.

The paper is divided into three main sections. In the first, I address Durkheim's conception of the sacred as articulated in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, and in an earlier essay co-written with Marcel Mauss on *Primitive Classifications*. In the second I focus on the development of aspects of Durkheimian thought in the work of Dumézil and Bataille. In the third I explore more recent work on classification, exemplified in particular by Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star's study *Sorting Things Out*.

In tackling the topic of classification and the sacred in a short paper I am keenly aware of the inevitable omissions and exclusions involved in

such a task. For example, I have left out of my account some seminal twentieth-century treatments of the fundamental social dimensions of the sacred and profane – works by Freud (1983), Eliade (1961) and Caillois (1959), to offer just three instances. However, by focussing in some detail on the work of Durkheim, Dumézil and Bataille, I have aimed at least to convey something of the future potential for a creative realignment of other older studies evoking the pervasiveness of the sacred dimension with contemporary emphases within the social sciences on complexity, fluidity and change.

Emile Durkheim and the Notion of the Sacred

> In all the history of human thought there exists no other example of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or so radically opposed to one another. The traditional opposition of good and bad is nothing beside this; for the good and bad are only two opposed species of the same class, namely morals, just as sickness and health are two different aspects of the same order of facts, life, while the sacred and the profane have always and everywhere been conceived by the human mind as two distinct classes, as two worlds between which there is nothing in common (Durkheim, 1976, p.38).

In this justly famous passage near the beginning of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, first published in 1912, Durkheim emphatically asserts that the binary division between the 'worlds' of the sacred and profane is the fundamental, universal and originary articulation of difference or distinction. It is therefore, it may be inferred, at the root of all later systems of knowledge-classification. Durkheim adds that no particular entity is *fixed* immovably on one side of the sacred: profane division. It may

> pass from one of these worlds into the other: but the manner in which this passage is effected…puts into relief the essential duality of the two kingdoms. (Durkheim, 1976, p.39)

This division, he goes on to say, is at the basis of religion, in the totality of its manifestations. Indeed,

> the real characteristic of religious phenomena is that they always suppose a bipartite division of the whole universe […]into two classes which embrace all that exists, but which radically exclude each other. (Durkheim, 1976, p.40)

The sacred is defined as 'that which the profane should not touch and cannot touch with impunity', or, in the words of a recent summary of Durkheim's work, the 'inviolable- that which it is impossible to go beyond, for it relates to the ultimate – the ultimate as determined by a society' (Pickering, 2002, p.32). Religion, meanwhile, according to Durkheim,

> is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things […] things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community […] all those who adhere to them. (1976, p.47)

Durkheim had earlier considered the issue of the origins of classification in an essay co-written with his nephew and pupil, Marcel Mauss, *Primitive Classification*, first published in 1903 (Durkheim and Mauss, 1963). Here a rather different line of approach is adopted, but not one that is essentially contradictory to that taken in *Elementary Forms*. Durkheim and Mauss begin by postulating that the hierarchy of concepts accepted as the basis for all logical and scientific thought is not a given, that the human mind developed from a 'state of indistinction', where 'consciousness […] is only a continuous flow of representations which are lost in one another' (Durkheim and Mauss, 1963, pp.5-7). Starting from this assertion, they launch a series of questions, which, as we will see, are highly suggestive for the continued deep interrogation of the classificatory schema employed by science and within society.

The essay explores both (a) ethnographic evidence from what were seen by the authors as 'primitive' cultures in Australia and North America, and (b) literary sources relating to more 'advanced' civilisations in ancient China, India and Greece. In the first case, it is argued that 'the classification

of things reproduces […][the] classification of men [sic]' (Durkheim and Mauss, 1963, p.11): thus that all scientific knowledge in the widest sense of the term is ultimately derived from the basic structures of social relations. In the second, the relationship between social organisation and classification is no longer simple or clear-cut – the earliest literary records offer evidence of an already elaborate proliferation of 'fundamental' elements. Yet the *context* of divination, which underlies the separation of space, time and material things, continues, Durkheim and Mauss suggest, to provide clues to its origins in familial and tribal structures.

In the concluding part of the essay, Durkheim and Mauss maintain that primitive classifications are neither 'singular [n]or exceptional, having no analogy with those employed by more civilised peoples': rather, 'they seem to be connected, with no break in continuity, to the first scientific classifications' (1963, p.81). But the conclusion of *Primitive Classification* goes further than this. It is, as has been noted, an exceptionally rich portion of text, defying easy summary (Allen, 2000, p.51). I will need to return to it later. For now, it suffices to note that the notion of the collective consciousness of the 'sacred', which is in essence described in terms of an *emotional* charge, emerges as the lynchpin of the classificatory impulse.

Thus, for Durkheim and Mauss, 'it is […] states of the affective mind (*âme*) which give birth to these groupings, and these states moreover are manifestly affective'. Ideas are not only 'systematically arranged for reasons of sentiment'; they are themselves '*products* of sentiment' (1963, p.85; my italics). 'Class' and 'category' are themselves at root affective notions, and the affective, moreover, is virtually synonymous, in the context of their argument, with the religious.

> Religious emotions, notably, not only give [the class] a special tinge, but attribute to it the most essential properties of which it is constituted (Durkheim and Mauss, 1963, p.86).

As Warren Schmaus (2002, pp.39-40) has noted, both *Primitive Classification* and *Elementary Forms* should be read within the context of the French intellectual milieu within which they were written, where 'epistemology', the theory of knowledge, was generally considered under the rubric of 'psychology'. Durkheim radically departed from tradition in proposing *social* - rather than psychological - origins and causes for the fundamental categories of thought, including the notion of 'category' itself. He typified his age however in that he sought to found his own 'scientific' approach to sociology along the lines of the empirical methodology employed by the natural sciences. Both he and Mauss, moreover, subscribed, in general terms, to an 'evolutionist' overview whereby society advanced progressively from simpler to more complex forms. Whilst the underlying teleological thrust behind this view and the ethical implications of labelling one sort of culture 'primitive' have been hotly contested (for a brief but incisive discussion, see Allen, 2000, pp.75-76), these historically contingent aspects of Durkheim's thought should not, in my view, be allowed to negate the abiding resonance of his ideas regarding the sacred: profane division and the origins of classification.[1]

Elaborations of the Sacred: Dumézil and Bataille

As Neil Allen persuasively suggests, the work of Georges Dumézil was indebted to *Primitive Classifications* via the studies of Granet, the Sinologist (2000, p.41). Dumézil's meticulous approach to the comparative study of the history of religion among Indo-European cultures led him, after years of research, to formulate a tripartite conception of society, 'namely, its division into three superposed zones corresponding to three functions: sovereignty,

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[1] See also Mary Douglas's 'defence' of the notion of 'primitivism' in *Purity and Danger*. Douglas argues that the 'right basis for comparison [of cultures] is to insist on the unity of human experience and at the same time insist on its variety, on the differences which make comparison worthwhile'(1966, pp.93-96). In her account 'progress' may simply be interpreted as 'differentiation'. 'Thus primitive means undifferentiated; modern means differentiated.' Moreover, she comments sagely, 'I suspect that our professional delicacy in avoiding the term "primitive" is the product of secret convictions of superiority' (Douglas, 1966, pp.93-96).

warrior force, economic prosperity' (Eliade, in Dumézil, 1970, p.xii). The first of these 'functions', which are fundamentally 'clusters of ideas' bound together by an emotive sensibility (Allen, 2000, p.41), was itself split into two complementary parts – representing, on the one hand, the 'magical' and, on the other, the 'juridical' aspects of sovereignty. Each of the three zones, for Dumézil, was related to a specific aspect or type of divinity. For example, in Ancient Rome, the triad of Jupiter, Mars and Quirinius emerge as the oldest and originally most important gods of the pantheon, representative of an 'ideology of three functions' whereby 'the principal elements and machinery of the world and of society are adjusted into three harmoniously adjusted domains' (Dumézil, 1970, p.161).

This tripartite schema may be seen as an extension, rather than a contradiction, of Durkheim's assertion that the fundamental classificatory act is the division between sacred and profane. For Durkheim, the binary distinction was *a priori*: and in *Elementary Forms* he explicitly set out to examine 'the most primitive and simple religion we can observe' (1976, p.23), exemplified for him in Australian aboriginal society. Dumézil, on the other hand, dealt with settings that, even at their earliest recognisable stages, were already subject to a greater degree of political and economic differentiation. The triadic structure he postulated at the basis of a range of Indo-European theologies reflected the additional degree of social stratification that had taken place – in particular the trend towards the divergence of political and military power – but retained at its core the notion of the intricate interdependence of the social and the sacred.

Like Durkheim before him, Dumézil also emphasised that particular entities (or in his term 'reagents') found within the social universe he studied – and he is explicit that these may be material beings, abstract notions or social mechanisms – profoundly alter both their function and their meaning when they pass from one classificatory domain to another. In *Archaic Roman Religion* he provides the example of the horse: in

connection with Jupiter, it is a symbol of the god's power; in relation to Mars, it is a sacrificial victim; to Quirinius, it 'is nothing special, an economic asset among others' (Dumézil, 1970, p.278). Thus, sacredness/profanity is never a fixed attribute or property of the entity, but has always to be grasped within a system of correspondences; it is a *function* as well as a *dimension* of classification. More recently, in a discussion of the persistence of 'culture' – understood as 'the organization of human experience and action in symbolic terms', and carefully distinguished from 'progressive ideas of "civilization"' – a broadly similar point has been made by Marshall Sahlins:

> The persons, relations, and materials of human existence are enacted according to their meaningful values – meanings that cannot be determined from their biological or physical properties. As my teacher Leslie White used to say, no ape could appreciate the difference between holy water and distilled water, any more than it could remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. (Sahlins, 2000, p.158)

In the late 1930s, Georges Bataille, along with other members of the Collège de Sociologie, including Michel Leiris and Roger Caillois, appropriated Durkheimian ideas relating to the antimony between sacred and profane under the banner of 'sacred sociology'. For Bataille, if not for his collaborators, the central project of the Collège was oriented towards a consideration of the political consequences of harnessing, within the contemporary world, the transformative energy or 'effervescence' that Durkheim had characterised in *Elementary Forms* as focal to the collective expression of the sacred (Durkheim, 1976, pp.214-219). Whilst Durkheim had himself insisted on the 'demonic' as well as the 'divine' aspects of elementary religion, Bataille laid even greater emphasis on the dynamic potential of the 'left sacred' – its debased elements of violence, delirium and madness (Richman, 2002, pp.123-127).

The notion of effervescence – used by Durkheim to describe the production, within the context of Aboriginal religious assemblies, of a

'violent super-excitation of the whole physical and mental life' – fed in to Bataille's conceptualisation of the fundamental importance of transgressive *excess*. An early conviction that 'human life is not entirely reducible to processes of production and conservation' (Bataille, 1985, p.118), led to his eventual formulation in *La Part Maudite* of the thesis of a 'general economy', which set out 'to go beyond the limits that bound "economic man" and economic reason' (Pefanis, 1990, p.147; Bataille, 1989).

In a review article published in the post-war journal, *Critique* (which he edited), Bataille offered a refinement of the distinction between sacred and profane, and their relation to 'totality'. 'Science' for Bataille is that which 'always *abstracts* objects from the totality of the world':

> The sum of those objects *as abstractions* is represented by the term, 'the profane'. The sacred therefore is the world of 'communication or contagion, where nothing is separated and a special effort is required to remain outside the undetermined fusion'. (Bataille, 1994, pp.113-114)

Much as Dumézil gave the example of the Roman horse as an object whose ontological significance changed according to its situation, Bataille illustrated his point by sketching out the image of the corpse of a child on a dissecting table – for the scientist it is 'an anatomical object presented to scholarly observation'; for the child's mother, 'what is at stake…is the totality of being', (1994, p.114). The sacred thus refers altogether *beyond* the separation of 'object' and 'subject' and indeed beyond the notion of the 'individual' senses, everyday or scientific, in which the word is usually applied. At the same time, paradoxically, the sacred *is* the individual – the undivided or indivisible, in a *literal* sense – that which resists every act of classification, because it is, as Bataille wrote elsewhere, 'subordinate to nothing' (2001, p.92).

Sorting Things Out: the Work of Contemporary Classification
Much recent work on the theory and practice of classification has entailed a shift of focus from a preoccupation with the origins of classification as an

expression of underlying social and symbolic structure, to a consideration of the politics of classification in contemporary liberal democracies, and the resulting processes of negotiation, revision and reformulation. For instance, explicitly distancing his approach from that of Durkheim, Paul Starr maintains that the 'origins' of classification in developed societies lie in 'political choice', and that categories are constantly susceptible to the conflicting interest claims of particular groups, (1992, p.177). Starr is predominantly interested in what he delineates as 'social' forms of classification – groupings linked to concepts such as gender, class and race – as opposed to classification in the natural sciences, where the entities classified, 'are in no position to protest' (1992, p.158).

In the same collection in which Starr's essay appears (Douglas and Hull, 1992), Ian Hacking takes a slightly different line, perhaps one that can be more easily reconciled with some of the arguments presented by Durkheim and Mauss. Hacking makes clear that he does not believe in a 'fundamental cleavage' between 'categorising and knowing about people' in everyday life and the approaches adopted in the natural sciences (1992, p.184). In a sophisticated and penetrating analysis, he takes as his example the category of 'child abuse', which is simultaneously 'scientific' and 'moral'. Hacking is not primarily concerned with establishing the degree to which abuse is a 'natural kind' or a 'social construction'. He suggests that it is both: 'neither reality nor construction should be in question' (Hacking, 1992, p.194). Rather, following Goodman (1978), he suggests ways in which a relatively modern concept has rapidly evolved and participates in the creation of 'new worlds' of difference, in part through processes involving metonymic and metaphorical extension.

Although neither Starr nor Hacking directly refer to the sacred: profane dimension, this does not in itself suggest that it cannot be read into their arguments, albeit implicitly.[2] The same might be said of Geoffrey

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[2] For example, Starr's paper centres on the practice of classification in what he calls 'liberal states', which, he argues, at least in their 'ideal-typical' form, do not 'recognise any

Bowker and Susan Leigh Star's (1999) book *Sorting Things Out*, which I will now focus on in rather more detail. My argument in essence is that a re-mobilisation of the notion of the foundational importance of the sacred, *alongside* a consideration of the arguments presented in this more recent work, present a particularly fruitful line of approach in exploring contemporary social phenomena.

Like other writers in this area, Bowker and Star draw on research in linguistics, for example the work of George Lakoff (1987), which distinguished between (1) 'Aristotelian' and (2) 'prototypical' approaches to classification. Formal, 'scientific' systems invariably carry implicit pretensions to the Aristotelian model where ideally any single member of a given population can be placed in one 'class' only – whether species, genus or so on – at a time. However Lakoff, in part following Wittgenstein, posits against this model the notion of the 'prototypical' approach inherent in 'folk categorisation' and within the development of language as a central tool of communication. Prototypical classification operates from a position of 'best example' and proceeds by metaphor, metonymy and analogy (an example used by Lakoff is the procedure adopted when we decide whether a certain household article is designated as 'furniture'; he shows that there is extensive cultural variation in this). Bowker and Star suggest that in practice there is less of a divide between the two approaches than traditional conceptions of science as a purely rational procedure might suggest (1999, p.63).

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preexisting, organic or transcendent structure to society' (Starr, 1992, p.170). Rather, they emphasise the rights and responsibilities of individuals and not groups. This, incidentally, appears to me a rather implausible claim, even in the case of the ideal-type: for example, surely in any such state it will founder on the question of how age is evaluated (who is designated a child and who an adult), if not of that of gender, race or nationality. However, taking it at face value, this notion of individual freedom and equality in liberal democracy, has religious roots, and resonance with the sacred, as the very language of the American Constitution, which Starr takes as exemplary, suggests.

Hacking (1992, p.194), in contrast, explicitly states that child abuse '*is* a real evil, it was before being constructed'. It is no criticism of course to add that he does not explore the implications of this: his focus is elsewhere. But on my reading the very term 'evil' precisely and inevitably brings in its wake fundamentally 'religious' as well as moral conceptions.

In addition, Bowker and Star outline three key aspects of the work performed by classification systems within modernity. These aspects, which themselves often blur and overlap, may be summarised thus:

(i) Over time, categories can be and are 'made and kept invisible', thus *de-realised*, as well as brought into being, by classification systems. Systems validate their own framework. It is a matter not of 'mapping a pre-existing territory but of making the map and territory converge' (Bowker and Star, 1999, p.258). Via strategies of 'erasure' (destruction of traces of previous categories and systems) and 'clearance' (making everything new), classification schemes and infrastructures are bound up – inevitably – with practices of 'selective forgetting' whereby an indeterminate past is continually reinvented. Certain aspects are privileged, others silenced, and thinking 'outside' the scheme becomes problematic.

(ii) Classification systems and standards are part of a wider 'built information environment'. Classification and coding 'software' may be seen as 'frozen organisational and policy discourse', simultaneously reflecting and contributing to dominant paradigms of thought. Bowker and Star offer as an example the design and format of the standard death certificate, from which directly flow a range of other classifications related to 'cause of death' (1999, p.124). In the 1930s certificates 'echoed the positive analytic philosophy of the time' but more recent revisions reflect 'the trend toward fractured, postmodern, multiple causation' (1999, p.124).

(iii) Classification schemes profoundly reflect, and resonate with, moral, ethical and political agendas. Every category is *inescapably* 'an ethical choice…and as such dangerous'. By means of a variety of case studies – for example, the grading of diseases such as tuberculosis, and race classification in apartheid South Africa – Bowker and Star demonstrate what they call the '*torquing*' of classificatory and biographical trajectories: the insidious and often damaging ways wherein a continuous 'intercalation' and

'inter-negotiation' between bureaucratic infrastructure/ classificatory typology and 'lived experience' subsists (1999, p.187).

If these insights are now aligned with a reintroduction of the claim in the conclusion of *Primitive Classification* that 'social affectivity' is at the root of the division of the universe into sacred and profane and at the origin of all classification, a profound, and in many ways unsettling, reorientation towards many aspects of social interaction is prompted. Durkheim and Mauss emphasise that emotion, and in particular collective emotion, 'is something essentially fluid and inconsistent' (1963, p.88). In this it contrasts accepted notions of 'class' and 'concept' as *determinations* of things whose 'limits may be marked precisely'. Yet, if their view is correct, the former underlies the latter, then as today. Moreover, as Durkheim and Mauss point out, it is in the nature of collective emotion that it

> defies critical and rational examination. The pressure exerted by the group on each member does not permit individuals to judge freely the notions which society itself has elaborated and in which it has placed something of its personality (Durkheim and Mauss, 1963, p.88).

As the saying goes, we find it hard to think 'outside the box'. Especially, it might be now added, when the box itself has been 'sacralised'.

Let me try, nevertheless, to sketch out a few provisional implications of the discussion so far. Revisiting in turn each of the three aspects of classification highlighted by Bowker and Star, it can be seen that what is at stake is nothing less than might be named, following Michel Maffesoli a process of '*re-enchantment*' (1996, p.39). In other words, a re-conceptualisation of what he calls the 'social divine', the re-introduction of a certain 'religiosity' to the processes of attempting to theorise social life. But we must be careful what is meant and not meant by 'religious'. Durkheim's own attempt at defining the term has already been cited. It is important to note, in passing, that neither Durkheim, nor far less, Bataille (!) were exactly sympathetic to the established religious conventions of their time. Essentially, both linked the religious, or at least the sacred, to the

notion of *community* / the collective and to the interplay of transgression and taboo, that is, interdiction (Durkheim, 1976, p.300; Bataille, 2001, pp.63-70).

Taking points (i) to (iii) outlined above, then:

(i) The vast majority of the ways in which contemporary lives, institutions and practices are classified no longer bear any formal relation to the sacred. This is the case, by and large, even where individuals are adherents of organised religions, or within religiously-oriented subcultures, at least throughout the Western world. Unlike the ancient societies Dumézil studied, most of what is encountered – for example illnesses, other living entities, the weather – is not seen as being under the sign of a god.

Paradoxically, however, there is tendency for the very notion of 'rational' classification to *itself* become sacralised, at least implicitly. For instance, a sensation of prolonged pain or discomfort – in literal terms a 'disease' – conventionally becomes an 'illness' or 'disorder' only once it is named and categorised by medical science.[3] The 'objective facts' of science become 'sacrosanct'. Yet the 'facts' themselves can be viewed as themselves produced and mutable over time, and constant work has to go into sustaining them, as studies of the history and sociology of science from Kuhn (1962) to Latour (1987) have suggested.

That there *are* contemporary gods, as ultimately indefinable and unreachable as the old ones, appears to me undeniable. 'Health', 'happiness' and 'security' are perhaps some examples of 'deifications', in terms of both the terminology employed and the supposed essence of what is signified, within everyday discourse. Or, as Mary Douglas observed many years ago, nothing in or of itself is 'dirty': 'where there is no differentiation there is no defilement' (1966, p.198). Attention to the affective dimension of the processes of inclusion and differentiation on the one hand, and exclusion

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[3] However the distinction between illness and disease as 'value terms' in both everyday and medical language is complex. See Fulford (1989: 25ff) for a particularly penetrating discussion of this.

and 'forgetting' on the other, productively disturbs the sacred hierarchy and puts it into question.

(ii) Pluralism, contingency, liquidity and complexity are increasingly features of everyday 'postmodernity'. There is a growing sociological literature in this area, of which Bauman (2000) and Urry (2003) are representative. Given that, as Bowker and Star argue, classificatory approaches tend to reflect wider developments, it is to be expected that they will multiply, blur and become increasingly unstable over space and time.

An analogy with the pantheons of classical Greek or Indian religion is tempting: one in which the identities of the gods constantly shift and fold into one another. In methodological terms, the social sciences might profitably veer away from their historical obsession with imposing universally applicable structures and form, and address the contingent, localised and dynamic qualities whereby 'multiple ontologies' may be said to co-exist and interact (see Law, 2004). This involves forging an attitude which it may not be improper to depict in 'religious' terms – for example one combining heretical boldness towards orthodox belief with due reverence for the unknowable!

(iii) Seen from the perspective covered by this paper, the 'torquing' process described by Bowker and Star raises 'religious' connotations of 'sacrifice' and 'spiritual' suffering for the individuals caught up in it. The image of the torque powerfully evokes the way lives and 'systems', including systems of thought, are bound together for good or for ill. In a wholly secularised world that is in part maintained by the process of classification, ethical and affective dimensions are often rendered invisible.

An approach that registers the fundamental role of the 'non-rational' and of collective emotion in the very origins of classification may at least be able to draw attention toward, if not to mitigate, the sometimes suffocating and repressive effects of the torque. For example, by reinforcing the extent to which any racial or ethnic 'identity', sexual orientation, or

'disorder' bestowed on an individual is neither 'naturally' given nor an 'objective' fact. In this sense, Durkheim and Mauss's elaboration of the 'normative' quality built in to the most 'primitive' of classificatory systems, alongside Georges Canguilhem's (1989) analysis of the 'normal' and the 'pathological', remains instructive. At the same time, Bataille's notion of *dépense*, of the principle of excess underlying the wilful and affirmative impulse behind expenditure to the point of waste, is potentially transformative, in that it challenges the limit imposed by the 'restricted economy' of the profane within any 'scientific' classification. A 'sacred sociology' based around this principle remains deeply subversive both of socio-political homogeneity and of psychological fixity on the level of the individual 'self'.

Conclusion: the Potential for 'Re-enchantment'

In her book on Bataille, and Durkheimian influence on his thought, Michèle Richman suggests that the distinctive contribution of the Collège de Sociologie was to show that 'the sacred/profane duality could be investigated as an opposition that is active within all social formations' and evokes the possibility of a new 'socio-logic of effervescence' (2002, p.201). However, relatively few writers within the contemporary social sciences have taken the dimension of the sacred seriously. One exception is Michel Maffesoli who, in *The Time of the Tribes*, combines an enthusiastic espousal of Durkheim's notion of the basic connection between religion, emotion and society, with an incisive analysis of the contemporary 'everyday', which emphasizes a fluid and flexible neo-tribalism. Maffesoli calls for a response to the 'new intellectual challenge, above and beyond political morality' to explore what he refers to as 'the socio-anthropological structures of the *passional order*' (1996, italics in original, p.164).

       In the present paper, my emphasis has been on what is essentially an alternative perspective of the same Durkheimian notion, as expressed in

The Elementary Forms of Religious Life – the relationship between the sacred: profane antinomy and the origins of other forms of classification. I have tried to explore the extent to which a re-reading of both Durkheim and Mauss's essay on *Primitive Classification*, and its resonation and amplification in the work of Dumézil and Bataille, provoke a radical rethinking of the role of the categories and classificatory tools employed by social agents – including social scientists. Furthermore, I have tried to argue that a dialogue between these accounts, and more recent research taking classification as an object – exemplified by the book by Bowker and Star – might be particularly fruitful.

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