

FORMISM: TRADITION AND MODERNITY

by

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1. The Preeminence of the Whole

What has been called the formalism of certain authors has often been misunderstood or misinterpreted. The term formalism, in itself, is not lacking in ambiguity since it seems to suggest an abstruse attitude, disconnected from the social "given". For this reason, in order to speak of a setting which could bring out the characteristics of the life of society without overly distorting them, I would like to propose the term "formism". The totally iconoclastic tradition of the Judeo-Christian West, as we know, has always been wary of the confusion wrought by the image, that is, by an expression of the senses. Often this tradition has had to put up with such an expression, though with great reservations. Thus, confronted with the cult of the saints and with their representation, Catholicism stipulated, with a pained air, that this was only respect for the saints while the adoration of God was directed to that one invisible God who embodies and perfects the attributes wrongly ascribed to the idols of the past. With the Reformation and the Enlightenment, this movement was brought to its logical conclusion, and the baroque of the Counter-Reformation is finally only a parenthesis which social Catholicism, from the nineteenth century onwards, will hurriedly seek to close.

On this foundation there appears the criticism, both "lay" and theoretical, of the cultural or political form, appearance

or manifestation of which we latecomers are only the heirs or protagonists. From all this it is understandable that thinkers dedicated to observing the interplay of social forms may seem to be the paradox or the complete antithesis of the dominant methods of analysis. It seems necessary to retain this paradox, however, since it is being analyzed more and more in diverse ways and since political life as well as daily existence are in ^Rlarge measure composed of theatricality, superficiality and a showy effervescence. All the importance of this must be measured. We might perhaps say, borrowing Nietzsche's expression, that depth is hidden at the surface of things and of persons. In fact, there is a commonplace remark that has a tendency to be overlooked: that it is the form which makes of a person something rather than nothing. This phenomenon is certainly also a limitation, but a limitation which is the basis of existence. In Latin, a "determinatio" is a stone marking the boundaries of a field, but it is just this limit that allows for life potentially as opposed to indeterminateness, and to the unformed spaces of the limitless desert. Thus, things exist because they are captured in a form. All creators are aware of this when they are confronted with a form of whatever type; the content is secondary or, more precisely, the content is not comprehensible without studying the form. The development of philology has clearly shown that even the most free or unrestrained poetry still obeys formal rules which cannot be flaunted and which are clearly noticeable.

The same is true for a social existence; it too is fixed

and structured. I have tried to show elsewhere what these paradoxical situations of the violence of anomaly or of totalitarian state violence or even of dionysiac values have owed to conformity or rules. To an even greater extent the same can be said for banality, for everyday life. The rituals which constitute them seem like so many collective staged scenes expressing confrontation with destiny. It is at this point that banality coincides with epistemological inquiry, what can be known, what discloses itself, what is gestured, what is dramatized. How far this is from the scorn with which proper thinking considers appearances! I feel that it is in function of these premises that the relevance of sociological "formism" may be justly considered. This formism, moreover, is at a great distance from a static vision of the world; the classic authors who have used this formism to whatever extent have known how to show the changes and the forces existing in the life of a society. Today all of G. Balandier's work, be it his African sociology or his social anthropology, reveal this "generative" dimension which structures all life in society.¹ I myself think, as I will show farther on, that formism and vitalism are the most stable poles around which a comprehensive sociology is structured.

In truth, the "structures" that can be elaborated can bring out clearly the diverse facets of life in its development. The problem of showing the historic "physiognomies" (to take an expression from O. Spengler) of the various social forms will continually appear in the course of human development.

To help make such a perspective, the modulations or derivations of institutions, cultural facts or daily rituals, when apprehended in their fleeting state, can be credited here and now with an undeniable efficacy.² The mechanics of belief and illusion, fragile but so deeply embedded, find perhaps an explanation there.

From all of Durkheim's teachings, it is perhaps this insistence on the concept of holism that deserves the most attention. Many times he returns to this idea of the specific nature of the social fact that cannot be reduced to the generality of an individual fact. This insistence emphasized the point that sociology has nothing to learn from an analysis based solely on the adding up of individual characteristics. For the task of each individual is to develop his inner self, in all possible senses of this word. From the deepest layer to consciousness (or to the unconscious, which is the same thing) not forgetting one's private space, one must reach perfection, completeness, which is gauged against the measure of autonomy one can attain. After that, autonomous individuals may group together on a contractual basis for such or such common action, but even there the important thing is the individual will which presides over the common act. To emphasize the specificity of the social whole is to prefer the collective form more than the individual basis, to affirm that the individual consciousness is the product of the whole rather than the opposite. In this respect Durkheim does not hesitate to affirm: "It is really the form of the whole which determines the form of the parts."⁴

Whatever Durkheim's individualistic ideology may have been, (or the French school of sociology's) his pertinent holistic remarks let one ponder the importance of the effect of structure

in understanding society. At a time like ours when we are witnessing the resurgence of organic function, these remarks are very much to the point. What is certain is that the preeminence of the whole over the parts that diverse "gestalt" theories have analysed well, exist at every moment in this life devoid of quality which constitutes the essence of the fabric of society. There is an intersecting of existences which beyond or ~~in~~spite of individualistic ideologies expresses itself vigorously, shakes the diverse types of imposed barriers and obstacles that can be encountered. There is a type of impulse of the whole that can be observed empirically and that never misses a chance to reveal itself. Even in the most sterile environment, those places that the contemporary technostucture has cunningly devised, these spaces conceived for gregarious solitude, one cannot help noticing a collective reappropriation which, in an exuberant or stealthy way, leaves a deep trace. Sports exhibitions, musical or political events, the noise and clamor of our city streets, all the different types of festive occasions, all these underscore forcefully this preeminence of the whole. Moreover, this preeminence tends more and more to lead to a reality of confusion, which I have called the return to dionysiac values, where individual characteristics defer to organicity, to the "architectonic"(Ch. Fourier) of the whole.

In this last image the gesture reigns, it is the imaginary in action where, in fleeting and vivid situations, are created and dissolved attractions and repulsions which owe more to the polyphony of the senses or effects than to reason's calculating

and economic vision. As can be seen in these few examples(perhaps prospective) what I call "form" is a polygod with an esthetic, ethical, economic, political and, of course, gnostic-like implications. In any case, what is certain is that civilizations and cultures founded on the individual unit are limited in time and space, and even where they have seemed strong, their dominion appears insubstantial and apt to slip through one's fingers. Soon individualism and its corollary, the "underlying content", or consciousness, will only be found with the intellectual who is perhaps the solopsist par excellence, only perhaps because it is easier to explain things through conceptual reduction rather than to understand by imaginal dissemination.

Because this solopsist tendency exists, so deeply rooted psychologically or in part philosophically, I think it necessary to discover, in that cultural tradition which is ours, anything that can be used as a touchstone for going beyond it, even if only for jolting our reflections out of their tranquil quietude or preconceived notions or from the arrogance of pedagogic dogmas tinged with moralizing airs. Understanding it thus, in a heuristical way, formism can have this ability to catch the exuberance of social appearances. Not directly, which would still be pretentious, but crosswise, while imposing limits or "determinations". In that case, to use one of Tönnies' expressions, there would be true sociological procedures only in apprehending "pure forms" and not in grasping singular realities.⁵

What can this mean, except that while being content to grasp structures and their developments, this procedure allows

singular realities to exist, to be what they are. They are not judged as conforming or not to what "should be", to what it would be better they were, and they are accepted in their incompleteness, in their partial and ephemeral aspect. Paradoxically then, the formist view respects the banality of existence, of popular representations and of the minute creations that punctuate everyday life. This view does not bestow a meaning, does not classify according to a religious, political or economic finality, does not formulate categorical imperatives; it is content, in its own way, to describe its own time; it thus becomes part of the polyphonic discourse that a society makes of itself. Perhaps this is what has been called "the organic intellectual".

Traditionally literature, from poetry to science fiction, including the novel or the theater, has taken upon itself the function of transfiguring daily banality. Of course there are exceptions, but as a rule that is the function men of letters have accepted. The theoretical process based itself on this model, and even accentuated it, since the concepts do not tolerate approximations, and have nothing to do with redundancy. Thence, the real can only be base matter to be gone beyond quickly, or more precisely, that must be guided based on a project or program which has been abstractly elaborated. This transfiguration, which in the fiction of a novel or poetry has at least in principal the advantage of touching the senses, becomes dry in theory, withers like a plant cut off from its roots. By wanting to break through or surmount whatever seems to be

an obstacle, namely, the world of appearances, theory becomes a simple catalogue of regulations when linked to power, or of injunctions or pious desires when it tries to reform or revolutionize power. In both cases it is replete with this resentment characteristic of all "failures in life" of whatever type they may be. Its fear of the pure image, its fantasy of transfiguration, in short, its iconoclasm leads theory to propose another world in place of the present "artificial" one. Just looking at the great developments of thought which have succeeded each other throughout the ages, we find this process in theology which transcended the numerous magical or religious practices, in philosophy which rationalized popular wisdom, in psychology which tries to subsume empirical knowledge about the spirit or the body, and more recently in sociology which condescendingly contemplates popular good sense or incorporated techniques which give structure to all societies.

In all these cases, a spontaneous lifestyle is considered a negligible quality which, through representation in images, gives order to time and space, lets one face collectively the tragedy of passing time and the anguish of the finite. It is, moreover, striking to observe that the theoretical constructs which arise from the modes of thought already alluded to, try to save the individual, to assure him of the fullness of his spirit, to cure him of his psychological malformations or to integrate him better into the social body. The object of all these diverse concerns is always the individual unit. It would seem as though, in order to work, the mechanism of transfigur-

ation can only be applied to the detached individual. The collective adventure is reversed in this individual adventure which the "Bildungsroman" of Wilhelm Meister of Goethe to the Magic Mountain of Thomas Mann describes so accurately. In some mysterious way, however - but mystery, as we know, is what unites the initiates among themselves - the basis for a civilization is formed from the collective values which function *without* being overly concerned with the consciousness of people. Of course there is "Cleopatra's nose", there are individuals who organize the chaos, the horrors and the disasters of history, but these individuals are more "acted upon" than really sovereign. This effect of structure, this movement, do not appear clearly to consciousness, but are intuitively felt for what they are. For this reason, perhaps, the masses have been called versatile, indifferent, skeptical; I would say, rather, quietist, because they "feel" that charismatic individuals or political powers come and go but that their actions toward them do not vary significantly.

Whatever the case may be, if there is an effect of structure, if the individual is finally only a more or less perverse avatar of the collective organism, it is important to discover means which can take into account the several forms that provide a structure for this organism. In this case, the stakes are dangerous: this intellectual instrument must not be a new way of programming what should be. At most it should be content to have a simple function of ascertaining the facts. And this while knowing that the social passions or political restlessness,

that the struggles and conflicts, the attractions and repulsions will take place despite the precision and accuracy of its findings. This instrument will not have transfiguration as its task, it will suffice it simply to bring out the diversity of the figures which constitute the social forces.

2. "Formist" Invariance

Besides the burden which, as I have just shown, carries with it the intellectual attitude of transfiguring that which exists, that is, which disdains appearances in order to look for a deeper meaning of things, there also exists, more or less under the surface, or by allusion in certain authors, a disposition for thinking about form. These authors have, in a certain way, succeeded in eliminating a vague individuality as the initial or final explanation. It would seem that this disposition can aid in understanding the indifference of the masses as opposed to the individual, that is, its retreat from politics. At any rate, this disposition can be of use to the sociologist who must ponder what he sees and not some "former worlds" or some future cities which, by the way, can be legitimately desired.

It is not surprising that the Greeks, who loved figures, have inspired all those who are attracted by appearances. I am not speaking about a structured philosophy, but the polytheistic substratum inseparable from this civilization. Thence, the adage "POLLON ANOMATON, MORPHÉ MIA", many names, one form. What is emphasized here that can clarify our reflection is the

recognition of the "formist" invariability across the multiplicity of modulations. Even if sociological observation must be wary of conceptual abstraction, this does not imply that it must proceed with an abdication of the mind. On the contrary, by trying not to give a precise finality to the smallest of our everyday actions, by accepting appearances such as they are, sociology can integrate them into the several larger structures that describe social life without any noteworthy changes in the course of human histories. Conceptual formalism tries, by its very action to interpret all it observes, it gives reasons and submits to reason, while "formism" is content to sketch the larger outlines that circumscribe without reducing the manifold and sometimes antagonistic values of contemporary life. In an endless coming and going the invariable form and the act(or the speech) which is a modulation of it respond to each other, clarify each other, oppose each other in order to create a balance both risky and solid which I have called social coenesthesia. To cite a remark by Gilbert Durand, the archetype and the stereotype participate in the same dynamic.

In the realms of creation one can observe that the great work or triviality are not fundamentally heterogeneous, and that each one in its own way lets us understand the other one. This linking of the stereotype and the archetype is an excellent metaphor allowing us to clarify the heuristic value of form which in one sense does not exist, is a vacuous entity, but which presents a possibility for understanding existing appearances. Understanding them in a qualitative way, since stereo-

types are not judged in any other way, are not rejected or devalued; they are observed in a new light, they can take their place in the great game of illusions which structures the social "given". In place of a science which, in order to exist, reduces, limits, cuts off anything non-essential, "formism" as suggested here proposes a more a more embracing scientism which can be integrated into the quest for parameters which are traditionally rejected. Everything is valued, the anecdote or the event have their place in the configurations which can measure each other. While the concept has an exclusive function, the form amasses. Form erupts. It produces a multitude of offshoots which, in turn, multiply into infinity. We again find there the metaphor of a vitalism which, without much discrimination, unfolds, abounds and creates the best as well as the worst.

It is difficult with this perspective to make value judgments on the situations and actions we observe. But is it not precisely an ambition of scientism to practice what Max Weber called a strict "axiologic neutrality"? Life, in its developments secretes all sorts of things, it maintains its own equilibrium by itself, according to its own forms. It is the same for social existence where order and disorder, functions and dysfunctions have always defined themselves in such a way as to assure their permanence. Having accepted this hypothesis, it will suffice to point out the form or forms which structure this exuberent expansion. The term used by V. Pareto in this respect is pertinent; the intangible "residue" around which

move its diverse "derivations" has a germinative connotation. And without having any precise causality, this reference to a seed allows us to see in a new light all subsequent burgeoning.

Before marking the place of this "formism" in the context of modern sociology, may we briefly recall its philosophical origins. And first of all in the thought of this positivist before his time, Thomas Aquinas, for whom in "the things which have sensations there is an intelligible element which is form."⁶ While leaving it to the specialists in medieval philosophy to analyze accurately this question, we can recognize for our purposes the fact that all things of the senses are potentially ("in potential") attached to a form; this opens up vast perspectives. This means accepting the fact that all things partake, in one way or other, of that divine characteristic which is form. At its farthest extent, evil itself is a derivation of the deity. In this respect the case of Lucifer in the Bible is instructive. And to take but one example, it is not surprising that these thomists who were the priests of the Company of Jesus try to use, in order to combat the most rigorous minds, the indulgence for the sin that torments the members of the Christian community. Everything can serve AD MAIOREM DEI GLORIAM, including evil. Everything is just a matter of one's point of view. And their use of the baroque is in this sense completely logical; appearances in all their forms can not be rejected since "potentially" they refer back to the divine form. The architecture and the emblems of Jesuit churches of the Counter-Reformation in their sensual and almost intoxicating

aspects may be interpreted as the sign of the accepting, of the affirming of all worldly situations. It was not for nought they were sought after as confessors in a society which was very libertine to say the least. By accepting what was, the Jesuits gave a completely pantheistic version of thomism;⁷ one has only to refer to several well-known sculptures, such as the one of St. Ignatius in the Church of Gesù or the one of St. Theresa in the Church of S. Maria della Vittoria to be convinced of this.

Another medieval philosopher, Occam, also developed ideas which can enlighten our discussion. Of course he was violently opposed to Thomism, but it seems to me that his nominalism can be interpreted in a way close to what has just been said. For him the Universal, another way of talking about form, is only the "sign of a plurality of singular things"(Jennerea., op. cit., p. 118). What we can grasp are these singular realities, and the word universal that designates them is only, after all, an instrument which, without exhausting all these singular things, groups them together within the framework of our intellectual research. From this point of view nominalism approximates the idea of the "vacuous entity" referred to above. Occam's position lets us clarify our approach in the sense that he refuses an intellectual reductionism while maintaining a desire for knowledge. Without going so far as to establish an irreconcilable dichotomy between words and the things they designate, we can recognize their respective antinomies and especially, which is more important for us, admit that the plur-

ality of things one term can refer to is an indication of the extraordinary richness of appearances and social phenomena which is an observation of daily existence. In this sense nominalism is another way of expressing the polytheism which dominates all life in society. Because, no matter what some vexacious minds might say, journalists in need of some copy, positivist intellectuals or politicians playing on various concerns, the polytheism in question does not refer back to a reactionary nostalgia of some lost religiosity, but rather to this essential characteristic of every social group which typifies, in several figures, the plurality of values, situations and passions which move it in its depths. In this sense there is a close link between nominalism and empathy. In complementary manner nominalism prepares the scene, the backdrop, the framework in which can be played out, thanks to empathy, the magic theater of our current existence.⁸

Continuing our rapid overview and following the slender but constant thread of a certain "formism", we can mention for the Renaissance the philosophers Gémiste Pléthon and, naturally, Nicholas of Cusa. Theorist of the plurality of gods, which is surprising in the fifteenth century, Pléthon also provides elements for supporting the two ends of this chain. In fact, these gods which are his "symbols of the formal causes" have a "creative" function in the order of the cosmos. Nothing is excluded from this symbolic order, not even the "gods of Tartarus" who also have their place in the totality of beings. His paganism which has been called a "figure of rhetoric" leads

him to turn all his attention to what he calls the "common notions"(KOINAI ENNOIAI) or "preapprehended"(PROLEPSIS) notions.⁹

The link between the creative aspect of the "formal causes" and the importance of the "common notions" is illuminating; we can find there, albeit in a rather esoteric way, this back and forth motion which we are attempting to grasp in this paper and which would best define the formulation of several invariable archetypes and of the multitude of figures(practical and representative) which make up the life of a society in its most banal aspects.

It is not without interest to note here that Pléthon had a considerable influence on Nicholas of Cusa who, I believe, developed the same confidence in common experiences as he attempted to delve into the "intellectual mind" that defines the elements of this experience. It was certainly not without reason that the man from Cusa was accused of pantheism; preferring the "Book of the world to the scholar's books"(GONDILLAC op. cit. p. 25-27) has always succeeded in irritating the clerks who are the administrators of knowledge and the guarantors of power. But for our purposes the importance he assigns to the "coincidence of opposites" or even more his desire to go beyond the Aristotelian "RATIO" too narrowly rooted in the principle of non-contradiction, all this is for us remarkably contemporary. In any case it refers back to this vision of a complex world whose diverse elements correspond with each other profoundly and where it is not possible to establish, strictly speaking, causalities. In the "UNITAS MULTIPLEX" there is interaction,

continual reversability, and unity is perhaps only a word that allows us to grasp the complexity without exhausting it. From an epistemological point of view, such a correspondance where everything has its place can not leave unmoved a comprehensive sociology which, as I have already stated, ascertains with lucidity that the plurality of acts and of ^{word} ~~missing~~ that classical sociology calls "holism", and which, when faced with any totalitarian (and monovalent) vision never prefers only a single particular element. Faced with this scientific and technological development, and considering the diversification of the means of knowing, it is more than ever necessary to demonstrate the complexity of the world that escapes, time and again, the phantom of enclosure. Every age has a period of optimistic scientism when it claims to have found the universal key, the totality of explanation. The history of ideas shows us clearly that no civilization or culture escapes this pretention. And in our tradition the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Positivism, etc. are instructive in this matter. It is a question of a constant, or a sociological weight that it is useless to try to deny.

Perhaps it is even a useful mechanism. It is true that such an optimism, by its very simplicity, allows a renewed surge of inspiration; it comforts the mobilizing myths, it conditions discoveries or rediscoveries of society. But it is important at the same time to underline the relativism of such a vision of the world, otherwise we risk falling prey to these mechanic designs from mandarins or Chinese eunuchs (cf. E. Balazcs) to

contemporary technocrats - which legitimate quantitative management, social control, and justify the techno-bureaucratic imposition whose harmful effects we can see on the base of sociality. By a perverse effect (what Jules Monnertot calls "heterotely") progressivist optimism, scientific Truth, the technological All, etc., becoming more and more abstract, can only undo this "feeling that a society has about itself" (Durkheim) which allows the persistence of the social group.

It is against all of this that formism puts us on guard. In fact, and this has been emphasized by numerous observers, the accentuation of "form" leads naturally to a polytheism of values, it gives preference to movement, and for each element of social life it takes into account the multiplicity of its aspects. Thus, characterizing the "formism" of G. Simmel - who was at the beginning of the century the first sociologist to demonstrate its advantages - Georges Friedman or Bernard Groethuysen show that it led to "a sort of extremely diversified skeptical pluralism" or even that it was led to "conceive of all things as a whole". And, by opening up an avenue of the greatest interest for the sociology of knowledge, Friedman goes to the point of drawing a parallel between this formism and the "refusal to choose", the availability, the freedom of the artist that we can find in the immorality of a Wilde or a Gide.¹¹ Of course, it can not be a question of elaborating such a comparison, it will suffice to bring out its relevance and to show its actuality. Since we are also in the process of reevaluating the complexity of the world and of rediscovering the importance

of the interplay of differences. The consideration of forms allows the multiple creations of situations of everyday life to appear without, for all that, constraining them within the narrow limits of finality. In this respect formism is a reaction against rationalist monovalence, it brings out the polysemous nature of gesture, the mottled aspect of contemporary life as opposed to the concept that tries to purify, reduce, condense the complex into pure brevity.¹² "Minds are brutal like the pure acts they are, in essence" says the Faust of Paul Valery to Mestoph~~e~~les. And it is certain that there is in rationalism something both simplistic and brutal, even if only in the pretention to exhaust what one finds, to make whatever object is analyzed express all that it contains.

The refusal to choose, the esthetic availability already mentioned are in themselves more respectful of the feeling aspect of social life, of its structural pluralism, in short, of the irrepressible hedonism that it is vain to want to suppress. It is not without interest to note that G. Simmel, while developing an analysis of forms, was the protagonist of a "sociology of the senses".¹³ Indeed for him the essential character of formism, just like the frame in painting, is to bring out the colors, the complex architectonic, the intense and the trivial, in a word, the profound appearance of everyday life. It is no vain paradox to ally depth and appearance, others have already done so (Nietzsche); the point I would like to make is that the essential part of existence is constituted by and in the apparent, which we must admit is nothing less than unified, pure and co-

herent. And beyond normative concepts of all kinds (conservative, reforming and revolutionary), what appears, in its most banal and apparent, has the merit of expressing the density and the pluralism of existence. It is precisely because of this that social theatricality must be accorded all the efficacy due it.

Thus, contrary to those givers of "scientific" lessons, we can understand that it is not what a social object is, but the way it presents itself that can guide our research. In that, the entire ambition of "formism" is summed up. In so doing, it is not at all a question of any abdication of the mind, but it is exclusively a matter of adjusting in the best possible way relativism and existential pluralism with the intellectual process. This is a perfectly legitimate practice, close to what V. Pareto called "descriptive theorems" whose goal is less to elaborate laws than to indicate their tendencies. Researchers in the "hard" sciences who at the present time are exposing the fruitfulness of error, or those who are rediscovering the interest of "successive approximations" are in this respect close to the logic of form which we are suggesting here.

In this logic of form, each time it again becomes current,† lets us contemplate the unbridgeable liaison which exists between the experience and the essence of things, between what is lived in society and the representations which portray it. It is, moreover, instructive, as I have already indicated, that the great protagonists of this emerging sociology have all, in one way or another, posed the problem of constants, invariables,

and archetypes which are so many indications of current situations. A remark by Kant can explain our thought. "My place is the fertile Bathos of experience and the word transcendental... does not signify that which goes beyond all experience, but which... precedes it(a priori), with this one goal of making possible exclusively experimental knowledge." He clarifies, furthermore, that if concepts go beyond experience, "their face then is called transcendent".¹⁴ I am not qualified to give a detailed analysis of this remark, it will suffice to emphasize the interesting dichotomy between "transcendental" and "transcendent", and, to take Kant's expression again, to indicate that "the word transcendental" has as its only function to serve as a backdrop, a frame, a horizon for what he calls experience, and which is nothing else than that day to day life which cannot leave a sociologist indifferent. In short, the transcendental procedure is the condition of possibility for all knowledge of the real.

Such a dichotomy can very likely be found in sociology. In one way, the societal could refer to these essential categories which also let us understand and highlight the minor situations of everyday life. Thus, the tragic, dramatization, ritual, the imaginary would all be in these societal categories. On the other hand, the social(an expression which, moreover, can be used in a neutral and uncritical way) could itself refer to a definite and dated representation of life in society which has a tendency to abstract itself from current life since it wants so much to serve as prosthesis. Whatever the case, it

is important to be attentive to the fact that what I have called the logic of form allows us to go beyond the separation of the intellect/senses, true commonplace notion of all theoretical reflection.

Simmel and Pareto have been cited; it is indispensable as well to refer even briefly to Max Weber who, in a specific way himself, did not hesitate to have recourse to what I have called "formism". We could find in his work numerous examples which, in one way or other, show this process. We have only to refer to the definition he gives of the expression "spirit of capitalism"; it is extremely subtle and blends together the diverse elements of our analysis. Thus, if it is true that this spirit of capitalism exists, it will only be a question of "one historic individual, that is, of a complex of relations present in historical reality that we bring together *by* virtue of their cultural significance into one conceptual whole". This notion of historic individual, just like the notion of an ideal type, are only empty ensembles, which are perhaps unreal and whose value is above all heuristic. The essential characteristic of such a concept is to be composed of "its singular elements" that can be observed in such or such historical moment. Weber, furthermore, makes it clear that it is not a matter of a "definitive concept", nor perhaps even of a "conceptual definition", but rather of a "provisional marking"(VERANSCHAULICHUNG).¹⁶

This discretion corresponds well to social fluidity and it is not surprising that it produced a first rate sociological work. Indeed, one feels that this "historic individual" which

has been elaborated is really the development of all those singular elements which constitute the social "given". At the same time it suggests by allusion those divine elements and thus allows one to set up the panorama of an age. It discloses the architectonic of the representations and practices which are the cause and effect of the circulation of goods, of speech and of sex. Thanks to it these elements can be integrated into configurations which remain flexible enough to avoid the traps of rigid dogmatism and of totalitarianism. Thus the "historic individual" or the "ideal type" are only rarely found as such, but one can imagine the help they can bring to sociological investigation. Thanks to them the small gestures of daily life, the trivial conversations in the Café du Commerce, the existential strolls which punctuate current life, the innumerable rituals that structure our days, all these elements, be they during leisure time or work time, become laden with meaning while not becoming locked into a preestablished finalism. Thus we can say of the fabric of social life what R. Guardini said of ritual, that it is "ZWECKLES ABER SINNVOL".¹⁷

In fact, what one can remember about the diverse modulations of "form" is that they insist on the fact that the multiple situations of daily life are consumed in their very act, they live in the present. And it is important that this present, which is the specific field of sociology, after having been long obscured in function of a promethean ideology, be restored to the preeminent place due it. On pain of becoming (or remaining) a purely abstract representation, sociology must be

attentive to this ethic of the moment which permeates so deeply the life of our societies in all of their communicative or instrumental activities. "Formism", moreover, and this is a consequence of the preceding remarks, also insists on seeming, appearance, show image, etc., these realities that the Western tradition has often slightly neglected. In fact, while highlighting miniscule creation, form gives it expression. We can also point out that a sociology of the imaginary - whose essential formulation Gilbert Durand has elaborated - will certainly allow the development of the two directions indicated herein.

From an epistemological point of view, it can use sociologically the findings of phenomenology. Thus the notion of the "imaginal" proposed by H. Corbin and G. Durand would allow us to observe in the present and in the everyday the manifestations of the intimate relationship of the intelligible and the sensory.¹⁸ It is good to recall such basic commonplace ideas, life begins by limiting itself, by being determined (c.f. the Latin "determinatio"), in the same way social existence only exists when it discloses itself, when it assumes a form. The "THEATRUM MUNDI" is not a useless concept, its expression is multiform (political, economic, everyday...), it is certainly that which justifies our sociological reflection on "formism".

Numerous authors, each in his own way, have felt this problem that is posed in our time. We can no longer understand the modern world on the basis of an orchestration which once had validity but which now seems somewhat obsolete. Thus, the logic of "either/or", thus the distinction between subject and

object, the foundation of our sciences, are more and more coming under scrutiny. For our purposes, we can say that attention to the form, as I have just described, should let us elaborate a new anthropo-sociology more inclusive and open to the complexity of the social world. Edgar Morin who, with perseverance and erudition is working to establish the foundation for this in his Method,¹⁹ indicating that "we need a principle of knowing that not only respects, but also reveals the mystery of things". Moreover, when he defines this method, he specifies that it is a matter of a "whirlwind-like movement, that goes from the phenomenal experience to the paradigms that organize the experience".¹⁹ All the terms of my analysis of form are brought together here: experience is another way of expressing what I have called empathy and the paradigm can be understood as a modulation of the "form". These terms all prove themselves and test themselves in the chaotic, "whirlwind-like" movement of social existence whose fecundity and polysemy have not yet been examined to the full.

It seems that such a process, while striving to be explicit knows how to respect the social "given" in all its complexity. For this reason I made an opposition between an easy understanding and a perhaps overly rigid explanation. In any case, this constant movement from experience to the paradigm, or from empathy to formism, shows that there is an organization, I prefer to say an organicity of things and of people, of nature and of culture. It is enough to suggest its contours. In so doing, the notion appears, serves as an indication, permits the cryst-

allization while maintaining sociality in its fertile plurality. There is an intimate liaison which unites "formism" and polytheism or, for our purposes, societal pluralism. And considering the failures of one-dimensional systems of reference when they fall under the blows of social practices, it is important that the sociologist, unmoved - on this subject - by incomprehension or by sarcasm, know how to appreciate today more than ever, the deep-rootedness and the usefulness of such a polytheism in daily life. This task is being pursued by the lucidity of all those (whose numbers are increasing) who know how to resist the totalitarianism of the normative concepts of the world.

FOOTNOTES

1 C.f. for example BALANDIER (G), Sens et Puissance, Paris, PUF, 1971, p.9.

2 C.f. for example MAFFESOLI (M), Le rituel et la vie quotidienne comme fondement des histoires de vie. Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie. Vol. LXIX, 1980, p. 341-349.

3 MAFFESOLI (M), La conquête du présent, Paris, PUF, 1979, 2ème partie, Fondements et formes du rituel.

4 For Durkheim's holism, c.f., Le suicide, Paris, PUF, 1973, p. 137. or same, De la division du travail social, Paris, PUF, 1926, p. 342, note 3.

5 C.f. for example TONNIES (F), Communauté et société, Paris, PUF, 1944, p. 11.

6 C.f. for example JANNEAU (E), La philosophie médiévale, Paris, PUF, 1963, p. 95.

7 On this point I refer you to the documented analyses of PERNIOLA (M), La società dei simulacri, Bologna, Capelli, 1980.

8 I have developed this question in my article Critique des théories du social et épistémologie des sciences humaines, Études en l'honneur de Julien Freund, Revue européenne des sciences sociales, Tome XIX, 1981, N°54-55, p. 325-337, Droz, Genève.

9 C.f. for example GANDILLAC (M. de), La philosophie de la renaissance, in Histoire de la philosophie, T.II, Paris, Hachette, 1973, p. 37 sq et bibliographie, p. 350.

10 C.f. for example LUKACS (G), L'Âme et les formes, Trad. Française, Paris, Gallimard, 1974, p. 16.

11 C.f. for example FRIEDMAN (G), La crise du progrès, Paris, Gallimard, 1936, p. 138.

12

Ever since a famous name of German car formulated it concisely ("Mercedez ein Begriff"), the "creative minds" of advertising agencies look for the concept which can best characterize the product they want to promote. The *brw*-**ta**lity of this utilitarian practice belies the essential characteristic of the conceptual procedure.

13

C.f. for example SIMMEL(G), Mélanges de philosophie relativiste, Paris, F. Alcan, 1912. Since these lines were written, we must signal a new publication by G. Simmel, Sociologie et épistémologie, Paris, PUF, 1981, with a prefatory remark by J. Freund *who* poses very well the problem of "Formal sociology".

14

C.f. for example KANT (E), Prolegomènes à toute métaphysique future, Paris, PUF, 1968, p. 170, note 1. My underlining.

15

For example, we can situate its apex in the nineteenth century when sociability became channeled, put to work, controlled, etc. c.f. on these definitions and their developments MAFFESOLI (M), L'ombre de Dionysos, contribution à une sociologie de l'orgie, Paris, Librairie des Méridiens, 1982, p.13; 2ème edition, 1985.

16

C.f. for example WEBER (M), L'Ethique protestante et l'esprit du capitalisme, Paris, Plon, 1964, p. 45 sq. and p. 113, for the "ideal type".

17

The German expression underscores the fact that something can be "full of sense" but "without finality".

18

C.f. for example DURAND (G), Un mésocosme divinatoire: le langage astrologique, Tours, 1975, p. 12.

19

C.f. for example MORIN (E), La méthode, Paris, Seuil, 1977, Tome 1, p. 20.