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Effervescence and Implosion in the Sociologies of Emile Durkheim and Jean Baudrillard: Towards a Sociology of Religion at the End of the Social

Paul-François Tremlett

Introduction

Jean Baudrillard's sociology entered the sociology of religion through the important work of Adam Possamai (Possamai 2005). Possamai defined new religions such as Discordianism, Matrixism and Jediism as hyper-real simulacrum of religion, "created out of, or in symbiosis with, commodified popular culture" providing "inspiration at a metaphorical level" and/or "beliefs for everyday life" (2012: 20). Despite the originality of Possamai's engagement with Baudrillard's work, he has nevertheless avoided many of Baudrillard's most provocative ideas, including the linked concepts of implosion, the end of the social and fatal theory. Arguably these are strange omissions, given the implication of Possamai's project (documenting processes of implicit religious resurgence) in the sociology of religion's dominant discourse the secularization thesis, and modernity's linear imaginaries of time and progress more generally. Baudrillard's experimentation with tropes and metaphors of implosion, dissipation and exhaustion in which modernity is envisaged not as limitless growth or expansion but as collapsing in on itself like a black hole, surely provides the basis for an important provocation against the evolutionist, productivist and positivist sensibilities that have shaped the classical sociology of religion and which continue to haunt contemporary sociological theory and research on religion.¹

¹ Elsewhere I have engaged with questions of methodology in relation to Possamai's work on hyper-real religions (see Tremlett 2013).

In this essay I accomplish two tasks: first, I bring Baudrillard's work into an alternative relationship with the sociology of religion through juxtaposition with the writings of Emile Durkheim (see Gane 1991: 9; Riley 2002: 255-257; Riley 2005: 293-295). Durkheim and Baudrillard share a common link to the figure of Georges Bataille, the founder of the short-lived *Collège de Sociologie* (1937-39). Like Durkheim, Bataille believed that ritual was constitutive of the social. But, in contrast to Durkheim's focus on totemic ritual, the "electricity" (Durkheim 1915: 215) it generates and the "perpetual sustenance" (1915: 211) this pure sacred provides for 'primitive' society, Bataille's focus was on the *potlatch*, the impure sacred, waste and non-utilitarian expenditure (Jenks 2003: 100-107; Richman 2003). Baudrillard's interest in implosion accentuates and deepens Bataille's break from Durkheim's productivist conception of ritual and its sacred energies: whereas Durkheim presupposed a virtuous circle between ritual, energy and the formation of a rational social entity available to the gaze of the sociologist, Baudrillard envisions the increasing impenetrability of the social, "an opaque nebula whose growing density absorbs all surrounding energy", that finally brings to an end "all those schemas of production, radiation and expansion according to which our imaginary functions" (Baudrillard 2007: 36-37). Second, then, I sketch a Baudrillardian approach to the sociology of secularization that assumes not the exhaustion of religion but the exhaustion of wider the social, a move with significant consequences for theories of secularization and the sacred on the one hand (Riley 2002), and for theories of lived and liquid religion and the conceptualisation of resilient, sustainable social solidarities, on the other (McGuire 2008; Groot 2006 and 2008). However, I begin with Claude Lévi-Strauss' meditations on entropy (Tremlett 2008: 92 and 2011: 363), to reflect upon the different imaginaries of energy and society articulated by Durkheim and Baudrillard.

Energy and Society

Durkheim and Baudrillard's exploration of the social through metaphors of energy are of course part of a wider tapestry of sociological writing exploring intersections of energy and society by the likes of Herbert Spencer, Leslie White and Clifford Geertz among others (see Rosa, Machlis and Keating 1988). For example, evolutionist social theory tied societal differences to technology and energy consumption, and imagined a limitless arc of innovation and growth. However, this imaginary of endless expansion was articulated without regard for the second law of thermodynamics which establishes the scientific foundations for the sustainability of complex social systems:

The second law of thermodynamics states the universal tendency of all isolated systems to pass from more to less organized states; this passage is called 'increase of entropy'. Increase of entropy is, if considered within the confines of the given isolated system, an irreversible process; the system cannot 'on its own' return to a more organized state. There is an interpretation of entropy as energy, which must be applied to bring the system back to its initial condition. This amount grows unremittingly as a function of time flow. No isolated system can draw the required energy from its internal resources ... The only remedy against the otherwise inescapable maximization of entropy ... seems to be to break the boundaries of the system open to exchange with what was previously its outside, and unrelated, environment (Bauman 1999: 47).

The work of the archaeologist Joseph Tainter (1988) is pertinent in this regard: his studies of societal collapse in the ancient world demonstrate the diminishing returns of complexity, and the difficulties that arise in seeking to stave off entropic exhaustion:

More complex societies are more costly to maintain than simpler ones, requiring greater levels of support per capita. As societies increase in complexity, more networks are created among individuals, more hierarchical controls are created to

regulate these networks, more information is processed, there is more centralization of information flow, there is increasing need to support specialists not directly involved in resource production, and the like. All of this complexity is dependent upon energy flow at a scale vastly greater than that characterizing small groups of self-sufficient foragers or agriculturalists. The result is that as a society evolves toward greater complexity, the support costs levied on each individual will also rise, so that the population as a whole must allocate increasing portions of its energy budget to maintaining organizational institutions. This is an immutable fact of societal evolution, and is not mitigated by type of energy source (Tainter 1988: 91-2).

Of the classical social theorists, Max Weber's sociology is unique in its assumption that the social system will ultimately exhaust itself.² At the end of *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber suggests that Western modernity is "now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism", speculating that it would "determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt" (2002: 123). No amount of charismatic energy will be able to forestall the inevitable running down and disintegration of the system (Parsons 1949: 752). A more sustained sociological engagement with theories of energy and society is to be found in the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who according to Christopher Johnson, conceived of culture, history and change in terms of the "thermodynamic or informational concept of entropy" (Johnson 2003: 116). Indeed, Lévi-Strauss is interested in open systems that, as they interact, set off catalytic reactions or information exchanges that in turn, generate new forms

² However, if one were to remove the messianic elements from Marx—specifically the idea of a subject pre-selected for the self-realization of itself and human history—then what is left is an analysis of capitalism for which no revolution is necessary, as capitalism is doomed to entropic collapse anyway, under the weight of its own dissipative, internal contradictions.

(his approach to myth exemplifies this point with particular clarity: see Tremlett 2016a). In *Tristes Tropiques*, he proposes the name of a new science of “entropology [entropologie]” to study processes of “disintegration” (2011: 414), for “what else has man done except blithely break down billions of structures and reduce them to a state in which they are no longer capable of integration?” (2011: 413). Elsewhere, he presents two models of the social. Both take as their point of departure a distinction between primitive and modern forms of society and both constitute applications of the thermodynamic concept of entropy to the study of social structures:

I have suggested ... that the clumsy distinction between ‘peoples without history’ and others could with advantage be replaced by a distinction between what for convenience I called ‘cold’ and ‘hot’ societies [*les sociétés froides et les sociétés chaudes*]: the former seeking, by the institutions they give themselves, to annul the possible effects of historical factors on their equilibrium and continuity in a quasi-automatic fashion; the latter resolutely internalizing the historical process and making it the moving power of their development (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 233-234; 1962: 309-310).

The distinction between hot and cold societies is first set out in the essay ‘The Scope of Anthropology’ (1994a: 29) where Lévi-Strauss includes an additional binary opposition to that of hot versus cold, namely egalitarian to hierarchical social structures (in an interview with Georges Charbonnier he also opposed clocks to steam engines as examples of distinct types of complex systems). According to Lévi-Strauss, cold, egalitarian, clockwork societies require a small amount of initial input energy to get them going. They are characterized by a negative feedback loop where “information on the output of the system is fed back to its input, to ensure that subsequent output is maintained within a limited set of parameters”, while hot, hierarchical steam-powered societies generate energy through exploitation—“differentiations between

castes and between classes are emphasized unceasingly in order to draw from them change and energy” (Lévi-Strauss 1994a: 29)—and are characterized by a positive feedback loop where “the system is subject to an exponential growth that know no limits” (Johnson 2003: 123). In short, then, hot societies exploit their environments—colonialism and capitalism secure, by whatever means necessary, constant access to new sources of energy—while cold societies generate a steady state with their environment, thereby guaranteeing “both a modest standard of living and the conservation of natural resources” (Lévi-Strauss 1994a: 28), an equilibrium founded in “deep respect for the forces of nature” (Lévi-Strauss 1994b: 319). Elsewhere Lévi-Strauss proposes some possible solutions, for modern societies, to the problem of thermic death, that do not depend on the violent extraction of resources (see Lévi-Strauss 1985 and 1994c). Importantly, the basic distinction he draws between hot and cold societies intersects Durkheim’s assumptions about the sustainability of the pre-modern social and Baudrillard’s prediction of modernity’s inevitable implosion. It is to the work of Durkheim and Baudrillard that I now turn.

The Sociologies of Emile Durkheim and Jean Baudrillard

Sociology against entropy

Emile Durkheim’s entire *oeuvre* is ordered according to a basic distinction, drawn in *The Division of Labor* (2014), between primitive and modern societies, and the types of solidarity—mechanical or organic—preponderant within them. According to Parsons, *The Division* is best understood “as a polemic against the utilitarian conception of modern industrial society” (1949: 343): rejecting the view that order derives simply from the satisfaction of the immediate interests of individuals engaged in relations of contract, Durkheim stresses the subjective, tacit, taken-for-granted values and rules, which are socially given, and through which individuals are integrated into a moral order that is prior to any such agreements or exchanges (see Durkheim

2014: 169). Durkheim's focus on law in *The Division* and in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1982) on 'social facts' as external constraints, might be taken to suggest that Durkheim's philosophical distance from Hobbes is not altogether great, because Durkheim seems to privilege violent legal sanction as the ultimate guarantor of mechanical solidarity. But for Durkheim, before any individual or indeed individual interests, wants or needs there is society, for "although society is nothing without individuals, each one of them is more a product of society than he is the author [chacun d'eux est beaucoup plus un produit de la société qu'il n'est l'auteur]" (Durkheim 2014: 274; 1930: 342). Society, therefore, is not simply an external environment or container in which individuals move around: rather, it is a "constitutive element in the individual's own concrete personality" such that the individual "is not placed in a social environment so much as ... *participates* in a common social life" (Parsons 1949: 399):

For the collective force [la force collective] is not entirely outside of us; it does not act upon us wholly from without; but rather, since society cannot exist except in and through individual consciousnesses [consciences individuelles], this force must also penetrate us and organize itself within us; it thus becomes an integral part of our being and by that fact ... elevated and magnified (Durkheim 1915: 209; 1960: 299).

In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915)—in the first instance, a study of Australian, aboriginal 'totemism' that is usefully juxtaposed with E. B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1903)—Durkheim focuses on ritual and in doing so, develops a highly original and influential theory of religion while simultaneously deepening the analysis of the social. According to Durkheim, the "primary object" of religion is "not to give man a representation of the world" as Tylor had claimed. Rather, it is "a system of ideas with which the individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members and the obscure but intimate relations which they have with it" (1915: 225). These "obscure but intimate relations" are

organised symbolically. The totemic rite assembles individuals who come to feel that they are acted upon by some external force. This external force is not any religious being or power but society itself metaphorically represented by the totem, the “flag” or “emblem” of the society (1915: 206). Central is Durkheim’s conception of the sacred, but it is not simply that which is opposed to the profane. Rather, the sacred is a force essential to the constitution and renewal of the social. However, it is also ambiguously split between pure and impure sacreds (Richman 2003: 32; Riley 2005: 275), and Durkheim’s emphasis is on the pure sacred—the sacred associated with order and reason (see Riley 2002: 252).

According to Durkheim, aboriginal social life is marked by two, distinct phases: in the former, small groups engage in subsistence activities largely independently of one another. In the second phase, these previously dispersed groups concentrate for the purposes of celebrating a religious rite. Durkheim characterizes the first phase of hunting and gathering as of “mediocre intensity” and as being marked by activities unlikely “to awaken very lively passions”. Life in the first phase is as such, “uniform, languishing and dull” (Durkheim 1915: 215). However, once the groups have come together, a transformation occurs:

The very fact of the concentration acts as an exceptionally powerful stimulant. When they are once come together, a sort of electricity [une sorte d’électricité] is formed by their collecting which quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation ... The initial impulse thus proceeds, growing as it goes, as an avalanche grows in its advance. And as such active passions so free from all control could not fail to burst out ... This effervescence often reaches such a point that it causes unheard of actions ... They produce such a violent super-excitation [surexcitation] of the whole physical and mental life that it cannot be supported very long: the actor taking the principal part finally falls exhausted [épuisé] on the ground (Durkheim 1915: 215-216; 1960: 308-310).

For Durkheim this “effervescence” is the energy and the creative principle of the social that makes possible the renewal of primitive society. Durkheim places ritual at the centre of his theory of religion but also of the social itself. Ritual is the great conductor of the electricity and the sacred effervescence that is generated by the massed tumult of bodies. Arguing that “there can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality” (1915: 427), the rite and the sacred energies it releases become the engine through which the Durkheimian social renews itself and keeps entropy at bay:

For it is through the agency of ritual that the ultimate-value attitudes, the sentiments on which the social structure and solidarity depend, are kept “tuned up” to a state of energy which makes the effective control of action and ordering of social relationships possible (Parsons 1949: 436).

Primitive society—and its characteristic mechanical form of solidarity—is then, entropy proof. But there is more. Durkheim’s argument concerning the restorative powers of sacred ritual effervescence suggests that these periodic explosions of energy are also sufficient insulation against the implosive centrifuge of modernity. “Hence come ceremonies”, writes Durkheim, “which do not differ from religious ceremonies, either in their object, the results which they produce, or the processes employed to attain these results” (1915: 427). Change, if it comes at all to the Durkheimian social, must come from the outside, or, following Parsons, it will be non-linear or “cyclic” (1949: 450), and it is precisely this resistance to change that insulates it from entropic decay.

The Sociology of Exhaustion

Durkheim was well aware of the dangerous currents that might undermine the equilibrium and apparently self-stabilizing tendencies of the social system: in *The Division and Suicide* (1952),

anomie functions as the entropic or implosive principle, as disorganization, disaggregation and disconnection, in short, a short-circuit of social relations. In *The Division*, Durkheim frames *anomie* as a pathology and as an abnormal form, something like a cancer that interrupts the smooth functioning of an organism (2014: 277). In *Suicide* the biological metaphors no longer preponderate but *anomie* remains an avoidable condition for which the sociologist can diagnose and propose remedies. Yet the effervescences of the sacred—in its ambiguous pure and impure expressions—have the capacity to generate both order and disorder, energy and exhaustion. It is precisely this impure sacred that is taken up by Durkheim’s students including Robert Hertz and members of the *Collège de Sociologie* including its founder Georges Bataille, and indeed, these two forms of the sacred point to two Durkheim’s, one concerned with order, morality and rationality the other interested in the power of social practices such as ritual to explode social life:

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, [and] the need to explode routinization via passionate association and transcendent ritual (Smith and Alexander 2005: 5; see also Riley 2002).

It is the radical Durkheim and “left sacred” that is seized upon by Bataille and then Baudrillard to explore “the tensions between system and anti-system” and “ideas about dread, productive excess, transgression, death, eroticism and embodied experience” (Smith and

Alexander 2005: 10). It is on the ground of the impure sacred, then, that Baudrillard meets Durkheim and Bataille. In Durkheim he finds the significance of the rite and its sacred energies (Baudrillard 2007: 73). In Bataille he finds the rejection of utility and the idea of an economy that is not “locked within productivist logic”, namely symbolic exchange which “breaks with all the utilitarian imperatives and revels in the Dionysian energies of play and festival” (Best and Kellner 1991: 115; see also Jenks 2003: 101). In *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993) Baudrillard explores this anti-productivist logic in relation to the dead. “Death”, writes Baudrillard, “is a *social relation*” (1993: 131), articulated through initiation or ritual. Here Baudrillard is trying to find, on the terrain of the primitive and symbolic—itself of course a fiction or anthropological simulacrum (Kuper 1988)—a new kind of critique of modernity (but see Riley 2002: 256). The substance of that critique would come from Durkheim’s account of primitive society and mechanical solidarity and its capacity, through ritual, to resist entropic implosion. Baudrillard adopts Durkheim’s insight that implosion is circumvented in so-called primitive societies via the centripetal and cyclical logic of ritual and symbolic exchange (see Lotringer, Kraus and El Kholi 2007: 9; see also Bogard 1987; Chen 1987). Like Durkheim, he asserts a huge divide between symbolic and modern societies but additionally argues that modern societies are reaching an end point marked by a descent into simulation and the hyper-real. In contemporary societies, according to Baudrillard, the impure sacred is accessed by the ‘black mass’ through rites of consumption and spectacle: but these rites generate neither order nor creative effervescence, only waste and entropy (Riley 2002: 256). In *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (2007) it is clear that the descent into entropic dissipation cannot be avoided:

Crucially, the basic temporal form of society ... is no longer that of a progressive, expanding or historical society ... Evolution has now not just slowed down, it has entered a phase of contraction in which whole new series of laws apply: a society in a phase of inward implosion (Gane 1991: 130).

According to Riley, Baudrillard is “announcing ... the end of sociology” but also “the end of production as the reigning paradigm of meaning and value and the arrival of a new way of understanding social exchange and experience” (2002: 256). As such, if Durkheim’s account of the totemic rite in *The Elementary Forms* describes a mass of bodies coming together to generate a strange effervescent power or electricity, the opening lines of Baudrillard’s *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* seem to have been deliberately composed to evoke that rite and its energies, except that all its elements are now functioning in reverse:

The whole chaotic constellation of the social revolves around that spongy referent; that opaque but equally translucent reality, that nothingness: the masses. A statistical crystal ball, the masses are “swirling with currents and flows,” in the image of matter and the natural elements. So at least they are represented to us. They can be “magnetized,” the social envelops them, like static electricity; but most of the time, precisely, they form a mass, that is, they absorb all the electricity of the social and political and neutralize it forever. They are neither good conductors of the political, nor good conductors of the social, nor good conductors of meaning in general. Everything flows through them, everything magnetizes them, but diffuses throughout them without leaving a trace ... They do not radiate; on the contrary, they absorb all radiation from the outlying constellations of State, History, Culture, and Meaning (Baudrillard 2007: 35-36).

The spiral towards implosion is irresistible, having acquired a seemingly “fatal speed” (Baudrillard 2007: 74). According to Baudrillard, the media—the functional equivalent of religion in modern societies, or the adhesive that is supposed to ensure that the centre can, in fact, hold—generates a reverse effect: “Instead of intensifying or creating the ‘social relation’ [they] are on the contrary entropic processes, modalities of the end of the social” (2007: 51). This “*reverse energy*” (2007: 69) rests on the paradox that as information expands and grows,

meaning contracts and collapses: “information dissolves meaning and the social into a sort of nebulous state leading not at all to a surfeit of innovation but to the very contrary, to total entropy” (2007: 102). Whereas in Durkheim’s sociology the effervescence of the rite guarantees society’s transparency to the sociological gaze, for Baudrillard, implosion comes to mean the reversal of the subject : object relation. In *Fatal Strategies* (1999), Baudrillard imagines the reversal of all of Descartes’ certainties, describing a strange, dream-like world of animate objects—fetishes no less—in which the endless proliferation of media and information defies rational analysis, overpowering modernity’s hero of knowledge—the knowing subject—rendering it incapable of generating knowledge. It is not only society that is imploding; Sociology will meet the same end:

There is perhaps but one fatal strategy and only one: theory. And doubtless the only difference between a banal theory and a fatal theory [une théorie banale et une théorie fatale] is that in one strategy the subject still believes himself to be more cunning than the object, whereas in the other the object is considered more cunning, cynical, talented than the subject, for which it lies in wait. The metamorphoses, the ruses, the strategies of the object surpass the subject’s understanding. The object is neither the double nor the repressed of the subject, neither its fantasy nor its hallucination, neither its mirror nor its reflection—it has its own strategy and holds the key to the rules of a game, impenetrable to the subject, not because they are deeply mysterious, but because they are infinitely ironic (Baudrillard 1999: 181; 1983: 259-260).

The Sociology of Religion at the End of the Social

The secularization thesis is the most important and debated model of religious change in the sociology of religion in the West. It predicts the exhaustion of religion as a corollary of the

expansion of modernity. There are a number of variants of the main model, including counter theories of religious oscillation and religious resurgence against the principal narrative of linear religious dissipation (for a general overview, see Warner 2010). It is important to note that the variants of the thesis correlate the fatal weakening of religious institutions with the emergence of new spiritual movements and groups beyond the confines of religious institutions.

Opponents of the main model of secularization have argued that while church attendance figures are falling in many West European countries, absence from church does not necessarily equate to unbelief. As the sociologist Grace Davie has argued, people may continue to believe even while they have ceased to belong to any particular parish or congregation (Davie 1994). Secondly, they note big changes in the global religious landscape including the huge growth of Christianity, perhaps particularly in its Pentecostal and charismatic forms, especially in the global south (Martin 2005; Meyer 2010; Walls 2010). Yet the fact remains that there has been a significant decline in all aspects of religious identification and affiliation in the West. The question is, how to interpret the evidence.

The linear model of religious change is associated, in Britain, primarily with the work of the sociologists Bryan Wilson and Steve Bruce and the historian, Callum Brown. Both Wilson and Bruce—utilizing census and survey data—locate secularization with the advent of modernity (see Bruce 2002: 2) and the emergence of the idea of the rational and autonomous individual who prefers horizontal attachments of democratic politics and culture to the vertical affiliations of religious institutions, and for whom religion becomes increasingly just one belief among many, in an increasingly plural world—a secularized and individualised marketplace of choices and opportunities. This is precisely the narrative that sociology’s classical tradition set in motion, at least in the Weberian variant and its narrative of disenchantment (see Weber 2002). This sense of secularization as the inevitable unfolding of the process of rationalization as described by Weber is exemplified in Bryan Wilson’s definition of secularization as

the diminution in the social significance of religion. Its application covers such things as, the sequestration by political powers of the property and facilities of religious agencies; the shift from religious to secular control of various of the erstwhile activities and functions of religion; the decline in the proportion of their time, energy and resources which men devote to super-empirical concerns; the decay of religious institutions; the supplanting, in matters of behaviour, of religious precepts by demands that accord with strictly technical criteria; and the gradual replacement of a specifically religious consciousness ... by an empirical, rational, instrumental orientation; the abandonment of mythical, poetic, and artistic interpretations of nature and society in favour of matter-of-fact description and, with it, the rigorous separation of evaluative and emotive dispositions from cognitive and positivistic orientations (Wilson 1982:149).

No amount of spiritual energy can resist the processes of rationalization and disenchantment described by Weber and re-inscribed by Wilson and Bruce. To be sure, Callum Brown's historical account of "the death of Christian Britain" (Brown 2009: 1) should be distinguished from that of Wilson and Bruce to the extent that Brown outlines a theory of secularization based in oral historical research rather than statistics and survey data and for which the causes of secularization are cultural and highly gendered. But Brown's model is still linear, though the starting point of decline begins a century after that identified by Wilson and Bruce: according to Brown, the collapse of Christianity in Britain begins in the 1960s with the rise of the counter-culture. If, prior to the 1960s, women were the primary agents of religious transmission outside the churches, feminism, the pill and the sexual revolution put an end, over a very short period of time, not simply to the participation of women in the churches but to the transmission of Christian values, beliefs and practices to the next generation (2009: 175-180). Yet despite these important differences, for all three the emergence of new religious and

spiritual groups and movements, the proliferation of sects and ecumenical currents are, in the last analysis, confirmations of secularization to the extent that they are responses to a situation in which religious values have lost their sacred aura.

Against these linear models of religious decline, Stark and Bainbridge have proposed an oscillation model in which secularisation and resurgence are correlated with the rise and fall of religious markets, specifically religious monopolies defined by a single state provider on the one hand and free market competition where numerous providers compete, on the other. Their modelling of religious economy characterized by cyclical processes of sectarianism and new religious innovation precipitated by monolithic institutional disintegration, presupposes free-market innovation versus state provider uniformity, with the former generating greater religious commitment among what become, under state church monopolies, populations largely indifferent to religion:

Without coercion, the natural condition of the religious market is one of numerous competing faiths and organizations. But for the greatest part of recorded history, societies have been guided by dominant religions that have achieved near monopolies through serving the needs of the state and receiving coercive support in return (Stark and Bainbridge 1987: 316).

The oscillation model assumes that religious needs are constant and that religions provide ‘supernatural compensators’ to assuage those needs. Importantly, they argue that it is only when “the religious market is free enough to offer several brands of religion” that the population “receives appropriate compensators and responds with firm religious commitment” (1987: 149).

Opposed to the linear and oscillation models of secularization there is a corpus of scholarship that argues that despite the disintegration of religious institutions, a resurgence is occurring that is marked by a shift from religion to spirituality. The idea of religious or spiritual

resurgence assumes the constancy of religious needs, needs which inevitably leak out from the confines of modernity's iron cage: Christopher Partridge's two-volume *The Re-Enchantment of the West* (2004) and Paul Heelas' *Spiritualities of Life* (2008) are representative of the claim that Europe is in the midst of a cultured reaction against the "secularizing forces of rationalization, bureaucratization and technological domination" (Partridge 2004: 43). For Partridge, this relates to the emergence of a "new subculture of dissent and opposition" and a return "to a form of magical culture" he calls "occulture" (2004: 40). Heelas, by contrast, foregrounds the social significance of what he calls alternatively "experiential spirituality" (Heelas 2008: 5) and "inner-life spirituality" (2008: 219). These spiritualities lie on a "romantic trajectory" that opposes the instrumentalism of bureaucratic and capitalist modernity and offers a counter-balance to processes that threaten to suffocate the creative Self that is "ever more regulated by legal, quasi-legal or economically justified procedures, rules, [and] systems" (2008: 2). For both Partridge and Heelas, secularizing reason deforms the human capacity for creativity and imagination and both oppose it to a spiritual awakening.

Much of the work around this shift from religion to spirituality has been framed theoretically through the idea of 'lived religion' (McGuire 2008) and 'liquid religion' (Groot 2006 and 2008). If individual religious practice is never isomorphic with "institutional religion" (2008: 185) or a simple reflection of official doctrine, then it is a fluid arena of social practice fabricated in *ad hoc* fashion from diverse religious, cultural, secular and political sources. The theologian Kees de Groot has argued that "the dissolution of institutionalized and organized religiosity" (2006: 92) can be understood in terms drawn from the sociology of Zygmunt Bauman (2000), that is as 'liquid religion'. More than the decline of 'official' or institutional religion, 'liquid religion' is the growth of new, 'unofficial' forms of association that combine different elements of religion, culture, politics and the secular in new and unexpected ways (Groot 2008) (one might equally imagine this liquidity in terms drawn from Deleuze and

Guattari, for example in terms of the rhizome or the body without organs [Deleuze and Guattari 2014]). There are numerous examples of these new lived or liquid, religious and spiritual forms, fabricated from overlapping religious traditions alongside cultural and counter-cultural elements, technologies and secular-political strategies, from Islamic hip hop artists suturing together a Quranic poetic tradition with a contemporary form of music (see Nasir 2012), to death/goth punk and drone metal bands such as UK Decay, M4Alice, Rudimentary Peni and Gravetemple, notable for their suturing together of extreme sounds with mystical and esoteric imaginaries drawn from Hindu, Buddhist, Judaic, Christian and cosmic horror sources, often all at the same time (for example, see Coggins 2015).³ Rieger and Kwok’s exploration of the intersections of religion and dissent in the American Occupy movement highlights comparable processes of assembly, particularly in terms of the organizational forms—the horizontal process—of the Occupy movement. They argue that “the old hierarchical models of the church seem outdated” and that in order to imagine an alternative it is necessary to draw not only from Christian theology but also from “organizational theory” (2013: 120). For Rieger and Kwok this is the point of bringing ‘religion’ and ‘Occupy’ together—to enable the emergence of an alternative imaginary of Christianity that moves away from the exhausted hierarchies of top-down power and towards a model of “*decentralized networks*” (2013: 121; italics in original) defined by the improvised and rhizomatic or “heterogeneous organizational structure[s]” (2013: 130) that were such a feature of the Occupy movement (see Graeber 2013; Tremlett 2016b). They deploy this alternative imaginary of assembly to define a “theology of the multitude” (2013: 6) and it is precisely in these decentralized, liquid, rhizomatic forms that Rieger and Kwok identify the potential future sources of religion and the social (2013: 40).

Importantly, these are examples not of eccentric outliers or ephemeral instances of cultural production: rather, they reveal entanglements of religion, culture and the secular that

³ The author played guitar for M4 Alice, 1986-1991.

point to attempts to construct new forms of solidarity and experience in the ruins of the institutions that were once the guarantee of the social.

The single question that all of this scholarship raises is, given the disintegration of religious and other institutions, what kinds of resilience—of energy—can the new spiritual, liquid or lived solidarities generate? If the problem of modernity “was the threat of [the] disappearance of the sacred” (Riley 2002: 259), then both Durkheim and Baudrillard provide ways to imagine the currents of the sacred in contemporary societies. For Durkheim, it was a question of its reconfiguration in order to be able to continue to channel it as a source of “primordial social energy” (ibid). For Baudrillard however, the sacred—in its impure form—guarantees nothing. Thus, perhaps the answer to the question lies, with Baudrillard, in abandoning the optimistic and thoroughly carbon-powered temporalities of communism, liberalism and their imaginaries of an ever expanding, progressive modernity, and in assuming that modernity is exhausted and that history has run out of steam. In the sociology of religion, the theory most indebted to the teleological temporalities of modernity’s evolutionary optimism, is the secularization thesis. The thesis predicts the terminal exhaustion Christianity in Europe and religion more generally, under the corrosive effects of an endlessly modernizing modernity. What if the error of the secularization thesis lies not in having predicted that religious populations and identifications would decline, but that it failed to recognize that this was but one element of a wider process of exhaustion (see Putnam 2000)? If religion is declining, then everything else is as well: populations have not only stop attending church, they have also stopped joining political parties and they have stopped voting. The institutions of Western modernity are falling apart, and once integrated populations are finding themselves forced to rely on their own resources and creative ingenuity to insulate themselves as best they can from the worst excesses of predation by oligarchs, authoritarians and self-styled populists in whatever ways they can:

We are facing a long period of systemic disintegration, in which social structures become unstable and unreliable, and therefore uninstrusive for those living in them. A society of this kind that leaves its members alone is ... less than a society ... a society devoid of reasonably coherent and minimally stable institutions capable of normalizing the lives of its members and protecting them from accidents and monstrosities of all sorts. Life in a society of this kind demands constant improvisation (Streeck 2016: 36).

Of course Streeck is not writing about religion or the sacred: he is interested in the links between neoliberal capitalism and politics which he regards as being in a state of entropic disintegration. The Baudrillardian frame insists that the key observation of the secularization thesis—that there has been a dramatic decline in church attendance and religious belonging—is only a small part of a wider story of dissipation and exhaustion. In which case, the significance of the new, improvised, liquid and lived spiritualities needs to be re-thought beyond simplistic conceptions of religious resurgence and instead in terms of the wider horizon of religion and society and their potential for generating energies and sustainable solidarities.

Conclusions

To date, the most substantial engagement with the work of Jean Baudrillard from the sociology of religion has been Adam Possamai's important work on hyper-real religions. In this essay I have positioned Baudrillard's work into an alternative relationship with the sociology of religion through juxtaposition with the writings of Emile Durkheim, focusing in particular on the ways in which Durkheim and Baudrillard explore processes of social integration and disintegration through metaphors of energy, framed in terms of a wider sociology of energy and society. However, I re-cycle them and put them to use as lenses to re-interpret the sociology of secularization and the sacred. I argued that this sociology is implicated not in the end of

religion but rather, pace Baudrillard, in the end of the social. This requires a re-thinking of the significance of the lived, liquid and improvised spiritualities beyond the idea of religious resurgence and towards the idea of the sustainable social. Theoretically, this marks a significant attempt to privilege a Durkheimian rather than a Weberian sociology of religion: the secularization thesis as expounded by Bryan Wilson, Paul Heelas and Adam Possamai among others, feeds upon Weberian concepts of disenchantment and rationality. The approach I have taken here, albeit inspired by Baudrillard, stands squarely within the Durkheimian tradition of sociology—to which Baudrillard also belonged—for which the unit of analysis is society and the central question is necessarily, the resilience and sustainability of the social.

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