

# Fellows

## **Eric Brandom**

IFK\_Junior Fellow

Duration of fellowship

01. October 2011 bis 30. June 2012

## **Eric Brandom**

### **PROJECT-TITLE**

The Revolution in the Republic: Georges Sorel and the Science, Sociology, and Political Philosophy of the early Third Republic

### **PROJECT-DESCRIPTION**

Georges Sorel (1847—1922), best known for his 1908 "Reflections on Violence", is a central figure in the political and social theory of the conflictual and productive French "fin-de-siècle". He has become an icon of political radicalism and anti-liberal intransigence as such, crossing between the left and right. If we wish to understand the threat to reasonable political process that Sorel has been taken to represent—according to Carl Schmitt as much as Isaiah Berlin—we must return to the intellectual field of late 19<sup>th</sup> century France and its distinctive formations. This project argues that the universally-recognized critical force of Sorel's writing comes from its remarkably close connection to the mainstream intellectual problems and debates of the early Third Republic, in particular its quasi-official philosophy, "solidarisme". Taking a contextual intellectual history approach, I show that the sources of Sorel's radicalism are to be found in Republican social science and philosophy of science of the 1870s—1900s. Sorel's writings take inspiration from explicitly Republican figures such as Alfred Fouillée, Émile Boutroux, and Émile Durkheim. Sorel's intransigence has its origin in an anarchist

suspicion of the State—but quite specifically the State constructed by these ideologues of the French Third Republic. Although the Revolutionary Syndicalism of the CGT remains central for Sorel, much of his political thought is in fact occasioned and shaped by the movement of the Third Republic—especially between the Dreyfus Affair and the 1905 law of separation—to foster civic religion through schools to the exclusion of the Catholic Church. On the basis of this archival reconstruction, my project also pursues the lessons of Sorel's work in the contemporary context, both of postmarxist theoretical writing, and the engagement of liberalism with religious culture.

## **CV**

Eric Brandom is a doctoral candidate in the History Department at Duke University, where he received an MA in 2008. His main field is French and modern European intellectual history, with interests in the history of literature and literary theory, philosophy of science, political theory, Caribbean history, and African-American intellectual history.

## **Publications**

Publications (among others): Perry Anderson, *The New Old World*, Polygraph 2011/2012 (forthcoming); Georges Sorel, Émile Durkheim, and the Social Foundations of la morale, *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*, 2011.