UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

'There's a Nation United': On the Interaction of Affect and Discourse in Shifting Significations of Ubuntu

Stuit, H.

Publication date
2014
Document Version
Final published version
Published in
Krisis

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Stuit, H. (2014). 'There's a Nation United': On the Interaction of Affect and Discourse in Shifting Significations of Ubuntu. *Krisis*, *2014*(2), 2-13. http://www.krisis.eu/content/2014-2/krisis-2014-2-01-Stuit.pdf

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, P.O. Box 19185, 1000 GD Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (https://dare.uva.nl)

Download date:08 Nov 2026

Krisis

Journal for contemporary philosophy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Krisis, 2014, Issue 2
www.krisis.eu

Articles

HANNEKE STUIT
'THERE'S A NATION UNITED'
ON THE INTERACTION OF AFFECT AND DISCOURSE IN SHIFTING SIGNIFICATIONS OF UBUNTU 2-13

OLIVIER SUREL
LET A HUNDRED NATURES BLOOM:
A POLEMICAL TROPE IN THE 'ONTOLOGICAL TURN' OF ANTHROPOLOGY 14-28

DARRYL CRESSMAN
ON FIFTY YEARS OF *ONE DIMENSIONAL MAN*
AND A CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF TECHNOLOGY 29-39

Interview

WILLEMINE WILLEMS
HOW TO DO THINGS WITH KNOWLEDGE
AN INTERVIEW WITH SHEILA JASANOFF 40-46

Reviews

ANNEMARIJE HAGEN
THE EMANCIPATORY POTENTIAL OF COSMOPOLITANISM:
ON SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH DISRUPTIVE PRACTICES GUIDED BY UNIVERSALISTIC ASPIRATIONS 47-52

Reviews

MARIJN HOIJTINK
RISK, COMMERCE, AUTHORITY:
TOWARD A CRITIQUE OF THE POLITICS OF POSSIBILITY 53-55

DANIËL DE ZEEUW
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE MASSES:
THE FUTURE OF A TRUE ILLUSION 56-61

EVELINE GROOT
KRITISCH MULTICULTURALISME EN DE MODERNISTISCHE ERFENIS 62-66

TIES VAN DE WERFF
VOORBIJ REDUCTIONISME EN DETERMINISME ALS KRITIEK OP DE NEUROWETENSCHAPPEN? 67-71

Krisis

Journal for contemporary philosophy

HANNEKE STUIT

'THERE'S A NATION UNITED'
ON THE INTERACTION OF AFFECT AND DISCOURSE IN SHIFTING SIGNIFICATIONS OF UBUNTU

Krisis 2014, Issue 2
www.krisis.eu

What is ubuntu and why talk about it now? Reasons are manifold. The Southern African concept of ubuntu is a powerful philosophy of community and belonging that has been crucial to the history of South Africa. With its focus on social harmony and unity, ubuntu can provide a useful tool for thinking through problems of social in/exclusion, antagonism and conflict, not just in South Africa, but in other heterogeneous societies as well. Ubuntu provides a number of productive overlaps and differences with Western ethically-oriented concepts like responsibility and hospitality and can thus enrich both traditions, opening an avenue to reduce the gap between Western and African philosophy. Like this crude division between the West and Africa, however, ubuntu itself is not an unproblematic term, especially with regard to community formations. As will also become clear from what is to follow, ubuntu can easily be used as a boundary marker for belonging. Despite its deeply humanistic content, it can come to function socially as a yardstick for determining who belongs to certain communities and who does not. These issues have been explored elsewhere in greater detail (2013), and in the present article I want to take a closer look at how recent developments and changes in the way the word ubuntu has been used influence its meaning, as well as the affective charge associated with this meaning. But before expounding on the relation between ubuntu, discourse and affect, it is necessary to explain in further detail what ubuntu is.

Ubuntu is generally conceived of as an interpersonal dynamic described by the Zulu and Xhosa proverb 'a person is a person because of and through other people' which emphasises qualities like generosity, hospitality, friendliness, compassion, a willingness to share and an interest in the common good (Driver 2005: 219; Tutu 1999: 34-5). In South Africa, ubuntu is widespread. Although it has been around for centuries, its most famous use is probably its role in the creation of national unity shortly after the end of Apartheid. In the meantime, however, its uses have spread. It is now used as a guideline for the creation of competitive advantage in businesses as well as human resource management. Ubuntu also appears as a way to promote products, as a commodity in itself, or a service in the form of, for example, the Ubuntu Security company in Pretoria, Ubuntu liquor stores, the fair-trade Ubuntu cola and, last but not least, catchy logos on t-shirts. Today, it is becoming increasingly well-known across the globe, both in a commercialised form, and in its capacity of philosophy and *Weltanschauung*. A compelling example of how ubuntu has crossed South African borders is the Ubuntu distribution of Linux, which is an open-source software system based on sharing and co-operation.

It is often described as an intuitive concept, the meaning of which is not readily available for conscious reasoning. It is said that it is difficult to understand until one sees how it works in practice. Generally, ubuntu reflects a way of life, 'a spiritual foundation, an inner state, an orientation, and a good disposition that motivates, challenges and makes one perceive, feel and act in a humane way towards others' (Saule qtd. in Mnyaka and Mothlabi 2005, 217). Definitions of ubuntu are multiple and vary depending on who works with the term (for an overview, see 2013), but it is safe

to say that it implies a striving for social harmony and a positive disposition towards others, as quoted directly above. As I will argue later in this article, it is exactly this positive feeling towards others that will prove crucial in the changes that ubuntu has undergone in the last twenty years. Although my case-studies are by no means exhaustive or representative of what seems to be a broader change within ubuntu, their comparison does reveal an important shift within the South African context. First, I will discuss the use of ubuntu in the Truth and Reconciliation process, where it was used to denote a positive adherence to the process of forgiveness and reconciliation in the aftermath of Apartheid in the 1990s. The second case-study revolves around a very specific use of the term in a commercial from 2009, where ubuntu is used to comic effect, yet also in the setting of a national endeavour. By looking at these two guises of ubuntu through the lens of affect theory and by making their affective connotations explicit, I hope to make visible how ubuntu has circulated in this particular cultural setting. Specifically, I want to show how some of its uses after the end of Apartheid slide problematically over the divisive and offensive social categories that make its meaning possible. I will argue that these categories in the use of ubuntu are maintained through an interaction between the term's discursive construction and what I will call ubuntu's affective connotations.

Affect and Signification

Looking at the transformations of ubuntu is not only important for gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning of ubuntu, but will also help to assess and think through what in recent theory seems to be a binary opposition between the realms of affective experience on the one hand, and that of signification and the workings of discourse on the other. This divide is made most explicit in the distinctions generally made between affect, emotions and feelings. According to authoritative texts by Gilles Deleuze and Silvan Tomkins, affect differs from both emotions and feelings because it is pre-cognitive. It is claimed that it 'precedes expression in words and operates independently' (Van Alphen 2008: 23). Brian Massumi, too, emphasises that it is important to separate affect from emotion, where the latter pertains to 'the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal' (1995: 88). Affect, on the other hand, does not belong to anybody and is not recognizable before it is signified and made personal. This moment in which affect enters the realm of signification and discourse is clarified by Massumi's description of affect's place of residence, the plane of the virtual:
'The virtual is a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect; where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt - albeit reduced and contained. For out of the pressing crowd an individual action or expression will emerge and be registered consciously. One "wills" it to emerge, to be qualified, to take on socio-linguistic meaning, to enter linear action-reaction circuits, to become a content of one's life - by dint of inhibition.' (Massumi 1995: 91, emphasis in original). According to Massumi, this 'crowd' of possible manifestations of affect is crucial in understanding 'our information-and image-based late-capitalist culture' (1995: 88), but the problem is that no cultural-theoretical vocabulary yet exists that allows us to assess how the signification of affect works. Until that time, thinkers run the risk of allowing 'received psychological categories to slip back' into the way we think of affect, undoing its inassimilable potentiality (1995: 88). Because of this same reason, affect is, according to Massumi 'resistant to critique' (Massumi: 1995: 88).

As Ruth Leys rightfully suggests in her stinging discussion of Massumi in her article 'The Turn to Affect: A Critique', deeming affect beyond critique is problematic. To place affect outside the socio-linguistic realm causes a disconnection between affect and ideology which potentially displaces the importance and necessity of signification and representation. As Leys puts it, the claim that individuals have 'subpersonal material-affective responses' (2011: 450) to which the mind is always half-a-second too late in responding, accords a secondary role to 'ideas and beliefs in politics, culture and art' (2011: 451). Later in her article, when critiquing Sedgwick's use of affect, Leys argues that too emphatic a turn to affect runs the risk of prioritising what we feel over 'what we believe or intend or mean' (465) when we interact with other people.

Although Leys certainly has a point in worrying about the consequences of an uncritical preference of affect for the importance and use of ideolo-

gy, the related issues of meaning, and especially intention, are not as self-evident as suggested in her article. In Literary and Cultural Studies, for instance, the shift away from approaches based on reader response criticism or authorial intent under the influence of deconstruction is a case in point. Intention is notoriously difficult, if not impossible to uncover; meaning depends on perspective and is different for every individual. I want to emphasise that my use of meaning and signification in this article should always be read as a reference to how meaning is constructed, or, in specific cases, as 'one of many possible meanings'.
Massumi, too, does not simply dismiss the issue of signification and intent, as Leys suggests he does. In his description of the plane of the virtual mentioned above, for instance, a notion of the 'will' curiously re-emerges in the landscape of affect - a landscape determined in the rest of 'The Autonomy of the Virtual' by anything but the wilful actions of an agential subject. No wonder, then, that the selection of one particular affect out of many which will render it intelligible in the socio-linguistic realm is referred to in both a passive construction ('an action will emerge') and in the most general terms possible when referring to a person: 'one "wills" it to emerge' (1995: 91). What seems to be at stake here for Massumi, then, is to avoid the reconstitution of the traditional subject in this selection process. But how can the relation between affect and signification be analysed without resorting to the idea that meaning and intention exist within a subject that 'wills' them into being? One possible answer is to interpret the socio-linguistic realm that Massumi refers to as 'discursive', rather than as controlled by specific subjects with specific intentions, as Leys seems to do. From this angle, Massumi's description of affect becoming emotion is rather similar to how Foucault has described the workings of discourse in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. As certain emotions can exist only through the exclusion of other affects, so discourse exists by the grace of the exclusion of possible alternatives to its own generated notions of what is true, sayable, and even reasonable (1972: 66-67).

In order to think through this relation between affect, signification and discourse, I will resort to the work of Sara Ahmed, who has attempted to theorize the social function of affect by placing it *in between* different subjects, signs, bodies, concepts and histories, rather than in the subject itself. In this interpretation, affect could thus be argued to form part of the discursive field amongst other elements. Indeed, according to Ahmed, affect sticks certain subjects or signs together by circulating 'between signifiers in relationships of difference and displacement' (2004a: 119). A helpful analogy at this point is the one Ahmed draws with commodity fetishism. From this perspective, affect is no longer the drive to accumulate value, power or meaning, but is itself actually accumulated over time: 'Some signs ... increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between signs: the more they circulate, the more affective they become, and the more they appear to 'contain' affect.' (2004a: 120). As a result, '"feelings" become "fetishes", qualities that seem to reside in objects, only through an erasure of the history of their production and circulation' (2004b: 11). Ahmed calls this double effect the metonymic slide of affect as it functions to create relations of resemblance between figures, where there may have been none before. The slide creates the characteristics considered to belong inherently to any particular body, subject, object, sign or group and functions to cluster certain groups of subjects in opposition to others. At the same time, however, the sideways movement obscures the historical relations needed to understand the new connections, thus blocking an awareness of the fact that these relations are historically contingent, rather than causal.

With regard to Massumi's statement that affective experience itself may as of yet escape signification, Ahmed's perspective provides the possibility to think of affect and signification as processes that take place simultaneously and in the same dynamic. Although affect in itself apparently does not 'contain' meaning and is often interpreted as an amplification of other drives (Van Alphen 2008, Tomkins 1995), it is still situated and transmitted (Brennan 2004) between objects, ideas, signs and persons that are located within a signified and discursive field. These things and people make an impression on us accordingly. Although it may not be necessary to collapse the categories of affect and emotion for every situation, as Ahmed seems to do,[1] I do think it furthers an understanding of the changes ubuntu is currently undergoing to think of affect and signification as at least mutually constitutive, rather than as autonomous and separate realms of existence. By tracing a number of different usages of the concept of ubuntu from the nationalistic context of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to its commercial use twenty years later, I

want to show how shifts in the signifier 'ubuntu' cause changes in the affective charge of it, and how shifts in the affects associated with ubuntu seem to influence the meaning of this word in a particular cultural and discursive field. With this, I do not intend an exhaustive Foucauldian genealogical project, in which I will uncover why and how certain interpretations of ubuntu got selected over others. Instead, I aim to show how the meaning of ubuntu transforms in particular settings and want to suggest that signification and affect are mutually constructive rather than mutually exclusive. Following Ahmed, I propose to think this relation in a way that takes the conditions of production and circulation that make meaning and affect possible into account.

Ubuntu and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

A suitable point of departure is one of ubuntu's most authoritative descriptions, namely that by Desmond Tutu, who chaired the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The TRC was installed at the end of apartheid in order to address the country's divisive past and to prevent the violence and antagonism that dominated South African society at that moment from spiralling further out of control (Wilson 2001; Thompson 2000). In *No Future Without Forgiveness*, written by Tutu afterwards, the concept of ubuntu is presented as the most important reason why South Africa chose to address the past with a Truth Commission, rather than through legal procedures. In Tutu's book, we find a description of ubuntu that has become seminal: 'Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say (…) "Hey, he or she has ubuntu." This means they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate. (…) It also means my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in theirs. We belong in a bundle of life. We say, "a person is a person because of other people." It is not "I think therefore I am." It says rather: "I am human because I belong." I participate, I share."' (1999: 34-35). As becomes clear from the above Tutu pits ubuntu against a Cartesian logic in order to foreground ubuntu's connotations of community, sharing, and belonging. He also emphasises the importance of these notions for becoming 'truly' human by embedding oneself in one's surroundings in a fashion that strives for social harmony. At the same time, however, this definition also immediately foregrounds an ambiguity in ubuntu with regard to social in/exclusion, in the sense that not belonging anywhere, or not wanting to belong, participate or share, can easily be considered deviant to the qualifications of the norm. What is considered to be communal and what is not, when one 'belongs' and when one does not, and, consequently, who sets the standard for when one's humanity is optimised, are central questions in ubuntu theory. These tensions reveal the constant need of negotiating ubuntu's benevolent, yet potentially asphyxiating drive towards harmony, and its function as a yardstick for communal, or in the case of the TRC, national belonging. Indeed, critics have objected to the explicit use of ubuntu in the TRC process because it reflects an exclusively Africanist focus on national reconciliation (see Wilson 2001).

This sense of national unity was partly the result of how people showing ubuntu in their dealings with others were discursively represented during the process. In one of the moments often quoted by scholars as a pivotal example of ubuntu, this discursive aspect of the meaning of ubuntu becomes particularly visible, because it was explicitly championed in the TRC report as an example of reconciliation and kindness (TRC Report vol. 5 1998: 366). The moment in question concerns a statement made by Cynthia Ngewu, who lost her son in what came to be known as the Guguletu Seven shooting in March 1986. In the shooting, which was the result of an ambush by the security police in Guguletu township near Cape Town, seven young men, allegedly members of the armed wing of the ANC, were killed. One of these men was Mrs. Ngewu's son, Christopher Piet. Here is what Mrs. Ngewu said after having met her son's killer, who requested a meeting with the family of his victims so that he could ask them for forgiveness:

'This thing called reconciliation... if I am understanding it correctly... if it means this perpetrator, this man who has killed Christopher Piet, if it means he becomes human again, this man, so that I, so that all of us, get our humanity back... then I agree, then I support it all.' (Krog 2008: 356; Praeg 2008: 374-5, pauses in original).

Mrs. Ngewu's statement quite neatly evokes the logic of ubuntu as described by Tutu. She is showing an acute awareness of the fact that her own humanity, as well as its restoration, is deeply caught up with the actions of the policeman who killed her son. As a result, she reformulates their relation in a constructive way that seeks a harmonisation.

In her article on the role of forgiveness in the process of reconciliation, South African poet and critic Antjie Krog claims, like Tutu, that 'it is precisely this understanding and knowledge of inter-connectedness-towards-wholeness that underpinned most of the testimonies delivered before the TRC' (2008: 357).[2] Philosopher Leonhard Praeg argues, instead, that it is through 'equivocations' like Cynthia Ngewu's that 'reconciliation and forgiveness came to stand for an African appreciation of "our shared humanity" and to metonymically represent the meaning of ubuntu' (2008: 375). Praeg's use of metonymy is crucial here, because it designates the creation of an association between two things on the basis of contiguity, as was the case in Ahmed's use of it. The metonymic slide noted by Praeg from 'an African understanding of "our shared humanity"' to ubuntu causes an association between certain terms, ideas, signs or people that are presented in proximity to each other, and come to be seen, because of this proximity, as causally related. Read like this, and contrary to Krog's claim, ubuntu only partly underpins Mrs. Ngewu's statement; rather, the statement was constitutive of what ubuntu came to metonymically signify in the context of the TRC process, namely an affectively-charged process of reconciliation and forgiveness.

This process of reconciliation and forgiveness served a number of purposes in the discourse surrounding the TRC. First, as Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, who was a psychologist working with victims and perpetrators in the TRC process, has explained: 'Reciprocating with empathy and forgiveness in the face of a perpetrator's remorse restores to many victims the sense that they are once again capable of effecting a profound difference in the moral community... Far from being an unnerving proposition and a burdensome moral sacrifice, then, compassion for many is deeply therapeutic and restorative.' (Gobodo-Madikizela 128-9). This psychological dynamic of forgiveness formed a crucial aspect in the discourse on national unity and reconciliation embodied by the TRC. As Gobodo-Madikizela suggests, personal forgiveness is helpful for the individuals involved, partly because victims feel they contribute to a larger project of moral regeneration. It is exactly this linking of deeply affective individual and communal experiences of forgiveness to the nationalistic and moral context of the TRC discourse which has become metonymically associated with ubuntu, not least by the centrality granted to the concept by Desmond Tutu at this point in South African history.

The turn of phrase used by Mrs. Ngewu, however, is also crucial in this metonymic shift, which is represented by the repetition of the word 'if' in her definition of reconciliation. 'If' can suggest uncertainty, of course, but can also signal conditionality. Mrs. Ngewu supports reconciliation if, and only if, it means that humanity will be restored to herself, to the perpetrator, as well as to 'all of us'. The fact that she is cautious about her phrasing ('if I am understanding it correctly') underlines her awareness of the discursive responsibility she is taking towards her son, herself, her son's murderer, as well as to a broader community. In doing so, Mrs. Ngewu expresses the insight that her personal interests are deeply entwined with those of others, and do not exist in a vacuum. In order to get this message across, however, the uncertain connotations of the word 'if' - concerning the suitability of the TRC discourse to represent her individual case, for instance - are pushed to the background. The metonymic shift towards ubuntu makes certain aspects of her statement visible, but at the same time excludes others. As Praeg persuasively argues, the very workings of ubuntu as displayed by Mrs. Ngewu are a signal of 'the irretrievable loss of what we had to forget or allow to slip away unarticulated in order for there to be a shared discourse on reconciliation, forgiveness and, the sign that unifies it all, "ubuntu"' (Praeg 2008: 375). Like in Ahmed's description of the 'metonymic slide' of affect, then, the shift to ubuntu creates a new meaning for ubuntu on the axis of nationalism, and simultaneously makes statements about Mrs. Ngewu's grief and mourning that counter the TRC discourse invisible.

The fact that Mrs. Ngewu's statement was quoted in the TRC's final report as exemplary behaviour, further underlines ubuntu's association not only with sharing and hospitality in general but also with a specific moral responsibility to work through one's personal feelings in the context of

the TRC in the interest of national unity. This suggests that, in the TRC process, ubuntu came to be determined by the following sequence of associations: to be ubuntu is to realize that one's humanity is enfolded with the humanity of others; is to forgive; is to participate in reconciliation; is to be morally responsible; is to adhere to nation-building; is to be good. In this way, the relational meaning of ubuntu comes to be associated, by proxy and, as Praeg suggests, by discursive performativity, with the category of 'the good, of doing the right thing'. I argue that it is the positive sensation of being morally responsible, of aligning one's interests with the common good that forms the affective charge of the signifier 'ubuntu' in the TRC discourse.

Shifting Signifiers: National Unity Revisited

The second use of ubuntu that I would like to discuss, dates from more than twenty years later. It shows an organization of affect and signification that differs from the way ubuntu came to the fore in the TRC context, although the new organization also implicitly refers to this previous use. This particular object mocks the moral significance of ubuntu in order to shift the sentiment previously associated with ubuntu to a new signifier. I will argue that this sideways movement partly obliterates and distorts the earlier meanings of ubuntu as well as the conditions under which the new meaning is created.

The object in question is a commercial aired in South Africa in 2009, when South Africa organised the Confederations Cup in order to prepare for the enormous task of hosting the soccer World Cup in 2010. During this time, British Petroleum (BP) aired a series of three commercials that won the Loerie Award (the South African award for best brand communication) the year it was released. Each commercial depicts a soccer matchbetween two stereotypical groups from South African society that are, because of the nature of the game, automatically in opposition. All three matches end in a tie, however, which allows for the same happy ending in each separate commercial, represented by a group photo full of smiling people. One match pitches divas against taxi drivers, in another car guards take on a group of boytjies, and in the last one the mamas take on the café owners. I will focus on the commercial that pits the mamas against the café owners.

At first sight, the commercial seems to be rather harmless, resembling a remake of Monty Python's soccer game between German and Greek philosophers more than anything else. However, the mamas' main plan of attack, explicitly called 'the ubuntu strategy' by the commentator, trig gers an interpretation of ubuntu that leans on issues of race, class and gender in a problematic fashion. The 'ubuntu strategy' consists of a circle formed by the mamas that tries to manoeuvre the ball towards the opponents' goal (fig. 1). As such, it associates ubuntu with a common effort that, symbolically, keeps the opponents on the outside of the circle and the ball on the inside, preventing the other team from coming anywhere near it - a form of exclusion that echoes ubuntu's potential for exclusion signalled in Tutu's description of the term. Initially, the strategy fails because the circle of mamas pushes over some of the café owners. Despite, or perhaps because of substantial protest from the mamas, this results in a booking for one of the mamas by the referee (fig. 2). The second time the strategy is deployed, however, it succeeds and we can clearly see how one of the mamas, by way of the famous cultural practice of carrying things on your head, breaks out of the circle that has allowed her to approach the opponent's goal to score the game-tying goal (fig. 3).

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

When the commercial's tagline 'Beyond 2010, there's a nation united' appears on screen, it turns out, however, that the stereotypes and 'the ubuntu strategy' are used not just for comic effect, but also to communicate a message of national unity that is familiar from the TRC context (fig. 4). In short, no matter who you are or what group of people you belong to, the common effort of hosting a successful World Cup crosses all boundaries. This spirit of camaraderie is further projected into the future by the word 'beyond', thus presenting the World Cup as a catalyst for national cohesion that does not yet exist, but is intended to last long after the catalysing spark has expired. This 'feel-good' sentiment is subsequently extended to the two brands depicted in the final frame: FIFA and BP (fig. 5). The two final frames of the commercial thus reveal an overt linking of the fate of South Africa as a nation to the implicit interests of two multinationnal enterprises. In other words, South African national unity is made to serve the commercial interest of sponsorship.

This link between sponsorship and nationalism is, of course, not new, especially not in the context of sports. As Alan Bairner notes in his study of the relation between sport, nationalism and globalization, 'there is little point in seeking to deny the extent to which global capitalism has affected the ways in which sport is played, administered, packaged, and watched throughout the world' (2001: 176). Indeed, 'the flagships of the global sporting economy,' like the Olympic Games and the soccer World Cup, entail a mutually constitutive relation between nationalism and globalization, in which the localized events of different nations battling each other would not be possible without global sponsorship and vice versa (2001: 176). However, no matter how heavily sponsored an event is or how dominant the 'emergence and consolidation of a global sporting political economy involving the sale of merchandise, sponsorship, labor migration, and so on', fans rarely 'wave the colors of sport's major sponsors, except when their names appear on the shirt of a club or a national team' (Bairner 2001: 176, 2). Silk, Andrews and Cole, in Sport and Corporate Nationalisms, even argue that 'the nation and national culture have become principal (albeit perhaps unwilling) accomplices' within the process of global capitalism's attempts to 'capitalize upon the nation as a source of collective identification and differentiation' (2005: 7). From this perspective, the most effective way to sell one's brand would be to put it on merchandise that displays national or club colours.

BP's plan of action, however, is different. By attaching its name to a message of soccer-oriented national unity, BP manages to tap into not one, but several positive associations related to the anticipation of hosting the World Cup. These associations have to do not only with the South African national team being able to participate in the World Cup in the first place, but also with the circumstances: the World Cup was expected to create job opportunities, to bring money into the country through tourism, and, most importantly, to provide South Africa with a second chance to achieve its long-awaited national unity through the common effort of making the World Cup a success.

During and after the World Cup, it would turn out, however, that these expectations were not to be fulfilled. For instance, the contracts with the labourers needed to build stadiums all over the country were not prolonged after the buildings were finished and South Africa is losing money on these stadiums every single day because they lack alternative lucrative purposes ('Trademark 2010'). Furthermore, the message of national unity and progress is a particularly bitter pill to swallow for the people carelessly grouped under the stereotypes reiterated in the commercial by BP. In fact, small entrepreneurs and members of South Africa's 'informal economy' represented here by the café owners, but more specifically by the mamas who are depicted with a popcorn stand, were denied sales contracts. So-called 'unofficial' retailers were not even allowed to come anywhere near the World Cup sites and were removed if they did not or could not adhere to FIFA sales regulations ('Trademark 2010'). Yet, they are the stars of the match in the commercial.

This economic reality, which intersects with a racial divide, underlines the irony of the BP-sponsored call to rally behind a common cause. The fact that the 'ubuntu strategy' is brought to bear on a team of café owners who are referred to by Greek family names further complicates this economic divide, because it makes use of the stereotypical idea that South African café-owners are usually of Greek origin and are considered to be notoriously racist. The depicted ubuntu strategy, then, is specifically aimed at excluding a group of people who are generally not considered to be 'real' South Africans and subtly reiterates the exclusionary and xenophobic claim that foreigners are stealing business opportunities from 'real' South Africans. This constitutes a repeat of the problematic potential in ubuntu of delineating who should be included and excluded in an already determined community - a delineation that is echoed in the circle formed by the mamas, which keeps the ball in and the opponents out. By staging this situation as a joke, however, the social inequities that lie at the basis of the national and commercial construct of nation-building are obscured.

In the commercial, ubuntu is thus no longer staged as a promotable ethical stance towards one's fellow human beings, but as a conscious strategy to achieve a certain goal in an antagonistic field. Would it, for instance, not have been more reflective of ubuntu's qualities of reconciliation to have the two opposing teams come together as one, rather than to stage ubuntu as something that takes place within and benefits only a certain group? By restricting the use of the ubuntu strategy to the mamas, the commercial stages it as something only African women do, which both racialises and genders the concept and damages its critical potential. This use is also familiar from the TRC context described in the previous section, where, although efforts were made to broaden the scope of ubuntu, the people promoted actively by the Commission's final report as most exemplary were often black African women (see Stuit 2013 and Driver 2005).

So even though national cohesion is still promoted in this commercial, it seems to have shifted signifiers. Whereas it was formerly attached to the signifier ubuntu in the politically-charged period of reconciliation shortly after the end of apartheid, the ridicule and the subsequent change of meaning of ubuntu in the commercial shifts attention from the first nation-building project to the second. The joke about ubuntu empties the signifier of its hefty moral load, which, under the guise of laughter, re-enters via the backdoor in the final shots of the commercial. There, it is attached to the new signifier: the commercially-driven organisation of the World Cup.

This humorous presentation of ubuntu is communicated through a tongue-in-cheek reinforcement of stereotypes (in terms of class, gender and race) imposed on certain people in South African society. As Mireille Rosello has pointed out in *Declining the Stereotype*, the problem with stereotypes is that they are extremely difficult to eradicate. They can travel around between different social contexts, disciplines, and texts without deteriorating much (Rosello 1998: 35). Although the reason for this resilience is perhaps - like the effect signification has on individual affective experience - impossible to uncover completely, Rosello suggests that it has something to do with the stereotypes' ability to bind people together: 'The paradoxical violence of stereotypes uttered in public is that they are often presented as a chance to make us prove our loyalty to the speaker but also as an opportunity to be accepted as part of a group. Here is an open invitation to belong, to be welcomed by a supposedly unanimous community.' (1998: 11). The use of ubuntu in the commercial, therefore, besides posit-

ing ubuntu as an attribute of the gendered and racialised stereotype of the 'mama' who is allotted a certain social class, also (re)creates another stereotype that is familiar from the TRC context, namely that of the responsible, caring and positive South African citizen. Following Rosello's description of the stereotype, it then becomes possible to argue that the joke about what is in fact an offensive stereotype of black women, Greek café owners, and the moral significance of ubuntu, potentially interpellates viewers who find this funny as caring and happy citizens, who are encouraged to bond over a carefree experience of the World Cup. In the creation of this imagined national community, viewers are, to speak with Ahmed, simultaneously encouraged to gloss over the conditions under which the grouping is effected: the racial, gender and economic inequalities that make the tournament possible are displaced.

Indeed, the readings of ubuntu in the TRC context and the BP commercial offered here, and which were based on Ahmed's idea of affect working metonymically and economically rather than residing in a single subject, both suggest that the circulation of affect can form a strategic tool for glueing people together in clusters that serve very specific goals. By recognizing the mechanics of these seemingly natural relations as the constructed effects of particular discursive representations and affective connotations, it becomes possible to put a spoke in the wheel of their potentially divisive effects. By this I do not mean to suggest that affects are necessarily ideologically undesirable, but to emphasise how important it is to realize how people, objects, theories and texts are stuck together in certain formations to achieve certain ends. While looking for ways to deal with the strategies of power that are prevalent in everyday life, it is also useful to keep in mind that the 'stickiness' of affect, as formulated by Ahmed, is not limited to 'big' affectations, like love, hate and fear. As the shift in ubuntu makes clear, what appears at first sight as a harmless and merely funny series of commercials, in fact reveals a great deal about how relations between, for instance, stereotypes, commerce and nationhood can be organized to exclude certain groups socially. The analysis of 'small' affectations like the use of humour in the BP commercial, helps to see which connections - whether between people, groups, objects, signs or texts - are sacrificed in favour of new ones. By paying attention to the movements of ubuntu, it becomes clear that certain meanings come into existence by displacing others and that the interaction between affect and signification in this process cannot be disregarded if the goal is to keep the conditions under which any type of meaning is created, reiterated and transported, visible.

Conclusion

As became clear from the above, the BP commercial performs a metonymic shift in the meaning and function of ubuntu. In this shift, the associative and affectively-charged sequence starts out with the moral and nationalistic significance of ubuntu in the TRC period - a significance which was itself a result of people working through their traumas on an individual and a communal level. Due to the fact that the TRC report picked up on the part of Mrs. Ngewu's response that proved commensurable with its own discourse on reconciliation and forgiveness, possible alternative responses to her plight have been obscured and never made it into the TRC's rendition of events, nor into what ubuntu came to mean in this period in South African history. This naturally presented link from individual to communal affect in the TRC discourse, can be, and has been, regarded as problematic. However, regardless of how one may value this particular interrelation of discourse and affect in the TRC process, it is also clear that ubuntu has played an important role in facilitating dialogue about South Africa's apartheid past.

Twenty years later, ubuntu is staged as slightly ridiculous and of little relevance to people in South Africa; in the BP commercial, it is restricted to a stereotyped trait of a particular group of (South) African women. The new meaning of ubuntu relies on this act of dismissal: by pushing aside ubuntu's prior meanings, attention is diverted from the term's potential relevance and room is created for introducing a new signifier for the mechanism of national unity. The commercial's staging of people uniting in soccer despite their differences flows into the suggestion that the World Cup is an effective way of striving for national unity that is economically organised. South Africans are not just united over their excitement about the tournament, they are also united in their efforts to make money out

of it. As became clear from the analysis given above, however, these economic conditions are radically different across various social strata, and the disjunctive sequence is set up, amplified, and made coherent by the positive sensation of having enjoyed the commercial. The result is that a seemingly natural relation between the different aspects is made possible and the processes of stereotyping, sponsorship, commercialism and economic differences that underpin it are subsequently obscured.

By making this shift in the uses of ubuntu visible, I have tried to argue for an analysis of ubuntu that does not take its 'intuitive nature' for granted. Instead, I have tried to look at how the meaning of ubuntu heavily relies on affective connotations. At the same time, these connotations are also made possible by the discursively-produced meaning of ubuntu in the settings discussed here. My goal in doing so has been twofold. On the one hand, it is important to acknowledge that the meaning of ubuntu will change according to the different contexts the word encounters. Looking closely at these different uses and how they depend on an interaction of the affective and the discursive, will, I hope, keep ubuntu available as a productive tool for thinking through intersubjective and communal relations without having to rely on an uncritical rendition of ubuntu as morally good or universally desirable. Instead, paying attention to how ubuntu circulates in particular cultural settings helps to keep its mechanics of production visible and available for constructive critique.

On the other hand, I have also wanted to suggest that ubuntu offers a crucial possibility to think through the relation between signification and affect in more general terms. As the particular analyses in this article suggest, to think of ubuntu with the radical split between affect and discourse in place only reveals a part of how the concept has functioned in the uses described here. To analyse ubuntu in the setting of the TRC, for instance, as a political discourse that was implemented from a governmental level without paying due to the affective connotations the term came to carry in this process of forgiveness and reconciliation, means to ignore its crucial function as a lubricant in bringing together radically disparate social groups. Although it is probably true that ubuntu would not have been able to function accordingly if the concept had not been 'pushed' politically, paying attention to ubuntu's affective connotations also makes clear that the term's relative success could not have taken place if individuals like Cynthia Ngewu had not felt affected by the social momentum ubuntu came to represent.

Thus, what ubuntu eventually came to signify in the transition period in South Africa can only be made visible by acknowledging that affect and processes of signification take place in a mutually-constitutive dynamic. This, in turn, suggests that Massumi's idea of the plane of the virtual as a realm of experience that is autonomous from signification does not hold in the case of ubuntu. It suggests, at the very least, that the moment of transition from affect to meaning is not a one-way street. By referring to Ahmed's notion of affect as an accumulation taking place in-between different concepts, meanings, bodies and subjects, I have furthermore tried to suggest that it is exactly the critique of how affect comes to signification in particular uses of ubuntu - a critique foreclosed by Massumi's approach - that allows for a glimpse of the relations, histories and material conditions swept under the rug by the shifts in meaning performed in the interaction between affect and discourse.

Hanneke Stuit is assistant-professor at the Literary Studies department and affiliated with the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, both at the University of Amsterdam. Her research interests revolve around issues of cultural representation (both visual and textual), discourse, ethics, and community formation. Her dissertation (defended February 1, 2013) deals with the Southern African concept of ubuntu and the ways in which it relates to other (predominantly Western) concepts of communality and intersubjective relations. In this context, she analyses the interaction between ubuntu as a concept and cultural expressions, like novels, poetry and photography. She has also written on the representation of ubuntu in the process of truth and reconciliation initiated after the end of apartheid.

References

'2010 FIFA World Cup FNB TV Commercial.' Online video. 8 Feb. 2007. YouTube. 4 July 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjPazSFQrwA.

Ahmed, S. (2004a) 'Affective Economies.' In: *Social Text* 79, 22.1: 117-139.

Ahmed, S. (2004b) *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP.

Alphen, Van E. (2008) 'Affective operations in art and literature.' In: *Res* 53/54: 20-30.

Bairner, A. (2001) *Sport, Nationalism and Globalization: European and North American Perspectives*. Albany: SUNY Press.
Brennan, T. (2004) *The Transmission of Affect*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP.

Driver, D. (2005) 'Truth, Reconciliation, Gender: The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Black Women's Intellectual History.' In: *Australian Feminist Studies* 20.47: 219-229.
Gobodo-Madikizela, P. (2004) *A Human Being Died That Night*. Claremont: David Philip.

Hobsbawm, E. and T. Ranger. (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Krog, A. (2008) 'This Thing Called Reconciliation... Forgiveness as Part of an Interconnectedness-towards-wholeness.' In: *South African Journal of Philosophy* 27.4: 353-366.

Massumi, B. (1995) 'The Autonomy of Affect.' In: *Cultural Critique* 31: 83-109.

Mnyaka, Mluleki, and Mokgethi Mothlabi. (2005) 'The African Concept of Ubuntu/Botho and its Socio-Moral Significance.' In: *Black Theology: An International Journal* 3.2: 215-237.

Praeg, L. (2008) 'An Answer to the Question: What is [ubuntu]?' In: *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 27.4: 367-385.

Rosello, M. (1998) *Declining the Stereotype. Ethnicity and Representation in French Cultures*. Hannover/London: Dartmouth/UP of New England.

Silk, M.L., D.L. Andrews and C.L. Cole. (2005) 'Corporate Nationalism(s)? The Spatial Dimension of Sporting Capital.' In: M.L. Silk, D.L. Andrews and C.L. Cole (eds). *Sport and Corporate Nationalisms*. Oxford / New York: 1-12.

Stuit, H. (2013) *Ubuntu Strategies in Contemporary South African Culture*. Dissertation. University of Amsterdam.

Thompson, L. (2001) *A History of South Africa*. Yale: Yale University Press.

Tomkins, S. (1995) 'What are Affects?' In: E.K. Sedgwick and A. Frank (eds.). *Shame and its Sisters: A Sylvan Tomkins Reader*. Durham: Duke UP: 33-74.

'Trademark 2010. Westerse idealen in Zuid-Afrika.' *Tegenlicht*. 16 Nov. 2009. Web. 9 Jan. 2012. http://tegenlicht.vpro.nl/afleveringen/2009-2010/heilige-huisjes/trade-mark-2010.html

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report. Vol 5. 1998. Web 5 July 2012. http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/index.htm.

Tutu, Desmond. (1999). *No Future Without Forgiveness*. London/Sydney/Auckland/Johannesburg: Rider, 2000.

Wilson, R.A. (2001) *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa. Legitimizing the post-Apartheid state.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

[1] Ahmed does not make a distinction between affect, feeling and emotions in both *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, and 'Affective Economies.' Instead she relies on the word 'impression' in her discussion of the subject because it allows her 'to avoid making analytical distinctions between bodily sensation, emotion and thought as if they could be "experienced" as distinct realms of human experience' (2004b: 6).

[2] 'Interconnectedness-towards-wholeness' is a term used by Krog to explain how ubuntu works.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons License (Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0). See http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/nl/deed.en for more information.

Krisis

Journal for contemporary philosophy

OLIVIER SUREL

LET A HUNDRED NATURES BLOOM: A POLEMICAL TROPE IN THE 'ONTOLOGICAL TURN' OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Krisis 2014, Issue 2
www.krisis.eu

'What I liked in anthropology was its inexhaustible faculty of negation, its relentless definition of man, as though he were no better than God, in terms of what he is not. But my ideas on this subject were horribly confused, for my knowledge of men was scant and the meaning of being beyond me.' Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*.

Is the concept of Nature, as we make use of it in the humanities at large, a concept whose unity is at stake? If that is so, does it still make sense to pursue merely *naturalist*[1] agendas in anthropology and in philosophy, and isn't it better to adopt an alternative, enriched position, that its proponents call 'multinaturalism'? In recent years, under the heading of the 'ontological turn'[2], certain trends of post-structuralist anthropology raised this very question by appropriating and dynamizing motifs of critical philosophy (or, at the least, notably considered ethnographic data as an ideal site for the philosophical production of concepts). In more negative terms, this could be seen as the effect of a 'crisis of late structuralism' (Turner 2009), if one considers the departure from the project of a formal analysis of culture that was at the origin of many works of the pre-1968 era in the French social sciences. Another, more moderate, and more cogent characterization of such a moment has been spelled out as the 'birth of neo-classical anthropology[3]", one which could be broadly conceived as the response to the postmodern critique of authorship in post-Malinowskian ethnology, resulting in the regulative ideal of a delegation of the authority of the ethnographer to the collectives under study. An ethnographer, who, among other things, pleads guilty of importing remnants of a monolithic 'naturalist' ontology that is deemed to be insensitive to the (reconstructed) ontologies of non-Modern collectives.

In what follows, we will first attempt to give a sense of the origin of the conceptual neologism that is 'multinaturalism'. Secondly, and considering that the latter concept is polemically opposed to naturalism, we will examine how naturalism survived in structuralism itself up to post-structuralism. Thirdly, we will narrow down the problem posed by naturalism in such a context to that of its postulated theoretical alliance to multiculturalism. Fourthly, we will give a more thorough analysis of the construction that is opposed to the alliance of naturalism and multiculturalism, namely the consideration of multinaturalism itself as designator of the reconceptualization of Nature as a multiplicity of 'natures'. Fifthly, we will examine this reconceptualization from the point of view of its implicit social ontology, or theory of social beings. Lastly, we will go through a reconstruction of the very idea of a multinaturalism, giving a comparative analysis of its uses.

Making the 'multinaturalist' scene

If two names are attached to the ontological turn, at least in a 'French Theory-centered' context, they are Philippe Descola's, and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's.[4] Descola developed his theses in a moderately systematic way in *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Viveiros gave his enterprise a more philosophical, albeit rather polemical[5], twist with the publication of a book entitled *Cannibal Metaphysics*, all the while maintaining the mission for anthropology, in his words, of 'being the theoretical practice of a permanent decolonization of thought' (Viveiros de Castro 2009: 4). Furthermore, against the thesis for which the account of the forms of life of 'non-Modern' collectives[6] is nothing but an Occidental distortion on his part, Viveiros insists on the fact that his own theoretical proposal rather

constitutes the opportunity of 'putting our imaginary into variation' (Viveiros de Castro 2009: 5), a motivation which will be important in our own acceptance of the idea of a 'multinaturalism'. In any case he takes, quite boldly, the influence of a certain 'indigenous praxis' as fostering an 'immanence' of anthropology against the 'transcendent' (read here: hegemonic, oblivious of singularities) points of view of sociology and economics. Towards the end of his book, Viveiros states that his life-long project (the *Anti-Narcissus*), of which we today read scattered elements, has more to do with the projection of possible social worlds from indigenous thought *reconstructed*, than with a thorough analysis of 'indigenous cognitive processes' (Viveiros de Castro 2009: 160)[7]. In what could have been a useful *proviso* to the book, he later stated that such a 'thought-experiment (…) may be read as outlining a sort of imaginary identikit picture of an Amerindian philosophy which would stand to indigenous mythopoiesis as Cartesian or Kantian ideas, say, stand to what I'm calling the Modern West' (Viveiros de Castro 2012: 64). In a similar fashion, his colleague Marilyn Strathern stated, in *The Gender of the Gift*, that she had 'not presented Melanesian ideas but an analysis from the point of view of Western anthropological and feminist preoccupations of what Melanesian ideas might look like if they were to appear in the form of those preoccupations' (Strathern 1988: 309)[8]. In the words of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Viveiros' wish could be construed as the drawing of philosophical conjectures from a human science whose global movement is more 'centrifugal' than 'centripetal' (that is, less preoccupied by the examination of its own posits than by an 'estrangement' of those very posits by building conceptual bridges with indigenous ontologies).

But for reasons pertaining to disciplinary divisions, the situation of Descola's discourse might appear clearer: he's involved in a theoretical program (and leads a Chair at Paris' Collège de France) baptized 'Anthropology of Nature', which aims at giving an account of how human collectives relate to their environments in situations where it is not at all clear that the Western division between 'nature' and 'culture' holds. Thus, Descola's Anthropology of Nature sees itself as exposing elements which could potentially make us drift away from the certainties of our own native 'naturalist ontology', which is, as we shall see, idiosyncratically taken here to be reducible to the postulating of a continuity of 'physicalities' and a discontinuity of 'interiorities'. In other words, naturalist ontology is taken to fundamentally affirm the *necessity* of bodily entities (warranted, we could add, by the unification of the formal discourse of physics) and the *contingency* of the realm of spirit (broadly, singular expressions of subjectivity and their correlated cultural formations). How then, considering the conceptual lineage in question here, is one to consider not naturalism *tout court*, but particularly the naturalism that pertained to structuralist anthropology itself?

Naturalism, from Lévi-Strauss to Descola

It is the case that structuralist anthropology itself subscribed to a certain naturalism (sometimes verging on an unholy alliance of formalism and empiricism, by e.g. the use of a group-theoretic model to analyze cultural phenomena, a characterization made by Badiou, 1968/2007). Nevertheless, it appears that Lévi-Strauss tried in a certain fashion to escape one form of naturalism opposed to his own, which was conjoined with a 'cultural materialism' (attached in the United States to the name of Marvin Harris, and to the publication of his book, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*). To do so, Lévi-Strauss articulated a position for which the environments subject to human socialization were to be fully taken in account if one was to do the genealogy of symbolic systems, systems among which one finds the elements of our Modern 'cultures' (a position which is summed up in Lévi-Strauss' (1973) detailed answer to Marvin Harris under the title 'Structuralism and Ecology'). By human 'socialization', one must discern something that is more akin to a continued collective transformation and predation of entities in given environments and its related symbolic production, than to some kind of pacific and autonomous process of identification between humans and given 'natural kinds'. Such socialization of the environment finds its paradigmatic expression in totemism, or the collective attribution of a common ancestor shared by the human group and definite natural kinds. Totemism is in turn characterized by Lévi-Strauss (1971) (against Durkheim's view for which totemic associations pertained to a certain logics of representation) as the consequence of definite hunting practices.

This is a part of what Lévi-Strauss conjectured under the heading of a theory of 'double determinism', thus refuting the mono-directionality of theorization characteristic of Harris' anthropology. Indeed, Harris proceeded from a determinate combination of categories (infrastructure, or environmental constraints; structure, or modes of production; superstructure, or the ensemble of symbolic systems), originating in a Marxism which saw infrastructure as shaping structure without reciprocity, superstructure being here specified as *ideology* - granted that Harris maintains the motif of a kind of 'monopoly of symbolic production' on the part of special individuals.

From here, going back to *The Savage Mind* could be a good way to further seize the identity of the discourse that is in direct line of inspiration for Anthropology of Nature. Towards the middle of his book, Lévi-Strauss (1966: 94-95) states that: 'The first point is that natural conditions are not just passively accepted. What is more they do not exist in their own right for they are a function of the techniques and way of life of the people who define and give them a meaning by developing them in a particular direction. Nature is not in itself contradictory. It can become so only in terms of some specific human activity which takes part in it; and the characteristics of the environment take on a different meaning according to the particular historical and technical form assumed in it by this or that type of activity. On the other hand, even when raised to that human level which alone can make them intelligible, man's relations with his natural environment remain objects of thought: man never perceives them passively; having reduced them to concepts, he compounds them in order to arrive at a system which is never determined in advance: the same situation can always be systematized in various ways.' To sum up, and if one wants to get a global grasp of such an approach, the 'structuralist' trait could be reconstructed through three posits:

(a) There are general forms of socialization of environments by human collectives;

(b) Those basic forms are - for reasons that have to do with intersubjective constraints consequent to the use of definite techniques - dynamized by collectivity in various symbolic forms which are, in turn, in position of co-determination with definite techniques;

(c) There is a possibility of registering those variations in a kind of transformative model (and *that* defines the matter of structural anthropology in the strict sense - granted that we have to keep in mind that each systematic variation bears its own regime of sense[9]).

After this, and as a disciple of Lévi-Strauss, Descola opened the way to a 'practical structuralism', a theory of action and practice in a thesis, *La Nature domestique*, subtitled 'Usages et représentations de la biosphère'. Interestingly, the editors of the book have retained a subtitle that echoes more strongly both structuralist and Marxist subscriptions of the thesis, that is 'Symbolisme et praxis dans l'écologie des Achuar'.

But it is with his addendum of sorts to *Beyond Nature and Culture* that Descola (2011: 71) vindicated the novelty of his orientation, amending a sometimes too indistinctive theory of natural-cultural hybrids, whose prime defender is Bruno Latour. In the 'symmetric anthropology' of *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), Latour circumscribes the project of Modernity as oblivious of its perpetual practice of 'hybridization' of entities that are at the same time deemed to be either 'natural' or 'cultural': 'Indeed, symmetric anthropology is still lacking a general theory of the stabilization of collectives of humans and non-humans in singular forms of practice. But for such a theory to be developed, one would have to go against certain principles of the sociology of associations (or actor-networks) which are foundational for symmetric anthropology, and grant more credit to instituted apparatuses which organize the manner in which hybrids are produced, here and there, which render a given configuration of humans and non-humans, possible or impossible.' (our translation)

There are many 'ways of treating Nature', so to speak, if we consider them as governed by the interplay between various symbolic forms and definite economies of subsistence and existence. From such a manner of considering things, Descola identifies such salient ways, thematized as 'modes' of identification, and a posteriori posited as *ontologies*:

Analogism, or the postulation of a discontinuity of physicalities and interiorities[10]; animism, or the postulation of a discontinuity of physicalities and of continuity of interiorities; naturalism, or the postulation of a continuity of physicalities, and of a discontinuity of interiorities; totemism, or the postulation of a continuity of physicalities and interiorities.

Those 'ontological' distinctions could also be considered as the most general characterizations of very diverse 'symbolic ecologies', of the many 'symbolic' ways in which non-Modern collectives relate to a given environment through a systematic, albeit popular knowledge (Descola 2006: 66). At any rate, the ontologies in question are to be counted amongst (to borrow the rather Oxbridge-spirited terms of Strawson 1959) *revisionist* ontologies, or in more Lévi-Straussian terms, the 'centrifugal' ways in which 'our' naturalist ontology could repopulate itself. Such an imperative could also, and realistically it seems, be read as the call to acceptance of more entities than those that are spelled out by reductionist trends in philosophy, which have little patience for the specificity of the objects of the social sciences. This notwithstanding, and problematically, anthropology is often in that regard the most argumentatively secure, as it is sometimes characterized by Lévi-Strauss as 'the social science of the observed' (or as we would sum up, a science *of* indigenous praxis for the sake of introducing progressive variations in the observer's imaginary).

Naturalism's strange bedfellow (multiculturalism)

To get closer to our point, we could say that post-structural anthropology allows a certain mode of reconsideration of Modern thought (at least if we take Modern thought to be organized by the central concept of Nature and a correlative 'naturalist' ontology) by (notably) Amerindian[11] cosmologies, and by what Viveiros reconstructs at its margins as the Amerindian 'metaphysics of predation', picking up the venatic ('related to hunting practices') element so central to many non-Modern collectives. Reconsideration which brings forth the conceptual couple of 'multinaturalism' and 'perspectivism', the former being deemed to counter the 'multiculturalism' of our parliamentary democracies, the latter being the crux of the metaphysical dimension of those cosmologies[12], or what Viveiros defines precisely as an 'ethno-epistemological corollary of animism'.

Lacking here is of course a careful examination of what the term of 'multiculturalism' implies beyond the facilitation of a broad mapping of what appears to be a genuine ideological conflict around cultural essentialism, a position which we could trace back to Franz Boas and especially to his disciple Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* of 1934. Today, in the hegemonic space of 'parliamentary democracies', the problematic seems also to include the alliance between naturalism and multiculturalism, as it overlooks the level of symbolic ecologies. Such an ideological alliance is taken to be considering that 'cultures' are a myriad ways of singularization through fixed intra-communitarian expressions, and to ignore preexisting and complex 'ways of treating Nature'. The latter is a trait notably picked up by Viveiros in his defence of indigenism (Viveiros de Castro, 2006), when he stresses that the Amazonian 'virgin forest' as conceived by Western administrations13 is a broad fiction, its distribution and composition having been affected by thousands of years of human intervention.

Such an agenda of cogently articulating *symbolism* and *praxis* in the body of anthropological study is shared with Descola, inasmuch as the latter explicitly addresses the problem of transformation of singular environments by human collectives. Doing that, the latter expresses more materialism by evoking the solidarity of symbolic systems with 'schemas of practice' (Descola 2006, 'Les schèmes de la pratique') and not mere 'conceptual schemes'[14], the disproportion of which stand, in multiculturalism, as subject to pacification through communicative action only, thus masking wider forms of systemic segregation. This is why one finds more acuteness in the concept of 'symbolic ecology', a concept which also includes in earnest the prescriptive dimension that given collectives deploy regarding the organization of knowledge.

Another characterization of the aforementioned articulation may indeed be expressed by what Baptiste Gille called (after Gayatri Spivak) a 'strategic essentialization of cosmologies', as a necessary theoretical move to strike collective imaginaries as well as (broadly multicuturalist) power apparatuses (Gille, 2012). Such a characterization doesn't neutralize the interest of

a merely comparativist approach: Viveiros even further affirms, after Martin Holbraad, that the aim of anthropology is also that of being a 'comparative ontography'. In a way, the anthropologist thus sets her task as the recording of diverse ontologies, giving to ontology in a broad sense a richer pragmatics, exposing its social conditions of emergence. But however we reproach the multiculturalist model, it seems that we have to examine more patiently this postulate of unity of Nature, a unity which is supposed to a multiplicity of cultures.

Considering Nature through multiplicity

It is to be noted that Viveiros associates naturalism with the posit of an 'objective universality of bodies and substance'.[15] But what 'substance' stands for is not entirely clear. Viveiros' naturalist, if not a straw man, is a rather curious beast, who defends a naïve version of Spinoza's rationalism[16] (a version where the concept of Nature is bluntly equated with that of Substance, stripped bare of the fine-grained distinctions of the Ethics), along with a foggy synthesis of the different programs found under the heading of 'physicalism', or the general theory for which everything supervenes on a more fundamental physical level.

Considering this, and for the sake of conceptual clarity, it seems useful to distinguish at least two main regimes of philosophical naturalism. We would tentatively categorize them as the 'short' and 'long' ways of naturalism[17]. The short way being that of a dogmatic and reductionist tendency towards a unification of other spheres of thought through the model of the natural sciences (e.g. the unmediated philosophical assimilation of the proceedings of the 'neo-Darwinian synthesis' in biology). The long way being indeed that of the use of the natural sciences by philosophy through the normative scope of a certain 'immanentist' trend, Spinozist in inspiration (the conceptual historiography of which has recently been initiated by Italian researcher Vittorio Morfino in a book entitled *Il tempo della Moltitudine*, see Morfino (2010), and in another measure see also Sharp (2011)).

For matters of conceptual refining now, we could even say with Viveiros that there is another kind of naturalization, pertaining not to the domain of philosophical discourses, but to that of a process that is central in Amerindian cosmologies themselves: that of a slow morphogenesis, accounted in the terms of a cosmogony, of a slow bodily differentiation from an abstract principle standing for the attribute of humanity, a principle which is in its turn conflated by Viveiros de Castro with 'culture'.[18] But such a 'naturalization' would then be a misnomer, and even more if one follows the path of a symmetric anthropology (if we borrow Latour's terminology for a moment). We could then say that naturalizing, in the (reconstructed) Amerindian sense, is thought to be a process towards multiple embodiments of a primordial, mythical (human) subjectivity, whereas in the Modern sense, naturalizing means restituting the inferential commitments of opaque theoretical posits, or getting rid of remains of a philosophical discourse immune from instrumental testability[19] (including the conception of the Self as a fixed and innate entity, a problem that nourished philosophical *oeuvre*s in contemporary naturalism from Daniel Dennett's *Consciousness Explained* to Thomas Metzinger's *Being No One*, among others).

Nevertheless, and interestingly, Viveiros de Castro precisely refers to Dennett's naturalism when he goes on to describe the central trait of Amerindian 'perspectivism', which he calls an 'imputation of agency' to non-human entities. Such an imputation is precisely what Dennett describes as the adoption of the 'intentional stance'. In a few words, and if we still follow Viveiros's reading of Dennett, taking the intentional stance is imputing the intentionality (or in Viveiros' words, the agency) of a certain entity, bearing in mind that in an Amerindian context the imputation proceeds from the primacy of the predator/prey relation. And it is characteristic of Viveiros' discourse that he sometimes stands in a relative epistemological proximity with a naturalism that he rejects in another form.[20] At any rate, the most pertinent metaphysical motif for Viveiros is that of perspectivism, for which 'salient' entities of a given symbolic ecology are considered as intentional systems, or at the very least, as entities endowed with a *point of view*, able to reciprocate human action in some.[21] It is also crucial to note that only species which play a key symbolic or practical role in a given environment are so endowed (it is thus still tempting, in

Althusserian fashion, to introduce here in earnest the question of an 'indigenous' mode of production).

Furthermore, Viveiros de Castro (2009: 38) states that 'different types of beings see different things in the same fashion', which leads to a problematic characterization of this 'sameness'. It is clear that such a criterion of 'sameness' can't be based upon a physicalist description of what happens, unless we take the richness of phenomenological experience to be contingent on the possession of a complex nervous system, which sounds a bit tricky if we, following Amerindian cosmology, 'let spirits in' (and granted that Viveiros himself only draws an *analogy* between a possible perspectivist model and the phenomenon of multi-stability in psychophysics). A formal model that would account for this 'sameness', which then pertains to being a position in a system of permutations, could be helpful to get a global grasp of it. For that matter, we could formalize the Amerindian system of perspective permutations (from now on noted PsPm) after Viveiros, using a simple conventional notation where $\triangleq$ designates perception under one of the following types:

Human (hm)
Animal (an), and predator/predated subclasses (an1), (an2)
Spiritual (sp), and predator subclass (sp1)

And where $\downarrow$ indicates a tautological account of the perception of types and $\rightarrow$ the account of a relation of 'standing as' (for example, in the case of humans perceiving humans as humans, we have (hm $\triangleq$ hm $\downarrow$) :

PsPm1 (hm $\triangleq$ hm $\downarrow$)

PsPm2 (hm $\triangleq$ an $\downarrow$)

PsPm3 (hm $\triangleq$ sp $\downarrow$)

PsPm4 (an1, sp1 $\triangleq$ hm $\rightarrow$ an2)

PsPm5 (an2 $\triangleq$ hm $\rightarrow$ sp1, an1)

PsPm6 (an, sp $\triangleq$ an, sp $\rightarrow$ hm)

Such a simple formalization may be a part of what Viveiros aims at when he states that perspectivism supposes 'a constant epistemology', which seems here at least reducible to a rudimentary model, even though it remains far from Lévi-Strauss' attempt to produce a 'canonical formula of myth'[22] in his *Structural Anthropology*. This is at least the core of what drives Viveiros to make Nature multiple, so to speak. Here lies the 'bomb'[23] that could make naturalist ontology shift to 'multinaturalism'. Viveiros adds that those permutations suppose 'variable ontologies' (Viveiros de Castro 2009: 41). As he states it, speaking for Amerindian collectives, 'what is for us blood, is beer for jaguars; what is for the spirits of the dead a rotten corpse, is fermented manioc for us; what we see as a puddle of mud, is a big ceremonial house for tapirs...' (our translation).

We might be dealing with variable ontologies in the sense in which the speculative ethology of Jakob von Uexküll, for example, helps in deducing different material ontologies for every observed animal, granted that for him, every animal is taken to be capable of distinguishing as many objects as the actions it is able to perform in its environment.[24] But even if Amerindians recognize a physiological unity of animal bodies, it seems to be thematized by their perspectivism in a non-totalizing way. Indeed, Amerindian perspectivism seems to be doing away with corporal morphology, presenting a sort of enriched 'ethogram' (an inventory of behaviours and capacities), which stands as the result of considering bodies as sites of 'sheaves of affects and capacities' which integrate, to use Descola's phrasing, a class limited by a given symbolic ecology (Viveiros de Castro 2009: 40).

Now, Viveiros often insists on the fact that such a 'seeing as', down to *perspectival* units of experience, has, in the very context of Amerindian symbolic ecologies, to do with *non-conceptual* content (at least if we stick to a rather minimalistic definition of what a concept is). The questions we could ask ourselves at this point are:

(a) What could be a 'seeing as' relation in the realm of non-conceptual content?

(b) Considering the reading in terms of social ontology or 'theory of social beings'[25] that such a transformative anthropology elicits, could it be more productive to reformulate the question, and draw the differences that must be existing between facts in the order of 'seeing as', and facts in the order of 'standing/counting as'?

Sketch for a socio-ontological take

It is pretty clear that elucidating how such a 'seeing as' holds in the realm of non-conceptual content leads us to consider action as deeply modified by certain types of experiments, to the extreme (in the commerce with 'spirits') augmented by intake of hallucinogenic decoctions (like *Brugmansia, Datura* or *Banisteropsis* according to Descola's reports), or more simply, in the horizon of expectations set by ceremonies and incantations - like the *anents* of the Achuar, such as the one sung during the hunting of woolly monkeys. One can here get a glimpse of how kinship is extended to predated non-humans (under what Descola names their '*affinal* nature', to distinguish it from *consanguinity* and *filiation*) as well as of the dark beauty borne by the sublimation of those modes of relation (hunting, the archetypal activity in this context, being at the intersection of the familial and cosmological planes) (Descola 1986: 321):

'Little brother-in-law (4x), let's now see in which point I will break you into pieces.

Little brother-in-law (2x), the little *shuni* man is on your tracks, little brother-in-law(2x), in which point will I pass through you?

Little-brother-in law of mine, I will kill you on distant lands.

In which point will I get through you? (4x), Little woolly monkey, let's see in which point (2x), I will pass through you (5x).'[26]

To go back now to the perspectivist permutations, let us deploy, as we announced a bit earlier, a few elements of social ontology, or the systematic study of social beings (surprisingly, despite its extreme critical poverty, one of the most orthodox works on that question remains John Searle's in *The Construction of Social Reality*). When faced with the question of the 'counting as' relation in Searle's social ontology, we can stress the fact that for such a relation to be satisfied, there should be a recognition, on the part of the agent, that an entity X is the token of a class Y, (for example that a $20 bill is the token of the type 'money'), and a knowledge of the rules and norms governing such a type. Considering the insufficiency of such an account, the semiotician Chris Sinha (2009) was one of the first to stress that the relation of 'counting as' as part of a *normative* level had to be distinguished from the relation of 'standing as' as part of the *semiotic* level. Thus the relation of 'seeing as' picked up by the anthropologist is not a relation of 'counting as', but more cogently specifiable as a relation of 'standing as'. It is the case for Achuar perspectivism that, for an animal like the jaguar, human blood *stands for* manioc beer, and doesn't merely 'count as' manioc beer.[27]

The biggest problem here remains that of a certain conventionalism where *conventions* don't seem to be holding. If we were to ignore the difference between the semiotic and the normative and, from the ethnography of the Akuryio of Surinam, accept that vultures in *seeing* worms in rotten flesh *as* roasted fish do so because of a collective acceptance of norms (however we could conjecture it) we would be put in the realm of a pleasant but rather inconvenient account of the situation, at least for our own (Western, rationalist) symbolic ecology. It thus seems more adequate to reinvest the Marxist concept of 'real abstraction'[28], in order to sustain the thesis for which all conventionalism in our hyper-managed environments is rendered null and void. Furthermore, it simply doesn't seem fruitful to sever the question of such a 'seeing as' disposition from a certain functionalism, about which we will say more soon).

In human societies, what we experience when we use, say, money, is not essentially the quasi-automatic attribution of a disposable 'status-function'[29], but the efficacy of a 'real abstraction', that is, a symbolic disposition that took a relative autonomy from individual or collective agency

to the point of dominating social relations. Thus conventionalism as regards the core features of a society is pragmatically undermined by the fact that one could not suspend any status-function without experiencing marginality and precariousness (which is maximally true for paradigmatic abstractions like money as expression of the value-form).

Our point is that in a way (and even if Descola precisely refused to embrace the Marxian variations on the concept of 'structure', granted that for him talking 'ontologies' gives us a grasp of something more fundamental and dynamic) it seems cogent to say that the concept of 'symbolic ecology' is more in tune with Marxian realism about social entities than the bourgeois conventionalism of a John Searle for example (at least if we provisionally take them to be the two extremes, respectively heterodox and orthodox, of contemporary social ontology). Indeed, Searle drew up the blueprint of an analytic social ontology where social entities are nothing but constructions, in the sense that they require 'collective acceptance and recognition'. An account of acceptance and recognition which deprives itself of all historical and speculative inquiry on those constructions - which is why historical materialism provides a better explanation of the autonomization of symbolic dispositions, even more so if one considers combining it to a comparativist program like that of an Anthropology of Nature.

Considering the question of the autonomization of abstractions, and if we now go back to the use of schematism by Descola in *Beyond Nature and Culture*, bearing in mind that we here oppose Descola's richer 'symbolic-ecological' point of view to a mere 'conceptual-schematic' point of view, what we have is no longer the actualization of the conceptual apparatus deployed in Kant's first *Critique*, where schematism was deemed as the power of imagination through which an abstract schema (that is, *not* a representation) presents a category to consciousness.[30] In Descola's conception of what he goes on specifying as 'integrative schemes' (or modes of relationships and identification to others and the environment), representation itself (or mental images) and the afferent declarative knowledge are absent. In addition, it is the institutional distribution of those schemes that is put to the fore (as well as, if we consider Viveiros' elaboration from Amerindian ethnography, their fixation through affectivity). Such a use of schematism is interesting inasmuch as it vindicates something that was overlooked by Lévi-Strauss in his polemics with American cultural ecology: something that could be conceived as a schematism directly connected to the practices of given collectives.

At any rate, practice is here, again, specified as the active transformation of given environments. This is precisely why one has to consider such a symbolic ecology as a space of 'lived abstractions' so to speak, and not one where individuals seek to partake exclusively (as the official philosophies of multiculturalism like those of Jürgen Habermas or Charles Taylor have it), in a collective deliberation on norms (the question of the validity of the identification of shamans as the main producers of ideology notwithstanding[31]).

The very idea (a reconstruction)

Such is the richness of the comparativist project that lays at the heart of Descola's Anthropology of Nature, and it is somehow tempting to equate the correlated idea of a 'multinaturalism' with that of a diversity of symbolic ecologies, against a 'multiculturalism', which ciphers the project of a regulation of exogenous (and preferential) beliefs. But to go further into distinctions, the idea of a multinaturalism could be said to include the following (non-exclusive) theoretical components (some of which we will immediately specify):

(a) As we saw it, a discrimination of Modern and non-Modern senses of 'naturalization'. It then concerns a program of subversion of philosophical conceptuality by, an Anthropology of Nature or Viveiros' comparative ontography;

(b) An abandonment of the importance given to the conceptual scheme attached to Substance (in a monistic sense), and the endorsement of:

(b1) A conflation of 'Nature' with sets of 'natural kinds' in a non-essentialist sense, along the lines of an 'affinal substantialism' and its

amended theory of *affects*;

(b2) A 'historicist' grasp of scientific results, and furthermore, its possible integration in the program of a 'cosmopolitics'.

Nature as sets of (affinal) kinds?

That Viveiros has little sympathy for contemporary evolutionism[32] is manifest, and it is to be doubted that he would accept a conflation of multinaturalism with a (mainstream) essentialist conception of 'natural kinds' (that would be for him, and rightly so, another step backwards to a form of a *reductive* naturalism, to an all-too-Modern form of naturalization). But to invoke another source in the philosophy of biology, John Dupré (2001) recognized (in a *textbook* piece on the concept) that defenders of natural kinds in biology resort to higher levels of abstraction for formulation of 'real laws of nature' (as candidates: predator; population; species, all considered here as *categories* and not as particulars). As such, according to Dupré, the genealogical investigations of evolutionists differ from those suited to investigations of contemporary interactions in ecology, and certain kinds applying to isolated species (mammals, birds) may not be suited e.g. to bacteria or flowering plants. To sum up: science and everyday life could need a cross-cutting classification and lead us to drop strictly essentialist distinctions (Dupré calls such a position 'promiscuous realism', and Viveiros, in an expression that we could reconstruct following his 'post-structuralist lines of anthropology', 'affinal substantialism' (Viveiros de Castro 2009: 40)[33], giving it a less formal ground). But multinaturalism does not lead as such to a program of theoretical ecology, and retains more of Spinozism than it seems to be willing to admit (inasmuch as it maintains that, more than morphology or physiology, it is a theory of *affects* that is in order).

As regards the form of such an 'affinal substantialism', the couplings of which (e.g. beer/blood) could be sets of *functional* equivalence, the anthropologist Terrence Turner (2009: 34) makes a clearer point when he comments on other indigenous (animist) ontologies: 'The generic forms and contents of these processes consist of functional activities (i.e., hunting, foraging, eating, drinking, finding shelter, mating and reproducing) which are essentially identical for all embodied spirit-beings regardless of the particular differences in their forms and contents. Beings of different species can thus identify their concretely different activities on the basis of their functional equivalence from the perspective of their common engagement in sustaining their bodies and spirit-forms.'

Following Turner, we could consider culture in this context as an 'incremental transformation', consisting in the coupling of processes that were isolated before their integration in the same process of production (Turner 2009: 32). And a certain stability of such processes of production in the Amerindian case define those functional nodes that integrate the regional ontology of affinal substantialism, and stand as potential candidates for 'affinal kinds'.

A historicism in our grasp of scientific results

To be more explicit, as post-Quinian naturalist philosopher Penelope Maddy tellingly puts it, a 'historicism' (our use of the term, not hers) in our grasp of scientific results consists in the realization of the importance of historicizing experiments, beyond the fantasy of a unity of science through a 'final theory' and its strong criteria of demarcation between scientific discourse and so-called 'ordinary language'. But nonetheless, even if foundational discourses or first philosophies are revoked by this type of moderately reflexive naturalism, a certain attitude or 'internalization of methods' remains, as Maddy (2001: 48) characterizes it in the following remarks (our emphasis): 'My naturalist's methodology isn't 'trust only science!'; her methodology just is a certain range of methods, which happen to be those we commonly regard as scientific. When asked why she believes in atoms, she says, 'because of the experiments of Perrin' and such-like, not 'because science says there are atoms and I believe the methods of science'. So my naturalist applies no necessary and sufficient conditions; as a *native* of the contemporary scientific world view, she simply proceeds by the methods that strike her as justified.

The program of a 'cosmopolitics'

If we turn to Bruno Latour and his broad project of a 'symmetric anthropology', the horizon changes a little, largely because his theoretical aim in the social sciences is, even more than Viveiros, deemed to be the consequent of a more *polemical* than analytical (or even political) gesture. First, Latour recognizes in Descola's enterprise a certain performative faithfulness to naturalist ontology, and sees the three other ontologies (analogism, animism, totemism) as opportunities for naturalism itself, as *ontology*, to explore permutations of its fundamental categories. But furthermore, and at a time of massive socio-technical entanglement of practice, a so-called 'second' Latour (2011: 2) may be right for once when he converts the concept of multinaturalism as the point from which one could fully embrace the consequences of a perpetual merging of *experience* and (managed) *experiments*: 'Today, however, it would be an understatement to say that nothing, absolutely nothing remains of... [the] trickle-down model of scientific production... the laboratory has extended its walls to the whole planet. Instruments are everywhere. Houses, factories, hospitals have become subsidiaries of the labs... The boundary between natural history - outdoor science - and lab science - indoor science - has slowly been eroded.'

Throughout this development, Latour associates naturalism (along with a lax use of the term 'natural history') with a certain production of a 'unitarist' discourse, for which the unity of formal methods in science equals a unity of Nature. Now if such a 'modernist' situation called for a proper globalist politics (or a *cosmopolitics*, as the term was revamped by Isabelle Stengers), the new, conjectured situation where multinaturalism enters the scene comprises of a new cosmopolitics, not mediated by the nation-state but by what Latour calls after John Dewey the 'public' (or the body of citizens standing as 'patient' of the negative externalities consequent of State decisions), and boils down to a more democratically-sourced expertise. Thus, Latour seems to associate naturalism *tout court* with a centralism of scientific experimentation, whereas multinaturalism would somehow allow its 'folk-federalization' or at least, a wider evaluation of what scientifically matters in the contemporary phase of hyper-management of life. Furthermore, Latour (2011: 9) proposes a sort of 'litmus test' to reveal the spontaneous ontology of the (non-)modernist: 'A simple, sharp, but... very discriminating test: do you associate nature with unification or with even more divisions?'

Put in today's ideological context, it is clear that the question as such is a bit critical, the alternative being: either a *conceptual* unification of natural phenomena through a 'protocol language' consistent with the posits of contemporary physics (if one puts aside the difficult question of the unity of Substance in Spinoza's system), or a conceptual 'rhapsody', of which a taxonomic ingenuity tied to groupuscular experiences may be the main pole of production. There, Descola might be on the right path when he suggests that Latour's symmetric anthropology would be considerably enriched by more case-studies of singular practices.

To conclude

From a strongly philosophical stance, one can recall the Fregean insight: a monism/pluralism/nihilism is vouched on an operation of numerical predication (x is to be considered one/many/null). But one has to distinguish those general characterizations of philosophical systems not only from a philosophical practice of pluralism, but also from a certain philosophy of multiplicity in post-Deleuzian theory - a philosophy which considers the opposition between unity and multiplicity as one of understanding, and multiplicity itself as the substantive category. In that regard, 'multinaturalism' is the thesis for which Nature itself is to be reconceptualized through multiplicity, and according to us it reconceptualizes 'Nature' in the last instance to sets of ways to affect and to be affected (or, to be closer to Viveiros, ways to predate and to be predated). In a sense, and in minimal Spinozist terms, it retains a small portion of *natura naturata* and abruptly sidelines *natura naturans*.

Once the New Age varnish is rubbed off it, Joseph Almog's recent take on this question stands as one of the best articulated. In the midst of an interpretation of Spinoza's œuvre where one encounters thinkers as different as Cantor and Balibar, Almog (2014: 39) states that the aforementioned

Spinozist distinction is often obscured by the false dilemma raised up by globalist and localist takes:

'On the globalist interpretation, the very idea of a local nature is that of a Nature-development. All beings, natured this or that way, are precisely nothing but Natur-*ings*, developments of Nature at a given cosmic locale. In contrast, on the localist reading, individuals come first and have relational natures all right … At this stage, there is no logical need to mention the existence of global Nature.'

On such terms, we could characterize multinaturalism as a flamboyant problem child of Spinozism (if we set aside Descola's sobered-up concept of symbolic ecology). We could add that it stands as a conceptual attempt to give a sense of the utter perplexity that emerges in shared experiences between 'Modern' and 'non-Modern' collectives. But more importantly, the correlative position might be taken as an index of post-structuralist anthropology's wish to remain a discursive formation where the (naturalistic) assumptions of the observer themselves are subject to transformation in the course of inquiry. Furthermore, in the midst of a vulgar materialism bearing the clothes of 'naturalism', it seems that the multiplicity contained in the concept of 'multinaturalism' points to a universe of discourse where purely theoretical reform appears to be a secondary task, perhaps after a sort of activism of the theoretical imaginary.

Olivier Surel is a doctoral researcher at Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense (Sophiapol Laboratory), where he works on critical theory and social ontology in the light of problems in historical and contemporary Spinozism.

Acknowledgements

This article is a rewritten and extended version of a talk given at the Mahindra Humanities Center at Harvard University on October 10, 2013, on the occasion of a curatorial intervention in the Harvard Museum of Natural History under the title 'Multinatural Histories' (in collaboration with Marcus Owens of the Non-Human initiative at Harvard GSD). For more information see: http://www.multinaturalhistories.com. I wish to thank here the organizers of the 'France and the World' seminar at Harvard for their invitation, Marcus Owens (Harvard GSD), as well as my colleagues Camille Chamois, Daphné Le Roux (organizers of the 'Pratiques/Ontologies' seminar at the Sophiapol, Université Paris Ouest), Baptiste Gille (Oxford University), Pierre Charbonnier (CNRS), Martin Fortier (Institut Jean Nicod) and the reviewers of *Krisis*, for their precious comments and input on ideas discussed in this article.

References

Almog, J. (2014) *Everything in its Right Place. Spinoza and Life by the Light of Nature*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Badiou, A. (2007) *The Concept of Model*, ed. and trans. by Zachary Luke Fraser and Tzuchien Tho, Melbourne: Re-Press.

Davidson, D. (1974) 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme'. In: *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 47:5-20.

Dennett, D.C. (1991) *Consciousness Explained*, Boston: Little.

Descola, P. (2006) *Par-delà Nature et Culture*, Paris: Gallimard.

Descola, P. (1986) *La nature domestique. Symbolisme et praxis dans l'écologie des Achuar*, Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.

Descola, P. (2011) L'écologie des autres. L'anthropologie et la question de la nature, Paris: Quae.

Descombes, V. (2005) *Les institutions du sens*, Paris: Minuit, 2005.

Dupré, J. (2001) 'Natural Kinds'. In: W.H. Newton-Smith (ed.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Science*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Gille, B. (2012) 'De l'écologie symbolique à l'écologie politique. Anthropologie des controverses environnementales chez les Salish côtiers'. In: *Tracés*, 22, 85-103.

Kant, I. (1999) *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. P. Guyer, A. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pedersen, M.A. and Holbraad, M. (2014) 'The Politics of Ontology'. In: *Fieldsights/Theorizing the Contemporary, Cultural Anthropology Online*, January 13.

Larrère, C. & Larrère, R. (2006) *Du bon usage de la nature. Pour une philosophie de l'environnement*, Paris: Flammarion.

Latour, B. (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. C. Porter, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Latour, B. (2009) 'Perspectivism: Type or Bomb?'. In: *Anthropology Today*, April, 5:2.

Latour, B. (2011) 'From Multiculturalism to Multinaturalism: What Rules of Method for the New Socio-Scientific Experiments?'. In *Nature and Culture*, Spring, 6:1, 3.

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1963) *Totemism*, trans. R. Needham, Boston: Beacon Press.

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1966) *The Savage Mind*, trans. G. Weidenfield, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1973) 'Structuralism and Ecology'. In: *Social Science Information*, February, 12, 7-23.

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1988) *The Jealous Potter*, trans. B. Chorier, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Maddy, P. (2001) 'Naturalism Friends and Foes.' In: *Philosophical Perspectives*, 15, 48.

Metzinger, T. (2003) *Being No One. The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*, Boston: MIT Press.

Morfino, V. (2005) *Il tempo della moltitudine. Materialismo e politica prima e dopo*. Spinoza, Rome: Manifesto Libri.

Nash, R.F. (1967) *Wilderness and the American Mind*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Petitot, J. (1988) 'Approche morphodynamique de la formule canonique du mythe'. In: *L'Homme*, 28, 108/107, 24-50.

Sharp, H. (2011) *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Sinha, C. (2009) 'Language as Biocultural Niche and Social Institution'. In: V. Evans and S. Pourcel (eds.), *New Directions in Cognitive Linguistics*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 289-310.

Strathern, M. (1988), *The Gender of the Gift*, Berkeley, University of California Press.

Strawson, P.F. (1959), *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, London: Methuen.

Surel, O. (2014) 'Jakob von Uexküll: une ontologie des milieux'. In: *Critique*, 803.

Toscano, A. (2008) 'The Open Secret of Real Abstraction'. In *Rethinking Marxism*, 20:2, 273-287.

Turner, T.S. (2009) 'The Crisis of Late Structuralism. Perspectivism and Animism: Rethinking Culture, Nature, Spirit and Bodiliness'. In: *Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*, 7, 1, 3-42.

Uexküll (von), J. (2010) *A Foray Into the World of Animals and Humans*, trans. by J.D. O'Neil, University of Minnesota Press.

Viveiros de Castro, E. (2006) 'Une figure humaine peut cacher une affection-jaguar'. In: *Multitudes*, 24, Spring, Paris: Editions Amsterdam.

Viveiros de Castro, E. (2009) *Métaphysiques Cannibales. Lignes d'anthropologie post-structurale*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Viveiros de Castro, E. (2012) *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere*, Hau Master Class Series.

[1] Inasmuch as 'naturalism' could be considered a position which takes Nature to be the conceptual unifier of all phenomena.

[2] For a recent and lively introduction to those debates, see Pedersen and Holbraad (2014), and related comments.

[3] Salmon G., 'La délégation ontologique. Naissance de l'anthropologie néo-classique'. Talk at the 'Pratiques/Ontologies' seminar at Sophiapol, Université Paris Ouest - Nanterre-La Défense (December 11th, 2013). Salmon considers here 'classic anthropology' as the interplay of localized observations and a comparative knowledge of a higher order, a move which requires what he somewhere else calls a 'desindexation' of spatio-temporal coordinates. In considering the ontological turn as 'neo-classic anthropology', he also takes into account two traits: the precedence of very traditional ethnographies; the reinvestment of concepts (totemism, animism) that forged the identity of anthropology between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th Century.

[4] The case of Bruno Latour is also interesting, but won't concern us before the attempt at a reconstruction of those three thinkers' shared concerns later on.

[5] One could indeed identify, in such works of Viveiros or in some of Bruno Latour's, a 'polemical style' in the philosophy of the human and social sciences.

[6] It is one of the characteristic traits of the 'turn' to use the term 'collective' instead of 'society'. Descola many times affirmed that he did so to avoid the latter concept which, according to him, not only led to too much totalization in the fields in which it operated, but more importantly made too much space for human intentionality.

[7] But Viveiros' grasp of cognitive science under the term 'cognitivism' appears to be rather synechdocal as, for him, the practice of cognitive science implies a belief in the centrality of 'mental representations', which is a highly problematic assumption for many practitioners.

[8] Such a discursive characteristic is precisely what motivated Gildas Salmon's forging of the term 'ontological delegation'.

[9] For more on this question and a cogent critique of Lévi-Strauss' mentalism (that is, the position for which all those variations are brought about only thanks to the combinatorial faculties of the human mind) see Descombes (2005: 257 ff).

[10] Recall that one could more cogently read under those rather opaque terms 'bodies under description by a formally unified physical theory' and 'cultural phenomena'.

[11] A characterization moderated by Viveiros himself, who writes that the adjective refers to 'a limited number of native cultures from Lowland South America (mainly from Western Amazonia) and from septentrional North America (Northwest Coast, N. Athapaskan, N. Algonquian, Eskimo)'. A problematic consequence of the style proper to the thought experiment he proposes being, as he recognizes, the erasing of 'internal differences in social morphology, economic and political structure, ceremonial life, religion, and so on'.

[12] According to Viveiros, such perspectivism and/or what he as well calls 'cosmological transformism', is found in South America among the Vaupes, the Wari' of Rondonia, the Yudja of the Middle Wingu, the Rock Cree of Canada, and other hunter-gatherer populations in the great American North and in parts of Asia (cf. Viveiros de Castro 2012).

Before him, Lévi-Strauss saw this 'reciprocity of perspectives' as the very character of mythical thought, see Lévi-Strauss (1988, 206).

[13] For a study of the lingering romanticism that pervades U.S. preservation policies, or what he calls the 'wilderness cult', see Nash (1967).

[14] For less critically oriented developments about 'conceptual schemes', see Davidson (1974). The present text, inasmuch as it embraces the drive towards a supplementation of 'conceptual-schematic' accounts of symbolic production, could have been called 'On the Very Idea of a Symbolic Ecology'; but that would in a way have occulted the rhapsody of senses attached to the idea of 'multinaturalism' and its polemical aspects.

[15] Even though, as we'll see, animist ontologies are also deemed to postulate a universality of physical substance in a certain sense.

[16] This problem seems of importance, and a Spinozist voice would insist on the fact that the idea of a universality of bodies is a product of imagination, and that 'substance' can be grasped only by a certain mode of intellection - but developing this would put us too far from our present preoccupations.

[17] To paraphrase Larrère & Larrère (2006), such a problematic is part of the redefinition of the socio-political conventions that surround the question of 'Nature', set against a distant cousin of the naturalism of the Cynics, which for Diogenes Laertius constituted the 'short way' of naturalism.

[18] With little doubt, a hardline Hegelian would here superimpose the trait of the 'oriental view of things' denounced in the *Lessons on the History of Philosophy*, where a primordial absolute identity is the basis for differentiation. It is also the case in such mythological schemes, but in the Amerindian case, that the formal identity of the Subject and Substance can be affirmed, in a way that seems to partly resist the Hegelian rejection. Note that Viveiros himself deals with such a metaphysical problematization of identity and difference, but in a more 'regional' way. To be more precise, and as Viveiros (2009: 33-34n) puts it, the extensive differentiation proper to speciation in Achuar ontology is accompanied by an 'infinite internal identity', every species counting equal representatives of itself. Granted that this is sometimes relativized in cases where sexual preferences in the human species are informed by knowledge of their 'animal essences' (the latter serving justifications of judgements on the degree of desirability of sexual partners). We can't dwell on this too much here, but it seems to be a problem worthy of exploration. Viveiros (2009: 61) himself briefly evokes the problem of a Hegelian subsumption of such philosophical propositions, admitting that no doctrine of concepts is latent there but a 'fluent' schematism of symbols and figures.

[19] Other types of naturalization (and correlative culturalization) are detailed by Lévi-Strauss (1966: 127), in the 'Totem and caste' chapter of *The Savage Mind*, where he writes that 'Simplifying a great deal, it may be said that castes picture themselves as natural species while totemic groups picture natural species as castes. And this must be refined: castes naturalize a true culture falsely, totemic groups culturalize a false nature truly.'

[20] But if he was to reject, in Dennett's characterization of the intentional stance, a certain air of 'explanatory adaptationism', Viveiros could refine his argumentative strategy in the same way that Lévi-Strauss did against Marvin Harris' very own brand of adaptationism (remember that according to Harris' account, structures and superstructures were subordinated to infrastructures, thus constraining human collectives to find appropriate solutions on the last two planes).

[21] Interestingly, and against the motif of a theoretical hegemony of anthropology, Viveiros soon stresses that perspectivism contains the theory of its own description, that of a constant shifting of perspectives (even if it is here more akin to the way one experiences the shifts on the surfaces of a Necker cube). Such a characterization of method is correlative to his evaluation of Descola's theoretical gesture: in the style of the great 'meta-' questions that came with the reception of canonical philosophical texts, by extraction of one of their fundamental categories (e.g. the determination of the faculty from which Kant's three *Critiques* were written, or of the type of knowledge from which Spinoza's *Ethics* was composed), Viveiros states that *Beyond Nature and Culture*, and its moments of 'combinatorial' reconstruction of ontologies, proceeds along a methodological *analogism*, sometimes verging on totemism (Viveiros de Castro (2009, 50)).

[22] $F_x(a) : F_y(b) \approx F_x(b) : F_a^{-1}(y)$

a/b being a qualitative opposition of terms

a/b being a qualitative opposition of terms; x/y being a qualitative opposition of functions, where $F_f(t)$ signifies that the term t possesses the function f and where $F_a^{-1}(y)$ signifies: that there has been an *inversion* of the value of term a as an inverse value a^{-1}; that there has been an *exchange* between a term-value and a function-value.

It is this very formula that made Jean Petitot (1988) state that there could well be a 'morphological turn' of structuralism, applying to Lévi-Strauss' formalization his own approach from 'morphodynamics'. Petitot, with René Thom, is one of the figures identified by Viveiros as decisive in Lévi-Strauss' shift from algebro-combinatorial to topologico-dynamical models.

[23] To borrow the words of Bruno Latour (2009) who, in a short commentary piece, attempted to evaluate the difference between Viveiros' and Descola's use of perspectivism and a 'classical' use of perspectivism as a category in a typology (one could of course think of Leibnizian perspectivism as a source of such classical use).

[24] For more details, see Uexküll (2010), and a critical commentary of the most recent French translation in Surel (2014).

[25] We could even add that a question lingers in Viveiros' book: that of social organization outside of the State-apparatus, at a level of analysis that is often that of a free-form social ontology. He himself recognizes, in a Deleuzo-Guattarian fashion, that his book is an attempt at subtracting his thought from the 'monarchic regime' of enunciation that pertains to the legacy of Ancient Greek philosophy, through the means of a positive consideration of 'savage minds'.

[26] Our translation from the French cannot warrant a considerable loss in sense.

[27] Let me note briefly that such a characterization could help us in getting out of the aporias of Viveiros' theory of symbolization that he elaborated from Roy Wagner's semiotics, in which perception itself proceeds from 'conventions', which seems quite a difficult way to get out of a 'direct realism' (at least if such a task is on one's agenda).

[28] On the distinction between living and abstract labour in Marx, and the consequent Marxist concept of 'real abstraction', see Toscano (2008).

[29] According to John Searle, a 'status-function' is anything that human social practices impose as a function on an entity that can't be induced from the physical structure of the given entity.

[30] Or in the words of Kant, it is 'the representation of a general process of imagination to give to a concept its image' (Kant: 1999).

[31] This being said, the shaman does stand at the verge of *anomia*, and is somehow a legislating figure: *he* establishes contracts with hyper-predating 'outlaw' entities that are the jaguar or the anaconda, the latter also being held responsible, in its moments of ire, for earth tremors (Descola (1986: 206)) - note that such mythological associations seem to be the closest point where catastrophe could elicit a more realistic singularization of Nature as a sphere of non-manageable contingency. It is thus not entirely clear that the deliberative trait is totally absent from 'indigenous praxis'. But here, it is maybe the 'contemplative' trait that is the most misleading, granted that it was, at the time when Descola wrote *La nature domestique*, entertained by ethnology itself (Descola (1986: 11)).

[32] And thus actualizes Lévi-Strauss' rather impressionistic critique of cultural evolutionism in *Race and History*, according to which 'an axe can't give birth to an axe', delivering a skimmed-up version of the Kantian argument of the *Critique of Judgement* (§ 65), which sustained a strong distinction between machine and organism, and correlatively, of *motor* and *formative* forces.

[33] Recall that 'affinity' is here distinguished from consanguinity, and characterizes the symbolically mediated relationship between distant kins and enemies. A beer/blood entity is considered by Viveiros to be such an affinal substance in Amerindian cosmology.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons License (Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0). See http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/nl/deed.en for more information.

Krisis

Journal for contemporary philosophy

DARRYL CRESSMAN

ON FIFTY YEARS OF *ONE-DIMENSIONAL MAN* AND A CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF TECHNOLOGY

Krisis 2014, Issue 2
www.krisis.eu

'True judgment judges this reality not in its own terms, but in terms which envisage its subversion.'
One-Dimensional Man

Introduction

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (henceforth ODM). As a work of philosophy, ODM is a critical theory of modern capitalist society that comfortably blends together aesthetics, literary theory, philosophy of science, Freudianism, the philosophy of language, phenomenology, and Marxism in order to diagnose the problems of advanced industrial society. It is a product of decades of reading, writing, and thinking and exhibits the influence of Marcuse's connection with some of the greatest philosophical minds of the twentieth century. ODM is also a memento of the radical spirit of the 1960s counter-culture and its association with the zeitgeist of that era bestowed on Marcuse a type of fame that is difficult to imagine today. Opposed to both the United States and the Soviet Union (a radical move in 1964), Marcuse developed a critical theory of modern society that resonated with a generation that was looking to reject the norms and expectations of the world they were born into while also rejecting the conventional alternatives to this world. His essays and ideas were published and discussed in academic journals dedicated to radical thought, he was known to thousands of student activists in Europe and North America, and he was publically condemned by the Pope and Ronald Reagan (who was the Governor of California in the 1960s). By the 1980s, however, it was clear that the ambitions of the New Left and the 1960s counter-culture had failed and a new generation of philosophers and students looked to different traditions to make sense of Thatcher, Reagan, AIDS, crack, computers, a renewed cold war and the eventual fall of the Soviet Union. After fifty years ODM has a strange legacy: it is both a sophisticated philosophical critique of contemporary capitalist society and, fairly or unfairly, a symbol of the worst excesses of the 1960s counter-culture and a reminder of the unfulfilled potential of this generation. For many born after 1970, this latter interpretation of ODM tends to distort the former, detectable in today's generational bias towards first generation Frankfurt School writers like Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin. Although Marcuse's ideas parallel the ideas of Adorno and Benjamin, for contemporary readers these authors have an authority that has eluded Marcuse.

On this anniversary of ODM I want to return to the idea that this book is a sophisticated philosophical critique of contemporary society and draw out insights and perspectives that remain relevant today. The intellectual appeal of ODM in 1964 was that it proposed a dialectical philosophy that challenged the empiricist and positivist trends that dominated American philosophy and sociology in the 1960s. It also rescued critical theory from the Soviet Union's technocratic and scientific iterations of Marxism. Like all theorists affiliated with the Frankfurt School, Marcuse pushed Marxism past the assumptions that, first, capitalism will inevitably destroy itself (we just need to wait for socialism, a sort of Saint-Simon positivistic version of the stages of world history), and second, that the working class are the agents of revolutionary change. After witnessing the failed German revolution of 1919 (in which he participated [see Marcuse 1978]) and then watching the supposed agents of revolutionary change embrace fascism,

the unshakable beliefs of scientific Marxists seemed untenable and invalid. Fifty years after this intellectual appeal found its audience, I argue that ODM's enduring relevance is the critical philosophy of technology that Marcuse developed in this book. Marcuse politicized the technological base of contemporary society by demythologizing the presumed neutrality of industrial technology while transforming Marxist critical theory to make sense of an industrial society that seemed not only capable of absorbing and deflecting the supposed inevitability of its own demise but also provided an unprecedented level of material comfort for a great number of people. Marcuse's philosophy of technology is an indictment of advanced industrial society in its totality while proposing, theoretically, the possibility of a radical alternative to this society. This is a philosophy of technology in which advanced industrial society – that is, a society premised on a technological infrastructure dedicated to mass production and consumption – is a project that extends beyond any particular technological object or practice. Marcuse uses the term technological rationality to describe this project and is indebted to Martin Heidegger's idea of 'enframing' (Heidegger 1977 [1954]), but the concept of technological rationality has a much stronger connection with the Marxist/Weberian-inspired theory of instrumental rationality developed by Max Horkheimer (Horkheimer 1994). Unlike his Frankfurt School colleagues, Marcuse holds out hope that technology, and technological rationality, can be radically transformed by materializing values that negate the forms of non-freedom and domination inherent in the modern technological project. In this sense, Marx's suggestion that the technology of industrialization is historically contingent upon the social organization of labor is important for understanding the critical thrust of Marcuse's philosophy of technology (Marx 1867 [1954]: 351-476; see also MacKenzie 1996).

Fifty years after ODM, the notion that Marcuse has anything substantial to contribute to contemporary philosophy of technology seems old-fashioned. Although there are nuanced interpretations of Marcuse's philosophy of technology that reflect contemporary challenges, he is routinely identified as a 'classical' philosopher of technology alongside Martin Heidegger, Lewis Mumford, and Jacques Ellul. This distinction, Peter-Paul Verbeek points out, invalidates many of the insights of these writers due to particular theoretical and methodological commitments: 'In the eyes of contemporary critics, the judgments of the classical philosophers of technology were too abstract and sweeping: abstract in that they failed to connect with concrete technological practice, and sweeping in that were couched in blanket terms of 'Technology' with a capital *T*, leaving no room for different kinds of descriptions of different kinds of technology.' (Verbeek 2005: p.4; see also Brey 2010; Misa, Brey, & Feenberg 2003) Verbeek politely avoids the truth of this distinction – i.e. that 'classical' is a code that indicates that these writers fall prey to technological determinism and essentialism.[1]

Marcuse did not consider himself a classical philosopher of technology nor was he troubled by the specter of either determinism or essentialism. The designation classical, and all this implies, was applied retroactively to distinguish Marcuse from empirical social theories of technology. The empirical turn in the social study of technology emerged in the 1980s through a variety of similar approaches that are collectively known as STS or technology studies (Mackenzie & Wajcman 1999; Bijker, Hughes, & Pinch 1987; Bijker & Law 1991; Oudshoorn & Pinch 2003). The theoretical insights that developed out of the case studies that make up the empirical turn forced social theorists of technology (philosophers, sociologists, historians, anthropologists) to carefully consider how they think about, write about, and study the relationship between society and technology. The empirical turn has been decisive for the current reception of Marcuse's philosophy of technology. In 1964, ODM propelled Marcuse to the status of philosophical guru for an entire generation. After the empirical turn, ODM has been remaindered as a 'classical' philosophy of technology; a designation that by its very name means that is has been surpassed.

Theoretical and conceptual designations like 'classical' are useful but need to be checked on occasion as in this case. ODM's fiftieth anniversary provides an opportunity to properly reconsider Marcuse's philosophy of

technology as against the easy convenience of summarization in a few sentences so that it fits nicely alongside other determinists and essentialists who make up the canon of classical philosophy of technology. In the following paper I propose a way that Marcuse's critical philosophy can be reconciled with the work of empirical theorists of technology. To do this, I first present a summary of Marcuse's critical philosophy of technology as he developed it in ODM. Following this, I present an overview of the methodological and conceptual insights that developed out of the empirical study of technological design and innovation. Paralleling the ideas of philosopher Andrew Feenberg, I suggest that there are many similarities between these two social theories of technology and from this I propose a perspective towards technology that balances empirical studies of technological contingency and the context within which this contingency occurs.

Marcuse's Critical Philosophy of Technology

Echoing Heidegger's well-known claim that the essence of technology is nothing technological, the starting point for Marcuse's philosophy of technology is not technology. Rather, his point of departure is philosophy. We live in a society that is so wealthy and affluent that the goals and objectives of the individual are indistinguishable from the goals and objectives of capitalist society. (See also Marcuse 2007 [1965]). This leads to one-dimensional thought, which is thought that is focused on the world as it is, not as it could be. For example, if the laborer who works on the assembly line, the taxi driver, the doctor, the venture capitalist, the student, and the professor all desire a smartphone, it is in the best interests of all of these individuals, despite their different socioeconomic circumstances, to identify with a system that provides for this need. This need, though, is not their own, but that of advanced capitalism and industrial society. Inverting the traditional axiom of the triumph of progress, under industrial capitalism invention is the mother of necessity. Marcuse's theory of false needs is one of the more contentious aspects of ODM. To claim that one's needs are not one's own is suspiciously close to the graduate school arrogance of accusing someone of having a false consciousness. Regardless of the accuracy of Marcuse's sweeping condemnation of the false needs of capitalism, we only need to consider a scenario in which nobody needs or wants an iPad, a flat screen TV, a new automobile, a smartphone, or any other luxury good to examine the legitimacy of Marcuse's ideas. If no one desired to consume beyond his or her basic needs, would this be detrimental for the individual or for the system of industrial capitalism? Only when we fail to identify with the needs of the capitalist system is it possible to distinguish between true and false needs.

The cost of maintaining and fulfilling the needs of industrial capitalism is quite high: unnecessary competition for dreary and unsatisfying jobs that provide us with the resources to buy things, a throwaway culture premised on planned obsolescence and waste, and an attitude towards environmental degradation that is appalling. Yet there is a marked inability to imagine a world where the technical infrastructure of society and the social organization of labor does not include the mass production and consumption of unnecessary consumer goods and services; we conceptualize potential through the options that industrial capitalism provides for us.

In Marcuse's view of history, progressive social change is impossible without dialectical, or critical, thought and its elimination means eliminating the ability to transcend or even recognize alternatives to the world as it is. This is problematic because contemporary industrial society contains the means by which a very different society could be realized, a world in which people could be free to pursue their own interests and needs free from the obligation to make a living in a system that is not of their own making. Following Marx, industrialization is not a wrong turn or a historical error. It is a necessary step towards liberation from necessity. Labor that was materialized in manufacturing technologies was intended to free humans from the toil of providing the basic necessities for life like food,

shelter, and clothing. Once these goals have been accomplished, humans could be free to imagine a life where it was not necessary to dedicate one's life to securing basic necessities or competing with others for these necessities. 'Complete automation in the realm of necessity would open the dimension of free time as the one in which man's private and *societal* existence would constitute itself. This would be the historical transcendence toward a new civilization.' (Marcuse 1964: 37) The containment of this potential transcendence is accomplished by having individuals identify with the false needs of industrial capitalism. Advanced industrial society must irrationally perpetuate itself; unnecessary luxuries, more efficient and effective forms of violence and ways to wage war, and the celebration and pursuit of profit and wealth dooms us to a life determined by the needs of industrial capitalism while blocking the development of critical faculties that could direct technological society in radically new directions. Hence Marcuse's tragic diagnosis of technological society: it is one-dimensional and the potential for truly critical thought leading to a society where human potential can flourish is blocked by the achievements of industrial society.

The counter to one-dimensional thought is dialectical thought, or what Marcuse jokingly calls the power of negative thinking (at the time of ODM, one of the more popular self-help books in the United States was titled *The Power of Positive Thinking*). Dialectical thought is negative in the sense that it negates the given world in light of the very real potential for the pacification of existence. From Plato onwards, dialectical thought has existed in tension with other ways of knowing, but modern scientific knowledge, and the materialization of this knowledge in industrial technology, presents the greatest challenge to dialectical thought. Marcuse argues that dialectical thought is on the verge of being obliterated by industrial society and in ODM he explains in more detail the connection between the decline of dialectical thinking and industrial technology. (See also Marcuse 2007 [1960]).

For Marcuse, industrial society is a historical project that corresponds with the emergence and standardization of Taylorism and Fordism in the early twentieth century. These techniques for the organization of labor and resources mark the establishment of a technological system of mass production and consumption that, by virtue of its ability to deliver increased production of material wealth, becomes universally rational. States and societies either employ this system or aspire towards it and those that don't are considered backwards and irrational. Typically, opposition to the organization of labor and resources would come from those classes upon whom this organization is imposed. But within industrial capitalism, control over the organization and direction of one's labor is exchanged for managerial control of the labor process and the opportunity to consume the goods and services being produced. This, in turn, creates an alignment between the interests and objectives of all classes for the benefit of the wealthiest class:

'[…] scientific management and scientific division of labor vastly increased the productivity of the economic, political, and cultural enterprise. Result: higher standard of living. At the same time and on the same ground, this rational enterprise produced a pattern of mind and behavior which justified and absolved even the most destructive and oppressive features of the enterprise.' (Marcuse 1964: 46)

Recovering critical thought and opening up a horizon within which real social change can occur can only happen through the transformation of the technological base of industrial society. 'Domination perpetuates and extends itself not only through technology but *as* technology, and the latter provides the great legitimation of the expanding political power, which absorbs all spheres of culture' (Marcuse 1964: 158). The technological infrastructure of industrialized society results in a society in which goods are produced and desired, and this desire effectively blocks the potential for critical thought. Unlike traditional Marxists, who theorized that technology is a neutral tool that can be used for either socialism or capitalism, Marcuse believes that industrial technology itself is designed to reproduce a system of domination and control, and so liberation must begin with the basic form and function of industrial technology. Marcuse

argues that the design and function of the machines and techniques that make up advanced industrial societies are premised on a logic of domination and control that he equates with modern science.[2] Science is methodologically biased by its inability to grasp the history and social context of the objects that it studies. Working within a scientific perspective the immediate appearance of artificially isolated objects is taken as truth, 'these objects can be used, but not transformed, adapted to the dominant social purposes, but not transcended toward the realization of their potentialities in the context of a better society' (Feenberg 2002: 169). This logic is translated into the logic of industrial technology, which, under the guise of objectivity and neutrality, is oriented towards domination and control, 'the apprehension of nature as (hypothetical) instrumentality *precedes* the development of all particular technical organization' (Marcuse 1964: 153; see also Heidegger 1977 [1954]).

But what would a new technology look like? Because modern science and technology have rendered possible the translation of values into technical tasks, what is required is a 'redefinition of values in *technical terms*, as elements in the technical process. The new ends, as technical ends.' (Marcuse 1964: 232) As noted previously, Marcuse provides one guiding idea for the development of technology: the pacification of existence. If technology could be designed to meet the basic needs of humans (food, shelter, clothing), if technology could conquer scarcity with a minimal amount of toil and suffering, then a qualitatively different society could emerge that would enable greater freedom for individual and social development, free from the compulsion to work in order to consume unnecessary and destructive goods. The basis of this transformation would be a logic, or a rationality, directed towards a more long-term and tempered relationship with nature; not the conquest of nature, but a reciprocal relationship with it. More abstractly, Marcuse hypothesizes that the logic of art and aesthetics could serve the same purpose that the technocratic rationality of calculation and efficiency serve in today's technological society; this is a model of design and innovation premised on the Greek concept of techné. Liberation from the affluence of industrial society would free humans to develop under their own self-determination, free from the false needs of a system bent on the perpetuation of destruction and competition. From pessimistic beginnings, Marcuse's critical philosophy of technology culminates with a humanistic portrayal of technological potential that is closer to the practical utopianism of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backwards* than the pleasant dystopianism of Huxley's *Brave New World*.

To summarize, Marcuse's philosophy of technology in ODM argues that for philosophy to be effective and relevant it must necessarily be a philosophy of technology. Society is technological society and so any sort of social theory that aims to describe or explain ideas about politics, identity, or art must account for the role that technology plays in organizing, disseminating, and producing these ideas. This is a philosophy of technology in which industrial society is an historical project that extends beyond any particular technological object or practice. However, Marcuse is also opposed to any sort of escapist back to nature' attitudes towards technology and holds out hope that technology, and technological rationality, can be radically transformed by materializing values that negate the forms of unfreedom and domination inherent in the modern technological project. The potential benefits of directing technological progress towards different ends means that liberation from this technological society can only be accomplished through technology.

One-Dimensional Man after the Empirical Turn

Insights and methods developed through empirical social theories of technology highlight deficiencies and shortcomings of Marcuse's critical philosophy of technology and have effectively made obsolescent this philosophy for a generation of writers and students. Doomed to the fate of a 'classical' philosopher of technology, for contemporary readers Marcuse is taken to be an example of essentialism and technological determinism. In Marcuse's time (he died in 1979), there was nothing that could be com-

pared with today's Actor-Network Theory or Social Constructivism and so he never had the opportunity to respond to either the methodological or conceptual challenges that these theories pose for his philosophy of technology. In this section, I reconsider the relevancy of Marcuse's philosophy of technology in light of empirical social theories of technology. It is obvious to anyone who studies technology today that the contributions made by empirical theorists are essential for grasping the complex relationship between the social and the technical and so it cannot simply be a matter of dismissing one perspective for the other. In this section I propose a synthesis between these two social theories of technology, highlighting their similarities and proposing a research trajectory that resonates with the interests of both traditions.

The work of empirical social theorists of technology can be characterized by case-studies of technological innovation and design. By following the actors, a category that can include engineers, elected officials, and users as well as objects and inscriptions, it is possible to 'open the black box' of technology to discover exactly how technological objects come into being. The benefit of this perspective is that it empirically falsifies assumptions of technological determinism. Opening the black box reveals that technology is neither inevitable nor predictable nor neutral. There is no abstract technological rationality that determines the form and function of technology *a priori*. Rather, design is contingent upon empirically observable social contexts. Whereas Marcuse was concerned with industrial technology in its totality, empiricists are drawn towards case-studies that at the micro-level reveal fascinating details about the processes of technological design and innovation and the individuals and social groups who are involved with and contribute to these processes - what Bruno Latour calls studying 'technology in the making' by 'following the actors' (Latour 1987). Working from insights derived from case-studies, many empirical theorists of technology challenge the traditional distinction between the social and the technical and in turn challenge assumptions of social or technical essentialism. In practice, distinctions between the social and the technical are not clearly observable and so it is more useful to employ the prefix 'sociotechnical' to deny this distinction. Tracing complex sociotechnical interactions reveal that macro-level concepts like technology and society, as well as concepts like capitalism, power, safety, or health are the result of interactions that occur within sociotechnical networks: '…society, organizations, agents, and machines are all *effects* generated in patterned networks of diverse (not simply human) material' (Law 1992: 380; see also Callon & Latour 1981). In practice, this means that researchers do not impose pre-existing categories or concepts upon the phenomena they observe and describe. Rather, they examine how categories and concepts are produced through complex sociotechnical networks.

Despite methodological and conceptual differences, there are important similarities between these social theories of technology. The philosopher of technology Andrew Feenberg argues that empirical theories of technology validate ideas that were anticipated by Marcuse. These include the idea that technology is underdetermined by purely technical principles. For a technology to work, for it to succeed, there needs to be fit between the object and the interests and goals of the various social groups who are involved in the design process. The co-construction of the social and the technical is evident in Marcuse's philosophy, especially in regards to the concretization of values, needs, and technology that he describes. Feenberg also argues that the concept of delegation, a concept developed by Bruno Latour to describe how values are translated into technical design, parallels ideas found in Marcuse, although for the latter these ideas are identified at the macro-level instead of Latour's micro-level perspective (Feenberg 1999: 83-84; Feenberg 2005: 104). Working from these similarities, Feenberg locates the meeting point of Marcuse and empirical theories of technology at the level of design. He uses the environmentalism as an example of this synthesis: 'Such fundamental social imperatives as environmental protection are beginning to shape an alternative technological rationality in Marcuse's sense. These imperatives are the technological a priori embodied in the devices and systems that emerge from the culture and reinforce its basic values.' (Feenberg 2005: 105; see also Feenberg 1995b: 19-40) For Feenberg, empirical social theories of technology reveal that

technical design is malleable and can meet a number of different social imperatives. Following Marcuse, if we wish to transform the social world, this transformation will take place at the level of technical design.

Feenberg's synthesis is premised on the idea that both Marcuse and empirical theorists of technology understand technology at different levels of abstraction.[3] Debating the legitimacy of these traditions is fruitless. The task of the philosopher of technology is not to waste time arguing for the validity of one social theory of technology over another, but rather to 'relate levels of abstraction' (Feenberg 2005, p.104). Feenberg accomplishes this by identifying how macro-level ideologies can be translated through micro-level design decisions. Feenberg's critical theory of technology is convincing and an important framework through which progressive sociotechnical change can be theorized. Where Feenberg's synthesis occurs at the level of design, I want to suggest a synthesis that aims towards macro-level theorizing.

One of Marcuse's more problematic ideas is his totalizing view of technology. This idea develops out of his understanding of philosophical concepts. A concept, for Marcuse, is 'taken to designate the mental representation of something that is understood, comprehended, known as the result of a process of reflection…objects of thought, and as such, their content and meaning are identical with and yet different from the real objects of immediate experience' (Marcuse 1964: 105). Employing this definition points toward thinking about technological society in its entirety, as something that can be experienced both as a series of isolated phenomena and as something that is greater than the sum of these phenomena. In ODM, this is advanced industrial society, an undifferentiated whole that includes the machinery of production, the objects that are produced, the techniques of production, and the values, expectations, and behaviors that legitimate and reproduce this society: 'when technics becomes the universal form of material production, it circumscribes an entire culture; it projects a historical totality - a world' (Marcuse 1964: 154).

Can advanced industrial society, or any other similar interpretation of the relationship between the social and the technical, be reconciled with empirical theories of technology? For both proponents and critics of empirical theories of technology the answer seems to be no. For proponents, to speak of technological society in the way Marcuse does is to essentialize technology and fail to see the significant differences that make objects unique. For critics of the empirical approach, research that is case-study oriented results in an inability to recognize patterns that transcend discrete case studies and so technical objects end up being artificially locked in a time and a place, disconnected from the whole of technological society (Radder 1992). Overcoming these obstacles requires developing an empirical theory that can account for the similarities that tie our sociotechnical world together instead of describing the differences of a world of discrete and seemingly disconnected technical objects that are only tangentially related to each other. An example can help demonstrate how I think this can be accomplished. Upon entering my office each morning, I have already participated in dozens of interactions mediated by digital communication media, including sending text messages, checking email, buying coffee, using a transit pass, using a key card to enter my office, being recorded on surveillance cameras in public spaces, and so on. A long series of activities materialized through different objects and actions where I produce and receive large amounts of digital information, and I haven't even begun my workday yet. From this example, dozens of objects can be identified and reverse-engineered to reveal their inherent sociotechnical contingency. The key card reader that lets me enter my office, for example, is a complex system of knowledge, objects, and social norms materialized in a small device. Yet, there is something else going on here that transcends any particular object or even the individual involved. I do not experience these interactions as discrete activities; rather, each of these actions, and the objects and knowledge that they draw upon, are experienced and can be reflected upon as an undifferentiated whole within which each of these distinct objects and actions makes sense.

This recognition of the similarities that tie together the sociotechnical world and our place in it hints at the idea that technical objects are not designed in isolation from each other; rather, they are designed under a cultural-political horizon that legitimates a range of choices (Feenberg 1999: 87). Using the insights developed from empirical case studies it is possible to better reveal the particular cultural-political horizon within which technical design and experience occurs, thus directing empirical research towards the identification of the similarities that can reveal the horizon within which our sociotechnical world is produced and makes sense. Accounting for these similarities requires moving from case-studies to concepts (in the sense Marcuse uses the word). These concepts, in turn, draw out similarities that persist across case-studies, contributing to an articulation of the horizon within which designs are selected and everyday experience occurs. This last point requires a clarification of a difference between Marcuse's critical philosophy of technology and the synthesis I am proposing. We cannot reduce the meaning of technology to the extremes of capitalism as Marcuse does. Technological society is not a battlefield between control and domination and freedom and liberation. I agree with Marcuse that we need to consider technological society in its totality, but the characteristics of this totality are more complex and varied than the simplistic freedom/domination dichotomy that Marcuse theorized.

Following the example of ODM, the synthesis I suggest is meant to be a non-instrumental understanding of technological society that draws upon a type of philosophical reflection that is becoming rare in contemporary discussions and debates about technology. Marcuse's dedication to insights derived from reflection is a reminder that philosophical studies of technology do not need to move at the pace of modern technology. Writing and researching at a pace that attempts to 'keep up' with incessant technological innovation comes at the cost of an inability to comprehend technological society in its totality. When every new device, application, and activity is fascinating, there is neither the time nor the perspective to allow for contemplative thought. This is a problem of concepts. Focusing on the isolated activities and objects that make up contemporary technological society necessitates a strategy where one is always trying to hit a moving target. Identifying those aspects and characteristics that can be identified as part of a historical continuum, or attempting to conceptualize the similarities that tie technological society together, enables different kinds of insights that transcend any one particular technical object. Sustained philosophical reflection on contemporary technological society in its totality allows for the development of critical concepts that could transcend ways of knowing generated and privileged by this society and this, after all, was Marcuse's aim in ODM: the recovery of critical thought.

Conclusion

In many ways, ODM can be seen as a remnant of philosophical traditions that were waning even in the year it was published. Marcuse writes with an unabashed utopianism that seems optimistically naïve in an intellectual climate where concepts, belief systems, and accepted truths are taken to be constructed illusions. But his utopianism is intertwined with a fatalism and pessimism that is also anachronistic. A term like totalitarianism is thrown around too loosely to describe a social world that seems closer to science fiction, and the drastic descriptions of capitalist society are, at times, so extreme they are tough to take seriously. ODM shares a spirit of defeat with the post-war writings of George Orwell (b. 1903), Aldous Huxley (b. 1894), and Martin Heidegger (b. 1889), all of whom can be read as arguing that we had a chance to create a better world but we missed it, perhaps intentionally, and tragically this opportunity is lost forever. Add to this Marcuse's attitudes towards human agency and it is easy to see why readers influenced by important works in cultural theory and empirical social theory find ODM deeply problematic.

Despite these criticisms, only lazy writers reduce a book as prodigious as ODM to its faults. In this paper I have argued that after fifty years the legacy of ODM is the critical philosophy of technology that Marcuse devel-

oped. Although much has changed since 1964, socially, politically, and perhaps most significantly technologically, Marcuse's philosophy of technology can still be used to describe technological modernity. At a basic level, capitalism is the determining influence over the characteristics and direction of contemporary technological society. Planned obsolescence is rational and the material infrastructure we experience as 'new' digital media is manufactured within an accelerated context of Taylorism and Fordism that is only legal outside of the West. At a personal level, most of us continue to be condemned to unfulfilling jobs in order to purchase material goods that we don't need. Yet, as Marcuse argued fifty years ago, there is widespread identification with this technological society regardless of its terrible consequences; one-dimensional thought persists. To paraphrase Marcuse, the intellectual and emotional refusal to 'go along' with digital media appears neurotic and impotent (Marcuse 1964: p.9). To be critical, or even suspicious of digital media, as novelists Jonathan Franzen (*The Kraus Project*) and Dave Eggers (*The Circle*) have done recently, is to be denounced for questioning the logic of progress and condemned as an enemy of friendship, connectivity, knowledge, and sharing (as defined by software corporations).

Yet, as I have described in this paper, the relevancy of ODM is not solely that it provides a compelling critique of technology; Marcuse's critical philosophy holds out hope that things can be different. The synthesis between critical philosophy and empirical philosophy that I have described in this paper is intended to better comprehend technological modernity in its current iteration. Marcuse's ideas push us toward the utilization of empirical research to trace the connections that conceptually bind technologies together. These concepts can be used critically, as Marcuse uses them, to describe the world as it is in light of what it could be. It is a compelling endeavor for social theorists of technology to attempt to define and describe the similarities that tie modernity together alongside empirical research. Identifying and describing the concepts that can be used to make sense of technological modernity is a difficult task, but one that is necessary if we are to develop a strategy for progressive sociotechnical change. The first step towards a technology that realizes different values and needs is talking about the values and needs materialized in technology today.

Darryl Cressman is a lecturer in the philosophy of technology in the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences at Maastricht University. He received his PhD from the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. He has published books, chapters and articles on media theory, media history, and the philosophy of technology.

References

Bijker, W., Hughes, T.P. & Pinch, T. (1987) *The Social Construction of Technological Systems.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

Bijker, W. & Law, J. (1992) *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Brey, P. (2010). 'Philosophy of Technology After the Empirical Turn.' In: *Techne: Research in Philosophy and Technology* 14/1: 36-48.

Callon, M. & Latour, B. (1981) 'Unscrewing the Big Leviathan: How Actors Macro-Structure Reality and How Sociologists Help Them Do So.' In: K. Knorr-Cetina & A.V. Cicourel (eds.) *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology: Toward an Integration of Micro- and Macro-Sociologies*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul: 277-303.

Feenberg, A. (1995a) 'Marcuse or Habermas: Two Critiques of Technology.' In: *Inquiry* 39: 45-70.

Feenberg, A. (1995b) *Alternative Modernity: The Technical Turn in Philosophy and Social Theory*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Feenberg, A. (1999) *Questioning Technology* New York: Routledge.

Feenberg, A. (2002) *Transforming Technology* New York: Oxford University Press.

Feenberg, A. (2005) *Heidegger and Marcuse: The Catastrophe and Redemption of History*. New York & London: Routledge.

Habermas, J. (1972) 'Science and Technology as Ideology' In: *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science and Politics*. Boston: Beacon Press: 81-123.

Heidegger, M. (1977 [1954]) 'The Question Concerning Technology' In: D.F. Krell (ed.) *Basic Writings* New York: Harper: 307-343.

Horkheimer, M (1994) *Critique of Instrumental Reason*. New York: Continuum.

Kellner, D. (1984) *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kellner, D (1998) 'Technology, War and Fascism: Marcuse in the 1940s.' In: Kellner (ed.) *Technology, War and Fascism: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Vol.1*. London & New York: Routledge: 1-39.

Latour, B. (1987) *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Law, J. (1992) 'Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy, and Heterogeneity.' In: *Systems Practice* 5(4): 379-393.

Mackenzie, D. (1996) 'Marx and the Machine.' In: *Knowing Machines: Essays on Technological Change*. Cambridge: MIT Press: 23-49.

MacKenzie, D. & Wajcman, J. (1999) *The Social Shaping of Technology,* (2nd Edition) Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Marcuse, H. (1964) *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Marcuse, H. (1978) 'Theory and Politics: A Discussion with Herbert Marcuse, Jurgen Habermas, Heinz Lubasz and Telman Spengler.' *Telos* 38: 124-153.

Marcuse, H. (2007 [1960]) 'A Note on the Dialectic.' In: Feenberg and Leiss (eds.) *The Essential Marcuse: Selected Writings of Philosopher and Social Critic Herbert Marcuse*. Boston: Beacon Press: 63-72.

Marcuse, H. (2007 [1965]) 'Remarks on a Redefinition of Culture.' In: Feenberg and Leiss (eds.) *The Essential Marcuse: Selected Writings of Philosopher and Social Critic Herbert Marcuse*. Boston: Beacon Press: 13-32.

Marx, K. (1867 [1954]) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol.1*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

Misa, T (1988) 'How Machines Make History, and How Historians (and Others) Help Them to Do So.' In: *Science, Technology and Human Values* 13, 3/4: 308-311.

Oudershoorn, N. & Pinch, T. (2003) *How Users Matter: The Co-Construction of Technology*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Misa, T., Brey, P. & Feenberg, A. (2003) *Modernity & Technology*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Radder, Hans. (1992) 'Normative Reflexions on Constructivist Approaches to Science and Technology.' In: *Social Studies of Science* 22.1: 141-173.

Smith, M. R. & Marx, L. (1994) *Does Technology Drive History? The Dilemma of Technological Determinism*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Verbeek, P.P. (2005) *What Things do: Philosophical Reflections on Technology, Agency, and Design*. College Station: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Wyatt, S. (2008) 'Technological Determinism is Dead; Long Live Technological Determinism.' In: Hackett et. al. (eds.) *The Handbook for Science and Technology Studies.* Cambridge: MIT Press: 165-181.

[1] Determinism consists of two complementary aspects. Technological development is autonomous from social, economic, or other contextual influences and second, technology determines social change (Misa 1988; Smith & Marx 1994; Wyatt 2008). Essentialism posits that technology, as a totality, is oriented towards particular social ends, like efficiency or functionalism. A consequence of essentialism is the artificial separation of the social from the technical on the basis of fundamental differences between these two different spheres (Feenberg 1999).

[2] Opposition to this idea was the basis of Habermas's critique of Marcuse's dialectical philosophy of science and technology; see Habermas (1972). For more on the debate between Marcuse and Habermas, see Feenberg (1995a).

[3] It would be incorrect to somehow claim that these micro-level descriptions are any more or less concrete or abstract than the philosophical insights of Marcuse, a point that has been repeatedly demonstrated through the philosophical tradition of phenomenology familiar from Husserl and Heidegger who draw out the conceptual *a priori* that bestows meaning on empirical facts. Or, as Marcuse writes (against the logical positivists), for those working within the empirical tradition 'the range of judgment is confined within a context of facts which excludes judging the context in which the facts are made' (Marcuse 1964: 115-116).

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons License (Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0). See http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/nl/deed.en for more information.

Krisis

Journal for contemporary philosophy

HOW TO DO THINGS WITH KNOWLEDGE: AN INTERVIEW WITH SHEILA JASANOFF

WILLEMINE WILLEMS

Krisis 2014, Issue 2
www.krisis.eu

Sheila Jasanoff, Pforzheimer Professor of Science and Technology Studies at Harvard Kennedy School, is one of the most original, influential and productive researchers currently working in the field of STS. Jasanoff's work starts from the constructivist view that knowledge is situated in social and/or political contexts, and that researching the practices that define those contexts is crucial for understanding the production of knowledge, science and technology. However, reflecting her training in law and policy, she shows that the reverse is true as well. Her detailed research on topics as diverse as biotechnology, the British BSE crisis and the Bhopal disaster demonstrates that in our contemporary 'knowledge societies' the meanings of democracy, ethics, law and accountability are defined in part by *knowledge* practices. If we want to understand these meanings fully, we need to investigate not only the social and political, but also the 'knowledge contexts' in which these concepts play out.

Jasanoff's reversal of the familiar directions in STS research parallels to some extent the study of scientific controversies that became popular among European STS scholars in the 1980s. In order to gain access to knowledge practices that otherwise stay hidden, researchers such as Harry Collins (1985), Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer (1985) studied debates between scientists. As Thomas Kuhn (1970) famously argued in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* these debates teach us much about the logic of science, even though this logic might be a product of its time and situated in a particular context. In her early works, *Controlling Chemicals* (co-authored, 1985), *The Fifth Branch* (1990) and *Science at the Bar* (1995), Jasanoff by contrast focuses her research on practices of regulatory policy-making and law, where controversies often display an epistemic dimension. *The Fifth Branch* examines the legitimating work of scientific advisory committees, whose findings are frequently contested but which are indispensable for policy-makers who are responsible for technical decisions. In *Science at the Bar* the 'turbulent confrontations' between science and law in the courtroom are central. Both books scrutinize a "new" domain of social action, showing how, outside the context of the laboratory or the clinic familiar to most STS researchers, controversies involving science are also intimately linked to the production of social norms.

Among the many books and articles that Jasanoff has written and/or edited, the volume *States of Knowledge* (2004c) is a key source for understanding how her oeuvre can be seen as a coherent whole. The book consists of thirteen chapters written by established social scientists from fields such as political theory, sociology and anthropology, each addressing an issue that lies at the interface of science and social order. The stories described in these chapters take place against the background of modern society's sweeping efforts to rationalize the organization of political, societal and juridical practices. But like Bruno Latour's stories in *We Have Never Been Modern,* the chapters in *States of Knowledge* read almost like Greek tragedies. However hard we try to separate politics from science, facts from values, and knowledge from the world itself, that project of modernity is bound to fail. The world that Jasanoff and her co-authors depict is in this respect similar to the one inhabited by Latour's 'proliferating hybrids' (Latour 1993).

But the differences are crucial and profound. In the introduction and first chapter of the book Jasanoff frames the issues by means of the 'idiom of co-production', which rests on the premise that we cannot fundamentally distinguish 'the ways in which we know and represent the world (both nature and society)' from 'the ways in which we choose to live in it' (Jasanoff 2004c: 2). Importantly, then, the two sides of the modern distinction, nature and politics, are not demarcated *a priori*, but are 'co-produced' in the effort to secure order: the same processes by which we epistemically represent and organize the world also produce the social and political worlds we wish to inhabit.

Although the widely-used idiom of co-production was not introduced solely by Jasanoff, it is fair to say that she is its 'central impresario' (Winickoff 2012). She includes in her horizon of research the strand of co-production that is grounded in the 'epistemologically oriented Edinburgh School of Sociology of Knowledge' (i.e. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer (2004b: 28)). Instead of focusing exclusively on the emergence and stabilization of what Latour calls the modern constitution, her 'interactional co-production' looks at 'knowledge conflicts within worlds that have already been demarcated into the natural and the social' (2004b). For Jasanoff, it is not the purification of nature and society that is the key constitutional move of modernity. Rather, it is the continual production and reproduction of epistemic, material and normative hybrids that are constitutive of worlds that make sense and hold together.

In order to clarify this distinction, let us briefly look at the example of Dolly, the Scottish sheep that was cloned in 1996. Both Latour and Jasanoff would argue against the understanding of such an artefact of technological intervention as either a neutral instrument or an event that will determine our future. Nevertheless, their analyses would differ. Latour would focus on the ontological aspects: making visible the actor network that stabilizes Dolly as a technoscientific object, separating it from Dolly as an object of political or ethical deliberation. Jasanoff, on the other hand, would emphasize precisely those latter dimensions, using the normative discourses on Dolly as a vehicle for exploring why particular sociotechnical constellations take the forms they do. From this perspective, the birth of Dolly is a disruptive event that revealed a range of already existing frames within which social actors think and act. Focusing on the effects of such transformative events can bring more clearly into view salient differences between the political cultures of different countries and societies.

A second unifying theme in Jasanoff's oeuvre is public reason. What is it that 'societies do in practice, when they claim to be reasoning in public interest?' Or: 'how do democratic governments construct public reason' (2012). Different societies have differing political cultures reflected in specific modes of public knowing. Governmental officials and citizens of one country tend to frame technoscientific issues differently from citizens and officials of another. Questions such as what or who should be held accountable after a technoscientific disaster or what constitutes responsible political behavior will be answered differently depending on the country of concern. These differing answers are linked to what Jasanoff calls 'civic epistemologies': 'institutionalized practices by which members of a given society test and deploy knowledge claims used as a basis for making collective decisions' (2005: 255). Convictions that are part of civic epistemologies manifest themselves in specific moments of controversy, as well as of emergence, stabilization and cross-boundary transport. Such moments are especially interesting, because it is in them that the characteristics of a nation's civic epistemology and its modes of public reasoning come into view.

One of the reasons why Jasanoff is inspiring to many scholars is that she is strongly committed not only to describing and explaining issues on the interface of science and society, but also to a more normative agenda. Jasanoff's eye is directed to the moments in which new orders emerge or when existing orders clash. These moments, when everything is in flux, are especially suitable for formulating critique and 'setting the stage for future development' (2004a: 278). In the interview, Jasanoff talks about the different ways in which Science and Technology Studies in general, and her work in particular, not only describe the world, but can also help change practices in the political as well as the scientific domain. Moving from one example to another, she explains the possibilities and limitations of her field to influence or improve the world that is a significant object of her studies.

One of the important claims in your work is that contemporary society is a knowledge society. Do you think contemporary politicians know enough about the practice of science to function well as politicians in these 'knowledge societies'?

That politicians may not know science, that is really not the point. We can expect that politicians should have a clearer understanding of the differences between an exact representation of nature and the kinds of imperfect representations that must be relied on when exact replicas are not available. They should understand that there is no 'truth to nature' in a strict sense. It is judgment all the way down. But which judgments should be trusted more than others? And what are the standard types of errors that creep into expert assessments? That is the kind of understanding that Science and Technology Studies can generalize about and that can be communicated to policy-makers. This is not only about the organization of science but also about the interpretation and uptake of science. I think that Science and Technology Studies does have many things to say about the organization of scientific activity, but it also has crucial things to say about the interpretation of knowledge, about the circulation of knowledge and about the uptake and use of knowledge. It is important for a literate society to understand something about the place of science in society, and also for politicians and policy-makers, because they are representing the rest of society.

From reading your work it seems that for an STS scholar your aims are considerably normative. Do you think the insights of Science and Technology Studies could be informative for the practice of science?

Unlike Philosophy of Science, which has sometimes claimed that it can inform and improve the practices of science, I do not make that claim about Science and Technology Studies. I do think that the position of science in society would be improved if everybody, including scientists, understood some of the basic findings of Science and Technology Studies. For instance, when the Hubble telescope was launched, the initial pictures that were sent back showed that the lens had been manufactured wrong. The pictures were blurry. When you investigate what exactly was the matter with the production of the Hubble telescope, you find that it was a very trivial error, but an error of perfect theory bumping up against imperfect practice of the sort that STS scholars are very familiar with. In order to direct a laser-light beam in a particular way, the lens makers had to use a non-reflecting film in which there was just one pinpoint through which the light could pass. But at that point some of the film had broken away, so the light actually reflected back from the wrong point and produced a distortion in the lens. So this multibillion-dollar exercise produced a lens that was a little off-centred.

Fortunately the Hubble engineers were able to correct it using highly sophisticated technology. I am not sure if knowing more Science and Technology Studies would have kept that kind of error from happening; I do think STS-trained engineers might have looked a little more carefully when tests of the lens produced inconsistent results. Science and Technology Studies is not a predictive science, but it might attune you to the moments at which you have to pay particular attention. When you are using a new instrument or process for instance, or when you are engaged in an interface activity, in which you are moving from the theoretical physics of light into the material properties of the equivalent of photographic film. Any STS scholar would tell you that at those kinds of moments an error can creep in through the messiness of practice. Interface problems can arise at many points in a technological system. Maybe it would be useful for managers of large technological systems just to be more aware of those kinds of situations.

Once you understand the limitations of all knowledge-production systems, then it makes you more humble about the kinds of things that are claimed [by scientists]. I think some of what has been said in Science and Technology Studies has actually seeped into people's consciousness. When you talk about models, for instance, there is willingness, among modellers at least, to admit that these are not exact representations of the real world. They are representations of a simplified version of the real

world. But I think outside of modelling communities that kind of subtlety is not always very well understood.

More generally, in my work on co-production I explicitly address the connections between description, analysis and criticism. I think that for any social-science field, all of those aims are necessary. You need to have good descriptions to get anywhere. You need data, but you also need some form of critical analytic apparatus to make sense of what you are describing. In that sense prescription comes with the territory of STS. You don't have to bifurcate the field by saying: 'Now, I am doing description, and now I am doing the prescription that comes from it'. I've always argued that built into the very project of STS is a critical perspective. In the same way that philosophers believe observation is theory-laden, I would say from my point of view, that observation is normativity-laden, because it always presumes answers to the question why are we observing those things, in what ways and for what purpose. This is in effect the Jasanoffian law. It is an explicit theme of mine; it is not a claim that STS scholars make in general.

In one of your essays in the Public Reason *collection you relate the question of whether and how much societies can learn due to their underlying civic epistemologies (Jasanoff: 2005). Do you think political theory is focused too much on change and too little on stability?*

In that article on technological disasters, but also in other places, I ask what big breakdowns can teach us about the way things hold together, that is, about the constitution of modernity. Stability and change are two faces of the same coin, of the same enterprise. Controversy studies have had a lot of play in Science and Technology Studies as a methodological device. If you were an outsider to Science and Technology Studies and you asked 'does the field have any methods?' the answer might be, 'Yes, we use standard social-science methods like participant observation.' But you might also say that we have specific methods like lab studies and controversy studies. But we also have what I might call 'stabilization studies'. All the STS work on standardization, for instance, can be read as a contribution not only to the question 'how did a contingent claim become a fact?' but also 'how did it last, why did it endure?' STS importantly addresses the temporality question: 'Why do things last over time? When does it become part of culture?' Anthropologists often say that culture is not a stable thing. Nevertheless there is stability in social systems, and I think that Science and Technology Studies can and does contribute to answering questions about how properties of a culture get handed on across generations. How micro-practices become macro-institutions and so on.

I would not say that social and political theories do not pay enough attention to continuity or do not pay enough attention to the dynamics of change. But the dynamics of change itself has more than one face. It is partly about why things do not change. What is the inertia in systems all about? It is particularly interesting for studying sciences and technologies because these are represented as continually changing. If that is so, why is the rest of the social order not changing? That is a theoretically interesting question. Scientists always want to talk about the other institutions lagging behind, as if only science progresses. In some of my work - as you may know- I criticize this idea of the lag, in particular the law lag. But in that piece you mentioned I was in a sense tackling both instability and stability at the same time. At moments of extreme disorder, people wonder: 'Is our government really capable of doing the things that we entrust the government with doing?' I was suggesting that even in those moments of radical disorder you actually end up uncovering what gives a system stability over time, and I found part of the explanation in my other work on civic epistemologies.

In the above-mentioned article you relate civic epistemology to questions of causality or responsibility. Do you think that sometimes blaming is unproductive for learning processes in times of disaster?

My interest in the article was to make the point that in order to get a socially robust answer to the question 'what went wrong and who is to blame?' you have to shut out some pieces of the causal puzzle and act as if

those things do not matter. The easiest case to understand in this respect is the British BSE crisis. In this case study I said that British political culture takes pains to prevent individuals from being blamed for what went wrong, because in the British state it is important to maintain the legitimacy of the virtuous public servant. This is a well-established feature of the way that the British government is constructed. It is not a highly legalistic system, so governmental virtue is not secured by saying, 'You shall follow the Constitution and the laws'. That might be more of a German approach. Instead in Britain public servants have to demonstrate their ability to handle public affairs responsibly. The system depends on trust, and so it produces a crisis if any of the people who are carefully trained and selected to look after the public interest suddenly fail to live up to the public's trust. It is not surprising, against that backdrop, that inquiries seem to reframe the problems to some extent as problems of carelessness or problems of honest empirical error, but not as failures of virtue. Criticizing the public servant for having failed in virtue would really pull away one of the fundamental beliefs of the British system - that it is possible to train public servants who will be virtuous in the name of the people.

So I was articulating ways in which non-learning happens. Even the most overwhelming event is interpreted in the light of particular traditions of interpretation. These allow you to draw certain conclusions and make it hard to draw other ones because they would be too destabilizing. Learning is imperfect because cultural tendencies, such as civic epistemologies, place outer limits on the degree of self-reflection that an institution is capable of achieving.

Can awareness of a country's civic epistemology be of help for democratizing the public involvement in science?

Civic epistemology for me is operating in a different place [than democratizing public involvement of science]. It is part of my effort to theorize political culture. This is a concept that has completely fallen out of regular analysis in political science. I think Science and Technology Studies can do a lot to animate it. For me political culture is a very important component of how people know things collectively, as part of a political system. In turn, the concept of civic epistemology helps me to understand fairly important divergences that I see across political cultures. So for instance why is there far more contestation over scientific claims as foundations for public policy in America than anywhere else? Why is there the least amount of such contestation in Germany? The economist's answer might be: 'Because the public has no preference for it. They do not create a demand for it.' But why do publics have some preferences and not others?

The specific civic epistemology of a country offers an answer to that set of questions. A simple way to state the point is that, out of all the possible styles of producing and debating evidence for public policy in a nation state or in any stable political community, some styles are preferred, institutionally cultivated, performed and maintained. That is what I call civic epistemology. And it is worth studying those styles. This is not a claim that civic etymologies are unchanging. It is not a claim that civic epistemologies are the one and only thing that is alive in a culture. It is about the value of understanding the institutionalized preferences for styles of evidence and argumentation that are sustained in a durable political culture.

You ask if knowing this would help for organizing more democratic procedures of public involvement in science. I would say not necessarily. When you are organizing a public engagement process, you are operating most of the time with tacit knowledge of your culture's civic epistemologies. My work, the work of the social theorist, is to make explicit what is implicit. It is an open question whether, once you recognize that, you choose to do things in a different way or not. I get to my theoretical positions by seeing how people are behaving and generalizing from those observations.

Once you make the tacit theories explicit, it is a separate and interesting question whether people will change their ways in consequence. It is not possible to change long-held collective assumptions and practices all that easily. But if people were aware that civic epistemologies exist and matter, then they might not go around using universalizing terms like 'evidence-

based policy' that easily. What counts as evidence in public reasoning is a cultural product. It depends on national civic epistemologies. The term 'evidence-based policy' implies that evidence is a-cultural or transcultural. If you are reflexively aware how the processes of collective knowing work in your community, or in your country, maybe you can start tinkering to see what alternative processes are possible, and then you can try to borrow from other systems. But such borrowing does not always work.

One of the illustrative cases I talk about concerns America's observation in the 1980s that European consensual processes produce less contested evidence for policy. American regulatory agencies therefore began to experiment with European-style negotiation. It became enough of a practice to get its own little abbreviation. It is 'regulatory negotiation' and people called it 'reg neg'. So 'reg neg' became a preferred institutional practice for a while until it became obvious that actors participated in regulatory negotiation but then they fought the results anyway. So the American style of contested knowledge production resurfaced and it did not matter that 'reg neg' had been layered on top of it. It is a nice little example of how civic epistemology will come back in play at the end of the day.

Being aware of a political culture's prevailing civic epistemologies is not democratizing in and of itself, because it does not tell us whose voices have been marginalized or silenced. Again, there may be a more or less democratic way to build knowledge on a certain issue, but that has nothing to do with whether the issue itself was framed democratically in the first place. You know, if most people in a society are worried about poverty, and the decision-makers keep on talking about climate change, then they are not even in the same ball park as their fellow citizens. If you say: 'Don't talk to me about poverty until we first address climate change', that is politically not democratic because you are telling people to alter their priorities. If you say, 'Okay, I will talk about poverty but only as a consequence of climate change, as an issue about climate refugees or displacement and poverty', then people still may reasonably say: 'I don't want to go through the eye of the needle of climate change before I get to discuss my issue, which is poverty'. This is the sort of democratization that I address in a recent article.[1] It is about why and when we need to delegate the framing of public knowledge problems down to citizens and not try to establish the frames at a centralized, supranational or universal level.

Do you think the field of Science and Technology Studies has influenced the field of Philosophy of Science?

Thus far it is much easier to say how Science and Technology Studies, as a relatively new field, has borrowed ideas from existing disciplines. Those disciplines have not been particularly quick to take theoretical ideas from Science and Technology Studies on board. This is partly because disciplinary theories are tied to the kinds of questions that people are used to asking and the discourses in which they are asking them. So it is going to take a while before Philosophy, an ancient and well-formed discipline, decides that its questions could be enriched by History and Sociology of Science and Science and Technology Studies. In essence, these are diffusion problems. I don't have a grand theory of disciplinary diffusion, but I have observed that my work diffuses much more easily into other relatively new fields of study, and less easily into the more self-contained fields that have built their own high social and disciplinary walls around them. It is not necessary for philosophers to go out and listen to STS scholars. It is almost necessary for STS scholars to go out and listen to other disciplines, including Philosophy.

I have sometimes noticed that in the Netherlands, philosophers who have close ties with Science and Technology Studies are not considered real philosophers. Why do you think that is the case?

I think that kind of questioning can actually be quite useful if one does not allow oneself to get annoyed by it. When somebody tells you that 'what you are doing is not such and such', you can be attentive to it as a piece of mini-fieldwork. You can immediately recognize what is happening as boundary work. In turn, recognizing that something is boundary work is a starting point for asking 'why this boundary?' First of all, what

does it mean to the person drawing the boundary and what are the stakes in creating and upholding that boundary? And how can you bridge the boundary and overcome it? One has to learn to be charitable enough to say, okay, *you* might be trying to keep *me* out, but you are also showing me that there is something here that I need to overcome to make my own knowledge travel further. And then it almost becomes an exercise in political epistemology. It reveals the politics underlying the competing epistemological position. In that way, one can actually tackle and deal with what at first looks like an alien perspective in a productive, proactive way.

Willemine Willems is as a PhD student at Maastricht University. Her interdisciplinary research focuses on innovative healthcare practices combining methodologies from empirical ethics and behavioral economy.

References

Collins, H. (1985) *Changing Order. Replication and Induction in Scientific Practice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jasanoff, S. (1990) *The Fifth Branch. Science advisers as policy makers*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.

Jasanoff, S. (1995) *Science at the Bar. Law, science and technology in America*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.

Jasanoff, S. (2004a) 'Afterword.' In: S. Jasanoff (ed.) *States of Knowledge. The co-production of science and social order.* London: Routledge.

Jasanoff, S. (2004b) 'Ordering knowledge, ordering society.' In: S. Jasanoff (ed.) *States of Knowledge. The co-production of science and social order*. London: Routledge.

Jasanoff, S. (2005) 'Restoring Reason. Causal Narratives and Political Culture.' In: *Science and Public Reason*.

Jasanoff, S. (2005) *Designs on Nature. Science and Democracy in Europe and the United States*. Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press.

Jasanoff, S. (2012) *Science and public reason*. London & New York: Routledge.

Jasanoff, S. (ed.) (2004c) *States of Knowledge. The co-production of science and social order*. London: Routledge.
Kuhn, T. (1970) *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Latour, B. (1993) *We have never been modern*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.

Shapin, S., & Schaffer, S. (1985) *Leviathan and the Air-pump*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Winickoff, D. (2012) 'Preface.' In: S. Jasanoff (ed.) *Science and Public Reason*. London & New York: Routledge: ix-xii.

[1] The article Jasanoff refers to is 'Epistemic Subsidiarity: Coexistence, Cosmopolitanism, Constitutionalism' *European Journal of Risk Regulation*, Vol. 2 (2013), 133-141.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons License (Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0). See http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/nl/deed.en for more information.

Krisis

Journal for contemporary philosophy

ANNEMARIJE HAGEN

THE EMANCIPATORY POTENTIAL OF COSMOPOLITANISM: ON SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH DISRUPTIVE PRACTICES GUIDED BY UNIVERSALISTIC ASPIRATIONS

Review of: James D. Ingram (2013) *Radical Cosmopolitics: The Ethics and Politics of Democratic Universalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 352 pp.

Krisis 2014, Issue 2
www.krisis.eu

'The question was put to him what country he was from, and Diogenes replied, "I am a citizen of the world."' Diogenes' (404-423 BC) answer expresses a cosmopolitan consciousness: the recognition that we are, or can and should be, world citizens. Cosmopolitanism, in its traditional meaning, thus expresses the fact, possibility, or imperative of a certain universality, namely of the oneness of humankind. Although invented some twenty-five hundred years ago, cosmopolitanism has had a particularly strong appeal over the last two decades; as our shrinking world has increasingly implied a qualitative change in the way and the extent to which people relate to and depend on one another across borders: the world seems to be becoming 'more global' - interconnected, interdependent, and, in this sense, unified.

However, the cosmopolitan project is highly contested and subjected to extensive criticism. As Ingram points out already in the very beginning of his book, quoting Timothy Brennan: 'If we wished to capture the essence of cosmopolitanism in a single formula, it would be this. It is a discourse of the universal that is inherently local – a locality that's always surreptitiously imperial' (7). Or, in Ingram's own words, 'all ethical and political visions that have aspired to universality have ended up betraying it. Cosmopolitanism has been intimately tied to world-spanning empires and proselytizing religions; it has been carried by a stubborn elitism that runs from its classical origins to today's globe-trotting elites; it has inspired and justified many of history's most devastating projects, from holy war through colonialism and Communism to capitalist globalization' (7).

This being stated the reader barely has time to question why Ingram has nevertheless conducted his intensive study titled *Radical Cosmopolitics*. According to Ingram it is equally clear that, despite all these disappointments and reversals, we should still persist in our universalistic aspirations, because, Ingram contends, perversions of the universal can be most effectively fought on the ground of the universal. This sums up the scope and perspective of Ingram's ambitious project: Ingram does not only carefully scrutinize the paradoxical functioning of cosmopolitanism by bringing into focus the tension between what cosmopolitanism stands for and what has been done in actual terms (part 1), but he also utilizes a method of immanent critique to rethink the concept of cosmopolitanism as a critical tool which enables the fight against these perversions, working to revitalize and embody cosmopolitanism's emancipatory and egalitarian character (part 2).

The originality of this study lies in Ingram's strong emphasis on cosmopolitanism's critical potential, stating that if cosmopolitanism always aspires to the universal, to framing and relating the world as a whole, then one way of understanding it is to envision it as a series of attempts *to challenge* and introduce difference into how we as humans relate to our contexts. The key to his thinking about universalism is to recognize it as having disruptive potential, which always functions in contextual circumstances. This means that cosmopolitanism has to prioritize political action through the applicable universal norms that it develops and articulates in local contexts, rather than to focus primarily on abstract moral principles or guidelines that somehow need to be implemented in social reality.

By rethinking cosmopolitanism as an instrument for social critique that fights exclusion and is accessible to all, Ingram recovers its emancipatory capacity. As such, his study fits seamlessly into the project of critical social theory which aims to examine obstacles posed by social arrangements, with the purpose of bringing about social change for the better[1]. By taking up this challenge for cosmopolitanism, informed by his commitment to the demand for a truer cosmopolitics, Ingrams' work is of tremendous value for the series *New Directions in Critical Theory*.

Ingram starts his critical inquiry by bringing into focus how contemporary cosmopolitanism in general is afflicted by internal tensions and contradictions (Part I). Concerned with these tensions, Ingram investigates universalism in history (Chapter 1). Following cosmopolitanism as a series of intellectual and political movements, he points out that cosmopolitanism in its universalistic ambitions always stands in some relation to the real-world institutions and tendencies that appear to be unifying the world at a given moment (Roman conquest, Christianity, colonialism or capitalism). Through this general historical outline Ingram reveals the cosmopolitan universal as a disguised particular, and shows that this hegemonic functioning persists through different forms and in different periods. This works to render these varieties of cosmopolitanism as inherently ambiguous.

In addition to this analysis of the conventional narrative of cosmopolitanism, Ingram extensively discusses Nussbaum's influential essay 'Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism'[2], published in 1994 in the *Boston Review*, indicating that cosmopolitanism can be seen as a distinctive practice that interrupts a given discursive field. Despite the fact that cosmopolitanism articulates the ideal of a universal humanity, which has the desire to abstract, generalize, and transcend, it is always contextual, defined through its juxtaposition to a given particularism or parochialism. Stating that it would not occur to anyone to advocate cosmopolitanism except in response to some narrower claim of a tribe, polis, community, or state, Ingram emphasizes its disruptive, critical character, which he considers to be most promising for rethinking cosmopolitanism in order to overcome its aforementioned inherent tensions.

However, before advocating his approach to radical cosmopolitanism in chapter 2, 'Cosmopolitics in Ethics: Tensions of the universal', Ingram further examines how the tensions present in cosmopolitanism's different historical occurrences arise when attempts are made to arrive at a universal morality articulating the good for all human beings. Ingram takes the efforts of Kant and Nussbaum as paradigmatic cases to illustrate these tensions. Whereas Kant's definition of the universal 'humanity' implies a whole system of hierarchies – reason over emotion, activity over passivity – which map onto different kinds of people in highly prejudicial ways (83), Nussbaum directly appeals to a universal human nature (what she calls 'Aristotelian essentialism'), expressing her conviction that she knows better than others what is good for them. Through an examination of these influential thinkers, Ingram shows that what appeared as a problem of the content of universalism in Kant's humanism, emerges as a problem of position in Nussbaum's: speaking on behalf of humanity assumes an asymmetrical epistemic and practical position above ordinary agents. (84)

This asymmetry problem is at the heart of discussions within critical social theory. It refers to the assumption that from their critical perspective the theorist is able to gain an understanding of what is *really* going on in social reality. The theorist recognizes socio-economic structures, hidden interests, and hegemonic power relations that take place behind agents' backs and constitutes a 'false consciousness' that causes a distortion of the ordinary agents. Therefore, the asymmetry dogma advocates a strict separation of perspectives between the critic and the ordinary agents that is being talked about - a separation that is assumed by Nussbaum as well - allowing the theorist to install himself in a position from which he has authority over the deluded agents.

Although Ingram does not elaborate in great length on this central problem of asymmetry, he does advocate that one way of avoiding the problem is to determine the good for others while insisting that all have a say. Rather than specify what the universal is, the theorist should specify what would be involved in saying what it is. By taking this route, procedural universalism emerges as an immanent correction to the problems of substantive universalism. However, this does not solve the problem of false

consciousness. Without mentioning this term, Ingram encounters this problem when discussing Habermas' discourse ethics and communicative rationality. Although Habermas' procedure is to set out the trajectory of an ongoing deliberation to be carried out by those actually affected, it is still bound to the ideal speech situation (94). This situation has a problematically indeterminate character, for it is impossible to determine what everyone everywhere would agree to under ideal conditions. However, at the same time this principle is irreducible, for in reality oppressive social arrangements and ideologies entails that people are misguided about their true needs, and instead form adapted preferences.

In response to these problems of substantial and procedural universalism, which attempt to generalize the scope of the moral-ethical concerns of cosmopolitanism, Ingram puts forward his approach of critical-democratic cosmopolitics. He argues that universal claims are always made in a specific context, and these claims should fight hidden particularisms. The pursuit of universalism then consists in an endless assault on the limits of the accepted and the thinkable.

After examining how political versions of cosmopolitanism have violated the principle of a more equal distribution of power and resources when seeking to realize it (Chapter 3), Ingram further develops the moral and political core of this critical-democratic cosmopolitics in Part 2. This second part of the book is devoted to looking in the opposite direction. This means Ingram insists that the principle of freedom/equality can be realized directly, by the affected individuals and groups themselves, when necessary against hegemonic understandings and institutionalizations of the universal. To put his approach forward, Ingram manoeuvres with admirable clarity through the bodies of thought of critical heavyweights, such as Judith Butler, Pierre Bourdieu, Hannah Arendt, Etienne Balibar and Jacques Ranciere, and as such reframes and advances contributions that have already been made in the field of cosmopolitanism.

In the fourth chapter Ingram returns to moral-ethical universalism and the problem that any universal norm or idea always turns out to be particular in its conception or application. For a solution to this problem, Ingram looks to Judith Butler's work on universalism. Butler argues that we cannot articulate the universal as such. Instead it is best advanced through the critique of false universals. From Butler Ingram takes his understanding of the universal as a dynamic of contestation, but he criticizes her approach for not articulating its normative bases - how, that is, this critique could itself be oriented by the ideal of equal freedom. However, Ingram himself does not provide a straightforwardly positive account of the concepts of freedom and equality either. Instead, for a corrective to Butler's work, he turns to Pierre Bourdieu, showing how Bourdieu's descriptions of social relations in terms of power, domination, exclusion and discrimination, by simple inversion provide him with an evaluative standard of equality: equal inclusion in social life (175).

Through the works of Butler and Bourdieu, Ingram helps us see cosmopolitanism as a process of universalization rather than as the simple application of the principle of universality (182). However, we have not yet seen how this might function as a politics. This is the theme of Chapter 5, in which Ingram attempts to show how to conceive of cosmopolitics, a politics of universalism, as a principle of democratic contestation. Again, the key is to understand universality as emerging from the bottom up through challenges to denials of universal values, first and foremost that of equal freedom. Just as Ingram argues with regard to universalism that we should give up the search for universal norms and values and should look instead to the dynamics through which norms become *more universal*, in this chapter he argues that we are better off considering the politics through which practices and institutions can become *more democratic* (188). Expressing the idea in political terms, however, requires a basic shift in the perspective of democratic theory, for which Ingram turns to the counter-tradition of political theory that dissociates democratic politics from the state and its institutions, defining it instead as a kind of action (202). Taking Arendt's insight of political action as holding something new into it, Ingram adds insights from other authors in this tradition, such as Etienne Balibar and Jacques Ranciere, to show how such political action can be understood as a vehicle of democratic transformation (223). Democracy in his understanding is an open-ended logic of transformation that seeks to realize the promise of political equality, sometimes against

the very institutions that claim to embody it. 'On this view, democratic politics can be seen as the realization of the universalistic content of modern democracy through always particular struggles, an infinitely repeatable process by which people struggle to expand their autonomy to match the scale of the forces that determine their lives' (18).

In the final chapter Ingram uses the insights developed over the course of the book to criticize some common understandings on the politics of human rights, and to show the benefits of thinking about them as a critical-democratic politics of universalization. Ingram begins by showing a paradox in the liberal conception of human rights, for it understands these rights as protection from political power, yet it can only call upon the same kind of power for their enforcement. In contrast, the deliberative conception figures human rights politics as the institutionalization of right by legal means, but does not indicate what we should do when they are not. More generally speaking, Ingram argues strongly against what he calls bad idealism - the search for the best moral arguments and normative visions, which after being invented only need to be implemented. As illustrated by the human right approaches, this bad idealism abstracts away from the status quo and its fetishism of ends is insensitive to its means which often have contrary effect.

In response, Ingram's alternative points to a radically democratic model of human rights, figured as an open-ended right to political participation activated by the rights-claimants themselves. As such, he claims to put concrete struggles at the center of human rights politics. What does this imply in a more concrete fashion? In the last few pages he makes a few suggestions, stating that we should judge the field of human rights as an *emancipatory possibility*, which is not reducible to formal institutions. He also challenges the assumption that rights can simply be imposed, arguing that rights are only secure and effective when they are the creation and possession of their bearers. We should not focus only on whether certain norms are upheld or certain institutions exist, but also on the social and political capacities - the distribution of power - that must underlie them. The lesson of a democratic perspective on human rights is that we should see them as concerned with people's ability to participate meaningfully on the direction of collective life (262).

Thus, although arguing against bad idealism, Ingram clearly does not want to defend the status quo in the name of 'reality' as has been done by the most conservative, apologetic positions in international affairs, rejecting all ambitions for global reforms. Instead, his approach strives to respond to the world as it is, while still believing in the imperative to change it (269). At this point, Ingram explicitly aligns himself with the tradition of critical theory proposing a 'realism of possibility' – a realism devoted to uncovering and opening up space for the invention of what now appears impossible. However, the question that comes to mind is who is going to uncover these opportunities and subsequently going to fight the obstacles to change? At this point, we are well aware of the paradoxical effects of cosmopolitan practices, in the sense that we know what we should not do: we should refrain from acting on what we think promotes the 'general good' or any of the other formulas that try to sum up a universal interest at the expense of input from agents who are captured in the universal interest.

But as Ingram does not argue in favor of a hands-off approach, we cannot simply put the burden of emancipatory development on the people in the weakest political position, by stating that they have to somehow formulate and defend their interests. Rather, we should do 'whatever is likely to result in and, as much as possible to itself express, the greatest possible gain in freedom and equality among all those concerned.' (272) Although this cannot always be the work of those concerned, Ingram states that we should at least be able to judge it as if it were their work and evaluate the extent to which it will put them in a position to exercise a more equal freedom in the future.

However, to argue that the critical theorist is allowed to position himself in such a way that he can speak and act on other people's behalf stands in tension with Ingram's earlier acknowledgement that claims are only secure and effective when they are the creation and possession of their bearers. What exactly is our role as radical cosmopolitanists who focus on ac-

tual conflict and concrete resistance against exclusion and marginalization? What are the means to support this struggle, which are a possibility for – although not necessary lead to – change towards inclusion and freedom? How should we be involved with the ones concerned with these struggles? Ingram does not say much about this, but stresses that our actions must at least lead to a position of more equal freedom in the future. However, this suggestion might not be sufficient to support his radical project.

First of all, it is not clear how we can know that our actions have indeed established, or will establish, more equal freedom. Although Ingram attempts to formulate normative foundations for his emancipatory project, his notions of freedom and equality, as well as equal freedom, remain rather abstract. Considering his well-argued objection against formulating a universal good once and for all, he should indeed be careful in defining these normative concepts. However, given the obstinate and complex nature of our social reality it cannot be taken for granted that the contestation of specific hegemonic and exclusionary practices lead to *more* freedom, equality etc. Although this contestation aims to open up space for a transformation that now seems impossible, this by itself does not provide normative guidance for evaluating these newly constructed realities.

Secondly, to argue that the commitment to more equal freedom in the future is the condition under which the critical theorist is allowed to be a spokesperson who formulates and defends the interests for the agents involved, puts us back at the heart of the asymmetry problem. As stated by Isaiah Berlin, these emancipatory projects run the risk of making assumptions about what agents would choose if they were something they are not, or at least are not yet, even though this is in contrast to what they actually seek and choose. What should the critical theorist do when his insight about realizing more freedom is not shared by the ordinary agents? In order not to 'make free with a stick'[3], we have to take ordinary agents seriously in their self-reflective capacities, when we act as if we were in their position. However, this does not deny the fact that perverse social arrangements do often pose limitations to agents' self-understanding and prevent them to recognize and resist oppressive or exclusionary practices.

So it is one thing to emphasize the critical potential of cosmopolitics by stressing its disruptive power, but another to understand how and by whom exclusionary practices can be challenged. Following Ingram's line of thought, it is evident that these questions cannot be answered in a purely abstract manner. Rather, this is up to the difficult and uncertain judgment in close critical studies of particular circumstances. Ingram does provide some orientation for this critical task by strongly arguing for getting rid of formulating universal truths. My additional suggestion, based on the discussion with regard to the asymmetry problem, would be to stress the problematic nature of the assumption that it is always *the other* who is deluded, or the other who needs to live up to cosmopolitan ideals. This is especially important within the discussion on human rights, where liberal democracies have often (violently) intervened in non-democratic regimes. Ingram hints to this suggestion when he states that cosmopolitanism is not just a matter of installing institutions, but rather a way of realizing social and political capacities. This undermines the absolute normative power of liberal democracies, and values this institutional frame in so far as it contributes to the ability of people inside and outside the borders of the nation-state to participate meaningfully on the direction of collective life (262). This means that we should not only resist being indifferent to struggles for inclusion by people who do not share our citizenship, but we must also scrutinize and challenge our own social arrangements so as to live up to the universalistic aspirations of a truly radical cosmopolitics. Thus, Ingram's excellent work provides us with a lot to think about, and indeed also, to act upon.

Annemarije Hagen is a doctorate student at the Centre for Ethics, Social and Political Philosophy at the KU Leuven. Her current research focuses on exclusionary practices stemming from a liberal secular framework and is funded by a PhD-fellowship of Research Foundation (FWO) - Flanders.

[1] Geuss, R. (1981). *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School*. Cambridge University Press, p. 2.

[2] Nussbaum, M. (1994) 'Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism.' In: *Boston Review, 19(5).*

[3] Berlin, I. (1958) 'Two Concepts of Liberty.' In: I. Berlin (1969), *Four Essays on Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons License (Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0). See http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/nl/deed.en for more information.

Krisis

Journal for contemporary philosophy

MARIJN HOIJTINK

RISK, COMMERCE, AUTHORITY: TOWARD A CRITIQUE OF THE POLITICS OF POSSIBILITY

Review of: Amoore, L. (2013) *The Politics of Possibility. Risk and Security Beyond Probability*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Krisis 2014, Issue 2
www.krisis.eu

This book by Louise Amoore is a remarkably rich one. From the diverse worlds of risk management consulting, software design, forensics, and data visualization, Amoore examines the development of a new mode of governing that addresses emergent, uncertain, and possible futures. A central feature of 'the politics of possibility' is the increasingly close relationship between commercial opportunities and security threats, a relation that suggests that security and economic desires could be seamlessly integrated - for example, that 'biometric borders' could filter and police bad intention and the illegitimate, while also remaining open to economically viable trade and circulation (82; see also Foucault, 2007: 65). Drawing on the writings of Foucault, Agamben, Derrida, Judith Butler, and William Connolly, as well as on post- 9/11 novels and art works, Amoore analyzes the implications of such a politics for questions of authority, accountability, and critique.

Drawing out a close relationship with earlier data mining practices in the commercial domain, Amoore emphasizes that the politics of possibility could not be analyzed as a self- evident response to the events of 9/11. However, part I of the book suggests two ways in which security politics post- 9/11 have been reoriented. First, Amoore demonstrates how the very calculus of risk has changed: no longer strictly a matter of managing known or calculable risks, what comes to matter is the capacity for action on the basis of what is not (yet) known or on what could possibly happen. For example, through a reading of the testimony of the former UK prime minister Tony Blair before the Iraq Inquiry, Amoore shows how the actual presence of weapons of mass destruction became less important than suspicion about any possible impact in the future. Or, citing Blair, 'they killed 3,000 people, but if they could have killed 30,000 they would have' (24). In this context, Amoore is concerned with the particular apparatus at work in the politics of possibility. She argues that the purpose of risk assessment today is not to seek a causal relationship between items of data, but to operate on and through the relation itself. Thus, in the design of security algorithms, we find 'an ontology of association' combined with a mathematical means of calculating uncertainty: 'if *** and ***, in association with ***, then ***' (59). Here, the asterisks mark an unknown value that comes into view only through its relation with other forms of data. These efforts to make inferences across data items are necessarily speculative, Amoore elsewhere writes, for they are not about who we are, or what the data says about us, but about 'what can be imagined and inferred about who we might be - on our very proclivities and potentialities' (61).

Across the book we find several examples of domains in which the logic of association is put into force, for instance with regard to border security, forensics, and financial tracking programs. These discussions mark some of the strongest and most developed parts of the book. Moreover, they contribute to a better theoretical understanding of how government has come to evolve around life itself. Building on Foucault's 1978 *Security, Territory, Population* lectures at the Collège de France, Amoore points out that no longer being a clear demarcation of norm from deviation, the logic of association operates on the basis of a mobile norm, allowing for differential degrees of inclusion and exclusion. As she puts it, '[n]either the lightning strike norm established by the king, nor strictly the normalization of a self- governing disciplinary society, the differential curve of normality breaks subjects and objects into elemental degrees of risk such that the norm is always in a process of becoming' (65). What follows from this understanding - and this is the second element of what has come to define the politics of possibility - is that it becomes important to examine how that mobile norm is written, and by whom. Proposing a reading of Agamben's exception that is in fact 'teeming with decision, judgment, cal-

culation, and data,' this allows Amoore to shift attention to the plurality of forces that have become authorized to write the lines between normal and abnormal, safe and risky, inside and outside (46). Today, it is the private consulting companies, risk managers, and software engineers that emerge as experts in the application of the norm, yet, of them we know very little. Amoore's analysis sets out to study these private actors and the ways in which they are authorized to identify and govern exceptional circumstances.

This focus may well be motivated by dissatisfaction with some of the recent work on security that has put emphasis on the role of technology. The discussions on 'netwars' and 'virtuous war', for example, have had a tendency to depict risk- assessment systems, databases, and security algorithms in their ideal forms: as smooth and cutting- edge technologies that have the capacity to accelerate or even efface decision making (61). Skeptical of such idealized renderings of technology, this is probably also why Amoore is concerned with maintaining the notion of the decision. She argues, drawing on Derrida's writings on decision and judgment, that although the desire to act on the basis of uncertainty may seem to close off political decision, 'in fact decisions are made everywhere and all the time' (18). To reclaim those decisions - the writing of an algorithmic code, the organization of security pilot projects, stress testing - 'is to relocate the politics of an otherwise gleaming and technoscientific set of solutions'. Amoore's focus on the decision runs somewhat counter to her (loose) appropriation of the concept of the assemblage, which she uses to overcome the discourse/material dichotomy (in chapter 5) and to emphasize the contingency and instability of the constellation of forces that is at work in the politics of possibility (chapter 6). For me, following Jane Bennett's work (2005: 463) - foregrounded also by Amoore - the value of the assemblage lies in the ways in which it consciously deploys 'a distributive notion of agency', and thereby interferes 'with the project of blaming'. At the same time, as Bennett argues, the assemblage does not strictly abandon the project of identifying what Arendt called the sources of harmful effects: 'To the contrary, such a notion broadens the range of places to look for sources.' (Ibid: emphasis added).

In chapters 3 and 4 of the book Amoore is concerned with the contingent and fragile ways in which the politics of possibility crystallizes in a broad range of spaces, including the border. Here, she draws an interesting parallel between the border writing practices of the UK passenger- information units and the commercial logics of the call center, where incoming calls are selected and differentiated according to similar risk patterns and opportunities for profit. However, concrete examples of how such practices and technologies are negotiated at the border are missing from the analysis. Indeed, in the absence of more detail on these moments of contestation or reorientation of the new risk calculus, Amoore herself runs the risk of making these developments appear smoother than they are. Consider the following citation from one of her informants:

'But the idea of these systems is that they're fully automated […] every flight into your country and in all likelihood every flight out of your country or maybe even domestic flights. You're capturing the data, you're processing the data, you're assigning a risk score.' (88)

The question of how to relocate the politics of these 'fully automated' systems and technoscientific solutions becomes again relevant in chapter 6. Amoore is right to mark the difficulties of interrupting the contemporary politics of possibility. She asks, 'confronted by a technoscientific security politics that acts on the very basis of future possibilities, indifferent to whether they come to pass, how does one begin to map the "conditions of possibility" of such politics, or to show how things might be otherwise? Is the possibility of critique effaced by a political program that precisely takes possibility as its object?' (155). We could add: where do we locate politics when the responsibility to secure is dispersed across software engineers, risk- management consultants, or the algorithm itself? How can we question the collection of data if what counts is not the accuracy of the number, but the associations that can be drawn across data? And how can we critique contemporary security practices when they rewrite the benchmarks of cost- effectiveness and data protection? Indeed, such questions are particularly important in relation to a security politics that itself incorporates and capitalizes uncertainty and failure. As Linsey McGoey (2012: 8) points out, in today's security context, risk assessment can never really go wrong: if a predicted threat fails to manifest itself, this only nurtures the idea that the next crisis is near and that we need to become prepared. Similarly, when the expectations surrounding new security technologies and systems prove uncertain this only generates further investment, 'for more hope and hype are needed to remedy thwarted expectations'.

In an attempt to develop a critique of the politics of possibility Amoore turns to what Gilles Deleuze has termed 'immanent life' - 'a life of pure potentiality comprised only of "virtualities, events, singularities"' (157). For her, the question for critique becomes 'how to sustain potentiality itself, how to keep open the indeterminate, the unexpected place and the unknowable subject' (ibid). Among other things, Amoore proposes Bennett's notion of 'enchantment' as an alternative mode of imagination, one that appreciates 'the magic of future potential'. 'To be enchanted', Amoore cites Bennett, 'is to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday' Enchantment 'can propel ethics' in the sense that it maintains and creates a 'space for novelty' in the imagination of futures (168- 169). Two questions should be raised here. First, what does it mean for the border guard or the software analyst to be 'enchanted'? Put differently, how does a critique that is based on enchantment actually work in the space of the control room or at the border? Second, should our critique be based on preserving the indeterminate future, the unknown, and the uncertain, if these elements, as discussed above, are themselves seized by the politics of possibility? As Brad Evans and Julian Reid (2014) have recently claimed in their provocative analysis of the politics of resilience, should our critique not be oriented toward rescuing the very idea and possibility of security?

To a large extent, the question of how the politics of possibility can be held to account remains unanswered after reading this book. Nevertheless, Louise Amoore's *The Politics of Possibility* offers an insightful and elegant account of the emergence of a security mode that takes action in the face of what may possibly occur in the future. Further, it provides a theoretically convincing analysis of the emerging alliances between security and commerce. Such a focus is much needed in order to investigate the precise scope and effects of the commercializations that are set in motion by a security politics that is based on the possible.

Marijn Hoijtink is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at the University of Amsterdam. Her research critically analyses the convergence between security and commerce in spaces of everyday life, focusing on how industry involvement organizes new security practices and structures of governance that go beyond the public-private divide. Her work has recently been published in *Security Dialogue.*

References:

Bennett, J. (2005) 'The agency of assemblages and the North American blackout'. In: *Public Culture* 17(3), 445- 465.

Evans, B. and J. Reid (2014) *Resilient Life. The Art of Living Dangerously*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

McGoey, L. (2012) 'Strategic unknowns: towards a sociology of ignorance'. In: *Economy and Society* Vol. 41, No. 1, 1- 16.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons License (Attribution- Noncommercial 3.0). See http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by- nc/3.0/nl/deed.en for more information.

Krisis

Journal for contemporary philosophy

DANIËL DE ZEEUW

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE MASSES: THE FUTURE OF A TRUE ILLUSION

Review of Christian Borch's *The Politics of Crowds: an alternative history of sociology* (2012) and Stefan Jonsson's *A Brief History of the Masses: three revolutions* (2008).

Krisis 2014, Issue 2
www.krisis.eu

Thinking of the masses, stereotypical 19th and 20th-century images and scenes immediately come to mind: roaming crowds gathering for fascist festivals, factory floors with workers standing side to side and back to back, the great battles of the First World War, the anti-Jewish pogroms, and so on. But did masses and crowds outlive the second millennium? Or is their fate intimately tied up with its end, as the above stereotypes seem to suggest? If so, why bother to think about the masses as a concept, save for idea-historical inquiries? Is there any relevance for this vocabulary and the type of political problematic it signals, in terms of articulating the present? Or has its explanatory force subsided in the face of societal and scientific transformations? In a normative sense (pretending that we could actually influence the tectonic shifts mentioned above, a philosophically naive or rather 'idealist' assumption): is the category of the masses worthy of being saved, resuscitated, reinvigorated? And what recent societal trends are to be marked as possibly benefitting from such a re-appropriation, functioning – prospectively – as the latter's external ground of legitimation? Secondly, in a more descriptive sense, one could ask: is the general narrative of historical passage underlying and more or less assumed by these questions – namely that of the demise of the modern discourse of masses and crowds in so-called postmodernity – a correct reconstruction of the real shift of both societal and discursive formations?

Is it really that obvious that we have left behind the era of the masses? In the 21st century, urbanisation is still on the rise, globally; the scale of the organisation of industry and work continues to be massive and is still expanding; and people still flock together, in physical spaces (squares, music events, shopping-malls) and increasingly via digital media, initiating new collective modes of online conduct. This would be one way of arguing for the continuing relevance of the category of the masses (although given the emergence of the web, a set of further specifications and differentiations is clearly needed, e.g. how do we conceive co-presence in networks ontologically and epistemologically vis-à-vis classical crowd psychology). The fact that the obviousness of the narrative about the demise of the masses contradicts the reality of ongoing modernization leads us to suspect the presence of a necessary illusion – perhaps the seemingly intuitive validity of this narrative (the end of the era of masses) is dependent on a certain 'individualism' gaining ideological territory at the end of the 20th century that – arguably – fulfils a strong social function and has some basis in social reality. It is from this ideological perspective that another argument for the continuing relevance of the concept of the masses announces itself: by presenting – by means of the use of 'categories of collectivity' – a contrast and thinking against the grain of an individualism that has become hegemonic, it is able to disclose shifts and adaptations in these legitimizing discursive formations as such. Such a critical perspective is much needed, as the ontological privileging of the individual person as the basis of social relations strictly defines the limits imposed upon our self-understanding and imagination regarding the potentialities inherent to new socio-economic formations. This *political-methodological* problem can be further articulated by assigning, hypothetically, the category

of the collective to the basic socio-economic position and experience of the so-called working class, inasmuch as the category of the individual is tied to that of the bourgeois, as Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society* (1960) indeed argues when he claims that what defines proletarian culture vis-à-vis bourgeois individualism is 'the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought and intentions which proceed from this' (346).

Instead of pursuing this hypothesis any further, in the following paragraphs two recent book-length reconstructions of the various mass and crowd semantics of modernity will be discussed that also argue for the continuing relevance of the analytic frameworks at hand as well as reject the idea that the distinctively modern problematic connected to the category of the masses is superseded and its riddle solved, thus contributing to the ongoing political-methodological discussion outlined above. Whereas Christian Borch's *The Politics of Crowds: an alternative history of sociology* (2013) stays within the confines of the sociological tradition, Stefan Jonsson's *A Brief History of the Masses: three revolutions* (2012) takes both a political-ontological and art-historical take on mass discourse, especially the problematic of representation and democracy connected to it. Both however share what one could call an historically informed, discourse-analytical approach. This means that the masses are not presented as part of a relatively clear-cut representational problem (i.e. how do we conceptually capture the masses as they truly are, empirically, 'out there') and the specific form of critique that fits such an approach (such and such representation of the masses is to be rejected as it does not correspond to the actual dynamics of the social field). Instead, both trace genealogical lineages of various literary and scientific mass tropes connected to each other in a loosely coherent patching of discursive political practices ordered generally along class lines, and on the basis of a biopolitical conception of modernity.

In the introduction Borch states that 'the present book is not about real crowds and their actual behavior', whilst remaining agnostic as to their ontological status for pragmatic reasons. Besides shedding light on the concepts involved, the genealogy of mass and crowd semantics here also provides 'a doorway to studying the repeated attempts to mark out the proper and legitimate fields of sociological research' (14). Hence the subtitle: an alternative history of sociology – alternative because the history of sociology is observed not from the winners but the losers point of view: the type of sociological thought that has done away with the notion of masses and crowds, and the marginalized paradigms of various crowd semantics of the past and the present that Borch explores, respectively.

Why is it that since the 1970s the significance attributed to crowds and masses in sociological thinking is waning? Two conventional answers – that there are no longer any such crowds (realism) or that science has acquired better explanatory models (constructivism) – are deemed only partly adequate. Borch shares with Sloterdijk the rejection of the thesis that with the end of physical crowds 'the era has vanished in which the management of the masses is the central problem for modern politics and culture' (280). This rejection is substantialized by providing an extensive historical review of sociological crowd semantics as part of broader societal and political trends through a hybridization of the methodological frameworks of Michel Foucault, Niklas Luhmann and Robert K. Merton. He analyses several semantic plateaus in the nationally and historically specific contexts of late 19th-century French sociology (Ch. 1 and 2), Weimar Germany (Ch. 3) and the Chicago School in the USA (Ch. 4). The second half of the book focuses on the semantic shift from the notion of co-present crowds to dispersed, atomized masses, e.g. the conservative and *Frankfurter Schule* diagnosis of mass society and the critique of totalitarianism (Ch. 5 and 6). This part also includes the study of collective behavior in American sociology from the late 1950s onwards and the subsequent marginalization of crowd and mass semantics (Ch. 7), the remnants of mass semantics in its postmodern or 'post-political' variety by Jean Baudrillard, Peter Sloterdijk and Michel Maffesoli, as well as the resuscitation of the notion of Multitude by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (Ch. 8).

On the basis of this research, the epilogue enquires into the fate of the category of the masses in contemporary critical theory and the way it can be renewed so as to function, once again, as a critical conceptual tool with which to grasp hold of a highly complex social dynamic. He claims that classical crowd-psychological notions such as suggestion and contagion

can still be useful analytical tools for grasping contemporary social formations. Unfortunately (but understandably) this outlook itself remains a mere suggestion, in that he does not pursue the (often media-) theoretical fields in which these concepts are actually taken up in recent years: concerning both late capitalist and radical democratic appropriations and reconfigurations of mass semantics in terms of affective, viral and self-organizing networks (Parikka 2008), McLuhanite global villages and hive minds, collective intelligence, crowdfunding and sourcing, smart and flash mobs, distributed thinking, peer-to-peer production, and fashionable tropes of sociality such as sharing, collaborating, participating, and so on (Rheingold 2002; Surowiecki 2005). Nor does he consider ANT, or various Simondonian and Deleuzian social ontologies. Future studies into these realms however can and should make extensive use of Borch's rich historical overview with countless references to literature that deserves not to be forgotten, and can be useful in de-fetishizing a flourishing neoliberal, media-savvy crowd semantics suffused with what Richard Barbrook calls the Californian Ideology and in which extensive use of the tropes of sociality mentioned above is made.

Besides being a somewhat formal sociological term, the category of the masses also belongs to an affective and aesthetic register that is of great importance for the self-conception of modern society. It is as belonging to these registers that Jonsson approaches the discourse on masses and crowds, especially in relation to the aestheticizations that confer symbolic power upon the more political-philosophical notion of the sovereign People. In Hobbes' *Leviathan* for example– arguably the most famous symbolization of the modern, contract-theoretical ideal of a perfect political order – the body of the sovereign is populated by thousands of small bodies representing the People. In this body, the suggested unity faces the concrete multiplicity of the implied referent, disclosing the former's metaphoricity, i.e. its performative force: but what has only the semblance of unity breaks down in the masses of bodies in as much as the apparent facticity of this multiplicity is itself always already figural. This discrepancy – between the people represented as one and the multitudinous masses as the more-than-one – can be constructed as a difference constitutive of democracy, the motor that propels society towards ever more inclusive and egalitarian forms. But it can also function as the cornerstone of a critical attempt at unmasking democracy as an ideological fiction with which such unifying metaphors are complicit.

The people as represented on the frontispiece of Hobbes' *Leviathan* are part of a more general problematic peculiar to modernity: how to represent and legitimate the organization of the body politic? This is one of the main questions guiding Jonsson's brief history. The revolutions mentioned in the title refer, rather associatively, to the French revolution of 1789; the Belgian messianic socialism of around 1889; and the uprisings of 1968 in the West and 1989 in eastern Europe. To each an artwork corresponds: a sketch for the (never finished) *Tennis Court Oath* (1791, by Jacques-Louis David), *Christ's Entry Into Brussels in 1889* (1888, by James Ensor) and *They Loved It So Much, the Revolution* (1989, by Alfredo Jaar).

Besides an art-historical reconstruction of the masses that problematizes various ways of sociologically and artistically framing them, Jonsson also offers a contemporary discussion about the fate of democracy in our globalized world that reveals 'blind spots in contemporary discourse on politics and society' (6). And indeed, according to Jonsson, the masses are actually always *framed* in this framing, in the sense of being at the wrong end of a split constitutive of the People, in which the masses are excluded from political representation. Understanding the uneasy coupling of democracy and mechanisms of representation historically and (socio)logically requires a sensibility for 'the visible and invisible lines drawn through the social terrain that prohibit the majority from approaching the center of the picture' (6).

For Hobbes, what precedes the people as sovereign One is a multiplicity of individuals, a multitude as it resides in a state of nature. The multitude is not at all *constitutive* of the sovereign People – it is excluded from the foundational, law-making contract in whose name the people as sovereign is erected on a legitimate basis. So the founding of a state is at least partly premised on a strict separation of people and multitude. This split returns again and again in modern political philosophy as well as crowd psychology, where Hobbes' multitudes have become masses. But while the category of the masses indeed at times figures and functions discursively like a Hobbesian multitude, as one speaks of the masses as the will of

the people's 'darkening double', like Le Bon's *foule,* Hegel's *Pöbel* and Marx's *Lumpenproletariat* excluded from the social order (57), it can also take the place of the sovereign people, i.e. as the founding/founded subject of a social contract. The boundaries separating these political figures are constantly redrawn, their denotations and connotations shuffled so as to align them with specific social transformations and political demands (44).

Besides existing in opposition to the people, the masses are also delineated against the autonomous individual, itself the basic element of the people, and likewise presumed sovereign master over its own constitution. As Gustave Le Bon upheld, the de-individualized crowd is without will 'at the mercy of all external exciting causes' and so 'the slave of the impulses it receives' (Le Bon 2002: 11). Here the masses are again the very antithesis of the *sovereignty* of both the people and the individual.

By analyzing such discursive lineages taken from sociology, political philosophy and art history, Jonsson discloses significant semantic interconnections between the notion of democracy, the masses and biopower: for example the science of statistics, concerned with 'unspecified quantities of people or things' for whose protagonists the sovereign is less an abstract political figure than 'a phantom whose qualities can be discerned only through the bare fact of numbers' (9). It is also in this context that Adolphe Thiers speaks of a mass of vagabonds that one cannot locate anywhere, as Alexandre Calerre describes the masses as dis-eased by a contagious hystero-demonopathy. Such terror-ridden renderings of the masses help defuse the inner workings of the rather clean, apparently self-sufficient discourse of democratic politics when it engages in the analytics of collective processes.

In the middle part Jonsson convincingly argues against the paradigmatic reading of James Ensor's *Christ's Entry* as expressing a similar dismissal of the masses. Instead Jonsson shows that, on the level of its formal features and visual grammar, the painting is marked by the absence of the divisions through which the critique of the masses is conventionally articulated. By depicting the carnivalesque mass as a fluid aggregate without center, as something in-between collectivity and individuality, humanity and bestiality, identity and anonymity, mask and face, reason and (non)sense, Ensor 'discloses a reality anterior to those cultural and conceptual systems of representation that organize the social field into distinct entities, fixed meanings, and stable identities' (88).

What remains problematic is that throughout the book Jonsson expresses his sympathy for both Hardt and Negri's social-realist notion of multitude as well as Rancière's more constructivist leaning towards an understanding of the people and the idea of a *demos*, because these two approaches are actually incommensurable. The Spinozian absolute democracy Hardt and Negri propose should appear suspect from the perspective of a problematization of the masses in terms of their conceptual and metaphoric 'framing' as a representational dilemma, one transposed to and reiterated on the level of political ontology by Rancière and post-foundationalists such as Laclau and Mouffe. In other words, to think of institutional representation as an unnecessary distortion of the autonomous spontaneity of a multitude of productive forces contradicts the anti-positivist, dialectical sensibility for the constructed nature of objective social reality. Connected to this is Jonsson's supposition that the political form of representation that results from the great modern revolutions *always* contradicts the ideal of the *true* demos, as it institutes a group of representatives that by default excludes the represented majority. But this misses the significance of political representation as a form of symbolic power, a performative gesture. Here, it makes no sense to speak of the represented as excluded from political power, as the representatives act in their name. Insofar as mechanisms of exclusion persist, they lie not so much within the relation of representation but within this relation's relation to its outside, on whose basis it is able to constitute itself as such.

So although Jonsson successfully and productively engages the history of mass semantics with contemporary discussions in political ontology, he fails to represent the latter in a philosophically sound and well-differentiated manner. One cannot have one's cake and eat it too: either the substantial excess of the Multitude or the unbridgeable gap inscribed in every social reality that prevents it from being legitimated in terms of a positive identity.

Besides being incommensurable this double inspiration remains largely implicit and selective. The fact that he does not include a discussion of these ideas beyond mere mention, nor properly attribute his own normative evaluations to these political-philosophical frameworks undermines not only the falsifiability but the legitimacy of his critique of modern mass semantics itself, as well as the political forms of representation proposed as potential alternatives.

Needless to say, the notion of the masses – referencing that notorious entity also known as crowd, mob, plebs, horde, herd, proletariat, multitude, and so on – plays a seminal part in the philosophical and sociological discourses of modernity. In the preceding decades however, use of the term has become increasingly unfashionable and deemed obsolete. Besides the contingency that is part of unfolding academic fashions, there are several aspects to the demise of the category of the masses. In poststructuralist strands of thought it has been criticized for having homogenizing and reductive effects when applied to the complex and diverse reality of its actual elements, understood as irreducibly heterogeneous particularities. A social realist would argue that this critique is rooted in an actual transformation of the referent: the masses themselves have become more individualized and atomized. But, as a more constructivist account of social reality would show, one can never separate what is perceived as qualitative transformations in the social field from structural alterations and shifts within the discourses through which the former is articulated.

As already mentioned, the rendering of the demise of the category of the masses would reveal a certain ontological primacy of the individual that was allowed to establish itself in the last decades, becoming the hegemonic way of objectively capturing social reality, an ontology for which collective individuations are derivative or epiphenomenal. The validity of this perspective derives its main force from an historical account of the resurgence of particular strands of liberalism including – according to some – the movements of 1968, whose alternative (often communitarian) individualism in terms of personal autonomy and expression has come under heavy scrutiny from more orthodox Marxist perspectives. In the context of post-war American crowd semantics for example, 'the challenge posed to the notion of the liberal subject by the classical image of the crowd is (at least partly) responsible for the crowd topic's gradual expulsion from the central sociological agenda' (17).

Yet another important aspect of the critique of the category of the masses concerns its ideological signature. Historically, use of the term has been predominantly negative: in the conservative tradition of crowd psychology, e.g. Le Bon and Gasset; the individualist tradition associated with Nietzsche and Stirner; the philosophers of authenticity, e.g. Kierkegaard and Heidegger; as well as Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of mass-culture. Yet on the other end of this spectrum operated various socialist and communist traditions, in which the masses figure in a more positive, even utopian sense, as the collective protagonist of a coming society. More recently the term multitude has come to replace the masses in this utopian sense, as an emancipatory collective subject whose mode of individuation has ontological primacy over the individual, and incorporating a recognition of the irreducible heterogeneity (now called singularity) for which use of the term masses was criticized in the discourses of postmodernity.

In any case, when one speaks of masses it is always out of *concern for* them, in the sense of being concerned with (fearful of), or as being concerned about, out of sympathy, respectively. Those who are purportedly not part of the masses – academics, artists, politicians and administrators – concern themselves in this fashion. So the category of masses is epistemologically and normatively defined for those *not* part of it, and for whom it constitutes a problem, to be probed, eliminated, illuminated, and so on. The masses live, as an ungraspable reality, a question mark, in their representations of the world. 'There, in that ant-heap of the humble and unknown, the strangest types exist [...] Those bare feet and arms, the rags, the ignorance, the abjection, the dark places, all may be enlisted in the service of the ideal [...] cannot light penetrate to the masses?' (Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*).

In my view the category of the masses continues to be of critical importance, particularly in this spectral, phantom-like sense, i.e. as having its proper reality within such representations, just as for Foucault the plebs is not a real sociological entity and for Baudrillard the notion of the

masses 'has nothing to do with any real population, body or specific social aggregate'. The masses as such do not exist: except that they are constantly invoked through discursive practices and in that sense quite real, in Philip K. Dick's crypto-Lacanian sense, as something that refuses to go away even if one stops believing in it.

By studying the way crowd semantics of the last centuries were essentially concerned with finding solutions to the problems of emerging modern mass social formations (partaking in the history of what Foucault dubbed 'biopower', the art of governing populations) both Borch and Jonsson show the persistence and on-going relevance of this problem for the economic and political institutions of the present, debunking the ideological fantasy that somehow the age of the masses (and its dangers) has been overcome or is no longer of concern to the powers that be, replaced instead by a free collective of contracting autonomous, individual actors. A similar fantasy has contributed to the demise of the notion of class. In both cases, shifts in discursive formations that resemble and help stabilize shifts in socio-economic power-formations are presented as descriptions of emancipatory evolutions of society itself, or: its reduction to individuals, families, corporations and institutions, precluding alternative formulations through which the lingering spectre of the masses can be articulated anew as a political force.

Daniël de Zeeuw is an editor of Krisis and a PhD candidate at ASCA (University of Amsterdam) researching the political aesthetics of anonymity in popular culture, art and activism.

References

Le Bon, G. (2002) [1895] *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind.* Courier Dover Publications.

Parikka, J. (2008) 'Politics of Swarms: Translations Between Entomology and Biopolitics'. In: *Parallax* 14(3).

Rheingold, H. (2002) *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution*. New York: Basic Books.

Surowiecki, J. (2005) *The Wisdom of Crowds*. Anchor Books.

Williams, R. (1960) [1958] *Culture and Society 1780-1950*. Anchor Books.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons License (Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0). See http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/nl/deed.en for more information.

Krisis

Tijdschrift voor actuele filosofie

EVELINE GROOT

KRITISCH MULTICULTURALISME EN DE MODERNISTISCHE ERFENIS

Recensie van: Yolande Jansen (2013) *Secularism, assimilation and the crisis of multiculturalism*. French modernist legacies. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, IMISCOE Research, 339 p.

Krisis 2014, Issue 2
www.krisis.eu

Het multiculturalisme wordt al tien jaar lang met enige regelmaat dood verklaard. Europese politici – met Sarkozy, Merkel en Cameron voorop –hebben het multiculturalisme definitief de rug toegekeerd. Het bezwaar luidt veelal dat het multiculturalisme te stug heeft vastgehouden aan vastomlijnde identiteiten van zowel inwoners uit Europese landen als immigranten. Ook uit academische hoek klinkt kritiek op het multiculturalisme. Normatieve noties van multiculturalisme zouden te veel nadruk leggen op identiteitspolitiek en culturele verschillen en zodoende sociaal-economische verschillen veronachtzamen. Multiculturalisme zou naar essentialisme neigen, gezien het uitgaat van een concept van cultuur dat te weinig oog heeft voor de contextuele constructie en formatie van cultuur. Hierdoor creëert het ongelijkheid tussen meerderheids- en minderheidsgroeperingen in een samenleving. Multiculturalisme is dus een omstreden begrip in zowel hedendaags politiek beleid als in politieke theorie. Yolande Jansen stelt in *Secularism, assimilation and the crisis of multiculturalism* dat het echter te vroeg is om het multiculturalisme definitief af te wijzen: meer dan assimilatie of secularisme, heeft het politieke beleid van het multiculturalisme aandacht voor de werking van herinnering, de internalisatie van cultuur, de paradoxaliteit van privatisering en individualisering van verschil in de positie van etnische en religieuze minderheden.

Secularism, assimilation and the crisis of multiculturalism verscheen vrijwel gelijktijdig met Jansens inauguratie tot bijzonder hoogleraar Humanisme in relatie tot religie en seculariteit voor de Socrates Stichting aan de Vrije Universiteit. Het boek is het resultaat van haar reflecties op de diepgewortelde crisis van het multiculturalisme in de Euro-Atlantische regio. Jansen ontwikkelt een kritische politieke theorie over contemporaine discoursen over secularisme en assimilatie en schetst zo de contouren voor een rechtvaardige en democratische conceptie van burgerschap in een multiculturele samenleving (p. 13). Hierbij bouwt ze enerzijds voort op debatten rondom multiculturalisme, secularisme, assimilatie en integratie, terwijl ze anderzijds deze complexe en diffuse concepten tracht te overstijgen. Deze overstijgt ze echter niet allemaal en dit doet ze bewust. Jansen heeft nog hoop dat een revalidatie van het multiculturalisme zal leiden tot een gelijkwaardigere en rechtvaardigere samenleving (p. 295). Hoe ziet een heropleving van het multiculturalisme er volgens Jansen uit? Kan haar visie op multiculturalisme daaraan bijdragen?

Jansens studie is interdisciplinair. Ze zet naast kritische politieke theorie filosofisch, historisch, antropologisch, sociologisch en literatuurwetenschappelijk onderzoek in. Haar onderzoek heeft dan ook een dubbele focus. Enerzijds richt zij zich op het multiculturalisme-assimilatieintegratiekader en anderzijds op het seculier-religieuze kader (p. 17). Het eerste kader benadrukt de centrale rol van deze concepten in het debat over minderheden en immigranten in de Europese politieke context. In het seculier-religieuze kader, ofwel het laïcité-religieuze kader in de Franse context, worden publieke vragen rondom minderheden met een andere cultuur en identiteit in termen van religie en secularisme uitgedrukt. Dit denken in termen van religie en secularisme is volgens Jansen een product van het moderne denken dat dient te worden bekritiseerd. In haar eigen kritiek toont ze met name aan dat het secularisme intrinsiek verbonden is met de Franse laïcité-politiek: ‘deploying the framework of laïcité to debate the position of religious minorities places religion in the foreground, with questions of postcolonial history, racism and socio-economic position of secondary relevance’ (p. 15).

Een dubbele focus

Ook qua methodiek hanteert Jansen een dubbele focus. Zij analyseert zowel hedendaagse debatten als historische bronnen waarbij ze 'zigzagt' tussen strikt en grondig academisch en een meer essayistisch onderzoek. Deze methodische dubbele focus zien we terug in haar analyse van Marcel Prousts *Op zoek naar de verloren tijd* (1913-1927). Proust wordt door Jansen opgevoerd als een getuige van assimilatie in het 19e-eeuwse Frankrijk en deze analyse over de werking van assimilatie volgt haar theoretische uiteenzetting van de betekenis van assimilatie op.

Haar kritiek op socioloog Olivier Roy, die de pijnpunten van het denken in modernistische dichotomieën en kaders blootlegt, is een mooi voorbeeld van de mogelijkheden van Jansens kritische interdisciplinaire methode. Roy is van mening dat zowel de laïcité als het multiculturalisme schuldig is aan het stigmatiseren van islamieten. De publieke islam (neo-islam) moet niet verward worden met de traditionele islam die migranten hebben geërfd uit hun cultuur van afkomst. Roy maakt zo een duidelijke scheiding tussen islam als cultuur en islam als religie, tussen islam als praktijk en islam als individueel geloof: 'Being a Muslim, like being a believer of other religions, has become a matter of choice, and those who choose to make it a crucial element of their identities should be considered born again Muslims rather than Muslims in any other cultural (ethnic) sense' (p. 246). Dit is een onderscheid waarbij de concepten van cultuur, multiculturalisme en secularisatie onzorgvuldig door elkaar worden gebruikt, aldus Jansen. De herkomst en het gebruik van deze concepten alsook de relatie ertussen worden door de dubbele focus van Jansen duidelijker. Door Roys conceptie van cultuur en gebruik van het begrip cultuur te analyseren, komt Jansen tot de conclusie dat Roy een essentialistisch begrip van cultuur hanteert. Het behoren tot een cultuur wordt hierin opgevat als een keuze en religie en cultuur moeten rigoureus van elkaar onderscheiden worden. Hierdoor blijft de dichotomie tussen vrijheid en ergens toe behoren, die centraal staat in het discours van de laïcité, overeind. Daarmee ontsnapt Roy niet aan zijn eigen kritiek op de laïcité: 'Roy presses it [the neo-Islam] into a frame that is as old as the frame of laïcité [...] based on the same modernist divides between belonging and freedom, autonomy and heteronomy, and private and public inherited from the 19th century' (p. 249). Mede dankzij de vruchtbare interdisciplinaire kruisbestuiving komt Jansen tot een methode waarmee zij, zoals in het geval van Roy, hardnekkige dichotomieën in het moderne denken onthult. Dit doet zij met veel subtiliteit, scherpte en, zodoende, overtuiging.

Proust en paradoxen van assimilatie

In *Op zoek naar de verloren tijd* staan paradoxen van assimilatie centraal die werden ervaren door Franse Joden ten tijde van de Derde Franse Republiek. Jansen stelt dat de Joodse assimilatie in de negentiende eeuw vergelijkbaar is met de behandeling van islamieten en moslims heden ten dage. Middels een analyse van de romancyclus van Proust, aangevuld met haar interdisciplinaire kritische methode, ontwikkelt Jansen een genealogie die de erfenis van modernistische categorieën en dichotomieën in hedendaagse debatten rondom het multiculturalisme-assimilatieintegratiekader en het seculier-religieuze kader kan beschrijven. Volgens Jansen biedt Proust met name een uniek historisch perspectief op de paradoxale werking van assimilatie. Ze geeft aan dat assimilatie een paradoxaal karakter heeft omdat de belofte van assimilatie, van gelijkwaardig en volwaardig burgerschap voor immigranten en minderheden in ruil voor privatisering van culturele, religieuze en etnische verschillen, vaak juist leidt tot een groter onderscheid, grotere ongelijkheid en meer uitsluiting van minderheden omdat de nadruk ligt op verschil, op 'anders'-zijn. Assimilatie alsook (burger)integratie en secularisme hebben het risico uit te monden in vormen van nationalisme, Eurocentrisme en onbruikbare democratische concepties en uitingen van burgerschap.

De paradoxen van assimilatie nemen nieuwe vormen aan in het laïcité-religieuze kader waar veel nadruk ligt op het 'anders'-zijn van moslimmigranten (p. 46 en 253). Een vergelijking tussen de geschiedenis van joodse assimilatie en de situatie van moslimmigranten hoeft volgens Jansen niet te leiden tot een dramatisering van de hedendaagse migratieproblematiek. Het draagt eerder bij aan een genuanceerd beeld van al gedramatiseerde opvattingen van verschil die vaak diepe historische wortels

hebben (p. 277). Terecht beargumenteert Jansen dat deze diepe historische wortels niet vergeten mogen worden: ze zijn cruciaal om het multiculturalisme-assimilatieintegratiekader en het seculier-religieuze kader überhaupt te kunnen begrijpen.

Bij het ontstaan van intercultureel wantrouwen is een belangrijke rol weggelegd voor de internalisering en individualisering van etnische en religieuze uitingen door middel van assimilatie en seculier burgerschap, hetgeen leidt tot paradoxale relaties tussen meerderheden en minderheden; wij en de 'ander'. Hoe meer het publieke onderscheid tussen minderheden en meerderheden wordt afgedwongen door middel van integratie of assimilatie, hoe meer het geprivatiseerde en geïndividualiseerde verschil als een bedreiging en reden voor uitsluiting wordt gezien: 'the attempt to make ethno-religious difference invisible triggered the opposite' (p. 279). Deze ongewenste, tegenovergestelde uitkomst noemt Jansen 'the revolving doors of assimilation'. Zij beargumenteert dat het noodzakelijk is in te zien dat processen van uitsluiting binnen een politiek van assimilatie en secularisme niet voorkomen kunnen worden.

Jansen is niet van mening dat een definitie van laïcité die neutraler, kritischer of liberaler is voldoende oplossing kan bieden voor het probleem van 'the revolving doors of assimilation'. In lijn met haar overtuigende kritiek op de modernistische dichotomieën in het laïcité-kader zelf, is dit begrijpelijk. Laïcité als concept is vervlochten met de christelijke geschiedenis van het secularisme en zo bij voorbaat onvoldoende neutraal, liberaal en kritisch. Binnen het laïcité-kader blijft religieus – en dus ook ethisch en cultureel – verschil een cruciaal probleem: verschil an sich blijft een probleem. Jansen pleit ervoor de modernistische alternatieven voor het multiculturalisme, assimilatie, integratie en secularisme, in een liberale democratische context te verlaten.

Multiculturalisme als alternatief

Omdat de paradoxen van assimilatie nieuwe vormen aannemen en assimilatie vervlochten is met modernistische dichotomieën, waaronder die van secularisme en religie, is het nodig afstand te nemen van assimilatie en secularisme om zo de problematische dichotomieën te kunnen herkennen. Volgens Jansen toont Proust in *Op zoek naar de verloren tijd* aan dat herinneringen, bewust of onbewust, niet ten prooi vallen aan assimilatie. Haar lezing van de romancyclus stelt haar in staat pluralisme te verdedigen zonder terug te vallen op een essentialistische theorie van verschil of een essentialistisch begrip van cultuur.

In lijn met Richard Rorty (Rorty 1991: 84) beargumenteert Jansen dat dichotomieën tijdelijke constructen zijn die kunnen worden overstegen (p. 194). Een heropleving van multiculturalisme is één manier om deze te overstijgen. Het begrip cultuur is essentieel in complexe samenlevingen waarin meerderheden en minderheden naast elkaar leven. Dit hangt samen met de definitie van cultuur die zij hanteert, afkomstig van Bonnie Honig (Honig 1999: 39). Cultuur is een complex begrip waarin vrijheid en ergens toe behoren, systematische structuren en agentschap intrinsiek met elkaar verbonden zijn (p. 249). Cultuur is iets wat wij onder sociale en collectieve invloed internaliseren en wat op een onbewust niveau niet te assimileren valt. In deze lijn kan multiculturalisme nog steeds bruikbaar zijn als alternatief. Daarnaast heeft multiculturalisme oog voor zowel pluraliteit als historiciteit en, meer dan zijn alternatieven, oog voor de positie van etnische en religieuze minderheden zoals de werking van herinnering, de internalisatie van cultuur, en de paradoxaliteit van privatisering en individualisering van verschil. Het is volgens Jansen dus onwenselijk om multiculturalisme als concept zomaar overboord te gooien.

Een multiculturele maatschappij kan een maatschappij zijn waarin een vorm van democratische pluraliteit centraal staat die oog heeft voor het verleden, die reflecteert op diverse vormen van interactie tussen collectieve en individuele aspecten van religie, cultuur en etniciteit (p. 283) en die de dimensie van herinneringen meeneemt. In een dergelijke maatschappij is het voor minderheden mogelijk uitsluiting en afwijzing te herinneren, te thematiseren, te begrijpen, te bekritiseren en zich te emanciperen door zich van 'verhalen' van de meerderheid te distantiëren. De dreiging van categorisering (wij en de 'ander', westers en niet-westers, autochtoon en allochtoon) en uitsluiting (de 'ander', niet-westers en allochtoon) door

processen van internalisering en individualisering van verschil liggen dus minder op de loer in een samenleving die culturele diversiteit erkent. Een multicultureel alternatief biedt ruimte voor zichtbare etnische en religieuze verschillen.

Multiculturalisme in de vorm van communitarisme (onder andere Charles Taylor) wijst Jansen af, aangezien normatieve communitaristische ethiek verbonden is met het seculiere gedachtengoed en een politiek religieus vocabulaire gebruikt; hetgeen zij overduidelijk wil overstijgen. Ook multiculturalisme als identiteitspolitiek of als een theorie die verschil in cultuur, religie en etniciteit centraal stelt, wijst Jansen af. Wat het concept multiculturalisme precies omvat of dient te omvatten, laat zij in het midden. Wel geeft ze aan dat het multiculturele alternatief op de eerste plaats een kritiek op assimilatie en secularisme moet zijn. Deze vorm van multiculturalisme neemt de geschiedenis van uitsluiting van minderheden serieus en is gericht op (zichtbare) pluralisering van Europese maatschappijen. Jansen is van mening dat dit niet hoeft te leiden tot een terugkeer naar identiteitspolitiek. Een kritische vorm van multiculturalisme waarin de assimilatiepolitiek en modernistische dichotomieën aan de kaak worden gesteld, beschouwt mensen met verschillende identiteiten juist als gelijk. Alle normen en waarden, overtuigingen en levenswijzen zijn discutabel; zowel die van minderheden als meerderheden (p. 289). Jansens vorm van multiculturalisme staat zo in de traditie van Will Kymlicka die multiculturalisme als een *policy option* in plaats van een *policy machine* beschouwt. Het betreft een kritisch en progressief multiculturalisme, dat tekortkomingen van het beleid onthult en overstijgt.

Tot besluit

Jansen besluit haar onderzoek met de woorden: 'the progressive multicultural way is to focus on "us" and "them" together and to pinpoint our intricasies, conflicts and relationships, always with an eye to the equal access of all the rules of the game, including the game of critique of self and other'. De heropleving van het multiculturalisme zou aldus kunnen bestaan uit het hebben van een juiste kritische focus. Jansens begrip van multiculturalisme blijft hiermee enigszins zweven in het luchtledige – het grootste hiaat in haar positieve theorie van het multiculturalisme. Progressief multiculturalisme lijkt te zijn verworden tot een bewustwordingscampagne van de problematische en kwalijke gevolgen van de modernistische dichotomieën. Zonder een duidelijkere definitie blijft het een te vluchtig en vaag begrip dat moeilijk inzetbaar is in de praktijk van de alledaagse politiek. Hoe is multiculturalisme als een juiste kritische focus bijvoorbeeld te vertalen tot openheid van politiek beleid voor religieus, cultureel en etnisch verschil?

Hoewel Jansen met verve en overtuigingskracht heeft beargumenteerd dat er behoefte is aan een hedendaagse kritiek van assimilatie en secularisme die modernistische dichotomieën erkent en een kritiek die vraagt of publieke en politieke vraagstukken überhaupt binnen een seculier-religieus kader gesteld en opgelost kunnen worden, blijft de vraag waarom dit onder de noemer van het multiculturalisme moet. Wellicht zijn er geen betere alternatieven voorhanden in de Europese context? Misschien is het te vroeg om de 'hoop van het multiculturalisme' op te geven? Is interculturalisme als begrip ook vervlochten met modernistische dichotomieën? Of is multiculturalisme haar eigen beste alternatief? Jansens multiculturalisme is bovenal een kritische instelling die verdere uitwerking behoeft.

Eveline Groot volgde de researchmaster Philosophy aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam. Haar voornaamste interesses betreffen klassieke wijsbegeerte, vraagstukken rondom religie en secularisme, en de notie van transcendentie. Dit najaar vervolgt ze haar studie in Ancient Philosophy in Edinburgh.

Literatuur

Honig, B. (1999) 'My culture made me do it'. In: J. Cohen, M. Howard & M. Nussbaum (red.) *Is multiculturalism bad for women?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 35-41.

Rorty, R. (1991) [1985] 'Texts and lumps'. In: *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth. Philosophical Papers*. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 78-92.

Jansen, Y. (2013) *Secularism, assimilation and the crisis of multiculturalism. French modernist legacies*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, IMISCOE Research.

© De Creative Commons License is van toepassing op dit artikel (Naamsvermelding-Niet-commercieel 3.0). Zie http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/nl voor meer informatie.

Krisis

Tijdschrift voor actuele filosofie

TIES VAN DE WERFF

VOORBIJ REDUCTIONISME EN DETERMINISME ALS KRITIEK OP DE NEUROWETENSCHAPPEN?

Recensie van: Nikolas R. Rose & Joelle M. Abi-Rached (2013) *Neuro. The new brain sciences and the management of the mind*. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Krisis 2014, Issue 2
www.krisis.eu

In november 2012 vierde journalist Alissa Quart in een editorial in de *New York Times* de opkomst van de *neurodoubters*: bloggers zoals Neuroskeptic, NeuroBonkers, Dorothy Bishop en The Neurocritic, die minutieus neurowetenschappelijk onderzoek ontrafelen en de assumpties, methodes en slordigheden blootleggen - vooral als zulke boeken vergezeld worden door sensationele berichtgeving. Zo werden Naomi Wolfs problematische interpretaties van oxytocine en dopamine in haar boek *Vagina* bijvoorbeeld binnen enkele dagen geïdentificeerd en online bediscussieerd. De lezing van Dortohy Bishop over 'the science of bad neuroscience', met een overzicht van gemaakte fouten bij onderzoek met fMRI, ging zelfs bijna viral.

De bloggers staan niet alleen in hun kritiek. Ook onder filosofen, historici en sociologen groeide de laatste jaren kritiek op de uitbundige claims van neurowetenschappers - mede als gevolg van de infiltratie van de neurowetenschappen in disciplines als psychologie, recht en onderwijs. Neurowetenschappers worden onder andere beticht van het overgeneraliseren van hun claims, het verwarren en versimpelen van hun operationele concepten, het *cherry picking* binnen statische analyses en het negeren of niet onderkennen van de veronderstellingen en grenzen van hun methodes zoals fMRI (cf Dumit 2004; Jordan-Young 2010; Noë 2011; Tallis 2012; Satel & Lilienfield 2013). Na verschijning van het stuk in de *New York Times* klonk er dan ook gejuich uit de hoek van de sociale en geesteswetenschappen: eindelijk leek ook de kritiek op reductionistische neurowetenschappelijke verklaringen van gedrag *mainstream* te gaan.

Twee jaar na het artikel in de *New York Times* lijkt het hoogtepunt van de neurokritiek voorbij. Moe van het inmiddels evenzo versimpelde als salonfähig geworden *neurobashen*, startte Neurocritic het blog *Neurocompliment* om gemakkelijke en defensieve anti-neurosentimenten tegen te gaan. Het zoeken naar een genuanceerde middenweg tussen ophemelen en neersabelen is tekenend voor de huidige lichting van kritieken op de neurowetenschappen. In het onlangs verschenen *Neuro* pleiten ook Nikolas Rose en Joelle Abi-Rached (2014) voor een meer constructieve houding. Doel van het boek is om voorbij louter commentaar en kritiek te gaan en tot een vruchtbare samenwerking te komen tussen sociaal, geestes- en neurowetenschappers. De samenwerking tussen Harvard-promovenda Abi-Rached en Rose, belangrijk vertegenwoordiger in de *governmentality studies* die vorig jaar de London School of Economics verruilde voor King's College, is in ieder geval vruchtbaar. Door een nauwgezette historische analyse zijn de auteurs in staat om het idee van 'wij zijn ons brein', een belofte van enthousiastelingen en de vrees van criticasters, te ontkrachten. Al die neuroclaims hebben niet geleid tot een deterministische visie op de mens als brein op pootjes, zoals velen beweerden (cf Vidal 2009). We zijn niet ons brein, maar we *hebben* een brein en dat brengt nieuwe interventies en verantwoordelijkheden met zich mee. *Neuro* laat op overtuigende wijze zien dat de bekende kritieken van determinisme niet meer afdoende zijn om de reikwijdte en de maatschappelijke invloed van de neurowetenschappen te begrijpen. Op de suggesties tot verbroedering die Rose en Abi-Rached uiteindelijk aandragen valt echter het een en ander af te dingen.

Een neuromoleculaire manier van denken

Het verklaren van gedrag door te wijzen naar het brein is niet nieuw, aldus de auteurs. Wat wel nieuw is, is de autoriteit en de alomtegenwoordigheid van dergelijke verklaringen in onze populaire cultuur. Om te onderzoeken hoe het brein zo'n autoriteit heeft gekregen als verklaring voor gedrag traceren de auteurs hoe in de loop van de vorige eeuw conceptuele, technologische, biopolitieke en economische factoren het mogelijk maakten dat neurowetenschappelijke kennis zich gemakkelijk vanuit het lab naar de maatschappij kon verplaatsen. De auteurs betogen dat er een specifieke 'neuromoleculaire manier van denken' is ontstaan. Deze neuromoleculaire manier van denken bestaat uit drie elementen of paden die het brein naar de maatschappij hebben gebracht: het idee dat we hersenprocessen het beste kunnen begrijpen op moleculair niveau; dat we in staat zijn om hersenfuncties te visualiseren door middel van hersenscanners; en dat het brein plastisch is. De opmars van deze specifieke manier van kijken naar het brein ging gepaard met allerlei neurotechnologieën om gedrag te beïnvloeden - van antidepressiva en neurofeedback tot preventieve screeningsmethoden, hersentrainingsprogramma's en populaire claims als sudoku tegen Alzheimer. In 350 pagina's geven de auteurs een sociologisch en wetenschapshistorisch overzicht van de ontwikkelingen van het diverse veld van 'de' neurowetenschappen, het ontstaan van de meest gebruikte neurowetenschappelijke methodes en de fundamentele tekortkomingen daarvan.

De term 'neurowetenschappen' werd voor het eerst expliciet gebezigd bij MIT in 1961 om verschillende disciplines bij elkaar te brengen met als doel het bestuderen van de werking van de geest in termen van het brein. Structuur en functies van het brein werden kenbaar gemaakt als interacties tussen moleculen en synapsen, en mentale processen als perceptie, emotie en cognitie werden gezien als uitkomsten van zulke materiële processen. Dit is het eerste kenmerk van de neuromoleculaire manier van denken: het moleculaire brein. Rose en Abi-Rached tonen hoe de opkomst van dit onverholen reductionisme, in de jaren '50 door prominente neurowetenschappers als Sir Charles Sherrington nog gezien als zeer problematisch, nauw verbonden was met het onderzoek naar nieuwe psychofarmaca. Door middel van proefdieronderzoek, dierenmodellen en het *tweaken* van moleculaire eigenschappen werden nieuwe medicijnen voor geestelijke en gedragsstoornissen ontwikkeld. Met als gevolg dat geestesziektes voortaan gezien werden als een ontregeling van neuromoleculaire processen. De cartesiaanse scheidslijnen tussen body en mind, tussen organische en functionele stoornissen (breinletsel versus geestelijke stoornis), en tussen psychiatrie en psychologie vervaagden. De introductie van antidepressiva gebaseerd op moleculaire mechanismen (zoals Prozac) bracht deze neuromoleculaire visie vervolgens naar het bredere publiek.

Het tweede kenmerk van de neuromoleculaire manier van denken is het idee dat we hersenactiviteit zichtbaar kunnen maken. Centraal staat de methode van fMRI: functional magnetic resonance imaging. Het verschil met eerdere CT-scanners in de jaren '70 en '80 is dat fMRI niet alleen de structuur maar ook de functies van de hersenen beoogt te meten. fMRI meet feitelijk de magnetische resonantie van zuurstofdeeltjes in de bloedtoevoer als indicator voor hersenactiviteit, en is gebaseerd op het idee dat hersenfuncties en mentale processen gelokaliseerd kunnen worden in bepaalde clusters van neuronen in het brein. Visualiseringstechnieken zoals fMRI hebben de afgelopen jaren veel aandacht gekregen van critici - hoe dergelijke breinplaatjes afhankelijk zijn van statische procedures en interpretaties, hoe de artificiële labsituatie verschilt met de werkelijke praktijk, en welke retorische en normatieve functie deze hersenscans als 'foto's van je brein in actie' krijgen in de maatschappij. In dit hoofdstuk komt dan ook zowel de sterkte als de zwakte van het boek tevoorschijn: Rose en Abi-Rached geven een mooi overzicht van bestaan-de kritieken, maar voegen zelf weinig toe aan deze inmiddels bekende discussie.

Het derde kenmerk van de neuromoleculaire *style of thought* is het idee dat het brein plastisch is. Dit betekent dat zowel structuur als functie van het brein niet vaststaat bij de geboorte, maar gedurende het hele leven veranderbaar is; het brein is tot op zekere hoogte in staat zich te hervormen na letsel of door stimulatie en staat open voor omgevingsstimuli. Plasticiteit, dat in de praktijk al snel verwordt tot het idee van een maakbaar brein, vormt de meest recente manier waarop het neurodenken zich in de maatschappij heeft genesteld. Een mooi voorbeeld dat Rose en

Abi-Rached aanhalen is het Britse voorstel voor preventieve interventie bij jonge kinderen. Gebaseerd op de inmiddels beruchte mythe van de eerste drie jaar als 'kritische periode' - een afgebakende periode waarbinnen het plastische kinderbrein bepaalde vaardigheden zou kunnen leren - werden ouders aangespoord meer aandacht te besteden aan de psycho-emotionele ontwikkeling van hun kind. Dat zou niet alleen beter zijn voor de gezonde en normale ontwikkeling van het kind, maar zo zou ook de maatschappij in de toekomst gespaard kunnen blijven van onder andere crimineel en asociaal gedrag. De auteurs laten vervolgens de historische gelijkenis zien met eerdere interventies en debatten over het 'managen' van problematisch gedrag via de familie (zoals de *mental hygiene movement* in de twintiger jaren en het *cycle of deprivation*-concept in de jaren '70).

Wat de auteurs met deze en andere voorbeelden tonen, is dat sociale problemen (onder andere met behulp van de notie plasticiteit) gelinkt kunnen worden met neurobiologische afwijkingen in het brein, waarmee het plastische brein 'open' gemaakt wordt voor allerhande interventies. Met als gevolg een groeiend geloof dat je door het zorgen voor je brein je geestelijke welzijn kunt verbeteren, maar ook individuele en sociale problemen kunt voorkomen. Hier zijn we aanbeland bij de kernboodschap van het boek. De auteurs onderstrepen dat breinverklaringen van gedrag reductionistisch zijn; het fundamentele probleem van de *explanatory gap* tussen breinprocessen (body) en *mental states* (mind), kenmerkend voor neuromethodes als proefdieronderzoek en fMRI, is nog steeds niet opgelost. Maar dat dit reductionisme zou hebben geleid tot een wijdverbreide deterministische visie op de mens als een brein op pootjes, klopt niet volgens de auteurs. De neuromoleculaire manier van denken, het idee van een moleculair kenbaar, zichtbaar en plastisch brein, geeft eerder meer mogelijkheden tot interventie en meer verantwoordelijkheden dan minder. De kracht van neurowetenschappelijke verklaringen van gedrag ligt dan ook niet in haar reductionisme of determinisme, maar juist in het 'open'maken van het brein voor allerlei interventies. Het brein wordt zo een extra laag voor zelfinzicht, zelfstilering en zelfmanagement - een claim die lezers van Roses eerdere werk *The politics of life itself* (2008) zullen herkennen. Het gaat hier om de imperatief in de huidige *life sciences* om de toekomst te managen via het lichaam (in dit geval het brein): 'Once more, now in neural form, we are obliged to take responsibility for our biology, to manage our brains in order to bear the responsibilities of freedom' (p. 23).

Wat te doen?

In de laatste hoofdstukken proberen Rose en Abi-Rached de geestes- en de neurowetenschappen dichter bij elkaar te brengen. Allereerst claimen de auteurs dat al deze menswetenschappers elkaar kunnen vinden in een gemeenschappelijk doel: het onttronen van het rationele, autonome en narcistische individu. Neurobiologische claims die onbewuste processen in onze keuzes en gedrag aantonen, sluiten bijvoorbeeld prima aan bij studies in vakgebieden als culturele antropologie, filosofie en sociologie, die laten zien dat onze autonomie eerder relationeel is dan absoluut, en dat we minder rationeel handelen dan we denken. Om dit gezamenlijke doel te verwezenlijken, is het volgens de auteurs wel zaak dat we voorbij een reductionistische onderzoeksstrategie geraken. Hiervoor geven de auteurs enkele suggesties.

Om te beginnen zouden de menswetenschappers van de neuro's moeten eisen dat zij hun mechanische en geïsoleerde visie op biologie verruilen voor een meer holistische en belichaamde visie. Breineigenschappen bestaan niet los van het lichaam waarin het brein genesteld zit, neurowetenschappers zouden deze biologische werkelijkheid moeten onderkennen. Sociologen zouden vervolgens kunnen helpen met het conceptualiseren van de situationele complexiteit van ons handelen, door concepten als 'sociaal', 'geschiedenis' en 'cultuur' te vertalen in operationele input voor neurowetenschappelijk onderzoek. Hoe dit laatste precies in elkaar zit, blijft wat vaag. Rose en Abi-Rached pleiten vooral voor een open houding bij beide partijen en de bereidheid elkaars werk serieus ter hand te nemen. Een andere suggestie is dat sociaal wetenschappers meer werk maken van het bekritiseren van bestaande financieringsmechanismen en zij neurowetenschappers meer in bescherming nemen tegen vergaande eisen van premature toepasbaarheid en valorisatie. Ethici en filosofen zouden vervolgens kritisch de verschuivende verantwoordelijkheden en verplichtingen moeten bestuderen die ontstaan in praktijken waarin neurowetenschappen voor politieke doeleinden wordt gebruikt (zoals bij-

voorbeeld bij preventieve interventies bij kinderen of bij de popu-lariteit van *brain-based* managementboeken). STS'ers op hun beurt zouden het idee van een neurolab als *non-space* moeten bekritiseren en laten zien hoe neurowaarheden daar worden geconstrueerd en welke verwachtingen daarmee gemoeid zijn.

Uiteindelijk, zo hopen de auteurs: 'we may indeed find the basis of a radical, and perhaps even progressive way of moving beyond illusory notions of human beings as individualized, discrete, autonomous, coherent subjects who are, or should be, "free to choose"' (p. 234). In het licht van dit ideaal laten de praktische suggesties van de auteurs de lezer wat onbevredigd achter. Minpunt aan *Neuro* is dat het te weinig empirische voorbeelden bevat over hoe neurowetenschappelijke kennis daadwerkelijk relevant wordt gemaakt in specifieke praktijken. Zoals recente empirische studies hebben laten zien, wordt het brein in verschillende contexten voor verschillende doeleinden, waarden en idealen gebruikt; bijvoorbeeld voor het bestendigen van de status quo (denk aan het verschil tussen jongens- en meisjesbreinen in het onderwijs) of het articuleren van neoliberale noties van succes in termen van het brein (O'Connor & Joffe 2013; Pickersgill 2013). Door het gebrek aan specificering in verschillende praktijken blijft het onduidelijk hoe de praktische suggesties van de auteurs moeten leiden tot een ander publiek gebruik en receptie van breinkennis.

Rose en Abi-Rached lijken zich niet al te zeer expliciet uit te willen spreken - zeker niet op sociaaltheoretisch vlak. Als gevolg missen de oplossingsrichtingen overtuiging en kracht. In tegenstelling tot Rose en Abi-Rached heeft het *Critical Neuroscience*-project van Jan Slaby en Suparna Choudhury bijvoorbeeld een meer uitgesproken sociaaltheoretische en kennistheoretische visie. Zij scharen zich achter de 4E-beweging, waarin het brein wordt geconceptualiseerd als *enacted*, *embodied*, *embedded* en *extended*: het brein staat niet op zichzelf, maar wordt juist gevormd in interacties met het eigen lichaam en de omgeving. Het winnen van de *hearts & minds* van neuro- en geesteswetenschappers wordt bij Slaby en Choudhury verruild voor een (postmarxistische) analyse hoe structurele kenmerken van ons onderzoeks- en beleidslandschap het gehele translatieproces van neurolab naar praktijk beïnvloeden. Ook recente pogingen uit de feministische hoek tonen concreet hoe je met een expliciet eigen (politieke) agenda het neurowetenschappelijke onderzoeksproces te lijf kan gaan, bijvoorbeeld door binaire man-/vrouw concepten te vervangen door een queer-perspectief (zie de recent verschenen bundel *Gendered neurocultures* van de Neurogenderingsgroep bijvoorbeeld). De onderzoeksagenda van Rose en Abi-Rached lijkt voorbij te gaan aan dergelijke initiatieven die reeds op een constructieve manier kritiek uitoefenen op de neuro's.

De meerwaarde van *Neuro* ligt in het overzicht dat de auteurs brengen in de bestaande geschiedenissen en kritieken van de neurowetenschappen. Het laat overtuigend en gedetailleerd zien hoe de neurowetenschappen zo'n exceptionele status en autoriteit konden krijgen, en wat de fundamentele moeilijkheden zijn in deze vorm van mensonderzoek. Het pleidooi voor een meer constructieve houding is prijzenswaardig en relevant, maar de vraag is of de praktische suggesties die de auteurs voorstellen genoeg kritische massa hebben om tegenwicht te bieden aan het effect dat neurowetenschappen nu al uitoefenen op beleid, debatten en onze manier van denken. Duidelijk is echter wel dat we ons niet meer kunnen beperken tot kritieken van reductionisme en determinisme alleen. Het brein is inmiddels de verantwoordelijkheid van ons allemaal geworden.

Ties van de Werff is als promovendus verbonden aan de vakgroep Filosofie van de faculteit Arts & Social Sciences, Universiteit Maastricht. Zijn proefschrift bespreekt hoe het plastische brein waardevol wordt gemaakt in drie praktijken van het goede leven: opvoeding, werk en vrije tijd.

Een sterk verkorte en Engelstalige versie van deze recensie verscheen eerder in *Journal of New Genetics and Society* (33) 2, 225-227.

Literatuur

Choudhury, S. en J. Slaby (2012) (red.) *Critical neuroscience. A handbook of the social and cultural contexts of neuroscience*. West-Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.

Dumit, J. (2004) *Picturing personhood. Brain scans and biomedical identity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Jordan-Young, R.M. (2010) *Brain storm. The flaws in the science of sex differences*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Noë, A. (2009) *Out of our heads. Why you are not your brain, and other lessons from the biology of consciousness*. New York: Hill and Wang.

O'Connor, C., G. Rees en H. Joffe (2012) 'Neuroscience in the public sphere'. *Neuron* 74 (2): 220-226.

Pickersgill, M. (2013) 'The social life of the brain: neuroscience in society'. *Current Sociology* 61 (3): 322-340.

Satel, S. en S.O. Lilienfield (2013) *Brainwashed. The seductive appeal of mindless neuroscience*. New York: Basic Books.

Tallis, R. (2011) *Aping mankind. Neuromania, Darwinitis and the misrepresentation of humanity*. Durham: Acumen.

Vidal, F. (2009) 'Brainhood, anthropological figure of modernity'. *History of the Human Sciences* 22 (1): 5-36.

De Creative Commons License is van toepassing op dit artikel (Naamsvermelding-Niet-commercieel 3.0). Zie http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/nl voor meer informatie.