As a dedicated sociologist who wants to see her discipline become as good as possible, I welcome this. As Vidich and Lyman seem also to do. For, as noted at the beginning of this essay, they look to heterodoxies as sources for "intellectual visions" of sociodicies suitable for modern societies (307). Feminism is one such heterodoxy. As a feminist I am happy to be engaged in this enterprise.

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Phenomenological Sociology in France: A Review of Michel Maffesoli's La Conquete du Present

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Michel Maffesoli's work might be best called neo-Durkheimian, the "neo" connoting a rejection of Durkheim's positivist self-justifications, an acceptance of his focus on symbols and ritual, and an augmenting of this aspect of Durkheim with recent phenomenological, semiotic, and structuralist thought. At the time of World War I, Durkheimianism dominated French sociology. But the optimistic liberalism, naive corporatism, and mystical scientism of the early Durkheimians did not survive the slaughters of the Great War, the panic and depression, the fall of Blum, the capitulation to fascism. After World War II, Durkheimian sociology in France was replaced by Marxism, phenomenology, and existentialism—all imports from Germany.

Durkheimian thought remained powerful in France among historians and anthropologists (upon whom Maffesoli draws), but these scholars study societies far away in time and places, not contemporary France. At the same time, macro-social analysis of contemporary societies had been taken over by Marxist philosophers (Althusser, Poulantzas); social-psychological investigations were being done by existential phenomenologists (Sartre and Merleau-Ponty); and empirical statistical studies were the province of economists and urban planners.

Michel Maffesoli has taken the insights of both the historians of mentalités and the anthropologists of cognitive structures and applied them to modern societies. In this context Maffesoli represents a revival of Durkheimianism among sociologists of contemporary society, but now on a more reflective and inclusive level. Gone are the positivist pretensions of building a science of laws on an obdurate foundation of facts. Gone is the tendency to reify society and to devalue lifeworlds of members. Replacing these are new analytic tools from semiotics. The semiotic distinction between language and speech parallels Durkheim's distinction between society and individual, but it permits a structuralist analysis of language/society more refined than that of Durkheim. Such analyses are reflected, for example, in the historical writings of the Annales school or the anthropological work of Pierre Bourdieu. In addition, Maffesoli has used ideas and methods from existential phenomenology that help overcome limitations of both early Durkheimian sociology and Saussurian linguistic structuralism. For example, Maffesoli substitutes concepts of emergence and intersubjectivity for the earlier bifurcation between individual and societal levels of reality.

Along with Henri Lefebvre and Jean Baudrillard, who also draw on the same intellectual capital, Maffesoli represents a new and growing intellectual tendency in France. Marxism has declined and replacing it, on the one hand, is American-style statistical positivism and, on the other hand, this neo-Durkheimian sociology which uses everyday symbolic construction as its point of departure.

If this is where Maffesoli fits in the French context, what relation