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Durkheim and Innovation[1]

Dénes NÉMEDI

ABSTRACT: The paper analyses Émile Durkheim's concept of innovation. Durkheim was more a sociologist of stability than of change. In his early works, he treated rapid social change as a negative force, one that demolishes moral restraints and leads to anomie, and only held a slow and gradual change healthy. However, in his research after the turn of the century, Durkheim attached a greater importance to the issues of change, and innovation was clearly in the focus of The Elementary Forms of Religious Life. The main mechanism in this process was 'collective effervescence', a phenomenon that Durkheim interpreted not just as an unstructured social practice, but also as a structuring force in society. With this mechanism in the centre of the argument, Durkheim explained the emergence of the concept of impersonal force, and, without a reference to trascendence, that of religious ideas. The paper however points out that Durkheim blurred the difference between renewal and innovation and thereby made his argumentation circular. As the author shows, Durkheim failed to convincingly demonstrate that it was possible to interpret innovation in a sufficiently collectivistic manner and make the social constitution of new ideas credible, and at the same time grasp the innovative processes on the level of individuals. As a conclusion of the paper, the author suggests that the problem of social innovation should be pursued in two directions, and the solution to this Durkheimian problem could be to bring together the communicative action theory approach to language with the objective approach to sociality.

Durkheim is rightfully rather considered to be the sociologist of stability, balance and integration and less of change, and of conscious change. Durkheim was filled with anguish by rapid social change experienced in his own age. The most obvious example of it is the analysis of anomic suicide, and not the analysis of the different effects by gender exercised by marriage on the frequency of suicide but considerations assumed to exist between economic change and the frequency of suicide. As it is commonly known, Durkheim held that economic upturn as well as crisis enhance inclinations to suicide. The effect of economic crisis on inclination to suicide is less interesting from the angle of innovation which is my current topic. Here the role of individuals happens to be passive, they suffer the external necessities, and their effects drive them towards suicide instead of making them to try to satisfy their needs in new ways or to develop new needs. What is involved here is that people affected by a crisis "…then they must reduce their requirements, restrain their needs, learn

1 Professor Dénes Némedi, a key figure in Hungarian sociology, passed away suddenly on November 1st 2010. He wrote this article for the annual conference of the Hungarian Sociological Association, held on the topic of 'Conflict and Social Innovation'. Sadly, he did not have the opportunity to present this paper. We wish to commemorate his life and work with this posthumous publication.

greater self-control. All the advantages of social influence are lost so far as they are concerned; their moral education has to be recommenced. But society cannot adjust them instantaneously to this new life and teach them to practice the increased self-repression to which they are unaccustomed." (Durkheim 2002: 213) Actually, what is involved here is not anomie, but a type similar to the less expounded fatalistic suicide (Durkheim 2002; Besnard 1987: 109).

On the other hand, at the time of upturn, of "the sudden growth of power and wealth" people "The limits are unknown between the possible and the impossible, what is just and what is unjust, legitimate claims and hopes and those which are immoderate. Consequently, there is no restraint upon aspirations". (Durkheim 2002: 213). Durkheim was convinced that people "cannot assign themselves this law of justice. So they must receive it from an authority which they respect, to which they yield spontaneously. Either directly and as a whole, or through the agency of one of its organs, society alone can play this moderating role …" (Durkheim 2002: 209). In other words: a rapid social change which demolishes moral restraints and encourages individuals to develop 'innovative' behaviour would also drive them to get rid of their habitual forms of behaviour. In the case of upturn what is involved is real innovative change, which takes along members of the society, but unfortunately towards fall. Any change that destroys the laws of righteousness is suspicious.

Naturally, Durkheim did have a theory of change which was expounded in detail in his book on the division of labour. This well known theory identifies the expansion of the division of labour with change, and sees its cause in the growth of social density.

> "The division of labor develops, therefore, as there are more individuals sufficiently in contact to be able to act and react upon one another. If we agree to call this relation and the commerce resulting from it dynamic or moral density, we can say that the progress of the division of labor is in direct ratio to the moral or dynamic density of society." (Durkheim 1947: 257)

Durkheim offered a true Darwinist explanation to this growing density. He referred to the "struggle for existence" (Durkheim 1947: 266), which inevitably emerged once the population had grown in a given area, which can only be moderated if the functions were distributed.

> „All these changes are, then, mechanically produced by necessary causes. If our intelligence and sensibility develop and become keener, it is because we exercise them more, and if we exercise them more, it is because we are forced to by the greater violence of the struggle we have to live through. That is how, without having desired it, humanity is found apt to receive a more intense and more varied culture." (Durkheim 1947: 273)

Thus, it is out of the question that deliberately made inventions which may be called innovations would lead to changes that could be regarded as normal. Change is impersonal, it is a process above the individual, variations resulting

in change emerge accidentally, and the individuals' contribution is haphazard. All this is supplemented by Durkheim's conviction that healthy change would be gradual. This is visible when he speaks about the growth of the frequency of suicides. He is of the view that sudden growth suggests some more profound ill.

> "Our social organization, then, must have changed profoundly in the course of this century, tohave been able to cause such a growth in the suicide-rate. So grave and rapid an alteration as this must be morbid; for a society cannot change its structure so suddenly. Only by a succession of slow, almost imperceptible modifications does it achieve different characteristics. The possible changes, even then, are limited. Once a social type is fixed it is no longer infinitely plastic; a limit is soon reached which cannot be passed." (Durkheim 2002: 335)

All this could lay the foundations for the assumption that one may not look for the theorist of innovation in Durkheim.[2] The story, however, cannot be terminated here.

Even if Durkheim was convinced that only slow and gradual changes would be 'healthy', he had to admit that some change was needed, if, for nothing else for being able to eliminate ills manifest in anomie. One should not forget about the way Durkheim ended his book on the division of labour: "...In short, our first duty is to make a moral code for ourselves." That would be a real, planned 'social innovation'! But he immediately added: "Such a work cannot be improvised in the silence of the study; it can arise only through itself, little by little, under the pressure of internal cause which make it necessary."(Durkheim 1947: 409) In a word: the sociologist's attention should be directed towards the 'inner causes'.

On the other hand, one had to face the fact that putting slow, gradual and spontaneous changes to the foreground which qualified individuals' innovations as secondary and ineffective (one should remember his remark on the 'silence of studies'!) devalued individualism emphasizing individual creativity; whereas Durkheim stressed precisely the role of social integration of individualistic morality in his university lectures on the sociology of morals as well as in his rare public political appearances (Durkheim 1963; Durkheim 2008; Durkheim 1969). It had political reasons, which as been discussed by the relevant literature (Marske 1987; Miller 1988; Müller 1986; Némedi 2004).

Actually the problem is how a theory of change can be devised which considers the fact that the individuals are participants of change and partially they also shape it, but which does not lead back to the discarded idea that the starting point of change was the individual becoming independent of the society.[3] Such

2 The result would be the same if one considers the conclusions deriving from Tarde's well elaborated theory of imitation (Durkheim 2002). As contrasted to Durkheim, Tarde can truly be considered a theorist of innovation.

3 Tarde considered the individual as the source of change. His exposition sets out from science: "Il n'est pas de loi, il n'est pas de théorie scientifique, comme il n'est pas de système philosophique, qui ne porte encore écrit le nom de son inventeur. Tout est la d'origine Individuelle ... tout, mĕme ce qui est maintenant répandu dans tous les cerveaux cultivés et enseigné à l'école primaire, a débuté par ĕtre le secret d'un cerveau solitaire …. Mais, s'il est évident que la science s'est construite ainsi, il n'est pas moins certain que la construction d'un dogme, d'un corps de droit, d'un gouvernement, d'un régime économique, s'est opérée pareillement … N'est-ce pas par de minuscules créations d'expressions imagées, de tournures pittoresques, de mots nouveaux ou de sens nouveaux, que notre langue autour

an interpretation of change was needed which was sufficiently collectivist to preserve continuity with the sociologism of his early works but was also capable of considering the actions and ideas of individuals.[4]

The issues of change and 'innovation' were accorded an important place in Durkheim's researches after the turn of the century. It was the case also in his series of lectures surveying the history of French (secondary and higher) education (using the present terminology) (Durkheim 1990). Obviously major emphasis was laid on pedagogical changes in these lectures discussing medieval developments in the greatest detail, and in addition to the noted personalities taking initiatives that could not be omitted (Alcuin, Abélard, etc.) he emphasized 'group effect' saying how benevolent an effect was exercised on the progress of sciences and learning by the concentration of people following the same aims (naturally in Paris).[5] No somewhat expounded theory of innovation can be found in these lectures, only the direction is visible towards which Durkheim's thinking was moving in those days (he gave those lectures from 1904 on) (Halbwachs 1990:1).

The issue of innovation was clearly in the focus of *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.[6] In fact this work did not merely wish to explore the structure of religious life on the basis of Australian ethnological material, but it also raised an issue originating in evolutionary ethnology, namely: where had those ideas come from?[7] Interestingly Durkheim included such elements into the rather traditionally worded evolutionist questions which had nothing to do with the original ethnological question. Before presenting how rituals contributed to the emergence of common ideas (which is the core of the sketch of Durkheim's theory of innovation) he theorises on what characterised the divine in its relation to society. He states that the idea according to which there is one or more – at once moral and efficient (*efficace*) – authority" besides humans upon which they "depend" originates from social pressure (Durkheim 1995). This imagined force is at once in and outside us, says Durkheim, and next he starts to talk about politics. In other words, Durkheim assumed a relationship between the religious forces and ideas in the strict sense of the word and the social and political ideas and forces in a general sense, particularly as far as their origin, that is 'innovation' is concerned. He mentions 'common passions' that animate political as well as religious gatherings.

> "For this reason all parties – be they political, economic, or denominational – see to it that periodic conventions are held, at which their followers can renew their common faith by making a public demonstration of it together. To strengthen emotions that would dissipate if

de nous s'enrichit, et chacune de ces innovations, pour être d'ordinaire anonyme, en est-elle moins une initiative personnelle imitée de proche en proche?" (Tarde 2002: 62)

4 Ultimately it is a macro-micro relationship, which conceptualisation was naturally missing in Durkheim.

5 See in detail (Némedi 2009b)

6 See e. g. (Allen, Pickering et al. 1998; Joas 1992, 76; Pickering 1984; Olaveson 2001)

7 The starting point of Durkheim is that the Australian was the most primitive known social organisation. "If we succeed in discovering the origins of the beliefs which we have just analysed, we shall very probably discover at the same time the causes leading to the rise of the religious sentiment in humanity". (Durkheim 1995: 196)

> left alone, the one thing needful is to bring all those who share them into more intimate and more dynamic relationship." (Durkheim 1995: 212)

One has to remember the conclusion of the book on the division of labour, the warning that 'toady our primary duty is to create morality for ourselves'.

The same idea is repeated at the end of the book. Here, too, Durkheim says that there is no society "which would not feel the need to nurture and regularly confirm its unity and the collective sentiments and thoughts ensuring its specific image. In fact this spiritual reconstruction is only possible by meetings and congregations, where individuals getting into close touch jointly express and confirm their common sentiments ..." (Durkheim 1995: 386) It is not only the necessity of confirmation. Durkheim saw his own age as 'morally mediocre', he could see that renewal was necessary and also was confident that such a renewal was possible.

> "A day will come when our societies once again will know hours of creative effervescence during which new ideals will again spring forth and new formulas emerge to guide humanity for a time… There are no immortal gospels, and there is no reason to believe that humanity is incapable of conceiving new ones in the future." (Durkheim 1995: 428-429.)

Thus, Durkheim was interested in Australian rites among others because he thought he could find answers to his political questions in them, namely from where new morality would be born if not 'in the silence of studies'. He held that the common new morality he had been in quest of since the beginning of his career could only be the product of a renewing society, and not of great individuals. At the same time, he also assumed that this morality exercising dominance over individuals would not only be uplifting and giving strength, but it would also be innovative, and would not burden the individuals with the weight of tradition. This was a political creed: for a renewed and morally convincing republicanism.[8]

Clearly the analysis (or rather presentation) of the Australian rites (more precisely a part of a series of rites) was of central significance for Durkheim's entire concept. If it is a characteristic feature of religious life that it would classify everything existing (according to Durkheim) under either the isolated sacred and profane worlds then answering to the evolutionist question (what is the origin of religious ideas?) requires the presentation of what the origin of that curious distribution of everything existing is. If one succeeds in proving that the origin of this duality was society itself then one would also succeed in proving that new ideas (and new social formulations together with them) were actually being born during social cooperation. More exactly: it is society as collective actor that creates these ideas, meaning that society is capable of renewing itself and that too as

8 See the modern version of the idea of *effervescence collective* applied for political change in (Tiryakian 1995).

a collective (meaning that change is not originating from individual minds taking the collective along with itself).

According to Durkheim new ideas do emerge as a result of social association. The lesson of the description of the rite is that "once the individuals are gathered together, a sort of electricity is generated from their closeness and quickly launches them to an extraordinary height of exaltation. Every emotion expressed resonates without interference in consciousnesses that are wide open to external impressions, each one echoing the others. The initial impulse is thereby amplified each time it is echoed, like an avalanche that grows as it goes along." (Durkheim 1995: 217–218)

Thus he assumes a psychological mechanism, the phenomenon of 'collective effervescence' (*effervescence collective*) which has a strong direct effect on thinking and on social concepts.

> "It is not difficult to imagine that a man in such a state of exaltation should no longer know himself. Feeling possessed and led on by some sort of external power that makes him think and act differently than he normally does, he naturally feels he is no longer himself. It seems to him that he has become a new being. The decorations with which he is decked out, and the masklike decorations that cover his face, represent this inward transformation even more that they help bring it about. And because his companions feel transformed in the same way at the same moment, and express this feeling by their shouts, movements, and bearing, it is as if he was in reality transported into a special world entirely different from the one in which he ordinarily lives, a special world inhabited by exceptionally intense forces that invade and transform him. Especially when repeated for weeks, day after day, how would experiences like these not leave him with the conviction that two heterogeneous and incommensurable worlds exist in fact? In one world he languidly carries on his daily life; the other is one that cannot enter without abruptly entering into relations with extraordinary powers that excite him to the point of frenzy. The first is a profane world and the second, the of sacred things." (Durkheim 1995: 220.)

In other words: it is associate action which is the source of that basic religious idea, and if the analogy between social and religious ideas holds true then the 'new morality' looked for may also be born in these intensive social connections.

Naturally, there are a lot of problems related to Durkheim's explanation. The lack of professionalism is less significant in a theoretical sense. It is commonly known that he used ethnological descriptions rather selectively. He knew the ancient societies studied from secondary sources resulting in a number of inaccuracies, mistakes and distortions. It is also clear that the assumed collective psychological mechanism described fragmentarily is based on speculation bordering dilettantism. What is more important is that the train of thoughts contains such a logical somersault which was indispensable to the argumentation because of the half-heartedly undertaken evolutionist assumptions. In order to posit that the religious ideas (the basic difference between the sacred and the profane) emerge

during the intensive rites one should assume that those entering the rite do not as yet have the idea of dichotomy. Whereas Durkheim was fully aware that this was not the case: he knew that the life of the Australian societies was alternating between two phases, namely the profane individual gathering and the sacred, full of collective rituals (Durkheim 1995). He also knew from his nephew's paper that it was more general and observable in other cultures as well (Mauss– Beuchat 1979). In this manner Durkheim blurred the difference between renewal and innovation, hence making his argumentation a circular one. It is not clear how collective activity renewing beliefs and recurrent periodically would lead to innovation in the literal sense of the term.[9]

Stepping out of the narrower framework of Durkheim's analysis some more general issues should be raised. It is plausible to compare the analysis of societies divided into the sacred and the profane phases presented by Mauss and Durkheim with Turner's community/society dichotomy (not referring to them directly), and the Durkheimian collective effervescence to Turner's concept of liminality (Turner 1991). I would not enter into the details of this comparison; suffice it to refer only to the key theses of Turner on society and community. He thought as if two main, confronting and alternating 'models' of human exchange relations were involved here. "The first is of society as a structured differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions ... The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community." (Turner 1991: 96)

In order to avoid misunderstandings Turner made it clear that the difference between the two models was not so much that of the profane and the sacred but rather that there existed such an essential and basic human tie without which no society can exist (Turner 1991). Clearly every speculation pertaining to 'origin' was alien to Turner. The duality in Turner's sense cannot be interpreted as if major social innovations were born in the liminal phase (the Durkheimian dichotomy of the sacred and profane). At the same time it can be suited for interpreting such major political effervescences like the French Revolution or the Dreyfus case Durkheim was so much interested in. In those extraordinary moments (like the night of 4 August 1789 Durkheim referred to) earlier frameworks disintegrate (the privileged Estates had given up their privileges and thus, as revolutionary memory holds, they created the unity of the nation). The same can be said about the way fraternity was imagined and made a theme at the French revolutionary festivities producing the pattern of later national holidays (Ozouf 1988): not as creating structure but the dismantling of outdated structures and distinctions.

Durkheim, however, could not merely interpret collective effervescence as unstructured social practice due to speculation concerning origins, but he had

9 It is possible to differentiate between creative and re-creative effervescence as it is done by (Olaveson 2001: 101), but such a distinction has no direct trace in Durkheim. He interprets creative effervescence also as rite (that is repeated practice), which creates serious theoretical difficulties.

to interpret it as a structuring force, but that means something entirely different from liminality and the Turnerian understanding of the community. Durkheim's examples also indicate this: when he attributed the emergence of the Paris University to a collective effervescence it did not mean the dismantling of barriers and structures, but the development of new ones. The same was implied when he expected the birth of new ideas leading to the renewal of the French republican system from a new collective effervescence.

Of course, it is true that the rites analysed by Durkheim definitely had a destructuring aspect. For instance, at the Waramanga rite and the festival of snake Wollunqua, presented in detail, the basic social structure temporarily disintegrated, and the males, belonging to the Kingilli phratry, who present the rite had sexual intercourse with such Kingilli women who were otherwise taboo to them (wives of the males of the Uluuru phratry) (Durkheim 1995). Even a basically rudimentary psychological explanatory model requires the assumption that the social world would be de-structured and disintegrating during the course of collective effervescence.

In fact Durkheim's intention was not to simply elaborate the model of an intensive communality different from the everyday world in collective effervescence[10] (which was done by Turner), but going beyond it to explain the emergence of basic religious ideas, and, first of all, the concept of impersonal force. On the one hand, it keeps it captive in the traps of evolutionism, and it is just what opens up the entire construct towards the issue of innovation on the other. If collective effervescence plays a key role in the development of concepts it would mean that 'effervescence' does not only de-structure, but it structures as well (creating the difference between the sacred and the profane by developing the ideas of sacred things).

At first Durkheim – as he himself confessed – expounds "too general" ideas in this connection, and suggests that it is the force of society over the individual which provokes the concept of some kind of force above the individual. "Because social pressure makes itself felt through mental channels, it was bound to give man the idea that outside him there are one or several powers, moral yet mighty, to which he is subject." (Durkheim 1995: 211.) This social pressure is a structuring factor; it creates ideas and a world in which certain "forces at once demanding and helpful, majestic and kind" (Durkheim 1995: 214.) deserve extraordinary respect. Naturally, it is a question how in reality these ideas concerning those forces develop.

As contrasted to the 'too general' approach, Durkheim was of the view that ethnological observations offer a chance for putting more specific questions as well. Once again we are back to the speculative psychology of collective effervescence. This explanatory model is enriched by Durkheim by references to symbolisation and emblems. The Waramangas are surrounded by churungas and

10 The already quoted paper by Mauss and Beuchat (Mauss–Beuchat 1979) goes that far.

bodily ornamentations, and the snake Wollunqua itself is a symbol, an ornamented mound of sand (Durkheim 1995). It is revealed that even the assumed collective psychological mechanism only works through ideas, emblems and signs. According to Durkheim 'primitive man' is not aware of the fact that the totemistic signs represent the community. But these signs are constantly in view during the community rituals and the experience produced by direct communality lived through is linked to these signs (implicitly accepting assumptions of the psychology of association). The psychic energy released during the rites, the "collective and nameless force of the clan" adheres to these signs, and the signs become "the visible body of the god".

Durkheim writes the following about 'primitive man':

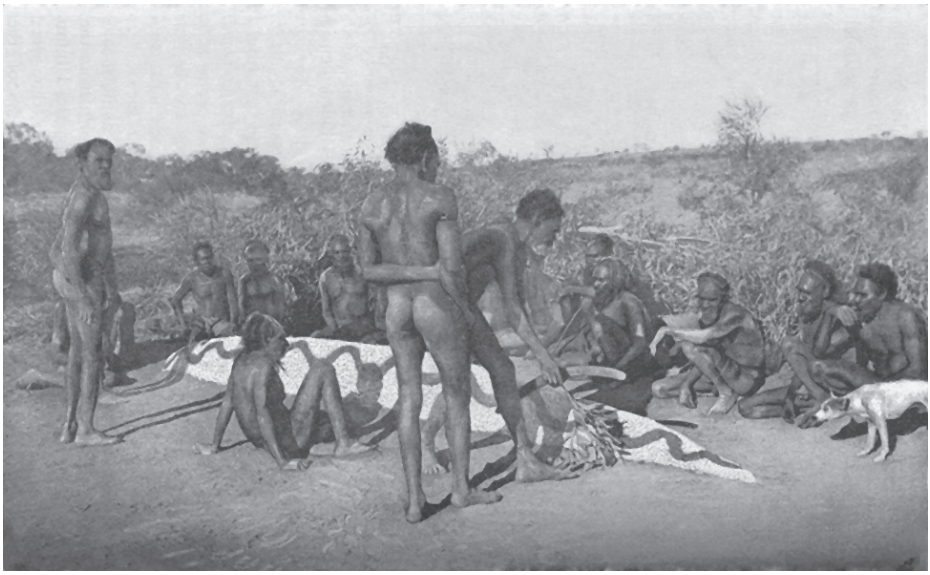
> "Repeated everywhere and in every form, how could that image not fail to stand out in the mind with exceptionally sharp relief? Thus placed at center stage, it becomes representative. To that image the felt emotions attach themselves, for it is the only concrete object to which they can attach themselves. The image goes on calling forth and recalling those emotions even after the assembly is over. Engraved on the cult implements, on the sides of rocks, on shields, and so forth, it lives beyond the gathering. By means of it, the emotions felt are kept perpetually alive and fresh. It is as though the image provoked them directly." (Durkheim 1995: 222.)

Durkheim's intention to explain religious ideas without reference to transcendence can be clearly recognised. Durkheim's Kantian sociological rationalism stresses the social constitution of ideas, concepts and categories. This is why emblems and their filling with meaning have such an important role. The Durkheimian collective effervescence cannot only be a de-structuring one just because of its social constitution. On the contrary: collective effervescence develops the structure of ideas organising social life. It means in the given case that totemism, representing basic social structuring is born out of collective rites, it is there where the concept of the totem develops, which, according to Durkheim is the form in which the 'primitives' grasp society.

Thus, reference to representations and signs is of central significance in Durkheim's understanding of innovation.

Naturally, the train of thoughts pertaining to emblems has the same weaknesses as the entire concept of collective effervescence has. Durkheim is forced to assume that the signs and emblems had already existed before they were filled with meaning during collective effervescence; more exactly they did not already exist but even had meanings before the rite. The sand mound representing the snake Wollunqua already had to mean that it was the snake Wollunqua before emotions enhanced during the rite could be linked to it and it would be filled with energy similar to religious power. In fact the emblem symbolising the snake Wollunqua was made by the very same people who would, then be convinced by the religious rite that social energies were somehow linked to the snake represented there.

Figure 1: *Stroking the base of the wollunqa mound to appease the snake. Warramunga tribe.*



The survey of Durkheim's concept of innovation has ended in a negative result. Durkheim was unable to convincingly demonstrate that it was possible to interpret innovation in a sufficiently collectivistic manner to make the social constitution of new ideas authentic and to be also able to grasp the innovative processes on the level of individuals.

If one tries to find out how the Durkheimian problem can be saved presumably one has to give up what had attracted so many analysts, namely to link innovation to extraordinary social events and to put collective effervescence into the focus. The question preoccupying Durkheim was whether it was possible to regard innovation as preceding sociologism in the sense that it is not deducted from individual action and meaning, yet it does not reduce change (similarly to the model offered by the book on the division of labour) to processes above the individual almost on the level of the ones in nature.

In my opinion the problem of social innovation should be pursued in two directions: on the one hand towards profane and labour activities totally neglected by Durkheim, and towards the problem of speech, symbolisation not totally neglected by Durkheim on the other. I could not expound it in greater detail in my presentation, and I have to be satisfied only by indicating it[11].

As far as the problem of language is concerned, it does emerge only tangentially in Durkheim as well, when he speaks about categories constituting the backbone of thinking. They are impossible to be created by a lonely mind as these

11 In an earlier writing I discussed the issue in somewhat greater detail (Némedi 2009a).

categories are the sum total of "enormous cooperation" in time and space. These categories

> "…appear as ingenious instruments of thought, which human groups have painstakingly forged over centuries, and in which they have amassed the best of their intellectual capital. This amounts to saying that to succeed in understanding and evaluating them, it is necessary to turn to new procedures. To know what the conceptions that we ourselves have not made are made of, it cannot be enough to consult our own consciousness. We must look outside ourselves…" (Durkheim 1995: 18.)

Durkheim was hindered by his own Kantianism in noticing that accumulated capital was not simply embodied in categories, because the precondition of the development, use and renewal of these tools of thought is the fact of constituting association which is the use of language by people, in other words, they perform a specific exercise. As it was seen, Durkheim does not speak about language, only about signs and emblems in his sociological and ethnological analyses. This is why he does not reach the real linguistic problem of innovation. The most important questions can be raised in relation to speech having a propositional content. Thus one way out of Durkheim's blind alley leads through the theory of communicative action, though not exactly along the line emphasized by Habermas who had elaborated the theory. As it is commonly known, inevitably demands of validity are expressed in speech (in acts of speech) which can be revised (Habermas 1984). Habermas' intention was to explain the force of speech coordinating action. Therefore his attention was mainly focused on normative correctness and a demand for validity oriented to correctness. From the current point of view, however, that aspect of communication by language deserves particular attention, whether the speaker's intention is "that he make a true statement (or correct existential presuppositions), so that the hearer will accept and share the knowledge of the speaker" (Habermas 1984: 307). It is a daily, constant innovative act, which explains why human communities are sensitive to the constant changes of the environment. Obviously the problem is far more complex than indicated here: speech simultaneously explains (partially) the ability of collective innovation becoming possible by the communicative revision of messages[12], but also there is the observable general tendency of resistance to collective innovation by the consolidation of meanings. Durkheim's reference to capital is also ambiguous: capital accumulated in speech means the resource that allows for further accumulation and lays the foundation for innovation, but it also means the ability of the collectivity to resist the breaking up of existing meanings.

The other direction one should set out would be profane labour activity totally neglected by Durkheim. Here Marx's tradition burdens thinking, namely the Marxian concept of work, which (primarily in *Capital,* Marx 1976) sets out from

12 It is important to remember that meanings can be revised in communication that is in interaction, because it is the only possibility to develop common meanings allowing for communication. It was already stressed by Mead (Mead 1934).

the model of individual activity. I am of the view that the approach unfolding in Latour's counter-sociology (Latour 1993; Latour 1999; Latour 2005) could offer some useful correction. Latour puts emphasis on that objects (obviously tools and objects of work as well) are the factors which make the relative stability of the society possible. Human society is capable of relative organisation because it is rather richly furnished with objective equipment. It is not individual possession that explains this stability but that things create a context. But even Latour, considering himself a 'lover of technology' stresses that the abundance of things is also the key to the exaggerated multiplication of things, the same way as capital is the outcome of accumulation as well as the possibility of creating new things.

Would it be a hopeless venture to bring together the communicative action theory approach to language with the objective approach to sociality? It would be the true solution of the Durkheimian problem.

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