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# The risky truth of fabulation: Deleuze, Bergson and Durkheim on the becomings of religion and art

Paul Stenner

## Abstract

*Based on a close reading of relevant works of Gilles Deleuze, and informed by Emile Durkheim and Henri Bergson's writings on religion, this paper articulates a novel concept of 'fabulation' which has significant implications for psychosocial theory. Beginning with a discussion of Jean Rouch's classic film 'Les Maîtres Fous', a distinction is drawn between a Deleuzian vision of fabulation as a profound fiction at the heart of the real, and an objectifying version which always contrasts fabulation with a supposedly external standard of reality. This latter version is clearly expressed in the literature of the psy-disciplines, but is also expressed in cultural forms such as the 'cinema of reality'. After sketching the connections between Deleuze's more risky yet also profound version of fabulation, Rouch's 'cinéma vérité', and Scholes' 'fabulator' tradition in literature (Vonnegut, Durrell, Navakov etc.), this concept of fabulation is traced back to Bergson's critical encounter with Durkheim over the question of the sacred. With help from the recent work of Ronald Bogue, the paper ends by emphasising the tight connection between fabulation and the dynamics of becoming.*

This does not mean that madness is the only language common to the work of art and the modern world...; by the madness that interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself (Foucault 1973, p. 288).

## 1. Introduction: The Mad Masters

*With footage shot using a hand-held camera, the viewer is shown the bustling city streets of Accra, then capital of Africa's Gold Coast. A French narrator introduces the viewer to several different categories of labourer at work: the dockers at the port, those who clear the gutters, mine the tin, etc. The film then takes the viewer to a rural location at which a selection of these workers proceed to enact a religious practice, with origins in Niger, called Hauka. Nominated initiates perform a circular dance to the tune of a one string violin and percussion. A substance-assisted trance ritual follows in which selected participants, wide-eyed and sometimes frothing at the mouth, become possessed by what the narrator describes as figures associated with the British colonial rulers of the region. A man possessed by the Corporal of the Guard rises and jerkily shakes hands with those present, carrying a piece of wood shaped like a rifle. As the Corporal flails and staggers around, Gerba the train conductor comes striding through the trees into the clearing, frothing at the mouth and clutching his shorts, making loud retching sounds before collapsing in front of a circular stone bloodied by a sacrificed bird. Captain Malia, who had been seated with eyes rolling, lurches to his feet and begins a slow parody of a military march. Various leadership challenges follow until, after much commotion, a round-table is called, featuring the sacrifice and eating of a dog, some eaten raw, and some boiled in a pot*

*from which the flesh is pulled with bare hands. The film ends with the people driving home to resume their ordinary working lives, with shots mundane work juxtaposed with flashbacks of the same people enacting the ritual.*

The passage above is a synopsis of Jean Rouch's highly controversial and much debated 1955 film 'Les Maîtres Fous'. As well as being an ethnographer, Rouch pioneered the cinematic genre known as 'cinéma vérité'. Some consider this film the preeminent anti-colonial movie. Its title 'The Mad Masters' expresses the perspective of Rouch's narration to the effect that the Hauka parodies the manners and ceremonies of the colonial rulers, scrambling the codes of the asymmetrical power relations between white colonial authority and black subjugation. Although this interpretation has been challenged, it is supported by the fact that it was immediately banned by the colonial rulers. Others, however, wanted the film burned because of the way it reinforces Western stereotypes about African people (Lim, 2002).

My intention is not to attempt a judgement that might settle this controversy. Rather, I begin with Rouch's work because of the significant role his 'cinéma vérité' plays in Chapter 6 of Gilles Deleuze's book *Cinema 2* (1989), entitled 'the powers of the false'. That chapter discusses a change that occurred within cinema through the 'cinéma vérité' of Rouch, the 'cinema of the lived' pioneered by Pierre Perrault, and the 'direct cinema' of Shirley Clarke and Cassavetes. For Deleuze, this change was effectively the discovery within cinema of a profound insight that had also flashed upon Nietzsche. In Deleuze's (1989, p.149) words, the core of this insight is that: 'the ideal of the true was the most profound fiction, at the heart of the real'. I will return shortly to examine the meaning of this quotation from Deleuze in more detail, but for now I use it - and the Mad Masters - as a way of introducing the concept that will be the focus of this article: fabulation. Any most profound fiction at the heart of the real must be *fabulated*.

In what follows I extend my recent work (Stenner, 2017a) and offer an account of fabulation that I hope will be useful for scholars working at the transdisciplinary interface between psychology and Deleuzian philosophy (see also Barr, 1992, Braidotti, 2000, Brown, 2010, Kruger and Le Roux, 2017, Nichterlein and Morss, 2017). Fabulation is not one of Deleuze's core concepts and is perhaps not a fully-fledged concept at all. In fact, unlike better-known Deleuzo-Guattarian (1988) inventions like becoming animal, de/re/territorialization and line of flight, Deleuze uses 'fabulation' rarely and in a fragmentary manner. My discussion of fabulation builds upon literary scholar Ronald Bogue's (2006, 2010) excellent efforts to piece together these fragments.<sup>1</sup> Bogue's main concern is to see if his assemblage can illuminate some recent novels (which it certainly can). I build on this through a number of steps. First, I provide a rapid overview of how psychology has 'disciplined' the concept of fabulation through a contrast enabled by an objective disciplinary standard. I then show how variations on this same disciplinary device are discernable, first in what Deleuze calls 'the cinema of reality' and, second, in Durkheim's sociology of religion. I present the latter as an important but rarely acknowledged influence upon Bergson's account of fabulation, which inspired Deleuze. Finally, my aim is to show the sense in which Deleuzian fabulation affirms a

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Maria Nichterlein for alerting me to Bogue's work.

creative and transdisciplinary relation to the truth that is more ‘risky’ than the disciplinary approach allows.

## 2. The Masters of Madness: Fabulation in the ‘psy’ sciences

Bogue defines fabulation as follows:

Fabulation... is closely associated with fiction, invention and the ‘power of the false’... [it] comes from the Latin *fabula*, which may be rendered as ‘talk’, ‘conversation’, or ‘small talk’, but also as ‘story’, ‘tale’, ‘myth’, or ‘legend’. In this regard, *fabula* resembles its Greek counterpart, *mythos*, which may be translated as ‘word’, ‘speech’, ‘story’, or ‘legend’... *La Fable*, according to the Robert dictionary, may refer to ‘the set of mythological stories as a whole’ (2006, p. 214).

The word fabulation evokes the ‘fable’ and carries forward the connotation of a folk story that is not intended to be taken as true because of certain evidently unbelievable components. The word ‘fabulous’ shares the same root for similar reasons. Aesop’s fables, for example, involve fabulous animals engaging in activities nobody would seriously expect of animals. Perhaps the point of a fable is that everyone knows that it is not ‘true’ in the sense that mice don’t really talk to lions and help them escape from nets, and foxes don’t really give soup to storks. If the teller of fables is nevertheless able to express something true, then perhaps this is not despite, but because of this freedom from the demand to faithfully relate actual events in their material unfolding. It might even be said that the distance afforded by fabulous animals protects the ‘truth’ of the fable by pulling it into closer proximity. But this ‘fabulous truth’ is not the ‘correctness’ usually implied when people think of a representation which accurately matches its object. Fabulous truth, unlike representational correctness, carries no guarantees of veridicality and in fact is never far from falsehood. The first words spoken to Hesiod by the Muses of Mount Helicon, for example, were a clear announcement of this risky relationship: ‘Rustic shepherds, worthless reproaches, mere stomachs, we know how to say many lies like the truth, and, whenever we wish, we know how to tell the truth.’ (Hesiod, and Caldwell, 1987, p. 27). As we shall see, this ambivalent and risky relation to truth is lost entirely from the concept of fabulation crafted within the ‘psy’ sciences.

In the context of psychology and the ‘psy’ sciences more generally, fabulation shares a family resemblance with a range of concepts including suggestibility, imitation, confabulation and, to some extent, somatization. Jean Piaget (1972, p. 202), for example, used the term ‘fabulation’ in the context of child development to indicate a phase during which children have difficulties distinguishing ‘between fabulation and truth’, ending, he proposed, at around 7 or 8 years of age. Piaget’s usage can be considered paradigmatic of the approach from the ‘psy’ sciences in so far as fabulation is construed solely from the perspective of deviations from accurate cognition. Far from being a *means* for truth, fabulation becomes its opposite.

This same feature applies to the closely related notion of ‘confabulation’ which was introduced into psychiatry by Emil Kraepelin (1886). Confabulation indicates a pathological condition where patients provide or act upon information that is evidently false or context-inappropriate. Since patients who confabulate are unaware

of this situation, Moscovitch (1989) coined the alternative phrase ‘honest lying’. It is relevant to note that fabulation and confabulation share this feature of being ‘honest’ deviations from accurate cognition with the medical concept of somatisation. In the discourse of psychosomatic medicine, the somatiser, unlike the malingerer, is not deliberately misleading the physician about the symptoms they report, but genuinely experiences them, despite lack of demonstrable disease (Greco, 2012). In this sense, both somatisation and psychiatric confabulation have connections with delusion, since all involve the unintentional production of false propositions (Berrios, 2000). A confabulation is an honest addition (a ‘production’) to a report of an experience and not just a reporting error. Failing to report something that did happen is not confabulation (Carruthers, 2018). Some clinicians, however, would characterise delusion as a disorder of belief formation whilst confabulation pertains to memory. The point I wish to extract here, however, is that fabulation and confabulation are considered within psychology either as immature (as in the case of Piaget) or as pathological (as in the case of Kraepelin) conditions.

When considered a matter of pathology, origins are sought either directly in organic damage to prefrontal structures, basal forebrain, temporal lobes or the anterior limbic system, or, alternatively, within the situational demands of highly stressful situations. When considered – qua Piagetian fabulation – a matter of immaturity, fabulation shades into the notion of suggestibility where, for obvious reasons, it has played a key role in debates around false memories and the suitability of children as witnesses in courts of law (see Motzkau, 2009, Brown and Stenner, 2009, Brown and Reavey, 2015 for critical accounts). Suggestibility, however, primarily suggests a susceptibility to influence from what others may have made up, although the word is also used to describe situations where events are actively ‘made up’ in light of suggestions from others.

This difference notwithstanding, fabulation shares with suggestibility a thoroughly *paradoxical* nature. In her research on the history of the concept of suggestibility within psychology, for example, Johanna Motzkau (2009) explored the paradoxical way in which it was viewed by early psychologists (William McDougal [1911], for example) as simultaneously an irrational expression of manipulability, and as perhaps the most fundamentally distinctive characteristic of human mentality and hence human nature: what makes learning, affection, socialization and social cohesion possible at all. As with the closely related theme of imitation (see Blackman, 2008), the suggestible self is inherently a social self that takes its cue from another, and yet it is only through such socialization that something like an ‘individual’, capable of rationally checking the evidence supporting the propositions s/he entertains, can ever emerge (see Stenner, 2017a).

Fabulation shares this paradox of being simultaneously a highly valued activity associated with some of the peaks of human cultural achievement, and a lamentable pathology<sup>2</sup>. As it is used within the ‘psy’ sciences, however, we have seen that the

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<sup>2</sup> In Bateson’s sense, this qualifies fabulation as something *sacred*. For Bateson (1975, p. 25), the sacred is ‘always a coin with two sides. The original Latin word “*sacer*,” from which we get our word, means both “so holy and pure” as to be sacred, and “so unholy and impure” as to be sacred. It’s as if there’s a scale – on the extreme pure end we have sacredness, then it swings down in the middle to the secular, the normal, the everyday, and then at the other end we again find the word “*sacer*” applied to the most impure, the most horrible’. The latter part of the current paper exploits this direct connection

concept loses this risky and paradoxical relationship with truth. More specifically, within these scientific uses, the concept of fabulation always presupposes an ideal and pre-given standard of truth, against which it can demonstrably fall short. Furthermore, in the case of the variations we have been considering, this standard typically rests upon the institutional epistemic norms, not just of science, but also of law (in the case of the suggestibility of witnesses) and medicine (in the case of psychiatric confabulation and medical somatisation). It is perhaps not surprising if the concept of fabulation loses its delicate and risky relation to truth in these hard institutional settings where it is defined as such only when demonstrably false in light of an objective standard provided by law, medicine or science.

### 3. Fabulating a more risky relation to truth

I can now return to what a concept of fabulation informed by Deleuze's statement quoted above – 'the ideal of the true was the most profound fiction, at the heart of the real' – might look like. That is, a concept informed by the proposition that the ideal of the true, or the very best of the true, is something fictional. How can an ideal of the true, be at the heart of the real? To approach this risky mingling of ideal truth, fiction and reality we can begin quite modestly by grasping the important change, noted above, that Deleuze associates with 'cinéma vérité' (and its variants). The change inaugurated by cinéma vérité can be expressed negatively: it is not about using cinema to challenge fictional falsehoods, embellishments, ideologies and fantasies by confronting them with a pure filmic documentation of how things really are. It is not about contrasting 'subjective' fiction with a pre-established objective standard of truth. The 'ideal of the truth' that Deleuze has in mind does not involve contrasting an apparently external and material objectivity with an internal subjective representation.

In fact, Deleuze associates just this effort (to use cinema to challenge fiction by contrasting it with a truth delivered by film) with an older form he calls the 'cinema of reality'. He links this older form with the work of Flaherty, Grierson and Leacock. For Deleuze (1989, p. 149), the challenges to fiction posed by these directors were paradoxical in so far as they preserved an ideal of truth '*which was dependent upon cinematic fiction itself*'. In other words, cinematic fiction itself – inherited and preserved by the 'cinema of reality' – provided a neat separation between images corresponding to subject and object. On the one hand, what the camera sees (beyond the purview of a given character) is taken as objective, and, on the other, what is seen to be seen by a given character is taken, by filmic convention, as subjective. Hence a film allows us to see what a character sees (subjective image) whilst also seeing what they do not see (objective image). This contrast creates rich potential for cinematic devices. For example, discrepancies between objective and subjective images can be used to constitute tensions and crises which can then be 'resolved' at the film's finale. We can 'feel for' characters because we are placed in the omnipotent position of knowing both what they know and what they don't know. When this discrepancy is resolved, some sort of 'identity' – the identity that was lost during the section of the film when subjective and objective were out of phase – is re-affirmed. Deleuze (*ibid*) refers to this identity in short hand using the formula: Ego = Ego.

By exploiting this duality, the anti-fictional 'cinema of reality' effected the separation of two poles: a documentary pole and a reportage pole. At the documentary pole the

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between fabulation and the sacred by showing the origins of the concept in sociological discussions of religion. See also chapter 5 of Stenner (2017a).

cinema of reality can claim to objectively display the real actions of real people in real settings, and at the reportage pole it displays the subjective ‘ways of seeing’ of the characters, showing how they define their problems and issues from their own perspectives. This ‘cinema of reality’ retains clear identities for characters (subjective) and film makers (objective) alike, and it challenges fiction in favour of a reality captured in this way by cinema (‘Ego = Ego’). But since this reality is in fact captured by cinema, the model of truth it retains is a consequence of the very fiction it presupposes. In Deleuze’s account it was just this paradoxical model of truth – with its clear identities for characters and film makers alike – that was systematically unraveled by a number of film makers including Lang, Welles and Pasolini. Pasolini’s ‘cinema of poetry’, for example, erodes and recomposes the distinction between objective and subjective images, creating a new form he calls ‘free indirect discourse’:

In the cinema of poetry, the distinction between what the character saw subjectively and what the camera saw objectively vanished, not in favour of one or the other, but because the camera assumed a subjective presence, acquired an internal vision, which entered into a relation of *simulation* (‘mimesis’) with the character’s way of seeing. It is here... that Pasolini discovered how to go beyond the two elements of the traditional story, the objective, indirect story from the camera’s point of view, and the subjective, direct story, from the character’s point of view, to achieve the very special form of ‘a free indirect discourse’, of a ‘free, indirect subjective’. A contamination of the two kinds of image was established, so that bizarre visions of the camera (alternation of different lenses, zoom, extraordinary angles, abnormal movements, halts...) expressed the singular visions of the character, and the latter were expressed in the former, but by bringing the whole to the power of the false. The story no longer refers to an ideal of the true which constitutes its veracity, but becomes a ‘pseudo-story’, a poem, a story which simulates or rather a simulation of the story. (Deleuze, 1989, p. 148-149)

Cinema vérité takes off from this unravelling achieved by Lang, Welles and Pasolini and thus departs from the ‘cinema of reality’ with its clear identities of character and film-maker afforded by its (fictional) contrast of fiction with truth. The ideal truth it offers is not a truth contrasted with fiction but a fiction at the heart of the real. In this process, the Ego=Ego scenario unravels and gives way to the transversal subjectivity of Ego=*becoming other*. In 1960 Rouch collaborated with the transdisciplinary sociologist Edgar Morin in the making of ‘Chronique d’un été’ (‘Chronicle of a summer’). No less anthropological than ‘Les Maîtres Fous’, this film involved the ‘tribe’ of Parisians. It had no actors, script, plot or scenario, but simply involved walking the streets of Paris with a camera and microphone and inviting passers-by to respond to the question: ‘are you happy?’ This was not a matter of gaining access to an undisturbed external reality. Rouch and Morin were very aware that the presence of a camera, microphone, interviewer and so on were important ingredients in what happened during filming. Some people walked away, some said ‘buzz off’, whilst others talked freely about their joys and sorrows. These were not stories of realities that might have happened had the camera not been there, but of what happens *because the camera is there*. The camera is ingredient in a living reality in which human beings are not objects, but subjects of the film. The film makers, in other words,

considered the situation to be a kind of experiment in which ordinary people were invited to actively participate (or refuse to participate) in a real creation.

In the same way, the question of the authenticity of *The Mad Masters* – whether it is a faithful depiction of real ritual practices or a show put on to please the pre-conceptions of the inquisitive European visitors - is not, for Rouch and Deleuze, the pressing issue. The issue is the experimental creation of a ‘profound fiction at the heart of the real’: a ‘free indirect discourse’ in which fiction is freed from the representational model of truth (and image of thought) which would seek to eliminate it, and re-connected to the transformative powers of fabulation. At stake here is what Deleuze calls:

the pure and simple *story-telling function* which is opposed to this model. What is opposed to fiction is not the real; it is not the truth which is always that of the masters or the colonizers; it is the story-telling function of the poor, in so far as it gives the false the power which makes it into a memory, a legend, a monster... What cinema must grasp is not the identity of a character, whether real *or* fictional, through his objective and subjective aspects. It is the becoming of the real character when he himself starts to ‘make fiction’, when he enters into the ‘flagrant offence of making up legends’ and so contributes to the invention of his people. (1989, p. 150)

This activity of fabulation (the ‘story-telling-function’ or ‘making up legends’), far from affirming coherent identities, summons a zone of indiscernability between the ‘characters’ and the ‘film maker’. Both are involved in a process of ‘making up’ in which who they are becomes inseparable from the before and the after of a ‘passage from one state to another’<sup>3</sup>. This passage enabled by fabulation, as Deleuze suggests, is not inconsequential, but of direct social relevance, since it ‘contributes to the invention’ of a people. Returning to our film, we can see that each of the ‘characters’ in *The Mad Masters* becomes another through the process of telling their story or making up their legend ‘without ever being fictional’. Magaria *becomes* Madame Salma just as the other men become Madame Lokotoro, the Corporal of the Guard, Gerba the conductor, Captain Malia and the Governor. But equally, Rouch the film maker ethnographer becomes with them. ‘With the camera to my eye, I am what Dziga Vertov called the mechanical eye... With a ciné-eye and a ciné-ear I am a ciné-Rouch in a state of ciné-trance in the process of ciné-filming (Rouch, 1989, p. 268 cited in Lim, 2002). Rouch becomes cyborgian ciné-Rouch as he fabulates a film which is itself a passage from a pre-liminary phase in which the workers are introduced and separated from their labours, through the liminal phase of the Hauka ritual, and culminating in the post-liminal re-incorporation back into working life. It might seem as if nothing has changed and that, after the Hauka, the workers and the film maker return to... ‘What they were before’ (Deleuze, 1989, p. 152). But, through this process, has not a new assemblage been formed between ritual and film, characters and film makers, perhaps even Gold Coast and Paris? As it acquires and transforms its audience, does the movie itself begin to fabulate in turn a ‘new people’? If so, then this is not a matter of a pre-established truth, faithfully or unfaithfully depicted by way of a ‘fiction’, but of new becoming, which sweeps up those involved

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<sup>3</sup> For an application of this idea to novels - and Mann’s *Magic Mountain* in particular - see Stenner and Greco (2018).



into a new reality whose heart now beats to the pulse of the fabulation that supplies its truth.

Not reality versus fiction, then, but a creative experimentation with what reality can become: an experimentation that activates a process of passage in which clear identities are scrambled as they melt down and are reconstituted. The ‘story telling’ does not reinforce and depend upon, but dissolves the very boundaries that constitute identities and structures and, in so doing, opens up the possibility of contributing ‘to the invention of [a] people’, even if that ‘people’ might not be even thought (as a possibility) yet. It seems to me that Edgar Morin (1985, p.5) expresses precisely this connection between the *vérité* of this kind of cinematic practice, and a ‘quest’ for solidarity: ‘Can’t cinema become the means of breaking that membrane which isolates each of us from others in the metro, on the street, or on the stairway of the apartment building? The quest for a new *cinéma vérité* is at the same time a quest for a ‘cinéma de fraternité’.

It is notable that, independently of Deleuze, the US literary critic Robert Scholes (1967) used the concept of fabulation to designate the new style of a specific group of Anglophone novelists. This group, which Scholes calls *The Fabulators* includes Vonnegut, Durrell, Hawkes, Murdoch, Barth, Golding and Navakov<sup>4</sup>. What is striking here is that the shift in literary approach examined by Scholes was contemporary with the new style of cinema that Deleuze associates with Rouch, Perrault, Clarke and Cassavetes, and, most significantly, shares with it the theme of a transformed relation between fiction and truth. Scholes work in the field of literature can in this sense be viewed as homologous to Deleuze’s work on cinema. Scholes’ fabulators depart from realistic and conventionally romantic fictional concepts by deliberately blurring the lines between artifice and reality, often through the device of dislocating time and space. Scholes shows how their work shares certain features such as ‘black humour’, the revival of rhetoric, and a questioning of certainties, and yet he discerns a universal ‘vision’ which stems from what he describes as a collision of myth and philosophy (their style can also be compared to ‘magical realism’).

Just as Rouch set up a transversal connection between anthropology and film, Scholes connects the new vision of fiction associated with fabulation to core developments in 20<sup>th</sup> Century science (relativity theory, quantum theory, systems theory, structuralism, etc.). In the work of the fabulists ‘the tradition of speculative fiction is modified by an awareness of the nature of the universe as a system of systems, a structure of structures, and the insights of the past century of science are accepted as fictional points of departure ... It is a fictional exploration of human situations made perceptible by the implications of recent science’ (Scholes, 1967, p. 54–55). Furthermore, as pointed out in a later work (Scholes, 1976, p. 47), the fabulators write ‘fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way’.

I have sketched a contrast between two very different concepts of fabulation, each associated with a very different image of thought and a very different ‘ideal of the true’. On the one hand, we have a psychological construction of fabulation which is substantially similar to that at play in the ‘cinema of reality’, both of which operate

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<sup>4</sup> Barr (1992) importantly extends this analysis in a feminist direction.

with an ideal of truth that depends upon objective epistemic norms, whether those be the institutional norms of science, law, medicine or the internal conventions of cinema itself. This version of fabulation is precisely denied the sort of delicate and risky relation to truth that is the characteristic feature of the other version that Deleuze finds at the heart of ‘cinéma vérité’ and that Scholes associates with the group of novelists he calls ‘fabulators’. For this alternative version, fabulation is not a subjective distortion of reality but a means to grasp and enact new becomings. This second version gives a significant place to artistic creativity and precisely does not rest upon the secure foundation of an institutionally or scientifically grounded objectivity:

It’s the greatest artists (rather than populist artists) who invoke a people, and they find they “lack a people”: Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Klee, Berg. The Straubs in cinema. Artists can only invoke a people, their need for one goes to the very heart of what they’re doing, it’s not their job to create one, and they can’t. Art is resistance: it resists death, slavery, infamy, shame. But a people can’t worry about art. How is a people created, through what terrible suffering? When a people’s created, it’s through its own resources, but in a way that links up with something in art . . . or in such a way that art (Garrel says there’s a mass of terrible suffering in the Louvre too) or links up art to what it lacked. Utopia isn’t the right concept: it’s more a question of a “fabulation” in which a people and art both share. We ought to take up Bergson’s notion of fabulation and give it a political meaning (Deleuze, 1990, p.1).

#### **4. Society and the sacred: Durkheim’s influence on Bergson**

In the quotation above Deleuze refers to ‘Bergson’s notion of fabulation’ as a potentially more useful concept than utopia for getting at this nexus of issues around art, suffering, resistance and the capacity to invoke and create ‘a people’. A utopia is the imagination of a kind of blue-print for a desired community or society, but ‘fabulation’ points to a more messy, liminal and un-predetermined process of transformative passage. As Deleuze implies, the concept of fabulation more readily opens up a set of questions around how art might contribute to these political efforts (Braidotti, 2000). But, as we shall see, the concept notably emerges from debates about the origins of religion and the sacred, pointing to a zone of indiscernability between the aesthetic and the sacred (see Stenner, 2017b). A moment’s reflection shows that we have wandered into territory that is a profoundly transdisciplinary mixture of art, politics, religion, psychology, philosophy, anthropology and, as we shall see, historical sociology. Much of Bergson’s philosophy, as Deleuze (1986, preface) points out, ‘was the diagnosis of a crisis in psychology’, but even if his concept of fabulation contributes to early critical psychology, it appears in a book called *The two sources of morality and religion* (Bergson, 1932). This book can be well considered as a transdisciplinary sociology designed to explain the emergence of religion.

To understand Deleuzian fabulation and Bergson’s aim in the *Two sources*, it is first important to grasp Bergson’s relation to Durkheim. As a convenient simplification of this relation, we might contrast the *transdisciplinary* and *processual* thought of

Bergson with the *disciplinarian* thought of Durkheim<sup>5</sup>. The two studied together at a prestigious Parisian school and Bergson even named Durkheim as his principal adversary (Belloy, 2002, cited in Lefebvre and White, 2010). Riley (2002) shows quite how defining the Bergson/Durkheim concern with the sacred was for 20<sup>th</sup> Century French social theory (including postmodernism), and Lefebvre and White (2010, p. 458) make a compelling case that Bergson's '*Two Sources* is written in response to Durkheim', and specifically to Durkheim's last and most important book *The elementary forms of religious life* (1912). Like any interesting rivalry, this one involved a combination of commonality of goal and difference of approach. The common goal was nothing small: to reinvent the religious sacred for modern times (Riley, 2002, p. 244). The differences were subtle but significant. As we shall see, a concept of fabulation (or Durkheim's equivalent, 'idealization') was at the centre of both efforts to explain and rescue the sacred.

*The significance of 'idealizing' within Durkheim's elementary forms*

Ultimately, Durkheim repeats the gesture, that I have described in Section 2 above, of disciplining a subjective perspective by way of an objective standard. As with Deleuze's description of the 'cinema of reality', Durkheim begins by describing religious experiences in terms acceptable to believers (equivalent to Deleuze's subjective 'reportage pole') and proceeds to explain that experience from the vantage point of sociological objectivity (the 'documentary pole'). The believer is credited with a genuine experience of the sacred, but Durkheim goes on to show how they fail to grasp that their sacred is really the distortion of a precious *representation of society* ('collective representation'). Durkheim thinks he has discovered a law that simultaneously explains religion, proves the pure autonomy of the social, and guarantees the scientificity of sociology as the highest of all sciences. For Durkheim (1912, p. 333) it is 'axiomatic that religious beliefs, as odd as they sometimes seem, have a truth that must be discovered.' The truth that Durkheim unveils is that the sacred is society itself and that society itself is sacred.

The revelation of sociology as the empirical science of the sacred is part of a thoroughly disciplinary strategy. At its basis is Durkheim's insistence that the concept of the social (and hence the subject matter of sociology) be kept pure and sacrosanct, not just by radically distinguishing it from the psychological and the biological, but also by insisting upon its superior and indeed totalising nature. Durkheim insists that the sacred/social is superimposed upon the mundane real as an ideal to which the individual rightly 'ascribes a kind of higher dignity' (1912, p. 317). For Durkheim society is this higher reality beyond the individual that emerges into communicable experience only through a process of 'idealization'. As 'soon as we recognize that above the individual there is society, and that society is a system of active forces – not a nominal or rationally created being – a new way of explaining man becomes possible' (p. 343). Durkheim never ceases insisting upon this purified concept of the social which makes of sociology a sacred science and of him its prophet.

Durkheim's well known premise is that facts are social facts only if they existed *before* and *outside of* the psychobiological individual, and only if they 'penetrate us by imposing themselves on us': only if an external constraint 'forcibly prescribes'

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<sup>5</sup> See Riley (2002, p. 7) for other ways of classifying the two thinkers.

them and they ‘sweep us along in spite of ourselves’ (1895, p. 52-53).<sup>6</sup> Sociology, in affirming the distinctly societal origins of the sacred, allows a new account of the sacred value of society. Unlike most religious accounts, Durkheim’s does not require an unobservable ‘supra-experiential reality’ (Durkheim, 1912, p. 342), but is grounded in actual occasions of experience. Durkheim’s core idea that the sacred is *society conceived symbolically* is taken from William Robertson Smith (1894, p. 264-5) who wrote that every act of worship expresses ‘the idea that man does not live for himself only but also for his fellows, and that this partnership of social interests is the sphere over which the gods preside’. Robertson Smith also stressed the importance of occasions of experience in which ‘the whole community [is] stirred by a common emotion’ and Durkheim applied this insight in what is perhaps his best known argument: that the sacred/social is actually experienced during occasions of collective emotional ‘effervescence’. The paradigmatic instance here is ritual. The Hauka ritual with which we began provides a good example of a situation in which ‘Man does not recognise himself; he feels he is transformed’ (Durkheim, 1912, p. 317). Effectively, this is Durkheim’s way of grasping how a people, a society, might be invented, or better, how it is possible to have a concrete experience *of* ‘society’ that can thenceforth serve as the basic representation a collective has of itself, *qua* collective.

Durkheim, for good reason, ascribes fundamental importance to this idea that ‘when collective life reaches a certain degree of intensity it awakens religious thought, because it determines a state of effervescence that changes the conditions of psychic activity... vital energies become overstimulated, passions more powerful, sensations stronger’ (ibid). These are *social facts* because such experiences are not possible alone, but also, they are the basis from which a higher, ‘ideal’ world – Durkheim’s world of society – is superimposed upon the supposed profane psychobiological life of individuals. Society, once strictly separated from psychology and biology (assumed to be individual) ‘wields a creative power that no palpable being can equal’ (1912, p. 342), and yet our grasp of it is necessarily distorted by the very conditions (of collective effervescence) under which we encounter it in collective experience. This experience, despite the disciplinarian strategy, thus carries a risky relation to truth since it is simultaneously the most profound truth of which we are capable (society really does exist beyond the individual), and something veiled in distorting mythology. The collective effervescence, for example, is ‘the experience man is interpreting when he imagines malevolent beings outside himself whose hostility, inherent or provisional, can be disarmed only by human suffering’ (p. 307). Out of the clinging mist of the experience of collective effervescence, in short, the shapes of gods and demons, angels and satyrs, are vaguely discerned. Collective effervescence, we might say, *is the material from which gods are fabulated*. This, essentially, is Durkheim’s sociological alternative to the postulation of what he calls a ‘natural faculty for idealizing, that is for substituting for the world of reality a different world to which he is transported by thought’ (p. 316).

### *Bergson’s faculty of fabulation*

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<sup>6</sup> Durkheim’s ‘evidence’ is presented in a startlingly authoritarian way: ‘it is sufficient to observe how children are brought up. If one views the facts as they are and indeed as they have always been, it is patently obvious that all education consists of a continual effort to impose upon the child ways of seeing, thinking and acting which he himself would not have arrived at spontaneously’ (1895, p.53).

Twenty years later, Bergson retained some of these insights, but construed them quite differently. This ‘natural faculty for idealizing’ – freed from Durkheim’s sociologising framework – is precisely Bergson’s faculty of fabulation. I am suggesting that to ‘idealize’ (to use Durkheim’s word) is to fabulate (to use Bergson’s). It is *to double reality with a superimposed ideal* and thus to create *an ideal of the true that, once superimposed, functions as a fiction at the core of the real*. The difference behind this commonality is the way of answering the question of ‘where this idealization comes from’ (Durkheim, 1912 p. 316). What sort of actual occasion of experience promotes it? For Durkheim, as we have seen, it derives from, and is renewed by, a type of emotionally heightened social occasion of experience which both comes from and *is* ‘society’ *par excellence* and *sui generis*. Pure society must have no intercourse with psychology or biology. Bergson refuses this absolute divide and rejects any tendency to ‘regard the individual as an abstraction, and the social body as the one reality’ (1932, p. 105). For Bergson ‘the individual and society are implied in each other: individuals make up society by their grouping together; society shapes an entire side of individuals by being prefigured in each one of them. The individual and society thus condition each other, circle-wise.’ (p. 199). Thus when Bergson describes his faculty of fabulation, he emphasises its biological and psychological aspects and – to strike directly at Durkheim’s Achilles’ heel – he gives examples which are precisely *not social* in Durkheim’s sense.

His most memorable example concerns a lady on the upper floor of a hotel who wished to descend to the lower level. Observing the gate of the hotel lift to be open, she hurried to enter. But a fault had occurred and the gate was open despite the fact that the lift was still far below. As she rushed forward:

she felt herself flung backwards, the man entrusted with the working of the lift had just appeared and was pushing her back onto the landing. At this point she emerged from her fit of abstraction. She was amazed to see that neither man nor lift was there... She had been about to fling herself into the gaping void; a miraculous hallucination had saved her life. (p.120).

This fabulation is clearly not a social occasion of collective effervescence, since the lady was alone. Equally clearly, it is not just ‘making things up’ but inventing or hallucinating images at an opportune moment as a defensive reaction. The lady fabulated automatically in the face of a void and this little drama averted a far worse crisis. Bergson is thus inviting us to view the lady’s imaginary lift-attendant as a fabulation no different in principle to an angel, a muse, or a god: ‘Just now, before the open gate a guardian appeared, to bar the way and drive back the trespasser’ (p. 122). Another example he gives is of William James’s experience of an earthquake, whereby James reported inadvertently personifying the geological event with quasi-human features. Bergson’s emphasis, in short, is not on the social nature of the occasion of significant experience, but on its nature as a more or less shocking *event*. ‘How is it’, Bergson asks, ‘that psychologists have not been struck by the mysterious element in a faculty such as this?’ (p. 196).

Consistent with his psychological focus (which does not exclude the social, but prevents Durkheim’s ‘top down’ social dictation), Bergson proposes an evolutionary function explaining the existence of this faculty. Essentially, fabulation is nature’s way of guarding against dangers introduced by the newfound intelligence of our

ancestors: their newly evolved intellectual faculties of judgement and reason. Intelligence is corrosive of any social order held together by biological instinct and unquestioned habit. The intelligent beast pursues rational self-interest and would reject the irrational demands for collective obligation, were it not for the co-evolution of fabulation. At crucial junctures – where crises might regularly occur – fabulations immunise humanity against the unexpected side-effects of its own powers of intelligence. Thanks to fabulation, phantasmic images and incipient hallucinations arise in the mind to intercept and counteract the direction in which an intellectual train of thought would otherwise take the thinker. If intelligence pursues only facts, the faculty of fabulation responds by generating counterfeit facts of experience which, serving as ‘virtual-instincts’, prevent us from sliding into anarchic disorder. The sociological benefit of fabulation is thus the salvaging of social order. The cost is that the social order that has been won is a backwards-and-inwards looking form that depends on the irrational stock of images and myths that Bergson calls *static morality and religion*. Having identified the faculty of fabulation as the source of our traditional religious imagery and stories, Bergson is able to define static religion rather emphatically as ‘*a defensive reaction of nature against the dissolvent power of intelligence*’ (p. 131).

Bergson’s process philosophy emphatically rejects Durkheim’s fundamental dualism between individual and society along with related dualisms like body/mind. The future of psychology, he suggests, (p. 105) ‘depends on the way it first dissects its object’. But this also applies to sociology, and indeed any science. To follow the natural joints, Bergson proposes a transdisciplinary distinction between a static nature oriented towards its own conservation (which he associates with abstraction, habit and all things mechanical and spatial), and a dynamically creative nature expressing an ever-emerging vitality (which he associates with intuition and process). This allows him to avoid Durkheim’s tendency to construe organic nature as mechanical repetition in contrast to society’s ideal obligations. Biology and psychology too can be static *and* dynamic. Nevertheless, Bergson invariably celebrates the ‘dynamic’ side associated with creation, invention and intuition. In discussing intelligence, for instance, he celebrates the ‘intelligence which invents’ over and above that which merely ‘understands, discusses, accepts or rejects – which, in a word, limits itself to criticism’ (p. 45). When discussing emotion he distinguishes a static and ‘infra-intellectual’ type with which the ‘psychologist is generally concerned’ (p. 44) from a dynamic and ‘supra-intellectual’ type, which alone is ‘productive of ideas’ and ‘the source of the great creations of art, of science and of civilization in general’ (p. 43). Put abstractly, on the one hand, we have an open ‘active, moving principle’ of ‘freely creative energy’ and on the other, the closed ‘matter’ which is merely the more or less refractory vehicle for this moving energy. It is as if the former were an electric current running through the latter. Different animal species are, from the perspective of creative evolution, merely resting points at which this ‘great current of creative energy... came to a stop’ (p. 209). From this perspective, an organism is relatively ‘closed’ like a ‘footprint, which instantly causes a myriad grains of sand to cohere and form a pattern’ (ibid). One footprint is, of course, just a step towards the next on an ‘open’ journey.

When Bergson contrasts closed and open societies, then, he links those types to psychological and biological dimensions. Thus the static religion that generates closed societies has its source in a psychological faculty of fabulation which results from

organic evolution, always in societal context. Closed societies use the benign trickery of fabricated ‘virtual instincts’ to conserve their solidarity. Static morality and religion are ultimately negative in that they dull our emergent intelligence by telling humanity ‘tales on a par with those with which we lull children to sleep’ (p. 211). Religious fabrications are not just nice ideas, but ‘ideo-motory’ constructions which, à la Durkheim, *demand* our unquestioning practical compliance. The strong implication from Bergson is that Durkheim’s entire theory of society remains static. The open society is something different. It is Bergson’s way of rescuing the sacred. Dynamic religion flows, not from the faculty of fabrication, but from intuition. It is not based on imposition but on a mystical love with its source in a direct grasp of the universe, enabled by intuition, as this unified and ever-moving flux of creative energy.

Only the mystic is capable of this intuition, but the mystic can influence all. For Bergson the human mind is limited by its need to transform the real flux into recognisable spatially located objects-for-mundane-use. For this reason, the daily material world is more like a curtain between mundane humanity and a higher truth. What we perceive – the world of matter that has been spatialized – is just a veil<sup>7</sup>. The mystic sees the dynamic process beyond the static veil. This vision promises the invention of an open society tolerant of a higher quantity and quality of ‘creative energy’. Bergson is the mystic with a soul sufficiently strong to ‘feel itself pervaded, though retaining its own personality, by a being immeasurably mightier than itself, just as an iron is pervaded by the fire which makes it glow’ (p. 212). With its mystic source, a dynamic religion would transfigure static religion and open the closed society. The bonds between individual, society and life would be re-energised by a joyful affirmation of mutual participation in the creative process of nature. No longer habitually attached to the illusory materiality of particular things, citizens would celebrate life-as-such. No longer attached by partisan commitments to local groups, they would identify with humanity as a whole (p. 268).

## **5. The fabled philosopher: the blocked and unblocked passages of Deleuzian fabulation**

Returning to the Bergson/Durkheim relation has allowed us to appreciate the scope of the concept of fabrication and its tight connection to the problem of the emergence of the sacred-social. Both thinkers fabricate a new image of society and the sacred which they hope is capable of sustaining and integrating future humanity. Durkheim’s is a disciplinary fabrication. Thanks to sociology, an ever more totalising society can be ‘progressively purified’ of the ‘subjective elements’ of pre-modern religion (p. 340). This purification process will yield a ‘supreme’ and ‘dominating’ trans-personal force that truly deserves the total obedience that, for Durkheim, all social facts demand of individuals: ‘the concept of totality is merely the abstract form of the concept of society: it is the whole that includes all things, the supreme classification’ (Durkheim,

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<sup>7</sup> In editing this article, Maria Nichterlein made the following insightful connection to a comment from Bateson (in his 1958 epilogue to Naven) on A.N. Whitehead and B. Russell. Bateson wrote of ‘a well-known story about the philosopher Whitehead. His former pupil and famous collaborator, Bertrand Russell, came to visit Harvard and lectured in the large auditorium on quantum theory, always a difficult subject, and at that time a comparatively novel theory. Russell labored to make the matter intelligible to the distinguished audience, many of whom were unversed in the ideas of mathematical physics. When he sat down, Whitehead rose as chairman to thank the speaker. He congratulated Russell on his brilliant exposition “and especially on leaving ... *unobscured* ... the vast darkness of the subject”’.

1912, p. 337). In Bergson's transdisciplinary fabulation, by contrast, the vitalist vision of the mystic will usher in the open society of globally flowing interconnected love. We will take our rightful place – as a unified part of the immanent whole of nature-in-process – in 'the essential function of the universe, which is a machine for the making of gods' (1932, p. 317).

In light of the above, Deleuzian fabulation can be sketched out via a double comparison. The first is a comparison with Bergson's concept. Deleuze writes little about religion<sup>8</sup>, and the focus of his concept of fabulation is on art (cinema, literature, painting). But Deleuze's 'artistic fabulation' clearly expresses Bergson's mystic vision of the universe as a surging tide of freely creative vital energy that 'shows up' temporarily as an array of objectified entities. In this sense, while consistent with it in other ways, Deleuze contradicts Bergson's argument that intuition is the source of this vision, and precisely *not* fabulation. For Deleuze, genuine art plays a politico-therapeutic role of releasing life from its static, blocked forms. As Deleuze puts it, the act of writing is 'an attempt to make life something more than personal, to free life from what imprisons it' (1995, p.142–3). The ways of living depicted in literature are taken by Deleuze as symptoms of how vital life might gush forth or get blocked-up or drain away. The death mask of the personal, from this perspective, is one aspect of the illness that literature aims to diagnose and cure. For Deleuze literature is not an effort to impose form on lived experience but a means through which it 'escapes its own formalization' (1998, p. 1). Great literature thus has nothing to do with recounting 'one's memories and travels, one's loves and griefs, one's dreams and fantasies' (p. 2). These are the travels, griefs and fantasies of the very *person* that literature aims to dissolve into a *becoming* other<sup>9</sup>. Only a neurotic notion of art revolves around the 'personal', forever seeking a reassuring daddy-mommy to fix one's form and to blot out the call of the wild, vital energy. Just as the cinema that Deleuze celebrates serves to replace the 'Ego = Ego' formula with 'Ego = becoming', so literature 'is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience' (p. 1). Literature begins, not

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<sup>8</sup> In *Desert Islands*, Deleuze (2004, p.11) suggests that 'rites and mythology' are the most profound aspects of the collective imagination, and indeed that literature is 'the attempt to interpret, in an ingenious way, the myths we no longer understand, at the moment we no longer understand them, since we no longer know how to dream them or reproduce them' (p.12). In the same essay he also evokes the theme of the sacred: 'humans do not put an end to desertedness, they make it sacred. Those people who come to the island indeed occupy and populate it; but in reality, were they sufficiently separate, sufficiently creative, they would give the island only a dynamic image of itself, a consciousness of the movement which produced the island, such that through them the island would in the end become conscious of itself as deserted and unpeopled' (p.10).

<sup>9</sup> This notion of *becoming other* is key to Deleuze and also to Deleuze and Guattari (1988, p. 272), for whom *becomings other* always follow a minoritarian trajectory towards maximal molecularity: 'A kind of order or apparent progression can be established for the segments of becoming in which we find ourselves; becoming-woman, becoming-child; becoming-animal, -vegetable, or -mineral; becomings molecular of all kinds, becoming particles. Fibers lead us from one to the other, transform one into the other as they pass through doors and across thresholds. Singing or composing, painting, writing have no other aim: to unleash these becomings'. For this reason, Deleuze and Guattari (1988, p. 291) insist that there is 'no becoming-man' (p.291). In this respect, it is interesting to note that the *Hauka* ritual depicted in 'Les Maîtres Fous' does indeed appear to involve becomings that move from minoritarian (subjugated black) to majoritarian (colonialising white). So long as we do not mistake becoming for the simple imitation of a molar subject, this deviation from Deleuze and Guattari's order might provide an interesting clue for a fresh interpretation of 'Les Maîtres Fous' in terms of fabulation. Here, I merely wish to note the direct connection between fabulation and becoming: 'There is a reality of becoming-animal, even though one does not in reality become animal' (p. 273).



with the personal 'I', but only when we are stripped 'of the power to say "I"' (p. 3). It is only as *becoming* that art can feed into the political becoming of a minoritarian people to come.

Deleuze's encounter with Bergson, therefore, does not leave Bergsonism unchanged. He famously confessed that he viewed 'the history of philosophy as a sort of buggery or (it comes to the same thing) immaculate conception. I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous. It was really important for it to be his own child, because the author had to actually say all I had him saying. But the child was bound to be monstrous too, because it resulted from all the shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emissions that I really enjoyed' (Deleuze, 1995, p. 6). Deleuze gives such a distinctive meaning to Bergson's fabulation that, when reading the following words, it is hard not to see Gilles approaching Henri from behind: 'There is no literature without fabulation, but as Bergson was able to see, fabulation – the fabulating function – does not consist in imagining or projecting an ego. Rather, it attains these visions, it raises itself to these becomings and powers' (Deleuze, 1998, p. 3). For Bergson, as we saw, fabulation can never raise itself to the mystic vision, since it is always a matter of conjuring an opportune falsehood to avert some crisis. Bergson even insists that 'the mistake is to believe that it is possible to pass, by a mere process of enlargement or improvement, from the static to the dynamic, from... fabulation... to intuition' (1932, p. 269). In gently unblocking this passage, Deleuze relieves Bergson's philosophy of the need to fabulate two distinct 'faculties', and implicitly unifies fabulation and intuition within a concept of the *event*, itself partly Bergsonian. An event ruptures prior causality and chronology and – in precipitating the disconcerting and ego-dissolving visions of fabulation – opens a new set of possibilities for becoming other. Deleuze precisely values the disconcerting visions produced by fabulation, since, for him, these can form the basis of works of art through which new political possibilities are created.

Albeit implicitly, Deleuze gives a similar treatment to Durkheim, and this is our second comparison. Certainly Deleuze sides with Bergson's critique, and prefers Tarde's 'molecular' sociology to Durkheim's 'molar' conception of a purified social (see Riley, 2002, p.16). But compared to Bergson, who lays stress upon the psycho-biological to refute his rival, Deleuze wants precisely to grasp the sociological and, more precisely, political contribution fabulation makes to what he calls 'the invention of [a] people'. In this respect he shares Durkheim's fascination with those occasions in which 'Man does not recognise himself; he feels he is transformed' (Durkheim, 1912, p.317). These experiences of 'collective effervescence' are the 'regions of intensity' in which the 'body without organs' is encountered and assembled on a 'plane of immanence'. But where Durkheim reaches always for the pristine collective representation emerged fully-formed in its purity like Aphrodite from a sea-shell, Deleuze returns us to the murky event of emergence itself. Deleuze (1990) doubtless had Durkheim in mind when he said: 'What I've been interested in are collective creations rather than representations'. In this sense, fabulation, as I have further discussed elsewhere (Stenner, 2017a), is the *passage from transformative event to communicable intuition*. The event as pure actuality of becoming is unstable, ambiguous, volatile and unfinished, and it veers unpredictably now towards a static fascism and now towards a progressive dynamism. But it contains the seeds of a 'profound fiction, at the heart of the real'. As Deleuze warns, literature 'is delirium, and as such its destiny is played out between the two poles of delirium. Delirium is a

disease, the disease par excellence, whenever it erects a race it claims is pure and dominant. But it is the measure of health when it evokes this oppressed bastard race that ceaselessly stirs beneath dominations' (1998, p. 4).

## 6. Conclusion

Through fabulation, Deleuze's thinking about art implicitly reconnects with the question of the sacred (and hence my choice to begin with the controversial cine-Hauka ceremony). If writing is about becoming, and warrants a concept of fabulation, then perhaps this is a function of the extent to which it approximates the experience of the sacred at play in rites of passage. Perhaps literature is an ingenious attempt to interpret, not just 'the myths we no longer understand', but also the rituals we no longer understand 'since we no longer know how to dream them ((Deleuze, 2004, p.12). Perhaps this is why Deleuze insists that the closer writing comes to becoming, the more it destroys itself *as writing*, and the more it approximates a *vision*. In the work of a great writer, language is 'toppled or pushed to a limit, to an outside or reverse side that consists of Visions and Auditions that no longer belong to any language' (Deleuze, 1998, p. 5). The language of the writer thus 'seems to be seized by a delirium, which forces it out of its usual furrows' (ibid). Antonin Artaud understood this process better than most and saw it as the vocation of true theatre: 'To shatter language in order to contact life means creating or recreating theatre' (1974, p. 6). All of these features can be understood as a certain *becoming ritual* of literature and cinema. And yet, in pointing to a zone of indiscernability between religious ritual, mythology and the arts, we must nevertheless attend to the specificities of the arts which precisely do not entail the total collective participation typical of rituals. Once individuated from their ritual matrix, theatre, painting, literature and indeed cinema presuppose a distinction between the sacred and the aesthetic. The aesthetic implies an audience for the product of an artistic creation whose process may be very lonely and – since art deals with that which is at the edge of semantic availability – may even veer close to madness. Fabulations, as Rosi Braidotti (2000, p. 170-1) suggests, propel becomings by bringing the unthinkable into representation. We thus grasp their connection to mysticism defined as 'insight into depths as yet unspoken' (Whitehead, 1938, p. 237).

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