

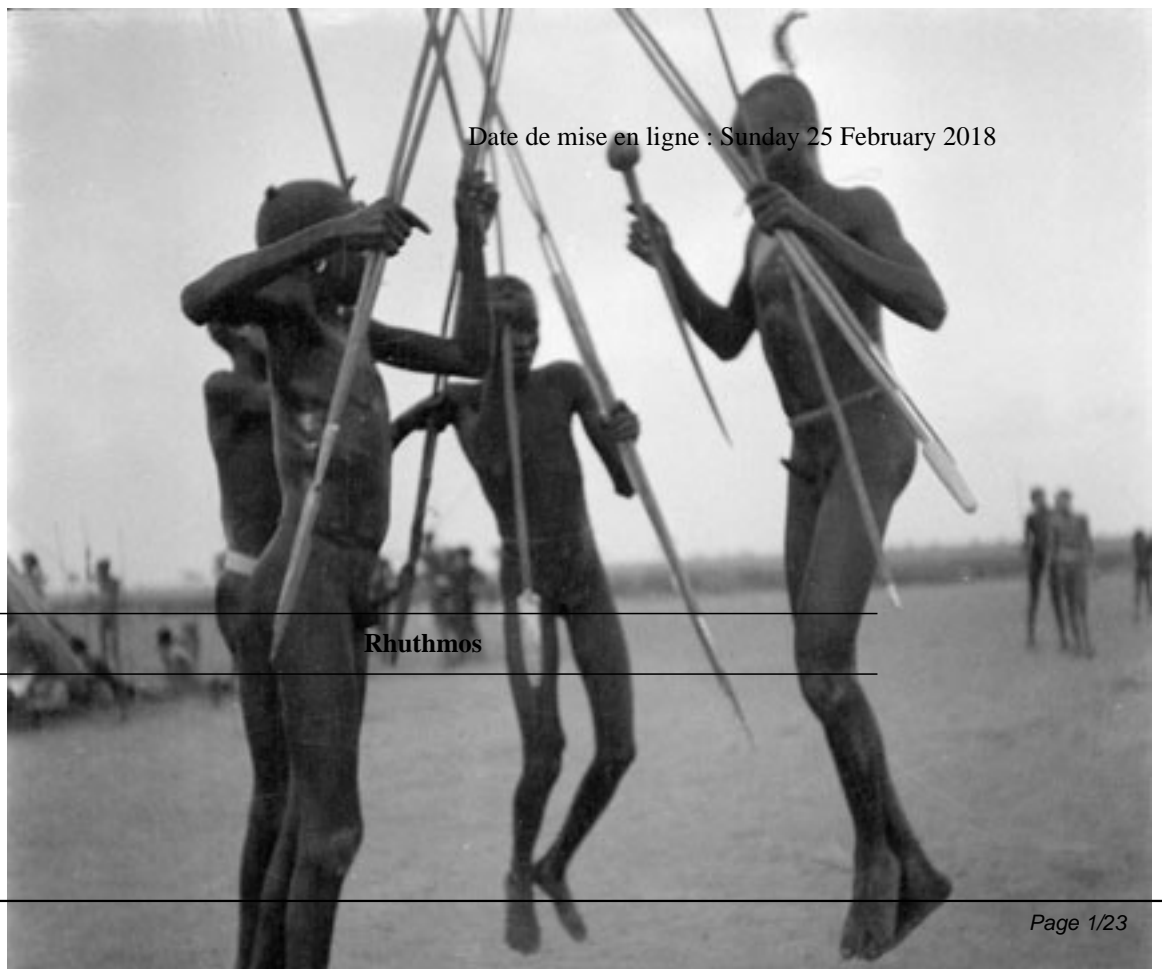
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Rhythm as Form of Individuation Process (part 1)

- Recherches
- Le rythme dans les sciences et les arts contemporains
- Anthropologie
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Rhuthmos

Table of contents

- [Rhythm of Duration or Individuation? \(Durkheim and his Followers - 1904-1912\)](#)
- [Rhythms of Archaic Societies: The Eskimo \(Mauss - 1904-1905\)](#)

[Previous chapter](#)

In the 1900s emerged a new way to address the fluidization of the world which was based on a quite different rhythmological ground. Unlike the economists, who were at least most of them using a naturalistic paradigm of rhythm partly derived from life science and medicine and greatly indebted to Plato, the sociologists and anthropologists rejected any continuity between nature and society and therefore developed a concept of rhythm that was and still is of a much greater interest to us. This chapter will be devoted to analyze and discuss this particular concept.

Rhythm of Duration or Individuation? (Durkheim and his Followers - 1904-1912)

In 1904, Henri Hubert (1872-1927) published a study on "The Representation of Time in Religion and Magic." His aim was to show how each society builds, in a particular way, the category of time through its calendar of festivals, ceremonies and rituals. Time was not a frame that was simply produced by the succession of states of consciousness. It was an impersonal form, a "rhythm," that enveloped our intimate existence and was borrowed from social life.

Divisions in days, weeks, months, years, etc., correspond to the periodicity of rites, festivals, public ceremonies. A calendar expresses the rhythm of the collective activity and, at the same time, its function is to ensure its regularity. (*The Representation of Time...*, 1904, my trans.)

In 1904-1905, Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) published his famous study on *Seasonal Variations of the Eskimo: A Study in Social Morphology*. Although it seemed apparently very close to Hubert's contribution, its object was, in fact, significantly different. Mauss, as we shall see below in detail, was not primarily interested in the Eskimo's ritual or religious calendar, but in the morphological variation of their societies during the year. As he indicated in the introduction to his study, he defined their "morphology" as

the material substratum of societies: this includes the form that societies assume in their patterns of residence, the volume and density of the population, the way in which the population is distributed, as well as the entire range of objects that serve as a focus for collective life. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 19, trans. James J. Fox)

Its explicit aim was to understand, by taking advantage of the exceptional amplitude of the variations of Eskimo

societies, the way in which,

the material form of human groups the very nature and composition of their substratum affects the different modes of collective activity. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 20, trans. James J. Fox, my mod.)

Hence, the cycle of ritual life appeared as a simple element alongside alternations concerning the legal and technological life of the more global cycle of the forms of society. And that was the reason why, for Mauss, the alternations of the social life of the Eskimo did not only provide the basis for a collective construction of the category of time, but also and mainly the re-production of the group as well as the individuals who composed it. The social rhythm, which for Hubert gave its form and organization to duration, ensured in Mauss, first and foremost, a socio- and psychogenetic function.

In 1912, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) integrated, synthesized, but also arbitrated between the works of his disciples. On the one hand, like Mauss, he pointed out that sociogenesis was rhythmically organized. He described, in terms close to those used by Mauss concerning the Eskimo, the morphological variations of Aboriginal societies.

The life of the Australian societies passes alternately through two distinct phases. Sometimes the population is broken up into little groups who wander about independently of one another, in their various occupations; each family lives by itself, hunting and fishing, and in a word, trying to procure its indispensable food by all the means in its power. Sometimes, on the contrary, the population concentrates and gathers at determined points for a length of time varying from several days to several months. This concentration takes place when a clan or a part of the tribe is summoned to the gathering, and on this occasion they celebrate a religious ceremony, or else hold what is called a *corrobbori* in the usual ethnological language. (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1912, p. 215, trans. Joseph Ward Swain)

On the other hand, his interpretation of these morphological data was quite different from Mauss.' After having very briefly shown that individuals enjoyed alternately a fairly "independent" life and a more "collective" life, Durkheim insisted on the very dissimilar psychological atmosphere of the respective phases: asthenia, monotony, on one side ; enthusiasm, effervescence, of the other. What the most interested him was the particular psychic state into which the participants entered during the phases of social concentration. The description was then almost explicitly based on the notions of imitation and influence and the anthropological dualism, peculiar to the crowd psychology of Le Bon and the first Tarde which he yet sharply criticized. When in the group, the "Primitive" was under the influence of "passions," "emotions," "enthusiasm," "exaltation," and "collective suggestion." He behaved like a "madman" Le Bon, who followed this line of argument to its ultimate conclusion, added "like a woman and a child" and it was from this madness that religion was born.

These two phases are contrasted with each other in the sharpest way. In the first, economic activity is the preponderating one, and it is generally of a very mediocre intensity. Gathering the grains or herbs that are necessary for food, or hunting and fishing are not occupations to awaken very lively passions. The dispersed condition in which the society finds itself results in making its life uniform, languishing and dull. But when a *corrobbori* takes place, everything changes. Since the emotional and passional faculties of the Primitive are only imperfectly placed under the control of his reason and will, he easily loses control of himself. Any event of some importance puts him quite outside himself. Does he receive good news? There are at once transports of enthusiasm. In the contrary conditions, he is to be seen running here and there like a madman, giving himself up to all sorts of immoderate movements, crying, shrieking, rolling in the dust, throwing it in every direction, biting himself, brandishing his arms in a furious manner, etc. The very fact of the concentration acts as an exceptionally powerful stimulant. When they are once come together, a sort of electricity is formed by their collecting which quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation. Every sentiment expressed finds a place without resistance in all the minds, which are very open to outside impressions; each re-echoes the others, and is re-echoed by the others. The initial impulse thus proceeds, growing as it goes, as an avalanche grows in its advance. (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1912, p. 215-216, trans. Joseph Ward Swain)

Rhythm as Form of Individuation Process (part 1)

Such was the argument by which Durkheim arrived at his famous thesis on the origin of religion. Moments of social concentration were moments of "effervescence" which, through reciprocal influence, transformed the psyche of individuals and made them collectively aware that something dominated them.

One can readily conceive how, when arrived at this state of exaltation, a man does not recognize himself any longer. Feeling himself dominated and carried away by some sort of an external power which makes him think and act differently than in normal times, he naturally has the impression of being himself no longer. It seems to him that he has become a new being : the decorations he puts on and the masks that cover his face figure materially in this interior transformation, and to a still greater extent, they aid in determining its nature. And as at the same time all his companions feel themselves transformed in the same way and express this sentiment by their cries, their gestures and their general attitude, everything is just as though he really were transported into a special world, entirely different from the one where he ordinarily lives, and into an environment filled with exceptionally intense forces that take hold of him and metamorphose him. How could such experiences as these, especially when they are repeated every day for weeks, fail to leave in him the conviction that there really exist two heterogeneous and mutually incomparable worlds? One is that where his daily life drags wearily along; but he cannot penetrate into the other without at once entering into relations with extraordinary powers that excite him to the point of frenzy. The first is the profane world, the second, that of sacred things. So it is in the midst of these effervescent social environments and out of this effervescence itself that the religious idea seems to be born. (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1912, p. 218-219, trans. Joseph Ward Swain)

This something that imposed itself upon them was only society as an all-encompassing totality, but the individuals interpreted it as a sacred principle, separated from the profane and the everyday life by a set of interdicts, a principle that they would figure in many ways and whose manifestations they would take great care to respect.

In fact, we have seen that if collective life awakens religious thought on reaching a certain degree of intensity, it is because it brings about a state of effervescence which changes the conditions of psychic activity. Vital energies are excited, passions more active, sensations stronger; there are even some which are produced only at this moment. (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1912, p. 422, trans. Joseph Ward Swain)

In lectures presented near the end of his life, Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973) gave many counterexamples drawn from ethnographic observations that contradict most of Durkheimian claims. But he also noted the methodological difficulty that I have just mentioned. Durkheim actually constructed his entire theory of religion and, more broadly, of the sacred, that is, *de facto* his entire theory of society, on an argument drawn directly from the crowd psychology.

It contravenes his own rules of sociological method, for fundamentally it offers a psychological explanation of social facts, and he himself has laid it down that such explanations are invariably wrong. It was all very well for him to pour contempt on others for deriving religion from motor hallucination, but I contend that this is precisely what he does himself. No amount of juggling with words like "intensity" and "effervescence" can hide the fact that he derives the totemic religion of the Blackfellows from the emotional excitement of individuals brought together in a small crowd, from what is a sort of crowd hysteria. (*Theories of Primitive Religions*, 1965, p. 67-68)

Rhythm as Form of Individuation Process (part 1)

Starting from the well-known descriptions of morphological rhythms those by Mauss on the Eskimo or those by the Anglo-Saxon anthropologists who studied the Aboriginal Australians Durkheim framed them into an interpretation marred by the vicious circles of collective psychology.

What is the evidence that the Blackfellows are in any particular emotional state during the performance of their ceremonies? And if they are, then it is evident that the emotion is produced, as Durkheim himself claimed, by the rites and the beliefs which occasion them, so the rites and beliefs which occasion them cannot convincingly be adduced as a product of the emotions. Therefore heightened emotion, whatever it may be, and if there is any particular emotional state associated with the ritual, could indeed be an important element in the rites, giving them a deeper significance for the individual, but it can hardly be an adequate causal explanation of them as a social phenomenon. The argument, like so many sociological arguments, is a circular one the chicken and the egg. The rites create the effervescence, which creates the beliefs, which cause the rites to be performed; or does the mere coming together generate them? Fundamentally Durkheim elicits a social fact from crowd psychology. (*Theories of Primitive Religions*, 1965, p. 68)

This little detour by the Durkheimian theory of the sacred explains, in my opinion, why the interest for rhythm, as a form of the movement of singular and collective individuation, was finally covered in Durkheim's thought by the conception, already expressed by Hubert, who defined the rhythm as simple organization of the duration. It combined a psychological description with a neo-Kantian goal. His primary concern was to determine the "basic forms of religion," that is, to provide a description of the historical as well as systemic origins of the sacred, which was for him the image and foundation of all society. Thus, in the conclusion of *The Elementary Forms...*, the rhythm retained a certain sociogenetic dimension that allowed for "collective renewal," but it supported above all the social construction of the category of time through which the group coordinated its actions and individuals organized their intimate "duration."

It is the rhythm of social life which is at the basis of the category of time. (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1912, p. 440, trans. Joseph Ward Swain)

The rhythm of collective life dominates and embraces the varied rhythms of all the elementary lives from which it results; consequently the time which it expresses dominates and embraces all particular durations. It is time in general. [...] This impersonal and total duration is measured, and the guide-lines in relation to which it is divided and organized are fixed by the movements of concentration or dispersion of society; or, more generally, the periodical necessities for a collective renewal. If these critical instants are generally attached to some material phenomenon, such as the regular recurrence of such or such a star or the alternation of the seasons, it is because objective signs are necessary to make this essentially social organization intelligible to all. (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1912, p. 442, trans. Joseph Ward Swain)

I have shown in a previous study (Michon, 2015b) how Mauss eventually broke with this sociological neo-Kantianism and tried to build, based on the notion of rhythm, a "physiology" of society, that, by accounting for society's permanent historical movement, would complete or even replace the quite unsatisfactory "anatomy" that was practiced until then. But, apart from Marcel Granet, of whom I will speak below, most Durkheimians have for their part been keen to continue what Durkheim's deeper research program was. Studies on rhythms have been integrated in the School's many studies aimed at showing that the categories of perception (space, time) or thought (whole, genus,

cause, substance, soul, person) are not innate but from social origin. The rhythm has been defined therefore as the more or less rapid movement of people and material objects within a group and in its relations with external groups viz. as a *tempo*. Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945) has shown that there is "as many collective times as separate groups" and that the depth of the "collective memory" varies according to these "rhythms" (1950, p. 148, my trans.). Georges Gurvitch (1894-1965), explicitly referring to Halbwachs, emphasized that some groups have a "slow pace [*cadences lentes*]," while others have a "medium or precipitous pace [*cadences moyennes ou précipitées*]" and that it explains the diversity of their "experience of time [*temps vécu*]" (1950, p. 317, my trans.). Leroi-Gourhan, who culminated this tradition, affirmed that "rhythms are creators of space and time, at least for the individual; space and time are experienced [*vécus*] only to the extent that they are materialized in a rhythmic envelope" (1965, p. 135, my trans.). In all these cases, the rhythm constituted the framework of the social activity and formed a set of markers making it possible to give consistency to the individual time that was otherwise entirely devoid of form. Rhythm was a means both of coordinating social interactions and organizing psychic duration.

For my part, I think that we should resume with the question of rhythm where Mauss left it, which seems much more adequate to the radically historical anthropology we badly need. By way of consequence, I will put aside the question of the multiple *ways of organizing the internal duration as well as the external interactions* in favor of the one, mostly forgotten today, of the *forms of the many processes by which the collective as well as the individual are produced and re-produced* the fundamental question of the "singular and collective individuation."

Rhythms of Archaic Societies: The Eskimo (Mauss - 1904-1905)

To enter the gigantic work of Marcel Mauss, we can start from the few lines that Evans-Pritchard devoted to him. According to the latter, Mauss, in his essay on the Eskimo, aimed at demonstrating, from a thoroughly studied example, the veracity of Durkheim's theses on the determining character of ritual rhythms for religion.

The general theme of this essay was a demonstration of Durkheim's thesis that religion is a product of social concentration kept alive by periodic gregariousness, so that time, like things, has sacred and secular dimensions. (*Theories of Primitive Religions*, 1965, p. 69)

But this criticism seems much less justified than that directed towards Durkheim. It is true that, in his lectures, Evans-Pritchard was interested only in the theories of religion. But this perspective led him to be quite unfair to Mauss, or at least to oversimplify his approach of the Eskimo and to neglect all subsequent studies that revealed, in retrospect, how far he already was from a simple application of Durkheim's theories on religion. In his study of the seasonal morphological variations of Eskimo societies, Mauss naturally appropriated a certain number of Durkheimian ideas, especially those concerning the close link between social morphology and the forms of law, enunciated in *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893). However, the whole study seemed to be going in a very different direction from that indicated by Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). Without being entirely erased, the questions of sacred, ritual calendar and category of time became secondary. The questions that came to the fore were those of singular and collective individuation. Whereas, guided, at first, by the postulate that religion was of social nature, Durkheim ended up by reversing his original perspective and making the ritual calendar the true cause of social alternation, Mauss postulated the primacy of the morphological alternation and made the cycle of religious life one of the expressions of this alternation among others like those of legal life or technological life. One may find this opposition a bit farfetched, and it depends, admittedly, only on a difference of emphasis in symmetrical interactions, but this difference exists and I allow myself to ask the skeptical reader to re-read the texts.

Rhythm as Form of Individuation Process (part 1)

For Durkheim, "the religious life of the Australian passes through successive phases of complete lull and of superexcitation, and social life oscillates in the same rhythm" (*The Elementary Forms...*, p. 219, trans. Joseph W. Swain), whereas, for Mauss, the argument was exactly the opposite: "The religion of the Eskimo has the same rhythm as their social organization" (*Seasonal Variations...*, p. 57, trans. James J. Fox).

I apologize for here again recapitulating the content of the essay on the Eskimo, but it is so often cited second-hand and abusively simplified, that this little effort of patience required from the reader should not be useless. He or she will better appreciate what distinguished or brought Mauss closer to Durkheim before him, or to Evans-Pritchard or Granet after him.

The Eskimo lived and still live in regions characterized by a clear climatic opposition between summer and winter. In summer, the sunlight lasts for a very long time, the temperature rises above zero, the seas are no longer covered with ice, sea animals (seals and walrus in particular) but also the terrestrial animals (wild reindeer, polar bears, musk oxen, etc.) are scattered throughout the territory. In winter, the sunlight is very short, the temperature drops below zero, the ice is re-forming, the animals become inaccessible except those that concentrate on certain spots of the coast.

Following these climatic and biotopic variations, the small Eskimo societies which, at the end of the 19th century, were installed along the coasts in series of independent and sometimes rival "settlements," regularly took entirely opposite social forms. In the summer months, they lived scattered in small family groups independent of each other. They lived in isolated tents and nomadized on huge stretches of coast in pursuit of game and fish. During the winter, all families gathered in one station. They lived in houses made of stone, skin or snow (*igloo*) which were close to one another and which always sheltered several related families that is, combined in a very large family extended to all collaterals. The number of these families could sometimes rise to ten. In some cases, all members of a settlement lived in a single long-house. In the center of the resort, there was also a common house, the *kashim*, which served as a meeting and ceremony venue for the entire community.

Mauss showed that this morphological opposition had an "impact" on the ritual life, the representations and the legal life (personal and real) he also mentioned consequences on technology, without however developing them (*Seasonal Variations...*, p. 57, n. 1). In summer, the religious life was minimal.

The religion of the Eskimo has the same rhythm as their social organization. There is, as it were, a summer religion and a winter religion; or rather, there is no religion during the summer. The only rites that are practiced are private, domestic rituals: everything is reduced to the rituals of birth and death and to the observation of certain prohibitions. All the myths that (as we shall see) fill the consciousness of the Eskimo during the winter appear to be forgotten during the summer. Life is that of the layman. Even magic, which is often a purely private matter, hardly appears except as a rather simple sort of medical science whose rituals are minimal. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 57, trans. James J. Fox)

The jural life was organized on an individualistic basis. Weapons, tools, clothing, amulets, kayaks were clearly identified as individual properties. In the same way, each woman owned the family lamp, the pots and all the household instruments.

All these household objects are identified, in a magico-religious way, with the person. Eskimo are reluctant to lend, give or exchange objects that have already been used. They are buried with the dead. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 71, trans. James J. Fox)

Rhythm as Form of Individuation Process (part 1)

The personal law was characterized by a patriarchal power, which gave the head of the family all authority, but women were so important in the domestic economy that they actually enjoyed a great deal of freedom. Heads of family had almost absolute independence. Except for the whale, they hunted alone or with their children.

Each daring fisherman or adventurous hunter brings his prize to his tent or stores it in his "cache" without having to consider anyone else. The individual is therefore as sharply distinguished as the small family. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 70, trans. James J. Fox)

In winter, everything changed. First, the religious life came back alive.

By contrast, the winter settlement lives in a state of continuous religious exaltation. This is the time when myths and legends are transmitted from generation to generation. The slightest event requires the more or less solemn intervention of magicians, *angedkok*. A minor taboo can be lifted only by public ceremonies and by visits to the entire community. At every possible opportunity these events are turned into impressive performances of public shamanism to avert the famine that threatens the group. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 58, trans. James J. Fox)

All these ceremonies and rituals most often took place in the *Kashim*, but they could also occur in the open air, like the "Bladder Festival" during which the bladders of all the marine animals killed "by the entire group" during the year were thrown into the sea, in the hope that the souls of the animals, which they were believed to contain, would go back to be reincarnated in female seals and walruses. Masked dances were performed before the entire community. In some cases, these ceremonies would give rise to some exchange of women. In Cumberland Sound, a mask representing a divinity coupled men and women regardless of their kinship but by their names, that is to say, as in the past the mythical ancestors after whom present individuals were named and whose persons they were living representatives. The festival of the dead was one of the most important, along with those which bound the group with the wild animals, because it ensured the continuity of the group in time and integrated its dead into it through a complex trade of gifts between the living and the dead.

Since it is customary that the latest child to be born takes the name of the last person who has died, the feast begins with a request to the souls of the dead to become reincarnated for a short time in the namesake which each of the dead has in the settlement. Next, these living namesakes of the dead are laden with presents, gifts are exchanged among all who have assembled, and then the souls are dismissed and they leave their human dwellings to return to the land of the dead. Thus, at this time, the group not only regains its unity but sees itself re-formed, through this same ritual, as an ideal group composed of all successive generations from the earliest times. Mythic and historic ancestors, as well as recent dead, come to mingle with the living and all are in communion through the exchange of gifts. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 59, trans. James J. Fox)

The jural life also changed and took a much more collective, almost communist aspect.

The nuclear family, so clearly individualized during the summer, tends to disappear to some extent within a much wider group [...] the group who together occupies the same igloo or long-house. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 64, trans. James J. Fox)

Rhythm as Form of Individuation Process (part 1)

Property no longer had the individualistic or domestic character particular to summer. Movable objects might be borrowed without any obligation of precise return.

To this narrow individual or family egoism is now opposed a broad collectivism. [...] The long-house is not the property of any of the families who live in it but of the housemates together. It is built and repaired at common expense. It even seems that there is a collective ownership of the land. As far as consumer goods are concerned, collectivism, instead of being restricted to the small family as in summer, extends to the whole house. The game is equally shared among all inhabitants. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 72, my trans.)

Finally, the power was no longer patriarchal and was incarnated in the person of a chief whose powers were very limited and who served only to facilitate the functioning of the group.

The head is designated not by birth but because of certain personal characteristics. He is generally an old man, a good hunter or the father of one; a rich man, often the owner of an *umiak*; an *angedkok* or magician. His powers are not extensive; his functions are to receive strangers and to distribute places and portions of meat. He is asked to regulate internal differences. But his rights over his companions are, in the end, quite limited. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 66, trans. James J. Fox)

When he existed, this chief was firmly controlled by the community and must redistribute his wealth.

A mystic efficacy is attributed to these exchanges and to this redistribution: they are necessary for success in hunting; for without generosity, there can be no luck. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 73, trans. James J. Fox)

Thus Mauss concluded.

This economic communism of winter is strikingly parallel to the sexual communism during the same season; it shows, once more, the degree of moral unity that the Eskimo community attains at this time. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 73, trans. James J. Fox)

This analysis shows how unfair Evans-Pritchard's criticism was. Mauss did not simply want to confirm the Durkheimian theory of religion by a complete case study. He certainly treated the question of ritual life with care but he did not limit his analysis to it. He was as much interested I believe, actually much more interested in Eskimo's beliefs or in their jural life, to which he dedicated three times more pages. In his essay on *Seasonal Variations...*, Mauss actually achieved the first total monographic and descriptive study of *the effects produced by morphological changes on singular and collective individuation*. The essay is for this reason seminal and must be taken as such for

our reflection on social rhythms.

Of course, Mauss' essay was still fragile in many respects. He seemed to be fascinated by the "communism" that reigned in the station. While expressing a slight distance, his text sometimes took on the appearance of a primitivist utopia.

Beginning with the earliest writers and continuing until Nansen, [who turned his observations into a dithyrambic eulogy], most observers have been struck by the gentleness, intimacy, and general gaiety that reigns in an Eskimo settlement. A kind of affectionate good feeling seems prevalent among everyone. Crimes appear to be relatively rare. Theft is almost nonexistent, though there are few occasions where theft could be committed, given the rules over property. Adultery is almost unknown. One of the characteristic features of a clan is the extreme indulgence shown toward offences or crimes committed by its members: sanctions are principally moral. This same indulgence is found in an Eskimo settlement. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 67, trans. James J. Fox, my mod.)

Moreover, Mauss also indulged, at least in certain parts of his monograph, to a somewhat summary psychology drawn from the crowd psychology. When they were assembled, the Eskimos seemed to him to entirely lose their individuality and to merge into an undifferentiated "*masse*."

This unity is indeed so strong that, inside the *kashim*, the individuality of families and of particular houses disappears; they call merge in the totality of society [*dans la masse totale de la société*]. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 58, trans. James J. Fox, my mod.)

Similarly, the exchange of women, which was culturally prescribed as a regeneration of the alliance with the mythical ancestors, seemed to result in a "fusion of individual personalities."

These different festivities are always and everywhere accompanied, quite significantly, by the phenomenon of sexual licence [...]. Communal sex is a form of communion, perhaps the most intimate there is. When it occurs, it produces a fusion of individual personalities something which we can see is far removed from the state of individualization and isolation in which small family groups live dispersed, during the summer, along enormous extent of coast. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 59-60, trans. James J. Fox, my mod.)

As for Le Bon and Durkheim, any social gathering led to a contagious "effervescence."

In winter, the society is highly concentrated and in a continuous state of effervescence and overactivity. Because individuals are closer to each others, social actions and reactions are more numerous, imitated, and continuous; ideas are exchanged, feelings reinforce and mutually enhance each other; the group, always acting, always present in the eyes of all, has more sense of itself and also holds a greater place in the consciousness of individuals. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 76, my trans.)

Rhythm as Form of Individuation Process (part 1)

Yet, his analysis suggested the presence of tensions in the group, that contradicted this unanimist vision. Interestingly, within the community, conflicts were regulated, according to Mauss, through ritualized poetic duels.

[The only punishment that is applied within the station, at least in Greenland, is of a genuine bonhomie: the famous "duel with songs," which is a drum dance in which alternatively,] two adversaries plaintiff and defendant take turn insulting each other using rhymed verse and refrain, until the fertile inventiveness of one of the opponents assures him a victory over the other. The esteem of the onlookers is the only reward, their reproach the only punishment to constitute this peculiar judgment. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 67, trans. James J. Fox, my mod.)

But he also reported that, in some cases, "chiefs have been assassinated because they were too rich" (p. 73), which suggested that violence was not entirely absent from the Eskimo settlements. Moreover, outside the group, the conflicts seemed pervasive and quite violent: "Place-fellows were obliged to avenge each other's death when the aggressor belonged to another locality." (p. 68) The vendettas between settlements were, thus, permanent and, as in the case of the Nuer eventually studied by Evans-Pritchard (see below), they probably constituted one of the paradoxical sources of their singular and collective individuation.

Tales are told of numerous vendettas in Greenland between one settlement and another. Sources indicate that throughout Baffin Land and to the north-west of Hudson Bay there used to be actual wars. In eastern Greenland, Holm and Hanserak report a similar hostility and constant enmity between settlements on different fiords. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 68, trans. James J. Fox)

However, Mauss saw sheer exaggeration in Boas's account of a cruel way to settle these conflicts.

It is claimed, undoubtedly with some exaggeration, that when a group visited a neighbouring settlement, the duel or violent game which took place between two chosen champions ended in the death of one of the combatants. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 68, trans. James J. Fox)

Thus, as soon as his essay on the Eskimos, the topic of internal and external conflictuality in the community appeared in Mauss' reflection. Admittedly, it was still embryonic but it was already present, which was sufficient to distinguish it from the denial of conflictuality by the contemporary economists who, almost unanimously, thought of society as a "living organism" which had its own internal law, naturally regulated itself, and was not to be disturbed by state interventionism.

Moreover, the topic of conflictuality was already linked to that of exchange. Gift, in particular, appeared as a mandatory provision that prevented the potential development of conflict.

It is a general rule that a family ought to possess only a certain amount of wealth. Throughout Greenland, when the resources of a house surpass what is considered to be the normal level, this wealth must be given to the poorer individuals. Rink reports that the members of a settlement jealously watch to see that no one possesses more than anyone else. When this occurs, the surplus, which is arbitrarily determined, is [lent - actually given] to those who have less. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 73, trans. James J. Fox, my mod.)

Rhythm as Form of Individuation Process (part 1)

As he later showed by thoroughly studying the *Potlatch* phenomenon, the gift was neither gratuitous nor affectionate. It had above all a religious significance and was addressed to the ancestors and to all those, children, current bearers of their names, which represented them.

This abhorrence of possessing too much is also widespread in the central regions. It is especially noticeable in the ritual exchange of presents during the festival of Sedna, when gifts are given to the namesakes of the ancestral dead, to children, and to visitors. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 73, trans. James J. Fox)

Finally, the gift appeared as a means of breaking down any emerging hierarchy and preserving a certain equality between group members.

The combination of this ritual with the Indian customs of the North-West leads, in the Alaskan tribes, to an institution, which is not identical, no doubt, but analogous to the *potlatch* of the Indian tribes. Most of the villages in this region possess some sort of chiefs, whose authority is not well defined, and in any case a number of rich and influential men. But the community remains jealous of their power; hence, a chief can remain a chief, or rather a rich man can remain rich and influential, only if he distributes his goods periodically. Only the benevolence of his group allows him to accumulate his wealth and, by dispersing this wealth, he triumphs over it. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 73, trans. James J. Fox)

Therefore, it is quite remarkable that Mauss, when thinking of these exchanges and conflicts and the social rhythms they were related to, no longer used the psychological vocabulary of "effervescence" but the strictly sociological terms of "intensity of social life/sociality [*intensité de la socialité*]."

There is, in short, between these two periods of the year, a tremendous difference due to the passage from an intense to a languishing and depressed sociality. [...] In the Eskimo, the social life follows therefore a kind of regular rhythm. It is not constant in the different seasons of the year. It has a moment of apogee and a moment of perigee. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 79, my trans.)

In 1905 Mauss partly remained under Durkheim's influence, but he began to distance himself from him at least on three accounts.

First, he recognized the need, in order to grasp the phenomenon of society, to make monographic studies that considered all aspects of a single society and not just the religious beliefs that were supposed to provide the group with the consciousness of its unity.

Second, he already perceived the presence at the very heart of society of a gift-conflictuality complex that ruined in advance any unanimist or, as we say today, consensus-based daydream.

Third, he began to discard crowd-psychology vocabulary and to outline instead the concept of a "variation of social

Rhythm as Form of Individuation Process (part 1)

life/sociality." Some milestones were thus laid that were soon to allow him to consider, through an intensive study of the *Potlatch* of the North-West Indians, the rhythms of singular and collective individuation on entirely different bases than those provided by the crowd psychology and to anticipate Evans-Pritchard's work in the 1930s.

In addition to that, Mauss clarified, by specifying a Durkheimian idea exposed in *Suicide* (1897), the theoretical status of social rhythms. He showed that the phenomenon of morphological but also technological, religious and legal alternation, was no mere adaptation to climatic and biotopic alternation induced by the poorness of available technology, but a *sui generis* phenomenon which received its ultimate explanation from the social level only. Social rhythms were not entirely determined nor explicable by geographical and technical conditions. As far as archaic societies were concerned, Mauss of course conceded that the environment and the level of technological development had an impact on morphological variations, but, in his eyes, they played only a secondary role.

On the one hand, at the outset of his essay, he warned against the falsity of absolute geographical determinism, because it was always mediated by the state of society.

[The geographical situation, far from being the essential factor which we have almost exclusively to consider, constitutes only one of the conditions for the material form of human groups.] In most cases it produces its effects only by means of numerous social conditions which it initially affects, and which alone account for the result. [...] So, when we study its effects, we must trace their repercussions on all the categories of collective life. All these questions are not, therefore, geographical questions but proper sociological ones; and in this study we will approach them in a sociological spirit. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 22, trans. James J. Fox, my mod.)

On the other hand, he emphasized that the technical relation to nature was not the only one nor the most important. The poverty of the Eskimo technology made them very dependent on the animals they hunted or fished, but this explanation was insufficient to account for what was happening, because in reality human beings insert themselves into nature through all aspects of their societies and not only through technology.

[It is because of this technology, which is a social phenomenon, that Eskimo social life becomes a veritable phenomenon of symbiosis that forces the group to live like the animals they hunt or fish]. These animals concentrate and disperse, according to the seasons. [...] In summary, summer opens up an almost unlimited area for hunting and fishing, while winter narrowly restricts this areas. This alternation provides the rhythm of concentration and dispersion for the morphological organization of Eskimo society. The population congregates or scatters like the game. The movement that animates Eskimo society is synchronized with that of the surrounding life. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 55-56, trans. James J. Fox, my mod.)

Rhythmic phenomena were therefore of a specific nature separated from the cosmos. They were historical phenomena which were brought about by a causality of their own, linked somehow to natural phenomena but not determined by them.

Nevertheless, although biological and technological factors may have an important influence, they are insufficient to account for the total phenomenon. They provide an understanding of how it happens that the Eskimo assemble in winter and disperse in summer. But they do not explain why this concentration attains that degree of intimacy which we have already noted [...]. They explain neither the reason for the *kashim* nor the close connection that, in some cases, seems to unite it to other houses. Eskimo dwellings could supposedly be grouped together without concentrating [so narrowly] and without giving birth to this intense collective life [...]. [Neither need they be long-houses.] But the state of Eskimo technology can only account for the time of the year when these movements of concentration and dispersion occur, their duration and succession, and their marked opposition to one another. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 56, trans. James J. Fox, my mod.)

Rhythm as Form of Individuation Process (part 1)

In fact, bio-climatic rhythms represented only "opportunities" that allowed social rhythms to spring up.

Instead of being the necessary and determining cause of an entire system, truly seasonal factors may merely mark the most opportune occasions in the year for these two phases to occur. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 79, trans. James J. Fox)

Thirty years later, Marcel Granet, commenting on the morphological variations in ancient China, perfectly summarized this point of view.

This rhythm [the seasonal morphological variation] is not *directly* modeled on seasonal rhythm. If it seems to depend on all natural conditions which control the activity of a society living especially on agriculture, it is because the season during which the Earth does not need human labor offers a time where men can most conveniently deal with interests that are not secular. Nature provides the signal and the opportunity. But the need to seize the opportunity and to perceive the signal has its source in social life itself. (M. Granet, *La Pensée chinoise - Chinese Thought*, 1934, p. 110, my trans.).

Finally, Mauss indicated, in support of his thesis, many other facts of morphological variations which were not linked to climatic variations or even to a deficient state of technology. He began with a large number of Amerindian populations in the American West. I quote at length because, besides giving us some information that will be needed below, these lines largely anticipate the subsequent work on the *Potlatch* that eventually led to the essay on *The gift* and the great theoretical texts of the 1930s.

Although this curious alternation appears most strikingly among the Eskimo, it is not limited to them. The fact that we just observed has a range that we do not suspect at first sight. First of all, there is in Indian America a large group of societies, each by itself quite large, which are living in the same way. These are, first of all, the tribes belonging to the so-called North-West civilization: Tlingit, Haida, Kwakiutl, Aht, Nootka, and even a fair number of Californian tribes, Hupa, Wintu, etc. In all these peoples there is an extreme concentration in winter and an extreme dispersion in summer, although there are no essentially different technological or biological conditions for this double organization; and this double morphology very often corresponds to two different social regimes. This is particularly true with the Kwakiutl; in winter the clan disappears and gives way to groups of a very different kind, secret societies or, more exactly, religious brotherhoods in which all the nobles and free people are hierarchized; the religious life flourishes in winter, the profane life in summer, as in the Eskimo. [...] Many Athapascan societies, ranging from those in the far north such as the Ingalik and Chilcotin, to the Navaho of the New Mexican plateau, also have the same character. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 78, my trans.)

But these examples, which are taken in more or less "archaic" populations, might still seem too close to the Eskimo, so Mauss added to them a series of other examples taken in more complex European and Asian societies.

These American Indian societies are not, however, the only ones that conform to this type. In temperate or extreme climates where the influence of the seasons is clearly evident, there occur innumerable phenomena similar to those we have studied. We can cite two particularly striking cases. First, there are the summer migrations of the pastoral mountain peoples of Europe which almost completely empty whole villages of their male population. Second, there is the seemingly reverse phenomenon that once regulated the life of the Buddhist monk in India and still regulates the lives of itinerant ascetics, now that Buddhist sangha no longer has followers in India: during the rainy season, the mendicant ceases his wandering and re-enters the monastery. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 78, trans. James J. Fox)

Finally, he cited examples taken from the society of his time.

What is more, we have only to observe what goes on around us in our Western societies to discover these same oscillations [*les mêmes oscillations*]. About the end of July, there occurs a summer dispersion. Urban life enters that period of sustained languor known as *vacances*, the vacation period, which continues to the end of autumn. [From this time on, it tends to increase steadily until it drops off again in July]. Rural life follows the opposite pattern. In winter, the countryside is plunged into a kind of torpor; the population at this time scatters to specific points of seasonal migration; each small, local, or territorial group, turns in upon itself; there are neither means nor opportunities for gathering together; this is the time of dispersion. By contrast, in summer, everything becomes reanimated; workers return to the fields; people live out of doors in constant contact with one another. This is the time of festivities, of major projects and great revelry. Statistics reflect these regular variations in social life. Suicides, an urban phenomenon, increase from the end of autumn until June, whereas homicides, a rural phenomenon, increase from the beginning of spring until the end of summer, when they become fewer. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 78-79, trans. James J. Fox, my mod.)

In this instance, Mauss was clearly indebted to Durkheim, who wrote in 1897 the following statement.

For the countryside, Winter is a time of rest approaching stagnation. All life seems to stop; human relations are fewer both because of atmospheric conditions and because they lose their incentive with the general slackening of activity. People seem really asleep. In Spring, however, everything begins to awake; activity is resumed, relations spring up, interchanges increase, whole popular migrations take place to meet the needs of agricultural labor. (É. Durkheim, *Suicide* (1897), p. 119, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson).

Many years later, Mauss emphasized again the discrete but general presence of social rhythms in modern societies.

I think I have given a good example of this principle of "double morphology" with the Eskimos. But it is almost the same everywhere. We live alternately in a collective life, and a family and individual life. (M. Mauss, "La cohésion sociale dans les sociétés polysegmentaires" (1931), *Ruvres*, t. III, 1969, p. 14, my trans.)

Societies no longer appeared in these lines as great pots where the social broth periodically returned to boiling, but as sets of "functions" varying according to different rhythms, in short as *systems of undulating functions*. Furthermore, Mauss did not have a schematic or mechanical vision of social rhythms. The latter were *not entirely regular or cyclical* and we see that they could sometimes overlap in the same society, as in the example cited above of rural and urban populations of his time.

In short, Mauss sketched a conception of society, which somehow resembled that of the economists, as a set of rhythms, defined as "oscillations," with different spatial extensions, complexity levels and frequencies. "Each social function probably has a rhythm of its own."

Among these people [the Eskimos], the phenomenon is so easily observed that it almost springs to view, [so to speak]; but very likely it can be found elsewhere. Furthermore, though this major seasonal rhythm is the most apparent, it may not be the only one; there are probably other lesser rhythms [*qui ont une moins grande amplitude*], within each season, each month, each week, each day. Each social function probably has a rhythm of its own. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 79, trans. James J. Fox, my mod.)

Rhythm as Form of Individuation Process (part 1)

But whereas economists were only interested in the succession of prosperity, crisis, depression phases, i.e. the variations of investment, activity, salary, profit and consumption, and compared the society to a living organism, sometimes even directly linked with the cosmos, Mauss on the one hand strongly objected to the reduction of the social to the living and the cosmos, and on the other hand, underlined both the ontogenetic and sociogenetic aspects of social rhythms. His reflection was not about capitalism but "individual life and collective life" and their historical-anthropological results.

However, the explanation he suggested not only failed to answer the questions of work, production and exchange that were addressed by the economists, but it was also ultimately based on an individualistic principle. Societies were indeed driven, each one in a particular way, by a rhythmic law "of considerable generality." But the main cause of this common rhythmicity was the need for human being, as living "bodies" but also as "minds," to periodically escape from social pressure. In other words, there was a kind of dialectic between the individuals and the social group they belonged to triggered by the resistance of the former against the latter.

All this suggests that we have come upon a law that is probably of considerable generality. Social life does not continue at the same level throughout the year; it goes through regular, successive phases of increased and decreased intensity, of activity and repose, of exertion and recuperation. We might almost say that social life does violence to [the bodies and minds] of individuals which they can sustain only for a time; and there comes a point when they must slow down and partially withdraw from it. We have seen examples of this rhythm of dispersion and concentration, of individual life and collective life. (*Seasonal Variations...*, 1905, p. 79, trans. James J. Fox, my mod.)

These questions were to be settled only two decades later in Mauss' most famous essay in which he was to propose a full perspective on economics, which was entirely opposed to the Classical Liberal paradigm and in which the generation and regeneration of singular and collective individuals were not subject to the production and circulation of goods but, reversely, commanded over them.

[Next chapter](#)