

*QUEST*: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie

Vol. XXI, No. 1-2, 2007

*special issue on: Lines and rhizomes – The transcontinental element in African philosophies*





# QUEST

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## *Lines and rhizomes*

*The transcontinental element in African philosophies*

*editor for this special issue: Wim van Binsbergen*

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# Lines and rhizomes – The transcontinental element in African philosophies

## Introduction

by Wim van Binsbergen

**Abstract: Lines and rhizomes – The transcontinental element in African philosophies: Introduction.** The present special issue on ‘Lines and rhizomes – Transcontinental encounters in African philosophies’ brings together a number of studies united by what seems to be a common – though in some cases implicit – orientation: the recognition that philosophy, whilst localised and home-bound in the philosopher’s body, a language, a writing system, a community of scholars, a journal, a regional and continental history etc., is at the same time unbounded in the sense that without worldwide inspiration, exploration and finally expertise in modes and systems of thought (both formal and informal) away from home, the universalising component of all conceptualisation and all verbal articulation risks to be unable to unfold its powers of imagination by which it creates and recreates the world; unable, also, to renew itself and to address the kind of novel problematics that the history of the last two centuries – and especially of the last two decades – has strewn so generously over our heads. What we see here is an assembly of authors who in many ways qualify as a collective of African philosophers, most of them hailing from Africa, all of them living with and writing on Africa, yet in a transcontinental orientation that reminds us how long ago it is that the debate on the possibility and the existence of an African philosophy has subsided. If Africa is anything, it is part of the world of humankind as a whole. If African thought is anything, it is both a resource for, and a celebration of, the thought of humankind as a whole. Therefore, the boundaries of historic identity and localising organisational structure that were once necessary so as to allow us to think African difference, may now increasingly become interfaces of exchange, geared to the pursuit of distant promises in space and time, and to the recognition of a common ground in what was once construed to be mutually exotic.

**Résumé: Des lignes et des rhizomes – L’élément transcontinental dans les philosophies africaines: Introduction.** Le présent numéro spécial de *QUEST* offre un nombre d’études unifiées par ce qui semble être une orientation commune (bien qu’elle reste implicite dans certains cas): tous les contributions

affirment que la philosophie soit, de l'un côté, localisée, orientée vers un chez-soi par son encadrement dans le corps d'un philosophe, dans une langue, dans un système d'écriture, une communauté des savants, une revue, une histoire régionale et continentale, etc. ; mais que de l'autre côté et en même temps, la philosophie ne connaît pas des frontières – ce qui veut dire que sans une inspiration mondiale, sans l'exploration aboutant à l'expertise dans des modes et des systèmes de pensée (formels aussi bien qu'informels) qui sont loins du chez-soi, l'élément universalisant impliqué dans toute conceptualisation et dans toute articulation verbale, risque d'être rendu incapable d'étendre, jusqu'au maximum, ses pouvoirs d'imagination par lesquels il crée et recrée le monde ; incapable aussi de se renouveler et d'adresser les problématiques nouveaux tels que l'histoire des deux siècles plus récents, et surtout des deux décennies les plus récentes, nous ont imposés en grand nombre. Ce que nous voyons ici, c'est un ensemble d'auteurs qui, dans plusieurs façons, qualifient comme collectif de philosophes africains, le plupart d'eux nés en Afrique, tous vivant avec et écrivant sur l'Afrique, mais néanmoins engagés dans une orientation transcontinentale qui nous rappelle combien de temps s'est écoulé depuis la fin du débat sur la possibilité et l'existence d'une philosophie africaine. Si l'Afrique est une réalité, c'est comme partie du monde humain entier. Si la pensée africaine est une réalité, c'est comme ressource pour, et comme célébration de, la pensée humaine entière. Par conséquent, les limites définissant et protégeant une identité historique et une organisation locale qui, il y a cinquante ans, étaient indispensable pour nous permettre de penser la différence africaine, aujourd'hui deviennent de plus en plus des champs d'échange – en poursuivant les promesses lointaines dans l'espace et dans le temps, et en reconnaissant un fond commun dans ce qui, avant, était mutuellement construit comme exotique, excluant et exclu.

**Key words:** Transcontinental, African philosophies, historic identity, localisation, globalisation, African difference, Greek-African continuity, universalism, rationality, Afrocentrism, Socrates, sagacity, panpsychism, anthropocentrism, Teilhard de Chardin

**Mots-clefs:** Transcontinental, les philosophies africaines, identité historique, localisation, mondialisation, la différence africaine, la continuité grecque-africaine, universalisme, rationalité, Afrocentrisme, Socrate, sagacité, sagesse, pan-psychisme, anthropocentrisme, Teilhard de Chardin

The present special issue on 'Lines and rhizomes – The transcontinental element in African philosophies' brings together a number of studies united by what seems to be a common – though in some cases implicit – orientation: the recognition that philosophy, whilst localised and home-bound in the philosopher's body, a language, a writing system, a community of scholars, a journal, a regional and continental history etc., is at the same time unbounded in the sense that without worldwide



inspiration, exploration and finally expertise in modes and systems of thought (both formal and informal) away from home, the universalising component of all conceptualisation and all verbal articulation risks to be unable to unfold its powers of imagination by which it creates and recreates the world; unable, also, to renew itself and to address the kind of novel problematics that the history of the last two centuries – and especially of the last two decades – has strewn so generously over our heads. What we see here is an assembly of authors who in many ways qualify as a collective of African philosophers, most of them hailing from Africa, all of them living with and writing on Africa, yet in a transcontinental orientation that reminds us how long ago it is that the debate on the possibility and the existence of an African philosophy has subsided. If Africa is anything, it is part of the world of humankind as a whole. If African thought is anything, it is both a resource for, and a celebration of, the thought of humankind as a whole. Therefore, the boundaries of historic identity and localising organisational structure that were once necessary so as to allow us to think African difference, may now increasingly become interfaces of exchange, the pursuit of distant promises in space and time, and the recognition of a common ground in what was once construed to be mutually exotic.

In this protean and kaleidoscopic process, which defies strict definition and runs in the face of established institutional and emotional interests, we are fortunate to take our lead from a contribution by that great ambassador of African difference in universalism, Valentin Mudimbe. In the opening contribution to this special issue, he ponders on the apparently trivial question: *what is a line*. (The smallest unit of graphic marking, the minimum way in which we can make a lasting impact on the world? The minimum gesture by which we can assault the sacrality of sacred books – to which we have been summoned not to alter even the smallest, line-like letter?<sup>1</sup> The basic component of the string games that, for some profound reason that yet escapes us for the time being, are one of the conspicuous universals of us, Anatomically Modern

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the *New Testament* of the Christian *Bible*, Mt. 5: 18.

Humans, who have constituted the only surviving human group on earth for the past 20,000 years? The scratches that, throughout the Upper Paleolithic, appear on animal bones and that have been rather convincingly argued to represent counting systems and lunar calendars? The boundary we draw on the ground. The sign Jesus of Nazareth drew on the ground, as his eloquent comment in a dispute on boundedness and unboundedness?).<sup>2</sup> For a start, let me cite the abstract of Mudimbe's inimitable text, which combines a profusion of heterogeneous inspirations from all over time and space, with yet, a common purpose – marking him as a post-African who dedicates this particular contribution to philosophy (protected and hallowed by layer upon layer of reference and quotation at the beginning of the piece) to his Latin American students, inhabitants of a largely diasporic continent where, by the vicissitudes of history and political economy, one is often compelled to be (structurally) African in a way not unlike Mudimbe's own way.

‘What is a line? The question is naïve. That is the way it would seem to anyone: simple and credulous, it would not need to be checked in a dictionary. Does not the notion of line bring to mind images and representations that are transparent to the point of not needing explanation? Any speaker knows that a line, real or imaginary, signifies a path, a continuous point, a moving mark. It is from such a perception, that one might invest it in expressions in which it functions as both designation of a reality and its figure; thus, for instance: the line of a mountain, for contour; the line of a body, for its shape; the line of water, for a demarcation. *A metaphor, it operates in our everyday life with such efficiency that we come to forget that this simple word not only organizes our spatial perception, but determines our conceptualization of basic rapports between front and back, deep and shallow, in and out, near and far, on and off, up and down, past and present, today and tomorrow, etc.* Looked at, from this awareness, one may then move toward what the directionality of the line implies, both the idea of *separation and distinction of parts it creates*. Our physical geography, the whole domain of our culture, including mental configurations and our relations to nature, are *topographies structured by lines*. It is not my intention to orient this reflection into debates brought, few decades ago, to the core of structuralism about whether binary oppositions—they are not detachable from the notion of line that defines their distance—are, or are not social constructs. *My purpose is, from the ordinariness of lines as figures determining spaces in the practice of everyday life, to interrogate what they suppose and impose in allegories that bring us in dialogue or separate us*

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. the *New Testament* of the *Christian Bible*, John 8: 6.

*in confrontation.*' (Mudimbe, contribution below)

What is particularly interesting is that, in his play on lines, Mudimbe strongly emphasises the way lines may serve as boundaries separating A | from B. And of course, from him as a post-structuralist we expect to be reminded of *the separation that is not a separation but a union* – a trope recurring in his own work (e.g. on the distinction of night and day) and worked out into many of its profound implications by Derrida. However, this one-sided emphasis on separation goes at the expense of what is yet a line's most obvious characteristic: *that it constitutes the shortest connection between two points* (in other words, not A | B but A – B). The latter notion has been scientifically canonised at least ever since – millennia after the rise of mathematics as a distinct subject in Egypt and Mesopotamia – the Hellenistic Greek Euclides formalised his planimetry. Yet this notion of line as most effective connection is infinitely older in humankind's conscious conceptualisation of the world: see the above allusion to string games; of the African myths of people, cattle, agricultural seeds, implements, even the Creator himself (herself?), descending from heaven on a line (a spider's thread?) – an idea which, according to myths, people were soon to revert so as to try and ascend to heaven.

The transcontinental lines that are at the heart of the present collection, are *lines of connection* – real, imagined, hoped for or resented, sometimes implied but overlooked or shunned, the choice of a distant reference group, a distant example that is 'good for thought', a thinker probing in a different language in a largely unfamiliar culture, hundreds of years ago, a problematic that yet has much in common with those challenging our thought here and now.

Such variegated lines of real or virtual intellectual connection are not always manifest, above ground, and rectilinear. Usually they are the opposite: not directly visible to the eye, but manifested by the sudden growth that pops up in unexpected places – the mushrooms spread in a circle around their invisible mycellium that has secretively survived in the earth during winter, spring and early summer, and that only towards autumn makes its presence known indirectly. It is the place where one

solemnly positions oneself to make secret wishes. In the last few decades, the conceptual toolbox of philosophy and literary studies has been enriched by Deleuze and Guattari's illuminating use of the concept 'rhizome', with similar implications.

Although united by this common theme of distant, often hidden, often vicarious, often virtual, yet unmistakable lines of connection which usually are transcontinental and transcultural, the collection that makes up the present special issue ramifies off in all directions, as befits a rhizomatic process revolving on the powers of thought and of imagination. Let us briefly review the contributions.

After Mudimbe's breath-taking and immensely inspiring equilibrium act on the suspended line high near the roof of the circus (and let us not forget that it is lines that keep the tent in place, and taut), Samba Diakité shows us an apparently very different equilibrium act which yet, in its hope for a trans-African universalism and his deconstruction of things (usually constructed to be) African, somewhat reminds us of Mudimbe: the prominent Cameroonian philosopher Marcien Towa as a 'Wanderer zwischen zwei Welten' (a wanderer between two worlds, or cultures). Here the rhizome appears to have toxic qualities: in the face of the West and its impact, the original African home is poisoned and rendered uninhabitable, and Towa's response to this situation is very different from Mudimbe's. Instead of the latter's positive affirmation of meta-African world citizenship,<sup>3</sup> Towa *retreats*:

'A retrospective view of the past gives way to ironic distancing from the uncertainties of the African continent, staggering on the bridge between two oceans.' (Diakité, contribution below).

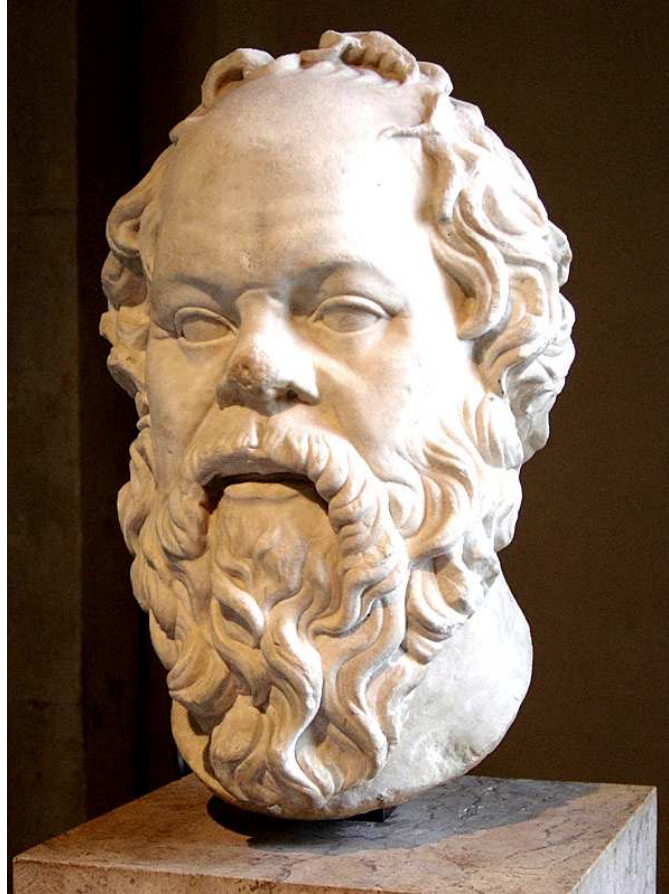
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<sup>3</sup> In this respect my earlier analysis of what I identified as the central theme of Mudimbe's thought: homelessness in the face of death, was too negative and pessimistic: between homelessness, and the poetics (in Wittgensteinian terms, the language games) of philosophy, stands – as I have been privileged to experience in personal contact with Mudimbe in recent years – the recognition and celebration of a shared humanity in fellow human beings; cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2005, '“An incomprehensible miracle” – Central African clerical intellectualism versus African historic religion: A close reading of Valentin Mudimbe's *Tales of Faith*', in: Kai Kresse, ed., *Reading Mudimbe*, special issue of the *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 17, 1, June 2005: 11-65; [http://www.shikanda.net/african\\_religion/mudil0.htm](http://www.shikanda.net/african_religion/mudil0.htm).

Because of its truncated nature as an obituary, Jean-Bertrand Amougou's paper on the recently deceased Cameroonian philosopher Hebga (1928-2008) had to be put in the section 'QUEST laboratory'. Yet Towa's position is strikingly thrown in relief by comparison with Hebga's life-long, insistent, eclectic and essentially optimistic probing for philosophical inspiration that would enable him and his readers (may they be many!) to address the specifics of modern Africa with the help of conceptual and analytical tools that – like so much in modern Africa – would combine local and transcontinental sources, resources, traditions and misconceptions. Amougou recently took a PhD on the basis of a thesis exploring in detail Hebga's highly original variety of rationality, one that did not prevent the latter to engage with Kant and Habermas, and to find – as a priest – shelter in the universalising conceptual and organisational edifice of Roman Catholicism; yet at the same time that form of rationality allowed Hebga to take African spirituality very seriously, and to write one of the most significant and sophisticated treatises on paranormal phenomena from an African perspective. Hebga thus situates himself firmly in the tradition of clerical intellectualism, that has brought us some of the finest philosophy from and in Africa, including Mudimbe's. Here the transcontinental connections make Africa appear, not as a staggering drunk unable to make up his mind whether to drown himself either in the Indian or the Atlantic Ocean, but as an essentially composed and sane, once richly endowed person, determined to find conceptual solutions for the problems of meaning that beset him at present, and drawing great comfort from realising that his resources are not just local but global, and extending across all of human history.

It is a universalising and globalising, yet at the same time Africanising positioning that we may also detect in Appiah *In my father's house: Africa in the philosophy of culture*, and we are fortunate to have, in the present issue, Mohammad Hossein Seifikar's review of Appiah's recent book on cosmopolitanism.

**Fig. 1. Bust considered to represent Socrates, 1st c. CE Roman copy, now in the Louvre museum, Paris, France**



As compared to Towa as mediated by Diakit , our next paper, by Victor S. Alumona, engages in a far more optimistic transcontinental encounter: a detailed analysis of the flow of verbal exchanges in Plato's *Protagoras* shows that one cannot teach new tricks to an old horse (which clearly applies to both characters, the inquisitive and incisive Socrates as well as the inveterate sophist Protagoras). But it also, implicitly, shows us something else: the flight of the spirit makes light with the compartmentalisation of the world in neatly demarcated provinces, regions, cultures and competences, and it is perfectly normal for an African scholar to address a debate in the history of ancient Greek philosophy, and make a contribution there – which is therefore also a contribution to philosophy in Africa –, without the word 'Africa' entering

even once into his or her argument. In recent decades we have seen the attempt to conveniently but also naïvely – almost Hollywood fashion – localise this sort of endeavour, by making of Socrates a Black man in continuity with sub-Saharan African culture. This Afrocentrist interpretation (and, in the present collection, Lusala lu ne Nkuka Luka's review of Jean Foukoué's book on Cheikh Anta Diop reminds us once more of one of its brilliant main inspirators) was passionately contested by North Atlantic classicists like Mary Lefkowitz; and admittedly it is not much of a convincing argument to go by the blunt, unclassical features of the man depicted in the one portrait bust (dating from over four centuries after Socrates' death!) traditionally considered to represent Socrates (Fig. 1).

The physiognomy of the depicted man follows a convention well established in Hellenic and Hellenistic sculpture – that of the rustic Silenus, whose more overt connotations would be Asian rather than African. However, as lies in the nature of the rhizomatic connections of thought and imagination that we are interested in here, there is much more to this than meets the entrenched scholarly eye of the classicist. I am thinking of Greek myths insisting on the need for a murderer to be cleansed before being re-admitted to human society (for all we know we may be reading pages from Evans-Pritchard's account of the Nuer leopard-skin chief and his functions as an earth priest).<sup>4</sup> I am thinking, more in general, of Africa's time-honoured institutions of community democracy and reconciliatory procedures and rituals, suggesting that the proto-historic bedding from which democracy issued – probably not very different from the proto-historic bedding from which *philosophy* issued – was much more extensive, in space and in time, than merely the Aegean region in the Middle Iron Age, and somehow seems to have included a considerable African component. And I am thinking of the Greek myth depicting two primal gods so locked in embrace that their offspring, representing creation, cannot issue from the primal womb (cf. the Yoruba

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<sup>4</sup> Evans-Pritchards, E.E., 1967, *The Nuer: A description of the modes of livelihood and political institutions of a Nilotic people*, Oxford: Clarendon; reprint of the original edition of 1940.

myth of Obatala and Oduduwa similarly engaged).<sup>5</sup> It would be an interesting experiment – probably long realised already – to let selected dialogues of Plato be presented at the stage by West African actors in some Soyinkan, thoroughly Africanising *mis-en-scène*; it would show that Robert Graves, the poet, novelist, and amateur editor of Greek myths, had a point when stressing the continuity between Ancient Greek intellectual culture, and West Africa. Literally making of Socrates an African amounts to taking recourse in a fallacy of misplaced concreteness, but the fact remains that the flashing, confrontational, challenging style of argument seeking to create fixed points in a fluid context of mutual impression management, as depicted in Plato's dialogues, has an unmistakable African flavour about it, difficult to miss for anyone who has spent years sitting in on African village moots, informal conversation under village shelters, at beer parties and at funerals. This is not the place to pursue these lines of connection with firm historical, linguistic and genetic evidence of Greek-African continuities;<sup>6</sup> all what matters in the present connection is that, rhizomatically, such connections exist at least *in thought*, enough to make us look at Plato's *Protagoras* with eyes enriched by an African perspective.

Whereas Alumona's paper revolves on the critical representation of, and reflection upon, European philosophy by Africa, a more common occurrence has been the reverse: European representation of African non-academic modes of thought known through more or less extensive fieldwork, yielding a measure of cultural and linguistic competence typically built up in adulthood rather than (as is far more standard in cultural learning) from earliest infancy on. Barry Hallen has been one of the most successful Northerners engaged in such a process, and his name

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<sup>5</sup> Scheub, Harold, 2000, *A dictionary of African mythology: The mythmaker as storyteller*, Oxford etc.: Oxford University Press. There is a further transcontinental connection here since the same myth has been recorded for various parts of Oceania – but that is regrettably beyond our present scope.

<sup>6</sup> Much of my research over the past ten years has concentrated on this question and related issues. Soon I hope to present, in the pages of *QUEST*, an article 'Before the Pre-Socratics' that explores these issues more fully.



reverberates through this volume of *QUEST*, with Kibujjo Kalumba's critical article assessing Hallen's approach, and Frederick Ochieng'-Odhiambo's review of Hallen's book, *African Philosophy: The Analytic Approach*, published in 2006.

However, apart from conditions created by historic accident during the ephemeral colonial period, there is no reason why the representation of African non-academic modes of thought should not be undertaken more effectively and congenially by people who from infancy have acquired the linguistic and cultural competence – including the many implicit and non-verbal elements – required for an appreciation and understanding of African life-forms and worldviews: by Africans themselves. It is here that the pioneering work of the lamented Odera Oruka situates itself, as brought out by Frederick Ochieng'-Odhiambo's full-paper contribution to the present special issue. He reminds us how Odera Oruka initially defined his own project:

Would it be possible to identify persons of traditional African culture, capable of the critical, second-order type of thinking about the various problems of human life and nature; persons, that is, who subject beliefs that are traditionally taken for granted to independent rational re-examination and who are inclined to accept or reject such beliefs on the authority of reason rather than on the basis of a communal or religious consensus?<sup>3</sup>

The difficulty does not so much lie in the identification of such African philosophic sagacity, nor in the communication with its spokespersons in the field, but in the subsequent *textual representation*. For what Odera Oruka had in mind was not making the wisdom of African sages available in the time-honoured format in which they had dispensed it so far (orally, and within the narrow horizon of the local community), but the form of discursive academic text, in print, in an imported world language of North Atlantic origin, and worldwide. This choice of format, taken to be self-evident yet bringing with it an entire Pandora's Box of intercultural confusion and misunderstanding (notably on the possibility, nature,

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<sup>3</sup> H. Odera Oruka, 'African Philosophy: The Current Debate' in H. Odera Oruka, ed; *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*, Nairobi: ACTS Press, 1991, p. 17; as cited in Ochieng'-Odhiambo's contribution below.

format, academic setting, and possibility of African philosophy),<sup>7</sup> situates Odera's project in the same rhizomatic transcontinental space as Hallen's, as that of ethno-philosophy, and at a somewhat greater distance, that of religious and worldview ethnography. Part of the attending misunderstandings are cleared up by Ochieng'-Odhiambo's argument.

Whilst Hallen's approach is painstaking, grounded in prolonged local engagement with African actors and in the process critically tested by them, a more common, North Atlantic initiated, form of transcontinental connection of African modes of thought is that of distant and stereotyping second-hand appropriation, as brought out in Wim van Binsbergen's critical study of the French post-structuralist philosopher Guattari – even though it is Guattari to whom we yet owe one of the focal concepts informing the present special issue. Here we have a typical paradox of transcontinental connections: while they fail to convince to the letter (for it is demonstrated that Guattari's handling of cultural material from outside the North Atlantic region is flawed in ways that fling into the face of his own philosophy of *reterritorialising* liberation), the subterranean rhizomatics of inspiration ensure that in the end our assessment of Guattari turns out to be much more positive. While anthropology (in itself an immensely problematic form of transcontinental connectivity in knowledge production)<sup>8</sup> can act as a touchstone for Guattari's omissions and one-sidednesses, the more central themes in Guattari's thought may yet contribute, it is argued, to make

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<sup>7</sup> To avoid misunderstanding: I consider the commission of African philosophical oral text to a format of scholarly text to be a Pandora's Box (in the original, Hesiod sense of a sealed package containing assorted trouble), not because the task is impossible or futile, let alone because Northerners would be better equipped for it (they are not), but only because that Pandora's Box was allowed to remain an unanalysed *black box*, in other words, because the many and profound, completely distortive implications of the transition from orality to written, edited, translated text had been insufficiently addressed, and have insufficiently been brought to bear on the protracted debate on the possibility etc. of African philosophy. With the spate of writing on orature etc. in recent decades, this condition no longer obtains, and the debate has largely subsided.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. my 2003 book: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2003, *Intercultural Encounters: African and Anthropological Lessons towards a Philosophy of interculturality*. Berlin / Boston / Muenster: LIT.

anthropology's transcontinental mediation more effective and less entrenched, in other words far more palatable from an African point of view.

*What can we use of the North Atlantic philosophical tradition, how can we selectively deploy it to elucidate our specific problematics in Africa today, and how can we hold our own – even go beyond – in the face of this transcontinental overkill in the way of resources, prestige and authority, publication facilities, canonisation.* These are, implicitly, the considerations that appear to inform the remaining three contributions to this special issue.

Godwin Azenabor examines the Golden Rule principle which he imputes to underly significant forms of African ethics, and compares it with Kant's categorical imperative. It is refreshing to see how African ethics, even though somewhat cursorily identified, can be invoked as a vantage point from which to take a critical distance from Kant's rationalistic lack of social and humanitarian considerations. This points to another, largely unexplored way which the transcontinental connection in the context of African philosophy can take: the way in which African philosophy can contribute significant new, identifiably African, viewpoints and modes of analysis to globally circulating philosophical problematics and debates. In the last decade, the discussion around *ubuntu* (see below) has been one of the view signs of such a positive South-North feed-back in philosophical matters. Another growth-point would seem to be the reflection on African paranormal and divinatory phenomena.

Jacques Nanema, inspired by the development discourse that is one of the major public expressions in Africa especially informing transcultural encounters of a political and economic nature, seeks the confrontation with another Northern thinker, the educational philosopher Mounier and his humanism. Nanema's position combines obvious admiration for the person and work of his subject, with an implicit sense of resourcelessness and helplessness on the African side. Admittedly, North Atlantic formal education (along with Christianity as a world religion, the modern formal organisation informing the modern state and

the modern economy) has been one of the major transcultural transformational forces on the African continent in the past two centuries. But need it lead to a situation where the African commentator seems to be almost paralysed by awe and respect? After all, Nanema himself begins by affirming that education is the commonest thing in the world – so surely there is a plethora of African discourses on this matter, as a basis to ‘speak back’ to Mounier, and transcend his inspiring but obsolescent, and culture-specific message. One would have wished for an affirmation of African time-honoured or recent educational practices and perspectives (what about the institutions of extensive puberty training, once found over much of Africa? what about the many twentieth-century studies of African childhoods? what about new forms of training emerging in modern African religious organisations, both of an Islamic and of a Christian nature?), in order to prevent too great a submission to an imported North Atlantic model that – considering the massive socio-cultural changes of the last fifty years – would have lost much of its topicality and applicability anyway.

Finally, Dieudonné Zognong, in his piece on ‘Philosophie de la nature et sauvegarde écologique de la terre chez Teilhard de Chardin’, concludes these three attempts to find Northern inspiration for thinking Southern topicalities (which in fact turn out to be global topicalities). It is heart-warming to see my childhood hero Teilhard acknowledged as a pioneer of ecological consciousness, and as exponent of pan-psychism, of a new anthropocentrism, and of panhuman planetisation. But again one wonders whether not more of an affirmation of African difference had been possible when mediating Teilhardian thought for an essentially African audience. Planetisation (Teilhard’s biologicistic, even – considering its dominant imagery of geological layers – geologicistic pioneering of a notion of globalisation, and therefore greatly in need of social-science and culture-philosophical revision) may not readily find antecedents in recognised African modes of thought. But pan-psychism certainly does, reasonably well recorded for many parts of Africa. By the same token,

one wonders whether the *new* anthropocentrism of Teilhard,<sup>9</sup> should not be offset against the time-honoured African anthropocentrism, detectable all over Africa at so many levels, but most poignantly expressed in the language and worldview of speakers of Bantu languages, and ushered into African philosophy under the heading of *muntu* ('human being'), and more recently in the Southern Bantu version of *ubuntu* ('being human').<sup>10</sup>

Mediating, to an African audience, a North Atlantic version of themes that, on second thought, turn out (without the fact being acknowledged) to be already deeply and originally ingrained in African philosophy anyway, is a common form for transcontinental encounters to take. Hegemonic intimidation and submission have been part and parcel of Africa's intellectual encounter with the wider world in recent centuries, and in that sense the word 'line' regrettably begins to mean, primarily not so much 'connection', but a line of north-south demarcation, and of one-way North-South traffic. It is time to try and dig up the rhizomes of long-range

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<sup>9</sup> 'New', notably as a response to the zoologisation of humankind in the context of modern biology, in the course of the 19th and 20th century CE, which pushed humankind away from the centre of nature where – for the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic tradition – Genesis had put it, not very differently in this respect from Graeco-Roman intellectual culture, and where – for North Atlantic culture – the Renaissance had reinforced it in new terms.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Kagame, A., 1956, *La philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l'Être*, Bruxelles: Académie royale des Sciences coloniales; Tempels, Placide, 1959, *Bantu Philosophy*, Paris; orig. pub. in Flemish 1945 and French 1949; Eboussi Boulaga, F., 1977, *La crise du muntu: Authenticité africaine et philosophie*, Paris: Présence africaine; Jahn, J., 1958, *Muntu: Umrisse der neoafrikanische Kultur*, Düsseldorf / Köln: Diederichs; Bimwenyi, O., 1968, 'Le muntu, à la lumière des ses croyances en l'au-delà,' *Cahiers des Religions Africaines*, 1968, 65-74; Motoshi M., 1995, 'Le Muntu ne meurt que pour vivre. Réflexions sur les 'morts-vivants' africains et le Danaoshi japonais,' *Telema*, 21: 37-43. Specifically on *ubuntu*, cf. Ramose, M.B., 1999, *African philosophy through ubuntu*, Avondele (Harare): Mond; Samkange, S., & Samkange, T.M., 1980, *Hunhuism or ubuntuism: A Zimbabwe indigenous political philosophy*, Salisbury [ Harare ] : Graham; Boele van Hensbroek, P., ed., *African Renaissance and Ubuntu Philosophy*, special issue of: *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, 15, 1-2, 2001; Battle, Michael, 1997, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press; Bewaji, J.A.I., & Ramose, M.B., 2003, 'The Bewaji, Van Binsbergen and Ramose debate on ubuntu', *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 22, 4: 378-415.

links and continuities, so that the lines between thinkers in time and space become once more the shortest possible connection between equal points. The rhizome of transcontinental connectivity grows, perhaps hidden, but in common ground extending across time and space to include the whole of humankind.

# What is a line?<sup>1</sup>

## On paradoxes about allegories of identity and alterity

by Valentin Y. Mudimbe

**Abstract.** **What is a line? On paradoxes about allegories of identity and alterity.** What is a line? The question is naïve. That is the way it would seem to anyone: simple and credulous, it would not need to be checked in a dictionary. Does not the notion of line bring to mind images and representations that are transparent to the point of not needing explanation? Any speaker knows that a line, real or imaginary, signifies a path, a continuous point, a moving mark. It is from such a perception, that one might invest it in expressions in which it functions as both designation of a reality and its figure; thus, for instance: the line of a mountain, for contour; the line of a body, for its shape; the line of water, for a demarcation. A metaphor, it operates in our everyday life with such efficiency that we come to forget that this simple word not only organizes our spatial perception, but determines our conceptualization of basic *rappports* between front and back, deep and shallow, in and out, near and far, on and off, up and down, past and present, today and tomorrow, etc. Looked at, from this awareness, one may then move toward what the directionality of the line implies, both the idea of separation and distinction of parts it creates. Our physical geography, the whole domain of our culture, including mental configurations and our relations to nature, are topographies structured by lines. It is not my intention to orient this reflection into debates brought, few decades ago, to the core of structuralism about whether binary oppositions—they are not detachable from the notion of line that defines their distance—are, or are not social constructs. My purpose is, from the ordinariness of lines as figures determining spaces in the practice of everyday life, to interrogate what they suppose and impose in allegories that bring us in dialogue or separate us in confrontation.

**Key words.** line, representations, path, reality, metaphor, directionality, culture, practice of everyday life, allegories, dialogue, confrontation.

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<sup>1</sup> This text was read on February 2, 2006 at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium. I am grateful to Filip De Boeck who organized and presided the session, to E. Corinne Blalock, my assistant, for her continued help, and to Diane Ciekawy for her assistance in correcting an earlier draft.

*Nonlinearity*: The term ‘linear,’ in connection with equations, theories, and physical interactions, is *not* meant to describe straight lines. Rather it means in some broad sense that things can be added. (Glossary to: S.W. Hawking, K.S. Thorne, I. Novikov, T. Ferris, A. Lightman, R. Price, *The Future of Spacetime*, Norton, 2002.)

Life cheats reason and reason cheats life. Scholastic-Aristotelian philosophy fabricated in the interest of life, a teleologic-evolutionist system, rational in appearance, which might serve as a support for our vital longing. This philosophy (...) was, in its essence, merely a trick on the part of life to force reason to lend it its support. But reason supported it with such pressure that it ended by pulverizing it. (Miguel de Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life*, Dover Publications, 1954: 116)

Que estoy soñando y que quiero  
obrar hacer bien, pues no se pierde  
el hacer bien aun en sueños.

I am dreaming and I wish to act  
rightly for good deeds are not lost,  
though they be wrought in dreams

(Pedro Calderón, *La Vida es Sueño*, II, 4.)

*To my Latin American students,  
inscribed bodies,  
who have been teaching me how to read absurd lines in compact economies  
of signs.*

## 1.

What is a line? The question is naïve. That is the way it would seem to anyone: simple and credulous, it would not need to be checked in a dictionary. Does not the notion of line brings to mind images and representations that are transparent to the point of not needing explanation? Any speaker knows that a line, real or imaginary, signifies a path, a continuous point, a moving mark. It is from such a perception, that one might invest it in expressions in which it functions as both designation of a reality and its figure; thus, for instance: the line of a mountain, for contour; the line of a body, for its shape; the line of water, for a demarcation. A metaphor, it operates in our everyday life with such efficiency that we come to forget that this simple word not only organizes our spatial perception, but determines our conceptualization of basic *rappports* between front and back, deep and shallow, in and out, near and far, on and off, up and down,



past and present, today and tomorrow, etc. Looked at, from this awareness, one may then move toward what the directionality of the line implies, both the idea of separation and distinction of parts it creates. Our physical geography, the whole domain of our culture, including mental configurations and our relations to nature, are topographies structured by lines.

It is not my intention to orient this reflection into debates brought, few decades ago, to the core of structuralism about whether binary oppositions—they are not detachable from the notion of line that defines their distance—are, or are not social constructs. My purpose is, from the ordinariness of lines as figures determining spaces in the practice of everyday life, to interrogate what they suppose and impose in allegories that bring us in dialogue or separate us in confrontation.

Using my own cultural wanderings, and understanding allegory, after Walter Benjamin, in the sense of a cultural attitude (*Anschauung*), and as a manner of visualizing something (*Anschauungsweise*), in other words a *habitus*, I would like to consider some of the paradoxes we are facing *à propos* identity and alterity in our contemporary global culture. Thus, not from grand theories on the order of things, but instead from the subjective experience of an African-born American teacher, in many senses a structural minority committed to tasks transcending time and geographies, this meditation on an intransitive Greek verb Θαυμάζω (*thaumatsô*), ‘I marvel, I wonder’, in the positive and in the negative. Thus the concept, unexpectedly, may sometimes transmute itself into that of τρημα (*trêma*), the substantive for perforation. Its English equivalent, trauma, stands for a shock initiating a lasting psychological damage that possibly can lead to a neurosis. One would say, therefore, from the simplicity of the semantics of a line, there is not much to worry about a rendering of such a procession. In effect, does not its signification belong to the banality of our daily existence, precisely the management of our activity and the stress it produces when correlated to healthy alignments? There are, in principle, available to anyone, skills and techniques for mastering the demands of today’s life. That is correct: fine arts relaxation therapies and mindset stress monitoring have become popular disciplines for ‘approaching and

creating harmony and wholeness in a chaotic world.’ As a matter of fact, the last phrase has simply transplanted the sub-title of *Living in Balance* (Conari Press, 1998), a commanding self-help textbook by Joel Levey and Michelle Levey, two well-known specialists in ‘life work balance’ and founders of the Seattle-based Inner Work Technologies Inc. Dignified by the moral authority of the Dalai Lama who introduces it with a foreword, the book prescribes an agenda outlined by three main axes: one, an inside-out approach to balance and wholeness; two, mind-body-spirit harmonics between energy and spirit; three, ways of expanding the circle of balance, or embracing the whole, from home to the world, through play and work. Yes, indeed, the perspective of this ‘cutting edge research in peak human performance’ *donne à penser*; at any rate, it stimulates the linear orientation I have accented so far, slightly twisting the measure of a line as a continuous one-straight-direction point, by emphasizing its sometimes circular and curve aspect, already alluded to à propos its contiguity with the idea of shape. With reference to this value, one might represent a line as a deviation from straightness, as signifying a smooth bend, an angle deflecting a plane and reorganizing in this fashion the morphology of a figure.

Prescriptions in all domains, particularly about cultural lines, are always intimidating. On the other hand, in agreement or disagreement with the type of programs inventing and promoting lines for healthy identities in our time, would it make sense, reappraising his 1935 Vienna lecture, to reformulate Husserl’s hesitations about the lines of ‘our surrounding world which is a spiritual structure in us and in our historical life’? In sum, how to apprehend them with a profound respect for the subjective validity of the particular, in their conjunction with the unconditionally universal? And from such a frame of reference, how to evaluate lines of narratives that set off and connect figures of a praxis in its double dimension, a negation of a negation, and an opening up to the unexpected? For me, these figures display, in their own ways, commitments lived everyday in translation, through three linguistic codes, those of English, French, and Spanish. In a sense, these codes accomplish the imaginary world I inhabit, and that is circumscribed by three questions, all of

them dynamic, yet basically unstable in their relation to the very confusing idea of line with which they identify: in communication, what does it mean to qualify a row of declarations, or a series of images, as my line of expression, of my visualization? in work, what does it mean to qualify my interventions from the line of my activity? in judgment, what does it mean to qualify an orientation from the line of my belief?

All foundational arguments, positive moral paradigms and their alternatives, cultural choices and their strategies, in our constructed worlds of natural and social constraints, stand in relation to a fundamental line, the one articulated by an original sin. Jean-Paul Sartre expressed it well in *Being and Nothingness* (Washington Square Press, 1956). Existing in a world in which, individually or collectively, we are superfluous; and, in which, by positing ourselves as subjects, we alienate others; and, in return, these others cannot but alienate us, since they are subjects in their own right. And the French philosopher adds:

‘this [is] the meaning of the famous line from Scripture: ‘They knew that they were naked’ (...). Thus, original sin is my upsurge in a world where there are others; and whatever may be my further relations with others, these relations will be only variations on the original theme of my guilt’ (op. cit: 531).

Such is the locus from which a social identity can be thematized. It is a self-concept, borne with a progressively increasing sense of belonging to already constructed in-groups (a race, a gender, a religion), and gradually accessing to its being, as a freedom. In its affirmation in ‘we-nesses,’ and facing out-groups, a social identity outgrows its genesis, asserts itself in a project, as that which, in concrete relations with others and in reference to itself, can identify with its own capacity, along those of others, in the travail of becoming a transcendence. This utopian vision does compensate for the original sin, but it does not erase it, cannot even negate it. Guilty, right, I am; and, at the same time, I know for sure that this form of guilt cannot be limited to anyone individually. With Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, from their dialogue on terror (in Giovanna Borradori ed., *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (University of Chicago Press, 2003)), I believe also that the main reason resides in a transparent evidence, namely that our identities are so interwoven, interdependent, that in the

incalculable multiplicity of their narratives, they overrun all our boundaries (gender, race, systems of beliefs, etc.) They force us to live simultaneously, at once and again, in multiple territories. Moreover, nowadays, each one of us is, by this very fact, split into numerous strands of experiences to the point that we should admit that everybody is, really, a community with, structurally, more or less autonomous components.

These remarks are aimed at a perspective: to face some alienating effects in our global world through procedures determining social identities; and for the sake of human dignity, to emphasize the uniqueness of its identity as what it should be, an autonomous project in cultural topologies clearly defined from a theoretical landscape with its interconnected lines. These should contribute to the grounding of a sound representation and its features. To define a topology, an English dictionary often adds two metaphoric extensions to its first meaning, the topographic study of a given place: from a medical lexicon, the anatomical structure of a specific area, or part of the body; and from mathematics, the study of the properties of geometric figures. These two metaphors allow me a delineation of interpretive charts with which I have been living the last few years, though their lines are, for sure, inscribed in the passion of a life and its singularity. In this retrodiction, rightly or wrongly, there are more lines converging toward the same challenge, the invention of identities, and accommodating its anti-essentialist perspective. The basic structure of the argument unveils an anxiety concerning the interassociation of three competing reasons—the economic, the political as fused with the cultural, and the ethical—; how they function in complex systems, and how these systems explicitly manipulate the technical and cultural notion of diversity; and, indeed, what the concepts of identity and alterity become within configurations mapped by morally unstable lines. Perceiving and analyzing an issue such as this, even when using credible sources as references, is one thing; another, to ascertain that one, at least partially, has not been conceptually blinded; and, about such a hesitation, surges a new problem, and it addresses the identity of the seer in its interferences with semantic lines of a verb, *verstehen*, an activity correlating perception (*Einsicht*, *Wahrnehmung*) and understanding (*Einsicht*, *Verständnis*).

## 2.

Thanks to *An Anthropologist on Mars. Seven Paradoxical Tales* (Knopf, 1995) by Oliver Sacks, a professor of neurology at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, in New York, I knew of correlations between physiological blindness and psychic blindness, in technical parlance the ‘Anton’s syndrome,’ that is acting blind. To use Sacks’ rendering, it consists in moderating the instability of one’s own visual system and visual identity to the point that, even for the therapist, it becomes ‘very difficult, at times, to know what [is] going on, to distinguish between the ‘physiological’ and ‘psychological’”(op. cit: 138) Sack’s references in hand, it was possible to specify the paradox by exploring three main axes: a first one, suggested in critical analyses of the Oxford *Companion to the Mind* (2005) edited by Richard L. Gregory, and the Blackwell *Companion to the Philosophy of Science* (2001) edited by the Balliol College, Oxford, philosophy professor William H. Newton-Smith; a second axis, was represented by two markers: *ad montem*, Denis Diderot’s *Lettre sur les aveugles* (1749); and *ad uallem*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945); finally, the last axis, an analogical line, represented by Ivan P. Pavlov’s classical treatise, in the translation of W. Horsley Gantt, *Lectures on Conditioned Reflexes. Twenty-Five Years of Objective Study of the Higher Nervous Activity Behavior of Animals* (International Publishers, 1980). In brief, the paradoxical neuropsychological disorder comes down to an attitude, that can be qualified through two conceptual entries. The first is the definition of Oliver Sacks:

perceptual-cognitive processes, while physiological, are also personal—it is not a world that one perceives or constructs but *one’s* own world—and they lead to, are linked to, a perceptual self, with a will, an orientation, and a style of its own. This perceptual self may itself collapse with the collapse of perceptual systems, altering the orientation and the very identity of the individual. (op. cit: 136)

The second entry involves the interaction between the physiological and the psychological, that is the Anton’s syndrome; or the possible process of moving from one site of blindness to another, a two way switch between the physiological and the psychological. This would account, con-

cretely, for such a phenomenon as the case of *L'Aveugle qui refuse de voir* (1771). And, as proposed by Sacks', it can also be compared to animals' self-defense mechanism of a sudden shut down; in Pavlov's language, a 'transmarginal inhibition consequent upon supramaximal stimulation' which, in an analogical transfer, led him to posit human psychosis as a conditioned statement against unpleasant stimuli.

Considered as a metaphor, the Anton's syndrome—reconfiguration of, or withdrawal from a visual space—could be connected to allusions from an ancient maxim: 'they have eyes, and they do not see'. As a matter of fact, the proverb has an extension, 'they have ears and do not listen', thus extending the meaning of a possible lesson: modalities of two sensory functions, seeing and hearing, confer them a general capability for perceiving and understanding. This, then, might explain attitudes, in any case practices for ways of inscribing oneself in the world. The process dissociates a paradigm from its particular effects.

The process also affirms the subject as the originator. S/He might choose whether to see, whether to hear, and how. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty emphasizes this, noting that in the relation between the perceiver and the perceived, it is the perceiving subject who, apprehending aspects of things, represents them as properties of totalities which are the things. This is to say that the capacity to see and recognize things relates the seen and the subject's awareness of seeing; and, in this measure, the identity of the subject expresses itself as an *expérience corporelle*, a bodily experience. In this sense, a subject-object relation organizes the world founding a cultural representation. It is from such a primacy, the 'primacy of perception' to refer to another title by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, that one may understand the rather unexpected statement of Jean-Paul Sartre when he writes in *The War Diaries* (Pantheon 1984: 15): 'I think with my eyes.' The metaphor brings to the fore the very foundation of the Cartesian science, the *ego cogito* expresses itself in the *ego percipio*. In this 'I see' the world, surges an 'I am the one seen', identical with the direct object produced in my own self-affirmation.

Let me accent, about the Anton's syndrome, only the metaphoric

line and, as a reference, formulate in paradoxes some of the figures that might overflow, from stating that Denis Diderot's *Lettre sur les sourds et muets* (1751) 'listens' and 'speaks' to his *Lettre sur les aveugles* (1749), and the latter was essentially about 'seeing' from the experience of blindness. In this exercise, from Diderot's main thesis on the miracle that a competent education can achieve, I am indeed implying that a deaf-mute can hear and speak, and that a sightless person can see, on the condition that, as Wittgenstein put it in *Philosophical Investigations* (209), 'we accept the everyday language-game', and acknowledge that 'the concept of 'seeing' (or 'hearing' and 'speaking') makes a tangled impression(...) There is not one genuine proper case of (what is seen, what is heard, what is spoken), the rest being just vague, something which awaits clarification.' It is precisely such a paradoxical challenge that Martin Jay addresses in 'the ethics of blindness and the postmodern,' a chapter devoted to Levinas and Lyotard in his *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (University of California Press, 1993). As he puts it, 'postmodernism may be understood as the culminating chapter in a story of the (enucleated) eye. Or rather, it may paradoxically be at once the hypertrophy of the visual, at least in one of its modes, and its denigration' (op. cit.: 546).

Denis Diderot was impressed by the perceptual capacity of Nicholas Saunderson, a blind man who, early in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century, of all disciplines one can imagine, was a professor of optics at Oxford. Oliver Sacks who, thanks to his *An Anthropologist on Mars* (op. cit.), orientated me to this, has in the same book the intriguing case of Jonathan I., a 'colorblind painter'. After a car accident in 1986, Jonathan I. discovers that 'My brown dog is dark grey. Tomato juice is black. Color TV is a hodgepodge.' (op. cit: 3) In fact, says the neurologist, Jonathan 'did not lose just his perception of color, but imagery, and even dreaming in color. Finally, he seemed to lose even his memory of color, so that it ceased to be a part of his mental knowledge, his mind (...) And

'as his former color world (became) fainter and died inside him a whole new world of seeing, of imagination, of sensibility, was born.' (op. cit: 40)

The economy of seeing espouses that of listening, and is related to

the authority of speaking. In this sense, one can generalize, without hesitation, Lacan's position which, reappraising a Freudian linear model on subject-formation, emphasizes a clinical evidence, and affirms in *Ecrits* (Norton, 1977) that what matters 'in psychoanalytic anamnesis, is not a question of reality, but of truth, because the effect of full speech, (=that of rendering a perception, an understanding), is to reorder past contingencies by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come, such as they are constituted by the little freedom through which the subject makes them present.'(op. cit.: 48). Exerting this passage and, in his *On Being Normal and Other Disorders* (Other Press, 2004), relating it to the rapport between a subject and the outside world, that is modalities under which an identity constitutes itself as 'a chain of signifiers through which both the subject and the other gain content, along with the specific character of their relation'(op. cit.: 211), the Belgian psychoanalyst Paul Verhaeghe rightly insists that 'this has very important repercussions for the aim of the treatment. The aim of psychoanalysis is not to arrive at an accurate reconstruction of the past, nor to explain (let alone justify) the present based on the history of the subject. The aim is to create possibilities for change.'(op. cit.: 211)

In such a dynamic process, a child's progressive inscription in the world or an adult's therapeutic direction, it is possible to apprehend both the centrality of 'seeing', 'listening' and 'speaking,' and the distinction of traits singularizing one's self-formation. *Verstehen* means a way of mastering the perceived, the verbalized, the understood; and the perceived is transmuted into a knowledge. *Ich verstehe die Situation so, daß(...)*: my understanding of the situation is that (...). The proposition puts the subject boldly forward, asserting clearly his or her responsibility in an explicit effort to make known a personal opinion; and, this will be received as an idea, a thought, a view (*Gedanke, Idee, Standpunkt*), an interpretation (*Deuten*), or as a process in knowing (*Können*).

Hence, the metaphor in 'a sightless individual can see' becomes understandable. In order to accentuate its reliability, let me go back briefly to Diderot's text which, not only supports its soundness, but extols the blind's high quality capability for abstract representations.



But if the imagination of the blind man be no more than the faculty of calling to mind and combining sensations of palpable points; and of a sighted man, the faculty of combining and calling to mind visible or coloured points, the person born blind consequently perceives things in a much more abstract manner than we; and in questions purely speculative, he is perhaps less liable to be deceived. For abstraction consists in separating in thought the perceptible qualities of a body, either from one another, or from the body itself in which they are inherent; and error arises where this separation is done in a wrong way or at a wrong time—in a wrong way in metaphysical questions, or at a wrong time in applied mathematics. There is perhaps one certain method of falling into error in metaphysics, and that is, not sufficiently to simplify the subject under investigation; and an infallible secret for obtaining incorrect results in applied mathematics is to suppose objects less compounded than they usually are. (op. cit., The Open Court edition, 1916 : 87-88)

Shift in perspective is not necessary in order to distinguish positive from negative attitudes proving the reality of perceptual blindness: yesterday, the slave refusing his liberation; still today, women freely inscribing themselves in harems; and striking, the vitality of transcultural variations of depressed easy-to-use self-destruction formats. In fact, why not indicate here that education, because of its structural symbolic violence—as used to say Pierre Bourdieu—, explains and justifies perceptual blindness; and, nowadays, authoritative arguments in trendy courses celebrate what the Chilean writer Pablo Neruda deemed an ‘impure philosophy’ for the fabrication of social identities devoted to death values.

To these examples of structuring an abstract space within or without the a priori experience of a visual field, and those of creating an affirmative, or negative new configuration of seeing, let me add an axis deduced from Diderot’s quotation, that of color mis-apprehension; and thus, accent some theoretical issues about perceptual identities and their relation to constructed spaces. These are *Metaphors We Live By*, to use the excellent title of the well-known book by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (University of Chicago Press, 1980 and 2003). Not being, at least to my knowledge, colorblind, I trust my representation of slit images and can, almost without thinking, distinguish, from the white light, the distinctive qualities that everyday language qualifies as red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet; and their absence, as black. I doubt that I could, instinctively, discriminate without hesitation incandescence or thermal radiation from luminescence, the so-called ‘cold light’ suscitated by a

chemical action; the bioluminescence of fireflies, from the fluorescence of some rocks etc. In any case, all these terms with their endings in *-e/-iscence* are reducible, in my imaginary, to the 'glow-in-the-dark' concept. From such a basic frame of organizing the prism spectrum, it goes without saying that the knowledge of any professional in color and light reflection and refraction cannot but be impressive. Vis-à-vis my visual identity, it witnesses a more complex code and, as a consequence, the professional's own particular perceptual identity. Thus, for example, should I decide to get my house painted, the professional's highly elaborated capacity for both constructing a richer variety of color interplays, and his skill in deconstructing processes of codifying slit variations, will be ringing against my partial blindness with regard to structures of light breaks, or their images interferences. My predicament could translate deliberative anxieties that the following questions might introduce: à propos the living room, do I see and understand the distinction the painter makes between ivory cotton, white cotton and white linen? À propos, the guest room, did I hear well and understand the comparative merits of a fuchsia pink vis-à-vis salmon pink and pulsar pink? À propos the study, did I visualize correctly and tell the painter about my poor understanding of the difference between cadmium yellow, cardstock and goldenrod, in order to explain my rejection of some tones?

Propaedeutic to a deliberation on how to transcend an empirical incapacity due to objective limitations of my perceptual identity, itself relative to degrees of my insertion in a culture, my apparently innocuous questions of a possibly everyday life minor puzzle might turn into baffling classical issues of epistemology. There are, firstly, questions of translation, and its relation to coherence theories. A possible exit from perplexity would be, in my case, a move to the more familiar conceptual configuration of a Romance language; consult with, say, a French or Spanish speaking friend, and wonder about how to measure the validity of my translation; and moreover, from which system of systems to evaluate both the degree of coherence and justification of our two judgments on what shall be sorted out? Secondly, there are questions of semantics, and these concern a concept, *Verstehen*, circumscribed by implicit corre-

lations associating statements such as ‘I see’, ‘I hear’, ‘I understand’, ‘I visualize’, and how they are signified in the subjective activity of a perceptual identity. It follows that, from the singularity of our shared experiential authority, we could decide on how to connect our interpretation to general principles of explanation. Thirdly, a metaphor, the partial blindness of my perceptual identity, in so far as the complex economy of wavelengths of the visible spectrum is concerned, could be called, according to the philosophical tradition, a simple figure of speech; or, as suggested by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s treatise on metaphor (op. cit.), the rendering of a concept structuring my existential experience, and cohering it through ‘multidimensional gestalts’. At any rate, there is little doubt that commonsense in fact, always and without big words, calls attention to the singularity of a social identity. It, reasonably, describes a perceptual behavior and its effects in relation to the values it does, or does not, actualize and their rapport to a socio-cultural situatedness.

Indeed, color perception, and its relation to a cultural catalogue, is probably one of the most overused illustrations to exemplify relativist or universalist stand in theory of knowledge. Qualifying a singular capacity, the poverty of my English lexicon, rather than invoking my relation to an idea deducible from an ontological question—what is pinkness? what is whiteness?—states a contingent cultural stammering. In this sense, a judgment might tend to valorize an interpretation induced from a response to an epistemological intention, namely: how does he differentiate something as this sort of pink, or that type of yellow? A discussion about my color lines competence could thus be reduced to an old philosophical debate on abstract general ideas forms without consequence in my real predicament. It may also lead to a concrete evaluation of how my limited capacity impacts both my social identity in everyday life, and the measure of its constitution in social intercourse transactions. One could then begin to suspect that the banality of my case opens up very concrete issues about identity formation, negotiation, flux. It becomes possible to invoke, for instance, the practicality of Eric Berne’s unified system of individual and social psychiatry: on the one hand, exploiting *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy* (Grove, 1961), focus on my game as a notion and norm

determining definite attitudes; on the other hand, with *Games People Play. The Psychology of Human Relationships* (Grove, 1964), hypothesize about my personality and style of knowing from my insertion in matrix areas—(1) rituals, (2) pastimes, (3) games, (4) intimacy, (5) activity—; evaluate effects of, and reactions to cultural programming of social operations, organized transactions, and their patterns, as well as the possible extension of their formulas in my lifestyle.

Let me combine colors mastery, gift offering in a culture of flowers—say, in a Latin American setting, in Colombia for example—, and the reality of a social identity, as the latter is constituted in negotiated conjunctions between social requirements and one's virtuosity in integrating socio-cultural procedures. In practical terms, to use Eric Berne's language, one may pinpoint the following requisites for a visiting academic to Colombia: on the one hand, a stabilization in a professional corresponding role; and, on the other hand, a sense of conduct appropriateness, and good taste in adapting to the local cultural mores, including how, when and to whom one has to present flowers. Technically speaking, this is a serious 'game' in both constructing and actualizing expected lines of one's social identity.

Now this. After some twenty years of frequent research sojourns and visiting professorships in Latin America, I had the following conversation with a colleague:

—Do you know how you are called? he asked me.

—Called? Not by my name?

—Indeed, we know your name. But for everybody, you are 'the one who, when invited, always brings books or wine; never flowers.'

This descriptive definition has reduced me to a voluntarily chosen behavior, itself an effect of a double cultural lack: poverty of my colors visual identity, and poverty of a comparative correspondence grid classifying types of flowers, and matching them with emotions to which they are culturally associated. Consider two ordinary flowers, carnation and poppy, and a popular gift plant, the geranium. My code would present association sequences like these:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. carnation: red, admiration;<br>pink, rare love;<br>white, sweet and lovely;<br>yellow, disappointment,<br>rejection. | 2. poppy: red, consolation, sorrow;<br>white, forgetfulness;<br>yellow, success, wealth. |
| 3. geranium: red, melancholy;<br>pink, ingenuity;<br>scarlet, comforting;<br>white, true friendship.                    |  |

Question: in offering-flower transactions, should one take for granted an automatic translation of the English symbolic value-code, thus risking transgressions; or review it, each time, according to non-English cultural contexts, thus risking also mistranslation? Any option seems a daunting task, even à propos the English reference table itself, when one takes into account popular culture's aesthetic representations. How to assure, for certain, a universal normativity?

In social intercultural games involving colors and flowers, a legality expresses itself in intersubjective precepts. It is *stricto sensu* to a language that one submits a performance. The qualification 'the one who never offers flowers' translates effects of my subjective negotiations concerning my identity images in a Latin American environment. One of its axes concerns my sociological consciousness as it is related to different procedures of individuation in Bogota, Mexico, my hometown in the United States, or elsewhere in the world. This axis is to be reconfigured each time by new cultural expectations for an intelligible social identity, and these expectations may appear as more and more demanding, depending on geographic, or simply spiritual and intellectual remoteness from my usual locality. The summons for an 'inculturation', should one wish to theorize, coincide with a hermeneutical task for a reformulation of one's identity in order to avoid misunderstandings, and accord oneself to different socio-cultural lines. From this principle, another axis would stipulate concerns about the construction of such an orientation as a way of existing in a foreign anticipation of meanings in which, among many symbolic languages, an economy of flowers and their color expresses a

system of aesthetic and moral values. To the knowledge required by a singular alien *Lebenswelt*, and the science of its operative value grids, reasonably one tends to choose strategies of partial or total withdrawal from certain lines, say those defining rulings à propos flowers, thus acknowledging a de facto partial psychological blindness in that field; and transfer one's obedience to the public foreign consciousness, through a substitution system and its theory, making sure that the operation still translates adequately the gift-exchange socio-cultural standards and symbolic sets. Hence, to the case in point, books or wine, with more or less the equivalent symbolic value of socially expected flowers, would possibly confirm a convergence in both understanding and compliance to a cultural horizon. Such a self-surrendering procedure exemplifies and magnifies how a social identity, any identity, is always a process, a constant invention of oneself as inscribed in a particular project.

The Anton's syndrome, with its dynamics of going into and out of blindness, serves us well as an image for consciously or unconsciously acting, and behaving blind. In its adaptations as a metaphor, it contributes to the clarification of the idea of a perceptual identity. We can, then, choose to emphasize the fact of cultural determinants that could account, at least partially, for its occasional poverty. In so doing, we are defining any perceptual identity as a reflection of a social identity, a given alterity, in contextual spaces in which it apprehends itself vis-à-vis others in a variety of symmetrical lines; and, moreover, it can be observed as intransitive through determinations qualifying its uniqueness.

Conscious or unconscious, the exercise of a partial psychic blindness is a total activity expressing a social identity affirming an alterity in the making. It expresses itself as an overflow caused by effects of subordination to constraining lines of a global sociological context. Illustrations are easy. For instance: in the economic space, the opposition between front and back, in mixed economies of third world regions; as well as the alternative of manufacturing versus service industries, and its impact on local employment; in the political space, the opposition between up and down, in sub-Saharan countries, as it is manifested in the centrally inefficient but inflexible government policies of luxury imports,

and its repercussion on the conditions of life in the rural areas; in the cultural space, from the opposition between near and far, the U.S. media's remarkable caring for the health of pets in its backyard, and the generosity of its 'compassion fatigue', versus the ambiguity of its reflexes about catastrophic socio-economic relations of production elsewhere.

In these abstract references, I have moved from individual to collective reflexes, implying, as a matter of fact, that cultures may witness to the Anton's syndrome. Three succinct notes will suffice in clarifying this point.

One, in the domain of ideas, the already mentioned study by Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, is a magnificent example: between the visible and the invisible, how to see and read the traces of the Enlightenment in the XX<sup>th</sup> century French philosophy? In interconnections of ocular permeation of language and a dynamic visual activity of understanding the priority of the everydayness, what Jay observes are mainly contrivances inherited through a stubborn yet exhausted faithfulness to a Cartesian perspective and its will to truth. Thus, for instance: with Surrealists, 'the disenchantment of the eye'; with a Sartre and a Merleau-Ponty, 'a search for a new ontology of sight'; in the psychoanalysis of Lacan, 'a specular subject of ideology' etc. In sum, all these endeavors would qualify as somehow testimonies in the dark. Bringing to light anything seems to signify concealing it, and in most of the explorations chosen, Jay delivers the same paradox, a doubt about knowing clearly how, and in which sense, consciousness may modify the configuration of its conditions of possibility, and how to act upon the world. Despite what he describes as a vivid hostility, Jay declares however, that the power of the visual, that sign of a critical reason, a light, not only survives; but 'can still provide us mere mortals with insights and perspectives, speculations and observations, enlightenments and illuminations, that even a god might envy.' (op. cit.: 594). This is a major issue that goes beyond the particularity of the French cultural space. Let me compensate Jay's optimistic stance by quoting a passage from *The Philosopher's Gaze. Modernity in the Shadows of Enlightenment* (University of California Press, 1999) by David Michael Levin, a Northwestern University philosopher:

Whereas the philosophers of the Enlightenment could see only simplicity, unity, clarity, and systematic totality; whereas they could assume complete control over meaning, and hence totally determinate, totally transparent meaning; whereas they could confidently ignore adumbrations of the marginal, the peripheral, and the implicit, we of today are obliged to give a more critical thought to these assumptions, cannot ignore intricacies, complexities, ambiguities, conflicts of interpretation, the breaches and caesurae in supposedly closed systems, and cannot overlook what philosophers of earlier times could comfortably overlook. We of today, heirs responsible for the present future of the Enlightenment project, are obliged to be allegorical thinkers, finding adumbrations of our destined roles among its cast of shadows. (op. cit.: 417)

Two, in the domain of political ideology, the case of National Socialism in Hitler's Germany is conceivably the best illustration. It clearly indicates that, conscious or unconscious, psychic blindness is not value neutral, and it brings about issues relating ethics to individual and collective responsibility.

Three, in history, this illustration with its own ethical problems. It concerns the European discovery of the world, scientific taxonomies of connections between geography, cultural diversity, and a shifting chromatic perceptual consensus, from a bicolor repartition of racial metaphors (white versus non-white, in the XV<sup>th</sup> and XVI<sup>th</sup> centuries) to the quadricolor model of Carl Linnaeus' 1735 *Systema Naturae* (*Europaeus albus*, 'white European'; *Americanus rubescens*, 'red American'; *Asiaticus fuscus*, 'yellow Asian'; *Africanus niger*, 'black African'). Historians, e.g. John Hope Franklin (*Color and Race*, Houghton Mifflin, 1968) and Winthrop D. Jordan (*White over Black. American Attitudes towards the Negro. 1550-1812*, University of North Carolina Press, 1968), have demonstrated an existing homology between the shift of chromatic metaphors, their rapports to technical tables of psychological features, and both the self-assessment of the observer and his cultural politics in interpreting history under modalities of both a divine and a natural election. Hence, the slave trade is not detachable from a christian exegesis on chromatic perception of humankind and its erroneous biblical justifications. A few years ago, Alden T. Vaughan suggested, in an excellent article on 'Changing Anglo-American perception of the American Indian' (*The American Historical Review*, 87, 4, 1982), that the American Indian's color evolved from 'innately white' to 'innately dark,' becoming



red only in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century; and, this transformation in perceptual behavior ‘helped assure the Indians’ continued segregation and heighten their exploitation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ (op. cit., 919).

My own bias has been sketching out thematic lines in order to introduce, and illustrate how types of specialized motives authenticate efficiently manifestations of the Anton’s syndrome, in a variety of ways. As they actualize themselves contributing to individual identities, they simultaneously subvert the very idea of a fixed identity as an essence. Does this raise the issue of alternatives true versus false, authenticity versus inauthenticity? Let me postpone the question; and provisionally, focus on the subject of perception, the ego of the *cogito* who, as Lacan used to say, is an eye. It can apprehend itself in representation as an object, and an alienated one in a world of images and stones.

What I see now, and very clearly, is this. Acting out the principle of indifference, for more than twenty years, I have been pretending, with good reasons, not to see that most of my American students, at some of the best universities in the nation, were monolingual, thus restricted to a linguistic canon and what it could integrate thanks to translations. On the other hand, I could see also that most of my Latin American students were competent in, at least, three languages. And, my perception as well as my understanding have been that, indeed, this basic linguistic imbalance, relative, is the reverse of the disparity represented by the economic capital which, sooner or later, problematizing it, would normalize two competing cultural capitals determined by a single economic reason, and both destined to live in the same cosmopolitan vocation.

### **3.**

Globalization, transnationality, and performance of paradigm shifts contribute to a new type of economic reason that dominates today’s global economy and its organization. Through the lines of its technology and policy grids, this new structure affects the identity of millions of people absorbed in its mechanisms. The measure of alienation created by human needs and distributive constraints seem the most obvious phenomena.

A number of approaches can be taken to analyze the 1990s world trade, which is one of a single economy and marketplace, and the booms it created: growth, no energy crisis, spread of free enterprise, the ‘East Asian miracle’, etc. I choose, instead, a different angle: to look at norms concerning formal structuration of systems, the action of three competing reasons—the economic, the cultural, the ethical—and their statements on human identities. Two main references will support my analysis aimed at an argument, an ethical one, that extols human dignity as a non-negotiable value. They are, firstly, Amitai Etzioni’s typology, *Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations* (Macmillan, 1961 and 1975), that goes beyond Max Weber’s classic on *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, (Hodge, 1947); and, secondly, Geert Hofstede’s twenty-five years research in *Cultures and Organizations. Software of the Mind* (McGraw-Hill, 1991).

Using as a core variable, the notion of compliance, that is ‘a relation in which an actor behaves in accordance with a directive supported (command, manipulation) by another actor’s power, and the orientation of the subordinate to the power applied’ (op. cit: 3), Etzioni’s study focuses on asymmetrical rapports of subordination and, for their evaluation, distinguishes two things: on the one hand, three main classes of power administration: (a) coercive (e.g. correctional institutions), (b) utilitarian (e.g. industries), (c) normative (e.g. education systems); and on the other hand, the corresponding set of forms of compliance relations—alienative, calculative, moral. These may be congruent in alienating, effective, coercive systems; and, as such have a negative impact on human qualities of subordinates’ work; and, another possibility, the compliance rapport might be incongruent, as in the case of Church organizations, and collective institutions based on a value-commitment; as such, reflecting a positive involvement, independent from the degree of members’ subordination. In fact, Etzioni’s typology sets up three types of power: coercive, remunerative, normative. They correspond to three modes of response behaviors: alienative, calculative, moral; and, produce nine different forms of compliance. Among these, Etzioni decides to focus on three combinations, the most frequent, and all of them congruent: the alienative

coercive type of power (e.g. a slavery structure), calculative remunerative (e.g. capitalist corporate function), and moral normative (e.g. political party activism). Thus, the following ‘dynamic hypothesis’:

Congruent types are more effective than incongruent types. Organizations are under pressure to be effective. Hence, to the degree that the environment of the organization allows, *organizations tend to shift their compliance structure from incongruent to congruent types and organizations which have congruent compliance structures tend to resist factors pushing them toward incongruent compliance structures.*

Congruence is attained by a change in either the power applied by the organization or the involvement of lower participants. Change of power takes place when, for instance, a school shifts from the use of corporal punishment to stress on the ‘leadership’ of the teachers. The involvement of lower participants may be changed through socialization, changes in recruitment criteria, and the like. (op. cit.: 14)

Differentiating himself from the Weberian emphasis on authority and its connection to the concept of legitimate power, Etzioni qualifies the efficacy of the economic reason from the rapport between economic goals and effective compliance, precisely the instrumental function of remuneration, rather than coercion, or normative power. In effect, in his language:

Production is a rational activity, which requires systematic division of labor, power, and communication, as well as a high level of coordination. It therefore requires also a highly systematic and precise control of performance. This can be attained only when sanctions and rewards can be readily measured and allocated in close relation to performance. Remunerative sanctions and rewards are the only ones that can be so applied, because money differentials are far more precisely measurable than force, prestige, or any other power differentials. (op. cit: 112)

The argument asserts a principle deduced from the analysis of complex systems operating in the West or, on the basis of its adaptation in transitional economies, in Mexico for example. Postulating the superior capacity of the remunerative type of power in the capitalist model, this principle does not induce its efficiency everywhere in all communities and all the time. Thus, as a case, the Chinese rural society, between 1949 and 1968, demanded a different grid that could account for its conflictual cycles between coercion and normative types. In the same man-

ner, the Zulu community was linked to lines of a theory of society that Etzioni elaborated later on, in *The Active Society. A Theory of Societal and Political Processes* (The Free Press, 1968). These two exceptions may indicate something relevant, not about their obstinate refusal to integrate the general grid of operation, but rather about production as a key measure regulating all complex systems. In effect, the effectiveness of the economic reason, in the competence of complex systems, is, in actuality, contingent on issues of human needs which, as suggested by Etzioni himself, should be addressed in difficult questions, having ethical implications:

Substantively, the question is, which kinds of governance in the institutions as well as society at large will people tolerate, accept, and thrive on? What are the long-term consequences of relying on remunerative rewards and settling for calculative commitment on the part of participants (the basis of capitalist systems)? Can a system last which relies on 'higher' sanctions and loyalties implied in the notion of 'permanent revolution?' Can an organizational system survive relying on no rewards or punishments, each participant doing his or her own thing, completely voluntarily (the ideal of the *kibbutzim* and numerous communes)? (*A Comparative Analysis*, op. cit: 469)

The questions bring to light the major issue about modalities of integration in, or exclusion from complex economic organizations. In today's international context, taking into account the resources and knowledge capital of the economic reason, these modalities, as Etzioni's analysis indicates, refer to a number of assumptions, including the genetic endowment of persons involved in the workforce, their regional cultural ensemble and its singularity vis-à-vis the liberal 'bourgeois' signification of important basic material and spiritual needs to be managed. These involve, *inter alia*, rules of structural subordination and hierarchy; and, on the other hand, values such as commitment, dedication, and freedom.

The project to transnationality of the economic reason, over the socio-cultural system of values of its blue or white collar agents, manifests itself in statements combining in a unique technical grammar, both individual alterity expectations, and their relation to an economic system having, these days, more and more its own diversity requirements. Diversity in this field implies two concepts expressing two very distinct realities: cultural differentiation, on the one hand; and, the most important, the

capacity for the transnational system to adapt to a variety of milieus, on the other hand. This second meaning designates a functional adjustment ability for optimal performance. It pertains to a flexible capability (style), knowledge-capital and technology (science) and, indeed, *savoir-faire* (policy), the objective being to maximize both productivity and the quality of products, thus profits.

Depending on this economic reason, individuals submit, and their difference becomes a question mark. Alterity always affirms itself in a reciprocal relation with someone else: the ipseity of the subject self-consciousness apprehending itself, to refer to Hegel, in a necessary need for an external recognition; a whatever gaze or voice which, from an outside standing, can stabilize it in a perceived, reidentified, and potentially usable difference. And, in this effort, a 'we-community' might constitute itself. The power that an economic complex system often manipulates resides in its authority for assigning to an alterity a value, often as only a possible integrable body in its production processes. In such a conversion into a labor force, an incommensurable alterity is impoverished, a social identity reified, its meaning instrumentalized.

To address such a scandal, third world intellectuals have attempted to oppose the reification by turning this absurdly created alterity into a nature. Indeed, one thing consists in negating a controversial thesis by contradicting it, and thus positing an anti-thesis, a procedure well exemplified in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Black Orpheus* (*Présence Africaine*, 1976). Another thing would be to stabilize such a weak moment of a dialectical process into an essence. From this view, the now popular 'subaltern studies' that conceptualizes an agenda in defense and promotion of stable egalitarian principles and values from the legacy of the Enlightenment, seems really puzzling. No serious student in today's humanities and social sciences could dismiss a transdisciplinary outlook that excels modes of either/or in our disciplines. Bridging horizons and re-appraising post-Marxist trends, philosophy, globalization critical theories, and academic engagement in public political spheres, such an intellectual orientation preserves an ethical balance for sure, in the challenging paths toward our common future. Then, why on earth, should it label itself 'subaltern'? The

notion seems to misrepresent an exacting perspective in conveying semantics of 'subordination' that such an adjective calls to the fore. To refer to the technical meaning of subalterneity in philosophy, the work of Gayatri Spivak, one of the founders of the movement, cannot be reduced to a subaltern proposition vis-à-vis a founding universal proposition. And only by mistake, one would qualify as subaltern Enrique Dussel's signification in contemporary ethics. A sign: his *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización* (Editorial Trotta, 1998) tracks, in an exemplary manner, the paradoxes we are concerned with; and, by its standards, attests the best in descriptive and normative ethical reflections of today.

From Dussel's work as a reference, we evaluate complex systems, knowing that human morality cannot be run by emotions concerning complex systems and their productivity. Can one say that ethics is an expression of contexts? The agent's dilemmas record a way of being in structures whose functioning in the global world largely depend on the politics of calculating orders. Let me be specific. The economic reason animates and assumes an expedient conjunction of rigorous lines that contributes to its success in three interconnected topographies and their internal processes: (a) procedures and mechanisms of a market space, as defined in interactions of resources, human intervention, work productivity and distribution of wealth; (b) procedures and mechanisms of a political space, as defined by a particular organization of power, its inscription in a history and the justification of its legitimacy; (c) finally, procedures and mechanisms of a social space, as defined by traditions, their rapports to the transmitted, negotiations à propos customs and the demands of necessary transformations. From ways they are approached for an analysis, conceived as processes of integration into a technical taxonomy, or invested for exploitation, these spaces function literally as texts and deliver organized lines determining the particularity of their syntax, against which experts articulate the most adequate grids of regulating power in order to maximize the efficacy of productive complex systems.

Two types of social constructs face each other. On the one side, the structure of a machinery, modeling its aims on the basis of its morphology as a universal narrative of productivity. On the other side, individual-

ized forms in their regional, conventionally expected arrangements, duplicate regulatory norms. This rendering of socio-cultural relations to, and vis-à-vis abstract models, analogizes Ferdinand de Saussure's view of any language system. The machinery activity of a complex system functions like a conventional normative tongue, a *langue*; and the agent's performance, in its compliance, actualizes the norm, expressing it in an individualized, concrete enunciation, that is a speech, a *parole*. The analogy could be reinforced, since one might, in the case of an economic system, as well as a linguistic model, consider the singularity of their inscription in history, say, the diachronic dimension; or, their synchronic capacity, that is their expression at a particular time. This is to say that, in time or in space, the two constructs produce their own particular grammars that unveil a difference, witnessing a personal identity.

The banality of the analogy I am suggesting between language and economic complex systems should not distract us from what it implies, with regard to asymmetrical relations of subordination, a socially constructed psychic blindness, the notion of alterity, and their impact on social identity modulations.

Let me summarize what the analogy allows, proceed with some illustrations, and then come back to comment on the concept of diversity. Like language (*langage*), an economic complex system is an abstraction transcending concrete contexts. Like language, when it manifests itself as this or that particular tongue (*langue*), that is a social institution, an abstraction in its own right, the economic system comes to exist as a model, an idea corresponding to a virtual type of enterprise, with expected functions and objectives. It is speech (*parole*) which, using the tongue as a databank, actualizes it in an individualized and creative way. In the same manner, a complex economic system comes to existence as a given entity incorporated somewhere, and having the means and methods for meeting its aims. And now, let us note three determining characteristics that contribute to the specificity of these systems' identity: an inscription in a particular history, the singularity of their topography, the dynamics between the virtuality of their abstract systems and the creative performance of their members. The interactions and conjunction of these three factors,

important but not the only ones, bring about their style and manifest the distinction, that is, the difference of their characters.

A sign of the collaboration between a collective identity in which one is inscribed at birth, and the exercise of a personal creative will to invent one's project, an individual identity, a flux said Hume, intends both causing to experience, and giving to be known. Let us separate, for necessary and illustrative reasons—after all, we have been allegorizing the economic in apprehending it as a language—, the two systems we are comparing. We should focus on the fact of organizational control in these systems, and its influence in the construction of social identities.

About the economic system, to the descriptive analysis of Amitai Etzioni, I am adding a famous prescriptive textbook, *Thriving on Chaos. Handbook for a Management Revolution* (Alfred A Knopf, 1987) by Thomas Peters, the author of *In Search of Excellence* (1988); and, more recently, of the startling 'Tom Peters Seminars': *Crazy Times Call for Crazy Organizations* (Vintage, 1994); and, *The Pursuit of Wow! Every Person's Guide to Topsy-Turvy Times* (Vintage, 1994). Etzioni's presentation, in the abstract, indicates mechanical lines of systems, their structuration and guiding principles. Peters's stance, an epic discourse on an injunction: listen to me, buy me; otherwise, you are lost. Etzioni describes processes through which complex systems stabilize their 'personality', hence constituting a functional organism; and he elaborates on their impact on, and expectation from, the identity formation of their agents. Peters depicts the regulating personality of a mechanical system as it is required by his evaluation of contemporary 'dire competitive situations'; the true objective, he writes in the preface to the *Handbook*, being 'to take the chaos as given and learn to thrive *on* it. The winners of tomorrow will deal *proactively* with chaos, will look at the chaos per se as the source of market advantage, *not as problem* (my emphasis) to be got around' The underlined restriction makes all the difference between a descriptive and prescriptive presentation. Thus, for example, on the issue of the elite corps, a major factor in instituting and promoting the identity of any complex system, and activating the agents' social identities and orienting them for the better, we get two visions. Etzioni organizes the prob-



lem around the question: ‘*who* controls *what*, and what the relationships are among those who control’ (op. cit: 159). This approach, emphasizing a comprehensive inquiry, establishes several levels of analysis: (a) an outline of constitutive elements (individualities, power, relations), (b) a qualification of elements (types of elite, source and forms of power, structures of relations); (c) a correlation of structural interconnections (activities, relations between elites, nature of these relations with, and in sub-collectivities’s). The outcome of the study portrays identity figurations whose subjective representation can be discussed. At least, they permit hypothetical interpretations on lines of self-fulfillment in coercive economic systems, on those concerning the notion and forms of integrative measure in normative organizations, on margins of social alienation in utilitarian complex systems. Grounded on re-interpreting history as evidence, Peters’s prerequisites for the internationalist achiever list instead, and only, objective conditions of exclusion. His model, in his own words, casts a ‘leadership that honors the line’; as a matter of fact, the *frontline* in the military sense: ‘attention to the line,’ and ‘hard leadership,’ that ‘promotes leaders who lead’ (op. cit: 446-448).

Let us suspend briefly this valuation of complex systems, and emphasize, again and again, language as a notion and reality which, everywhere and fundamentally, regulates and impacts any human system. This is to say that, indeed, a fortiori in preceding descriptive and prescriptive modalities of work in identity formation, language should be posited as the original experience of one’s identity in the community of being ‘in-the-midst-of-the-world.’ On this point, one would easily agree with Jean-Paul Sartre when, in *Being and Nothingness*, he writes:

In a universe of pure objects language could under no circumstance have been ‘invented’ since it presupposes an original relation to another subject. In the intersubjectivity of the for-others, it is not necessary to invent language because it is already given in the recognition of the Other. I *am* language. By the sole fact that whatever I may do, my acts freely conceived and executed, my projects launched toward my possibilities have outside of them a meaning which escapes me and which I experience. It is in this sense—and in this sense only—that Heidegger is right in declaring that *I am what I say*. Language is not an instinct of the constituted human creature, nor is it an invention of our subjectivity. But neither does it need to be referred to the pure ‘being-outside-of-self’ of the *Dasein*. It forms part of the *human condition*; it is originally the

proof which a for-itself can make of its being-for-others, and finally it is the surpassing of this proof and the utilization of it toward possibilities which are my possibilities; that is, toward my possibilities of being this or that for the Other. (op. cit: 485-6)

Language, in the dimension articulated here—that of the whole way of being, the most primitive manner of existing—expresses the conditions of possibility of one’s transcendence, that is identity, any identity, as a dynamic procession. At the same time, this activity reveals ‘the freedom (the transcendence) of the one who listens to me in silence.’ Indeed, contextual circumstances and their conditions clothe the peculiar way one is a language aimed at one’s transcendence.

What would life be like for a ‘languageless man’?, asks the neurologist Oliver Sacks, in his preface to Susan Schaller’s *A Man Without Words* (Summit Books, 1991). Ildefonso, an Indian Mexican, ‘who looked Mayan,’ has never been exposed to any language. Total, complete, incomprehensible isolation. Who can ‘imagine the alienation of life without language’, ponders Schaller, a teacher of American Sign language.

‘How did the man think without language? What did he see in all the apparently senseless interactions around him? Could we ever meet?’ (op. cit: 27).

Against the orthodox certitudes of experts on the sheer impossibility of bringing into language an untaught born-deaf, Schaller connects with Ildefonso. At the beginning, they are two strangers separated by an invisible line. Yet, in its nature, how different is it really, compared to other types of identity distinctions? Schaller confesses: ‘Ildefonso shared none of our language categories, whether parts of speech or division of time. His inability to understand my lessons on verbs and nouns and now on time did not derive merely from ignorance but from an entirely different view of reality. It struck me that his view could be just as legitimate as mine’ (op. cit: 118). Introduced into a common system, comments the neurologist Oliver Sacks,

‘Ildefonso’s mental processes, his perspectives and his very identity are transformed as he acquires language and all it embodies.’ (op. cit: 15)

One might say, right, but there is not a conversion of nature; instead, inscription into an unending process of creating one, inventing an identity.

And a question imposes itself on our consciousness: cannot we, through analogic steps, imagine what similar cultural integrations into the required structures of the economic reason, may represent for alienated bodies, submitting to the rationality of transnational mechanical languages, and might signify in the constitution of 'slave' social identities? What, here, would symbolize the sign represented by Susan Schaller for an Ildefonso?

#### **4.**

One could consider a number of axes which, à propos work in transnational ensembles, state cultural diversity principles as governing strategic policy for advancing lines of individualized performances.

A most globalist perspective would accent the capability in rules of market unification in diversity, emphasizing programmatic lines of action which would include the code of a new lexicon, perspective, methods for managing a new style in corporation culture. In *Managing Across Borders* (Harvard Business School Press, 1998) by Christopher Bartlett and Sumatra Ghoshal, two Business School academics at their best theorization, one finds suggested ideal lines of an economic will to truth: the transnational coincides with a definitive solution, identifies with a possibly perfect body. Its portrait decodes an agenda. One, it is a challenge by its capability, its model, and objective beyond structural fit; two, it is a paradigm by its competitiveness, flexibility, innovation; three, it legitimizes diversity, manages complexity, builds a pretty solid socio-economic commitment; four, conclusion, it is the solution. This recitation of the table of contents illustrates well the spirit of an imperial culture. It highlights the claim 'to defy geography' analyzed in John Micklethwait's and Adrian Wooldridge's exposition of management gurus under a telling entry, 'what does globalization mean?' The globalist project intends to create an original matrix not submitted to territorial contingencies. The globalist statement amplifies lines for penetrating different cultures, managing technical intricacies through coordination instead of centralization, allocating and integrating multiple tools, favoring flexibility, and adapta-

bility to a variety of environments. As a concept, such a model typifies, I am afraid, a divisive path extolled in an interested analytical study by the Japanese theorist Kenichi Ohmae, *The End of the Nation-State* (Free Press, 1995); and substantially debated in another volume that Ohmae edited the same year, *The Evolving Global Economy: Making Sense of the New Global Order* (Harvard Business School Press, 1995). Well, the magic of diversity lines might be served well in modifying the coloration of Barbie's hair from blonde to dark, in East Asian countries, and the system in negotiating the quality of coca-cola sweetness for non-American markets; but, as John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldrige write in *The Witch Doctors* (Random, 1996): 'whenever the wages in the host country get too high, the firm simply shifts production to a cheaper country' (op. cit.: 229). That is important, ethically. In effect, we should remember at least this from Levinas's 'language and proximity': an ethical practice, or discourse, 'does not proceed from a special moral experience, independent from the description developed until then. It comes from the very meaning of approach, which contrasts with knowledge' ( in A. Lingis, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, M. Nijhoff, 1987: 124.)

As a consequence of the preceding, one sees that the diversity theme belongs to the globalist argument only as a secondary support line of the economic reason in its postulations about investment, effective productive performance, and their relation to henceforth modalities of power (coercive, remunerative, normative), thus the issue of wage surfaces; and indeed, with it, that of modalities of compliance. Another example in conflict of interests, the Japanese in sub-Saharan Africa. Let me go back in time, just briefly, to the most inducive progress period for transnational systems: *The Roaring 1980s*—as they were thematized in 'a way to think about the past and the future' (Summit Books, 1988), an economic best seller published under a telling name, Adam Smith, a pseudonym of the Harvard educated host of a PBS trendy financial show on 'Money World,' George J.W. Goodman. Let me highlight a number of things. One, the central African region is universally recognized for its raw materials, notably antimony ore, bauxite, aluminium, chromium, cobalt, copper, ferro chromium, fluorspar, lead, petroleum, titanium ore.

Two, to this factor, another one: the 1980s globalization phenomenon was—as the international market expert Theodore Levitt put it, in an issue of the *Harvard Business Review* (May-June, 1983)—producing ‘a new commercial reality, the emergence of global markets on a previously unimagined scale of magnitude’ (quoted in *The Witch Doctors*, op. cit.: 213). Three, as such, the phenomenon would have qualified the African continent as a superb market for capital and consumer goods.

In a comparative study of the economic competition between Japan and the United States during this period, *Emerging Japanese Economic Influence in Africa. Implications for the United States* (IIS University of California, 1985), Joanna Moss and John Ravenhill, of the Berkeley Institute of International Studies, deduce a number of interesting marks for interpreting an array of statistics charts they compiled.

- a. At the threshold of the 1980s: two hypotheses, an identical economic reason, two competing policies.

In the statistical tests of this study we shall test the hypotheses that after 1975 (1) the Japanese share in African imports increased while the U.S. share declined; and (2) the United States became a more important market for African exports. The first hypothesis would require a stronger performance on the part of Japan than might appear true at first sight. Most African countries are oil importers and were faced with a rapidly increasing oil import burden after 1973. Accordingly, one would expect the share of oil-exporting states in their market to rise, leaving little room for non-oil exporters to increase their market share. If Japan is found to have been successfully maintaining its market share, it would represent a major achievement. A confirmation of hypothesis (1) would testify to a particularly impressive export performance on the part of Japan. (op. cit.: 18)

- b. About the early 1980s, the authors indicate ‘alarming trends in the development of U.S. and Japanese commerce with Africa’:

Whereas Japan has generally been successful in maintaining its shares of African markets, the U.S. share in most cases has declined in a statistically significant manner. This decline has been a major cause of the burgeoning U.S. trade deficit with the continent; the deficit is not merely the result of increased imports, but also stems from the failure of the United States to maintain its share of markets in sub-Saharan Africa other than South Africa. (op. cit.: 39)

- c. By the mid-1980s, Moss' and Ravenill's survey of Japanese enterprises, and their interviews with decision-makers, lead to two apparently paradoxical statements. On the one hand, an alarm signal à propos 'the relative success of Japanese corporations in winning a growing share of the market for capital equipment'; and, on the other hand, the two analysts foresee a revision of this economic activity:

While Japan was willing in the early 1970s—a time of great concern regarding future supplies of raw materials—to undertake investments that were perceived by others as being too risky (...), the current prevailing orthodoxy in Tokyo is that the risk of African mineral ventures generally has not been worthwhile (with the exception of uranium in Niger and oil in Gabon). Having successfully diversified its sources of raw materials over the last decade, Japan is now much more discriminating in choosing new projects and places greater emphasis on the potential reliability of new suppliers. (op. cit.: 113)

The strategic revision of a successful economic program addresses, in actuality, an external challenge to its own policy, and this is accounted for by both different work-ethics and cultural *a priori*s: difficulty of the Japanese in understanding African cultures, difficulty of the African in understanding the Japanese, perceived as 'one-dimensional economic being'; and, indeed, conflicts of interpretation about the diversity factor: 'although willing to participate in joint ventures, Japanese investors were generally wary of demands for increased African participation in shareholding, management, and intermediate inputs.' (op. cit.: 61)

## 5.

It remains now to register the cultural factor, a weak reason to all appearances. At first sight, it does not stand as having the monolithic solidity of the economic reason, nor its muscles and highly respected authority. It does not compare really with the political reason. In effect, the political calls to mind fascinating arts and techniques for managing communities, their history and their fate. It gives rise to imageries of complicated procedures and choices, along with cunning expediency, and shrewdness

figures. The cultural reason, somehow or another, brings to mind metaphors à propos a soft field welcoming attentive operations concerning the destiny of a community and its values as they relate to its fundamental conditions of existence: a genesis (to give birth, to grow, to ground); the quality of its reality and authenticity (to create, to cultivate, to nurture); the will to last (to communicate, to transmit, to bequeath). There are sciences, strictly devoted to the activity of the economic and political reasons. On the other hand, strictly speaking, there is not a science of cultures. The Husserlian *Geisteswissenschaften* whose semantic clarity supports the incredible solidity of *The Crisis of European Sciences* (Northwestern University Press, 1970), actualizes an administrative proposition of the Berlin Academy to distinguish two types of knowledge on the basis of the mind-body dualism. The division, now universally accepted, specializes fields—natural versus spiritual, or moral—, but it remains cumbersome. And today, an indeterminate number of disciplines—e.g. anthropology, geography, psychoanalysis—, disperse the immense domain of the cultural lines. As a matter of fact, in its incommensurable signification, anyhow and somehow, the cultural domain contains all the scientific practices that both, the economic and political reason, might motivate.

Culture is a body. Its metaphors and symbols inform a rich thesaurus in all human traditions, and represent a variety of maternal womb figures. A *corpus*, it folds and embraces existence, expands and consolidates it to potentially all the limits of space and time; at any rate, it animates questions and statements about destiny. It is from this perspective that one might consider distinguishing or uniting two cross-cultural types of narratives: those related to πνεῦμα *pneuma*, things spiritual, and those related to φύσις *phusis*, things natural, outward forms. Thus: on the one hand, spiritual libraries; on the other, another type of library, containing knowledge of forms, everything pertaining to the regular order of nature. The human uniqueness brings together the two types of knowledge, integrating φύσις and πνεῦμα in the mysterious cipher of a ‘human nature.’ Of all the most challenging axial metonymies, comes to my mind, the Arabic *rahim*, womb, that Titus Burckhardt reminds us, attests the same

root with the very name of the supreme divinity, *ar-Raḥmān*, the Compassionate, and the manifested expressions in, *ar-raḥmānīyah*, the divine bliss animating all aspects of reality. On the other hand, on the scientific side, we still have a perennial search, and its extrapolations for something like a foundational *mathesis universalis* to which, in our time, we can link the ambitious vision of Jean Charon in *Eléments d'une théorie unitaire d'univers* (Kister, 1962); or, closer to home, the extraordinary project of Claude Lévi-Strauss for ordering structural invariants of the human mind.

One could connect Lévi-Strauss's 'Kantism without transcendental subject'—as Paul Ricoeur summarized it magnificently—, to more pragmatic theories which, through cultural lines, have been decoding cognitive grids that tabulate systems à propos truth and falsity in epistemologies, good and bad in ethics, beautiful and ugly in aesthetics. In contemporary explorations for 'intercultural cooperation,' one would then account for a model such as the Geert Hofstede's 'software of the mind.' The founding director of an Institute for Research on Intercultural Cooperation, executive director of the Personnel Research Department of IBM-Europe, the Maastricht (the Netherlands) professor of organizational anthropology and international management, has been concerned with practical issues for administering multi-national businesses and negotiations. From a twenty-five years research in fifty countries, Hofstede suggests professional ethical guidelines for 'intercultural understanding,' and cultured positions. Concretely, (a) techniques for 'spreading multicultural understanding' in 'global challenges'; (b) intercultural cooperation that transcends regional value-laden choices and originations, as well as problems inherent to encounters and confrontations of cultural grammars of difference; (c) how to accentuate ethically sound converging lines for living in a projected global harmony.

If the establishment of Western-style democracies depends on a country's level of economic development (...), whoever wants to make the whole world democratic should face the economic and ecological consequences of this goal. At present, the rich countries' standard of living also implies a standard of environmental pollution and depletion of resources which makes it utterly impossible to extend this standard of living to the entire world population. Therefore, achieving the goal of democracy for everybody requires an entirely new way of handling our ecosystem: sustaining the rich countries' quality of



life but drastically reducing its ecological cost.’ (op. cit.: 244)

Against trends of cultural divergences determined by native ‘mental programs,’ Hofstede’s approach, acknowledging a constant interaction between the three reasons—economic, political and cultural—aims at engineering a ‘mental software intercultural space.’ Would his own intellectual education—a MSC in mechanical engineering and a Ph.D. in social psychology—explain, at least partially, his arguments on procedures for ‘rectifying’ mindsets? In any case, students of debates about the nature of the mind and the relationship between the mental and the environment might be puzzled by Hofstede’s assurance. The issue is both complex and tricky. On the one hand, it supposes that, to beg only few authorities, we know how to conceive properly the tension between the ‘savage’ and the ‘domesticated’ mind; and, one quotes the work of a Jack Goody, that of Claude Lévi-Strauss; or, the deviation between the ‘pathological’ and the ‘normal’; and, there, besides Georges Canguilhem’s philosophical oeuvre in the domain of life sciences, who to consult in the immense library of psychopathology who might not go in the sense of Canguilhem’s uncertainty about the very nature of the deviation? At any rate, the most recent critical anthologies in philosophy of sciences (e.g. that of Yuri Balashov and Alex Rosenberg, Routledge, 2001); and in philosophy of mind (e.g. that of David J. Chalmers, Oxford, 2002) are sources for sheer bewilderment, insofar as the mind and its operations are concerned. Indeed, this may not be a sufficient reason to raise doubts on the efficacy of a practical reason.

Hofstede’s model of intervention trades on a diagram defining the core of any culture from an index having as entries three notions—‘rituals,’ ‘heroes,’ ‘symbols’—, as what activate local practices and their referential registers. By age ten, believes Hofstede, any citizen has internalized them, and converted them into a constraining ‘habitus,’ a concept he borrows from the French Pierre Bourdieu in order to designate a way of being and behaving, as it is conditioned by one’s culture. Visible to anyone, including a disagreeable observer, the way of relating to the cultural frame of reference would be, in terms of meaning, fully decodable and understandable only to insiders, that is natives and inculturated for-

eigners. In effect, it expresses the cultural standards of ‘the desirable,’ in terms of agreement and disagreement in reference to an ethics; versus ‘the desired,’ in terms of individual interest, specifically in the tension between yours and mine. Hofstede’s intercultural software of the mind would witness to a meta-grammar. This system is built from regional grammars of norms presiding over activities between the desirable and the desired in schemata created by binary oppositions such as the following used in his information questionnaire.

Evil vs. good  
Dirty vs. clean  
Ugly vs. beautiful  
Unnatural vs. natural  
Abnormal vs. normal  
Paradoxical vs. logical  
Irrational vs. rational

Relativist in the light of its avowed respect for all possible cultural ensembles and their internal ordering principles, Hofstede’s horizon comes to reproduce the ‘grand dichotomy’ model without addressing its implications. Moreover, it transcribes, on business management agenda, an equation between economic convergence and necessary transcendence of any alterity; and by this fact, it might be bypassing, to some extent, the equality principle between cultural systems, in order to outline the requirements of a transnational organization. Thus, it comes without surprise that Hofstede would seem perplexed by the fact that: one,

‘there is little evidence of international convergency over time, except an increase of individualism’;

two,

‘not only will cultural diversity among countries remain with us: it even looks as though differences within countries are increasing’ (op. cit.: 238);

and three, finally, this commonsense observation that might not have needed twenty-five years of comparative research in fifty countries:

‘culturally a manager is the follower of his or her followers: she or he has to meet the subordinates on these subordinates’ cultural ground. There is free choice in managerial behavior but the cultural constraints are much tighter than most of the management literature admits.’ (op. cit.: 235)

An intellectual challenge, Geert Hofstede’s *Cultures and Organizations. Software of the Mind* is exemplary, compared to treatises that can be found on ‘sidewalks of transnational management theory’; in these ‘wilder areas where, as John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge put it felicitously, theory mixes with self-help, philosophy, futurology, or downright quackery—these unmapped regions (...) where the greatest fortunes are to be made’ (op. cit.: 304). Hofstede’s endeavor stands as both a paradox and a question mark à propos the collaboration between the economic and the cultural reason. Sign and symbol of a will to truth, it attempts to reconcile lines of competing statements, those on the validity and coherence of self-regulating cultural bodies, and those of the economic reason as directive of a global historical convergence. It has the straight of a beautiful illusion that reminds me of a gifted teenager’s exquisite illumination. In his *Nature Loves to Hide. Quantum Physics and the Nature of Reality, a Western Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 2001), Shimon Malin, a professor of physics at Colgate University, to the purpose of ‘the doctrine of the oneness of mind’, remembers a story told by Kenneth Brower, the biographer of Freeman Dyson, of the second generation of American quantum physicists in the 1950s.

Freeman told us that when he (...) was fourteen he had started a religion. Unhappy with the Christian notion that the heathen are doomed for reasons out of their control, he had begun a sect of his own. ‘I was convinced suddenly that all people are the same. We are all one soul in different disguises. I called it Cosmic Unity (...) I seem to remember that I even had a convert. Cosmic Unity lasted about a year, I think.’ (op. cit.: 234)

An adolescent fancy?, asks Malin. Yes, the oneness of mind, and acting like a mirror and actualizing one’s own reflection, that is Plotinus’ philosophy in *The Enneads*, insists Malin. And he adds,

‘we are all one soul in different disguises,’ that is a precise enunciation of the idea of the oneness of mind. This gifted fourteen-year-old boy suddenly taped into the universal mind.’ (op. cit.: 234)

## 6.

From yesterday to tomorrow, our predicament remains a question: how to handle a collaboration between our three competing reasons—the economic, the political and the cultural; and, defend the authority of an ethics of human dignity. The complex systems englobing us are the products of our intelligence and imagination. They should not become our masters. They contribute to the invention of our social identities. We should be conscious and responsible participants in this process, affirming a critical primacy of the ethical reason over the economic, the political and the cultural.

At the turn of the new millennium, Mary Modahl, the vice president of Forrester Research Inc. that specializes in market analysis, warned us about a new global enterprise of extreme efficiency: electronic commerce, which was steadily modifying the basic structures of transnational companies. Her *Now or Never. How Companies Must Change Today to Win the Battle for Internet Consumers* (Harper Business, 2000) addresses, indeed, experts on how to ‘exploit internet business models’ and ‘defy the gravity of the old ways.’ However, its main exploration is on diversity in businesses, and about forms of alterity represented by consumers’ differences. The research dwells on the psychology of behaviors, processes and dynamics of integrating individualities into the commerce systems. In sum, here, we face a concrete illustration of meta-systems transcending, for commerce purposes, Amitai Etzioni’s analysis of complex organizations and Geert Hofstede’s software of the mind program.

How to resituate the notion of compliance as a moral attitude?

Compliance, yes, in our public collective system of shared spiritual values in this global culture; in reference to the constitutive language of our community, the legality of values it enshrines according to a code of

ethics in the making, and transcending its own organic structure in a transhistorical and transcultural effort. How, conceptually, one could comply to what such an abstract sign might be supposing, a symbol traced by an unstable moving point, a cipher representing a possible convergence of continuous lines on the surface of histories? In sum, could we speak allegorically of a path which, from the uniqueness of human dignity as demarcated through time and space in a multiplicity of narratives, would state its own alignment in its transcriptions of lessons from traditions?

Reformulated in our concrete communities of existence within their laws and governance codes, and how the ethical reason is articulated in them, compliance to human dignity exigencies should stand as our supreme value, an absolute one. It should, in effect, prescribe and evaluate the activity of both the economic and political reasons. In this way, this notion of compliance would come to allegorize itself in modalities of agreement and obedience whose lines intersect in the common space of our 'we-community': acquiescence to, and accord with legally binding values in symmetrical relations. On the other hand, in intransitive determinations of difference, obedience to the authority of a grammar whose components, as they were well summed up in a XIX<sup>th</sup> century note by Renouvier, which can be found in the Lalande dictionary of philosophy: ipseity, alterity, synthesis. As a matter of fact, they call their coherence in the dynamic succession of identity, distinction, determination. And, compliance comes to signify a perpetually recommenced search for an access to an ethics of coexistence. Should not we adapt here, Locke's language à propos knowledge of the existence of beings and things, and promote an ethics presiding over acts, dispositions, willingness that synchronizes everything for the better? In our time, accenting the project of his *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Levinas reminded us this which transcends all technicalities:

'the word 'ethical' and the word 'just' are the same word, the same question, the same language.'

January 30, 2006



# Marcien Towa entre deux cultures

par Samba Diakité

**Résumé :** **Marcien Towa entre deux cultures.** Face à des phénomènes majeurs auxquels l'Afrique fut confronté, tels que l'aliénation, la traite négrière, et la colonisation, sans oublier le déchirement des indépendances, Marcien Towa évalue la complexité des problèmes et refuse l'abdication et le retour aux sources. Il circonscrit l'espace où sa pensée peut se permettre certaines audaces et décide de n'interroger que le visible de l'Afrique, du dedans comme du dehors. C'est ainsi que, conçue pour l'Afrique et sous le regard de l'Occident, la pensée de Towa, affirme sa cohérence en échappant au corset d'une pensée systématique et en proposant la nouveauté radicale d'une insatisfaction culturelle constamment entretenue sur les rapports de l'Afrique avec l'Occident, sur ses attitudes face au chaos de son époque. Les manches de son discours, ses bifurcations et la radicalité du commentaire, fragmentent l'unité factice ordonnée par l'étude de la culture africaine en passant par un regard rétrospectif sur le passé pour faire place à la dénonciation ironique de l'incertitude d'un continent qui vacille sur le pont de deux océans.

**Abstract.** In the face of the major phenomena with which Africa has been confronted (transcontinental exploitation, slave trade, colonisation, not to forget the disruption which independence brought) Marcien Towa overlooks the complex problematic and rejects both the stance of resignation, and the return to historic sources of socio-cultural meaning and identity. He defines the space within which his thought finds the freedom needed for courage, and decides to concentrate his analysis on what we can actually see of Africa, both inside and outside. Conceived for Africa but conscious of the Western gaze, Towa's thought turns out to be coherent while it escapes from the straightjacket of systematic philosophy. At the same time it discerns something which it recognises to be radically new, notably the cultural dissatisfaction which invariably attends Africa's relations with the West, and which becomes manifest in Africa's attitudes in regard of the contemporary chaos. The artificial unity stipulated by the study of African culture is broken up by the deployment of Towa's discourse, by the dilemmas which present themselves there, and by the radical nature of his commentary. A retrospective view of the past gives way to ironic distancing from the uncertainties of the African continent, staggering on the bridge between two oceans.

**Mots-clés :** Afrique, culture, civilisation, révolution, développement, occident, histoire

**Key words:** Africa, culture, civilisation, revolution, development, the West, history

## **Introduction**

La réflexion qui caractérise la philosophie doit prendre la forme d'un reflux de la pensée sur ses propres sources vives. Celles-ci doivent permettre au philosophe de se ressaisir comme l'origine du sens qu'elles confèrent à ses objets et à ses œuvres. Assurément, les réponses que le philosophe donne aux questions que se pose l'humanité, ne se trouvent pas quelque part déjà, là bas, dans l'au-delà d'une transcendance plus ou moins inaccessible. Elles ne se découvrent que progressivement dans leurs liens aux problèmes que l'esprit peut et doit se proposer comme autant de tâches à accomplir.

Mais si le philosophe doit toujours faire recours à ses propres sources vives, s'il doit toujours recommencer dans le temps, ce n'est nullement parce qu'il est voué à une répétition stérile, mais, seulement, parce que dans ces sources vives, dans de tels recommencements, se trouve la seule façon offerte à l'homme de maintenir le miroir dans laquelle il se voit, de boire dans la source dans laquelle il appartient. C'est pourquoi, loin de vouloir ressusciter quelque dogmatique "philosophie" ou culture éternelle, Marcien Towa, a voulu simplement nous permettre de penser notre condition afin d'en sortir. Son objet, c'est cette culture africaine qui ne qualifie pas seulement les solutions, mais les problèmes eux-mêmes. Sa destination, c'est cette culture occidentale qui convainc et qui vainc sans avoir raison ; dorénavant, il ne s'agira pas « d'avoir raison » mais de ne jamais renoncer à se servir de la raison et de sa propre raison en vue de ce qui dépasse toute raison.

« Dès lors l'enjeu ne peut plus être pour nous la reconnaissance d'un droit, mais l'exercice de ce droit. Pour la majorité des peuples noirs l'ère des chicanes sur les textes juridiques est close, close aussi celle des revendications pour la reconnaissance de « notre dignité anthropologique » Il faut maintenant passer aux actes, et imposer par des réalisations de tous ordres cette dignité anthropologique » .<sup>1</sup>

On admettra peut-être que la philosophie de Marcien Towa ne bé-

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<sup>1</sup> Towa (Marcien), *Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l'Afrique actuelle*, Yaoundé, Clé, 1981, p. 38.



néficie d'aucune priorité fondatrice, ne se prévaut d'aucun droit d'aînesse, qu'elle s'inclut dans les objets qu'elle étudie et se qualifie elle aussi, par son style au sens général que définit son *Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l'Afrique actuelle*. Aucune pensée, cependant, ne tend à une synthèse scientifique universelle, à une eschatologie totalisatrice de l'univers ou de l'histoire. Dans tous les cas, les décisions humaines ne s'imposent pas en vertu d'une nécessité impersonnelle, déductive ou technique, mais elles engagent absolument hic et nunc, celui qui, en les prenant, actualise dans sa situation concrète, par son choix, sa possible existence. En ce processus universel qu'est celui de la modernité, il est bien des temps, bien des lieux où l'histoire de la pensée semble se recueillir tout entière avec une particulière plénitude avant de re-survir dans une lumière neuve. Pour l'Afrique, l'éclairage nouveau, pour reprendre une image de Hegel, provient de la nouveauté du « soleil » qui s'est levé. L'occasion nous est offerte ; il nous suffit, à travers la pensée de Marcien Towa, d'avoir le courage de la saisir. Car, le choix pour nous, africains, n'est pas entre la culture africaine et la culture occidentale ; le choix pour chaque africain, est entre changé ou être changé – changer foncièrement et sans regret notre existence en soumettant notre culture à une critique sans complaisance, sous notre propre direction ou être changé par des impératifs économiques et politiques, venant de l'extérieur, imposés par les impératifs de la globalisation.

Dans l'Afrique actuelle, il ne peut y avoir de stabilité dans le traditionalisme.

« Poser une tradition comme parfaite, c'est vouloir la soustraire à tout changement et la poser hors du temps. Ce qui est parfait n'a en effet besoin d'aucune modification, d'aucun complément. La perfection est à conserver, à maintenir et non à changer. L'absolutisation de la tradition emprunte ordinairement la voie de la divination. Si une culture (lois, rites, croyances, etc.) est l'œuvre d'un être parfait, elle ne peut qu'être parfaite elle-même. Pour rendre crédible la perfection d'une culture, on l'attribue à un être parfait, divin »<sup>2</sup>.

Poser la stabilité n'est envisageable qu'à travers le maintien d'un équi-

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<sup>2</sup> Towa (Marcien), « Les conflits entre traditionalismes : recherche d'une solution » in *Recherche, Pédagogie et Culture*, n°56, Paris, AUDECAM, 1982, p. 33.

bre au cours d'une transformation rapide et consciente. C'est pourquoi, l'Afrique doit changer en opérant une critique sans complaisance de sa culture, en changeant ses institutions pour réaliser ses nouvelles aspirations afin de s'accorder avec ses propres objectifs qui ne doivent viser que le développement ; développement, d'ailleurs, qui n'est possible que par le progrès scientifique et technique dont l'Occident semble être le déposeur de la marque. Et ces transformations ne doivent guère être de simples réactions à des événements qui affectent notre continent. Il faut, désormais, que survienne une transformation profonde des structures de la vie culturelle, politique et sociale, que représentera la révolution radicale africaine à venir, pour que puisse s'imposer une intelligence nouvelle de l'Homme Africain, entendu comme Liberté radicale. Il faut aussi à l'Afrique des personnes capables d'inventer de nouvelles manières de penser, de vivre et d'agir.

Marcien Towa est, à n'en point douter, l'une de ces personnes-là. Mais tout grand homme, à quelques degrés près, est toujours incompris ; et Marcien Towa, plus encore que les autres, provoque des malentendus, sans doute parce qu'il est difficile de résister, face à lui, à la double tentation : soit chercher des prétextes pour neutraliser les terribles questions qu'il évoque, soit considérer ses écrits comme des préjugés de doctrinaires et d'idéologues occidentalisés. On alléguera ses contradictions, on lui reprochera son style révolutionnaire et radical ainsi que ses prises de positions tranchées, pour classer ses écrits au nombre des documents servant de couverture idéologique au socialisme et même de marxisme-léninisme dans sa phase révolutionnaire. On pourrait allonger la liste de ces interprétations aberrantes. Mais, l'essentiel est que l'influence que Towa exerce sur les esprits de notre époque, son autorité philosophique, se soit relativement imposée au point que, pour de nombreux jeunes africains, il est reconnu, aujourd'hui, comme l'un de ces rénovateurs sociaux qui doivent modeler le visage de l'Afrique d'aujourd'hui.

Il s'en faut de beaucoup, pourtant, que règne actuellement l'unanimité quant à la bonne appréciation du sens de la pensée de Marcien Towa. Ose-t-on s'aventurer dans les profondeurs de la culture africaine ? On se trouve engagé dans un labyrinthe aux multiples détours ;

c'est dire que la philosophie de Towa est une philosophie de risque si tant est que toute philosophie est d'abord risquée et courageuse. Elle n'autorise pas une explication univoque et définitive ; elle revendique sa liberté radicale. Sa vérité ultime réside dans l'impulsion qu'elle tourne pour aller plus loin, sur la route de l'Occident, en Occident, au fond de la civilisation occidentale, pour re-venir en Afrique, dans son Natal et se reterritorialiser.

Toutefois, la pensée de Marcien Towa apparaît en ce jour comme problématique. Qu'on comprenne Towa ou non, qu'on le rejette ou qu'on l'accepte, on est contraint d'admettre qu'il s'est imposé comme l'un des gladiateurs dans la difficile arène de la « Philosophie Africaine ». Dès lors, la pensée de Marcien Towa est-elle une philosophie critique fondée sur la désaliénation de la société africaine, sur l'idéal éthique d'une libération de l'homme, ou sur l'irréductibilité créatrice de la pratique révolutionnaire ? Il est donc indispensable de prêter la plus minutieuse attention aux plans où se déploie la problématique : quels sont les fondements philosophiques de la révolution culturelle de Marcien Towa ? Le développement scientifique et technique, à l'ère de la globalisation, impose-t-il à l'Afrique, un changement des mentalités, une reconversion des cultures, pour tout dire, une auto-occidentalisation ? Et c'est justement à ce titre que la pensée de Towa semble déterminer la radicalité des commentaires. Désormais, devant l'échec des cultures africaines face à la pénétration coloniale, devant l'échec de la révolution ratée des indépendances, il apparaît impérieux pour les africains, pour les siècles à venir, de poser les jalons d'une mentalité neuve, d'instaurer un nouvel ordre culturel afin d'éveiller la nouvelle révolution africaine. Mais, en quoi va consister cette nouvelle révolution ?

### ***1. De la recherche de l'affirmation d'une origine***

En marge du courant de la Négritude qui suscitait la valorisation des cultures africaines et leur entière conservation, Towa, par ses voies propres, conduit des recherches qui radicalisent la scission entre la période d'avant les indépendances et maintenant. L'objectif de Towa est de re-

conduire l'Afrique, dans l'élément de la pensée, à son sol de crédibilité qui puisse le solidifier. Mais comment réussit-il ce pari ? En effet, dans *Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l'Afrique actuelle*, Marcien Towa dénonce ce préjugé tenace qui prétend que les Africains n'auraient eu aucune part à l'œuvre générale de la civilisation. Il fustige les critiques violentes de Hegel dans *la raison dans l'histoire* et montre que celles-ci ne suffisent pas pour refuser à l'Afrique ce que la nature lui a donné. Il ne suffira pas non plus d'arracher à l'Afrique ses habitudes et de la déclarer anhistorique pour la faire entrer de force dans l'histoire universelle ; la recherche et la défense de la plénitude d'une identité ne doit guère mener à mépriser ou à nier l'identité de l'autre. Revendiquer son identité ou la valoriser, c'est reconnaître en substance, sans le dire vraiment, l'identité de l'autre et s'obliger à l'accepter comme telle. Car les civilisations diffèrent essentiellement par l'importance respective qu'elles accordent aux différentes structures, qu'elles soient d'ordre économique, politique ou culturel ; il faut seulement, grâce à l'élan vital, parvenir à surmonter la résistance de la matière. La supériorité de l'homme, l'homme la doit à celle de son cerveau qui, par sa capacité illimitée de monter des mécanismes opposés les uns aux autres, permet à la conscience de s'intensifier et de choisir ses voies en se rendant ainsi indépendante des automatismes naturels et corporels.

Ainsi donc, comme nous l'a expliqué Bergson, toute évolution peut se poursuivre sous la forme de créations spirituelles et celle de l'Afrique ne peut se dérober à cette règle. C'est cette aptitude à assumer son essence, à s'ouvrir les voies d'une signification d'ensemble du mouvement évolutif qui confère à l'homme, sans distinction de race, une place privilégiée dans la nature. Même si ce succès, il faut le reconnaître, reste, pour une bonne part, à l'état de possibilité. En tant qu'espèce, l'africain, comme l'occidental, infléchit toutes ses facultés dans le sens de l'utilité. Comme l'occidental, il tend à se conserver et à se répéter, plutôt que de continuer d'évoluer. De sorte que, compte tenu de son orientation naturelle, ses aptitudes spécifiques ne lui permettent pas de coïncider avec le dynamisme de l'élan vital. Ce constat ambiant montre que ce n'est ni la race ni l'espèce qui est la raison d'être de l'évolution des choses, mais le

rôle de ces personnalités morales, hors du commun, qui, de loin en loin, en émergent. L’Afrique aurait-elle manqué ces personnalités ? C’est alors qu’apparaît comme un signe inéluctable, orientant le devenir de l’Afrique la présence de l’Occident, hantise d’une époque noircie d’horreurs physique et morale, dans son « *acte libre et grandiose du saint et du héros, l’acte libre et humble de tout homme qui œuvre pour le bien et dans l’honneur* »<sup>3</sup>. En effet, selon l’Occident, l’Africain, issu du néant, serait condamné à y retourner, corps et âme, et son état ne serait qu’une modalité d’un perpétuel “anéantissement”. Dans ces conditions, l’Africain se heurterait sans cesse à l’impossible et à un perpétuel échec devant la vie. Dès lors, toute l’existence humaine africaine, ne serait, qu’une longue course à illusions. Illusion, le mouvement qui lance les hommes à la conquête de biens imaginaires ; illusion, le progrès, si tout avantage conquis ne se paie, en fin de compte qu’au prix du sang ; illusion enfin, cette “philosophie africaine”, ce moyen unique que devrait avoir tout peuple pour gagner la paix du cœur. Il y a donc aux yeux de l’Occident, le sentiment profond, pour ainsi dire métaphysique, d’une impossibilité radicale pour l’Homme Africain de sortir de soi et de s’unir aux autres hommes.

« Ainsi s’exigeraient et se correspondraient trois origines cardinales sur les plans philosophique, culturel et politique : l’origine du sens, l’origine de la civilisation et l’origine de la décision, toutes trois initialement revendiquées et confisquées par l’occident et refusées à l’Afrique »<sup>4</sup>.

En ce sens, la recherche et l’affirmation d’une origine unique et solide des civilisations correspond fondamentalement et historiquement à la recherche et à l’affirmation, tous azimuts et toutes identiques, d’une recherche de sens. Et, il incline, à cet effet, à penser que dans cet attachement à la topique des origines, la préoccupation première de l’origine du sens a pu conditionner, malheureusement, sans doute, celle de l’origine de la civilisation jusqu’au point de conduire l’ethnocentrisme de

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<sup>3</sup> Henri-Simon (Pierre), *L’esprit et l’histoire*, Paris, Petite Bibliothèque Payot, 1969, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> Njoh-Mouelle (Ebenezer), *Jalons II, L’Africanisme aujourd’hui*, Yaoundé, Clé, 1975, p. 6.

l'Occident devenu incontournable. La négation de toute origine de sens à l'Afrique, serait corollaire de la négation de toute civilisation africaine. Conséquemment, la découverte de la fausseté de l'histoire universelle dont la propriété exclusive revient à l'Occident, impliquerait la subordination des autres continents à l'Occident impérialiste et colonisateur. Pour Marcien Towa, le refus de l'histoire à l'Afrique n'est rien d'autre que le refus de son existence, de sa préhistoire et de son essence même. Or, la civilisation n'est pas un langage universel que nous puissions lire d'un trait. Il ne saurait être question ni de faire d'une philosophie le simple produit du contexte historique dans lequel elle est apparue, ni de parler d'un progrès en histoire de la philosophie. La soumission à l'histoire, disons, à l'histoire occidentale, est un refus de la philosophie, si occidentale, soit-elle, qui marque la fin du respect que nous devons à tout homme, un aveuglement desséchant qui s'interdit de juger une histoire, faite par les occidentaux et imposée aux autres au nom d'une mission civilisatrice.

« En réalité, nous dit Towa, ce qui est en jeu, c'est la hiérarchisation des civilisations et des sociétés, ni plus ni moins (...) En effet, le mouvement qui anime l'Histoire multi-millénaire de l'humanité n'a qu'un but : le triomphe final de la raison, et de la liberté. Par conséquent, la présence ou l'absence de la liberté et de la pensée, c'est-à-dire de la philosophie, signifie l'appartenance ou la non appartenance à l'histoire universelle. Le fait que la philosophie, (...), la pure pensée et la liberté, ne se rencontre qu'en occident veut donc dire en même temps que seul l'occident est véritablement historique »<sup>5</sup>.

L'analyse de ces pensées esclavagistes et impérialistes, de cette réalité totalitaire, nous montre réellement la généalogie du monstre et de ses avatars ; elle nous conduit à montrer que le totalitarisme occidental, notwithstanding ses différences idéologiques, est prête à justifier l'extermination des classes ou des races théoriquement "inférieures et condamnées" par la nature et l'histoire, leur histoire. Dès lors, la terreur devient légalité et constitue l'essence même de l'Occident, en même temps que son principe, non pas d'action, mais de mouvement.

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<sup>5</sup> Towa (Marcien), *Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l'Afrique actuelle*, Yaoundé, Clé, 1975, p. 5.

« Autant de manières de dire aussi que partout où il y a du Maître, partout où il y a de la domination et par conséquent de la servitude, il y a toujours, d'une manière ou d'une autre, manipulation du temps, méthodique gestion de son déroulement et de sa chronologie »<sup>6</sup>.

Ainsi donc, la méthode de la raison, n'a été inventée que pour des mobiles de puissance, de domination et de barbarie. L'envahissement de l'Afrique par l'Occident relèverait du fait que l'Afrique ne serait qu'une poussière d'humanité sans vigueur de raison et de maturité.

« Ces remarques, révèlent le sens profond du mouvement anticolonialiste. Un peuple qui lutte pour sa libération entreprend de reconquérir son humanité perdue, c'est-à-dire le pouvoir de s'exprimer et de concevoir, de décider et de réaliser ce qu'il a décidé. S'agissant de notre continent, le combat pour la réalisation vise ou doit viser l'émergence d'une Afrique prospère, puissante et autocentrée, une Afrique formant un centre autonome de besoins et d'aspirations, d'expression, de conception, de décision et de réalisation sur les plans politique, économique et culturel. Tel est le sens de la révolution qu'il s'agit d'opérer. L'impérialisme n'épargnera aucun effort pour l'empêcher et nous ne devons nous épargner aucun sacrifice pour l'imposer »<sup>7</sup>.

Il importe, désormais, pour l'Africain, de prendre conscience de soi comme sujet et d'instaurer précisément une nouvelle vision du temps, de l'histoire et de sa culture. Pour ce faire, Marcien Towa pense que l'Afrique devra briser l'être cyclique et prouver que le progrès ne doit pas signifier la répétition stérile ; que le progrès ne peut pas être refusé à l'Afrique et qu'il doit être la liberté de décider de la relation de l'Afrique avec la nature et avec l'Occident. L'acte libre, surtout dans une Afrique en quête d'indépendance, ne résulte nullement d'un choix indifférent ; il est au contraire l'acte le plus significatif qui ne doit pas obéir à un déterminisme radical et affectif. Il doit être une création de soi par soi en se muant en une expérience du moi comme révolte consciente qui doit résoudre l'énigme de la colonisation et révéler au monde que l'Africain, par sa pensée, peut s'élever au-dessus du donné, pour se donner d'autres possibles afin de limiter les tâtonnements et les échecs.

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<sup>6</sup> Henry-Lévy (Bernard), *La barbarie à visage humain*, Paris, Grasset & Fasquelle, 1977, p. 60.

<sup>7</sup> Towa (Marcien), *L'idée d'une philosophie négro-africaine*, Yaoundé, Clé, 1979, p. 54.

« L' inachèvement ou la partialité des discours antérieurs ne sont pas le résultat d'un travail insuffisant, mais le revers de l'inachèvement de l'Être ; et c'est du « mûrissement » de celui-ci que sortira le dépassement de cette scission du savoir et de la foi qui s'est instaurée avec le criticisme et caractérise encore, sous un de ses aspects, le monde moderne »<sup>8</sup>.

Cependant, l'expérience vécue par les africains, ne doit pas seulement les inciter à la révolte anti-esclavagiste ; ils devraient, à travers les masses, révéler une nouvelle figure des rapports de l'un et du multiple, des rapports de co-culturalité avec l'Occident, pour véritablement s'octroyer ce que Towa appelle « l'arme miraculeuse », une arme par laquelle l'unité et la pluralité, le même et l'autre ne se séparent jamais, mais s'unissent dans une sorte d'éléments hétérogènes qui se bifurquent pour s'interpénétrer. Mais, comment obtenir cette arme miraculeuse ? Towa préconise le retour à la culture occidentale en opérant une révolution radicale au sein des cultures africaines.

## ***II. La culture occidentale comme « arme miraculeuse » pour le développement africain***

Les États africains ont, aujourd'hui, le devoir d'organiser leur propre marche vers les progrès scientifique et technique. Ils ne sauraient également se détourner du développement de leurs cultures nationales à cause de la plus grande vulnérabilité de leurs civilisations durement éprouvées par la colonisation et l'esclavage. C'est pourquoi, Towa prône pour l'Afrique, une révolution radicale. Mais, celle-ci doit nécessiter une grande patience, une recherche technique et une synthèse lucide. Dans ce cas, il faudrait que les gouvernants soient eux-mêmes unanimement convaincus que sans culture, il n'y a pas d'État digne de ce nom ; il n'y a pas d'économie, pas de technique, pas de science au service de l'homme, pas de nation vivante et forte.

Ce n'est pas seulement au développement de certaines facultés de l'esprit par des exercices intellectuels appropriés, qu'il faut penser. Il faut

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<sup>8</sup> Sebag (Lucien), *Marxisme et structuralisme*, Paris, Petite Bibliothèque Payot, 1964, p. 17.



songer aussi à divers schèmes résultant d'une évolution historique, à des ensembles d'habitudes reconnues comme valables dans la société humaine et dont on peut repérer les traces dans toutes les sphères de l'activité humaine : le social, le politique, la réglementation, l'organisation de la vie collective, la réciprocité, les communications entre les êtres humains, car l'égalité que l'on réclamait ou que l'on continue de réclamer n'est qu'un vain mot, si chacun n'a pas le sentiment que sa dignité est reconnue. L'âme elle-même se sclérose lorsqu'elle s'habitue, lorsqu'elle accepte, lorsqu'elle ne s'intéresse plus qu'à ses droits et oublie de se forger des devoirs à l'égard des autres. Il est donc bon, qu'il y ait à chaque époque des éveilleurs de conscience pour sortir les hommes de leur quiétude égoïste et donner à leur vie un sens élevé, un sens humain, un tonus vivifiant et fortement humanisant, un bain de modernité, dans la mer infinie de l'humanisme universel.

Pour atteindre ce but, Marcien Towa veut rétablir l'alliance de la vérité avec l'Afrique, avec la culture africaine, par le biais de la raison critique. Porter la raison latente à la compréhension de ses propres possibilités et, ouvrir ainsi, au regard de la possibilité d'une culture en tant que possibilité, c'est là l'unique chemin pour mettre en route l'immense travail de réalisation d'une philosophie africaine, disons d'une philosophie universelle. Aujourd'hui, nous avons tous les moyens, non seulement de ne pas consentir à confondre le travail de la philosophie et le travail de manifestation de la raison, mais aussi de saisir déjà dans le caractère « infini » de la culture, c'est-à-dire dans ce travail de manifestation d'une entreprise interminable, la rançon de son in-finité en un autre sens, et plus radical, celui d'une indétermination originelle. Nous sommes également capables, élevant à la clarté du savoir la sentence fameuse prononcée par Kant dans l'obscurité du principe de juridiction critique que la « vérité » n'est qu'un mot « séduisant » – de coller Towa au mur d'une notion si plane, que de surcroît, il a lui-même aplanie jusqu'à l'absolue surface, c'est-à-dire la superficialité absolue de l'idée de révolution radicale de la culture. La vérité, c'est qu'il ne s'agit pas là d'une différence entre les hommes, mais d'une différence entre les cultures, entre des âges de l'humanité, c'est-à-dire entre des âges auxquels appartiennent les hom-

mes avec la totalité de leurs travaux, de leurs coutumes, de leurs manières de faire et d'agir et de leurs qualités.

«Car si la révolution est revendication de la liberté de choix par rapport à la tradition, cette liberté ne se donne pas mais se construit en fonction des jugements de valeur que l'on porte sur les données de cette tradition, de ce qu'il paraît souhaitable de détruire ou de conserver. Le paradoxe de toute révolution est d'être à la fois rétrospective et prospective, refus de la tradition et utilisation de cette même tradition. La destruction du naguère est souvent compensée par le recours au jadis. »<sup>9</sup>.

Quand tout cela serait vrai – et tout cela est vrai d'une certaine façon – nous n'aurions pas cessé, cependant, d'être précédés dans tout ce que nous venons de dire par le texte de Towa. A dire vrai,

« Il n'y pas de société définitivement rivée à la tradition en tant qu'ensemble de données du passé au point de ne percevoir la conscience de l'intervention active et efficace de la liberté humaine comme moteur du devenir prométhéen. Il n'y a pas de société statique se situant en dehors du temps historique pour une absolue fidélité à la tradition. Le jeu des contradictions internes et des antagonismes socio – politiques, la rupture de l'équilibre écologique sont des facteurs destructeurs ou modificateurs des données de la tradition et soulignent le pouvoir novateur de chaque société »<sup>10</sup>.

Encore faut-il, pour comprendre cela, que nous soyons capables d'entendre ce terme même de "révolution radicale". L'erreur serait de croire que le concept utilisé ici par Towa est un concept général (un *conceptus communis*), quelque chose comme la notion tempelsienne de « philosophie bantoue ». La difficulté vient au contraire, de ce que le concept de révolution radicale est chez Towa, un concept singulier, entièrement historique. Il réveille ainsi dans l'humanité africaine, l'idée d'une révolution. Il nous sépare des autres humanités comme l'unique peuple qui est sérieusement en retard et qui continue de magnifier sa culture et de l'exalter aux yeux de l'Occident.

Ce constat permet à Towa d'affirmer :

« Notre opinion est que nous devons exorciser la hantise de l'originalité et de la différence, c'est-à-dire, de la tradition, non pas certes en la condamnant et

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<sup>9</sup> Kouassigan (Guy Adjété), *Afrique : Révolution ou diversité des possibles ?*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1985, p. 53.

<sup>10</sup> Kouassigan (Guy Adjété), *op. cit.*, pp. 53 - 54.

en la rejetant en bloc, mais en la jugeant après l'avoir étudiée et examinée avec soin. Même si l'on admet l'idée d'un progrès global de l'humanité, il n'est pas dit que pour tel individu ou tel peuple particulier, le présent soit toujours meilleur, que le passé ; il n'est donc pas rare que le passé soit préférable au présent, que la tradition soit supérieure à la nouveauté. Néanmoins, il faut souligner que la différence, la particularité par rapport à l'autre n'a pas de valeur en elle-même, pas plus que l'identité par rapport à soi et la tradition qui la définit »<sup>11</sup>.

La question de Towa, celle qui assure à son œuvre entière sa portée historique et sa signification essentielle est ainsi une question sur le sens et le fondement de la modernité africaine. C'est seulement sur cette base qu'il est nécessaire d'avoir un modèle mondain d'une transparence, et que la culture, tout en restant la « baliverne » que la révolution radicale traite de haut, devient aussi le modèle et la matrice. Aucun tournant dans l'histoire de la philosophie africaine n'est sans doute aussi important que celui-là. C'est lui, en effet, qui mène de la Négritude et de l'Ethno-philosophie à la détermination critique des cultures africaines. Par détermination critique, il faut que Towa exhibe la limitation fondamentale à laquelle la philosophie africaine doit sa forme effective et son histoire concrète, et qu'il fasse apparaître cette limitation comme un manque ou un flottement essentiel, exactement comme une indétermination de forme déterminée par rapport aux exigences propres à un développement rigoureux du Logos.

Dès le début, la dimension propre de la révolution radicale, reste une dimension entièrement nouvelle, c'est-à-dire inconnue à elle-même et qui doit conquérir la détermination de son sens le plus général dans son détail concret. C'est précisément dans ce va-et-vient de la généralité concrète, (chacune dépendant de l'autre), et dans cet effort pour faire échapper la nouveauté déroutante de la pensée à son indétermination, qu'on peut apercevoir que la révolution est d'abord elle-même une pratique, c'est-à-dire un risque essentiel.

Aussi, faut-il à l'Afrique un rapport de lucidité à son passé pour pouvoir dénoncer les tares de la société africaine et mettre en place une

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<sup>11</sup> Towa (Marcien), *L'idée d'une philosophie négro-africaine* (Yaoundé, Clé, 1979), p. 66.

culture du développement, la culture se définissant selon Hegel comme étant

« une mise en forme et se constitue par la forme de l'universalité : ainsi l'homme cultivé est celui qui sait imprimer à toutes ses actions le sceau de l'universalité - qui a renoncé à sa particularité, qui agit selon des principes universels. La culture est forme du penser (...) L'homme cultivé connaît les différents aspects des objets ; ils existent pour lui et sa réflexion cultivée leur a donné la forme de l'universalité (...) En sauvegardant la variété, l'homme cultivé agit concrètement ; il est habitué à agir selon des points de vue et des buts universels. En bref, la culture porte le sceau de l'universalité »<sup>12</sup>.

Nous voyons donc clairement qu'en adhérant à cette pensée, Towa montre que la culture est le style de vie d'une nation, la manière dont elle construit, organise sa vie, la manière dont elle organise son développement. Parler de développement d'un peuple, c'est donc songer au développement de sa culture. Or, nous demeurons faibles sur plusieurs fronts par manque d'organisation, car c'est de là que vient la puissance dans le contexte de la vie moderne. Et plus l'organisation est discrète, plus elle est efficace et dynamique. Voilà, sans doute une vertu que l'Afrique moderne devrait songer à acquérir pendant qu'elle renoncera à la momification de sa culture, au théâtralisme et au tapage qui nous rendent prévisibles à mille lieux de notre passage. L'organisation appartient à la science, c'est-à-dire à la disposition de notre raison. Apprendre donc à s'organiser, c'est aussi s'initier à la démarche scientifique nécessaire à l'appréhension du monde moderne. Pour bâtir une Afrique moderne, il est nécessaire de choisir entre la révolution et la réaction, entre l'émotion et la raison, entre l'acte et la parole, entre le travail et le repos, entre la magie et la technologie.

Cependant, nous dit Towa, avec la décolonisation, les cultures africaines qui ont survécu à la tourmente de la traite négrière, à la conquête et à la domination étrangères, se sont affirmées avec plus de vivacité ; c'est dire que si on peut réduire un peuple à la servitude, on ne peut tuer son âme ; et la culture, c'est aussi l'âme d'un peuple. Mais si nos cultures se sont maintenues, si elles ont été même à la base d'une certaine forme de

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<sup>12</sup> Hegel (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich), *La raison dans l'histoire*, Paris, Union Générale d'Édition, 1979, pp. 87-88. .

résistance pendant les périodes les plus douloureuses de l'histoire africaine, si elles ont connu une certaine « modernité », c'est justement parce que

«la culture unit forme et contenu d'une manière tellement indissoluble que tel contenu qui, par l'analyse d'une représentation, s'amplifie en une foule de représentations et devient d'une richesse incalculable, devient pour elle un contenu empirique auquel la pensée n'aurait aucune part ».<sup>13</sup>

Mais, à la vérité, la modernisation accélérée avec les mutations qu'elle entraîne, remet forcément en cause certains aspects de la culture africaine. Dans tous les cas, au fur et à mesure que se modifieront les conditions matérielles de notre existence, des rapports sociaux nouveaux s'établiront, nos institutions évolueront, l'école s'étendra et nos cultures se transformeront. C'est là un processus irréversible, car on ne fait pas du développement avec des sociétés fermées. Le développement culturel, comme l'a souligné Albert Meister, exige le risque des espaces infinis et le changement qualitatif de la société comme corollaire de son action. Le développement suppose une rupture avec le passé et une éducation moderne « exaltant le neuf, l'ajustement aux situations nouvelles et la volonté de transformation du monde »<sup>14</sup>.

Avec les moyens modernes de communication, le repli sur soi est une impossibilité. Il n'est même pas souhaitable, car la relation au passé n'est significative pour une culture donnée que s'il s'agit d'un lien dynamique et efficace. Et l'effectivité d'un tel lien exige de ne pas se représenter le passé historique comme un roc immuable, mais certainement comme ce qui, ayant été, doit s'analyser, se réfléchir afin de rendre encore plus vivant le mouvement originel qui l'a d'abord laissé être, et qui exprime le désir de liberté. En ce point, le changement ne s'impose-t-il pas en vertu d'une nécessité interne conforme à la modernité ? Réaliser son être, n'est-ce pas le but que chaque peuple doit poursuivre dans l'histoire universelle ?

Quoiqu'on dise, le point suprême de la culture d'un peuple est de

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<sup>13</sup> Hegel (Georg Wilhem Friedrich), *op. cit.*, p. 202.

<sup>14</sup> Meister (Albert), *L'Afrique peut-elle partir ?* (Paris, Seuil, 1966), p. 30.

penser sa vie et sa condition de connaître ses lois, son droit, son éthique, ses faiblesses, afin de s'améliorer. D'ailleurs,

« en se contentant d'une ascension à l'immuable, pareil recours ramène sans plus le passé à la platitude d'un milieu indifférencié, mesurant toutes choses, de sa mesure sans mesure, et en lequel vient se fondre la conscience, dans la bouillie du cœur et l'enthousiasme, pour faire se dissoudre les interrogations insistantes du monde qu'elle n'a pas la force de soutenir. Un regard sur les modalités concrètes de l'existence sociale en Afrique pourra sans grandes difficultés, révéler l'actualité de ce recours au passé historique comme à un roc solide et fixe vers lequel les hommes s'empressent de tourner le regard dans les situations difficiles. Ceci a lieu même au niveau politique où pourtant la raison, devenue le Bien vivant, est censée se vouloir seulement elle-même et se développer en sa nécessité, ce qui veut dire aussi, en sa liberté (...) Chercher de magique façon une sécurité dans le passé en l'invoquant ou en s'y dissolvant soi-même, n'est-ce pas avoir perdu le sens de l'ouverture créatrice ? »<sup>15</sup>

Le progrès est donc dans le mouvement. Il n'est pas simplement quantitatif, mais une série ascendante des relations diverses avec ce qui est essentiel. Ainsi chaque changement est un progrès et le progrès doit constituer une succession d'étapes de la conscience. Le progrès est aussi dans les échanges. Ce phénomène n'étant pas particulier à notre continent, on s'acheminera lentement vers une symbiose progressive des cultures, cette convergence universelle qui annonce l'avènement d'une civilisation universelle. Il importe que face à ce courant et compte tenu des nécessités de notre unité et de notre libération, que nous nous définissions et qu'ensuite nous agissions, car en faisant les tristes réflexions aujourd'hui, en matière de développement, on voit le monde comme un océan de boue dans lequel un continent se noie jusqu'au cou. L'Afrique est aujourd'hui un domaine privilégié pour la curiosité - une sorte de terrain de chasse particulièrement riche parce qu'on peut y découvrir du jamais vu ou du jamais entendu.

Pour Marcien Towa, dans les administrations africaines, comme dans les activités quotidiennes des africains, on ne rencontre que le triomphe du laisser-aller et de l'à-peu-près. Pour lui, la révolution radicale a pour rôle de combattre une telle africanité, un tel culturalisme, car

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<sup>15</sup> Dibi (Augustin Kouadio), op. cit, pp. 57-58.

une telle vision du monde ne peut bâtir l'Afrique moderne. L'Afrique a besoin d'hommes exigeants vis-à-vis d'eux-mêmes, vis-à-vis de leurs cultures et vis-à-vis des autres. Des hommes qui ne se contentent nullement de l'a - peu près ni ne se satisfont allègrement de la médiocrité. Ainsi, Towa nous invite-t-il à exorciser le culte de la différence :

« parce que le rapport entre l'occident et nous demeure celui entre le maître et l'esclave, nous devons nourrir à l'égard de tout culte de la différence et de l'identité une méfiance systématique ; sans quoi nous courons le risque de nous confirmer dans la servitude. De toute manière, il est vain de vouloir immobiliser la tradition et l'identité culturelle, car tout l'univers est soumis au changement. Et en passant de la nature à la culture et à l'histoire, le rythme de transformation s'accélère et change qualitativement. Dans le monde culturel, bien plus rapidement que dans la nature, tout se transforme par développement ou par dégradation. Dans ces conditions, le problème n'est plus de savoir si notre tradition va changer ou non, elle change inéluctablement, mais quels changements l'affectent, avec quelle rapidité »<sup>16</sup>.

Dès lors, ce que Towa demande aux africains, ce n'est pas de chanter la race et de brandir le passé, mais de trouver les moyens qui permettent à l'Afrique de sortir du sous-développement. Il n'y a donc plus de place pour un retour à l'authenticité, à un retour aux sources immuables en dehors du combat révolutionnaire, étant donné que l'optique révolutionnaire nous libère de la dictature du passé en le relativisant, en présentant tous les éléments constitutifs de notre passé comme des produits, des résultats, des œuvres d'une praxis créatrice passée. Ainsi la révolution radicale ne saurait rien avoir de gratuit ni d'onirique. Elle plonge au contraire ses racines dans la réalité vécue pour révéler à la conscience, par un éclairage adéquat, ses aspects contradictoires avec l'exigence fondamentale du développement qui réside dans la libération de l'homme à l'égard de toutes sortes de servitudes, en vue de l'épanouissement complet des potentialités humaines de chacun. Par conséquent,

« Toute société qui renaît à l'histoire doit être messagère de révolution et porteuse de changements radicaux qui doivent se traduire par l'éradication du système colonial et par la recherche d'une voie originale de synthèse entre

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<sup>16</sup> Towa (Marcien), *L'idée d'une philosophie négro-africaine* (Yaoundé, Clé, 1979), p. 66.

l'affirmation de soi et l'ouverture au monde »<sup>17</sup>.

Pour l'Afrique donc, il n'y a pas d'autre issue que le développement et cela passe nécessairement par une prise de conscience de nos valeurs culturelles et une étude minutieuse de celles de l'Occident. C'est donc une illusion de penser notre africanité en nous référant au passé comme modèle à reproduire pour réaliser l'authenticité de notre être. La phénoménologie de l'authenticité est toujours en passe d'être trahie par ses propres signes puisque les politiques de l'authenticité la définissent toujours par rapport à l'inauthenticité considérée comme un paradigme dont elle est l'ombre et l'effet. C'est la référence au modèle qui fait que notre africanité se présente comme un obstacle ontologique infranchissable dans notre projet de développement technique et technologique.

La révolution radicale doit donc avoir lieu. D'ailleurs, comme l'a révélé Adotévi Stanislas Spéro Kodjo,

« reconnaître la civilisation africaine, ce n'est pas s'extasier sur les particularités culturelles nationales, ni s'ébaurir sur une originalité perdue, mais admettre et faire admettre que notre culture désormais cristallise toutes les tares, toutes les tensions, tous les déchirements d'une politique d'esclavage et de destruction systématique. De cela il résulte que rencontrer sa culture, ce n'est pas la découvrir, mais la radicaliser, c'est-à-dire renforcer la conviction que chaque Noir doit faire quelque chose pour transformer la situation et produire une nouvelle civilisation »<sup>18</sup>.

Dès lors, la prise de conscience du Nègre doit signifier un changement radical du cours des choses, une nouvelle interprétation de la culture, une orientation nouvelle et dynamique de l'existence, une révolte consciente.

Certes, aujourd'hui, le ciel est incertain, mais l'incertitude de l'avenir nous fait un devoir de rejeter le traditionalisme et l'abdication. Il suffit de promouvoir une action culturelle vigoureuse, fondée sur des concepts radicalement nouveaux qui maintiennent la béquille de la liberté et de la tolérance entre les peuples afin d'obtenir une articulation cohérente et systématique des démocraties et des exigences des masses contre

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<sup>17</sup> Kouassigan (Guy Adjété), *op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>18</sup> Adotevi (Stanislas Spero), *op. cit.*, p. 247.



la problématique antérieure de sujétion.

Il ne sert plus à rien de pleurer sur notre passé, même s'il nous faut le reconnaître et établir la vérité historique de façon à nous adosser à notre histoire et faire face à l'avenir. La problématique pour les peuples noirs est donc de savoir s'ils doivent exister ou disparaître. Et le problème se pose avec acuité *et nunc*. C'est dire que notre responsabilité dans le destin de l'Afrique dépend maintenant de notre degré de conscience et de notre volonté.

Pour revenir à la question des rapports conflictuels entre valeurs culturelles endogènes et valeurs culturelles exogènes, on peut dire que la question du développement ne peut se lire que dans le sens d'une sorte de phagocytose des premières par les secondes, car

« tout porte à croire que pour améliorer la qualité matérielle et surtout spirituelle de la vie, il faut nécessairement s'occidentaliser, recourir ou simplement se résigner au reniement de soi pour accéder à l'assimilation qui détruit tous efforts d'invention en détruisant les chances de l'invention dans la perspective d'une vie plurale. L'ethnocentrisme de l'Occident qui est la ligne maîtresse de notre temps objective les autres peuples en niant leur substantialité pour les appréhender en tant que phénomènes »<sup>19</sup>.

Ainsi pour déclencher le processus de développement dans les économies à croissance ralentie que sont les nôtres, notre premier souci doit être de supprimer les blocages structurels et culturels qui freinent le développement. Or, aujourd'hui, le problème essentiel de développement ou de la modernité est posé en terme de développement scientifique, technologique et informatique, conçu pour nous Africains, comme un transfert plutôt comme une injection aux sociétés africaines de savoir-faire des sociétés de la modernité par la vente d'une technologie et de ses soutiens logistiques. Aussi, la science, la technologie et l'informatique sont-elles devenues ces ordonnances médicales susceptibles de nous guérir de nos maux qui ont pour nom : sous-développement, mal-développement, en voie de développement, anti-développement.

Ainsi donc

« le développement se révèle être un processus par étapes (*Stufengang*), une

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<sup>19</sup> Kouassigan (Guy Adjété), *op. cit.*, p. 55.

série de déterminations de plus en plus concrètes de la liberté émanant de son concept même, c'est-à-dire de la nature même de la liberté devenant consciente d'elle-même. La nature logique ou, mieux encore, dialectique du concept en général est de se déterminer lui-même, de se poser en soi des déterminations et les supprimer et les dépasser (*aufheben*) en acquérant par là une détermination positive plus riche et plus concrète »<sup>20</sup>.

Mais, malheureusement, à en croire Towa, la conscience africaine accuse une grande faiblesse théorique et s'enlise le plus souvent dans une répétition monochrome et un dogmatisme officiel. Et dans son odyssée, l'Afrique est habitée par une obsession unique, indéracinable, celle d'obéir aux ordres et aux lois des dieux occidentaux de la modernité.

« Il est temps toutefois, d'aller à la racine du mal. Il ne suffit pas de dénoncer la succession qui a été léguée de déclarer que l'Afrique est pauvre et de divaguer la faiblesse matérielle des nègres. Il faut savoir trouver les causes réelles du retard, la raison des incohérences et de la faiblesse. Il faut choisir entre le colonialisme et l'indépendance (...). Rien n'est plus préjudiciable à ce continent que les hésitations, l'inconsistance et la panique qui débilitent l'Afrique à l'heure misérable des indépendances... le fil d'Ariane de tant de misère paraît être la ruine du vouloir vivre. Il manquerait cette volonté farouche de se tenir dans une seule et même voie. Et ferait défaut, la décision des principes. Or, on ne peut y parvenir qu'en provoquant chez nos masses une aversion sans limite à l'égard du contenu mystificateur de toutes les formes de déréalisation, en fondant le souci de vouloir une révolution contre les sources dernières de l'exploitation moderne, le besoin de liquider d'une seule et même décision, la néo-colonisation et toutes ses structure. »<sup>21</sup>.

C'est cette révolution, qui, dans un univers politiquement libéré, recréera une culture à la hauteur des ambitions et de la souffrance des peuples noirs. N'est – ce pas que toute grande tradition provient généralement d'une grande révolution ? Dès lors, la révolution ne peut être que l'œuvre d'hommes audacieux, capables de concevoir un monde différent, de s'imposer des sacrifices pour le réaliser. Elle est la condition de toute reconnaissance culturelle.

L'Afrique doit donc, selon Marcien Towa, faire une critique sans complaisance de ses cultures, si elle veut être présente au rendez-vous du donner et du recevoir.

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<sup>20</sup> Hegel (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich), *op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>21</sup> Adotevi (Stanislas Spero), *op. cit.*, p. 268.

« Or le temps passe et nous ne parvenons pas à le faire : en prenons-nous seulement le chemin ? Alors s'impose à nous de façon plus impérative une action plus énergique et plus profonde sur nous-mêmes. Car ce sont nos insuffisances qui s'imposent à présent à notre attention, et non plus nos richesses et nos possibilités. Ce que nous avons en propre, ce ne sont pas seulement les valeurs que le monde attendrait, mais aussi de redoutables lacunes. Celles-ci furent responsables de notre défaite, et la responsabilité de nos difficultés actuelles doit aussi leur être attribuée pour une bonne part. Or on ne peut espérer édifier toute une civilisation, faire surgir tout un monde en se payant de mots : il faut payer de son être- même.»<sup>22</sup>.

Dès lors, le rôle des intellectuels africains consistera à réfléchir sur les problèmes de la société africaine et à exhorter les masses à un changement de mentalités, une reconversion des cultures. Il faut une conscience théorique exercée au penser dialectique. Il faut renouer avec le courage comme la puissance authentique de l'esprit.

C'est ainsi que pourra se résoudre la dialectique du raisonnable et du déraisonnable, de la tradition et de la modernité dans une Afrique qui veut se transformer dans le respect de sa propre identité. Mais la défense de l'identité pourrait conduire à de nouvelles ambiguïtés si elle se traduisait par le mépris ou la négation d'autrui, car revendiquer son identité, pour chaque peuple, c'est aussi défendre et accepter l'identité des autres même si

« la révolution est avant tout, promotion des masses et, par conséquent, promotion de leur culture demeurée largement traditionnelle »<sup>23</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

A travers la pensée de Marcien Towa, il nous a été utile de montrer que l'Afrique ne peut donc sérieusement se tenir dans la complexité du monde qu'à la condition de ne plus vouloir son passé comme un roc solide et immuable qui aurait la valeur d'un en soi transcendantal et norma-

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<sup>22</sup> Towa (Marcien), *Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l'Afrique actuelle* (Yaoundé, Clé, 1979), p. 39.

<sup>23</sup> Towa (Marcien), *L'idée d'une philosophie négro – africaine* (Yaoundé, Clé, 1979), p. 70.

tif ; mais elle devra accueillir le présent comme le lieu où elle est appelée à exercer sa liberté, dans l'attention soutenue de la pensée au miroir de sa culture. Il y a donc nécessité de dialogue, d'échange, d'ouverture sur autre chose que l'immédiateté de notre culture particulière, de notre horizon habituel, de nos vues pour nous ouvrir à l'Autre.

La modernisation ne peut donc tuer les civilisations spécifiques, si celles-ci veulent à se renforcer. La double « structure » c'est-à-dire le maintien d'une civilisation originale, avec son éthique propre, s'appuyant sur les traditions les plus profondes, n'est pas impossible dans une société industrielle ; l'exemple du Japon en témoigne parce que ce pays a su préserver le patrimoine culturel en discernant soigneusement parmi les forces de la tradition et les forces du progrès, celles qui lui permettent d'assumer son passé, de le valoriser et d'en être fier. C'est dire donc, à en croire Towa, que

« tous les pays qui ont pu échapper à l'impérialisme européen ont dû se nier pour s'approprier le secret de la puissance européenne (...) les peuples qui ont décidé de perdre leur essence afin d'assimiler le secret de l'occident impérialiste se retrouvent en demeurant eux-mêmes, et ceux au contraire qui ont voulu préserver leur originalité, leur être profond sont en train de les perdre en se perdant. Les premiers ont fait peau neuve et ont recouvré santé et vigueur, les seconds, incapables de riposter adéquatement au défi du temps, succombent sous le poids du passé, s'éloignent de la scène de l'histoire et deviennent un champ d'action et d'extension de l'autre »<sup>24</sup>.

Mais cela suppose aussi un retour constant aux sources, à la masse nourricière, matrice de la culture originelle dans ses transformations et dans ses mutations, non pour y demeurer, mais pour s'en souvenir. S'enraciner dans notre africanité, à l'ère de la modernité, serait aussi l'une des conditions premières de survie de nos cultures, le moyen de les dynamiser et de les imposer.

Il s'agissait donc pour nous, dans l'analyse des réalités culturelles africaines, à travers la pensée de Towa, de voir comment identifier les valeurs de civilisation du continent, de les élaborer, de les définir, de révéler leur spécificité et leur portée universelle. C'est une démarche simple sur-

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<sup>24</sup> Towa (Marcien), *Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l'Afrique actuelle* (Yaoundé, Clé, 1979), p. 42.

tout qu'elle n'a pas besoin de recourir à des simplifications abusives. Nous devons donc prendre acte des différences, ou du moins de ces nuances dont nos aires de civilisation et de culture témoignent. Mais nous devons insister surtout sur nos convergences, sur l'apport réciproque de nos diverses cultures, sur la singularité de nos patrimoines et par – dessus tout sur la communauté de nos destins qui légitiment les concertations entre africains pour jeter les bases d'une politique africaine de la culture fondée sur une originalité-ouverte de chaque peuple.

La civilisation de l'universel est un projet. Chaque peuple n'est-il pas ainsi, en sa différence, un mode de la manifestation de l'universel, cherchant à se donner un visage, une expression, parmi plusieurs autres, de la nature humaine toujours éprouvée dans l'affectivité historique ? Dès lors une civilisation qui réalise la synthèse et la mise en commun des dynamiques de nos cultures est un impératif, mais c'est aussi une nécessité qui tend à s'affirmer chaque jour davantage. Elle n'est pas une donnée et c'est une des tâches les plus urgentes que d'analyser avec sérénité et bonne foi, les voies et moyens par lesquels on pourrait l'édifier sans l'exclusion d'aucune contribution valable. Il importe d'être très attentif aux grands courants qui se dessinent aujourd'hui dans le monde pour saisir toute la signification que revêt le fait de culture nationale en cette période controversée de la modernité.

Il est alors grand temps de tirer les enseignements de la leçon de la Grande Royale à son jeune cousin Samba Diallo :

« Notre grand-père, disait-elle, ainsi que son élite ont été défaits. Pourquoi ? Comment ? Ces nouveaux venus seuls le savent. Il faut le leur demander ; il faut aller apprendre chez eux l'art de vaincre sans avoir raison »<sup>25</sup>.

Mais, malheureusement, dès que l'on parle de l'universel, des voix s'élèvent en Afrique pour protester en disant qu'il s'agit là simplement d'une manière de fuir sa propre condition, sa propre culture, pour habilement tourner les yeux vers l'Occident qui se serait historiquement imposé comme référence absolue de la rationalité et de toute effectivité. C'est pourquoi, on n'hésite pas de qualifier Towa d'occidentaliste aliéné.

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<sup>25</sup> Kane (Cheick Hamidou), *L'aventure ambiguë* (Paris, Ed Julliard, 1961), pp. 44-45.

D'ailleurs, n'est-ce pas que les différences dans la vie sont des différences posées et entretenues par la vie elle-même et pour cette même vie ? De cette façon, il faut donc rompre avec un passé qui emprisonne et des habitudes néfastes afin de s'emparer du secret de la victoire de l'Occident qui est

« la nécessaire médiation conduisant à une réelle affirmation de nous-mêmes dans le monde actuel »<sup>26</sup>.

Selon Marcien Towa, qu'on le veuille ou non, c'est de cette Europe que l'on sent la présence culturelle, économique, technique partout en Afrique. Mais elle ne saurait davantage être adoptée telle qu'elle est, du fait d'une simple antériorité historique. Celle-ci, on le sait, n'est pas sans comporter pour elle, des responsabilités qui ne contribuent pas toutes à faire d'elle une image flatteuse. Il lui faut de nouveaux titres, pour justifier la confiance, la confiance ébranlée des africains.

Qu'à cela ne tienne, le sort de l'Afrique n'est pas éternel, il n'est pas résolu une fois pour toutes, ni enfermé dans les limites de sa vie charnelle. De tels malheurs n'atteignent pas l'essentiel de sa vie et ne doivent pas l'entraîner au désespoir. La pauvreté présente n'est que le noviciat du temps. Les malheurs n'y sont pour l'Afrique qu'épreuves et dépassement. Notre souffrance doit être pour chacun d'entre nous une occasion de pénitence et d'ascèse et cela ne peut que conduire l'Africain à un loyal examen de conscience : plus la crise subie est grave, plus le nègre doit choisir la direction donnée à son existence. Ainsi, Towa voudrait-il nous inviter à nous emparer du secret de l'occident, car selon lui,

« s'emparer du « secret » de l'occident doit dès lors consister à connaître à fond la civilisation occidentale, à identifier la raison de sa puissance et à l'introduire dans notre propre culture. Seulement cette introduction n'est pas à concevoir comme une simple addition qui laisserait intacts les anciens éléments culturels, ni même comme une paisible greffe devant opérer sans heurts les transformations désirées ; elle implique la rupture avec cette culture, avec notre passé, c'est-à-dire avec nous-mêmes».<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Towa (Marcien), *op. cit.*, p. 42

<sup>27</sup> Towa (Marcien), *op. cit.*, p. 40.

Il faut donc libérer l'esprit, car à chaque époque, domine le peuple qui a saisi le plus haut concept de l'esprit. Et l'Esprit africain doit se dépasser dans l'activité spontanée et consciente d'elle-même de la conscience de soi. Ce dépassement doit être une œuvre de la pensée ; il doit être à la fois conservation et transfiguration. À ce point, le changement s'impose en vertu d'une nécessité interne ; et la Grande Royale l'exprime avec force aux gens de Diallobé en les exhortant à laisser Samba Diallo aller à l'école occidentale. Elle le dit avec raison :

« L'école où je pousse nos enfants tuera en eux ce qu'aujourd'hui nous aimons et conservons avec soin, à juste titre. Peut-être notre souvenir lui-même mourra t-il en eux. Ce que je propose est que nous acceptions de mourir en nos enfants et que les étrangers qui nous ont défaits prennent en eux toute la place que nous aurons laissée libre... Que faisons-nous de nos réserves de graines quand il a plu ? Nous voudrions bien les manger, mais nous les enfouissons en terre. La tornade qui annonce le grand hivernage de notre peuple est arrivée avec les étrangers, gens de Diallobé. Mon avis à moi, Grande Royale, c'est que nos meilleures graines et nos champs les plus chers, ce sont nos enfants. »<sup>28</sup>.

Par ces propos, Towa à la suite de Cheick Hamidou Kane, voudrait montrer que dans la bataille du développement, il ne faut pas être conservateur à tout prix. Nous africains, nous pouvons être authentiques, mais sans fermer le hublot qui nous permet de regarder à l'extérieur. Il faut désormais passer les autres cultures au tamis. C'est pourquoi en s'adressant à nous, le sage Hampaté Bah conseille :

« L'Afrique sera demain ce que vous ferez d'elle. Si vous cessez d'être africains, il n'y aura pas une Afrique, il y aura seulement un continent. Et là, vous aurez arraché une page de l'histoire de l'humanité. Vous serez absents »<sup>29</sup>.

Et la présence à l'humanité, pour nous autres africains, exige une conversion et une éducation de l'homme, de l'homme africain en même

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<sup>28</sup> Kane (Cheick Hamidou), *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>29</sup> Bah (Amadou Hampaté), *Le petit Bodiel*, (Abidjan, NEI – EDICEF, 1995), pp. 90-91.

temps qu'un changement de structures, parce que l'oppression n'est pas seulement un fait économique et politique, elle est au tissu et au centre de nos cœurs.

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# Philosophic sagacity

## A classical comprehension and relevance to post-colonial social spaces in Africa

by F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo

**Résumé: De la sagacité philosophique: Compréhension classique et relevance pour les espaces postcoloniales en Afrique.** Des quatre tendances ou approches identifiées en philosophie africaine par H. Odera Oruka, à savoir l'ethnophilosophie, la sagacité philosophique, la philosophie idéo-nationaliste et la philosophie professionnelle, il y a lieu de relever que la sagacité philosophique a été la moins présente dans les discours et pratiques intellectuelles philosophiques en philosophie africaine. Un facteur majeur qui pourrait peut-être expliquer cet état de choses est que la sagacité philosophique n'a pas été correctement comprise. Pourtant, au contraire, la sagacité philosophique a un rôle significatif à jouer dans la solution aux problèmes sociopolitiques et réalités qui ont embrouillé les États-Nations d'Afrique. Cette dernière remarque forme le soubassement de la première rationalité de cette essai. Précisément l'essai réexamine la sagacité philosophique en retraçant ses origines et préoccupations. Parallèlement, l'essai clarifie aussi la distinction entre les deux termes liés linguistiquement, à savoir la « philosophie sage » et la « sagacité philosophique ». Quelques-uns de ceux qui ont exprimé verbalement leur vues ou qui ont écrit sur la sagacité philosophique ont souvent utilisé les deux termes comme synonymes au détriment des objectifs et buts pourtant clairs de la sagacité philosophique. Ceci constitue le fondement de la deuxième thèse de cet essai.

**Abstract: Philosophic sagacity: A classical comprehension and relevance to post-colonial social spaces in Africa.** Of the four trends in, or approaches to, African philosophy identified by H. Odera Oruka namely ethnophilosophy, philosophic sagacity, nationalist-ideological philosophy and professional philosophy; it is philosophic sagacity that has been given the least space in intellectual philosophical discourses and practices on African philosophy. Perhaps, a major contributing factor in this regard could be that it has not been adequately comprehended, or simply misunderstood. Yet, on the contrary, philosophic sagacity has a significant role to play in resolving some social-political problems and realities that have bedevilled African nation-states. Herein lies one rationale of this essay. The essay revisits philosophic sagacity by tracing its origins and concerns. At the same time, the essay also clarifies

the distinction between the two linguistically related terms 'sage philosophy' and 'philosophic sagacity'. Some of those who have said or written something on sagacity in African philosophy have often used them synonymously at the expense of the clear objectives and aims of the latter. Herein is to be found another rationale of the essay.

**Mots clefs:** Odera Oruka, sagacité philosophique, racines philosophiques de la culture, naïveté philosophique, moralité technologique, sagacité populaire, ethnophilosophie, école de philosophie professionnelle.

**Key words:** Odera Oruka, philosophic sagacity, philosophical roots of culture, philosophical naivety, technological morality, folk sagacity, ethnophilosophy, professional school.

## **Introduction**

As an approach to African philosophy, philosophic sagacity made its maiden appearance in international philosophical discourse in 1978 during the commemoration of Dr. Anthony William Amo<sup>1</sup> Conference held in Accra, Ghana. This was by way of Kenyan philosopher H. Odera Oruka's presentation titled 'Four Trends in Current African Philosophy'. The following year, Odera Oruka read a slightly different version of the essay during the 16<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Philosophy in Dusseldorf, Germany. The essay has been seminal in academic African philosophy. Besides the essay, Odera Oruka authored several others, including two texts, in the area of African philosophy most of them focussing on philosophic sagacity. It is therefore not surprising that he is generally regarded not only as the icon of philosophic sagacity, but its progenitor as well.

As is the case with the other approaches to African philosophy, philosophic sagacity has had its share of critics. However, this essay does

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<sup>1</sup> Amo was born in present-day Ghana in 1703. At the tender age of four years, he was in Amsterdam possibly as a slave though other possibilities have been offered as well. Whatever the case might have been, while in Europe, he exhibited great intellectual élan, successfully undertaking undergraduate and graduate studies in various fields of study namely law, medicine, psychology, and philosophy. He later taught at the universities of Halle and Jena in what is now the Federal Republic of Germany, and published several philosophical works. He returned to his native land in Ghana in 1753 and died soon thereafter.

not seek to directly address some of these specific criticisms. It is a general disquisition on philosophic sagacity meant to give an accurate exegesis and account of the approach. Many may be under the false impression that the approach found its way into the philosophical arena in the early 1980s.<sup>2</sup> Others may query its relevance beyond proving the obvious that sages existed or exist in traditional Africa. Yet still, some may wonder what sets it apart from ethnophilosophy. Such impressions, queries, and wonders may be made redundant by a proper understanding of philosophic sagacity. In its specificity, this essay has three objectives. These are: (1) To trace and enunciate the origins of philosophic sagacity as an approach to African philosophy in academic intellectual discourse. (2) To highlight its relevance to modern African nation-states, despite its anchorage in traditional Africa. (3) To decipher the distinction between philosophic sagacity and sage philosophy, given that too often, some individuals have definitively, though at times mistakenly, used the two terms interchangeably.

### ***Origins of Philosophic Sagacity: Odera Oruka's Two Research Projects***

Despite the fact that philosophic sagacity was pronounced to the international community in 1978, many seem not to be aware that Odera Oruka had actually started work on it a couple of years earlier in his two, though related, research projects, one in 1974 and the other in 1976. In other words, though he first employed the term 'philosophic sagacity' in his 1978 essay, it is apparent that his 1974 and 1976 projects were exercises in philosophic sagacity. The two research projects therefore rightfully demarcate the origins of philosophic sagacity. Hence, contrary to conventional belief, the birth year of philosophic sagacity within academia pre-date 1978. Knowledge of this fact, as will be apparent below, is fundamental in that it not only enhances the general comprehension of the

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<sup>2</sup> This is because, though H. Odera Oruka read the paper 'Four Trends in Current African Philosophy' in 1978, it was only published in 1981.

approach but also highlights its significance to the social-political realities of modern Africa.

In 1974, together with some of his colleagues at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, notable among them the charismatic philosopher and theologian Joseph Donders, Odera Oruka formulated a research project at the University of Nairobi, Kenya. It was entitled 'Thoughts of Traditional Kenyan Sages'. At its inception, the immediate aim of the project was to address the following question:

Would it be possible to identify persons of traditional African culture, capable of the critical, second-order type of thinking about the various problems of human life and nature; persons, that is, who subject beliefs that are traditionally taken for granted to independent rational re-examination and who are inclined to accept or reject such beliefs on the authority of reason rather than on the basis of a communal or religious consensus?<sup>3</sup>

In 1976, Odera Oruka designed yet another related research proposal of national and social significance. On the face of it, the project appeared rather ambitious given the enormity of its attendant implications in terms of duration and resources necessary for the fulfillment of its objectives. The project was titled 'The Philosophical Roots of Culture in Kenya'. In the proposal, researches were initially meant to cover the Western part of Kenya. The ultimate objective however was:

To uncover and map out the philosophical ideas which underlie some of the main cultural practices of Western Kenya. This would be treated as a regional investigation which, if co-ordinated and supplemented with researches from other parts of the Republic would provide an over all [sic] pattern of the Philosophy of Kenyan National Culture.<sup>4</sup>

The objective of the 1976 research proposal was premised on two assumptions.

First, philosophy is always the moving spirit and the theoretical framework of

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<sup>3</sup> H. Odera Oruka, 'African Philosophy: The Current Debate' in H. Odera Oruka, ed; *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*, Nairobi: ACTS Press, 1991, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> H. Odera Oruka, 'The Philosophical Roots of Culture in Kenya', unpublished research proposal presented to the Ministry of Culture and Social Services, Government of Kenya, 1976, p. 8.

any national culture. Any serious and meaningful national culture must have a philosophy. Second, because Kenya as a State is struggling tirelessly to ground itself permanently as a nation – and a national culture is always the axis of a nation.<sup>5</sup>

Given the gist of the two research projects one cannot fail to fathom that they were exercises in what Odera Oruka later christened ‘philosophic sagacity’. The 1974 project sought to identify philosophic sages, whereas the 1976 one was geared towards engaging their thoughts for the sake of social cohesion and national prosperity.<sup>6</sup>

## ***Significance of the Two Research Projects***

### *(a) The 1974 Project*

The late 1960s through to the 1970s was a turbulent period for African philosophy. It was the period that African philosophy was attempting to ground itself in mainstream academic philosophy. Prior to this era, and also during the period, discussions regarding what African philosophy was, was dominated by views that had been expressed in Placide Tempels’ *Bantu Philosophy* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1959)<sup>7</sup>; Alexis Kagame’s *La Philosophie bantou-rwandaise de l’être* (Bruxelles: Académie Royale des Sciences Coloniales, 1956); Léopold S. Senghor’s *On African Socialism* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964); Marcel Griaule’s *Conversations with Ogotemmêli* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); Robin Horton’s ‘African Traditional Religion and Western Science’, *Africa*, vol. 37, nos. 1 and 2, 1967; and John S. Mbiti’s *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969). The ground, however, had been set

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> The spirit of the 1976 research project is also discernible in H. Odera Oruka’s later essay titled ‘Sagacity in Development’ in H. Odera Oruka, ed; *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*, pp. 57-65.

<sup>7</sup> The text was originally written in Dutch titled *Bantoe-filosofie*. The first French version titled *La Philosophie bantoue* was published in 1945, and the first English translation, by Rev. Colin King, was published in 1959.

by the French anthropologist L. Lévy-Bruhl, whose text *Primitive Mentality* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1923) had achieved certain notoriety for its hostility towards the African mind and also for its attendant ideological pretensions. The views contained in the texts crystallized in what later became known as ethnophilosophy, 'the study of collective forms of culture as manifestations of African philosophical systems'.<sup>8</sup>

Paulin Hountondji, the fiercest critic of ethnophilosophy, saw it as ethnological works with philosophical pretensions.<sup>9</sup> Generally, the critics of ethnophilosophy were displeased with its ambiguous use of the term 'philosophy'. When applying it to Africa, ethnophilosophers use it in the ideological sense. Hountondji, for instance, noted that:

Words do indeed change their meanings miraculously as soon as they pass from the Western to African contexts [...]. That is what happens to the word 'philosophy': applied to Africa, it is supposed to designate no longer the specific discipline it evokes in its Western context but merely a collective world-view, an implicit spontaneous, perhaps even unconscious system of beliefs to which all Africans are supposed to adhere. This is a vulgar usage of the word, justified presumably by the supposed vulgarity of the geographical context to which it is applied.<sup>10</sup>

The Malawian philosopher, Didier N. Kaphagawani, on his part, observes that given the suppositions and underpinnings of ethnophilosophy, some philosophers justifiably see it as 'simply a constitution of both schemes of conduct and schemes of thought (not a philosophy)'.<sup>11</sup> African philosophy was presented by the ethnophilosophers as atypical, as a remarkable unanimity with no dissenting voice; it was a philosophy without philosophers.

It is against this backdrop that the so-called professional school as

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<sup>8</sup> Ivan Karp and D. A. Masolo, eds., *African Philosophy as Cultural Inquiry*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Paulin J. Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>11</sup> Didier N. Kaphagawani, 'The Philosophical Significance of Bantu Nomenclature' in Guttorm Fløistad, ed., *Contemporary Philosophy: A New Survey*, vol. 5, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987, p. 130.



an approach to African philosophy emerged. The school sensed some promiscuity in the use of the word 'philosophy' by the ethnophilosophers, whom to them were using it pejoratively and in service of the Western world.<sup>12</sup> To these scholars, African philosophy was not what the ethnophilosophers portrayed it to be, at least not in its totality. According to them, it was wrong to dress African philosophy essentially in traditionalism or communal folk thought. Just like Western philosophy, African philosophy was supposed to be seen from the professional and academic angle also. It had to involve critical, discursive and independent thinking as well.

However, notwithstanding the noble intentions of the professional school, it caused discomfort to others in two ways. (1) It was argued that what the school was referring to, as African philosophy was not purely African. The professional philosophers having basically studied Western philosophy and hardly anything about African philosophy treated African philosophy from a typically Western standpoint. They employed Western logic and principles to criticize and create what they like to call African philosophy.<sup>13</sup> The end result of what they qualified, as African philosophy was in essence a scholarly exercise rooted in the West. (2) Though the professional school granted the existence of African philosophy in the technical and proper sense, it limited itself to modern Africa, giving the impression that traditional Africans were incapable of technical philosophy.

In the two observations noted above lies the rationale of Odera

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<sup>12</sup> See for example, Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980; Paulin J. Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996; Peter O. Bodunrin, 'The Question of African Philosophy', *Philosophy: The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy* 56, no. 216, April 1981; F. Eboussi Boulaga, 'Le Bantou problematique', *Présence Africaine*, no 66, 1968; Marcien Towa, *Essai sur la problematique philosophie dans l'Afrique actuelle*, Yaounde: Clé, 1971; and to some extent Franz Crahay, 'Le Décollage conceptuel: conditions d'une philosophie bantoue', *Diogenes*, no. 52, 1965.

<sup>13</sup> H. Odera Oruka, ed., *Trends in Contemporary African Philosophy*, Nairobi: Shirikon Publishers, 1990, p. 19.

Oruka's 1974 research project. Regarding the second observation, the project sought to prove that African philosophy does not begin in modern Africa; that even in traditional Africa there are individuals who are capable of critical, coherent and independent thinking. On the first observation, it sought to identify African philosophy in the technical sense as seen through African spectacles, that is, as portrayed by Africans with little or no Western intellectual influence.<sup>14</sup> In a way therefore, besides disproving the suppositions of ethnophilosophy, philosophic sagacity also came in as a rescue package meant to salvage the professional school.

*(b) The 1976 Project*

In the 1976 proposal, Odera Oruka identified, what he referred to as, philosophical naivety as the problem that was posing a great threat and danger to the development of authentic national culture in modern Kenya, and indeed the rest of Africa. Philosophy in the usual sense is sometimes naively regarded as the heritage of the Greeks and thus treated as a typical European activity with the result that Africans are regarded as innocent of true philosophical thought and discourse. As already noted above, this also explained the hostility of the professional school towards ethnophilosophy. Because of the view that confines philosophy to the West many people who have had to write or say something on African philosophy have done so with remarkable naivety. They have argued that African culture and its philosophy are a lived experience, not a myriad of concepts to be pictured and rationalized by the mind. Thus, they see philosophy in Africa as an inseparable part of the concrete, of culture as Africans feel and live it and not an entity to be isolated and discussed. As a detailed activity and exercise, philosophy, has, according to this position, no place in African culture.

The underlying assumptions of Odera Oruka's 1976 proposal was that any genuine and concrete national culture should be identical with the unifying or common patterns of the general way of life of a people

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

living as a community or believed to have the same identity. Accordingly, a national culture must have two aspects: practical and theoretical. Things such as music, dance, and fashion make up the practical aspect. The theoretical aspect is formed by the philosophy (principles and ideas) that justifies such activities. A culture without a clear philosophy is incomplete, or as Kwame Nkrumah puts it, 'practice without thought is blind'.<sup>15</sup> Such a culture is therefore blind and hence vulnerable to every foreign values and ideas, no matter how obnoxious the foreign values may be. This is one of the biggest threats to the various African cultures. One sure way of avoiding the invasion of foreign ideas is for a nation to develop and articulate the philosophy of its culture. One cannot fight for or defend ideas by use of guns; one can only successfully fight for or defend ideas with ideas.

Philosophical naivety is preposterous. Taking philosophy as tenets that underlie practice and action, the truth is that Africa must, as any other place, have philosophical principles that justify and govern its cultural practice. It is only that in Africa these principles are mostly covert and left at the implicit level. These principles must be unearthed and made explicit since they are the basis upon which a concrete and meaningful national culture would be built. This, according to Odera Oruka, was and still is the great challenge facing African scholars and cultural conservationist today. They should

'investigate and unearth such principles. This is necessary for posterity and for the development of a national culture. This investigation should be part of the national programme in every African State'.<sup>16</sup>

For the sake of posterity and prosperity, Odera Oruka later added another dimension to the role that sagacious reasoning could play in the development of national cultures and social cohesion in various modern

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<sup>15</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonisation and Development with Particular Reference to the African Revolution*, London: Panaf Books, 1970, p. 78.

<sup>16</sup> H. Odera Oruka, 'The Philosophical Roots of Culture in Kenya', unpublished research proposal presented to the Ministry of Culture and Social Services, Government of Kenya, 1976, p. 8.

African nation-states. Sagacious reasoning is not just reasoning for the sake of reasoning. He noted with dismay that philosophy especially in the academic understanding of the term, has tended to estrange itself from the 'Socratic' partnership with wisdom with the result that philosophers have proceeded in a manner in which they perfect their reasoning skills without caring about, or at the expense of, its practical utility. They have become too theoretical and have tended to divorce philosophy from society, and study the subject in a vacuum. Little wonder, some non-philosophers view philosophers with lots of suspicion. They are considered as individuals who are stuck to their armchairs in ivory towers dreaming dreams that cannot be lived. They are perceived as people who cannot say anything sensible concerning problems of life.<sup>17</sup> This is an unfortunate state of affairs and is a challenge to all philosophers worth their salt, for in truth, philosophy is after all for life and not the vice versa.

In all seriousness, the general project of philosophic sagacity is an effort to bring back some of the lost glory of philosophy by emphasizing on sagacious reasoning or wisdom. In his earlier essays, Odera Oruka had defined a sage simply as a person 'versed in the wisdoms and traditions of his people'.<sup>18</sup> However, in a later work, he attaches the ethical quality as an explicit and necessary component of the definition. This, he thought, would underscore the practical aspect of philosophic sagacity. The thoughts of the sages must be seen primarily as concerned with the ethical and empirical issues, and questions relevant to the society, and the sage's ability to offer insightful solutions to some of those issues. He is unequivocal that a sage has two qualities or attributes,

insight and ethical inspiration. So a sage is wise; he has insight, but employs this for the ethical betterment of the community. A philosopher may be a sage and vice versa. But many philosophers do lack the ethical commitment and inspiration found in the sage [...]. A sage, proper, is usually the friend of truth and wisdom. A sage may suppress truth only because wisdom dictates not be-

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<sup>17</sup> See H. Odera Oruka, 'Philosophy and Other Disciplines' in Anke Graness and Kai Kresse, eds., *Sagacious Reasoning: Henry Odera Oruka in Memoriam*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 1957, p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> H. Odera Oruka, 'Sagacity in African Philosophy', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 4, 1983, p. 386.

cause of some instrumental gain. Indeed, Pythagoras' definition of a philosopher as the 'lover of wisdom' should have been reserved for a sage, since the sophists were the grave-diggers of wisdom and truth. Socrates was wrongly labeled, 'philosopher'; he was first and foremost a sage. Socrates used philosophy only as a means to advance his sagacity and expose the hypocrisies of his time. But when all is said, one must still emphasize that sagacity and philosophy are not incompatible.<sup>19</sup>

Odera Oruka therefore rightly believed that if the thoughts of the sages were granted more intellectual and social spaces in modern Africa, then that would be one sure way of avoiding or at least downplaying the raging invasions of obnoxious foreign ideas and values impinging on African cultures. Take for example what may be called technological morality. It is a morality in which technological innovations are preponderant and are objects of worship. It is a genre of morality in which technological superiority or efficiency is identified with the good. What is technologically possible and fitting is treated as also being morally permissible. And the bad is that which lags behind technological advancement. Thus, for instance, if abortion is medically possible and safe (a reflection of advance technology), then it is treated as also being morally all right for a woman to abort.

In Africa today, it is increasingly becoming acceptable that to be good or beautiful is to have technological fashion on one's side. In a manner of speaking, a beautiful lady, for example, is no longer she who relies on her natural built. She is one who dresses fashionably and decorates her innocent body with cosmetic trappings: thanks to technology. And the handsome man is he who owns what the latest technology has in store. To him, ladies will be attracted as flies are to a rotten body. Love and marriage are becoming material at the expense of spirituality. The question is not just, how one can love one's partner and enrich the marriage or relationship spiritually, but what one can materially benefit from the relationship. This could very well be one of the reasons why divorce is spiraling out of control in the modern world in general. Technological morality is thus dangerous to African societies because in truth it deprives

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<sup>19</sup> H. Odera Oruka, 'Introduction', in H. Odera Oruka, ed; *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*, pp. 9-10.

culture of morality in the proper and desirable sense. Sagacity, if well articulated, properly documented, and readily availed to community members especially in the urban areas, could thus act as check on technological morality as well as other undesirable foreign invasions. In emphasizing the important roles of sages, Odera Oruka asserts that:

Sages exist in all cultures and classes. Indeed, sages are among the custodians of the survival of their respective societies. A society without sages would easily get swallowed up as an undignified appendage of another. All societies use their sages or at least the ideas of their sages to defend and maintain their existence in the world of inter-societal conflict and exploitation.<sup>20</sup>

Since Africa is today at a crossroads and under invasion by foreign cultural elements, there is an urgent need that the sages be accorded more prominent roles in their respective societies. Otherwise African cultures will end up getting swallowed up as undignified appendages of Western culture. The question of Africa being swallowed up, as an undignified appendage of the West has been a concern of several African scholars and statesmen, though the solutions they have offered has varied. Kwame Nkrumah, for example, called for a social revolution in the emergent independent African nation-states: a revolution in which African thinking and philosophy are directed towards the redemption of the African humanist society of the past. He believed that his notion of consciencism was best placed to achieve this. He defines it as:

The map in intellectual terms of the disposition of forces which will enable African society to digest Western and Islamic and the Euro-Christian elements in Africa, and develop them in such a way that they fit into the African personality. The African personality is itself defined as the cluster of humanist principles which underlie the traditional African society.<sup>21</sup>

### ***What Philosophic Sagacity is Not***

Some critics as well as proponents of Odera Oruka's approach to African

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonisation and Development with Particular Reference to the African Revolution*, p. 79.

philosophy commonly use the terms ‘sage philosophy’ and ‘philosophic sagacity’ interchangeably as if they mean one and the same thing. From a purely semantic point of view this is understandable, but from a philosophical angle, it is inexcusable since it is a reflection of misreading Odera Oruka. A perusal of his texts and essays on sagacity shows that he assigns somewhat different shades of meaning to the two terms. He does not use them synonymously.

Sagacity consists of thoughts having or showing insight and good judgement. It is therefore thoughts of persons acknowledged as wise by their respective communities. In yet another sense, sagacity is a body of basic principles and tenets that underlie and justify the beliefs, customs, and practices of a given culture. In-built in the second definition is the first, since it is the beliefs and thoughts of persons acknowledged as wise by their respective communities that in essence constitute the basis of that community’s culture. It is important therefore to take cognizance of the fact that sagacity and sage philosophy are synonyms given that the latter is described as:

The expressed thoughts of wise men and women in any given community and is a way of thinking and explaining the world that fluctuates between *popular wisdom* (well-known communal maxims, aphorisms and general common sense truths) and *didactic wisdom* (an expounded wisdom and rational thoughts of some individuals within community). While popular wisdom is often conformist, didactic wisdom is at times critical of the communal set up and popular wisdom.<sup>22</sup>

From the definition given above, it is apparent that sage philosophy has two facets: popular (or folk) sagacity and philosophic (or didactic) sagacity. The former consists of well-known communal maxims, aphorisms, and general common sense truths, whereas the latter is an expounded wisdom and rational thoughts of some given individuals within the community. The folk sage, unlike his philosophic counterpart, operates squarely within the confines of his culture. For him,

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<sup>22</sup> H. Odera Oruka, ‘Sage Philosophy: The Basic Questions and Methodology’ in H. Odera Oruka, ed; *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*, p. 33.

Beliefs or truth-claims within culture are generally treated as 'absolutes' [not to be questioned]. Anything outside or contradictory to the culture is treated with indifference and even hostility. Those sages or persons who are [merely] experts in the culture defend this philosophy and the structure of their society with the zeal of fanatical ideologists defending the political line.<sup>23</sup>

To illustrate the distinction between these two aspects of sage philosophy, Odera Oruka contends that the thoughts of Ogotemmêli reflect popular or folk wisdom, whereas those of Paul Mbuya Akoko belong to philosophic sagacity. This is because:

Ogotemmêli's text is given as the verbatim and faithful recitation of the beliefs common to his people, the Dogon. No attempt is made to assess the extent to which the sage himself has thoughts that transcend the communal Dogon wisdom. Mbuya's text is a mingling of an informal formulation of the traditional Luo beliefs and a critical objection to and, at times, a rational improvement on those beliefs.<sup>24</sup>

Given the above, it is quite clear that sage philosophy and philosophic sagacity are not exact synonyms. While it is true that all instances of philosophic sagacity belong to sage philosophy (as in Mbuya's case), not each and every instance of sage philosophy would qualify as philosophic sagacity; they could be instances of popular or folk sagacity (as is the case with Ogotemmêli's thoughts). Despite this distinction some scholars have commonly, though erroneously, continued to equate sage philosophy with philosophic sagacity.<sup>25</sup> And there is no doubt that this error has

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<sup>23</sup> H. Odera Oruka, 'Sagacity in African Philosophy', in Tsenay Serequeberhan, ed; *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings*, New York: Paragon House, 1991, p. 52.

<sup>24</sup> H. Odera Oruka, 'Sage Philosophy: The Basic Questions and Methodology' in H. Odera Oruka, ed; *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*, p. 34.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Anthony S. Oseghare, 'Sage Philosophy: A New Orientation' in H. Odera Oruka, ed; *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*, pp. 237-246. Gail M. Presbey, 'Is Elijah Masinde a Sage?' in Anke Graness and Kai Kresse, eds; *Sagacious Reasoning: Henry Odera Oruka in Memoriam*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997, pp. 195-209. Patrick M. Dikirr, 'Sagacity in the Maasai Concept of Death and Immortality' in Anke Graness and Kai Kresse, eds; *Sagacious Reasoning: Henry Odera Oruka in Memoriam*, pp. 181-193. Chaungo Barasa, 'Odera Oruka and the Sage Philosophy School: A Tribute' in Anke Graness and Kai Kresse, eds; *Sagacious Reasoning: Henry Odera Oruka in*



been to the disservice of the narrower and more specific philosophic sagacity project for it has had negative ramifications and given critics an opportunity to equate sage philosophy with ethnophilosophy *in toto*, yet in actuality it is only the folk sagacity aspect that lends itself to ethnophilosophy. This equation contradicts Odera Oruka's thesis that philosophic sagacity 'is the only trend that can give an all-acceptable decisive blow to the position of ethno-philosophy'.<sup>26</sup>

It is instructive to note that when Odera Oruka identified the four trends in African philosophy, he labeled them Ethno-philosophy, Philosophic Sagacity, Nationalist-ideological Philosophy, and Professional Philosophy.<sup>27</sup> And even when he added two more trends namely, Hermeneutical Philosophy, and Artistic or Literary Philosophy about a decade later in his edited text *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*, he still talked of Philosophic Sagacity as one of the six trends, not Sage Philosophy. Why title the text Sage Philosophy but nevertheless still talk of philosophic sagacity as one of the trends? One may muse. The reason should not be difficult to gauge. In the 1970s when Odera Oruka formulated the two research projects, his aim was unmistakable. He wanted to prove the existence of critical independent thinkers in traditional Africa (1974 project), and also explicate a clear methodology upon which national unity could be attained and obnoxious foreign ideologies and values checked (1976 project). His endeavour in both instances pointed to sages who were didactic in their thinking. It is for this reason that Odera Oruka made a clear distinction between what he was doing from ethnophilosophy.

It [philosophic sagacity] differs from ethno-philosophy in that it is both individualistic and dialectical: It is a thought or reflection of various known or named thinkers not a folk philosophy and, unlike the latter, it is rigorous and

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*Memoriam*, pp. 19-22. Parker English and Kibujjo M. Kalumba, eds., *African Philosophy: A Classical Approach*, Upper Saddles River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996.

<sup>26</sup> H. Odera Oruka, 'Sagacity in African Philosophy', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 4, 1983, p. 384.

<sup>27</sup> See H. Odera Oruka, 'Four Trends in Current African Philosophy' in Alwin Diemer, ed; *Philosophy in the Present Situation of Africa*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH, 1981.

philosophical in the strict sense.<sup>28</sup>

Odera Oruka believed that contrary to the aims of his two projects, ethnophilosophy was being applied in service of the Western world, not Africa.<sup>29</sup> His articles on African Philosophy written during this period express open hostility towards ethnophilosophy; the articles are polemical.<sup>30</sup>

A careful reading of Odera Oruka's works on sagacity reveals that the term 'sage philosophy' appeared much later. He employed the term for the very first time in 'Philosophy in English Speaking Africa', a paper published in 1984.<sup>31</sup> However, it was only in his text *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*, first published in 1990, that he makes a deliberate distinction between 'sage philosophy' and 'philosophic sagacity'; a distinction which had escaped the eyes of many because of their semantic affinity. As already noted, the distinction lies in the fact that 'sage philosophy' has two wings of which 'philosophic sagacity' is one, the other being folk or popular sagacity. In his text *Trends in Contemporary African Philosophy*, also published in

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<sup>28</sup> H. Odera Oruka, 'Four Trends in Current African Philosophy' in H. Odera Oruka, ed; *Trends in Contemporary African Philosophy*, Nairobi: Shirikon Publishers, 1990, p. 17. The essay was however first published in Alwin A. Diemer, ed; *Philosophy in the Present Situation of Africa*.

<sup>29</sup> For similar arguments, refer to Paulin J. Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996; Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba, 'Philosophy and African Intellectuals: Mimesis of Western Classicism, Ethnophilosophical Romanticism, or African Self-Mastery', *Quest*, vol. v, no. 1, June 1991; Christian M. Neugebauer, 'Ethnophilosophy in the Philosophical Discourse in Africa', *Quest*, vol. iv, no. 1, June 1990; Christian M. Neugebauer, 'Hegel and Kant: A Refutation of their Racism', *Quest*, vol. v, no. 1, June 1991.

<sup>30</sup> See for example his essays 'Mythologies as African Philosophy', *East Africa Journal*, vol. 9, no. 10, October 1972; and 'The Fundamental Principles in the Question of 'African Philosophy' I', *Second Order: An African Journal of Philosophy*, vol. iv, no. 1, 1975.

<sup>31</sup> H. Odera Oruka, 'Philosophy in English Speaking Africa' in E. Agazzi, ed; *Nouva Secondaria*, no. 10, Roma 1984. Having established the existence of philosophic (didactic) sages in traditional Africa and also having laid the groundwork for his 1976 project, Odera Oruka saw no harm in delving in popular sagacity hence the coming into being of 'sage philosophy'.

1990, he goes on to equate folk sagacity with ethnophilosophy. Here he asserts that the thoughts of Ogotemmêli constitute folk sagacity besides being ethnophilosophical, in contrast to Paul Mbuya Akoko's which are philosophic.<sup>32</sup> Both however fall within the broad category of sage philosophy. He also qualifies renowned ethnophilosophical pieces by Claude Sumner, *Ethiopian Philosophy* vol. 1 and, John O. Sodipo and Barry Hallen 'An African Epistemology: The Knowledge-Belief Distinction and Yoruba Thought' as works in current African philosophical literature that deserve the label 'sage philosophy', though not philosophic sagacity.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> H. Odera Orika, 'The Basic Questions about Sage Philosophy in Africa' in H. Odera Orika, ed; *Trends in Contemporary African Philosophy*, p. 52.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52 and p. 69.



# The use of several species of *ad hominem* arguments in Plato's *Protagoras*

by Victor S. Alumona

**Résumé.** L'emploi de plusieurs arguments *ad hominem* dans *Protagore* de Platon. Plusieurs sortes d'arguments *ad hominem* dans *Protagore* de Platon sont identifiées et étudiées dans ce travail. L'idée principale de notre étude est que Socrate et Protagore emploient ces arguments pour gérer adroitement une situation rhétorique tendue qui est pleine d'exigences, et qui en plus est caractérisée par des tentatives de Socrate pour convaincre Protagore que celui-ci ne connaît pas « l'excellence » et par conséquent doit s'arrêter de l'enseigner. Protagore, comme réponse, rejette cet appel, et, par ce rejet, renforce l'autre argument de notre étude, à la suite de George Yoos, disant que, dans son ensemble, le dialogue *Protagore* est « une rhétorique d'appel et de réponse » composites dans laquelle « l'étalage de position social », « l'affirmation transcendante », la dissociation et *l'eristicos*, « la métaphore du maître », etc., sont librement utilisées dans des épisodes spécifiques par les interlocuteurs du débat. L'étude conclut que « les appels rhétoriques » de Socrate à Protagore ont échoué parce que Protagore n'est pas convaincu qu'il lui faut changer sa « façon d'être » de quarante ans en dépit des arguments *ad hominem*. Au lieu de cela, Protagore tourne le dialogue en monologue tandis que Socrate le salue et se retire.<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** The use of several species of *ad hominem* arguments in Plato's *Protagoras*. The work identifies and analyses various species of arguments *ad hominem* in Plato's *Protagoras*. The leading idea of our study is that Socrates and Protagoras use these arguments in order to adequately handle a tense and demanding rhetorical situation. This situation, moreover, is characterised by Socrates' attempts to convince Protagoras of the fact that the latter does not know 'excellence', and therefore should stop teaching that subject. In answer, Protagoras rejects this challenge, and thus reinforces the other line of our present argument. Here, following George Yoos, we claim that the entire Protagoras dialogue amounts to 'a rhetoric of complex challenges and responses'.

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Dr. F. A. Soyoye of the Department of Foreign Languages, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, for translating the résumé into French. Dr Soyoye however is not responsible for such alterations as the editor made subsequently for considerations of space.

In this connection ‘the display of social position’, ‘transcendent affirmation’, dissociation and the *eristicos* (the ‘master metaphor’) are lavishly used by the interlocutors at various specific episodes of the debate. The study comes to the conclusion that Socrates’ ‘rhetorical challenges’ have misfired: Protagoras has not been convinced that he should change his ‘way of being’ of forty years’ standing, despite arguments *ad hominem* to that effect. Instead, Protagoras turns the dialogue into his own monologue, while Socrates greets him and leaves the scene.\*)

**Mots clefs:** des arguments *ad hominem*, la situation rhétorique, l’appel rhétorique, exigence, mode d’existence, *arête*, savoir

**Key words:** *ad hominem* arguments, Rhetorical situation, Rhetorical appeal, Rhetorical Response, exigencies, ‘way of being’, *arête*, knowledge.

## 1. Introduction

The general perception that Plato’s *Protagoras* comes alive with a sense of the dramatic seems to have obscured the need to identify in specific terms its rhetorical features. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to develop the recognised view that the conduct of arguments in the dialogue is generally *ad hominem*.<sup>2</sup> These arguments deployed by Socrates and Protagoras against each other are either implicit<sup>3</sup> or explicit.

There are further 6 sections of this paper excluding the Introduction. The rhetorical situation in which Protagoras finds himself is reconstructed from section 2 to 5, as a background to the succeeding arguments and episodes of the dialogue. This situation is characterised mainly by Protagoras’ self advertisement as a sophist, Socrates’ challenge to Prota-

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\*<sup>)</sup> *Editorial remark:* the author carries no responsibility for this English translation of the abstract: it was made when it was found, in the last moment, that the author’s original, English abstract was not available.

<sup>2</sup> Guthrie, W.K.C. *A History of Greek Philosophy vol. iv Plato: The man and his Dialogues: Earlier Period*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975, p. 222.

<sup>3</sup> Remland Martin has shown how nonverbal displays such as body movements of various kinds, can be used to denigrate one’s opponent in a debate thereby implicitly attacking his/her person. See ‘The Implicit Ad Hominem Fallacy: Nonverbal Displays in argumentative Discourse,’ *Journal of The American Forensic Association* (192) 79-80. I found this paper quite useful in shaping my thoughts in this essay.

goras regarding the content of his (Protagoras) curriculum, and the sophist's bid to manage the situation to his advantage. The other *ad hominem* fallacies arising from the conduct of arguments on topical issues of the dialogue, are identified through discussion in section 6 and its subsections. The conclusions to the paper appear in section 7, and one thing noteworthy is that in spite of all his *ad hominem* attacks on Protagoras, Socrates fails to convince the foremost sophist to reconsider his life long profession<sup>4</sup> of teaching *excellence* to the young and ambitious youths in Greek Society of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. enlightenment.

## **2. Setting the stage: Protagoras' professional profile**

At the beginning of the dialogue, Plato highlights Protagoras' popularity and claim to fame. He declares himself a sophist openly unlike the other wise men of Greek history and legend, who were either afraid or ashamed to do so. Though he is a foreigner from Abdera in northern Thrace, he has taught and practised rhetoric for forty years without any harm to himself. This is in spite of the risks he runs always by luring away his host cities' young and promising men, who come to him for paid instructions, from their indigenous teachers. In addition, he is old enough to be a father<sup>5</sup> to any person in the audience in Callias' house. Furthermore, Plato makes us appreciate the fact that Protagoras is one who is invincible in the display of his rhetorical prowess and other specialities.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This is what modern rhetorical theorists call 'Way of being'. It connotes a person's (in the case of Protagoras) convictions or disposition prior to the influence of rhetorical communication on him/her. 'Self-rhetoric', that is, the evaluative process initiated by this communication in him/her induces reconsideration, of his/her conceptions of himself/herself which make him/her in a sense, wonder whether there are not better conceptions about oneself h/she could adopt in the light of the rhetorical communication s/he has received. See Arnold, C. 'Johnstone's 'Wedge' and Theory of Rhetoric', *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 20, (2) 1987.

<sup>5</sup> *Prot.* 317c.

<sup>6</sup> DK80A1 shows that Protagoras was the first to exact a fee of a hundred Minas. He was the first to distinguish the tenses of the verb, to expound the importance of the 'right moment,' to conduct debates, and to introduce disputants to the tricks of

These credentials constitute a kind of status display<sup>7</sup>, for Protagoras presents himself to the audience as one who cherishes and basks in the glow of his fame as a sophist, a wise and accomplished teacher of *excellence*. The vivid description of the majestic movements of Protagoras in the opening scene of the dialogue shows that he not only believes in his status as a wise and famous man but he behaves so too.

However, contrary to Protagoras' conviction and that of most of his contemporaries that he has a good knowledge of his subjects and therefore can teach them competently, the reality that emerges as the dialogue unfolds, is that the great sophist for all his wisdom is an impostor, who cannot vindicate his pretensions to knowledge<sup>8</sup>. Thus, right from the beginning of the dialogue we are made to see Protagoras in danger of carrying an image or reputation, which he may not be able to defend in the ensuing debate.

Hence on a general level, the whole dialogue is a rhetorical appeal<sup>9</sup>

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arguments. He was the first to introduce the Socratic type of argument, to introduce the method of attacking any thesis. All these and more of his rhetorical skills should indeed make Protagoras popular.

<sup>7</sup> Remland Martins articulates the view that in debate context, or in a rhetorical situation such as described in the *Protagoras*, status display, that is (literally) throwing one's weight around, intimidates an opponent in an argument and as such is a kind of implicit *ad hominem* fallacy. Much of the autobiography, which Protagoras advertises in this part of the dialogue, falls into this category. See 'The Implicit *Ad Hominem* Fallacy,' 79 – 86.

<sup>8</sup> It appears that ultimately, the rest of the sophists are implicated in this anticipated defeat or disgrace of Protagoras. This is, presumably, the whole purpose of involving Prodicus of Ceos in the analysis of Simonides' poem – to show that Prodicus' method of analysing language and its application to texts lacks substance but is rather prolix. Hippias of Elis is also made to expound his theory of cosmopolitanism by showing himself a supporter of *physis* in the *nomos- physis* antithesis debates, through which the essence of the noble ideal of cosmopolitanism cannot be determined contrary to what the sophist obviously thought. Cf. Grube, G.M.A. 'The structural unity of the Protagoras', *Classical Quarterly* 27, 1933, 203 – 207.

<sup>9</sup> George Yoos uses the concepts of 'rhetorical appeal' and 'rhetorical response' to explain what most likely happens to the *psyche* of both rhetorician and his audience in a rhetorical situation. His definitions and use of these concepts support Charles Arthur Willard's position that argument is a process of intersubjectivity of arguers in a social interaction. For while 'rhetorical appeal... attempts to alter beliefs or commitments of



by Socrates to Protagoras himself, to the immediate audience in Callias' house, and by Plato to the readers of the dialogue. The major aim of this appeal is to make Protagoras and the identified audiences, but especially the immediate one, reconsider his credentials as a sophist. Protagoras and his audience respond to this rhetorical appeal through all sorts of interchange of opinions, ideas and arguments. This paper is concerned with identifying the features of the rhetorical appeal that Socrates makes in the dialogue and the responses of Protagoras and the rest of the audience.<sup>10</sup>

### **3. The 'wedging' operation on Hippocrates**

The general feature of the dialogue as a rhetorical appeal and response is replicated in the individual episodes<sup>10</sup>. For instance, while Socrates and Hippocrates wait at the gate of Callias' house for the day to break clearly, Socrates questions the young man. The questions are asked in such a way as to test Hippocrates' convictions, his beliefs on earlier commitments<sup>11</sup> regarding what he hopes to gain from Protagoras, as his pupil. Much as these questions are not speeches, they are nevertheless posed to Hippocrates in a social interaction, that is, in a collaborative communication – a

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audience ... seeks accommodation with others by seeking change within their commitments and acceptances', 'rhetorical responses' are explanations that address audiences as inquirers. They address the curiosity of audiences concerned about various matters'. See, 'Rhetoric of appeal and Rhetoric of Response' *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 20 (2) 1987, 107 – 117.

<sup>10</sup> See also Charles Arthur Willard, "A Reformulation of the concept of Sociology of Arguments" *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 14 (Winter 1978) 121 – 140.

<sup>10</sup> Plato's aporetic dialogues are mostly and essentially rhetorical appeals and responses.

<sup>11</sup> For Hippocrates, one may assume, these are that he believes himself to be an endowed noble Athenian citizen who aspires to public life in politics, and that he has the means to hire the services of esteemed Protagoras, reputed to have the skills to teach people *arête* which in this case is efficiency at managing both private and public life. His conceptions of himself are not what the rhetorical appeals are directed to change, but his commitments to the public image and opinion about Protagoras. See, Yoos, 'Rhetorical Appeal and Rhetoric of Response' p. 111.

discussion. So, the trend of the discussion between him and Socrates constitutes a rhetorical appeal and response. As Carroll Arnold would describe it, Socrates' questions as rhetorical appeal drive a wedge into Hippocrates' consciousness. This is held open by deliberation or self-rhetoric, and makes it possible for him to consider possible ways of being<sup>12</sup>. In other words,

'it ...maintains consciousness that he is, but that he could be otherwise'<sup>13</sup>.

Socrates intends to dissuade Hippocrates from enrolling with Protagoras as a pupil, and in that way encourage him to search for an alternative way of life. Apparently, this is the purpose of Socrates' questions.

Those questions used as the wedging weapons in the operations do at the same time suggest to the lad new possible ways of being – he should rather aspire to nobler things than studying under a sophist. It is further suggested implicitly through the questions that the sophists are an infamous set from whom not much that is noble and of lasting value, is expected or can be learnt. Hippocrates should therefore reconsider his eagerness to be a pupil of Protagoras.

It may be surprising that as the dialogue unfolds, nothing is said again of Hippocrates whose request to be introduced to Protagoras initiated the whole debate in the first place. He neither asks questions nor makes any comment in the course of the debate. Hippocrates' silence can be explained by supposing that the 'wedging' questions directed at him

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<sup>12</sup> As Arnold puts it in the paper referred to above, 'Self-rhetoric is what holds open the 'space' while 'temporal vistas' revealing 'haunting possibilities are contemplated' His view is that what 'George Yoos calls rhetoric that appeals...' acts, according to Henry Johnston, as 'a wedge between a percipient and an object of perception', creating what Molly Wethermer calls 'vistas'. Therefore, 'self-rhetoric... holds open the space while 'temporal vistas' revealing haunting possibilities are contemplated'. See 'Johnstones Wedge and Theory of Rhetoric', p. 125.

<sup>13</sup> Given Hippocrates' awareness that Socrates is speaking to him or asking him questions in order to dissuade him from associating with the sophist – Protagoras – and the lad continued to be in 'collaborative communication' with Socrates, Hippocrates then risks his present 'way of being'. He is nudged to engage in a critical and moral assessment of his present 'way of being' – beliefs, convictions, aspirations with a view to maintaining, modifying or abandoning some or all of them altogether.

by Socrates achieved the expected results. It appears that by the time the debate began in earnest, the young man has changed his mind about his earlier request. He is obviously unable to find answers to the searching questions of Socrates during the 'wedging' 'experiment'. Consequently, at *Prot.* 313c, Hippocrates admits the case to be as Socrates says it is: He has now to ponder on the advantages and disadvantages of putting himself under the tutelage of a sophist. Apparently, Hippocrates has been saved from risking an association with the sophist. But he has at the same time listened 'to a potentially influential other'<sup>14</sup> – Socrates who induced, through questions, 'a critical assessment of self and what is heard'<sup>15</sup>. He subsequently becomes a silent spectator at the debate between Socrates and Protagoras. Soon, Socrates attempts a similar wedging 'operation' on Protagoras who resists it, and in doing so, gets the dialogue under way.

#### **4. Socrates' challenge to Protagoras**

In response to Socrates' demand that Protagoras tells the audience the subject matter which he hopes to teach Hippocrates, Protagoras declares that unlike the other sophists who over-burden their pupils with learning of technical subjects<sup>16</sup> such as mathematics and astronomy, his curriculum is designed to inculcate in his pupils, 'the proper care of his personal affairs, so that he may best manage his household, and also the state's affairs, so as to become a real power in the city...' (*Prot.* 318ff). This means that Protagoras' speciality is teaching virtue (*arête*), that is, *eubou- lia* or sound judgement.

Socrates challenges Protagoras on this occasion to show convincingly that *arête*, as he describes it, is teachable. And against the sophist's

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<sup>14</sup> See, Arnold, 'Johnstone's 'wedge' and Theory of Rhetoric' p. 125.

<sup>15</sup> Arnold, p. 125.

<sup>16</sup> Obviously, Protagoras was depreciating such practises and by looking at Hippias as he speaks, he uses glances as nonverbal displays to associate the man of Elis with this undesirable, in Protagoras' view, curriculum in the presence of the audience at Callias' house, cf. Remland, 'The Implicit Ad hominem Fallacy', 79-86.

claim, Socrates cites three counter examples:

1. That there are no identifiable teachers of *arête*.
2. That every citizen discusses political matters in the Athenian assembly even when he is not considered an expert in them.
3. Moreover, virtuous Athenian fathers seem not able to teach their sons those *aretai* for which these fathers were famous.

The case of Pericles and his sons who could not excel in politics and civil administration like him, is cited as an example (*Prot.* 319).

Thus, the onus is on Protagoras to defend his fame and reputation as the leader and wisest of the sophists. This, presumably, is Protagoras' own personal interest in the situation.<sup>17</sup> However, this defense of Protagoras' professional integrity<sup>18</sup> is to be done in the face of Socrates' public insistence that there is no viable problem for Protagoras to tackle. Socrates' challenge, which is an exigent in the rhetorical situation, forecloses it. However, Protagoras has to surmount this exigent, for it seems that there is no need for his profession given that *arête* that he claims to teach cannot be taught.

Socrates in consequence covertly suggests to Protagoras to rethink his life-long profession of teaching *arête*. This is the 'wedge' he drives through Protagoras' consciousness and personality<sup>19</sup>. Given that a public

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<sup>17</sup> In keeping with Alan Briton's elaboration of Lloyd Bitzer's notion of exigence in a rhetorical situation, Socrates' challenge as an exigent has both factual and interest components in that the sophist is challenged to prove himself before an assembly of fellow sophist – competitors, and their admirers, especially as the sophists used such an occasion as described in the dialogue, to recruit their clients and pupils. See Alan Briton, 'situations in the Theory of Rhetoric', *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 14 (4) 1981, 234 – 248.

<sup>18</sup> Protagoras' integrity here is not moral. Rather it is, as Scott Consigny articulates, the idea of rhetorical integrity, the ability of the rhetor, using rhetoric as an art, 'to disclose and manage indeterminate factors in novel situations without his action being determined'. See his 'Rhetoric and its situations', *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 7 (3) 145 – 186.

<sup>19</sup> The idea of 'wedging' expressed in this paragraph is still an application of the views of George Yoos and Carroll Arnold in their works already cited at various times

debate like one in the *Protagoras* is both an intellectual and psychological contest, and that success in it requires both deep insights and emotional stability, Protagoras has to resist Socrates' 'wedging operation' on his (Protagoras') *psyche*.

### **5. Protagoras tackles the recalcitrance<sup>20</sup> of the situation**

Given Plato's picturesque description of the majestic movements of Protagoras in the courtyard of Callias' house, exhibiting the flamboyance of his personality just as Socrates and Hippocrates arrive, it is reasonable to suggest that Protagoras was poised for a public display – *epideixis* – and was not really expecting the sort of challenges Socrates sprung on him. He now has to defend himself and show to all and sundry that his life – long profession of teaching *arête* had not been a ruse after all. Socrates has just made the situation frosty. Protagoras has to defrost the situation, make it warm and lively by showing that there are lots of interesting problems to tackle in the face of Socrates' enervating scepticism designed to make him rethink the way he had been for upwards of forty years. In other words, in the situation he finds himself, he must, in order to maintain his integrity as a master of speech, 'transform the indeterminacies into a coherent structure'.<sup>21</sup> He has to use all the resources at his disposal to meet the exigence of the situation.

He starts doing this by first of all securing the approval of the audience to respond to Socrates' challenge, as he, Protagoras, prefers. He chooses to respond through a myth. This choice does few things for Protagoras in the situation. It shows that he has a repertoire of rhetorical de-

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above.

<sup>20</sup> This word captures the idea of aberrant of factors, incidents, in the rhetorical situation. Thus, Consigny sees it as 'those aspects and orders which the rhetor discloses through engagement', which 'may force (him) to alter (his) original strategy'. See, Consigny, 'Rhetoric and its situation', p. 178.

<sup>21</sup> Consigny, p. 178.

vices from which he selects how to respond, depending on the situation. Because he can ‘work through... the pragmata of the situation’ with a view to making ‘issues emerge from it’<sup>22</sup>, he maintains his rhetorical integrity. This then conforms with what is already known about him – that ‘he was the first to conduct a debate’, and ‘to introduce the methods of attacking any thesis’ (DK80AI).

In maintaining his integrity by displaying his versatility in rhetorical art, he also displays his status<sup>23</sup> for he asks the audience: ‘But shall I, like an old man addressing his juniors recount to you an illustrative myth? Or shall I go through an expository discourse’?<sup>24</sup> It appears that Socrates and others in the audience refuse to be intimidated by this remark, just as Protagoras resisted the ‘wedging operation’ on him a short while ago. Otherwise, the dialogue would have turned out differently than it eventually did.

Secondly, the choice of response through a myth enables Protagoras exhibit the rhetorical technique of ‘the right moment’ – *kairos* (DK80AI). That the myth<sup>25</sup> genre is appropriate in the rhetorical situation described in Callias’ house is shown by the excitement caused by the

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<sup>22</sup> Consigny, p. 178.

<sup>23</sup> Remland discusses this kind of display and even calls it an implicit *ad hominem* fallacy. See his paper cited above.

<sup>24</sup> This is George Grote’s translation in *Plato and other companions of Socrates*, vol. II, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 38.

<sup>25</sup> Myths can be used by a speaker to quiet an audience and secure its attention because myths have entertainment value. When compared with the illustrative parallel, we see that myths suit addresses to large audiences because they are comparatively easier to invent (see, Aristotle, *Rhet.* ii.1394ff). In the present case, the utility of myths is underscored by the fact that they constitute a part of the shared or collective wisdom of a people’s culture, such as the Athenian culture of the fifth century B.C. enlightenment. As such, their assumptions enjoy widespread, acceptance and high level of intellectual respectability especially in a culture, like the Athenian culture of the epoch, under consideration, undergoing transition from orality to literacy (cf. R.J. Connors, ‘Greek Rhetoric and the Transition from Orality’, *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 19 (1) 1986, 38-65). Either myth or the illustrative parallel can be cited always as an authority to drive home a point even when the extrapolation from the moral of one incident to another may be dubious.

imminent clash of two giants of the Greek enlightenment – Socrates and Protagoras. This created a hilarious audience in the house of the son of Hipponicus.

Myths generally, and the Prometheus story<sup>26</sup> in particular, which Protagoras embellishes for his purpose on this occasion usually embody 'words high in imagery'.<sup>27</sup> They are almost 'concrete verbal utterances'.<sup>28</sup> Hence in terms of Dale Hample's discussion of 'Dual Coding theory', Protagoras' myth is to be coded verbally, and most likely, non-verbally in the minds of people in the audience. Going by this theory, concrete verbal utterances are usually coded in both verbal and non-verbal systems. In view of this, the myth facilitates Protagoras' identification with the majority in the audience who may likely say to themselves: He is one of us, for he shares the beliefs of our culture as shown in the imageries he deploys in his speech. So, he is really wise and ought to have the truth about the subjects of debate.<sup>29</sup>

## **6. The appearance of more exigencies in the rhetorical situation and arguments of the dialogue**

Thus far, Protagoras seems to be in charge of the situation. But as the dialogue shows, at a point in time, he exhibits some exasperation, and much later towards the end, he ceases to answer Socrates' questions altogether. Generally, the latter behaviour of Protagoras is explained in terms of his

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<sup>26</sup> A similar story provides the plot for Aeschylus' drama: *Prometheus Bound*, and also appears in various forms in several stories of human progress from bestiality to civility found in Greek Literatures. See also, W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* vol. III, pp. 61-79.

<sup>27</sup> Dale Hample, 'Dual coding, Reasoning and Fallacies' *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 19 (Fall, 1982) 59 –77.

<sup>28</sup> Hample 'Dual Coding', 59 –77.

<sup>29</sup> According to Remland, endeavours by a rhetor to seek this kind of identification with the audience are implicit *ad hominem* fallacies. It is however mentioned here in connection with the deployment of the myth by Protagoras at this stage, to show his dexterity in managing the rhetorical situation.

inability to follow and participate meaningfully in the philosophical explanations of issues by Socrates. In my view, while this may be part of the explanation it certainly is not the whole of it. The other part has to do with how the debate between him and Socrates is conducted. Some of the instances are examined below.

### 6.1. *The metamorphosis of Protagoras' euboulia*

In his revealing paper, Joseph P. Maguire<sup>30</sup> shows that the meaning of *arête* which Protagoras claims he can teach Hippocrates on becoming his pupil, is not the same meaning with which his myth ends. What Protagoras claims to impart to Hippocrates is *arête* or *euboulia* defined as 'the ability to manage household and city efficiently'.<sup>31</sup> However, by the time the myth ends, and as Maguire vividly shows<sup>32</sup> there is 'an obvious shift... from (the conception of *arête* as *euboulia*) an amoral managerial skill at the beginning to the 'quiet' moral virtues...'<sup>33</sup>.

In order to appreciate how this transformation occurs it is important that the 'movement'<sup>34</sup> of terms in that part of the dialogue be traced following Maguire's labours<sup>35</sup>. We can recall that at the on set, and in or-

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<sup>30</sup> 'Protatogras... or Plato? II: The *Protagoras*', *Phronesis* 22 (2) 1977, 103-122.

<sup>31</sup> This view that what Protagoras claims to teach is *arête* conceived as managerial efficiency is supported by John Poulakos. He shows that the sophists taught or practised rhetoric as an art – *techne*. See, John Poulakos, 'Towards a sophistic Definition of Rhetoric', *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 16 (1) 1983, 38 – 65.

<sup>32</sup> See, Maguire, 'Protagoras... or Plato?' p. 105.

<sup>33</sup> Maguire, p. 106.

<sup>34</sup> Socrates' remarks in the *Euthyphro* that he must be greater than his ancestor, Daedalus, 'for whereas, he (Daedalus) only made his own inventions to move, I move those of other people as well' (*Euthyphro*, 11). Though the remark is meant jocularly as a reply to Euthyphro's complaint that Socrates makes his definitions of piety unsteady, in the *Protagoras* we should take seriously Socrates' ability to make the meaning of Protagoras' *euboulia* 'move' through operative terms in the debate.

<sup>35</sup> See Maguire, 'Protagoras... or Plato? II: The *Protagoras*'. Most of the phrases in double quotation marks in this section of the paper are those of Maguire.



der to show how Hippocrates' association with him can improve the lad, Protagoras talks of inculcating in him *euboulia* – 'sound judgement' – regarding his own private affairs and those of the city-state. Shortly after this Protagorean declaration, Socrates quickly 'identifies *euboulia* with 'political expertise' (*techne*, 3226b), and the 'ability to make good citizens (*agathous politas*, 319a). As the dialogue shows, Protagoras agrees with this subtle identification.

In addition, 'political expertise' which now encapsulates *euboulia* is further equated with virtue (*arête*, 319e2, 320a3, 65,c1). However, in Protagoras' myth,<sup>36</sup> we encounter further a triple equation of terms: 'political wisdom' (*Sophia*, 312d5) is equated with 'political expertise' (*techne*, 32265), and then with 'political virtue' (*arête*, 322ef). Consequently, a sense that all these terms are equivalent is conveyed without any warning to the contrary.

Furthermore, 'political virtue/expertise' embracing the art of war (32265), establishment of cities in accordance with reverenace (*aidos*) and justice (*dike*) (322c2,4,7,d5), is distinguished from 'technological wisdom', (32id1,4), 'expertise' (32263,321elf), and 'Virtue' (322d7). Thereafter, we finally encounter the equation of 'political virtue / expertise' with 'justice and self control' (*dikaiousunes* and *sophrosunes*, (323a6,b2), which in turn is further equated with 'justice and the rest of political virtues' (325a1). This is eventually identified with 'man's virtue generally' (*andros arête*, 325a2).<sup>37</sup>

Thus the conclusion is drawn from the preceding explanation that 'there has been an obvious shift with these series of equivalences from an amoral managerial skill at the beginning to the 'quiet' moral virtue and

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<sup>36</sup> Plato makes us believe that Protagoras freely chose this myth himself, whereas this 'movement' of meaning of terms conveys the impression that it is one of those devices Plato/Socrates uses to disparage the sophists.

<sup>37</sup> This metamorphosis of *euboulia* yields the following Maguirean schema: Good judgement = political expertise = good citizenship = virtue = political wisdom = political virtue = Justice and self-control = Justice and the rest of political virtues = Justice, Self-control and pity. (See, Maguire, Protagoras... or Plato? II' p. 105).

the tranvaluation of virtue itself at the end'.<sup>38</sup>

The point really is that in the *Protagoras*, there are 'three distinct levels of *arête*:

1. the managerial, moral, level at the beginning (Protagoras euboulia)
2. the conventional morality represented by any teacher, including Protagoras, who has no standard beyond the *doxai* of the community.
3. the intimations at the end of a moral level related to knowledge of an absolute standard'.<sup>39</sup>

It is therefore obvious that by the time the debate really commences, Protagoras has been shifted from the first level through the second to the third level of meaning of virtues which require a standard in wisdom/knowledge for it to be beneficial to man. The debate on this by Socrates creates the favourable atmosphere for the deployment of further *ad hominem* techniques, dispositions and arguments by the two major interlocutors in the dialogue as shown subsequently.

## 6.2. *Argument on the identity of justice and piety (330c-332a)*

Perhaps, one way of identifying other *ad hominem* features of the interlocutors' strategies against each other, is to review Cobb's<sup>40</sup> powerful reconstruction of Socrates' argument especially in the section on the Identity of Justice and Piety laid out thus:

6.2a Justice is something (330c1)

6.2b this thing itself is just (330c5)

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<sup>38</sup> Maguire, p. 122; see also *Prot.* 356b5.

<sup>39</sup> Maguire, p. 122.

<sup>40</sup> See, William Cobb, 'The Argument of the Protagoras' *Dialogue* 21 (1982), 713 – 731: Apart from the numbering which has been slightly modified to suit my purpose here, the layout of the argument is Cobb's.

- 6.2c Piety is something (330d2-4)
- 6.2d Piety itself is pious (330d8-e1)
- 6.2e the parts of virtue are such that the one of them is not of the other sort (330e5-6)
- 6.2f if piety is not of a just sort, it is unjust; and if justice is not of a pious sort it is impious (331a8-b1)
- 6.2g Justice is pious and piety is just (331b2-3)
- 6.2h Justness is the same as piety or it is most similar, and most of all justice is of the piety sort and piety of the justice sort (331b4-6).

Cobb considers this argument valid. The premises are admissions Socrates secures from Protagoras through *elenchos*<sup>41</sup>. However, prior to showing how valid it is, he makes the following noteworthy comment:

Socrates shows that the commonly held view expressed in 6.2a-2d leads to contradiction of 6.2e, which is 6.2h... Protagoras is unhappy about this. He reacts to 6.2h with a vague claim that it seems to him that there is some difference between justice and piety (331c2-3), but says that it does not matter, so they might as well call them the same if Socrates wants (331: 3-4). Socrates vehemently objects to this causal response to a contradiction among one's beliefs. Protagoras responds by saying that since everything is in some way or other similar to everything else he supposes justice and piety are similar, but he does not think they are the same (331c4-332a4).<sup>42</sup>

Cobb himself recognises that given 6.2f above, the argument 'involves inferring from the fact that something lacks a certain property the claim that it possesses the contrary of that property'<sup>43</sup> This is invalid as a general principle for counter examples can easily be provided as he actually does.

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<sup>41</sup> '... an elentic demonstration is an *elenchos*, the conclusion of which is the contradictory of a proposition asserted by the interlocutor, and the premises of which are each obtained from the same interlocutor'. See Alan Code, 'Aristotle's investigation of the Basic Logical Principle: which Science Investigates the Principle of Non-contradiction?' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16 (3) (September 1986), 341 – 358.

<sup>42</sup> Cobb 'The argument of the Protagoras', 713 – 731.

<sup>43</sup> Cobb, p. 718.

For instance ‘apples are not pious but neither are they impious’<sup>44</sup>.

He also accepts that there is one plausible way in which Socrates’ argument at 330 can fail: The property in question may be inapplicable to the object, implying that deficiency of an object in a particular quality does not amount to the presence of the contrary in it. Moreover, there could be a neutral position between the contrary properties such that if an object does not possess one, it does not thereby mean it possesses the contrary.<sup>45</sup>

In spite of this, Cobb contends that Socrates argument here is not fallacious, and inconsequence asserts, without evidence that

‘‘Socrates’ inference is not subject to either of these failures and hence not invalid’<sup>46</sup>.

He secures the validity of Socrates’ argument with the claim that it

‘depends on the definition of ‘piety and of ‘justice’... it is plausible to take as operative some general definitions as the following derived from ordinary usage of the terms: ‘piety’: means doing what the gods approve<sup>47</sup> or ... acting divinely, that is, in accordance with those values which are of eternal significance’<sup>48</sup>,

‘Justice’: means maintaining a proper order among things, that is in accordance with true value<sup>49</sup>. On the basis of these ordinary definitions, he then concludes that ‘given such rather vague definitions, Socrates’ argument is valid’ for ‘in order to attack his premises, Protagoras would have to hold positions which outrage the average citizen...’<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Cobb, p. 718.

<sup>45</sup> Cobb, p. 718.

<sup>46</sup> Cobb, p. 718.

<sup>47</sup> It is noteworthy that in Plato’s *Euthyphro*, Socrates rejects this definition of piety as extrinsic. What he requires of Euthyphro is an intrinsic definition. So it is improper for Cobb to use it to make Socrates’ argument in the *Protagoras* valid.

<sup>48</sup> Cobb, ‘The Argument of the Protagoras’ p. 718.

<sup>49</sup> Cobb, p. 719.

<sup>50</sup> Cobb, p. 719.

This manner of making Socrates' reasoning valid is objectionable for the simple reason that Socrates 'demands a careful, rigorous, and critical assessment of traditional views and ... hold out *elenchos*, the rational examination of beliefs rather than their mere articulation, as the only hope of becoming better persons'<sup>51</sup>. Hence premises articulating traditional views, which Socrates rejects, cannot be used to legitimise his argument.

Guthrie's<sup>52</sup> forthright assessment of the argument is preferable to Cobb's animated defence. Guthrie shows that Socrates uses an eristic method of argument against Protagoras: 'He (Socrates) does this (with 6.2e above) by the typically sophistic device of presenting an adversary with crude 'either – or' alternative... and by what is usually called a confusion of contradictories with contraries'<sup>53</sup>.

In continuing the debate, Socrates in addition wants to foist on Protagoras the assumption that the above 'either – or' alternative (as 6.2f shows) is exhaustive,<sup>54</sup> for Socrates maintains that going by Protagoras' admissions here, 'piety will not be just nor justice pious, and so justice will be impious and piety unjust. But then, Protagoras protests and counters that, 'otherness does not exclude all similarity and that even contraries have something in common'<sup>55</sup>.

Socrates apparently notices that this is a credible objection and thus abruptly and inconclusively cuts off that direction of argument rather than allow Protagoras a chance to examine the matter further. Without any further hint that a change in the debate is imminent, Socrates instantly introduces the argument on the 'identity of wisdom and self-control (332a-333b) as a transcending claim'<sup>56</sup> because it 'moves the focus of discussion

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<sup>51</sup> Cobb, p. 713.

<sup>52</sup> Guthrie, W.K.C. *A History of Greek Philosophy* vol. IV p. 232.

<sup>53</sup> Guthrie, p. 222.

<sup>54</sup> Guthrie, p. 224.

<sup>55</sup> Guthrie, p. 226.

<sup>56</sup> According to Suzanne Mecorkle, 'a transcending claim is a superordinate claim

or argument from a specifically challenged statement to a different statement’.

These abrupt movements of Socrates with the subject matter of arguments can throw even an experienced user of *kairos* like Protagoras off balance, and as such, the abrupt changes in the arguments are implicitly *ad hominem*. Moreover, Guthrie also notes that earlier on in the debate, Socrates in questioning Protagoras ‘brushed aside the important lessons of Protagoras’ speech’<sup>57</sup>, which then in my view facilitated the bridging of terms that resulted eventually in the metamorphosis of Protagoras’ *euboulia*. Protagoras, no doubt, notes all these meanderings of *Socrates* and fencing with arguments in the rhetorical situation.

### 6.2.1. Further *ad hominem* features of the debate on identity of justice and piety

Given the inherent weakness of 6.2e and 6.2h in the above argument regarding the ‘Identity of Justice and Piety’ Socrates’ reasoning therein is invalid. But an invalid argument is not necessarily *ad hominem*. There is, therefore, the need to give more details about the *ad hominem* character of the progression of argument thus far.

The issue between Socrates and Protagoras in the dialogue is: What is virtue? Is it of one or many essences? Socrates no doubt sets the theme of the argument squarely under the topic of ‘one-many’, ‘Unity – Plurality’ dissociation.<sup>58</sup> Thus he requests Protagoras

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which alters the immediate point of contention... the transcending claim evokes a break in the progression of argument on a certain claim by moving the focus from a specifically challenged statement to a different statement’. See, ‘The Transcending claim as a strategy of Pseudo – Argument’, *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 17, (Summer 1980), 11-17.

<sup>57</sup> Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* vol. IV, p. 222.

<sup>58</sup> Dissociation is a strategy whereby an arguer attempts to break up an idea into two concepts: one which will be positively valued by the audience, and the other which will be negatively valued. This task is accomplished through the employment of philosophical pairs one of which is usually considered metaphysically, epistemologically or ethically superior to the other. In dissociation, the arguer seeks to persuade by arguing that of his chosen philosophical pair for instance, ‘Appearance/Reality’, his own chosen philosophical definition represents the real or

'... tell me *truly* whether virtue [*arête*] is *one* whole, of which justice and temperance and holiness *are part*; or whether all these are only the names of one and the same thing' (328).<sup>59</sup>

Socrates does this apparently for two reasons: He uses the dissociation as a bait for Protagoras believing that he would choose the second term in the dissociation in accordance with the popular view of the nature, that is, *physis* of virtue (*arête*) which as a sophist, is a view Socrates believes he shares and expects him to affirm on this occasion. Hence the bait is an *ad hominem* strategy against Protagoras as a sophist. In using the dissociation, Socrates appears to have also assumed that with it, his *elenchos* can be a veritable tool for tripping up Protagoras in argument. This is especially so as he (Socrates) can, if he wants, use his *elenchos* to argue on either side of a subject/question, although this is regarded as a speciality of the sophists.

Incidentally, Protagoras in his response to this Socratic strategy quickly merges the dissociation into a contradiction. He maintains 'the qualities, that is, justice, temperance, holiness are the parts of virtue which is one' (328).<sup>60</sup> This move elicits Socrates hostile reaction as pointed out by Cobb. In that way therefore, Protagoras rejects the bait offered earlier by Socrates and deliberately builds into his response a rhetorical tension.<sup>61</sup> Its purpose is to enable him show that he can 'attack any

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true instance of what is being sought. That of his opponent is now cast in the bad light as illusory. See, Edward Schiappa, 'Dissociation in the arguments of Rhetorical Theory', *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 22 (Fall 1985), 73-81.

<sup>59</sup> Emphasis added, not in the original text.

<sup>60</sup> cf. The Eleatic (Zeno's) argument that a unit in a collection cannot have parts else it ceases to be a unit but a collection of units (see Fr. 1). With this and other similar arguments Zeno highlights the absurdity inherent in the pluralistic stand point of those deriding his master's (Parmenides) Monism and deductions from it about the nature of reality. That Protagoras on this occasion was imitating this type of argument is testified by the Fragment that says he was the inventor of *The Antilogue*. See Diogenes Laertius ix, 55.

<sup>61</sup> William Cobb in the paper already referred to above, is therefore not correct when he says that Protagoras does not appreciate the tension in his answer at 328 in maintaining that one is many. Cobb himself does not consider the rhetorical import of Protagoras' answer.

thesis' (DK 80A1) and consequently, win the argument.

Socrates in turn sets out to redirect the trajectory of the argument along this line: virtue (*arête*) is one. Hence, his next question:

'Are they parts... in the same sense in which mouth, nose and eyes and ears, are parts of a face, or they are like parts of gold which differ from the whole and from one another in being larger or smaller' (328).

The suggestion here is that virtue is of one essence just as gold. Its parts can differ in size and dimension but never in essence.

Protagoras seems unimpressed by the said suggestions. His acceptance of it can make him lose the advantage of the rhetorical tension. Given the contradiction he created earlier on, he stands a chance of winning the debate by arguing (alternately) with equal cogency on either sides of the subject: 'virtue is one and many' (see DK 80a20). So, he merely restates his position: 'They are related to one another as parts of a face are related to the whole face' (329d). In support of this position, he denies Socrates' next suggestion that once a person has a part of virtue (*arête*) say piety, he in consequence possesses the rest. Rather he maintains that 'many a man is brave and not just or just and not wise' (349d). Armed with these suggestions, Protagoras sets the line of his own defence. He can go ahead to argue that virtue is of one essence and almost in the same breath that it is not, given that it has parts – an epideitic rhetorician's pattern of debate. These moves by the interlocutors are *ad hominem*. Protagoras attacks Socrates and dodges his questions as an expert in *maieutic* method, while Socrates attacks Protagoras as an epideitician or as a wrangler in argument. It is noteworthy, however, that each time, Socrates determines the topic under which the matter at hand is discussed.

The debate on identity of virtues further exhibits one notable feature. Socrates uses an analogy the import of which should not be lost on us. At 330 the face – virtue (*arête*) analogy in respect of their parts is very clear. Rhetorical theorists have identified two types of analogy or metaphor. These are the master and pupil's metaphors.<sup>62</sup> The use of the former

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<sup>62</sup> The master's metaphor is used by a rhetor (master, and in the present case,



by a discussant shows his superiority in the conduct of argument. The analogy at 330 is a master's metaphor.

The significance of using it prior to the debate on the 'Identity of virtues' is that Socrates literally puts Protagoras in his 'requisite' place as a neophyte in argumentations who should be spoon-fed from the simplest of intellectual desserts in order not to strain his fledgling mind. This *ad hominem* master's metaphor deployed at this stage in the debate further enables Socrates to show dominance which in addition to his determining always the topic under which the issue is to be discussed, allows him to claim covertly a superior position to Protagoras in the debate.

### *6.3. The debate on the identity of wisdom and self-control (332a-333b)*

Even while trying to argue for the identity of wisdom and self-control or temperance, Socrates is in a rush. He however tries to establish the preferred identity between wisdom and self-control using two basic arguments. The first one, which creates the appearance of a problem when there is none, plays with abstract nouns in the following way:

1. Foolish actions are done by folly and temperate actions by temperance.
2. That is done strongly which strength, and that which is weakly done by weakness do.
3. That which is done with swiftness is done swiftly, and that which is done with slowness, slowly.

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Socrates) to explain to an audience (who lacks understanding, Protagoras in this case) something, which the rhetor understands. The master's metaphor then has no heuristic value to its creator (Socrates in this context). It simply represents the rhetor's effort to clarify meaning for someone.

On the other hand, the pupil's metaphor represents an attempt by the rhetor to express a hypothesis based upon what he feels he knows. It is a unique expression of meaning, which the creator himself cannot, at least at the moment comprehend in any other terms. The creator invents the metaphor in order to explain something to him as well as others. See, James R. Wilcox and H.L. Ewbank, 'Analogy for Rhetors' *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 12 (1) (Winter, 1979), 1-20.

4. That which is done in the same manner is done by the same, and that which is done in an opposite manner by the opposite. (332)<sup>63</sup>

The objection to this kind of argument is that premises (1-3) and the conclusion (4), are all contrary to experience. For instance there could be a temperate action that is clearly foolish: A father who gives money repeatedly to his incorrigible gambler-son might have temperately created domestic peace in his family, but at the same time foolishly continued to encourage his son to perdition. Secondly, there are strong things created by weak actions or processes. Rocks are formed by either weak molten magma or the weak process of sedimentation; the act of war is a strong physical manifestation of inert deliberations and decisions of political/military leaders. Further counter empirical examples can be cited for the other premises.

In this regard, Guthrie remarks,

‘we do not normally ask for agreement to statements that it is by self-control that the self-controlled are self-controlled, that to be performed weakly an act must be performed with weakness, and that in general acts done in the same manner are done by the corresponding agency’.<sup>64</sup>

Socrates second ‘argument’ in this section hinges on three incoherent statements:

1. Everything has one opposite or contrary
2. Wisdom and temperance as parts of virtue are dissimilar both in themselves and their functions
3. Folly has two opposites: wisdom and temperance (333).

These three propositions are admissions of Protagoras, which do not cohere with one another. The only way to remove the incoherence between them is that in keeping with (1), it has to be said that in (3), Socrates sug-

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<sup>63</sup> This is Benjamin Jowett’s translation in his *Plato, no. 7*, in the series: *Great Books of the Western World* Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc, 31<sup>st</sup> printing, 1989, p. 226.

<sup>64</sup> See Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* vol. iv, p. 226.

gested, wisdom is the same as temperance.

It has been pointed out that no. 1 above is a dogma which is vitiated by the realization that

'non-X need not be contrary to X but may either be at an intermediate point on the same scale or belong to an entirely different category'<sup>65</sup>.

It is noteworthy that Protagoras reluctantly agrees to no. 3 in the argument at 332, and we notice that he does not bother to raise an objection, possibly because he knows that Socrates in the argument engages in solecism, and being himself the master of solecism as DK80A28 testifies, Protagoras may have chuckled and reluctantly allowed Socrates have his way instead of chasing shadows. In the case of the argument at 333, Socrates does not allow Protagoras any chance to examine it. Rather, with this abrupt comment: 'Protagoras... we must finish the inquiry and not faint', he initiated a new argument for the identity of justice and self-control (333b), which also acts here as a transcending claim essentially.

In view of the abrupt endings of the two preceding debates on the 'identity of justice and piety' (330c-332a) and on the 'identity of wisdom and temperance or self-control' (332a-333b), it is reasonable to suggest that Protagoras notices that on one occasion when the tide of the argument may have favoured him (330c-332a) in view of his credible objections, it is cut off by Socrates. On the other occasion (332a-333b), he is not even allowed a breathing space to examine the argument. So, he is gradually convinced that in this rhetorical situation Socrates exhibits dominance, which is an index of power in a rhetorical situation. It is thus another way of telling one's adversary, 'I am not intellectually at par with you as I can do with the argument what I prefer'<sup>66</sup> This sort of disposition

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<sup>65</sup> Guthrie, p. 226.

<sup>66</sup> In a private discussion, Professor J.T. Bedu- Addo informed me that the Greeks regarded Socrates and Protagoras to be intellectually at par with each other, even though Socrates nowadays is regarded as superior intellectually to Protagoras. This is, apparently, a modern sentiment which does not tally with this expressed confusion regarding the inventor of Socratic *elenchos*: 'In spite of much discussion, there is no certain answer to the question whether Socrates developed the *elenchos* from methods already used by the sophists like Euthydemus, or even Protagoras, who influenced the

is regarded in rhetorical theory, according to Remland, as an implicit *ad hominem* fallacy.

#### 6.4. *Protagoras' treatise on the relativity of goods and his quest for respite (Prot. 334)*

In pursuance of Socrates' identification of Justice and temperance, he endeavours to make Protagoras admit that the absolutely inexpedient is good: 'when you say, Protagoras, that things inexpedient are good, do you mean inexpedient for man only, or inexpedient altogether? And do you call the latter good?'<sup>67</sup> The sophist rejects this view that the absolutely inexpedient could by any means be called good, and instead delivered a treatise on the relativity of goods (*Prot.* 334ff). Thereafter, one of the exigencies of the rhetorical situation of the dialogue appears: Socrates threatens to leave because, according to him, he has a short memory and cannot follow Protagoras' long speech. He demands that Protagoras, who boasts of expertise in both long and short speeches, should rather adopt the latter for this occasion.

Few things can be said about this exigent in the context of the rhetorical situation under discussion. First, going by Socrates' remark at 333 that 'I thought that Protagoras was getting ruffled and excited, he seemed to be setting himself in an attitude of war'<sup>68</sup>, it seems that Protagoras as an experienced debater, consciously creates the noted exigent in order to give himself respite in the tense rhetorical situation. In this regard, the exigent widens the circle of debate by bringing in other sophists into the fray, in an attempt to resolve the exigent and thereby control any further recalcitrance of the situation. This attempt, by all and sundry, at controlling the recalcitrance naturally gives Protagoras some respite in the intense debate context of the *Protagoras*.

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development of sophists' argumentative methods'. See, H.D. Rankin, *Sophists, Socratic and Cynics*, New Jersey, Barnes and Nobles books, 1983, p. 22.

<sup>67</sup> *Prot.* 334; Jowett's translation in *Plato*, p. 50.

<sup>68</sup> Jowett, p. 50.

Secondly, Protagoras as a master of the opportune moment – *kairos* – sees the exigent as such, and consequently uses the episode to draw attention to Socrates' unfair debate rules. These require Protagoras to use only the question and answer method. He therefore reminds Socrates

‘... many battle of words have I fought, if I had followed the method of disputation which my adversaries desired, as you want me to, I should have been no better than another, and the name of Protagoras would have been no where’<sup>69</sup>.

In analysing Simonides' poem (339-347) Socrates makes a long speech after the manner of the sophists. He thus out rightly violates his own rules against making long speeches, and nobody in the audience calls him to order. This confirms his dominance in the situation.

In addition, ‘the reconciliation offered by Socrates [in analysing Simonides' poem] is a caricature of the method of interpretation given by the sophists’.<sup>70</sup> So, by the time the debate resumes on the claim that ‘courage is knowledge’ (349d-3516), Protagoras has been sufficiently disenchanted with a host of implicit, and sometimes explicit *ad hominem* fallacies.

### 6.5. *The debate on the identity of courage and knowledge (349d – 351b)*

The test of wits proceeds as Protagoras realises that he has been made to admit the statement that ‘all the confident are courageous’, whereas his earlier admission commits him to maintaining only that ‘all the courageous are confident’. In view of this he proceeds to offer a *reductio ad absurdum*<sup>71</sup> of Socrates' earlier argument to show that ‘courage is knowledge’<sup>72</sup>. Socrates secures this identity by pointing out that ‘confidence

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<sup>69</sup> *Prot.* 335.

<sup>70</sup> Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, p. 124.

<sup>71</sup> Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy* vol. iv: The Dialogues p. 230.

<sup>72</sup> Guthrie, p. 230. cf. Socrates' example to Meno in the dialogue of same title, that ‘circularity is a figure but not figure:; showing him that circularity stands to figure as

and courage are not coterminous but confidence is a genus of which courage is only one of two species'<sup>73</sup>. The validity of this argument depends on the assumption that 'All powerful men are strong', which is a conversion of a universal affirmative proposition. According to Guthrie, this Protagoras' *reductio* is 'a travesty of Socrates' argument because it leaves out an essential step taken in 350b1-c2: 'But the ignorant may also be bold, therefore some bold men are not brave'<sup>74</sup>. It is therefore interesting that

'Protagoras leaves this out and charges the omission to Socrates as a weakness. It is he (Protagoras) who has introduced the fallacy of converting a universal affirmative proposition, and then foisted it on Socrates'<sup>75</sup>.

This move by Protagoras is *ad hominem*. It is similar to Socrates' attempt to foist the 'either ... or' alternative absolutely on Protagoras during the debate on the 'identity of justice and piety (329c- 332a).

### 6.6. *The debate on pleasure and goodness (351-358d)*

Between 351b and 358d, hedonistic thesis and the hedonistic calculus are debated. Protagoras' view on the question of hedonism and goodness is however located at 351b3-c7. Donald Zeyl has reconstructed the argument of that segment of the dialogue, which can now be helpful in this discussion<sup>76</sup>. In the argument under reference, Protagoras is known to have maintained a number of propositions on the subject of hedonism and goodness as follow:

1. Some men live well, others badly.
2. A man lives badly if he lives in distress and suffering

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species to genus See *Meno* 74ff.

<sup>73</sup> Guthrie, p. 230.

<sup>74</sup> Guthrie, p. 230.

<sup>75</sup> Guthrie, p. 230.

<sup>76</sup> Donald J. Zeyl, 'Socrates and hedonism: *Protagoras* 315b – 358d', *Phronesis* 25 (3) 1980, 250 – 269.

3. A man lives well if he lives pleasantly to the end.

From (2) and (3) Socrates deduces (4) thus: 'Living pleasantly is good and living unpleasantly is bad'. But Protagoras assents to this only as modified in (5) as: 'Living pleasantly is good if one lives in the enjoyment of praiseworthy things'. Now, Socrates links (5) to (6) thus: 'Some pleasant things are bad, some painful things are good' - a standpoint he attributes to the common people.

Zeyl's two comments on the direction of the argument above is important for us to highlight the *ad hominem* strategy of Socrates here. Zeyl maintains first, that

'Protagoras shrunk from accepting hedonism out-right by proposing (5), and thus would not stand by the implication of his earlier answers. So, now, Socrates has reason to object to Protagoras' proposal of (5) and the non-hedonistic view of the relations of pleasant and good which it entails as stated in (6), not because he thinks that (5) and (6) are false, but because they are inconsistent with the sophist's earlier answer'<sup>77</sup>.

Secondly, Zeyl's position then is that 'Protagoras is vacillating between two views about that relation, a hedonistic one to which his actual evaluation commits him, and a non-hedonistic one which alone his scruples allow him to accept explicitly'<sup>78</sup> Thus, in view of Protagoras' noted inconsistency and vacillation, Socrates uses (7): 'Pleasant things are good in respect in which/to the extent to which they are pleasant; painful things are bad in respect in which/to the extent to which they are painful'<sup>79</sup>, in 'pressing his interlocutor (Protagoras) to be consistent'<sup>80</sup>.

The point should be made clearly and emphatically that anyone pressing a sophist especially, Protagoras and Gorgias to be consistent is arguing *ad hominem*, for in view of their rhetorical principles<sup>81</sup>, and as

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<sup>77</sup> Zeyl, pp. 253 – 254.

<sup>78</sup> Zeyl, p. 254.

<sup>79</sup> Zeyl, p. 251.

<sup>80</sup> Zeyl, p. 251.

<sup>81</sup> See my paper 'Protagoras' Homo Mensura Dictum, and the Possibility of Rhetoric',

sophists basically, inconsistency is an essential tool or disposition in their profession and practise of rhetoric. The point is made once and for all, in their favour, when it is said of Gorgias that he

‘was never at loss for words, for if he speaks of Achilles he praises Peleus, then Aeacus, then the god, and similarly in the case of manliness, which does this or that or is of a certain sort’ (DK82B).

Similarly, Gorgias maintained as a rhetorical tool, that ‘the opposition’s seriousness is to be demolished by laughter, and laughter by seriousness’ (DK82B12). Inconsistency is also the essence of Protagoras double arguments, which many of the sophists adopted as a rhetorical device.

Moreover, from 353, Socrates and Protagoras ostensibly examine, at the instance of the former, the opinion of the many regarding the relationship between pleasure and pain.

Now, in view of the noted disparaging remarks of Alcibiades – son of treachery and partisanship – at 348 which Socrates accepts made Protagoras ashamed, this section on hedonism and goodness and the way the argument there – in is conducted, is also *ad hominem*. Protagoras is invited to participate in examining the popular opinion on the question of pleasure and pain, only to be ridiculed in the process. He is surreptitiously taken as one of the many, even though he seems not to realise it.

The absurd conclusion drawn from this discussion such as ‘a man should do what he knows to be evil when he ought not, because he is even overcome by good...’ and other statements like this one in that context, are really logical jabs at Protagoras in the guise of examining popular opinion. The centrepiece of the *ad hominem* argument here is that Protagoras like the ignorant many talks of hedonistic calculation without realising that such a calculation requires a standard of measurement and knowledge of it. Protagoras like the ignorant populace is not even bothered to acquire such a standard and knowledge.



## 7. Conclusions

The tripartite audience of the *Protagoras*, as observed at the beginning of this paper, include Protagoras himself as Socrates' interlocutor, the assembly in Callias' house, and we the modern readers of the dialogue. In terms of its features, the dialogue is basically a rhetorical appeal and response in which *ad hominem* strategies and arguments are generously deployed.

The appeal is directed, in the first instance, to Protagoras urging him to reconsider the basis of his claim to wisdom and fame. He sees this as a genuine challenge and as a consequence, initiates a rhetorical response to meet it. This response is seen especially in his myth and speech on the relativity of goods, believing up till the discussion on the hedonistic calculus (351b – 353d) and slightly beyond it, that the argument has been earnestly pursued. However, it gradually becomes clear to him that the conduct of the arguments in the dialogue has all the while been *ad hominem* in various ways.

In the first instance, there is the subtle 'wedging operation' by Socrates on Protagoras' *psyche* and personality. In addition, the salient aspects of his myth are brushed aside, and as a consequence, his idea of virtue (*arête*) as *euboulia* is forced, through unfair bridging techniques to assume a moral connotation. Based on this, the debates on 'identity of virtue' is foisted on him, and even when he assents to debate it, the *topics* are surreptitiously changed from dissociation where his double – arguments and other rhetorical techniques should be effective, to that of 'Identity' under which Socratic *elenchos* is quite efficacious.

Second, Socrates has used the eristic method to prod him (Protagoras) to accept that the 'either-or' alternative encountered in the debate on the 'Identity of justice and Piety' (330c-332a), is exhaustive. Socrates' use of transcending claim against Protagoras is also *ad hominem*, for without notice, he changes abruptly from the debate on 'identity of Justice and Piety' (330c – 332a) to that on 'identity of Wisdom and Self-control (332a – 333b).

Third, Socrates' deployment of the explanatory 'Virtue: face' mas-

ter's analogy portrays Protagoras as a neophyte in argumentation, and thus demeans his intellectual ability. Moreover, Socrates' use of Solecism during the argument on the 'identity of wisdom and self control' is meant to divert Protagoras to a red herring of debating whether 'act done in the some manner are done by the corresponding agency'<sup>82</sup>. However, Protagoras, himself a master of solecism, notices the trap and neglects it.

Protagoras as an experienced discussant and a master of 'the opportune moment' tries a few *ad hominem* strategies against Socrates. His status display in choosing to address the audience as juniors through a myth is one example. Another is his merging of the dissociative topic of 'one – many' into a contradiction during the debate on the 'Identity of Justice and Piety'.

In addition, Protagoras presses Socrates sore point by delivering a long speech on the relativity of goods, thereby instigating recalcitrance in the rhetorical situation characterised by Socrates' unfair debate rules. This recalcitrance gives the sophist some respite. It widens the circle of discussion by bringing into it other members of the audience who endeavor to control the said recalcitrance by prevailing on Socrates not to abandon the discussion.

Furthermore, Protagoras foists on Socrates the fallacy of converting a universal affirmative proposition at the debate on the 'Identity of Courage and Knowledge'. Finally, Protagoras' suspension of cooperation towards the end of the dialogue when he convinces himself, that the sophists as a class, are the objects of ridicule in the dialogue<sup>83</sup>, is one way of managing an unfavourable rhetorical situation. In that way, he turns a debate into a monologue thereby allowing an over-zealous opponent to run himself out.

It can be said that given the foregoing, Socrates' rhetorical appeal to Protagoras does not succeed as it did in the case of Hippocrates who appears to have reconsidered his aims and intentions – his 'ways of be-

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<sup>82</sup> Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* vol. IV. p. 226.

<sup>83</sup> In making this point it is supposed that Protagoras as an experienced and intelligent arguer engages himself in Carroll Arnold's 'self-rhetoric'.

ing'. Nevertheless, Socrates' appeals 'opened' Protagoras' consciousness, and this wedge is maintained by debate in the rhetorical situation much as 'self-rhetoric' would have done in the absence of an objective rhetorical situation.

However, Protagoras' possible realization that the whole debate is a pun on him and his colleagues makes him decline a reconsideration of his 'way of being', contrary to Socrates' expectation. For Protagoras, it has been a credible and worthwhile existence which is evident in his achievements and life-style. Apparently, no further argument is necessary, in his view at this stage, to prove it. So he keeps quiet as a way of indicating that Socrates' rhetorical appeal to him failed to achieve its aim. This possibly explains the complements the interlocutors pay to each other at the end of the debate.



# Four Problems with Barry Hallen's Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy

by Kibujjo Kalumba<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract: Four problems with Barry Hallen's analytic experiments in African philosophy.** Barry Hallen's two classics of African philosophy, *Knowledge Belief and Witchcraft* (subtitled: *Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy*) and *The Good the Bad and the Beautiful*, resulted from a nine-year cross-cultural work that began in 1970 among the Yoruba of Nigeria. In the field, Hallen relied on the expertise of several Yoruba *onisegun* (masters of medicine) to analyze the meanings of key Yoruba epistemological and ethical terms underscoring the criteria governing their correct usage. In the two books, Hallen compares the criteria governing the correct usage of some of the Yoruba terms with those of their supposed English equivalents, drawing several, significant philosophical and cross-cultural inferences from the comparisons. A self-proclaimed analytic philosopher, Hallen describes the method he employs in the two books as 'conceptual analysis.' In light of this method, the main purpose of my essay is to critique four important aspects of Hallen's work in terms of such 'virtues' of analytic philosophy as clarity, validity, relevance, and consistency.

**Résumé: Quatre problèmes qui s'attachent aux expérimentations analytiques que Barry Hallen a conduites en philosophie africaine.** Les deux classiques de la philosophie africaine, *Knowledge Belief and Witchcraft* (dont le sous-titre était : *Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy*) et *The Good the Bad and the Beautiful*, de Barry Hallen résultent de neuf ans de recherches effectuées à partir de 1970 chez les Yoruba du Nigeria. En la matière, Hallen s'est appuyé sur l'expertise de plusieurs *Onisegun* (maîtres de la médecine) pour comprendre les significations des principaux termes épistémologiques et éthiques yoruba afin de mettre en évidence les critères de leur bon usage. Dans

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les deux ouvrages, Hallen compare les critères régissant l'utilisation de certains termes yoruba avec leurs supposés équivalents en anglais et aboutit à des résultats significatifs tant au niveau culturel que philosophique. Se définissant comme un philosophe analytique, Hallen qualifie comme « de l'analyse conceptuelle » la méthode qu'il utilise dans ses ouvrages. A la lumière de cette méthode, le but principal de mon article est de faire la critique de quatre aspects importants de son analyse au regard des « vertus » de la philosophie analytique telles que la clarté, la validité, la pertinence et la conséquence.

**Key words:** aesthetics, African philosophy, conceptual analysis, epistemology, ethics, *onisegun*.

**Mots clefs :** l'esthétique, la philosophie africaine, l'analyse conceptuelle, l'épistémologie, l'éthique, *onisegun*

## **Introduction**

Barry Hallen's two classics of African philosophy, *Knowledge Belief and Witchcraft* and *The Good the Bad and the Beautiful*, resulted from a nine-year cross-cultural work that began in 1970, among the Yoruba of Nigeria.<sup>2</sup> His research project consisted mainly in analyzing the meanings of key Yoruba epistemic and ethical terms and comparing those meanings with those of their supposed English equivalents. In the process, Hallen ended up drawing several significant cross-cultural and philosophical conclusions. The overarching goal of his project was to introduce some of his findings into the Nigerian university curriculum, whose philosophical content was then dominated by British analytic philosophy, 'so that the "problems" and "topics" of academic philosophy could become more relevant to a Nigerian student body.' (2000: 5) Hallen (2000: 7) claims to have received his original inspiration from the work of the English philosopher J.L. Austin, the founder of ordinary-language philosophy. A self-proclaimed analytic philosopher, Hallen (1997: 10, 40, 2000: 35, 38) describes the method he employs in the two books as 'conceptual analysis.' In light of this method, the main purpose of this essay is to critique

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<sup>2</sup> *Knowledge Belief and Witchcraft* was co-authored with J. Olubi Sodipo. But for the sake of simplifying subsequent references to this book I will treat it as Hallen's single-authored work.

four important aspects of his work in terms of such 'virtues' of analytic philosophy as clearness, consistency, validity and relevance. This type of critique is not only germane to the type of philosopher Hallen is it is also a safe tool for someone like me who lacks even proficiency in the Yoruba language. Let those knowledgeable of Yoruba language and culture carry on the more substantive critical engagements of Hallen's work that are based on direct language interpretation and analysis. Let me proceed with the four criticisms.

### **1. Lack of clarity regarding the extension of the first criterion of Imo**

Hallen's main task in Chapter 2 of *Knowledge Belief and Witchcraft* is to undertake a four-tiered comparison of the meanings of the English epistemological terms 'know' and 'believe' with those of their supposed Yoruba equivalents, which, according R.C. Abraham's *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba*, are *mo* and *gbagbo*, respectively. Hallen (2000: xiii) refers to this 'most venerable of Yoruba-language dictionaries' as 'the established translation manual' (etm). The comparison is four-tiered in the sense that he compares the meanings of these two pairs at the levels of their references, their objects, the criteria governing their correct usage, as well as their sources. In specifying the meanings of 'know' and 'believe', Hallen relies especially on the works of leading English-language epistemologist Keith Lehrer, Rodney Needham, and H.H. Price. He bases the meanings of the Yoruba equivalents on the analyses of some twelve *onisegun* (master of medicine) of the *Ekiti* region of Yorubaland, who were regarded as wisest by both other members of their professional society (the *egbe*) as well as their clients. In this section I will focus on the criteria governing the correct usage of the terms 'know' and *mo*, since it is at this level of meaning and with these two terms that Hallen's analyses and comparisons entail the most significant cross-cultural and philosophical results.

Hallen (1997: 45-50) regards 'knowing that' as 'the most common' variety of knowledge and proceeds to identify its two least controversial

criteria or necessary conditions as truth and belief. That is, where S is a person and P is a proposition, S knows that P only if it is true that P and S believes that P. After adducing several direct quotations from the *onise-gun*, Hallen concludes that the *onisegun* articulate two necessary conditions for *imo* (the noun form of *mo*). The first one is *ri* or visual perception. ‘The person who claims to *mo* must *literally* have seen the thing himself.’ (1997: 60)<sup>3</sup> The second condition is *eri okon*, the witnessing of the perceiver’s *okon*<sup>4</sup> (etm: heart and mind or apprehension) that what is perceived is *ooto* (etm: true, truth). That is, ‘As well as seeing the thing first-hand, one must also comprehend what one is seeing and judge that one has done so...’ (1997: 61)

It is the first condition of *imo*, *ri*, that, according to Hallen, accounts for the precise difference in meaning between ‘know’ and *imo*. Whereas, *ri* leaves no room for any *imo* derived from second-hand information, the conditions of ‘knowing that’ do. Consequently, some information that qualifies as knowledge can fail to qualify for *imo*. For example, the average American knows (from second-hand sources) that George Washington was the first President of the United States. But he or she cannot be said to *mo* this ‘fact,’ since he or she cannot be in a position to witness it. According to Hallen, the Yoruba system of thought relegates all second-hand information to the level of *igbagbo* (the noun form of *gbagbo*), the second-best epistemic status.

The criteria that define the respective extents of and interrelations between *imo* and *igbagbo* stipulate that any experience or information which is not first-hand, personal, and direct must by definition fall under the heading of *igbagbo*. The sense of *igbagbo* may therefore be paraphrased as ‘comprehending, and deciding to accept as possible...information that one receives in a secondhand manner. *Imo*...and *igbagbo*...together exhaust all the information that human beings have at their disposal. (2000: 17)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The emphasis is added.

<sup>4</sup> Is it ‘*okon*’ or ‘*okan*’? The former is used throughout *Knowledge Belief and Witchcraft*, the latter is used throughout *The Good the Bad and the Beautiful*.

<sup>5</sup> Hallen (1997: 64) analyzes *igbagbo* as a conflation of *gba* (etm: agree) and *gbo* (etm: hear) and paraphrases its sense as ‘agreeing to accept what one hears from



Even though Hallen (1997: 84) claims that the meaning of *igbagbo* differs from that of 'belief' he does not give a criterion for *igbagbo* comparable to *ri* that sharply distinguishes the meaning of one term from that of the other. Can information that passes for belief fail to pass for *igbagbo*, or *vice versa*? This question cannot be answered by reference to Hallen's texts alone. What I find most puzzling though is the fact that after taking the criterion of *ri* to imply that 'there is virtually no margin for *imo* that has not been empirically confirmed' (1997: 72), Hallen proceeds to provide two contexts in which *imo* does not involve *literal* visual perception. The first context pertains to introspection the second involves insight. Let me elaborate.

According to Hallen (2000: 43, 51, 82) a person has privileged access to his or her motives and feelings through introspection as a result of which he or she can be said to know (*mo*) something about his or her character (*iwa*). Hallen supports this claim by invoking the words of the *onisegun* according to which an individual can *mo* if he or she is an enemy to another person.

It is only the person himself or herself who can know (*mo*) [introspectively] whether he or she is an enemy...to any other person. Because if a person could know who their enemies...are, they would do as much as possible to avoid them, but the mind of an enemy...may be very dark [difficult to identify, much less access]. (2000: 82)

This quotation provides us with a clear case of *imo* that does not involve *ri* in the literal sense of the term. I say this, because in his exposition of the Yoruba concept of the self (*inu* or *emi*), Hallen (2000: 50) attributes introspection, not to the sense of sight, *ri*, with its physical components, but to a faculty of the self called *iye inu*. But according to Hallen (2000: 89-90) the object of introspection, the self and its faculties, is not physical. Hence introspection has no physical components by virtue of either its object or the faculty responsible for it. Therefore it must be distinct from *ri*.

The possibility of *imo* by introspection evokes several questions regarding *ri* as one of *imo*'s criteria. Is *ri* necessary for all cases of *imo*? If

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someone.'

so, the *onisegun* just quoted by Hallen are using the term *imo* incorrectly. But who would expect the wisest of the wise experts in Yoruba culture to make this sort of error in the context of articulating the criteria that govern the correct usage of a small set of terms that includes this very term? Is *ri* perhaps only required for *imo* claims pertaining to things that are distinct from the subject's self? If so, then one wonders why Hallen did not see the need to make this restriction explicitly clear in his two major works.

Claims of *imo* by insight evoke similar questions and puzzlement. Hallen takes the *onisegun* to attribute insight to a special faculty of the *emi*, called *oju inu*. According to a direct quotation from the *onisegun*, there are some people known as *aje* who, by virtue of their more powerful *oju inu*, are capable of acquiring *imo* of things that are beyond the scope of the sense of sight, *ri*.

As some people are more powerful...than others, so also their intuitive insight (*oju inu*) is more powerful. There will be two [eyes] outside and two inside. We call them 'aje.' You see...that he or she will be more powerful than someone with [only] two [two eyes...]. Some people can sit down here and may know (*mo*) what is happening down there [on the other side of the town]...Their intuitive insight (*oju inu*) may be seeing other places. We call then 'aje.' (2000: 93)

As was the case with introspection, the *imo* the *onisegun* attribute to the *aje* in this passage cannot be said to involve literal *ri* by virtue of either its objects or the faculty responsible for it. Might it be the case that *ri* is only required for *imo* claims of ordinary people and that extraordinary peoples' *imo* claims, such as those of the *aje*, are exempt from this requirement?<sup>6</sup> If so, Hallen does not give a clear statement of this exemption in his two main texts?

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<sup>6</sup> Even though conventionally translated as 'witch,' Hallen (2000: 86-97) renders 'aje' into English as 'intellectual.' He attempts to demythologize the *aje* and proceeds to regard them as human beings with superior intelligence and ability. The *onisegun* quoted by Hallen claim that, unlike ordinary human being who have one *emi*, the *aje* have two. It is not exactly clear from the text though if the number is literal or metaphorical.

## **2. Classification of information acquired by inference**

Judging from the above-quoted passage in which Hallen explains the difference between *imo* and *igbagbo*, all information that is not acquired directly should be classified as *igbagbo*, even if the acquisition of the information in question involves *ri* in some indirect manner. It is puzzling then to see the *onisegun* calling *imo* some information that by Hallen's admission (2000: 67) is acquired by inference. According to the *onisegun*:

If you are doing ... what is good... they will say your character (*iwa*) is good... If you are doing what is bad ...they will say your character (*iwa*) is bad... They know (*mo*) your character (*iwa*) from the way you behave... (2000: 41)

The biggest problem with classifying as *imo* information that is acquired by inference from what is directly visible to what is invisible is that the classification undermines what Hallen regards as a significant cross-cultural consequence of the *imo/igbagbo* distinction. Let me elaborate.

Hallen (1997: 72-73, 2000: 13-19) contends that, as explicated by the *onisegun*, the *imo/igbagbo* distinction puts a critical check on the hasty generalizations about traditional people by 'intellectualist,' like Robin Horton. Horton (1967) argues that there is a striking similarity between traditional people and theoretical scientists, because both groups seek to explain the visible world in terms of the invisible world. Horton, however, observes a two-fold difference between the two groups. The first difference is one of medium of explanation. Whereas, traditional people's explanations are in terms of the behavior of gods and spirits, a fact that makes their explanatory beliefs religious, scientists' explanations are in terms of the behavior of such theoretical entities as atoms, particles, and so on, making their explanatory beliefs 'theoretical.' The second difference is one of attitude toward the explanatory beliefs. According to Horton, traditional people see their religious beliefs as constituting a revered, closed system that must be accepted uncritically and passed on unchanged from generation to generation. According to Horton, empirical testing is alien to traditional people for whom appealing to the ancestors

is the only known form of justification. In contrast, Horton contends that scientists regard their theoretical beliefs critically, as always open to revision through further empirical testing.

Hallen's contention is that Horton's generalization is contradicted by the case of the Yoruba. According to Hallen, the *imo/igbagbo* distinction in the language of these traditional people suggests that they don't revere their religious beliefs to the extent suggested by Horton. Since the Yoruba acquire their religious beliefs from oral tradition, which is a second-hand source, they cannot accord them the highest epistemic status of *imo*. Instead, they relegate these beliefs to the lower epistemic status of *igbagbo*, the status of information that one agrees to accept as possibly true. As for the alleged lack of criticism and empirical testing, Hallen says that the *imo/igbagbo* distinction suggests that the Yoruba treat critically all beliefs acquired from oral tradition (including all religious beliefs), as merely hypothetical, until they are verified by first-hand observation.

What was said to be distinctive about African oral traditions was the relatively uncritical manner in which they were inherited from the past, preserved in the present, and passed on to future generations... One problem for this...portrait of the African intellectual attitude toward tradition is that it is contradicted by the manner in which the Yoruba employ 'mo' and 'gbagbo' in discourse. If my grandfather tells me that he knows the recipe for a potent headache medicine (that he in turn learned from his grandfather) and teaches it to me-this exchange of information would still be on the level of *igbagbo*, of secondhand information. I could not be said to have *imo* of this medicine as medicine until I myself had prepared it, administered it to someone, and witnessed its curative powers... [A] tradition deserves to remain a tradition only if it proves effective... Until this has been proved in a direct and personal manner its empirical status can be no more than hypothetical, something that may possibly be true (or false) and therefore must be classed as *igbagbo*. (2000: 19)

Hallen's critical check on Horton's generalization would be beyond reproach if all traditional Yoruba acquired all their religious beliefs from the secondhand source of oral traditions. Yet if Horton is right, and Hallen does not oppose this particular aspect of his views, there are traditional Yoruba that acquire at least some of their religious beliefs by inference from what they perceive directly. An *onisegun* might, for example, acquire by inference a religious belief about a certain ancestor in

the process of diagnosing the cause of an unusual body rash. In general, any creative traditional thinker may, by observing some puzzling phenomenon in the visible world, infer any number of general religious statements about the spiritual world as the best explanation for it. Since the *onisegun* classified as *imo* information about the invisible *emi* that is inferred from observations of visible behavior, *consistency* would require the *onisegun* to use the same appellation of *imo* regarding information about the invisible spiritual world that is inferred from observations of visible phenomena in the physical world. If my observation is plausible, then some traditional Yoruba, indeed some of the best thinkers among them, revere some religious beliefs as known truths (*imo* entails *ooto* or truth). This consequent clearly undermines Hallen's criticism of Horton.

### **3. An unwarranted inference**

Hallen contends that the high epistemic status knowledge and truth enjoy in English-language culture is due to the fact that both concepts are more than personal.

'Information that is labeled 'knowledge' and 'true' becomes so, in principle, for anyone. Knowledge and truth thereby transcend the personal, the subjective, and assume the cloak of universality.' (2000: 20)

In contrast, Hallen argues that '*imo*' and '*ooto*,' the supposed Yoruba equivalents of the two English terms, necessarily involve a personal element that makes them 'veer markedly toward the subjective.' (2000: 20). Hallen is careful not to deny the Yoruba an objective notion of truth. His sole point is that *ooto* involves a personal element and that

'in Yoruba discourse...it has not been possible to identify a single term that conveys a truth that is more than personal, that attaches to propositions or things independently of whoever happens to be experiencing them.' (2000: 28)

The personal element to *imo* is obviously due to the criterion of *ri*. Hallen bases the personal element to *ooto* on its criteria as well, which he states formally as follows:

$Ri + eri\ okon \supset ooto$  and  $ooto \supset ri + eri\ okon$ . (1997: 62)

Assuming that *ooto* is a necessary condition of *imo*, as the latter's second criterion seems to suggest, and assuming further that the first and second criteria of *imo* are together sufficient for it, the first (sufficient) condition of *ooto* can be justified by the following simple formal argument:

1.  $Imo \supset ooto$
2.  $Ri + eri\ okon \supset imo$
3.  $\therefore Ri + eri\ okon \supset ooto$ .

It is, however, the second (necessary) condition of *ooto* that is directly responsible for its alleged inability to shed the personal element, and Hallen uses the following words of the *onisegun* to justify this condition:

It is *ooto* that this motor vehicle stands here. If people say that the motor vehicle does not stand here, you will say that you use your own eyes to see it - that it is *ooto*. You should not have two thoughts. (1997: 62)

As they stand in translation these words of the *onisegun* do not logically support what Hallen claims be the necessary condition of *ooto*. Since the *onisegun* use *ri* in this passage to justify *ooto*, the most that is derivable from it is that *ri* is a sufficient condition for *ooto*, a claim that makes perfect sense in the case of veridical *ri*. Frankly, I find it hard to believe that Hallen failed to notice this *non-sequitur*.<sup>7</sup> But, given the centrality of the concept of truth in any cognitive system, I find it even harder to believe that Hallen chose to base the meaning of *ooto* solely on one three-sentence quotation. Couldn't Hallen argue, though, that *imo* and *ooto* are so intimately related that since the former is 'subjective' the latter must be 'subjective' as well? This sort of argument might be implicit in the following (rhetorical?) question. 'If *imo* arises from a subjec-

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<sup>7</sup> Might knowing the lead question that elicited the *onisegun*'s response throw some light on how Hallen was sold on to this *non-sequitur*? It might. Unfortunately, though, Hallen has not published his lead questions. According to Mike Reynolds, one of my best African philosophy students, failure to provide these questions is the biggest problem with Hallen's project.

tive base, does it make sense to couple this aspect of experience with a translation of “*ooto*” – “truth” - that in English usage implies, above all, intersubjective agreement?’ (Hallen, 2000: 22) My view is that this question cannot only answered in terms of the specific relation that exists between *imo* and *ooto*. If, as we have seen above, *ooto* is regarded as no more than a necessary condition for *imo*, then the subjectivity of *imo* cannot be used as sufficient evidence for the subjectivity of *ooto*.

#### **4. The relevance of Quine's indeterminacy thesis of radical translation**

Chapter 1 of Hallen's *Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft* is devoted to an extended discussion of W.V. O. Quine's Indeterminacy Thesis of Radical Translation. A behaviorist, Quine denies abstract meanings to verbal expressions and accepts only empirical meanings, that is, meanings that can be expressed in terms of immediate physical stimuli. Consequently, Quine classifies all verbal expressions into two groups: observation sentences and standing sentences. Observation sentences comprise all those verbal expressions whose meanings can be readily expressed in terms of physical stimuli, that is, meanings that can be taught ostensively. Standing or theoretical sentences, in contrast, are such that their meanings cannot be taught by ostension as those meanings are not describable in terms of immediate physical stimuli. Quine contends that translations of standing sentences from one language into another are totally indeterminate. That is, given any translation of a standing sentence, a different, equally plausible translation of that same sentences is always possible, and there is no conclusive way to determine which one of the competing translations is the correct one. This obtains because neither of the competing translations can be put to a discriminating empirical test. In contrast, Quine argues that translations of observation sentences can be accomplished with some level of determinacy, since at least some of the competing translations can be ruled out by reference to immediate physical stimuli. Roughly, this is the Indeterminacy Thesis as summarized by Hallen.

Hallen's interest in the Indeterminacy Thesis stems from the fact

that a big part of his project consists of comparing the ‘meanings’ of Yoruba epistemic and ethical terms with those of their supposed English equivalents. Since the Yoruba meanings are proposed in terms of verbal expressions, such as *ri*, Hallen is concerned that translations of these expressions into English might turn out to be indeterminate, making these translations unreliable bases for his desired comparisons. He addresses this concern as follows.

Focusing on the level of criteria and objects for the key epistemic terms *mo* and *gbagbo*, Hallen (1997: 81-84) argues that a significant number of the verbal expressions representing the meanings of these two terms at these levels are observation sentences. Consequently, he contends that their translations into English are sufficiently determinate to serve as stable bases for his cross-cultural comparisons. As examples of the relevant verbal expressions that he regards as observation sentences, Hallen give *ri*, the first criterion of *mo* and the objects of *mo* which he takes to be ‘propositions’ and ‘experiences’. Regarding *gbagbo*, Hallen cites its criteria of ‘absence of *ri*’ and ‘what one is told’ as well as its objects, such as, ‘oral tradition,’ ‘formal education,’ and ‘book information.’ I have argued elsewhere that none of these verbal expressions that Hallen regards as observation sentences are observation sentences in any recognizable sense of the term. Take *ri*, for example. If it is translatable as ‘visual perception,’ then it refers to a complex process whose meaning cannot be taught ostensibly. And I don’t believe it takes much sophistication to realize the ‘theoretical’ nature of the meanings of Hallen’s other verbal expressions.<sup>8</sup>

Hallen (2000: 183) acknowledges my critical discussion of his *Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft*. Given his awareness of my criticism, It is surprising to see that, in subsequent works, Hallen continues to treat his translations of the meanings of *mo* and *gbagbo* as if they were immune to the Indeterminacy Thesis. It is even more surprising to see that in *The Good the Bad and the Beautiful*, even though Quine’s name is mentioned several times (e.g., pp. x, xiii, and 42), no effort is made to give

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<sup>8</sup> See Kalumba (1996: 154).



empirical meanings to any of the involved Yoruba ethical or esthetical terms. Did the Indeterminacy Thesis lose its relevance for Hallen's project? If not, he needs to explain why he stopped worrying about the empirical content of the project's key Yoruba terms.

## **Conclusion**

I share the conviction underlying Hallen's project that

'the systematic analysis of ordinary...language usage in...African cultures can prove to be of fundamental philosophical value. (2000: 1)

I also believe that the conclusions of his analytic experiments, so far, are very significant, though, as he himself has admitted 'incomplete' (1997: 85). My hope is that the critique presented in this essay will contribute to the completion of Hallen's worthy project. If my observations are plausible, the work ahead will require revisiting Hallen's original data, or even conducting fresh research. This seems to be the only way precision will be gained on the extension of *ri*, and convincing support be adduced for the criteria of *ooto*. It will also require coming to terms with the relevance of the Indeterminacy Thesis. In all likelihood, these endeavors will call for a modification of some of Hallen's current cross-cultural conclusions.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> With minor revisions, this essay was read at the Annual Conference of the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, in January 2007.

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# The eclectic scientism of Félix Guattari

## Africanist anthropology as both critic and potential beneficiary of his thought

Wim M.J. van Binsbergen<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** Félix Guattari's scientism: Africanist cultural anthropology as both critic and potential beneficiary of his thought (*Le scientisme de Félix Guattari: L'ethnologie africaniste comme critique aussi bien que bénéficiaire potentiel de sa pensée*). Looking at Guattari's work (often in combination with Deleuze's) from the cross-roads of philosophy and cultural anthropology, this article sets out by situating Guattari within the contemporary awareness that the subject as a construct is specific in time and place. The subject produced by late-capitalist technocratic society faces specific predicaments which Guattari's work helps us to identify and partially remedy. Guat-

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to my colleague Henk Oosterling, who brought me to Guattari's work, and who together with S. Thisse was the inspiring editor of a collection on Guattari, *Chaos ex machina: Het ecosofisch werk van Félix Guattari op de kaart gezet*, Rotterdam: Instituut voor de Studie van Filosofie en Kunst (1998), in which a highly truncated Dutch-language draft of the present article was included. Many of the themes discussed in the present argument have been more extensively treated in my Rotterdam inaugural address: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1999, 'Culturen bestaan niet': *Het onderzoek van interculturaliteit als een openbreken van vanzelfsprekendheden*, Rotterdam: Faculteit der Wijsbegeerte Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, Rotterdamse Filosofische Studies XXIV; a greatly revised and expanded English version of which was published as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2002, 'Cultures do not exist': Exploding self-evidences in the investigation of interculturality', *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, special issue on language and culture, 13: 37-114; and in: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2003, *Intercultural encounters: African and anthropological lessons towards a philosophy of interculturality*, Berlin / Boston / Münster: LIT, ch. 15, pp. 459-524; and most recently in van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2007, 'The underpinning of scientific knowledge systems: Epistemology or hegemonic power? The implications of Sandra Harding's critique of North Atlantic science for the appreciation of African knowledge systems', in: Hountondji, Paulin J., ed., *La rationalité, une ou plurielle*, Dakar: CODESRIA [Conseil pour le développement de la recherche en sciences sociales en Afrique] / UNESCO [Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'éducation, la science et la culture], pp. 294-327.

tari favours an aestheticising over a scientific knowledge paradigm, in a bid to deprogram such schizogenic effects as modern subjectivity entails. This renders his use of language and concepts kaleidoscopic and brings it close to that of New Age. His eclectic, and playfully superficial, poetic appropriation of domains of knowledge especially addresses the natural sciences and mathematics, but also extends to anthropology, and there it remains remarkably altering and dated. Yet, despite these negative points, his work is of great positive significance for anthropology today. It offers us a rich and liberating perspective on identity and globalisation, virtuality and the culture of capitalism; it helps us to develop an anthropology of non-meaning, of violence, and of the subconscious. It points the way to a post-hegemonic aesthetics of anthropological field-work. In general, its insistence on deprogramming / reterritorialisation leads to a re-evaluation of art as a crucial factor for the future, but – besides art – also implies an intercultural role for anthropological knowledge production. Even so, the argument situates itself in a field of tension between the idiosyncratic, ludic liberation advocated by Guattari, and the collectively managed formats and methodologies of knowledge production, on which scientific truth claims depend, also in anthropology.

**Résumé: Le scientisme de Félix Guattari: L'ethnologie africaniste comme critique aussi bien que bénéficiaire potentiel de sa pensée.** Cet article considère l'œuvre de Guattari (souvent en combinaison avec celle de Deleuze) du point de vue de l'intersection entre la philosophie et l'ethnologie. Il commence par situer Guattari dans le cadre de la notion contemporaine qui déclare le sujet comme une construction qui est spécifique dans l'espace aussi bien que dans le temps. Le sujet qui a été produit par la société technocratique du capitalisme tardif rencontre des défis spécifiques que l'œuvre de Guattari nous aide à identifier et, partiellement, remédier. Guattari favorise un paradigme esthétisant sur un paradigme de connaissance scientifique – et comme ça il vise à déprogrammer les effets schizogéniques impliqués dans la subjectivité moderne. Par conséquent de cette tendance esthétisante, sa langage et ses concepts deviennent kaléidoscopiques, et s'approchent quelque peu à ceux du mouvement 'New Age'. Son appropriation éclectique, et ludiquement superficielle, de domaines de savoir se dirige surtout aux sciences naturelles et mathématiques, mais s'étend aussi vers l'ethnologie, et dans ce cas-là elle est remarquablement altérisante et datée. Néanmoins, en dépit de ces points négatifs, son œuvre a une grande signification positive pour l'ethnologie d'aujourd'hui. Il nous offre une perspective riche et libératrice sur l'identité et la mondialisation, la virtualité et la culture du capitalisme ; aussi, il nous aide à développer une ethnologie du non-sens, de la violence, et du subconscient. Il nous indique la route pour un esthétique post-hégémonique des recherches de terrain anthropologiques. En général, son insistance sur la « re-territorialisation » (le processus d'être déprogrammé) nous conduit à une réévaluation de l'art comme facteur décisif pour le futur. Mais – à part de l'art – il aussi implique une rôle interculturelle pour la production de savoirs anthropologiques. Ce qui n'empêche pas que l'argument se situe dans un champs de tension entre la libération ludique idiosyncrasique telle que propagée par Guattari, de

l'un coté, et, de l' autre coté, les formats et méthodologies de la production du savoir – formats et méthodologies qui sont gérés *collectivement*, et sur lesquels se basent toute déclaration, toute réclamation de vérité scientifique.

**key words:** scientism, Guattari, Deleuze, cultural anthropology, paradigm, schizogenesis , modern subjectivity, New Age, poetics, natural sciences, alterisation, objectivation, exotism, globalisation, virtuality, culture of capitalism, non-meaning, violence, subconscious, hegemony, field-work, art, methodology, kaleidoscopsics

**mots clefs:** scientisme, Guattari, Deleuze, ethnologie, paradigme, schizogénèse, subjectivité moderne, New Age, poétique, sciences naturelles, altérisation, objectivation, exotisme, mondialisation, virtualité, culture du capitalisme, non-sens, la violence, subconscient, hégémonie, recherche de terrain, art, méthodologie, kaléidoscopique

## **1. Introduction: The historicity of subjectivity**

Since the 1960s post-structuralism has constituted the main form of Continental philosophy, and after the initial success of Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard, the last two decades have seen the rise to fame of Giles Deleuze (1925-1995) and the psychiatrist-philosopher Félix Guattari (1930-1992) – who published several major books together.<sup>2</sup> Félix Guattari, on whom we shall concentrate in the present argument, may be situated in a fairly unique field of tension defined by:

- therapy
- Marxist-orientated political engagement and activism
- theory (notably the theory and analysis of symbols), and finally
- art

In this way Guattari has taken very seriously the common dream of Marx-

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<sup>2</sup> Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F., 1972, *L'Anti-Oedipe: Capitalisme et schizophrénie, I*, Paris: Minuit; English tr. 1977, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*, New York: Viking Press; Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F., 1980, *Mille plateaux: Capitalisme et schizophrénie, II*, Paris: Minuit; English tr. *A thousand plateaux*, tr. B. Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1987; and, written earlier but published much later: Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F., 1991, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, Paris: Minuit.

ist intellectuals in the 1960s-1980s, – a dream aspiring to the responsible and relevant union of theory and praxis, of theoretical social analysis and a concrete research praxis which would automatically be a political praxis at the same time, and in which the reductionist shortcomings of the Marxist approach to symbols would be overcome.

What most inspired Guattari to the elaboration of his ideas on these points was the therapeutic environment of La Borde near Paris, France. Largely a creation of Guattari in the first place, La Borde was (and in some respects still is) a laboratory for the exploration of freedom, deprogramming, for breaking out of schizoid compulsive repetition – all of them hope-inspiring achievements which Guattari also recognises more in general in art and in other creative forms of ‘reterritorialisation’. Therefore, an extensive description of what Guattari considered essential in La Borde provides us with a key to his thinking on the meaning of creativity in the present era:

‘Social ecology and mental ecology have found privileged sites of exploration in the experiences of institutional psychotherapy. I am obviously thinking of the clinic at La Borde, where I have worked for a long time; everything there is set up so that psychotic patients live in a climate of activity and assume responsibility, not only with the goal of developing an ambience of communication, but also in order to create local centres for collective subjectivation. Thus it’s not simply a matter of remodelling a patient’s subjectivity – as it existed before a psychotic crisis – but of a production *sui generis*. For example, certain psychotic patients, coming from poor agricultural backgrounds, will be invited to take up plastic arts, drama, video, music, etc., whereas until then, these universes had been unknown to them. On the other hand, bureaucrats and intellectuals will find themselves attracted to material work, in the kitchen, garden, pottery, horse riding club. The important thing here is not only the confrontation with a new material of expression, but the constitution of complexes of subjectivation: multiple exchanges between individual-group-machine. These complexes actually offer people diverse possibilities for re-composing their existential corporeality, to get out of their repetitive impasses and, in a certain way, to re-singularise themselves. Grafts of transference<sup>3</sup> op-

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<sup>3</sup> As a psychiatrist, Guattari here specifically refers to *transference* between client and therapist as a central tool, but also a main stumbling-block, of psychoanalysis. In transference, the inner conflicts of the clients deceptively appear as if embodied by the person of the therapist, and vice-versa. While familiar with such transference as a therapist (and indeed, as a patient), in my intercultural-philosophical critique of cultural anthropological fieldwork I have used the concept in a modified way: arguing

erate in this way, not issuing from ready-made dimensions of subjectivity crystallised into structural complexes, but from a creation which itself indicates a kind of aesthetic paradigm. One creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way that an artist creates new forms from the palette. In such a context, the most heterogeneous components may work towards a patient's positive evolution: relations with architectural space; economic relations; the co-management by patient and carer of the different vectors of treatment; taking advantage of all occasions opening onto the outside world; a processual exploitation of event-centred 'singularities' – everything which can contribute to the creation of an authentic relation with the other. To each of these components of the caring institution there corresponds a necessary practice. We are not confronted with a subjectivity given as in itself, but with processes of the realisation of autonomy, or of autopoiesis...'<sup>4</sup>

Central in Guattari's work is the reflection on subjectivity, and on the historical processes that produce, contest and subjugate subjectivity. He defines subjectivity as:

'The ensemble of conditions which render possible the emergence of individual and/ or collective instances as self-referential existential Territories, adjacent, or in a delimiting relation, to an alterity that is itself subjective.'<sup>5</sup>

With Deleuze, with Foucault (vis-à-vis Guattari combines both unmistakable distance, and considerable kinship of thought)<sup>6</sup> – and incidentally also with Lyotard even though the latter is not mentioned by Guattari in this connection,<sup>7</sup> – Guattari demands attention for the *non*-human ('ma-

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– mainly with reference to the details of my own fieldwork in various parts of Africa – that what the fieldworker reads into the host society and culture, may also be saturated with transference in the sense that he or she is tempted to subconsciously project inner, often infantile, conflicts onto the hosts in his or her field interaction with them, and in the subsequent, written analysis of the society and culture under study.

<sup>4</sup> Guattari, F., *Chaosmosis: An ethico-aesthetic paradigm*, tr. Bains, P., & Pefanis, J., Sydney: Power Publications, originally: *Chaosmose*, Paris: Galilée, 1992, p. 6f.

<sup>5</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis, o.c.*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Guattari, F., 1992, *Les années d'hiver*, Paris: Barrault Bernard, p. 207f; Guattari in interview, as quoted in: Stivale, C.J., 1993, 'Pragmatic/Machinic: Discussion with Felix Guattari (19 March 1985)', *Pre-Text: A Journal of Rhetorical Theory*, 14, 3-4: 215-250.

<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere Guattari does mention Lyotard, notably where the former takes a distance from the latter's characterisation of the postmodern condition; cf. Guattari, F., 1989,

chic’) side of subjectivity. This non-human side of subjectivity lies, among other things, in language and in the mass media. Guattari’s emphasis on this point contains an obvious lesson for cultural anthropology, which (on the basis of a philosophically under-analysed conception of man as is endemic in that branch of social science) tends to overemphasise the constructability, the nature of being constructed, of culture, and the volitional dimension of the formation of patterns in individual behaviour.<sup>8</sup> However, beyond language and mass media, Guattari identifies capitalism as the main force working on subjectivity – for capitalism produces a highly specific form of subjectivation which is subservient to capitalism; we shall come back to this below.

Typical of Guattari’s work as a post-structuralist, post-modern philosopher is the awareness that *there can be no privileged position from which the philosopher (or the empirical researcher, for that matter) surveys the world and obtains authority for his or her pronouncements*. The opposite position is implied in systematic philosophies and in dominant paradigms within mainstream disciplines of empirical research – their edifices of theory, method and consistency are in fact meant to constitute such privileged positions, as a basis for scientific truth claims. Much of the charm of Guattari’s work resides in his essentially unpretentious, yet egotistic and pedestrian, idiosyncratic positioning, in which he poetically uses the results of scientific work while making light with all method and paradigmatic control (on which these scientific results’ claims to truth yet wholly depend). For a critic this has worrying implications, for whereas the critic’s field of expertise and erudition would implicitly appear, to himself, as a privileged position from which to pass a devastating judgement on Guattari, a more congenial reading of the latter’s work would tend to evaporate such authority, and reduce the critical encounter to a

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*Cartographies schizoanalytiques*, Paris: Galilée, p. 56; cf. Lyotard, J.-F., 1979, *La condition post-moderne*, Paris: Minuit. On the many parallels between Lyotard’s and Guattari’s work especially in the period of the latter’s collaboration with Deleuze, see: Oosterling, H., 1996, *Door schijn bewogen: Naar een hyperkritiek van de xenofobe rede*, Kampen: Kok Agora, pp. 562, 586.

<sup>8</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis, o.c.*, p. 9.



strictly personal, idiosyncratic duel between antagonists who have no other claim to validity than the ephemeral paper tigers of their verbal constructs; as if they were divine tricksters in combat in African or Native American folktales. This would be an adequate definition of the present critical encounter, if only the choice of weapons and the definition of the rules of criticism were entirely left to one of the two combatants, to Guattari. Both impressed and irritated by Guattari's work, and with considerable sympathy for the overall post-modern philosophical position he represents, I have attempted to steer a middle course, in which my own professional experience as an anthropologist and an intercultural philosopher is not so much taken as a privileged position, but as a more or less arbitrary vantage point from which to interrogate Guattari's work, without the pretension that in this way I could arrive at some valid final judgment. It is in line with this self-positioning that I will find much that is wrong with Guattari's treatment of anthropology, yet will conclude my discussion by pointing out the several ways in which anthropology could benefit from Guattari. Even so, the entire argument situates itself in a field of tension between the idiosyncratic, ludic liberation advocated by Guattari, and the collectively managed formats and methodologies of knowledge production, on which scientific truth claims depend, also in anthropology.

## **2. *Between natural science and the poetics of magic: Guattari's 'scientistic' style of writing and thinking***

For Guattari (and in this respect he is an exponent of modern Freud criticism) the psychoanalytical schemas as presented by Freud are merely human inventions, and not the revelation of objective scientific facts. These schemas introduce new ways of generating experiences.<sup>9</sup> Guattari also sees his own psychiatric explorations, his own 'schizo-analytical mappings', not as scientific theory but rather as essays indicative of one of the many possible forms of the interaction between the human creative

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<sup>9</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 10.

mind and the surrounding world:

‘Just as an artist borrows from his precursors and contemporaries the traits which suit him, I invite those who read me to take or rejects my concepts freely.’<sup>10</sup>

This means that the main thrust of Guattari’s writings is not primarily scientific, but in his own words *ethico-aesthetic*, for which I propose to substitute the term ‘*scientistic*’.<sup>11</sup>

‘My perspective involves shifting the human and social sciences from scientific paradigms towards ethico-aesthetic paradigms. It’s no longer a question of determining whether the Freudian Unconscious or the Lacanian Unconscious provide scientific answers to the problems of the psyche. From now on these models, along with the others, will only be considered in terms of the production of subjectivity – inseparable as much from the technical and institutional apparatuses which promote it as from their impact on psychiatry, university teaching or the mass media ... In a more general way, one has to admit that every individual and social group conveys its own system of modelising subjectivity: that is, a certain cartography – composed of cognitive references as well as mythical, ritual and symptomatological references – with which it positions itself in relation to its affects and anguishes, and attempts to manage its inhibitions and drives.’<sup>12</sup>

Guattari goes very far in choosing an aestheticising instead of a mainstream scientific paradigm. For in the pursuit of his essayist type of intellectual production, he employs, of all possible literary material, a genre of scientising writing, full of formulas, diagrams, schemas, matrixes etc. The result is disconcertingly hard to distinguish from the language of New Age. For Guattari the elementary particles of physics, the remotest galaxies and the Big Bang hypothesis, constitute just as obvious subject matter for his nervous, compelling, kaleidoscopic, incessantly argumentative style of discourse, as the violent events at the Square of Di-

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<sup>10</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> The suffix ‘-istic’ is often used as an intensity marker, indicating that the entity in question displays to an excessive degree the usual characteristics indicated by the adjective, e.g. ‘sociologistic’, i.e. ‘not allowing any other explanation but a sociological one’. In my own usage here, however, the suffix conveys an aestheticising, decontextualised caricature of the original, in this case of modern world-wide science.

<sup>12</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 10f.

vine Peace, Beijing 1989, or the Eastern Block politics of the sometime American President Ronald Reagan. As we see, Guattari philosophises for topicality rather than for eternity – and topicality rapidly gets stale. His scientism consists in that he employs the language and imagery of science, not because these are supposed to represent some impersonal and lasting truth, but because, aesthetically, they produce seductive language that is, at the same time, inspiring to action. The point of knowledge, for Guattari, is not that it coincides with truth but that it indicates the road to freedom.

Personally I have a considerable problem with such language use full of natural scientific, philosophical and political *names-dropping*, with incessant kaleidoscopic effects. Such language use has for me the same combination of on the one hand forbidden, almost libidinous fascination, and on the other hand overt rejection and disgust, as the language of astrology – whose history and worldwide distribution I have studied intensely over the last two decades in the context of a large comparative and historical research project intended to help me situate prominent African forms of divination. Both forms of language use constitute some sort of pornography of science.

Nonetheless we must be conscious of a huge difference, which limits the comparability of today's astrology and today's natural science to the extent to which the latter is being appropriated by Guattari. The surprisingly massive<sup>13</sup> production of astrology in the North Atlantic region today is rightly called 'pseudo-science', because – even though astrology once started, in the Ancient Near East four thousand years ago, as the spearhead of proto-science at the time, and even though astrology was still taught as a university subject in the 18<sup>th</sup> century CE) – already a few centuries ago astrology as a branch of systematic knowledge production detached itself entirely from the collective, critical and academically managed, disciplinary canons of the theory and method of science. In Barthes' characterisation of astrology today:

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<sup>13</sup> In the Google Internet search machine, the search term 'astrology' (in English alone) returns 40,000,000 pages, the more specific 'western astrology' (likewise just in English) still returns 489,000 pages (retrieved 5-1-2009).

‘Elle sert à exorciser le réel en le nommant. (...) L’astrologie est la littérature du monde petit-bourgeois.’<sup>14</sup>

Astrology thus could be a good example of what in Guattari’s terminology would be called *deterritorialisation* (perhaps to be translated as ‘up-rootedness’?): *a closed system that does not, or does no longer, produce knowledge for freedom.*<sup>15</sup> In the course of the last three centuries, science

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<sup>14</sup> Barthes, R., 1957, *Mythologies*, Paris: Seuil, p. 168; cf. van Binsbergen, *Intercultural encounters, o.c.*, pp. 244f.

<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, in my book *Intercultural encounters, o.c.*, ch. 7, I cast doubt upon such an argument. I do this, not by attributing any direct veridicity to the professional procedures of modern astrology *per se*, but by describing how a professional astrologer in practice arrives at his or her pronouncements. Under the appearance of astronomical, unequivocal exactitude, a plethora of astrological ‘planets’ including Sun, Moon, Earth, and merely mathematically defined points such as lunar nodes and Mid-heaven, activate a network of extremely complex and usually massively contradictory correspondences. This produces such a ‘superabundance of understanding’ (cf. Werbner, R.P., 1973, ‘The superabundance of understanding: Kalanga rhetoric and domestic divination’, *American Anthropologist*, 75: 414-440) that, in the absence of any consistent and unequivocal result, the astrologer, making creative use of the *many degrees of freedom* which the astrological system in fact allows for (so much for deterritorialisation!), actively designs a selective compromise of contradictions, in which that astrologer’s own knowledge and intuition about the client and the latter’s situation prevail in such a way that the final pronouncement strikes that client as revealing and relevant, positively inspiring further action. In the same book also, on the basis of my practice of two decades as an effective and successful African diviner, I have initiated an argument that in subsequent years has gradually taken more definite shape: a central implication of modern quantum mechanics is that there is an inextricable threesome consisting of (1) our measurement results, (2) ourselves as experimenters, and (3) the world, therefore our thought is actively and in the most literal sense world-creating – the world (which is protean beyond human understanding anyway) may, to a considerable extent, turn to us the face that corresponds with the mindset in which we approach it; if our mindset is that of nineteenth-century CE (i.e. Newtonian, pre-quantum mechanics and pre-relativity) mechanistic natural science, astrology can only return results that appear to us illusory and meaningless; but if we approach the world with the mindset of astrologers of the Ancient Near East or the European Renaissance, the world may turn to us that particular face that is more or less in line with the assumptions of astrology. And, as I found in my divinatory practice over the years, the same can be said of African geomantic divination, where very much to my surprise, and contrary to all expectations I brought to my encounter with African divination as a highly trained social scientist and expert statistician, my divination usually turned out to be veridical. Apart from the facile accusation of downright fraud, the standard, sceptical explanation of such a subjective researcher’s

and technology have totally transformed the world (especially North Atlantic society and its worldwide socio-cultural satellites), in such a way that science and technology have (in a way cogently argued by Foucault) supplanted religion as the central legitimating, truth-producing and hence world-creating factor. For Guattari this implies that science and technology, too, are *detrterritorialised* fortresses of unfreedom *par excellence*.<sup>16</sup> His playful, essentially artistic, superficial and nominal appropriation of today's science must then be seen, I suggest, primarily as an attempt of *reterritorialising* this recently emerged omnipotence towards the service of freedom – Guattari's own freedom in the first place. In other words, in an attempt to break open what he experiences as the suffocating framework of our time and age, Guattari turns, courageously and deliberately, science that is disciplinary valid to begin with, into a form of pseudo-science, into pornography of thought.

In *Chaosmosis*, Guattari's main book that was not co-authored, *Chaosmosis*, Guattari states that his worldview has four dimensions, which he defines as follows:

'En raison d'une segmentation des axes de deterritorialisation et de discursivité, sur laquelle je reviendrai plus loin, le Plan de Consistance se trouve divisé en quatre domaines de consistances:

- les Flux energetico-signalétiques (F.), dont les entités sont disposées en Complexions;
- les Phylum machiniques abstraits (P.), dont les entités sont disposées en

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impression is that the researcher's mindset has unintentionally falsified that researcher's assessment of reality. My own explanation, however, is that – since reality is multifaceted and protean anyway, beyond our wildest imaginations – the researcher's mindset (as one of the three components of the quantum-mechanical interactive world-image: observer, experiment, and reality) has helped to produce an assessment of reality that is valid, even though it is strikingly different from the – equally valid – assessment which the specific mindset of a modern natural scientist would produce under laboratory conditions governed by willful instrumentality.

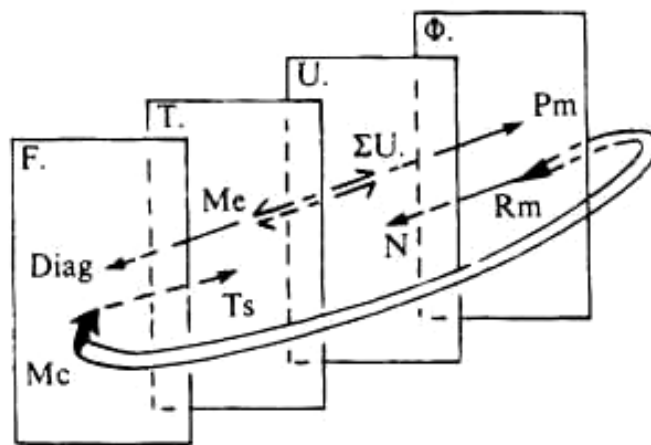
<sup>16</sup> Thus, although he does cite the great theoretician of prehistoric technology Leroi-Gourhan, Guattari ignores the common argument that technology in itself is primarily liberating, since it progressively reduces humankind's vulnerability in the face of the body's dependence on food and shelter, dramatically increases the distance over which human beings can be effective as communicators, food producers etc., and over which they can exert force, even violence, far exceeding the muscle power of their own bodies.

Rhizomes;

- les Territoires existentiels (T.), dont les entités sont disposées en De-coupes;
- les Univers incorporels (U.), dont les entités sont disposées en Constella-tions.<sup>17</sup>

Here appears the following intriguing figure which would be just as much in place in a magical handbook (it is reminiscent of the Hermetic Ourobouros snake biting its rear end, ubiquitous in esoteric writings):

*Fig. 1. The four dimensions of Guattari's reality*



*'Feuilletage des quatre niveaux de quantification intensive'<sup>18</sup>*

The relationships which Guattari claims to exist between these dimensions and their various manifestations are described in a language that is strongly reminiscent of electronics and the mechanics of fluids (as branches of physics). In my opinion, Guattari, a psychiatrist by training, uses such a scientific terminology, not primarily for the economy of expression through the use of compact but highly significant scientific notation; nor in the hope of sharing in the powers of persuasion which any manifestations of the scientific may claim in public opinion today; but

<sup>17</sup> Guattari, *Cartographies*, o.c., p. 80.

<sup>18</sup> Guattari, *Cartographies*, o.c., p. 80.

primarily as a form of poetical emulation.

Guattari's case does not stand alone. Much figurative use, and some misuse, has been made in the twentieth century CE by philosophers, social and literary scientists, and poets, of natural science and mathematical concepts and theories such as Gödel's theorem, Planck's constant (concerning the discontinuous, stepwise transitions between energy quanta), Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, the 'laws of large numbers' such as formulated first by Bernoulli and later Poisson, entropy as indicated by the Second Law of Thermodynamics, 'the principle of least effort', chaos theory, etc.<sup>19</sup> Some of the most characteristic literary expressions of our time have been engendered by the desire to appropriate, and to aesthetically exorcise into poetic images, the cold formulas – however poorly understood – of the most prestigious, best financed, and most threatening branches of academic, industrial and military knowledge production. To this trend we owe, for instance, some of the finest poems of the Dutch poet Gerrit Achterberg:

'...Wat eenmaal plaats gehad heeft kan niet meer  
ontkomen aan 't verbruikte kwantum tijd  
dat het gebonden houdt als water zuurstof.

Maar als de stroom van het gedicht zijn vuurslag  
door de verbinding slaat wordt gij bevrijd  
van 't eeuwig onherroepelijk weleer.<sup>20</sup>

'...What once took place can never more  
escape the quantum of time it has used up  
remaining locked in it like oxygen in water

But when the poem's current strikes its flint  
right through the bond, then Thou art liberated  
from the eternal past that cannot be revoked.'

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<sup>19</sup> This is not the place for an extensive discussion, but the examples are there for the taking, including: Teilhard de Chardin, P., 1955, *Le phénomène humain*, Paris: Seuil; Zipf, G.K., 1965, *Human behaviour and the principle of least effort; An introduction to human ecology*, Cambridge (Mass.); Jung, C.G., & Pauli, W., *Naturerklärung und Psyche*, Olten: Walter Verlag, 1971, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1952 – this contains Jung's notorious discussion of his concept of synchronicity; Mendes, C., 1997, 'Discours et entropie de la représentation', in: Larreta, E.R., 1997, ed., *Représentation et complexité: L'agenda du Millenium*, Rio de Janeiro: UNESCO/ ISSC/ Educam, p. 97-183. Moreover: Best, S., 1991, 'Chaos and entropy: Metaphors in postmodern science and social theory', *Science as Culture*, 2: 188-226.

<sup>20</sup> The final two tercines of the poem 'Electrolyse' from the collection *Doornroosje*, in: Gerrit Achterberg: *Verzamelde gedichten*, Amsterdam: Querido, 1963, p. 617.

As the physicists Sokal and Bricmont<sup>21</sup> have demonstrated with a literalist lack of humour and of imagination that makes a caricature of their profession, this trend has yielded us some of the most cryptic pages of the most prominent French philosophers, including Lacan, Kristeva, Irigaray, Latour, Baudrillard, Virilio, and... Deleuze & Guattari. It can hardly come as a surprise that the latter have received an entire chapter in Sokal and Bricmont's book *Impostures intellectuelles*.<sup>22</sup>

It is remarkable that Sokal & Bricmont (naïvely celebrating what they think is their privileged position as professional scientists)<sup>23</sup> could do no better than mechanically check the philosophical use of terms against the conventional meaning of these terms in their original context of physics and mathematics. The reader who lacks a natural science background and hopes that Sokal and Bricmont will enlighten him on the conceptual implications of the scientific philosophical language use, is in for considerable disappointment. To drive home his devastating criticism of such language use, Sokal wrote a parody of it under the turbo title 'Transgressing the boundaries: Toward a transformative hermeneutics of quantum gravity' and – oh triumph – succeeded in having this parody accepted as a serious article in the prominent philosophical journal *Social Text*.<sup>24</sup> However, in the best of cases he merely demonstrated that, precisely because of the impersonal, inhuman, nature of language and science, it is quite possible to produce specific texts in that genre, texts that can be recognised as meaningful within that genre, even though the author himself

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<sup>21</sup> Sokal, A., & J. Bricmont, 1997, *Impostures intellectuelles*, Paris: Odile Jacob. In the same vein: Koertge, N., ed., 1997, *A house built on sand: Exposing postmodernist myths about science*, New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>22</sup> Sokal & Bricmont, *Impostures, o.c.*, ch. 8, pp. 141-152.

<sup>23</sup> In line with my footnote above on the suffix '-istic', Sokal & Bricmont's approach could also be called 'scientific', but then in the first sense, of uncritically taking the perspective of one's own branch of knowledge production as self-evident and exhaustive. However, in order to avoid confusion, in the present argument I will exclusively use the term 'scientific' in the second, performative and aestheticising sense.

<sup>24</sup> Sokal, A.D., 1996, 'Transgressing the boundaries: Toward a transformative hermeneutics of quantum gravity', *Social Text*, 46/47: 217-252, incorporated in French translation as appendix in Sokal & Bricmont, *Impostures, o.c.*, pp. 211-252.



does not believe in what he wrote. Cervantes' *Don Quixote* – eminently applicable here in more than one sense – is *both* a parody of romances of chivalry, *and* a great book of chivalry in its own right.

Alas, two points escape the awareness of our two disciplinarian physicists, and make their lampoon ridiculous in its lack of hermeneutical humour. In the first place we must realise that, in general, *philosophy is primarily the creation of a language*, notably the kind of language that does not just mediate another language already in existence (for instance, the language of today's natural science), but that seeks to mediate the aporetic aspects of the philosopher's contemporary experience in a novel language, striking a precarious balance between, on the one hand, innovative originality, and, on the other hand, intersubjectivity ensuring that the philosophical text produced remains, to a considerable extent, understandable and recognisable. Formally the term 'pseudo-scientific' may be applicable to the philosophical genre produced by Guattari etc.,<sup>25</sup> yet such a label makes us forget too easily that the aim of philosophy today is not the empirical description of reality, but the tentative development of a language of expression. It is quite possible to incorporate natural science and mathematical elements in such a language, but then precisely because such elements can be used figuratively.<sup>26</sup> In the second place, for Deleuze

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<sup>25</sup> The term is especially well-known from Popper's negative assessment of e.g. astrology by means of the criterion of empirical falsifiability; Popper, K.R., 1959, *The logic of scientific discovery*, New York: Basic Books; first published in German in 1935, *Logik der Forschung: Zur Erkenntnistheorie der modernen Naturwissenschaft*, Vienna: Springer. Sokal & Bricmont, *Impostures, o.c.*, p. 152, n. 190, speak of 'pseudo-scientifique' specifically in connection with Deleuze and Guattari. Sokal & Bricmont refer to Canning, P., 1994, 'The crack of time and the ideal game', in: Boundas, C.V., & Olkowski, D., eds., *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*, New York: Routledge, pp. 73-98, and: Rosenberg, M.E., 1993, 'Dynamic and thermodynamic tropes of the subject in Freud and in Deleuze and Guattari', *Postmodern Culture*, 4, 1, which discusses authors who have applied and elaborated Deleuze's & Guattari's scientific vocabulary. Also cf.: Alliez, E., 1993, *La signature du monde, ou Qu'est-ce que la philosophie de Deleuze et Guattari?* Paris: Editions du Cerf.

<sup>26</sup> Perhaps too predictably, I thus attribute to Guattari a language strategy similar to that which I believed to detect for the leading African philosopher Valentin Mudimbe, whose closeness to Foucault and Lacan would also put him in the post-structuralist camp: concepts are employed as part, not of a rigorous and consistent edifice of sys-

and Guattari the quasi-scientific appropriation and re-creation of natural science and mathematical elements in philosophical and literary language is a means to an end rather than an end in itself: it reflects an active positioning vis-à-vis the natural-science and technological encroachment typical of our time; it can only be understood – as stressed above – as a deliberate, liberating attempt at poetical *reterritorialisation*.

Also Guattari's term 'chaosmosis', extremely effective though it is, reflects a scientistic strategy.<sup>27</sup> At first sight it would merely look as the topical philosophical application of one of the major mathematical innovations of the last half century – the development of the mathematics of non-linear systems, better known as chaos theory.<sup>28</sup> We must not underestimate the considerable influence of chaos theory upon Guattari's thought. Chaos theory promises a way out of mechanicism in the sense that processes which, considered at micro level, appear to be fully stochastic, determined by chance alone, yet under narrowly defined mathematical conditions may yield recognisable patterns of qualitative distribution at the macro level. However, the term 'chaosmosis' has a much older genealogy, which reveals a remarkable tautology. Osmosis is

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tematic philosophising, but as part of an eclectic enunciative poetics, whose touchstone is performative (notably, literary effectiveness) rather than formal (the truth-affirming procedures of logic, etc.). Cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2005, '“An incomprehensible miracle” -- Central African clerical intellectualism versus African historic religion: A close reading of Valentin Mudimbe's *Tales of Faith*', in: Kai Kresse, ed., *Reading Mudimbe*, special issue of the *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 17, 1, June 2005: 11-65.

<sup>27</sup> Albeit via: Deleuze, G., 1968, *Difference et répétition*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, where the concept of chaos is for the first time introduced in modern philosophy.

<sup>28</sup> For an excellent, albeit non-mathematical, introduction, see: Gleick, J., 1988, *Chaos: Making a new science*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 8th impr; first publ. 1987. Guattari has extensively moved in circles where the wider possibilities of chaos theory for biology and human sciences were being explored: Guattari, F., 1988. 'Les énergétiques sémiotiques', in: Brans, J.-P., Stengers, I., & Vincke, P., eds., *Temps et devenir: A partir de l'oeuvre d'Ilya Prigogine: Actes du colloque international de 1983*, Genève: Patino, pp. 83-100. Cf. Prigogine, I., & Stengers, I., 1988, *Entre le temps et l'éternité*, Paris: Artheme Fayard; Prigogine, I., & Stengers, I., 1984, *Order out of chaos: Man's new dialogue with nature*, Toronto etc.: Bantam.

the diffusion of molecules across a semi-permeable boundary, e.g. a pig's bladder; it is caused by the Brownian, 'chaotic' movement of molecules in liquids and gasses discovered by Robert Brown in 1827, and in the course of the nineteenth century explained by kinetic gas theory. The phenomenon of osmosis itself (although, no doubt, at the pragmatic level known to artisans and food producers for millennia) was scientifically discovered by Abbé J.-A. Nollet in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century CE, and subsequently subjected to detailed research in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by G.-F. Parrot and R.J.H. Dutrochet, likewise French.<sup>29</sup> 'Chaos' is in the first place the Greek primal confusion out of which the world emerged (in itself not without predecessors and examples in the Ancient Near East, cf. Genesis 1: 2, and in Ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian and African representations on the origin of the world out of the primal waters). However, more in particular the ancient concept of chaos constituted the inspiration prompting the Early Modern chemist van Helmont (1579-1644) to formulate his seminal concept of 'gas' – as a Dutch variant of the Greek word *χάος* *chaos*.<sup>30</sup> More than two centuries later it turned out that one of the principal characteristics of gas was the Brownian movement and hence the possibility of osmosis. Guattari's conceptual toolbox for the understanding of subject, society and art is highly mechanistic and scientific – which makes it all the more impressive what he achieves with the aid of that one-sided lexical material.

Guattari's surprising language often reminds us, not only of his teacher Lacan, and via the latter of that great materialist scientist Freud himself, but also of *Le Matin des Magiciens*.<sup>31</sup> That book has internation-

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<sup>29</sup> Wiggers, A.J., R.F. Lissens, A. Devreker, G.A. Kooy & H.A. Lauwerier, eds., 1975, *Grote Winkler Prins: Encyclopedie in twintig delen, deel 14*, Amsterdam/ Brussel: Elsevier, s.v. 'osmose', pp. 728-729.

<sup>30</sup> Sarton, George, 1927-1947, *Introduction To The History of Science*, Baltimore.: Williams & Wilkins; Dampier, W.C., 1966, *A history of science and its relations with philosophy and religion*, London: Cambridge University Press; first edition 1929; rev. ed. 1948; Störig, H.J., 1965, *Geschiedenis van de wetenschap: Van middeleeuwen to negentiende eeuw*, Utrecht/ Antwerpen: Spectrum, p. 50; originally part of *Kleine Weltgeschichte der Wissenschaft*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1965.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Pauwels, L., & J. Berger, 1960, *Le matin des magiciens: Introduction au real-*

ally met with devastating criticism since it was published in 1960.<sup>32</sup> I believe that we are in the presence here of a more than superficial (and probably not unintentional, considering Guattari's emphasis on creativity and art) parallel between Guattari and the last magicians of the West European tradition,<sup>33</sup> with whom his concept of chaosmosis (even regardless of modern chaos theory) is continuous in just or two steps of science history. Van Helmont was a major successor of Paracelsus, whose contemporary Cornelius Agrippa was, among other qualities, a prominent geomantician.<sup>34</sup> The versatility, volatility, inventiveness and unbounded communicability implied in Guattari's concept of chaosmosis, are the characteristics *par excellence* of Mercury, *i.e.* Hermes – as Hermes Trismegistus / Thoth the magicians' patron under the Hermetic tradition, and the legendary inventor of cleromancy (the lot oracle by means of detached elements, lots) one of whose most flourishing branches has been geomancy.<sup>35</sup>

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*isme fantastique*, Paris: Gallimard.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Ostoya, P., 1962, 'Le succès d'un mauvais livre: *Le Matin des Magiciens*', *La Nature - Science Progrès*, juin, p. 263; Gault, R. T., n.d. [ ca. 1994-2004 ], 'The Quixotic Dialectical Metaphysical Manifesto: Morning of the Magicians', at: <http://www.cafes.net/ditch/motm1.htm>. In the Netherlands, Rudy Kousbroek wrote a very apt and funny critique of the book, cf. Kousbroek, R., 1970, *Het avond-rood der magiërs*, Amsterdam: Meulenhoff. Kousbroek (born 1929) studied natural sciences and Japanese (which gave him an excellent position to both appreciate and debunk pseudo-science), became one of the Netherlands' principal essayists, and in 1994 received a honorary doctorate in philosophy from Groningen university out of the hands of Lolle Nauta, until his death on 11 September 2006 member of the Quest Advisory Board.

<sup>33</sup> I pass over the more recent, cramped attempts, with low levels of credibility, to revive that magical tradition, as for instance in Aleister Crowley's British cultic community of the Golden Dawn around 1900, and the New Age movement of the recent decades.

<sup>34</sup> Hartmann, F., 1913, *The principles of astrological geomancy: The art of divining by punctuation according to Cornelius Agrippa and others*, Londen: Rider; Agrippa, H. C., 1993, *Three books of occult philosophy written by Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim*, J. Freake, tr., D. Tyson, Ed. & Ann., St. Paul: Llewellyn., First Latin ed., 1531; first English trans., 1651.

<sup>35</sup> Geomancy is not the vague *omens* doctrine based on the perception of qualitative

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changes in the surface of the earth (as it was for the Roman writer Varro, 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, or for St Isidore, 560-636 A.D.). Geomancy is the Latin term under which Europe, by means of translations from the Arabic, Hebrew and Persian, has appropriated a highly formalised divination system whose original name was *‘ilm al-raml*, علم الرمل ‘sand science’. ‘Sand science’ is an astrologising form of divination, originating in Iraq c. 300 A.H. (early 9<sup>th</sup> century CE) under the influence of the historically cognate Chinese cosmological classification and divination system 易經 *yì jīng* (*I Ching*). It spread over a large part of the Old World (i.e. Asia, Africa, Europe) in subsequent centuries. It is based on four parameters (‘head’, ‘body’, ‘legs’ and ‘feet’), all of which can assume two different values: present or absent. (Cf. Skinner, S., 1980, *Terrestrial astrology: Divination by geomancy*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1996, ‘Transregional and historical connections of four-tablet divination in Southern Africa’, *Journal on Religion in Africa*, 25, 2: 2-29; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1997, ‘Rethinking Africa’s contribution to global cultural history: Lessons from a comparative historical analysis of mankala board-games and geomantic divination’, in: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1997, ed., *Black Athena: Ten Years After*, Hoofddorp: Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society, special issue, *Talanta: Proceedings of the Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society*, vols 28-29, 1996-97, pp. 221-254; and extensive bibliography there.) Especially in Africa, geomancy is very widespread; many authors consider it a major component of African philosophy and claim it to be an autochthonous African invention. (Apostel, L., 1981, *African philosophy: Myth or reality*, Gent: E. Story-Scientia, ch. vii: ‘African geomancy, formal logic, and force metaphysics’, pp. 214-244; Abimbola, W., 1983, ‘Ifa as a body of knowledge and as an academic discipline’, *Journal of Cultures and Ideas*, 1: 1-11; Abimbola, W., ed., 1975, *Sixteen great poems of Ifa*, no place: UNESCO (also excerpted in: Abimbola, W., 1991, ‘Poesie VI: Aus “Sechzehn große Gedichte aus Ifa” ’, in: Kimmerle, H., ed., *Philosophie in Afrika: Afrikanische Philosophie: Annäherungen an einen interkulturellen Philosophiebegriff*, Frankfurt am Main: Qumran, pp. 226-234); Akiwowo, Akinsola, 1983, ‘Understanding interpretative sociology in the light of *oriki* of Orunmila’, *Journal of Cultures and Ideas*, 1, 1: 139-157; Aromolaran, A., 1992, ‘A critical analysis of the philosophical status of Yoruba Ifa literary corpus’, in: H. Nagl-Docekal & F. Wimmers, eds., *Postkoloniales Philosophieren Afrika*, vol. 6, Wien: Oldenburg, p. 140-154; Eze, E., 1993, ‘Truth and ethics in African thought’, *Quest: Philosophical Discussions*, 7, 1: 4-18; Makinde, M.A., 1988, *African philosophy, culture and traditional medicine*, Athens (Oh.): Ohio University Center for International Studies; Tunde Bewaji, 1994, ‘Truth and ethics in African thought: A reply to Emmanuel Eze’, *Quest: Philosophical Discussions*, 8, 1: 76-89; Uyanne, F.U., 1994, ‘Truth, ethics and divination in Igbo and Yoruba traditions: (A reply to Emmanuel Eze)’, *Quest: Philosophical Discussions*, 8, 1: 91-96; van Binsbergen, Rethinking, *o.c.*) In the light of my comparative research the claim of an African origin is implausible. Most probably, we need to distinguish two phases in the spread of geomancy:

1. its emergence as a major cosmological and divination idiom in Neolithic West Asia (on the basis of a widespread elemental system of cyclical transformations), and its subsequent spread across the Old World including eastward to

Although this may be an uncongenial connection for post-modern philosophers, it is in this connection that we may situate some of the important characteristics of Guattari's style. For it is typical of magical rhetoric to try and representatively grasp in a microcosmic context (a book, an interpretational schema, a talisman) the totality of the universe – not as a Leibnizean monad which combines external impenetrability with an internal depiction of the universe, but as the expression of an harmony which constantly penetrates everything and brings it to vocal expression – the Hermetic principle of 'As above, so below'. This conception of the world order is not limited to the magical tradition which, via Late Antiquity, the Arabian high culture and the European Renaissance reaches right into today's New Age in the North Atlantic region (as, in a more implicit form, and treading a different path in the last few centuries, it is reflected in the merging of celestial and terrestrial physics by Galileo and Newton). It has many parallels with the Chinese worldview as mediated within Taoism, with its complex pharmacopoeia from the animal, vegetal and mineral kingdom;<sup>36</sup> with Needham and Ling, we may suspect on this

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China, and southward (probably in the Early Iron Age) into the Sahara and sub-Saharan Africa;

2. the much more recent development, on the basis of (1), in Mesopotamia / Iraq, of *'ilm al-raml*, and the latter's spread, in the course of the second millennium CE, into Africa, producing complex interaction and feedback effects with less formalised and non-astrological geomancies already in existence there.

<sup>36</sup> Girardot, N.J., 1983, *Myth and meaning in early Taoism: The theme of chaos (huntu)*, Berkeley: University of California Press; Kaltenmark, M., 1965, *Lao-Tseu et le Taoisme*, Paris: Seuil; Legge, J., tr. & ed., 1993, *I Ching/ Book of Changes*, The Chinese-English bilingual series of Chinese classics, Beijing: Hunan Publishing House; Maspero, H., 1950, 'Le Taoisme', in: Demieville, P., ed., 1950, *H. Maspero: Mélanges posthumes sur les religions et l'histoire de la Chine, vol. II*, Paris: Civilisations du Sud, Publications du Musée Guimet, Bibliothèque de Diffusion; Maspero, H., 1971, *Le Taoisme et les religions chinoises*, Paris: Gallimard.; Needham, J., in collaboration with Wing Ling, 1956, *Science and civilization in China, vol. 2. History of scientific thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.; Pai Wen P'ien, 1976, *Pai Wen P'ien or the hundred questions: A dialogue between two Taoists on the macrocosmic and microcosmic system of correspondences*, tr. R. Homann, Leiden: Brill, Nisaba no. 4; *Texts of Taoism, vol. 39-40, Sacred Books of the East: Translated by various oriental scholars*, ed. M. Muller, first published Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900-1910, reprinted 1988, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass; Waley, A., 1934, *The way*

point early East-West interactions and continuities.

In yet another part of the world again (with, however, demonstrable transcontinental continuities with East and South East Asia as well as with West Asia and the Mediterranean) the surgery of Doctor Smarts Gumede (1927-1992), a modern traditional healer (a practitioner of African geomancy; and in that capacity my principal teacher of divination) in Francistown, Botswana, Southern Africa, may illustrate how wide the global distribution of this model of thought is:

‘The room is an apparently bizarre compilation of numerous heterogeneous objects: just as much from the animal, vegetal and mineral kingdoms as may be compressed onto a few square metres – like in the 18th-century curiosities’ cabinets which were the predecessors of West European modern museums. It is a microcosm in which, by means of selection and concentration, the entire macrocosm has been meaningfully represented. In the same way the geomantic interpretational schema underlying Dr Gumede’s divination rites constitutes a cosmology. In fact it re-creates a timeless microcosm in which the client seeking medical and social advice does not necessarily feel at home but which all the same offers him clues for identification and revelation. By the same token, many of the objects in the surgery are menacing and repulsive, and many clients of traditional doctors in today’s Southern Africa are more at home in town, with wage labour, formal organisations, mass consumption and electronic media than in the historic symbolism and worldview of their distant home village.’<sup>37</sup>

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*and its power: A study of the ‘Tao Tê Ching’ and its place in Chinese thought*, London: Allen & Unwin. The Taoist pharmacopoeia has been extensively published by B. Read in collaboration with Li Yu-Thien, ‘Chinese materia medica’, *Peking Natural History Bulletin*, 1934-1939, and separate volumes, Peiping: French Bookstore, 1924-1939.

<sup>37</sup> van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1994, ‘Divinatie met vier tabletten: Medische technologie in Zuidelijk Afrika’, in: Sjaak van der Geest, Paul ten Have, Gerhard Nijhoff and Piet Verbeek-Heida, eds., *De macht der dingen: Medische technologie in cultureel perspectief*, Amsterdam: Spinhuis, pp. -110, pp. 88f; and my *Intercultural encounters*, chs. 5-8. Another photograph of Dr Gumede’s surgery in: Van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1997, *Virtuality as a key concept in the study of globalisation: Aspects of the symbolic transformation of contemporary Africa*, The Hague: WOTRO [Stichting Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek van de Tropen, Netherlands Foundation for Tropical Research],

Fig. 2. Dr. Gumede's surgery, Francistown, Botswana, 1989.



In other words, Guattari's language is that of a magician who in a grand poetical gesture, and with a strong suggestion of self-evidence – seeks to grasp total reality. Hence also the 'conceptual euphoria' which one of Guattari's major commentators, the Dutch philosopher Henk Oosterling, recognises in the work that Guattari wrote together with Deleuze in the 1970s.<sup>38</sup>

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Working papers on Globalisation and the construction of communal identity, 3, p. 58.

<sup>38</sup> Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen*, o.c., p. 429 n. 276.



In view of all this it is far from strange that Guattari himself felt at home in the intellectual company of Paul Virilio.<sup>39</sup> The latter, in an interview about Guattari, was prompted to make the following fairly naïve statement (naïve, because the separation of natural science and philosophy was effected several centuries ago; to that separation we owe the two pillars of Early Modern thought: both Newton's physics, and Kant's critical philosophy):

'Philosophy has a shortcoming for me, in that lies no so much in its origin. (Hegel said:<sup>40</sup>

"It is the sin of philosophy to have an origin."

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Virilio, Paul, 1990, *L'inertie polaire*, Paris: Christian Bourgois; Virilio, Paul, 1995, *La vitesse de libération*, Paris: Galilée.

<sup>40</sup> I have not been able to locate this quote, and it appears possible that it was garbled in the process of translation and re-translation between French and German. However, the general idea behind this statement is unmistakably Hegelian, cf.:

'...der Geschichte des *Sündenfalls*. Der Mensch, nach dem Ebenbilde Gottes geschaffen, wird erzählt, habe sein absolutes Befriedigtsein dadurch verloren, daß er von dem Baume der Erkenntnis des Guten und Bösen gegessen habe. Die Sünde besteht hier nur in der Erkenntnis: diese ist das Sündhafte, und durch sie hat der Mensch sein natürliches Glück verscherzt. Es ist dieses eine tiefe Wahrheit, daß das Böse im Bewußtsein liegt, denn die Tiere sind weder böse noch gut, ebensowenig der bloß natürliche Mensch. Erst das Bewußtsein gibt die Trennung des Ich, nach seiner unendlichen Freiheit als Willkür, und des reinen Inhalts des Willens, des Guten. Das Erkennen als Aufhebung der natürlichen Einheit ist der Sündenfall, der keine zufällige, sondern die ewige Geschichte des Geistes ist.' (Hegel, G.W.F., 1992, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel Werke 12, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1st ed. 1986, p. 389).

Hegel's idea of philosophy as the Fall of Man (the Judaeo-Christian narrative explaining the origin of evil) has been extensively treated in Ringleben, Joachim, 1977, *Hegels Theorie der Sünde: Die Subjektivitäts-logische Konstruktion eines theologischen Begriffs*, Berlin: de Gruyter, pp. 62f, where that author indicates influences from Fichte and Schiller on this point. Reflection on sin and history was found not only in Hegel's discussion of the Fall of Man, but also in his pupil Kierkegaard, who argued that sin could have no history (*Begrebet Angest [The Concept of Anxiety]* published in 1844 under the pseudonym of Vigilius Haufniensis, cf. Kierkegaard, Søren Aabye, 1902, *Samlede værke*, eds A.B. Drachmann, J.L. Heiberg og H.O. Lange, Kjøbenhavn: Gyldendalske boghandels forlag, pp. 273ff.)

No, I would say, while I take this up in yet another way, ‘The sin of philosophy is no so much that it has an origin, but that it has broken with physics. I personally join it with physics again.’<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, I believe that for the kaleidoscopic, scientific language use of Guattari (and of Deleuze, in the period of their collaboration) different, and fundamentally artistic, factors may be identified, in addition to what Oosterling explains as a writing strategy connected with the insistence, in these post-structuralist philosophers (he sees the same tendency not only with Guattari and Deleuze, but also with Lyotard and Foucault), to think beyond

‘Kant’s infinite regressus of the power of imagination, and [beyond] the evil infinity of Hegel’.<sup>42</sup>

Guattari’s scientism denies, and seeks to reterritorialise, the deterministic mechanicism that is the hall-mark of natural science in the Enlightenment and the 19th century CE.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> ‘Die Philosophie hat für mich einen Makel, und das ist nicht so sehr ihr Ursprung’. (Hegel sagte:

“Die Sünde der Philosophie ist es, einen Ursprung zu haben.”

‘Nein, ich würde sagen, indem ich das in einer anderer Weise wiederaufnehme: Die Sünde der Philosophie ist nicht so sehr, einen Ursprung zu haben, sondern mit der Physik gebrochen zu haben. Ich persönlich verbinde sie wieder mit der Physik.’

Virilio, P., 1995, ‘Trajektivität und Transversalität: Ein Gespräch über Félix Guattari’, in: Schmidgen, H., 1995, *Aesthetik und Maschinismus: Texte zu und von Félix Guattari*, Berlin: Merve, pp. 25-37. Cf. Virilio, P., 1989, ‘Trans-Appearance’, tr. Diana Stoll, *Artforum*, 27, 10: 129-130; Virilio, P., 1990, *L’inertie polaire*, Paris: Bourgois; Virilio, P., 1995, *La vitesse de libération*, Paris: Galilée.

<sup>42</sup> Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen, o.c.*, p. 465 n. 320: ‘van Kants oneindige regressus van de verbeeldingskracht of van de slechte oneindigheid van Hegel’; cf. Guattari, F., 1992, ‘Félix Guattari: Een vrolijk filosoof’, *Filosofie Magazine*, 1, 3: 37.

<sup>43</sup> Of such mechanicism, the notorious ‘Spirit of Laplace’ is an apt expression. He wrote (1814; repr. Laplace, Pierre Simon, 1986 [5th ed. 1825], *Essai philosophique sur les probabilités*, Paris: Christian Bourgois):

‘Une intelligence qui pour un instant donné connaîtrait toutes les forces dont la nature est animée et la situation respective des êtres qui la composent, si

In the case of natural science, with its enormous hold on the world today, Guattari's strategy of reterritorialisation through scientific appropriation is illuminating and rewarding. But what about the other fields of science today – fields that cannot be said to be legitimating, truth-producing and world-creating to the same extent as natural science and technology have become. For instance, how does Guattari's aestheticising scientism behave within the framework of cultural anthropology, where the central place is occupied not by the North Atlantic experience implied to be obvious and self-evident, but by the encounter between respective cultural and linguistic others? In such an othering framework, is Guattari still capable of liberating reterritorialisation, or does he simply slide back into the dominant, hegemonic collective representations of the North Atlantic region today?

The question is important for its answer will allow us to identify both the potential and the limitations of a courageous but contentious form of modern philosophising.

### ***3. Guattari's social scientism: The cultural, historical and archaeological other – Guattari's selective and superficial appropriation of cultural anthropology***

Anthropology was one of the great scientific adventures of the twentieth century CE, and it is no wonder that it has exerted a certain influence upon psychiatry and philosophy. Oosterling's monumental study of modern continental philosophy *Door schijn bewogen / Moved by appearances* features the anthropologists Mauss, Bateson, Lévi-Strauss and Bourdieu as inspirers of philosophers, Paul Rabinow (well-known by a book on fieldwork in Morocco) as Foucault interpreter, and in the background – just like in anthropology itself – the founding fathers of sociology Weber, Durkheim and Parsons, not to mention Marx.

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d'ailleurs elle était assez vaste pour soumettre ces données à l'analyse, embrasserait dans la même formule les mouvements des plus grands corps de l'univers et ceux du plus léger atome: Rien ne serait incertain pour elle et l'avenir comme le passé serait présent à ses yeux'.

### 3.1. 'How Natives Think'...

The exotic other, and anthropology as the (apparently neutral, self-evident and unproblematic) study of the exotic other, are amply present in Guattari's work, and predictably they serve as anchorage for unsubstantiated theses concerning Guattari's own North Atlantic culture and art. Let us take one characteristic quote from Guattari's work:

'Moreover, anthropologists, since the era of Lévy-Bruhl, Prieziuski, etc., have shown that in archaic societies, there was what they call 'participation,' a collective subjectivity investing a certain type of object, and putting itself in the position of an existential group nucleus.'<sup>44</sup>

Instead of stopping to critically consider this alleged, but highly contentious, 'scientific fact', Guattari rushes on to Deleuze's views concerning new art forms such as the cinema, in which images of motion and time constitute the seeds of subjectivation. Referring to Lévy-Bruhl, Guattari presents as well established an anthropological position which, however, has always been highly disputed.<sup>45</sup> In the concept of participation as attributed to Lévy-Bruhl, and besides also in Guattari's own views concerning a 'refrain' that – as some sort of group-binding mantra – produces group solidarity, we hear Durkheim's thesis of *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912): group ritual brings about a collective state of *effervescence* (psycho-social 'glowing', 'burning'), in which individualities melt down so that in the heat of the ritual moment not only the group

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<sup>44</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 25.

<sup>45</sup> Lévy-Bruhl, L., 1910, *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*, Paris: Alcan; Lévy-Bruhl, L., 1922, *La mentalité primitive*, Paris: Alcan; Lévy-Bruhl, L., 1927, *L'âme primitive*, Paris: Alcan; Lévy-Bruhl, L., 1931, *Le surnaturel et la nature dans la mentalité primitive*, Paris: Alcan; Lévy-Bruhl, L., 1947, 'Les Carnets de Lucien Lévy-Bruhl', *Revue philosophique*, 137: 257-281; Lévy-Bruhl, L., 1963, *La mythologie primitive: Le monde mythique des Australiens et des Papous*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. Evans-Pritchard, E.E., 1934, 'Lévy-Bruhl's theory of primitive mentality', *Bulletin of Faculty of Arts*, 2, 1, Egyptian University, Cairo. I have treated Lévy-Bruhl here implicitly as an anthropologist, but he was in the first place a philosopher, publishing – in addition to his works on archaic thought – books on ethics, and on what was in his time modern French philosophy: Descartes, Comte, Jaurès, Jacobi.

does emerge, but also its objects of veneration (which are arbitrary symbols directly reflecting the group), and finally all collectively sustained (in other words, culturally supported) categories of thought.<sup>46</sup> But whereas, in a bid to avoid the racialism then rife in the young social sciences and in North Atlantic society at large, Durkheim decided to develop his universal theory – meant to apply to the whole of humankind, and indeed still one of the major components of the cultural anthropology of religion – exclusively on the basis on the ethnography of the Australian Aboriginals, Lévy-Bruhl's version of a decade later was to be a testimony of particularist difference. For, according to the apt English title of one of his main works, Lévy-Bruhl's argument sought, to establish *How Natives think* – published in the heyday of North Atlantic colonialism, when the distinction between *native* on the one hand, and *civilized European / White* on the other hand, was constitutive for socio-political relations in a large part of the world. An important advocate of Lévy-Bruhl's work was the British anthropologist E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973), who was destined to become the leading European anthropologist of his generation, and whose fieldwork took place largely in close association with the colonial authorities.<sup>47</sup>

However, Evans-Pritchard's praise for Lévy-Bruhl has been shared by few fellow anthropologists. Lévy-Bruhl's ideas were subject to a devastatingly critical discussion by the anthropologist Fahrenfort,<sup>48</sup> who ex-

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<sup>46</sup> Durkheim, E., 1912, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. There is an unmistakable parallel here with the early Nietzsche of *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (1872); and considering Durkheim's philosophical interest and the forty years separating the two books, there may be a genuine historical relationship.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Evans-Pritchard's enormously positive introduction to the English translation of *L'ame primitive: The 'soul' of the primitive*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1965, first ed. 1928. In the next decade (the 1930s) Evans-Pritchard would develop into one of the great British anthropologists of the classic paradigm, and specifically would gain world-wide recognition with his book *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande*, London: Oxford University Press, 1937.

<sup>48</sup> Fahrenfort, J.J., 1933, *Dynamisme en logies denken bij natuervolken: Bijdrage tot de psychologie der primitieven*, Groningen: Wolters.

erted a considerable influence on Dutch anthropology especially through his student A.J.F. Köbben – one of my own principal teachers of anthropology in the 1960s. Flatly dismissive of Lévy-Bruhl was also Paul Radin, who stressed that traditions of thought world-wide display forms of rationality, distancing and reflection that are eminently comparable with the North Atlantic philosophical standard.<sup>49</sup> Guattari's uncritical mention of Lévy-Bruhl once more underlines the importance of the following reminder of Bernasconi in a philosophical context:

‘Continental philosophers in Europe and North America have shown little interest in African thought, except perhaps for what they culled from the works of Lévy-Bruhl without submitting them to the appropriate level of scrutiny.’<sup>50</sup>

Fahrenfort's and Radin's type of emphasis on logical competence and on the capability of practical, sober distancing as a characteristic of humanity as a whole became the hallmark of modern anthropology. Nowadays most anthropologists are of the strong opinion – contrary to Lévy-Bruhl – that the patterns of thought and the structures of experience of Africans and Asians today are not fundamentally different from those of the inhabitants of the North Atlantic region. Modern anthropology has come to consider ‘nostalgia’ as a term of abuse, and insists on radically exposing as myth any projection of North Atlantic, nostalgic popular representations concerning ‘noble savages’ and concerning ‘innocent’, ‘virgin’, ‘exotic’ cultures ‘closed onto themselves’. Within anthropology, this is a political rather than an epistemological positioning. Its extensive ad-

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Radin, Paul, 1949., ‘The Basic Myth of the North American Indians’, *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, 17: 359-419; and his main work: Radin, Paul, 1957, *Primitive man as a philosopher*, foreword John Dewey, New York: Dover, first published 1927, New York/London: Appleton & Co. For a more recent assessment and re-interpretation of Lévy-Bruhl, cf. Horton, R., 1973, ‘Lévy-Bruhl, Durkheim and the scientific revolution’, in: Horton, R., & Finnegan, R., eds., *Modes of thought: Essays on thinking in western and non-western societies*, London: Faber, pp. 249-305. Also for C.G. Jung, Lévy-Bruhl was the most important source of anthropological inspiration, likewise with painful consequences; cf. Segal, Robert A., 2007, ‘Jung and Lévy-Bruhl’, *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 52 (5), 635-658.

<sup>50</sup> Bernasconi, Robert, 1997, ‘African Philosophy's Challenge to Continental Philosophy’, in: Eze, Emmanuel Chukwudi, ed., *Postcolonial African philosophy: A critical reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 183.

vantages are obvious, in terms of thinking human equality and affirming the universal birth right of every human being regardless of culture, language, creed and somatic appearance. However, this lofty insistence on universal traits has also one disadvantage. For it usually means that anthropologists, for reasons of political correctness, can no longer afford to ask themselves whether all cultures today<sup>51</sup> – from (a) those in which writing, the state, and formal organisations dominate the intergenerational transmission of culture and the sanctioning of cultural conformity, to (b) those in which myths, rites and the resulting internalised cosmological and normative structures govern the cultural largely face-to-face community – are all ‘culture in exactly the same way’, deep-programming their members in fundamentally identical ways (regardless of overt surface behaviour, which evidently is programmed marginally differently from culture to culture). Is cultural transmission exclusively through a learning process embedded in cultural communication, or are there (as, for instance, in Jung’s concept of a collective unconscious, as an attribute of humanity as a whole but also, specific in time and space, of each of its myriad constitutive sub-groups) implicit, collective orientations and representations that may be so deeply programmed as to be practically beyond volition, beyond conscious communication, perhaps even genetically transmitted? The dominant disciplinary paradigm<sup>52</sup> in modern anthropology does not allow even the articulation of such questions – alternative answers deviating from the disciplinary consensus are simply unthinkable, and the (racialist and divisive) ‘yes’ of nearly a century ago has been, understandably but perhaps somewhat too simply, replaced by today’s ‘no’. In modern anthropology (especially since the Manchester

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<sup>51</sup> Or, for that matter, all cultures of Anatomically Modern Humans – the specific variety of *Homo sapiens* that emerged c. 200,000 years ago in Africa and to which all humans of the last 20,000 years have belonged.

<sup>52</sup> Despite the accumulated historiographic and epistemological criticism of his model, in the present connection Kuhn’s notion of the history of science as the history of the rise and fall of successive, mutually exclusive, consensus-generating and truth-creating paradigms remains essentially valid and illuminating; Kuhn, T.S., 1970, *The structure of scientific revolutions*, 2nd ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Needless to argue that Kuhn’s is essentially a market model.

School and transactionalism in general – approaches concentrating on the micro-politics of social institutions and of ritual),<sup>53</sup> the continuing emphasis on the historic specificity of other societies has been combined with a fascination with the manipulative, strategic, constructed and negotiable aspects, in the anthropologist's own society but especially in other societies.

Thus in certain respects modern North Atlantic anthropologists' perspective on other societies is as saturated with the principle of the market as is the case for these anthropologists' own social and political

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<sup>53</sup> The term 'transactionalism' refers to an anthropological approach, which emerged in the 1960s and which, from a methodological individualistic perspective, stressed no longer social institutions and culture but the micro-politics of social behaviour; major texts are: Bailey, F.G., 1969, *Stratagem and spoils*, Oxford: Blackwell; Boissevain, J.F., 1974, *Friends of friends: network, manipulators and coalitions* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1974); Barth, F., 1966, *Models of social organization*, London: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, Occasional Papers no. 23; Barth, F., 1969, *Ethnic groups and boundaries: The social organization of culture differences*, Boston: Little, Brown & Co. The Manchester School is an anthropological movement which arose c. 1950 around H. Max Gluckman – with illustrious members such as Elizabeth Colson, J. Clyde Mitchell, Victor Turner, Jaap van Velsen, Emmanuel Marx and Richard Werbner – which display the same characteristics as transactionalism, but which avoided the superficial approach of transactionalism especially because of the Manchester School groundedness in ethnographic research in rural and urban societies in South Central and Southern Africa; cf. Gluckman, H.M., 1942, 'Some processes of social change illustrated from Zululand', *African Studies*, 1: 243-60; reprinted in: Gluckman, M., 1958, *Analysis of a social situation in modern Zululand*, Manchester University Press; Gluckman, H.M., 1955, *Custom and conflict in Africa*, Oxford: Blackwell; Gluckman, H.M., 1963, *Order and rebellion in tribal Africa*, London: Cohen & West; Gluckman, H.M., 1964, ed., *Closed systems and open minds: The limits of naivety in social anthropology*, London: Oliver & Boyd; Gluckman, H.M., 1965, *Politics, law and ritual in tribal society*, Oxford: Blackwell; Gluckman, H.M., 1971, 'Tribalism, ruralism and urbanism in South and Central Africa', in: Turner, V.W., ed., *Profiles of change: Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960, vol. III*, general editors Gann, L., & Duignan, P., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 127-166. Epstein, A.L., 1965, ed., *The craft of social anthropology*, New York/ London: Social Science Paperback/ Tavistock; Werbner, R.P., 1985, Werbner, Richard P., 1984, 'The Manchester School in South-Central Africa', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 13: 157-185; van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 2007, 'Manchester as the birth place of modern agency research: The Manchester School explained from the perspective of Evans-Pritchard's book *The Nuer*', in: de Bruijn, M., Rijk van Dijk & Jan-Bart Gewald, eds., *Strength beyond structure: Social and historical trajectories of agency in Africa*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 16-61.



experience within their home society. Whenever, in the context of globalisation, other societies link up with North Atlantic society, what many anthropologists study of such an encounter is primarily the processes of market and commoditisation.<sup>54</sup> Today, the Third World is hardly a place anymore where anthropologists expect to encounter some Lévybruhlian participation.

All this suggests that Lévy-Bruhl and Guattari might yet have a point after all, but, even if they had, modern anthropologists would by and large (for lack of training in philosophy, epistemology and the history of ideas) be insufficiently equipped to notice, while intradisciplinary social control and a more general striving towards political correctness would scarcely afford such anthropologists the opportunity to publicly articulate their counter-paradigmatic findings. Modern anthropology could be said to have reached a point that can surprisingly well be described with Guattari's term deterritorialisation. However, I will come back to this point below, arguing that what may appear as deterritorialisation, is better understood as an indispensable collective safeguarding of the formats and methodologies upon which the truth claims of scientific pronouncements rest.

### 3.2. *The West African legba*

Also in the following example Guattari conjures up the image of the archaic, exotic or archaeological other. He develops a theme that is obvious to anthropologists: the multi-layeredness and multidimensionality of the

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<sup>54</sup> See for instance: Meyer, B., & Geschiere, P.L., 1999, eds., *Globalization and identity: Dialectics of flows and closures*, Oxford: Blackwell; Fardon, R., van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., & van Dijk, R., 1999, eds., *Modernity on a shoestring: Dimensions of globalization, consumption and development in Africa and beyond: Based on an EIDOS conference held at The Hague 13-16 March 1997*, Leiden/London: EIDOS [ European Interuniversity Development Opportunities Study group ] ; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., and van Dijk, R., 2003, eds, *Situating globality: African agency in the appropriation of global Culture*, Leiden: Brill; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., & Geschiere, P.L., 2005, eds., *Commodification: Things, Agency and Identities: The social life of Things revisited*, Berlin/Boston/Muenster: LIT; and the extensive international literature cited in these works.

religious symbol. Guattari does so, applying his typical conceptual apparatus to the *legba* or *elegba*, a well-known West African cultic object that represents the ambivalent divine trickster of the same name; the object usually consist of an earthen cone, sometime topped by an earthen hemisphere for a head, in which cowry shells (*Cypraeidae* family) indicate two eyes and a mouth.<sup>55</sup> Because it is difficult for the reader to visualise the *legba* as object merely on the basis of this schematic description, I add a recent depiction from a West African source.<sup>56</sup>

Guattari writes about this cultic object in the following way:

‘Archaic societies are better equipped than White, male, capitalistic subjectivities to produce a cartography of this multivalence of alterity. With regard to this, we could refer to Marc Augé’s account of the heterogeneous registers relating to the fetish object *Legba* in African societies of the Fon. The *Legba* comes to being transversally,<sup>57</sup> in: a dimension of destiny; a universe of vital principle; an ancestral filiation; a materialised god; a sign of appropriation; an entity of individuation; a fetish at the entrance to the village, another at the portal of the house and, after initiation, at the entrance to the bedroom... The *Legba* is a handful of sand, a receptacle, but it’s also the expression of a relation to others. One finds it at the door, at the market, in the village square, at crossroads. It can transmit messages, questions, answers. It is also a way of relating to the dead and to ancestors. It is both an individual and a class of individuals; a name and a noun.

‘‘Its existence corresponds to the obvious fact that the social is not simply of a relational order but of the order of being.’’

Marc Augé stresses the impossible transparency and translatability of symbolic systems.

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<sup>55</sup> The word which Guattari uses in this connection, ‘fetish’, – derived from the Portuguese word *feitiço* ‘made object’, in other words a graven image (cf. the Bible, Exodus 20: 4) or idol – is scarcely used any more among anthropologists because of its connotations of Western appropriation and of reduction of the cultural other to superstitious barbarism; this applies in the first place to the Portuguese, as the first European nation to sail the coasts of sub-Saharan Africa in Early Modern times.

<sup>56</sup> Source:

<http://www.elalquimistaonline.com/img/descargas/eleggua%20alagguana.jpg>, with thanks.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Transversality’ is a central concept in Guattari’s thought; it stands for transversal connections between the four basic dimensions as distinguished by Guattari.

“The *Legba* apparatus [...] is constructed on two axes. One is viewed from the exterior to the interior, the other from identity to alterity. Thus being, identity and the relation to the other are constructed, through fetishistic practice, not only on a symbolic basis but also in an openly ontological way.”<sup>58</sup> (...)

Contemporary machinic assemblages have even less standard univocal referent than the subjectivity of archaic societies.<sup>59</sup>

*Fig. 3. The West African legba divinatory shrine*



Incidentally, the *legba* is closely associated with a divination cult, notably one of the many African branches of geomancy. This specific branch is based on the manipulation of sixteen cowries, as a transforma-

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<sup>58</sup> Original reference to: M. Augé, 1986, ‘Le fetiche et son objet’ in: *L’Objet en psychanalyse*, ed. Maud Mannoni, Paris: Denoel.

<sup>59</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., pp. 45-46.

tion of the foursome which is at the basis of all geomancy. Extensive descriptions of *legba* the attending forms of divination may be found with, among others, Bascom, Ilésanmí, Kassibo, Maupoil, and Traoré.<sup>60</sup>

The point here is not that there is anything factually wrong with Guattari's treatment of the *legba*,<sup>61</sup> but that – just like in the case of physics and mathematical expressions discussed above – his treatment is a form of third-hand appropriation, out of context, forced onto the Procrustes bed of an imposed, alien conceptual toolbox (Guattari's – not to speak of Augé's as that of a leading mainstream anthropologist), and hence at variance with much that modern professional anthropology stands for. Guattari's acquaintance with the *legba* and with Augé's work was brought about – and the same applies to most anthropological references in Guattari's work – not in a context where anthropology is at home, but by means of an article written by Augé as guest contributor to a psychoanalytical collection. Quite differently than was the case with Freud, who read plenty of anthropology and made – for better or worse – a profound impact on the anthropological field,<sup>62</sup> for Guattari anthropol-

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<sup>60</sup> Maupoil, B., 1943, *La géomancie à l'ancienne Côte des Esclaves*, Paris: Institut de l'Ethnologie, pp. 177f, 265f; Bascom, W., 1980, *Sixteen cowries: Yoruba divination from Africa to the New World*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Abimbola, W., 1975, ed., *Sixteen great poems of Ifa*, no place: UNESCO; Akiwowo, Akinsola, 1983, 'Understanding interpretative sociology in the light of oriki of Orunmila', *Journal of Cultures and Ideas*, 1, 1: 139-157; Mákánjúolá Ilésanmí, T., 1991, 'The traditional theologians and the practice of òrìsà religion in Yorùbáland', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 21, 3: 216-226; Kassibo, B., 1992, 'La géomancie ouest-africaine: Formes endogenes et emprunts extérieurs', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 32, 4, no. 128: 541-596; Traoré, M.L., 1979, 'Vers une pensée originelle africaine: Exposé géomantique, critiques de la négritude et du consciencisme', These de 3e cycle, Université de Paris-IV, unpublished; Aromolaran, A., 1992, 'A critical analysis of the philosophical status of Yoruba Ifa literary corpus', in: H. Nagl-Docekal & F. Wimmers, eds., *Postkoloniales Philosophieren Afrika*, vol. 6, Wien: Oldenburg, pp. 140-154.

<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile Guattari's 'machinism' has inspired an interesting analysis of African traditional material: Peixoto Ferreira, Pedro, 2001, 'Um Estudo Sistemático Sobre a Máquina Territorial Primitiva', at: <http://www.geocities.com/ppf75/TXT/MTP.pdf>; I am not aware that this piece has already appeared in print.

<sup>62</sup> Freud's explicit interest in anthropology led not only to the anthropological science fiction of *Totem und Tabu* (Freud, S., 1918, *Totem and Taboo*, New York: Random

ogy is only a (quite limited) aspect of his erudition, and not a field of special interest by virtue of which he peruses professional anthropological works in their own right in search of food for thought.

### 3.3. *Primitives and barbarians: The exotic and archaeological other as a literary topos*

In a next passage Guattari – on the spur of the leading French prehistorian of a previous generation, Leroi-Gourhan<sup>63</sup> – evokes the exotic other, in this case the archaeological other of the Early Iron Age: as the early blacksmith, as the toiler in iron mines, as the farmer with an iron band around his cartwheel – and this other turns out to be nothing but a literary cliché.

‘If we take a hammer apart by removing its handle, it is still a hammer but in a ‘mutilated’ state. The ‘head’ of the hammer (...) can be reduced by fusion. It will then cross a threshold of formal consistency where it will lose its form (...). We are simply in the presence of metallic mass returned to smoothness, to the deterritorialisation which precedes its appearance in a machinic form. To go beyond this type of experiment (...)’<sup>64</sup> let us attempt the inverse, to associate

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House, English tr. of German edition *Totem und Tabu*, first published 1913), but also to psychoanalytical anthropology and to the *culture and personality* studies of the 1930s-1950s, with the pioneer Roheim and also e.g. Kardiner and Margareth Mead. Guattari is far removed from that tradition, but made contact with it through the work of Gregory Bateson, who was for many years the husband and co-fieldworker of Mead, but who over the years became more and more critical of the *culture and personality* approach.

<sup>63</sup> Guattari’s implicit reference is to: Leroi-Gourhan, A., 1961, *Le geste et la parole*, Paris: Albin Michel.

<sup>64</sup> Guattari refers here to Descartes’ famous passage on the immutability of wax as a substance (*Seconde Méditation*, §§ 10-18, first ed. Paris 1641; Descartes, R., 1904, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, eds. Adam, Ch., & Tannery, Paul, Paris: Cerf). Guattari remains close to Descartes’ example. Incidentally, Descartes is echoing here a passage from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (XV: 165f) which by Descartes’ time had already been famous for over one and a half millennium, and which I render here in Welsted’s 1812 translation: Ovid, 1812, *Metamorphoses, translated into English verse under the direction of Sir Samuel Garth by John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, William Congreve and other eminent hands*, London: Suttaby, Evance, & Fox; Sharpe & Hailes; Taylor & Hessey, vol. III, p. 181):

the hammer with the arm, the nail with the anvil. Between them they maintain relations of syntagmatic linkage. And their ‘collective dance’ can bring to life the defunct guild of blacksmiths, the sinister epoch of ancient iron mines, the ancestral use of metal-rimmed wheels... Leroi-Gourhan emphasised [with exclusive reference to prehistoric technologies – WvB] that the technical object was nothing outside of the technical ensemble to which it belonged. It is the same for sophisticated machines such as robots, which will soon be engendered by other robots.’<sup>65</sup>

With Guattari, incorporation of the anthropological and archaeological other in his text usually remains limited to a literary embellishment and nothing more:

‘Artistic cartographies have always been an essential element of the framework of every society. But since becoming the work of specialised corporate bodies, they may have appeared to be side issues, a supplement of the soul, a fragile superstructure whose death is regularly announced. And yet from the grottoes of Lascaux to Soho taking in the dawn of the cathedrals, they have never stopped being a vital element in the crystallisation of individual and collective subjectivities.’<sup>66</sup>

Besides, it may be extremely confusing, and amounting to ethnocentric imposition, to apply the concept of ‘art’ to the rock paintings of Lascaux which are so pleasing to the North Atlantic modern eye, or to the

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*Omnia mutantur, nihil interit: errat et illinc  
huc venit, hinc illuc, et quoslibet occupat artus  
spiritus eque feris humana in corpora transit  
inque feras noster, nec tempore deperit ullo,  
utque novis facilis signatur cera figuris  
nec manet ut fuerat nec formam servat eandem,  
sed tamen ipsa eadem est, animam sic semper eandem  
esse, sed in varias doceo migrare figuras.*

*Thus all things are but alter'd, nothing dies;  
And here, and there th' unbody'd spirit flies.  
By time, or force, or sickness dispossess,  
And lodges, where it lights, in man or beast;  
Or hunts without, 'till ready limbs it find,  
And actuates those according to their kind;  
From tenement to tenement is toss'd,  
The soul is still the same, the figure only lost:  
And, as the soften'd wax new seals receives,  
This face assumes, and that impression leaves;  
Now call'd by one, now by another name;  
The form is only chang'd, the wax is still the same:  
So death, so call'd, can but the form deface;  
Th' immortal soul flies out in empty space,  
To seek her fortune in some other place.*

<sup>65</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 37.

<sup>66</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 130.

products of African and Oceanian pictorial and sculptural techniques which are likewise so sublime to the inhabitants of the North Atlantic region. For there is little reason to assume that these products have been intended, by their makers, towards the boundary-crossing celebration of freedom which, ever since the Renaissance, has been so characteristic for North Atlantic art production. How can we usher in such production forms into the Guattarian discourse without the risk of becoming irresponsible – *i.e.* with a minimum of ethnocentric projection on our part?

The cultural other is also present in Guattari's quote from the masterpiece (strongly influenced by Durkheim) which the French Sinologist Granet wrote in the early 1930s, and that soon, and deservedly, established itself as a classic in the general education of the French intellectual: *La pensée chinoise*.<sup>67</sup> Also with Granet we see again an evocation of the Durkheimian *effervescence* as the source of social order, and cited approvingly by Guattari:<sup>68</sup>

'In *La Pensée chinoise* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1980), Marcel Granet shows the complementarity between the *ritornellos*<sup>69</sup> [*i.e.* refrains – WvB ] of social demarcation in ancient China and the affects, or virtues as he calls them, borne along by vocables, graphisms, emblems, etc.:

'“the specific virtue of a lordly race” was expressed by a song and dance (with either an animal or a vegetable motif). Without a doubt, it is appropriate to recognize for the old family names the value of a kind of musical motto – which translates graphically into a kind of coat of arms – the entire efficacy of the dance and the chants lying just as much in the graphic emblem as in the vocal emblem” ([Granet 1980:] pp. 50-51).'

The principal characteristic of this quote is that it adopts the term '*lordly race*', *i.e.* *Herrenvolk* [the German Nazist expression, ultimately with

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<sup>67</sup> Granet, M., 1934, *La pensée chinoise*, Paris: Albin Michel; Guattari refers to the 1980 ed.

<sup>68</sup> Guattari, F., *Cartographies, o.c.*, cited according to the English edition, p. 268, n. 19; my italics.

<sup>69</sup> French: *ritournelles*, which the inventive American translators of Guattari rendered as *ritornelloes* – one can hardly ignore the half-rhyme with *peccadilloes*...

Nietzschean connotations] without explicitly taking a distance from it – and this is regrettably in line with the evocation, elsewhere in Guattari's work, of 'barbarians' and 'primitives', a use of terms to which we will turn shortly.

But let us first concentrate on the selective appropriation of Chinese elements. Elsewhere in Guattari's co-authored work with Deleuze the 'Eastern eroticism' of Taoism is being evoked.<sup>70</sup> This sort of terminology regrettably reinforces Guattari's essentially nostalgic construction of the 'exotic' other who in the process is being reduced to an object. In Guattari's world there does not seem to be much place for the exotic other as a person, a woman, an equal, as someone who speaks back – someone whose very exotism is merely based on the intellectual observer's perspectival distortion (indeed, this is again the delusion of looking at the world from a privileged standpoint), for that observer (the anthropologist) is just as exotic, or as little exotic, as the people whose collectively structured lives are being observed.

Another passage from the co-authored work by Deleuze and Guattari demonstrates that the innovating subtleties which these authors develop in their approach to their own North Atlantic modern society, go hand in hand with nothing less than a bluntly stereotypical conservative construct when it comes to statements concerning societies outside the North Atlantic region. The passage in question deals with zombies and capitalism. Of course modern anthropologists realise that the people in Africa, Asia, Oceania, Australia and the Americas do not have a monopoly of the kind of phantasms which ancient travelogues and classic anthropologists attributed to them – rightly or wrongly. More and more modern anthropologists study the specific myths which are being produced and spread by modern culture (primarily North Atlantic, but in fact already worldwide, dominated as it is by effectively globalising information and communication technology): *horror, science fiction, New Age*.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Deleuze, & Guattari, *Mille plateaux, o.c.*; Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen, o.c.*, p. 511.

<sup>71</sup> Cf Verrips J., 2001, 'The Golden Bough and Apocalypse Now: An-other fantasy',



The anthropological and historical study of witchcraft has obtained a new dimension when we discovered that, in many places in the world today, increasing modernity did not lead to a decrease but, on the contrary, to an increase of witchcraft discourses.<sup>72</sup> Also zombies can now flatter themselves with a certain amount of attention from the part of modern anthropologists: zombie representations are part of the imagery of witchcraft (a human being is made into a zombie because of someone else's witchcraft, which in turn has been inspired by the other's desire for riches and power), but zombie beliefs are also an example of the unbounded, global, mass-media based collective fantasies which has become placeless and are no longer (as those collective fantasies described by classic anthropology) bound to a specific society localised in time and place.<sup>73</sup> In the face of these phenomena, which in themselves are admittedly interesting enough, Guattari and Deleuze suddenly become strangely unable to discern any more modern myths than just the zombie one. Light-heartedly relapsing into a terminology which in anthropology has already been unacceptable for over half a century, they distinguish between 'primitives', 'barbarians', and 'modern humans'. And probably their lapse is justified in their own eyes for, after all, far from being deliberately racist at the expense of people from other continents than their own, they are trying to

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*Postcolonial Studies: Culture, Politics, Economy*, Volume 4, Number 3, 1 November 2001, pp. 335-348, and the extensive literature cited there.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Geschiere, P.L., with C.F. Fisiy, 1995, *Sorcellerie et politique en Afrique: La viande des autres*, Paris: Karthala, Les Afriques; English ed.: *The modernity of witchcraft*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997; for a critical reaction on this path-breaking and influential book, cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2001, 'Witchcraft in modern Africa as virtualised boundary conditions of the kinship order', in : Bond, G.C., & Ciekawy, D.M., eds., *Witchcraft dialogues: Anthropological and philosophical exchanges*, pp. 212-263; there I seek to counterbalance Geschiere's one-sidedly modernist view by stressing the non-modern element in African witchcraft beliefs and of the practices based on those beliefs.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Migerel, H., 1987, *La migration des zombis: Survivance de la magie antillaise en France*, Paris: Ed. Caribéennes; Comaroff, J., & Comaroff, J.L., 1999, 'Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony', *American Ethnologist* 26, 2: 279-303; Comaroff, J. & Comaroff, J., 1999, 'Alien Nation: Zombies, Immigrants, and Millennial Capitalism', *CODESRIA Bulletin*, 3 and 4, pp 17-28.

explain *that these modern humans are even worse* than the other two categories. Thus Guattari & Deleuze have the following to say about zombies:

‘The only modern myth is the myth of zombies – mortified schizos, good for work, brought back to reason. In this sense the primitive and the barbarian, with their ways of coding death, are children in comparison to modern man and his axiomatic (so many unemployed are needed, so many deaths, the Algerian War doesn’t kill more people than weekend automobile accidents, planned death in Bengal, etc.). (...) Once it is said that capitalism works on the basis of decoded flows as such, how is it that it is infinitely further removed from desiring production than were the primitive or even the barbarian systems, which nonetheless code and overcode the flows? Once it is said that desiring production is itself a decoded and deterritorialized production, how do we explain that capitalism, with its axiomatic, its statistics, performs an infinitely vaster repression of this production than do the preceding regimes, which nonetheless did not lack the necessary repressive means? (...) The answer is the death instinct, if we call instinct in general the conditions of life that are historically and socially determined by the relations of production and antiproduction in a system. (...) If we examine the primitive or the barbarian constellations, we see that the subjective essence of desire as production is referred to large objectivities, to the territorial or the despotic body, which act as natural or divine preconditions that thus ensure the coding or the overcoding of the flows of desire by introducing them into systems of representation that are themselves objective. (...) Things are very different in capitalism.’<sup>74</sup>

I have a problem here, not with the fact that the death drive is situated by Deleuze and Guattari at the very heart of capitalism<sup>75</sup> (vocally articulating as a Marxist in the 1970s and ‘80s, I have remained enough of a Marxist

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<sup>74</sup> Guattari, F., with Deleuze, G., ‘The first positive task of schizoanalysis’, in: Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, o.c. (English ed.), pp. 322-39; my italics.

<sup>75</sup> See below, notably the section devoted to my positive assessment of the potential of Guattari’s work for anthropology. How great is the theoretical gain of his (and Deleuze’s) concrete historical positioning of general Freudian concepts becomes apparent when we compare their work with a seminal psychoanalyzing texts from the field of literary criticism: Brown, N.O., 1970, *Life against death: The psychoanalytical meaning of history*, London: Sphere Books, first published 1959. Brown’s book was highly acclaimed and has contributed enormously to the spread of Freudian ideas in the humanities, yet it did not manage to expose and critique the spurious *universalist* pretensions of these ideas, which Deleuze and Guattari help us to understand as being highly specific in place and time, i.e. as springing from the very structure of North Atlantic Early Modern and Modern society.

to consider such a position understood), but with the terms employed for the characterisation of non-capitalist societies.

In general we may say that, whenever Guattari occupies himself with phenomena which fall within the orbit of – often obsolescent – anthropological concepts (witchcraft, fetish, magical object,<sup>76</sup> totem<sup>77</sup>), then this springs not from any acquaintance with the anthropological literature, but from the often stereotypical, even fossilised way in which such concepts have, ever since Freud, been fed into the domain of psychoanalysis, where Guattari is at home. Such domesticated and appropriated concepts bereft of their original analytical context, are very well comparable with the ‘part objects’ which play such a big role in Guattari’s own psychoanalytical arguments: the breast, the nipple, the anus, the penis, which are being thought of, and fantasized about, in a state of contemplative intoxication, in isolation from the totality of the body and of the person who exists through that body – and which are thus being reduced to a libidinous ‘fetish’. Or – to employ a typically Guattarian concept – should we rather consider these anthropological *topoi* as ‘refrains’, around which the relatively small professional community of psychoanalysts contracts in a group subjectivity which no longer seeks to understand the interconnections between on the one hand that group and its refrains, on the other hand the rest of the world?

This kind of appropriative and fossilising use to which the social scientific inspiration is put, says a lot, I am afraid, about the signature of Guattari’s spiritual adventure: it is an adventure, all right, poetical and inspiring, and no doubt boundary-effacing, but it is at the same time a jour-

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. the reference to: Bonnafé, P., 1970, ‘Objet magique, sorcellerie et fétichisme’, *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, 2: 159f. This reference derives from: Guattari, F., with Deleuze, G., ‘The first positive task of schizoanalysis’, *o.c.*, p. 94 n. 4; reprint from: Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, *o.c.* (English tr.), pp. 322-39. Rather like in the case of the Augé article discussed above, Bonnafé’s is an anthropological piece published in a psychoanalytical context – Bonnafé conducted anthropological fieldwork in Congo-Brazzaville (cf. Bonnafé, F., 1987, *Histoire sociale d’un peuple congolais, livre I: La terre et le ciel*, Paris: ORSTOM); however, contrary to Augé, he is also known as a psychiatrist.

<sup>77</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, *o.c.*, p. 105.

ney which only leads across boundaries of a very specific type: that what can be thought within a narrowly defined, French intellectual tradition, which is felt, and serves, as home or as nest), whereas Guattari at the same time carefully, even painfully, avoids and ignores the negotiation of other, globally more relevant, types of boundaries: boundaries in space, in time, between cultures, between disciplines. In this respect, and despite the grand vistas of his arguments, Guattari's adventure is, after all, and regrettably, a retreat to inside the home, and it must be for profound and systematic, although hidden, reasons that the cultural other, and to a certain extent also the historic other, plays scarcely a role in his work.

### 3.4. Bateson and Castaneda

Although of very limited scope, the anthropological side of Guattari's erudition does include the work of Gregory Bateson, whom I already mentioned above. Bateson, for many years the husband of his popular colleague Margaret Mead, is an anthropologist who is shunned by many of his fellow anthropologists but venerated as a cult figure by some;<sup>78</sup> his work operates at the borderline between ethnography, schizophrenia, cybernetics, and ecology, and its influence on Guattari has been much greater than on modern anthropology in general. Bateson describes how his own approach to schizophrenia (similar to Guattari's) came into being: after formulating a particular theory, he wished to refine it empirically and for that purpose proceeded to do ethological<sup>79</sup> observations in

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<sup>78</sup> Bateson, G., 1978, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution and epistemology*, Paladin Book, Frogmore: Granada Publishing House, first published 1972. Cf. Adam Kuper's introduction to Bateson, *Steps, o.c.*; Simonse, S., 1998, 'Conflict, accommodation, and avoidance: From Gregory Bateson to René Girard', in: Elias, M., & Reis, R., eds., *Getuigen ondanks zichzelf: Voor Jan-Matthijs Schoffeleers bij zijn zeventigste verjaardag*, Maastricht: Shaker, pp. 131-156.

<sup>79</sup> It should hardly be necessary to point out the differences between 'ethological' (= relating to the empirical study of animal behaviour); ethnological (= an obsolete synonym of cultural anthropological); ethical (= relating to the philosophy of proper human conduct); and ethnical (relating to sub-national forms of identity in a wider socio-political framework).

the local zoo, and there he hit on something for which his theory had not prepared him (simple pet ownership might have, instead, I am tempted to add), notably the *playing* behaviour of monkeys – cf. Guattari's description of La Borde as a therapeutic environment for deprogramming, ludic liberation.<sup>80</sup> Guattari and Deleuze derived from Bateson the concept of 'plateau', the key concept of their second book on the relation between capitalism and schizophrenia;<sup>81</sup> by the same token, other psychiatrists (Laing and his fellow partisans for an antipsychiatry) derived from Bateson the concept of the *double bind*.

However, besides Bateson, Guattari (like most cosmopolitan intellectuals in the 1970s) has read at least one other anthropologist, and one that is an entire class in himself: Castaneda. This again is one of the most contested figures in anthropology. His works consist of the records of the inner transformations which he went through as a pupil of the Native American ('Indian') sorcerer Don Juan. Initially these records were welcomed as expressions of the deepest wisdom, as the seed for a radical re-orientation of anthropology towards intersubjectivity between the researcher and the people under study, for a re-evaluation of the mystical encounter between cultures in fieldwork, and as a reminder of what other cultures, with their differently structured fantasy space, have yet to offer not only to anthropology but even to modern North Atlantic culture at large.<sup>82</sup> However, soon serious doubts arose, and at present a fairly gen-

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<sup>80</sup> Incidentally, the discovery and interpretation of the playing animal was an important and enriching theme in ethology ever since its inception in the 1930s. Cf. Fagen, Robert, 1981, *Animal Play Behavior*, New York: Oxford University Press; Hassenstein, Bernhard, 1976, 'Leer- en speelgedrag', in: Grzimek, B., *Het leven der dieren: Encyclopedie van het dierenrijk, XVI Gedrag*, ed. Klaus Immelmann, Utrecht / Antwerpen: Het Spectrum, pp. XVI 317-336, Dutch tr. of: *Grzimek's Tierleben: Enzyklopedie des Tierreiches*, Zürich: Kindler, 1970; Buytendijk, F.J.J., 1932, *Het spel bij mensch en dier als openbaring van levensdriften*, Amsterdam: Kosmos.

<sup>81</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *Mille plateaux, o.c.*; cf. Guattari in: Stivale, *o.c.*

<sup>82</sup> Castaneda, C., 1968, *The teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui way of knowledge*, New York: Simon & Schuster; Castaneda, C., 1971, *A separate reality*, New York: Simon and Schuster; Castaneda, C., 1972, *Journey to Ixtlan*, New York: Simon and Schuster; Castaneda, C., 1974, *Tales of power*, New York: Simon and Schuster; Castaneda, C., 1977, *The second ring of power*, New York: Simon and Schuster. On Castaneda's re-

eral feeling among anthropologists is that Castaneda's work was heavily overestimated and that it is not even certain that he ever experienced in the flesh the mystical, initiatory experiences he describes. By now many anthropologists consider him a charlatan. Personally I wish to defer my judgment, for like several other modern anthropologists such as Jaulin, Stoller, and Janzen,<sup>83</sup> I too claim to have undergone, in the context of my fieldwork, an esoteric initiation which appears to be similar to Castaneda's, even though our respective descriptions of the experience are miles apart.<sup>84</sup> However, the question as to ethnographic validity has nothing to do with the – in principle irreproachable – way in which Guattari utilised the thought experiments of Castaneda and Don Juan in order to illustrate certain forms of what Guattari calls 'ecosophic cartography' a term perhaps to be interpreted as 'strategically reclaiming and responsibly reclaiming the space of singularisation (or, in a more established idiom,

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ception, cf. De Mille, R., 1976, *Castaneda's journey: The power and the allegory*, Santa Barbara: Capra Press; De Mille, R., 1980, ed., *The Don Juan papers: Further Castaneda controversies*, Santa Barbara: Ross-Erickson; Murray, S.O., 1979, 'The scientific reception of Castaneda', *Contemporary Sociology*, 8: 189-196. A very positive reaction came from the leading British anthropologist Mary Douglas: 1984, *Implicit meanings: Essays in anthropology*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1975; Schroll, M. A., & Schwartz, S. A., 2005, 'Whither Psi and Anthropology? An Incomplete History of SAC's Origins, Its Relationship with Transpersonal Psychology and the Untold Stories of Castaneda's Controversy', *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 16: 6-24; Marton, Y., 1994, 'The Experiential Approach to Anthropology and Castaneda's Ambiguous Legacy', in Goulet, J.G. & Young, R., eds, *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Experiences: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience*, Ontario: Broadview Press.

<sup>83</sup> Jaulin, R., 1971, *La mort sara: L'ordre de la vie ou la pensée de la mort au Tchad*, Paris: Plon; Stoller, P., & C. Olkes, 1987, *In sorcery's shadow: A memoir of apprenticeship among the Songhay of Niger*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Janzen, J.M., 1992, *Ngoma: Discourses of healing in Central and Southern Africa*, Los Angeles/ Berkeley/ London: University of California Press. Cf. ook Hall, J., 1994, *Sangoma: My Odyssey Into the Spirit World of Africa*, New York: Putnam.

<sup>84</sup> van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1991, 'Becoming a sangoma: Religious anthropological field-work in Francistown, Botswana', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 21, 4: 309-344; my *Intercultural encounters, o.c.*; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2003, 'Sangoma en filosoof: Eenheid in de praktijk, dilemma in de theorie', in: Bulhof, I.N., Poorthuis, M., & Bhagwandin, V., eds., *Mijn plaats is geen plaats: Ontmoetingen tussen wereld-beschouwingen*, Kampen: Klement-Pelckmans, pp. 219-231.

of *difference*)’.<sup>85</sup>

It is of some importance to remark that Guattari’s fascination with the work of Bateson and Castaneda does not revolve on the ethnographic representation of other cultures, but on the idiosyncratic intellectual production of two peripheral anthropologists, *triggered* only in part – and considering the intellectual free flight of these two authors, certainly no longer *determined* – by what they, as anthropologists, once acquired during fieldwork, in the way of knowledge about a different culture. This is

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<sup>85</sup> Stivale, *o.c.*:

[ *Stivale*: ] “...in the plateau 6 of (...) [ A thousand plateaux – Deleuze & Guattari, *o.c.* ], (...) you compare the relationship between the organism and the body without organs to the relationship between two key terms suggested to Carlos Castaneda by Don Juan in *Tales of Power*, the ‘Tonal’ (the organism, significance, the subject, all that is organized and organizing in/ for these elements), and the ‘Nagual’ (the whole of the Tonal in conditions of experimentation, of flow, of becomings, but without destruction of the Tonal).(...) This correspondence between your terms and the Tonal/ Nagual couple created some problems for me to the extent that the Nagual seems to correspond to the general ‘plane of consistency,’ to the bodies without organs which you pluralize in this plateau. Could you explain the difference between the various forms of bodies without organs (for example, you designate a particular body without organs for junkies and some other very specific forms of bodies without organs) and the more general Body without Organs?”

(...) *G[uattari]*: (...) to make oneself a body without organs, starting with drugs, with a love experience, with poetry, with any creation, is essentially to produce a cartography, that has this particular characteristic: that one cannot distinguish it [the cartography] from the existential territory which [the cartography] represents. (...) That means that there is no transposition, that there is no translatability, and therefore no possible taxonomy. The modelization here is a producer of existence. (...) [O]ne must distinguish between what I call a speculative cartography, concepts of trans-modelization, and then the instruments of direct modelization, i.e. a concrete cartography. To push the paradox to its limit, I’d say that the interest of a speculative cartography is that it be as far away as possible, that it have no pretension of accounting for concrete *cartographies*. This is its difference from a scientific activity. Science is conceived to propose the semiotization which accounts for practical experience. For us, it’s just the opposite! The less we’ll account for things, the farther we’ll be from these concrete *cartographies*, those of Castaneda or psychotics (which are more or less the same in this case), and the more we can hope to profit from this activity of speculative cartography.’

typical of the kind of appropriation in which Guattari engages. Admittedly, it is far from self-evident how we should define and problematise other cultures, but few would doubt that acknowledgement of the historic specificity of other cultures should be a major aspect of our approach to them. However, for Guattari other cultures scarcely seem to exist, unless as subjects of archaeology, or of a thought experiment. Other cultures as such have left only a faint echo in the politics of the multicultural society of France in the course of the last few decades: the debate is fuelled *by the clash of politico-cultural position within France today*, rather than by the historic specificity of the immigrants' cultures of remote origin that make up the multicultural society of Western Europe. The world from outside the North Atlantic region only vaguely enters Guattari's horizon – or it should be as selectively imported and domesticated within the France of the 1980s, with the xenophobic agitator Le Pen as key figure.

Meanwhile the *historically other* (provided he or she belongs to the North Atlantic region) is, admittedly, present in Guattari's work, but even that other is being eclipsed by very schematic summaries of human history in a handful of very large eras, reduced, Hegelian fashion, to a few core themes rendered in a few lines: the era of European Christianity; the era of capitalist deterritorialisation of modes of knowing and of technology; and the era of global computerisation.<sup>86</sup>

### 3.5. *The price of superficial appropriation of a field of study*

Above I critically discussed how the physicists Sokal en Bricmont opposed the appropriation of originally natural-science terms and mathematical terms within modern French philosophical prose including that of Guattari. For me, originally trained as an anthropologist, and until a decade ago holding a succession of professorial chairs in that discipline, the temptation is great to follow their example and to direct the same kind of criticism against the anthropological side of Guattari's work. Admittedly,

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<sup>86</sup> Guattari, F., *Cartographies*, o.c.



anthropologists often fiercely oppose the appropriation of their intellectual products by others, both within their discipline and across disciplinary boundaries. One obvious factor in this attitude is that anthropologists mainly acquire their data by a painful and tedious process of personal, usually strictly individual, fieldwork, which makes it difficult to develop intersubjectivity about such data vis-à-vis fellow anthropologists, let alone vis-à-vis outsiders. It can easily be demonstrated that Guattari did not know how to situate his meagre anthropological data in their original culture-specific context, and only used them instrumentally, in order to embellish, by facile contrast, an already pre-set argument almost exclusively inspired by modern North Atlantic society. However, not without reason did I give up anthropology for intercultural philosophy, a decade ago.<sup>87</sup> Often self-congratulatory thriving in a context of taken-for-granted othering and hegemony (hence ‘development-relevant’); largely unwilling or unable to address the economic and power relations inherent in the production of anthropological knowledge through fieldwork; often reluctant to involve local populations, actively, with full rights of initiative and veto, in that production; increasingly retreating into the use of *linguae francae* – often the researchers’ own native tongues – rather than spending years on learning local languages; and risking that individual, qualitative fieldwork becomes saturated with utterly personal transference (to mention but a few of the leading themes of my book *Intercultural encounters*), – for all these reasons much of modern anthropology can hardly claim to be a convincing pursuit of valid transcultural knowledge. To the extent to which disciplinary organisation and methodology help to substantiate the claim of a privileged, authoritative scientific viewpoint, I

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<sup>87</sup> Opinions differ as to the extent to which such an attempt was justified, and was successfully completed; cf. Boele van Hensbroek, Pieter, 2003, ‘Should intercultural philosophy take over from anthropology in the study of culture? In reaction to Wim van Binsbergen’s *Intercultural Encounters*’, *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie*, 17, 1-2, 2003: 109-124; Devisch, R., 2004, ‘Reading Wim van Binsbergen’s *Intercultural Encounters*’, *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie* XVII: 141-152; Osha, Sanya, 2005, ‘The Frontier of Interculturality: A Review of Wim van Binsbergen’s *Intercultural Encounters*’ in: *Africa Development*, 2005, 1-2, pp. 239-250.

do appreciate the post-structuralist insistence on the illusory nature of any privileged standpoint. Yet this cannot be the last word. The intersubjectivity created by the social organisation and the communication strategies (conferences, journals, peer review) of a scientific discipline, and the painstaking and critical application of usually quite tedious and time-consuming methodologies, are not in the first place intended to protect and maintain intradisciplinary academic power, but to distinguish home-spun, lazy, performative pseudo-science (science fiction in the literal sense) from the best possible anthropology – the best guidance (however defective still) on our arduous road to slightly more valid knowledge. But even so the reader need not fear that I will limit my argument to merely a predictable, mainstream anthropological critique of Guattari: *I wish to conclude with a positive assessment of Guattari's potential for anthropology.*

Meanwhile, it is not just humourless, mainstream disciplinary chauvinism (like I think was involved in the case of Sokal and Bricmont) which makes me revolt against Guattari's superficial appropriation of cultural anthropology. He uses a meagre selection of largely obsolete anthropology, ripped out of context, in order to idiosyncratically mark an intellectual trajectory, and develop an intellectual style, to which anthropology and its professionals are not allowed to contribute any more. In this way he completely ignores the struggle of modern anthropologists to arrive at a transcultural knowledge that combines, hopefully, ethical and political integrity with empirical and epistemological validity.<sup>88</sup> This

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. Salamone, F.A., 1979, 'Epistemological implications of fieldwork and their consequences', *American Anthropologist*, 81: 46-60; Poewe, K., 1996, 'Writing culture and writing fieldwork: The proliferation of experimental and experiential ethnographies', *Ethnos*, 61, 3-4: 177-206; Wolf, D.L., 1996, *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, Colorado: Westview Press; Funder, M., 2005, 'Bias, Intimacy and Power in Qualitative Fieldwork Strategies', *The Journal of Transdisciplinary Environmental Studies*, 4, 1: 1-9; Nelson, C., 1988, 'An Anthropologist's Dilemma: Fieldwork and Interpretive Inquiry', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 8: 53-66; Tehindrazanarivelo, E.D., 1997, 'Fieldwork: The Dance of Power', *Anthropology & Humanism*, 22 (1), 54-60; Michrina, B.P., & CA Richards, 1996, *Person to Person: Fieldwork, Dialogue, and the Hermeneutic Method*, Albany, NY: SUNY; Clifford, James, 1997, 'Spatial Practices: Fieldwork, Travel, and the Disciplining of Anthropology', in: A.

struggle casts, in retrospect, serious doubt on all apparently established elements of anthropological knowledge (including the elements which Guattari himself uses: the ethnography of *legba* and of African geomancy in general, the esoteric knowledge of Meso America, the collective representations of zombies and witchcraft). This struggle deprives these elements of anthropological knowledge of their alleged objectivity, and situates them at long last within *the aporetic problematics of the intercultural encounter* – in many respects the central dilemma of our time. But Guattari's appropriation could not care less. It is therefore imperative that both anthropology and intercultural philosophy explicitly take their distance from such a form of intellectual autism disguised as erudition. Guattari's strategy of appropriation is far from being a convincing testimony of the liberation which he yet champions so endearingly. In the last analysis his attitude is not so much pseudo-scientific but anti-scientific. For his attitude expects that humankind will progress, not on the basis of the methodical dedication to empirical description as the principal inspiration for theoretical insight, but merely on the basis of idiosyncratic, poetical intuition expressed in an evocative language which, performatively, shares only the vocabulary, but not the empirical nexus nor the method, nor, therefore, a researcher's very hard and essentially humble and responsively, interculturally interactive work over many years, with the sciences of man and of nature.

It is now time to see how positive, after all, the relation between Guattari and cultural anthropology can be, as long as we only take our distance from the specific defective references to anthropology in his work.

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Gupta & J. Ferguson, eds., *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, pp. 185-222; my *Intercultural Encounters*, *o.c.* Perhaps more than any of these articles and collections, the work of Michael Jackson and René Devisch offers excellent examples of an anthropology aiming at transcultural encounter, empathy and intersubjectivity; cf. Jackson, Michael., 1989, *Paths toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press; Devisch, René, 2008, a extensive discussion in the pages of *CODESRIA Bulletin* of his views on the meaning and future of anthropology for Africa in connection to his being granted a honorary doctorate from the University of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, 2007 – with extensive commentaries by Mudimbe, Keita, van Binsbergen, and others.

## 4. And yet: Guattari's potential for anthropology

### 4.1. Identity and globalisation

A major point of convergence between Guattari and modern anthropology lies in the study of globalisation and identity.

Guattari keenly perceives how the construction of identities especially in politico-ethnic national and international globalised spaces is one of the most important phenomena in the modern world, as an expression of the increasing desire, all over the world, of subjective points of identification. Guattari is generous enough to see this as a striving for national liberation, but fortunately he is also alive to the fact that such ethnic processes are often forms of politically *conservative* reterritorialisation of the subjectivity. This most important, global development shows the bankruptcy of the universalist conception of subjectivity as embodied in capitalism (whose major characteristics are universalism and deterritorialisation anyway):

‘Generally, one can say that contemporary history is increasingly dominated by rising demands for subjective singularity – quarrels over language, autonomist demands, issues of nationalism and of the nation. (...) Today, as everyone knows, the growth of nationalism and fundamentalism in Arab and Muslim countries may have incalculable consequences not only on international relations, but on the subjective economies of hundreds of millions of individuals. It's the whole problematic of disarray as well as the mounting demands of the Third World, the countries of the South, which are thus stamped with an agonising question mark.’<sup>89</sup>

Guattari manifests a profound awareness of the underlying dynamics permeating and connecting all these movements, however different they may be:

‘There is at present a very profound upheaval of subjectivity in France developing around the questions of immigrants and of the emergence of new cultures, of migrant cultures connected to the second generations of immigrants.

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<sup>89</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis, o.c.*, p. 3. Guattari wrote this over a decade before the various instances of massive violence on the USA eastern seaboard on 11 September 2001.

This is something that is manifested in paradoxical ways, such as the most reactionary racism we see developing in France around the movement of Jean-Marie Le Pen, (...) but also, quite the contrary, manifested through styles, through young people opening up to another sensitivity, another relationship with the body, particularly in dance and music. These also belong to molecular revolutions. There is also a considerable development, which, in my opinion, has an important future, around the Green, alternative, ecological, pacifist movements. This is very evident in Germany, but these movements are developing now in France, Belgium, Spain, etc.

So, you'll say to me: but really, what is this catch-all, the huge washtub in which you are putting these very different and often violent movements, for example the movements of nationalistic struggles (the Basques, the Irish, the Corsicans), and then women's, pacifist movements, non-violent movements? Isn't all that a bit incoherent? Well, I don't think so because, once again, the molecular revolution is not something that will constitute a program. It's something that develops precisely in the direction of diversity, of a multiplicity of perspectives, of creating the conditions for the maximum impetus of processes of singularization. It's not a question of creating agreement; on the contrary, the less we agree, the more we create an area, a field of vitality in different branches of this phylum of molecular revolution, and the more we reinforce this area. It's a completely different logic from the organizational, arborescent<sup>90</sup> logic that we know in political or union movements.<sup>91</sup>

However, it is a pity that Guattari himself did not yet take any clear steps to let sprout the seeds which his work contains towards the framing and dynamising of ethnic studies. Nonetheless his suggestions concerning the multicultural society of Western Europe today have been picked up by others. As Oosterling remarks:

‘...in the works of Derrida and Lyotard the problem of justice [becomes] more and more prominent from 1980 on. Although books like *L'Anti-Oedipe* [by Deleuze & Guattari] likewise imply an ethical appeal, Deleuze is perhaps the only one [from among these post-structuralist philosophers] to refrain from specifying an ‘ethical’ aspect within his nomadic thought. However, from the applications of the work which he wrote together with Guattari it turns out that this dimension is yet there – at least according to his commentators.’<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> I.e. ramifying like trees, in the familiar, formalised shape of dendrograms and organograms.

<sup>91</sup> Guattari in: Stivale, *o.c.*

<sup>92</sup> ‘...in de werken van Derrida en Lyotard [ treedt ] na 1980 het probleem van de rechtvaardigheid nadrukkelijk op de voorgrond. Hoewel boeken als *L'Anti-Oedipe* impliciet eveneens een ethisch appèl inhouden, is Deleuze wellicht de enige die ervan

Oosterling continues in a footnote:

‘With regard to the position of minorities their theories have furnished a critical apparatus for the diagnosis of, for instance, the positions of Aborigines in Australia or of subcultural groups in Western culture.’<sup>93</sup>

Apparently, despite his glaringly superficial appropriation of anthropology, Guattari has a discourse on ethnicity and race which many have recognised as important. One of these echoes is to be found in the work of the prominent historian of science Robert Young; only with Guattari & Deleuze he found a suitable expression for the fact that in the modern world, race has become not so much a category of exclusion, of pure categorical boundaries, but on the contrary a category of *hybridisation*:

‘In recent years a whole range of disciplines has been concerned with the question of the exclusion and representation of ‘the Other’, of inside/outside notions of Otherness, or of the difficulties, so painful for anthropology, of self-Other relations. Brown’s finely gradated table<sup>94</sup> by contrast, suggests that racism, and therefore perhaps colonialism, also worked according to a different paradigm than ours (still in fact present today, but hidden), of diversity and inequality. Deleuze and Guattari get it right in the course of a discussion of Christ’s face in a scene from Giotto’s *The Life of St Francis*:

‘‘If the face is in fact Christ, in other words, your average ordinary White Man, then the first deviances, the first divergence-types are racial: yellow man, black man... European racism as the white man’s claim has never operated by exclusion, or by the designation of someone as Other. . . Racism operates by the determination of degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face, which endeavours to integrate non-conforming traits into increasingly eccentric and backward waves . . . From the viewpoint of racism, there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside. There are only people who should be like us

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afziet om in zijn nomadische denken een ‘ethisch’ aspect te expliciteren. Uit toepassingen van het samen met Guattari geschreven werk blijkt evenwel dat deze dimensie in ieder geval volgens zijn interpreteren - wel aanwezig is.’ Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen*, o.c., p. 594; my translation.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Ten aanzien van de positie van minderheden hebben hun theorieën een kritisch apparaat geleverd voor een diagnose van bijvoorbeeld de posities van Aborigines in Australië of van subculturele groepen in de westerse cultuur.’ Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen*, o.c., p. 594, n. 441; my translation.

<sup>94</sup> Reference is made here to: Brown, R., 1873-1879, *The races of mankind*, 4 vols., London: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, vol. II, p. 6 [WvB].

and whose crime is not to be.’’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988 [= *A thousand Plateaux*, London: Athlone ], p. 178).

Nineteenth-century racism was constructed through the ‘computation of normalities’ and ‘degrees of deviance’: a race, Deleuze and Guattari observe,

‘‘is defined not by its purity but rather by the impurity conferred upon it by a system of domination. Bastard and mixed-blood are the true names of race’’ (p. 379).<sup>95</sup>

Still within the field of anthropological studies of globalisation, it is remarkable that for Guattari deterritorialised capitalism, as a source of dislocation, is opposed to what we could call (albeit in terms that are totally alien to Guattari’s vocabulary) ‘the liberating powers generated within the local horizon of organic signification’. On this point Guattari’s work converges with a trend in modern anthropology – most vocally expressed in the work of the Indian-American researcher Arjun Appadurai – , according to which not the diffuse, world-wide, globalising aspect of the social experience, but on the contrary the focused, the local, the home, is an active construct that needs to be researched and explained, notably by ethnicity research; the latter often concentrates on the geopolitical illusions attending the ideological construction of a ‘home’:

‘...I hope to extend my thoughts about local subjects and localized contexts to sketch the outlines of an argument about the special problems that beset the production of locality in a world that has become deterritorialized, diasporic and transnational’.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Young, R., 1994, ‘Egypt in America: Black Athena, Racism and colonial discourse’, in: Rattansi, A., & Westwood, S., 1994, eds., *Racism, modernity and identity: On the western front*, London: Polity Press, pp. 150-169, p. 167; Youngs reference is to: Deleuze & Guattari, *A thousand plateaux, o.c.*, pp. 178, 379.

<sup>96</sup> Appadurai, A., 1995, ‘The production of locality’, in: R. Fardon, ed., *Counterworks: Managing the diversity of knowledge*, ASA decennial conference series ‘The uses of knowledge: Global and local relations’, London: Routledge, pp. 204-225, p. 213. Cf. Appadurai, A., 1990, ‘Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy’, in: Featherstone, M., ed., *Global culture: Nationalism, globalisation and modernity*, London/ Newbury Park: Sage, pp. 295-310; Appadurai, A., 1997, *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*, Delhi etc.: Oxford University Press.

On this point Appadurai refers explicitly to Deleuze & Guattari,<sup>97</sup> but he does not say in so many words that for him (balancing between two continents, in the context of a global pursuit of – implicitly universalist – social science) the construction of the home is far more problematic and artificial than it is for these two French philosophers, for whom their modern French intellectual home apparently remained as self-evident and invisible as the air they breathed.

#### 4.2. *Virtuality*

One of the concepts which anthropology has used in its approach to modern globalisation processes has been *virtuality*.<sup>98</sup> It now so happens that Guattari has much of value to contribute to this concept – conceived no longer in the Aristotelian or Scholastic sense of δύνάμις *dunamis* / *potentialitas*; nor in the modern but very specific sense (‘materially unreal, but real in its effects’) of electronics and automatisisation; but conceived as a reference to unprecedented new worlds evoked by creativity:

‘Expressive, linguistic and non-linguistic substances install themselves at the junction of discursive chains (belonging to a finite, preformed world, the world of the Lacanian Other) and incorporeal registers with infinite, creationist virtualities (which have nothing to do with Lacanian ‘mathemes’). It is in

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<sup>97</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *A thousand plateaus*, o.c.

<sup>98</sup> Rheingold, H., 1993, *The Virtual Community. Homesteading on the electronic frontier*, Addison Wesley, New York; Woolley, B., 1992 *Virtual Worlds*, London: Penguin; Heim, M. 1993, *The metaphysics of virtual reality*, New York: Oxford University Press; Jones, S.G., 1997, ed., *Virtual Culture. Identity & Communication in Cybersociety*, London: Sage; Carrier, J.G., & Miller, D., 1999, eds., *Virtualism – A New Political Economy*, Oxford: Berg; Poster, Mark, 1995, ‘Postmodern Virtualities’, in: Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows, eds., *Cyberspace, Cyberbodies, Cyberpunk. Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, London: Sage, pp. 79-95. For my own contributions to this debate, see: van Binsbergen, *Virtuality*, o.c.; also cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1998, ‘Globalization and virtuality: Analytical problems posed by the contemporary transformation of African societies’, in: Meyer & Geschiere, o.c.: 273-303; van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 2001, ‘Witchcraft in modern Africa as virtualised boundary conditions of the kinship order’, in: Bond, G.C., & Ciekawy, D.M., eds., *Witchcraft dialogues: Anthropological and philosophical exchanges*, Athens (OH): Ohio University Press, pp. 212-263.



this zone of intersection that subject and object fuse and establish their foundations.’<sup>99</sup>

Even despite Guattari’s scientific use of language, one of the most inspiring aspects of his work revolves around the poetic evocation of these forms of virtuality especially in the context of art:

‘Strange contraptions, you will tell me, these machines of virtuality [*i.e.* these forms of art – WvB], these blocks of mutant percepts<sup>100</sup> and affects, half-object half-subject, already there in sensation and outside themselves in fields of the possible. They are not easily found at the usual marketplace for subjectivity and maybe even less at that for art; yet they haunt everything concerned with creation, the desire for becoming-other. as well as mental disorder or the passion for power. Let us try, for the moment, to give an outline of them starting with some of their principal characteristics.

The assemblages of aesthetic desire and the operators of virtual ecology are not entities which can easily be circumscribed within the logic of discursive sets. They have neither inside nor outside. They are limitless interfaces which secrete interiority and exteriority and constitute themselves at the root of every system of discursivity. They are becomings – understood as nuclei of differentiation – anchored at the heart of each domain, but also between the different domains in order to accentuate their heterogeneity. A becoming child (for example in the music of Schumann) extracts childhood memories so as to embody a perpetual present which installs itself like a branching, a play of bifurcations between becoming woman, becoming plant, becoming cosmos, becoming melodic....’<sup>101</sup>

### 4.3. The culture of capitalism

All this suggests that, despite the blemishes in Guattari’s handling of concrete anthropological materials, anthropology yet could benefit from Guattari just as he could benefit from anthropology.

What we specially encounter in Guattari is the struggle in order to

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<sup>99</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 24f. Cf. Deleuze & Guattari, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie*, o.c., p. 111f, where science as knowledge of the real is being contrasted with philosophy as knowledge of the virtual.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Percept’, ‘concept’ and ‘affect’ are (in critical reflection upon Kant) the three key concepts of Deleuze’s thought from the 1970s onward, with which Guattari’s ideas converge on this point; cf. Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen*, o.c., p. 543f, 560f.

<sup>101</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 92.

liberate language and thought of the frameworks whose pathogenic and paralysing effects turn out to be directly connected with structures of economic and political domination. Marxist Africanist anthropologists a few decades ago simply identified these frameworks as 'capitalism'. What eventually made many of them (*of us!*) relinquish the Marxist perspective, was what we perceived as the practical impossibility to arrive, from a Marxist point of departure, at a non-reductionist theory of the symbol and of symbolic production, including art and religion.<sup>102</sup> Perhaps such a theory could be constructed (my 1981 own book *Religious change in Zambia* was one of several attempts in that direction at the time, and so was the collection I published with Peter Geschiere *Old modes of production and capitalist encroachment*, 1985), but in this connection we were more and more incapacitated by the dogmatic materialism that adhered to brands of Marxism then current. And after many years of enthusiastic work on Marxist interpretations of African data, we called it a day.

For Guattari, however (as for Deleuze and many members of their generation, e.g. Baudrillard), the continued preoccupation with the problematic of the culture of capitalism remained self-evident, and on this point they made considerable advances which however, because of disciplinary and geographical boundaries, fell short of fertilising the later

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<sup>102</sup> I distanced myself from my earlier, neo-Marxist approaches to African religion in: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1988, 'The land as body: An essay on the interpretation of ritual among the Manjaks of Guinea-Bissau', in: Frankenberg, R., ed., *Gramsci, Marxism, and Phenomenology: Essays for the development of critical medical anthropology*, special issue of *Medical Anthropological Quarterly*, new series, 2, 4, december 1988, pp. 386-401. Nonetheless I continue to attach much value to a Marxist perspective. French and Dutch neo-Marxist anthropologists in the 1960s-1980s developed and routinised the concepts of 'mode of production' and 'articulation of modes of production'. These I consider a lasting enrichment of the cultural anthropological conceptual apparatus, which I have continued to use to this very day; cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1992, *Tears of Rain: Ethnicity and history in central western Zambia*, London/Boston: Kegan Paul International; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2006, 'Mythological archaeology: Situating sub-Saharan cosmogonic myths within a long-range intercontinental comparative perspective', in: Osada, Toshiki, with the assistance of Hase, Noriko, eds., *Proceedings of the Pre-symposium of RIHN [Research Institute for Humanity and Nature] and 7th ESCA [Ethnogenesis of South and Central Asia] Harvard-Kyoto Roundtable*, Kyoto: RIHN, pp. 319-349.

work of neo-Marxist anthropologists outside France:

‘The other operation of this capitalism is an operation of integration, *i.e.* its objective is not an immediate profit, a direct power, but rather to capture subjectivities from within, if I can use this term. (...) And to do so, what better technique is there to capture subjectivities than to produce them oneself? It’s like those old science fiction films with invader themes, the body snatchers; integrated world capitalism takes the place of the subjectivity, it doesn’t have to mess around with class struggles, with conflicts: it expropriates the subjectivity directly because it produces subjectivity itself. It’s quite relaxed about it; let’s say that this is an ideal which this capitalism partially attains. How does it do it? By producing subjectivity, *i.e.* it produces quite precisely the semiotic chains, the ways of representing the world to oneself, the forms of sensitivity, the forms of curriculum, of evolution; it furnishes different age groups, categories of the population, with a mode of functioning in the same way that it would put computer chips in cars, to guarantee their semiotic functioning.’<sup>103</sup>

It was particularly Guattari’s combination of psychiatrist and political activist which brought him to make significant progress in this field. What enables him to escape from the straight-jacket of reductionist Marxist dogmatics and thus to show the way towards a theoretical innovation beyond Marxism? That is especially the insight, as mediated in *L’Anti-Oedipe*, to the effect that, instead of the contradiction between interests and desires which both Marx and Freud took for granted, in fact there exists an intimate contamination between these two poles of the human condition.<sup>104</sup> Deleuze and Guattari began to perceive that the Oedipus complex is not a universal of human culture, but a specific product of the subjectivation of high capitalism in Central and Western Europe. This makes us aware of an important aspect of the symbolic production of capitalism, but also presents a distorting mirror to anthropology itself. For if Deleuze & Guattari’s hypothesis concerning the capitalist background of the Oedipus complex is correct, then this would mean that capitalism produced not only the Oedipus complex, but also a specific form of universalism in psychoanalysing anthropology. That is the reason why, for *culture and personality* anthropologists of the 1920s–1960s, it was self-evident that the Oedipus complex *had* to be universal –

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<sup>103</sup> Guattari in: Stivale, *o.c.*

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen, o.c.*, pp. 601, 604.

just as deterritorialised as the economic structures that had produced it; it was literally unthinkable to these researchers that the Oedipus complex as a form of subjectivation could be limited to the spatial and temporal horizon of modern North Atlantic culture – which was their very own, and dominating the colonial world of their times. Thus the position of hegemonic ethnocentrism appears to be built into the very science, anthropology, which was to enable us – in the same first half of the twentieth century, of all periods – to formulate the concept of ethnocentrism in the first place, as well as, in the hands of Melville Herskovits,<sup>105</sup> its counterpart, notably cultural relativism.<sup>106</sup>

But are we speaking here of the same capitalism whose twentieth-century expansion we sought to study in Africa as Marxist anthropologists in the 1970s? Guattari has raised the intellectual strategy of poetic, conceptual kaleidoscopes to a virtue and a fine art, so that for him capitalism is not *per se* the historic social formation of modern Europe; on the contrary, capitalism can occur in many eras, usually in the company of technologies of domination such as writing, bureaucracy, and the state.

‘Capitalistic deterritorialised Assemblages do not constitute well defined historical periods – any more than do emergent territorialised Assemblages. (Capitalistic drives are found at the heart of the Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Chinese empires, then throughout the whole of classical Antiquity.)’<sup>107</sup>

It is not by accident such apparatuses of subjectivation strike us as echoes of the concept of ‘ideological state apparatuses’ with which Althusserian Marxism, inspired by Gramsci, sought to understand the nexus between human subject, the state, and capital, in terms of the subjugation of the former to the latter by means of the middle term, the state. At the same

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<sup>105</sup> Herskovits, M.J., & Herskovits, F.S., 1973, eds., *Cultural relativism: Perspectives in cultural pluralism*, New York: Vintage Books.

<sup>106</sup> For an incisive critique of cultural relativism, see: Aya, R., 1996, ‘The Devil in Social Anthropology; or, the Empiricist Exorcist; or, the Case Against Cultural Relativism’, in: Hall, J.A., & Jarvie, I., 1996, eds., *The social philosophy of Ernest Gellner*, Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, Poznan Studies in the Philosophy of Sciences and the Humanities, pp. 553-562.

<sup>107</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis, o.c.*, p. 105.

time we cannot close our eyes to the language game that Guattari is playing here: at such a formidable level of aggregation, what does capitalism as a concept of historical analysis still mean, if it can be claimed to apply to the slavery-based mode of production in Pericles' Athens, just as well as to the temple-based economies of Old Kingdom Egypt and of Sumer, and to the patrimonial bureaucracy (Weber) of China under the T'ang dynasty? Again, the desire to conjure up the subjective experience of a poetical understanding at minimum costs propels Guattari on a trajectory away from creative intellectual freedom, and towards deterritorialisation.

#### *4.4. Towards an anthropology of non-meaning, of violence, and of the subconscious*

However, another point on which Guattari may have a fertilising effect on modern anthropology is in taking a relative position vis-à-vis *meaning*, a concept that has taken obsessional forms in some anthropological work of the last fifty years.<sup>108</sup> One of the major developments in anthropology in

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<sup>108</sup> The following is a minimal selection: Goodenough, W., 1956, 'Componential Analysis and the Study of Meaning', *Language*, 32: 195-216; Spiro, M., ed., 1965, *Context and meaning in cultural anthropology*, New York: Free Press; Geertz, C., 1973, *The interpretation of cultures*, New York: Basic Books; Geertz, C., 1979, 'From the native's point of view: On the nature of anthropological understanding', in: Rabinow, P., & Sullivan, W.N., eds., *Interpretive social science: A reader*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 225-241; Geertz, C., 1983, *Local knowledge: Further essays in interpretative anthropology*, New York: Basic Books; Dolgin, J.L., Kemnitzer, D.S., & Schneider, D.M., eds., 1977, *Symbolic anthropology: A reader in the study of symbols and meaning*, New York: Columbia University Press; Douglas, M., 1973, ed., *Rules and meanings*, Harmondsworth: Penguin; Douglas, M., 1984, *Implicit meanings: Essays in anthropology*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; reprint of first edition, 1975; Kapferer, B., 1976, ed., *Transaction and meaning: Directions in the anthropology of exchange and symbolic behavior*, Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues; Keesing, R.M., 1987, 'Anthropology as interpretive quest', *Current Anthropology*, 28: 161-176; Lafontaine, J.S., ed., 1972, *The interpretation of ritual*, London: Tavistock; Lévi-Strauss, C., 1979, *Myth and meaning*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Chock, P., & J. Wyman, eds., *Discourse and the social life of meaning*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution. For explorations of the ways in which the meaning problem poses itself in the context of modern African, especially urban, societies engaged in globalisation, cf. Hannerz, U., 1992, *Cultural complexity*:

the course of the twentieth century CE was the popularisation of the concept of symbol, especially via Susanne Langer going beyond Cassirer.<sup>109</sup> According to a common definition the symbol stands for, but is detached from, its referent; this led to a shift in anthropology, from the study of material objects, customs and institutions, to the study of how meanings are being generated from recognisable cross-linkages within culture. Although it had a rather different background, the structuralist method helped to bring that new ideal within reach.<sup>110</sup> However, in this connection one ran into considerable embarrassment whenever (within the local cultural horizon in time and place) the ethnographer encountered phenomena which for the participants themselves appeared to have no explicit, explicable meaning – and as all fieldworkers know this is a common occurrence. Theoretically, a possible way out is then to appeal to the hypothesis of a collective unconscious, in which latent meanings can be surmised to be stored which are too painful, too destructive, or too central to the construction of social order, than that they could be allowed to penetrate to the surface of consciousness. But often such an appeal is unjustified, even regardless of the utterly problematic nature of the concept of ‘collective unconscious’ in itself, and of the formidable empirical and methodological problems attending its systematic study. What to think of cultural objects and practices which in the past, and elsewhere, did have an explicit meaning, but this meaning became detached from

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*Studies in the social organization of meaning*, New York: Columbia University Press; van Binsbergen, *Virtuality*, o.c.; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1993, ‘Making sense of urban space in Francistown, Botswana’, in: P.J.M. Nas, ed., *Urban symbolism*, Leiden: Brill, Studies in Human Societies, volume 8, pp. 184-228.

<sup>109</sup> Langer, S.K., 1942, *Philosophy in a new key*, Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press. Cassirer, E., 1944, *An essay on Man*, New Haven: Yale University Press; Cassirer, E., 1946, *Language and myth*, New York, tr. S.K. Langer of *Sprache und Mythos*, Berlin, 1925; Cassirer, E., 1953-7, *The philosophy of symbolic forms*, 3 vols, New Haven, tr. R. Mannheim of *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Berlin, 1923-1929.

<sup>110</sup> Leach, E.R., 1976, *Culture and Communication: The logic by which symbols are connected: An introduction to the use of structuralist analysis in social anthropology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale*, o.c.

these objects and practices in their peregrinations through space and time – e.g. what anthropologists were to call ‘survivals’ around the turn of the twentieth century: fragments of tradition which are no longer understood by the participants and which are enshrined in ‘folklore’. There is a large class of explicitly formal cultural systems which are characterised by a high degree of strict distinctions in a systematic framework: language, writing, divination systems, astronomies, cults and their formal organisations; these systems have the capability of maintaining themselves with improbable tenaciousness and considerable immutability across many boundaries in both space and time, and thus to end up in contexts where they cannot derive their meaning from an overarching *local* culture – because their meaning already lies with the distant time and place of their origin. Modern anthropologists came to be obsessed with the structural-functional integration of cultural elements *within* a very narrow horizon of space and time (once the ‘tribe’, now the community, the ethnic group, the people) – the dominant paradigm in anthropology from the 1930s especially with the rise of intensive and prolonged fieldwork (which inevitably imposes local horizons as a practical constraint). Because of this orientation, modern anthropologists have found it immensely difficult to deal with this kind of meaninglessness, common though it is. This is a serious handicap, not only for the understanding of diffusion of cultural elements in the geographical space, and of successful cultural transmission over longer periods of time (which tends to go hand in hand with the erosion of the original meaning of such elements – often but far from invariably compensated by the attribution of new meaning in the context of localising transformation within the local culture of destination), but also for an understanding of cultural globalisation in the modern world. For in the latter case a very conspicuous phenomenon is the incessant local arrival (via globalising mechanisms such as electronic media and trade) of cultural elements which initially have no meaning whatsoever within the local cultural horizon. On this point Guattari can contribute to our theory formation, for he takes the idea of a meaningless semiotics for granted – with this proviso that he does not situate such meaninglessness in the lost history and the distant trajectories of collective representations, but in the

individual creation of new cultural forms of imagination.<sup>111</sup>

Forced by circumstances, one of the growth points of anthropology today lies in the study of violence.<sup>112</sup> Also this is implicitly in line with

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<sup>111</sup> Guattari in: Stivale, *o.c.*:

“...S[tivale]: I’m still trying to situate the idea of an a-signifying semiotic.

...G[uattari]: OK, here it is. What is important in this a-signifying character, in this a-signifying vacillation of chains that elsewhere could be meaningful? It’s the following: first, a spectrum of a-signifying, discreet signs in limited number gives a power of representation, i.e. on a spectrum that I master, that I articulate, I can pretend to take account of a signified description (*tableau signifié*), on an initial level. But obviously, this doesn’t stop here. This subjectivation that I lose starting from this a-signifying spectrum, gives me an extraordinary surplus-value of power; i.e., it opens fields of the possible that aren’t at all in a bi-univocal relationship with the description presented. When Debussy invented a pentatonic scale, he wrote his own music; perhaps he felt it at a level we might call “his inspiration”, but he engendered abstract machinic relationships, a new musical logic that has implications, that represents trees of implication or, we really must say, rhizomes of implication, completely unforeseen in all sorts of other levels, including levels that aren’t, strictly speaking, musical. It is precisely on the condition that this constitution, that this semiotic arbitrarization occurs, to generalize Saussure’s notion of “arbitrary” in regard to signifier and signified, that there also will be the creation of these coefficients of the possible. If the representation of coding codes too much on the signified description, the signifier is like a cybernetic “feedback” and, in the long run, does not carry an important coefficient of creativity, of transversality. On the other hand, as soon as there is this arbitrarization and this creation of a spectrum that plays on its own register as an abstract machine, then there are possibilities of unheard-of connections, there is a possible crossover from one order to another, and then, moreover, there is a considerable multiplication of what I call these spectrums of the possible.’

<sup>112</sup> E.g. Nordstrom, C., & A.C.G.M. Robben, 1995, eds, *Fieldwork under fire: Contemporary studies of violence and survival*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press; Gewalt, Jan-Bart. 2004, ‘Global media and violence in Africa’, in: Wim M.J. van Binsbergen, & Rijk van Dijk, eds. *Situating Globality. African Agency in the Appropriation of Global Culture*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 90-106; Vidal, Claudine, 2004, ‘La commémoration du génocide au Rwanda: Violence symbolique, mémorisation force et histoire officielle’, *Cahiers d’études africaines*, 175 XLIV(3): 575-592; Bagalwa-Mapatano, J., 2004, La chanson populaire politique face à la violence politique au Congo-Zaire post Mobutu, in R. M. Beck & F. Wittmann, eds., *African Media Cultures, Transdisciplinary Perspectives*, pp. 193-214. Köln: Köppe Verlag; Becker, Heike, 2003, ‘Sites of Violence & Memory: Mapping the Namibian



Guattari, applying a perspective that has been widely accepted among Marxist anthropologists for a long time: the view according to which the principal task of a society's ideological institutions (religion, myths, political ideology) is to block, from the consciousness of the members of society, the violence that is at the root of the society and of the state.

'In a subsequent reference to Klossowski's commentary<sup>113</sup> to Nietzsche's Eternal Return,<sup>114</sup> the contamination of desire and interests is brought into relation with signification: the attribution of purpose and meaning takes away the meaninglessness and absurdity of such violence as is implied in the institution of laws and – in terms of the Nietzschean problematic of *appearance* – is being 'masked' "*de convertir ainsi l'absurdité en spiritualité*".<sup>115</sup> Fascism reveals its true face, as soon as this unthinkable, constituting violence becomes manifest (it is the violence that, in my opinion, Derrida in *Force de loi* analyses as the "mystical foundation of authority"). Until that moment, fascism hides its true face in the lap of democracy.'<sup>116</sup>

Finally, Guattari's work can serve to strengthen the psychoanalytical reflection within modern anthropology. For the time being, psycho-

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Liberation War', paper presented at the 5th Northeast Workshop on Southern African Studies. Burlington, Vt, 5-7 September 2003.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Klossowski, P., 1969, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*, Paris: Mercure de France; Klossowski, P., 1973 'Circulus Vitiosus', in: Cerisy-la-Salle, 1973, *Nietzsche aujourd'hui? 1. Intensités, 2. Passions*, Paris: UGE, 10/18, pp. 91-122.

<sup>114</sup> Throughout Nietzsche's work (e.g. *Die froehliche Wissenschaft*, and *Also sprach Zarathustra*) we find references to the idea of an 'ewige Wiederkehr' ('eternal return or recurrence'), which he greatly abhors yet appears to find irresistibly attractive.

<sup>115</sup> Original reference to: Deleuze, & Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe*, o.c.

<sup>116</sup> 'In een daaropvolgende verwijzing naar Klossowski's commentaar op Nietzsches Eeuwige Wederkeer wordt de verstrengeling van verlangen en belangen met zingeving in verband gebracht: het geweld dat in het instellen van wetten besloten ligt wordt door toekenning van doel en zin – dus ook: richting – van zijn zinloosheid en absurditeit ontdaan en - in termen van de nietzscheaanse schijnproblematiek – 'ge-maskeerd' "*de convertir ainsi l'absurdite en spiritualité*". Zodra dit ondenkbare, stichtende geweld, dat Derrida naar mijn mening in *Force de loi* als het 'mystieke fundament' van de autoriteit analyseert, manifest wordt, toont het fascisme zijn 'ware' gezicht. Tot op dat moment verbergt het fascisme zijn gelaat in de schoot van de democratie.' Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen*, o.c., p. 604 (my translation; italics added), cf. p. 421 for the same argument.

analysing anthropologists such as Bonno Thoden van Velzen<sup>117</sup> in the Netherlands, and René Devisch<sup>118</sup> in Belgium, have remained fairly isolated, which hampers the rich fertilisation which potentially can come from a psychoanalytical approach. It would be especially interesting to test Guattari's ideas in the context of modern cultures outside Europe: not only his ideas on art and capitalism, but also those on schizophrenia – the field of his primary professional expertise.

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<sup>117</sup> Thoden van Velzen, H.U.E., 1984, 'Irma at the window: The fourth script of Freud's specimen dream', *American Imago*, 41, 3: 245-293; Thoden van Velzen, H.U.E., 1995, 'Revenants that cannot be shaken: Collective fantasies in a Maroon society', *American Anthropologist*, 97, 4: 722-732; Thoden van Velzen, H.U.E., & W. van Wetering, 1988, *The great father and the danger: Religious cults, material forces and collective fantasies in the world of te Surinamese Maroons*, Dordrecht: Foris, Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, Carribean Series 9. In Africa, we have had for decades the impressive group around the Dakar-based journal *Psychopathologie africaine*, but although this has often touched in anthropological topics, it usually did so as ancillary to more central psychiatric concerns – not unlike Guattari's work.

<sup>118</sup> Devisch, R., 1984, *Se recréer femme: Manipulation sémantique d'une situation d'infécondité chez les Yaka*, Berlin: Reimer; Devisch, R., 1985, 'La complicité entre le socio-culturel et le corps total chez les Yaka du Zaïre', in: Jeddi, E., ed., *Psychose, famille et culture*, Paris: L'Harmattan, pp. 82-114; Devisch, R., 1985, 'Symbol and psycho-somatic symptom in bodily space-time: The case of the Yaka', *International Journal of Psychology*, 20: 589-616; Devisch, R., 1985b, 'Dertleşmek, "Het delen van mekaars leed": Een therapeutische zelfhulpgroep onder Turkse vrouwen', *Psychanalyse*, Summer 1985: 80-91; Devisch, R., 1989, 'Spiegel en bemiddelaar: De therapeut bij de Yaka van Zaïre', in: Vertommen, H., Cluckers, G., & Lietaer, G., eds., *De relatie in therapie*, Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, pp. 331-357; Devisch, R., 1990, 'The therapist and the source of healing among the Yaka of Zaïre', *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 14, 2: 213-236; Devisch, R., 1993, *Weaving the threads of life: The Khita gyn-eco-logiscal healing cult among the Yaka*, Chicago/ London: Chicago University Press; Devisch, R., 1995, 'L'engendrement libidinal du sens en milieu yaka du Zaïre', *Religiologiques*, 12: 83-110; Devisch, R., & B. Vervaeck, 1985, 'Doors and thresholds: Jeddi's approach to psychiatric disorders', *Social Science and Medicine*, 22, 5: 541-551; Devisch, R., & Brodeur, C., 1996, *Forces et signes: Regards croisés d'un anthropologue et d'un psychanalyste sur les Yaka*, Paris/ Bazel: Editions des Archives Sociales.

#### *4.5. Towards a liberating aesthetics of anthropological fieldwork?*

Besides a further thinking through of the culture of capitalism, Guattari's work has still other promises for modern cultural anthropology. His emphasis on art within the total of a society's symbolic production, and his scientific and aestheticising, instead of scientific, approach to his own knowledge production, generate in Guattari's work an enchanting flicker of form, beauty, seduction and freedom, which stands in beneficial contrast with the sometimes cramped attempts at a scientific habitus which characterises much ready-made prose from the hands of anthropologists. Admittedly, Guattari's own handling of anthropology is defective, but implicitly he calls on anthropologists to reconsider the orientation, both in form and in contents, of anthropological knowledge production: should not they, too, follow his example of scientific aestheticising, which in principle (and despite the defects of Guattari's own work) might avoid the objectification of the cultural and / or somatic Other so that the latter is not deprived of his or her humanity and real political progress can be made.

Guattari's work holds up a mirror, not only to the psychoanalysing anthropologist, but also to the ethnographer. When in this connection Guattari describes his experiences with certain forms of *video-assisted* group therapy at the level of the family, he does so in terms which are familiar to the anthropologist. For the latter primarily derives her data and her inspiration from very long and very intensive participation in pre-existing social groups of which she was originally not a member. If in the passage below we replace 'video' by 'participant observation', Guattari's description evokes such fieldwork, including the increasing powers of perception and self-reflexivity which ideally should be a component of such fieldwork:

'Family therapy produces subjectivity in the most artificial way imaginable. This can be observed during training sessions, when the therapists improvise psychodramatic scenes. Here, the scene implies a layering of enunciation: a vision of oneself as concrete embodiment; a subject of enunciation which doubles the subject of the statement and the distribution of roles; a collective management of the game; an interlocution with observers commenting on the scene; and finally, video which through feedback restores the totality of these

superposed levels. This type of performance favours the relinquishment of a 'realist' attitude which would apprehend the lived scenes as actually embodied in family structures. This multi-faceted theatrical aspect allows us to grasp the artificial and creative character of the production of subjectivity. It should be emphasised that the video is always within sight of the therapists. Even when the camera is switched off, they develop the habit of observing certain semi-otic manifestations which would escape normal observation. The ludic face-to-face encounter with patients and the acceptance of singularities developed in this sort of therapy distinguishes it from the attitude of the traditional psychoanalyst with an averted gaze, and even from classical psychodrama.<sup>119</sup>

For the anthropologist, it is as distressing as it is illuminating to see how Guattari's characterisation – intended as just very general – of value formation and communication according to the consumptive logic of capitalism, also applies to the practice of 'scientific' ethnography of 'other cultures', as became customary in cultural anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century and has largely persisted ever since.

'This sectorisation and bipolarisation of values can be defined as capitalistic due to the neutralisation, the systematic dequalification, of the materials of expression from which they proceed – which puts them into the orbit of the economic valorisation of Capital, treating as formally equal the values of desire, use values, exchange values, and which puts differential qualities and non-discursive intensities under the exclusive control of binary and linear relations. Subjectivity is standardised through a communication which evacuates as much as possible trans-semiotic and amodal enunciative compositions. Thus it slips towards the progressive effacement of polysemy, prosody, gesture, mimicry and posture, to the profit of a language rigorously subjected to scriptural machines and their mass media avatars. (...) Modular individuation thus breaks up the complex overdeterminations between the old existential Territories in order to remodel the mental Faculties, a self, organs, personological, sexual and familial modalities of alterity, as so many pieces compatible with the mechanics of social domination. In this type of deterritorialised assemblage, the capitalist Signifier, as simulacrum of the imaginary of power, has the job of overcoding all the other Universes of value. Thus it extends to those who inhabit the domain of percept and aesthetic affect, who nevertheless remain (...) nuclei of resistance of resingularisation and heterogenesis.'<sup>120</sup>

*Is it at all possible to develop an ethnographic practice which effectively liberates itself from capitalist subjectivation, and which there-*

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<sup>119</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 8; my italics.

<sup>120</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 104f; my italics.

*fore refuses to be one of the instruments of North Atlantic hegemony?* This question was very vocally posed in the 1970s, in the debates on anthropology and imperialism, and entered a new phase with Said's devastating critique of orientalism by the end of that decade.<sup>121</sup> Today anthropology, in addition to the mainstream of predictable scientific ready-made prose, allows for a rich variety of 'meta-ethnographic' experiments in the search to a valid answer to this question – experiments not only according to textual genre (novel, poem, biography, autobiography, historiography, photo essay, movie, multimedia production, website) but also in terms of the choice of perspective, in terms of the choice of the subject (not only the research but also the population under study, or a group of people investigating themselves), and in terms of product (not necessarily as text, but possibly also as hypertext, a project, a data base, a network, a political process of taking consciousness and of effecting change).

This type of experiment however, although in principle possible like never before, yet continues to meet with very strong limitations imposed by the relations of production within anthropology: limitations in terms of time, funding, and recognition by fellow professionals. This is, however, not simply a case of professional conformism and respect for intradisciplinary power relations, being enforced in exchange for institutional and career security. If the scientific pursuit of knowledge is to be more than a relatively well-paid, cynical pastime, one has to collectively

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<sup>121</sup> Copans, J., 1974, *Critiques et politiques de l'anthropologie*, Paris: Maspero; Copans, J., 1975, ed., *Anthropologie et impérialisme*, Paris: Maspero; Buijtenhuijs, R., 1972, 'Defeating Mau Mau: Some observations on "Counter Insurgency Research" in Kenya during the Emergency', *Sociologische Gids*, 19: 329-339; Buijtenhuijs, R., 1992, 'Anthropologie et impérialisme: Où en sommes-nous aujourd'hui?', *Politique africaine*, 48: 139-141; Said, E., 1978, *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1984, 'Kann die Ethnologie zur Theorie des Klassenkampfes in der Peripherie werden?', *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 9, 4: 138-48 (English version also in: van Binsbergen, *Intercultural encounters, o.c.*); van der Veer, P., 1995, *Modern oriëntalisme: Essays over de westerse beschavingsdrang*, Amsterdam: Meulenhoff; Konings, P., van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., & Hesselink, G., 2000, eds., *Trajectoires de libération en Afrique contemporaine: Hommage à Robert Buijtenhuijs*, Paris: Karthala.

define, manage and protect – and only in the last resort *change* – the formats and methodologies for that pursuit, because there reside the only epistemological bases for the truth claims (however relative and ephemeral) scientists are making. The limit of Guattari's applicability in anthropology coincides with the extent of his anti-scientific, idiosyncratic and performative scientism.

### **5. Conclusion: The future role of art and anthropology from a Guattarian perspective**

In conclusion, let me consider, from an anthropological perspective, Guattari's optimistic vision of the responsibility of art in the present time.

Apparently, Guattari practically ignores a few concepts with which others have sought to characterise North Atlantic modernity: rationality (Weber), capitalist exploitation and alienation (Marx), anomie (Durkheim), and discipline (Foucault). Implicitly, however, these themes may be found back in Guattari's analysis of capitalism as the producer of specific forms of deterritorialised subjectivity. Guattari applies himself to the liberation of this specific form of subjectivity, and he sees such liberation primarily in art and in other forms of originality and creativity. Apart from Guattari's inimitable use of language, this idea is far from new: it goes back, in part, to German Romanticism around 1800 CE, and was widely established in literary circles throughout the North Atlantic region in the twentieth century.<sup>122</sup>

It is a moot point whether, with this conviction, Guattari is not much too optimistic. Is it not true that the heterogeneous subjectivation, the exploration of virtualities hitherto unknown, such as art puts before us, are yet very strongly tied to capitalist relations of production, which make them possible and to which they are attracted like moths to a light

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. Atz, B.K., 1982, *Herbert Marcuse and the Art of Liberation: An Intellectual Biography*, London: Verso; Guyer, Paul, 2003, 'Aesthetics between the wars: art and liberation', *The Cambridge History of Philosophy 1870–1945*, Thomas Baldwin, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

at night?

Under post-modern conditions of hyper-individualisation, the image of the human in interaction with other humans is more and more supplanted – or, in the best of cases, is more and more mediated, in highly structured manner) by the interaction between human and machine: computer, Internet, CD-ROM, DVD, cell phone, etc. Especially under such conditions, one is tempted to bring another objection against Guattari's euphoric expectations as far as art is concerned. For it seems to be true that artistic production and participation (it would already be disfiguring to speak of 'consumption' here ) mainly addresses the private level, and has no real public implication in the direction of collective liberation (apart from the role of applied art in the creation and preservation of hegemony and civil subjugation). However, Guattari (and Deleuze) primarily refer to *avant garde* art milieus, which tend to operate in groupings and movements. Therefore this objection may be little convincing; it stresses the individual powerlessness of art, and that is precisely the pattern of thought (the capitalist subjectivation) which Guattari seeks to overcome.<sup>123</sup>

However, in order to break out of the shackles of capitalist subjectivation, and in order to achieve this feat through art of all activities, art must be in a position to liberate itself from capitalist framing. Guattari's vision on art as deprogramming – as liberation from the strictly defined framework and the subjugation of socio-political life today – seems to turn a blind eye to processes of capitalist production and expropriation which also dominate the world of art. As has been remarked by Bourriaud,<sup>124</sup> except in Guattari's arguments on the 'plural-subjectivating refrain', our philosopher is in fact scarcely interested in reception aesthetics, – his interest is exclusively in the production side of art. Hence

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<sup>123</sup> Also see Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen, o.c.*, p. 569, n. 423, who juxtaposes, on this point, Guattari's approach and the neo-pragmatist one of Rorty, in which the contradiction private/public plays a major role; cf. Rorty, R., 1989, *Contingency, irony and solidarity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>124</sup> Bourriaud, N., 1995, 'Das ästhetische Paradigma', in: Schmidgen, *o.c.*, pp. 39-64 p. 54.

he has no specific argument on commoditisation<sup>125</sup> and consumption of art – even though in general he does very clearly perceive the force of capitalist subjugation in the symbolic domain, and the role of media and machines in that connection.<sup>126</sup> Conversely, on the production side he only sees the liberating creative moment, and turns a blind eye to the (usually: capitalist) material, financial, ethnic and political conditions under which that moment is realised – and to the compromises which such conditions therefore tend to make necessary.

Moreover, for Guattari art is in the first place North Atlantic contemporary art. Some attention for contemporary African art might have served to considerably dampen his optimism.<sup>127</sup> In our research of African art forms, including music and dance, what comes to the fore is not the mediation of some timeless, home-bound ‘participation’ (*i.e.* Guattari on the authority of Lévy-Bruhl), but<sup>128</sup>

- unmitigated commoditisation, turning Africans’ own production of contemporary art into the production of merchandise for the (pri-

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. van Binsbergen & Geschiere, *Commodification*, *o.c.*

<sup>126</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, *o.c.*, p. 104f.

<sup>127</sup> For a useful overview, cf. Preston Blier, S., 1993, ‘Truth and seeing: Magic, custom, and fetish in art history’, in: Robert H. Bates, V.Y. Mudimbe & Jean O’Barr, eds., *Africa and the disciplines: The contributions of research in Africa to the social sciences and humanities*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 139-166. For our specific problematic, see especially the work of Johannes Fabian and Bogumil Jewsiewicki from Preston Bliers bibliografie. Relevant is also: Kaarsholm, P., 1991, ed., *Cultural struggle and development in Southern Africa*, Londen: Currey.

<sup>128</sup> van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1992, *Kazanga: Etniciteit in Afrika tussen staat en traditie*, inaugural lecture, Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit; shorter French version: ‘Kazanga: Ethnité en Afrique entre Etat et tradition’, in: Binsbergen, Wim M.J. van, & Schilder, K., eds., *Perspectives on Ethnicity in Africa*, special issue on ‘Ethnicity’, *Afrika Focus*, Gent (Belgium), 1993: 9-40; English version with postscript: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1994, ‘The Kazanga festival: Ethnicity as cultural mediation and transformation in central western Zambia’, *African Studies*, 53, 2, 1994, pp 92-125; van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 2000, ‘Sensus communis or sensus particularis? A social-science comment’, in: Kimmerle, H., & Oosterling, H., 2000, eds., *Sensus communis in multi- and intercultural perspective: On the possibility of common judgments in arts and politics*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, pp. 113-128.



marily North Atlantic) market

- the imitation of geometrical, strictly disciplined forms derived from the North Atlantic practices of the media, bureaucracy and other formal organisations
- the appropriation of the products of art production by elite groups imposing themselves as brokers between the local group and the outside world, especially the state and mass media.

This is the reality of contemporary Africa, with its enormous increase of local and regional cultural festivals, and with the state co-opting – for the sake of its own, ever so shaky, popular legitimation – (neo-) traditional and modern artistic expressions of music and dance in the context of state rituals such as the celebration of Independence Day and the state visits of foreign politicians. One wonders whether Guattari does have an answer to the question as to how to bend such processes in the direction of creative liberation? How to discharge Guattari's instructions so as to arrive at an 'ecosophic cartography' capable of producing

'assemblages of enunciation capable of capturing the points of singularity of a situation'?<sup>129</sup>

How, in particular, should intellectuals (artists as well as scientists), in Africa, Asia and Latin America, formulate their own historical mission in this connection? How can the North Atlantic region help them in this respect, in a more positive sense than merely by avoiding crowding them, and buying their products?

We should not take too one-sided a view of Guattari's emphasis on art. With Deleuze, he himself admits that essentially the same promising future as he sees for art, lies in store for philosophy. For philosophy and art have

'en commun [la mission at la capacité] de résister, résister à la mort, à la servitude, à l'intolérable, à la honte, au présent'.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 128.

<sup>130</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, o.c., p. 105; cf. Oosterling,

We may conclude that also anthropology has a contribution to make to the future as sketched by Guattari. That contribution can hardly be limited to cleansing Guattari's work from the many blemishes resulting from his appropriation of an obsolescent and second-hand anthropology. His 'ecology of the virtual' (in very liberal translation: the responsible care, not only for the natural environment but also for the cultural and artistic environment) contains not only the symbolic innovations by individual artists and by artistic movements (as well as other North Atlantic forms of creativity), but, in principle, also the alternative cultural and social forms such as have presented themselves at other times and in other places.

'In our era, aesthetic machines offer us the most advanced models – relatively speaking – for these blocks of sensation capable of extracting full meaning from all the empty signal systems that invest us from every side. It is in underground art that we find some of the most important cells of resistance against the steamroller of capitalistic subjectivity – the subjectivity of one-dimensionality, generalised equivalence, segregation, and deafness to true alterity. This is not about making artists the new heroes of the revolution, the new levers of History! Art is not just the activity of established artists but of a whole subjective creativity which traverses the generations and oppressed peoples, ghettos, minorities.... I simply want to stress that the aesthetic paradigm – the creation and composition of mutant percepts and affects – has become the paradigm for every possible form of liberation, expropriating the old scientific paradigms to which, for example, historical materialism or Freudianism were referred. The contemporary world – tied up in its ecological, demographic and urban impasses – is incapable of absorbing, in a way that is compatible with the interests of humanity, the extraordinary technico-scientific mutations which shake it. (...) An ecology [*i.e.* an ethics of care and respect in the awareness of the finitude of resources – WvB] of the virtual is thus just as pressing as ecologies of the visible world.'<sup>131</sup>

In principle, this has implications for the preservation of the cultural heritage of other cultures – in the same way as we should also preserve biodiversity. However, Guattari scarcely has any direct perception of other cultures as such – he can only deal with them through the filter of the national French multicultural society of the last few decades, the filter of

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*Door schijn bewogen, o.c.*, pp. 640f.

<sup>131</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis, o.c.*, p. 90f.

psychoanalysts dabbling in other cultures in the context of their specialist professional journals, a few peripheral anthropologists that happened to become cult figures in general intellectual culture such as Bateson, Castaneda and in fact also Lévy-Bruhl. Hence Guattari does not stop to elaborate on the global contribution of anthropology towards the future of humankind.

Defining that contribution and its terms is the specific field of activity of intercultural philosophy in conjunction with anthropology. In the immensely important task of developing a new language so as to address the aporia of our time and age (the task, in other words, of developing a relevant philosophy of today) we need the entire bandwidth of the diversity of human culture, preferably mediated in a way that is controlled by the respective owners and bearers of these cultures. Such mediation cannot be left to the market, since this is saturated with capitalist subjectivation, even though this market includes commercial internet sites offering South products, even Fair Trade shops, and African music labels.

However, if anthropology is to mediate the full range of diversity of humankind's cultural forms, in their specific individuality and in the sense advocated by Guattari – as a contribution to liberating reterritorialisation – , then a primary requirement is that the dilemmas of ethnographic (and historiographic) method are being confronted and overcome. If the mediation of other cultures takes place in a format that is inspired, or even dictated, by the symbolic technologies of global hegemonic domination, then no liberation whatsoever is to be expected from such a process. Luckily the bearers of cultures outside the North Atlantic region more and more take such mediation into their own hands – but that offers no guarantee that they will avoid the imitation of hegemonic and capitalist models, as is clearly demonstrated by contemporary African art. Another danger, which Guattari did recognise, is that of ethnic entrenchment, which replaces the unboundedness of the capitalist project (including its symbolic and value components) for a different kind of oppressive subjectivation: that of the closed horizon of ethnic or religious particularism. Rwanda 1994, Bosnia 1992-1995, Islamic fundamentalism, Christian and Hindu anti-Islamic fundamentalism – these catchwords demonstrate, I re-

peat, that here we are dealing with one of the major problems of our time. Moreover, above we spoke of creative experiments in 'meta-ethnography' seeking to break through the rigid (and potentially hegemonic) disciplinary framework of mainstream anthropology; but however liberating, necessary and timely, such experiments will inevitably give rise to new problems in the nature of appropriation, projection, transference, egotism, on the part of authors-researchers as well as on the part of the cultural groups they deal with, and if these problems are not confronted, the ensuing global intercultural mediation will remain defective.

It is an important responsibility for intercultural philosophy to explore these problems and propose solutions, in conjunction with its sister discipline cultural anthropology. Not the letter, but the spirit of Guattari's writings can inspire us profoundly in the process.

# The Golden Rule principle in an African ethics, and Kant's Categorical Imperative

A comparative study on the foundation of morality<sup>1</sup>

by Godwin Azenabor

**Abstract:** The Golden Rule principle in an African ethics, and Kant's Categorical Imperative: A comparative study on the foundation of morality. This research attempts to throw light on, and show the fundamental similarities and differences between, African and Western ethical conceptions by examining the foundation of ethics and morality in the two systems, using the Golden rule principle in an African ethics and Kant's categorical imperative in Western ethics as tools of comparative analysis. An African indigenous ethics revolves around the 'Golden Rule Principle' as the ultimate moral principle. This principle states that, 'Do unto others what you want them to do unto you'. This principle compares favorably with Immanuel Kant's whose main thrust is found in his 'Categorical Imperative', with the injunction for us to 'Act only on that *maxim* through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.' The categorical imperative becomes for Kant, the principle of reason and universalizability, which according to Kant, is categorical and must be equally binding on everyone. This idea of Kant, we argue, compares with the 'Golden Rule Principle'. Both are rationalistic and social but the limitation of Kant which I hope to point out is the idea that moral intentions can be fully grounded on reason. I argue that human interest or welfare is the basis for morality. This refusal to see the wider horizon of morality is precisely the limitation of Kant's principle, which makes it quite insufficient as the foundation of morality. The African conception is more humanistic and better describes morality. The main difference between the two ethical systems lies in the fact that whereas the 'golden rule' starts from the self and considers the consequences on the self before others, the universalizability principle on the other hand considers the consequences on others first before self.

**key words:** African ethical conceptions, Western ethical conceptions, rational-

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<sup>1</sup> Revised version of a paper presented at the XXIV World Congress of Philosophy held at the National Seoul University, Seoul, Korea, on July 30th – August 5th, 2008.

ism, humanism, morality, Golden rule, Kant, categorical imperative, universalizability

## **Introduction**

This discourse shows how the traditional African experiences, comprehends, conceptualizes and communicates moral reality within his thought system with the ‘Golden Rule Principle’. We situate this against a western paradigm and examine the foundation of ethics and morality in African thought system against Kant’s ‘universalisability principle’ in western system of thought. We shall examine the adequacy or inadequacy of the two principles with regards to value judgment or moral valuation. We argue that both are rationalistic and social but that that of Kant is insufficient as the foundation of morality and that the African’s, which is more humanistic and pragmatic, describes morality better.

We begin by clarifying some of the central concepts: ‘ethics’, ‘morality’ and ‘African ethics’, in order to better situate our discourse and guide the reader.

Ethics in general, consists in the study of the fundamental principles guiding the good of the individual within the context of the social interactions and the community. It is that branch of knowledge that deals with human behavior or conduct. It studies the ‘whys’ and ‘why-nots’ of human action or conduct. There are different senses of ethics:

- (1) There is the sense of ethics as a theoretical enterprise. Here ethics deals with the fundamental questions of moral law – questions like, how I am supposed to behave? What is good and what is bad? Ethical prescriptions try to give answers to these questions. It is in this respect that we define ethics as that branch of philosophy which deals with principles underlining human conduct or behaviour.
- (2) There is a sense ethics as a science – a normative science (as opposed to empirical science) of human conduct – normative because it sets out to describe how things *ought* to be, not how things *are*.

The empirical sciences are concerned with *facts* while ethics is concerned with *values*.

- (3) There is ethics as a value system. The judgment which ethics makes concerning issues is referred to as values. Value refers to the desirable good, a worthwhile and worthy pursuit. Value can be individual or social, subjective or objective, instrumental or intrinsic, but it is contextual.
- (4) There is a sense of ethics as a mode of moral conduct, action or behaviour. This is morality. Ethics is referred to as the study of the principle of morality and morality refers to a set of rules and norms for guiding and regulating the conduct of people in the society or their behavior patterns. Morality is the basis for ethics because we already had a sense of morality before ethics; which is a reflection on the principles underlying our moral conduct. Morality is the rule of conduct for harmonious living in the society.
- (5) There is a sense of ethics as a set of conduct, governing principles, code of conducts, governing the moral behaviour or activity of a people, group or organization, like work ethics, professional ethics, etc.
- (6) There is also a sense of ethics as applied – the application of ethical theories and principles to controversial problems and topics like euthanasia, abortion, suicide, homosexuality, prostitution, etc.

The sense in which ethics is used in this study is in the fourth sense of ethics. Ethics as a principle is universal; there are always principles that others can share and adopt because of our *human beingness*, whereas morality is cultural, societal and relative. Morality is the practical, while ethics is the theoretical. Furthermore, ethics is a defined system, while morality is often based on a personal or social belief. Ethics especially in a profession can be more compelling than morality. In fact, ethical systems are enforceable whereas moral systems are not.

African ethics is that branch of African philosophy, which deals with the critical reflection on the manner, or nature of life, conduct, behavior and character of the African. African ethics is defined by K.

Wiredu 'as the observance of rules for the harmonious adjustment of the interest of the individual to those of others in society' (Wiredu 1998: 210), it is the conceptualization, appropriation, contextualization and analysis of values within the African cultural experience. African ethics presupposes a regional ethics. Even though theories and ideas of universal character are propounded in ethics, they do not diverge from their prevailing cultural experience, the philosophical spirit of their age, challenges of the time, history, tradition and civilization that they find themselves. This is the basis then for the appellation 'African ethics'.

### ***The Golden Rule Principle in an African Ethics and Kant's Universalizability Principle***

An African indigenous ethics revolve round the 'Golden rule principle' as the ultimate moral principle. Bolaji Idowu in his book *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Religion* maintains that the Yorubas have a fundamental ethical principle and he identified this as the Golden rule principle. This principle states as follows: 'Do unto others what you want them to do unto you'. This principle dates back to the biblical days. Jesus Christ in the beginning of the Common Era is reported to have admonished, 'All things whatsoever you would that men should do unto you, do even to them'. The principle is also similar to the biblical injunction 'love thy neighbor as thy self' and also as far back as 500 BC, Confucius is credited with the view that:

'Do unto another what you would have him do unto you and do not to another what you would not have him do unto you. Thou needest this law alone. It is the foundation of the rest' (Ilawole: 2006, 50).

These principles of Confucius are contained in the nine ancient Chinese works handed down by Confucius and his followers.

For the purpose of this work however, I am throwing my philosophical nest into an African indigenous territorial waters; the Esan cultural paradigm, in order to avoid the charge of over-generalization and to better situate an African ethics within a socio-cultural context. The Esan community is found in Edo State, Nigeria, to the south east of Benin King-



dom in the old Midwestern region of Nigeria. The Esan community lies between latitudes 6.15' and 6.36' north and longitudes 6.15' and 6.25' east of the equator (Okojie, 1994, 1). It consists of about thirty tribal groupings or sub-cultural divisions, namely Ekpoma, Egoro, Opoji, Uromi, Urhohi, Irrua, Ewu, Ugboha, Oria, Ubiaja, Udo, Okhuesan, Emu, Ohordua, Ewohimi, Ewatto, Ewossa, Ekpan, Ebelle, Okalo, Amahor, Ogwa, Ugun, Ujiojba, Ugbegun, Igueben, Ekekhenlen, Orowa, Ukhun and Idoa.

The absence of a written tradition has necessitated the Esan people to document their ethics and morality, especially in the traditional setting, in proverbs, music, poems, maxims, incantations, aphorisms, arts, sculpture, etc.

There is the ontological, religious and communal foundation of African ethics. *The Ontological Foundation* revolves round the basic assumptions of African metaphysics and African morality is a derivative of African ontology – a wrong moral action is one, which offsets and diminishes the set-up and man's life force. African morality Tempels tells us is something demanded by the very nature of things. It is 'ontologically understood and has social dimension to it. (Tempels 1963: 121).

The *Religious foundation* has to do with the recourse to the gods, ancestors and deities who are custodians of justice. In fact, African ethical system has been said to be based on religion. John Mbiti in his book *African Religions and Philosophy* and Bolaji Idowu in *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* hold this view. To these scholars religion is surely a foundational theory of morals in African societies. But African ethics is not based on religion; rather religious elements are only part of the moral scheme. Ethics is not founded on religion, rather, where man becomes handicapped in the enforcement of moral violations; he takes recourse on the Gods. In all situations, the African adduces reasoned arguments why one ought not to do that which is wrong. So, authority of morality is not identifiable with the Gods. Oluwole (1992: 67), puts the argument this way:

... As a matter of fact, social cohesion will elude the African if he identifies the authority of morality with the Gods. This is because his is a society, which grants the freedom of religion. The implication of making morality a religious

concern is therefore unthinkable in a society where there are almost as many gods as there are families.

Rather, what is moral is what promotes the well being of the society by way of harmonization of interest and peaceful co-existence. The role of religion in morality in African ethics is that the Gods are only agents of moral *sanctions* rather than *sources* of morality. The Gods are the last court of appeal in matters of moral justice. There is the retributive spirit – this is the tendency to seek compensation and or reconciliation and in cases where extra-human forces are thought to be estranged; *purification* not just punishment. This is where the idea of reincarnation comes in. So, the force of religious sanctions only enhances the African value system, not that it is based on religion. The gods are custodians of morality. They can bring to the limelight what was done in secret.

The justification of the religious assumption, which is the relegation of *final judgment* of moral actions to the gods, is one of acknowledgement of man's limitations to produce an objective, adequate and reliable system of arriving at moral judgments. The traditional African seems to realize that no matter how much we try, we are limited by our natural ability as man and this makes it impossible for us to have a conclusive, objective knowledge of the intension of a moral agent. The history of morality has shown that the other possible alternative to the religious assumptions are neither philosophically convincing nor are they more naturally or emotionally satisfying. If for example, we push moral justice to man, we discover that we cannot expect a reliable system of justice. And we should not be tempted to accept the dictum of Protagoras that 'man is the measure of all things', because, here, we discover the danger and shortcoming of ideally leaving justice to man as the last arbiter. Moreover, this dictum of Protagoras is based on emotional repulsiveness, which is rather an arrogant conclusion. Man cannot predict with certainty that what he sows he will reap, he cannot always plan and know for sure that his plans will succeed, no matter how much care he himself may take. We are very much aware that there is a limit to human knowledge; we are limited by our natural ability as man. On the other hand, if we decide to push moral justice to the wind, what we shall have is anar-

chy. The best we could do, perhaps, is to allow he who has the power or the ability to know all the factors to pass the final judgments; after all human efforts have failed. Bolaji Idowu puts it this way:

‘God is the searcher of hearts, who sees and knows everything and whose judgment is sure, and inescapable’ (Idowu, 1968: 161).

So it is the Gods who bridge the gap between man’s limitation and absolute justice. The Gods take over where human knowledge stops. The gods are only agents of moral sanctions rather than authorities whose moral prescriptions man must obey’ (Oluwole, 1982: 14). The gods in traditional Africa are just safeguards of morality, the way the police are in modern society. So there is a conceptual separation between Religion and Morality. The point we are making is that ethics/morality in African thought system is a rationally derived principle.

### ***The Communal Foundational Theory***

J.C. Ekei in his book *Justice in Communalism* (2001: 119-123) informs us that moral justice within the African traditional system is communal. This, according to him is explained in four essential dimensions of communal responsibility, namely, personnel, social, cosmic and metaphysical. These are various channels of the expressions of the principle of communal/moral justice.

The influencing factor or guiding principle for moral valuation/judgment in which the Golden rule rests is empathy - what the Esan people call *arumere* – the valuer or judge has to place himself or herself in the position of those concerned, he or she must relate what is in question to himself, see if it can be done to him or her, if he could tolerate or accommodate the thing in question. By so doing, one would be able to make fair decisions and move from subjectivism to objectivism, since whatever answer one gets from the self-examination will be applied to those before them. This principle of empathy is the basis of the Golden rule. The principle has to do with initiative, cooperation, mutuality and mediation. This principle is further buttressed and finds similarity in the

Socratic dictum 'man know thyself'. You know yourself first, before others – charity begins at home. Scholars have given a reductionism approach to the golden rule principle by propounding other similar theories, among which are: Ethical Egoism, (selfishness), for example, Thomas Hobbes (1651), Altruism (unselfishness), for example, Auguste Comte (1798), Utilitarianism (the greatest happiness of the greatest number), for example, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill (1789), Moralism (putting the interest of others alongside one's interest), for example, C.S. Momoh (1991), Ethics of consensus (sacrificing or adjusting the interest of the minority to that of the majority, even at the cost of some self denial), for example, Kwasi Wiredu (1999).

All of the above ethical principles have been analyzed along the golden rule principle as having some areas of confluence and congruence with the golden rule principle. But the Golden rule principle compares favorably with Immanuel Kant's *Universalizability* principle contained in his book, *Ground Work for the Metaphysics of Morals* and *Lectures on Ethics*, where he proposes a new approach to ethics and morality, by attempting to establish the supreme principle or foundation of morality (Kant, 1972: 390-392). The main thrust of Kant's thesis is found in his 'categorical imperative', with the injunction for us to 'act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law'. The categorical imperative becomes for Kant, the principle of *universalizability*. The moral imperative of *universalizability*, according to Kant, is categorical; must be equally binding on everyone.

To Kant, all moral concepts have their seat and origin wholly a priori in human pure reason (Kant, 1974, 710). Thus, to Kant, there is no giver of law or author of morality outside of man. Since reason endows man with the capacity to be moral and law abiding, it follows that morality for man is a self-imposed duty and this is what is meant by an 'imperative'. An imperative is a maxim, which states a universal principle of morality, intended to achieve justice, or what Kant dubbed the 'universal Kingdom of ends'. The willing of a maxim to become universal for the good of all is what Kant calls the principle of *universalizability*, which imposes.

The Golden rule principle is however different from Kant's principle of *universalizability*. The main difference between them is that whereas the Golden rule starts from the self and considers the consequences of the self first the *universalizability* principle on the other hand, starts from other and considers the consequences on other first before the self. Furthermore, the Gold rule principle transcends the self and extends same to the interest of the others – friends, family and community for cooperation, solidarity and fellowship. To the Golden rule theorist, like for Kant, using a fellow human being as a means to an end is immoral. Kant in fact urged us to treat others as end and never as means, which is to further one's own self-interest.

### **Comparative Critique**

Kant's position that there is no giver of law or author of morality outside of man has an existential relevance. Kant pays man's rationality a complement and develops the idea of moral autonomy, intended to debunk the theory of the Natural Law Doctrine that God or the superhuman or the spiritual is the originator of morality. It is from this Kantian doctrine of 'moral autonomy', according to Popper that Sartre developed his theory of 'absolute atheism' in his existential ethics (Popper, 1969: 182-183).

But then, by his doctrine of 'noumena', Kant is aware that total justice is not achievable here on earth, as such allowance should be made for virtuous people who could not obtain justice in this life to do so in the hereafter. This is also the basis of the African appeal to the Gods and the theory of reincarnation, as hoped for redress.

Both principles have suffered devastating criticisms. For Kant, the decisive consideration is that one cannot consistently will the maxim of an action that is contrary to good morals to be universalized. But Kant's theory does not solve the problem of morality or value for the society. Kant's principle of universalizability is not a test of morality of human action - it presupposes a morally right action, rather than prove it. If a person for instance, is willing to see the maxim of his action become a universal law, it does not mean that the action in question is morally right

since it is quite possible for a person to want the maxim of an immoral action became a universal law especially if he is anti-social sadistic or wants to further disorganize the society and break it up. This is precisely why Wiredu observed that Kant universalizability theory is quite insufficient as the foundation of morals. If it were, the principle of non-contradiction would be the supreme law of morals, but it is not (Wiredu, 1995: 392). Simply put, the problem with Kant's moral theory is that it does not solve moral problems of what is good. Kant has forgotten that what is good for the goose may not be good for the gander, precisely because one man's meat is another man's poison.

According to Kant, reason is required in rational beings in order to deduce actions from the principle of morality; therefore he identifies the will for rational beings with practical reason. However, David Ross in his book, *Kant's Ethical Theory*, (p. 38) pointed out that Kant can hardly be right in his theory because reason as we know it, is the faculty of apprehending truth, while practical reason as such is the faculty of knowing the truth of what should be done. Ross maintained that it is possible to know the truth of what should be done and yet not will to act accordingly (This is *akrasia*; human weakness). The point is that Kant's principle is limited and insufficient as the foundation of morality, especially because it is a rule of reason, generalization and universal application. But moral intention cannot be fully grounded on these. Morality also has to do with other factors like welfare, human interest, justice, happiness and the will. These are also principles that we share as human beings and they are principles we can adopt.

Both the Golden rule and Kant's universalizability are rationalistic and social; they are both principles of reason. The Golden rule is more humanistic and describes morality better. However, the Golden rule, unlike the universalizability principle, is not a rule of generalization or universal application. It deals with particular situations, such that every situation will determine its own rule of application.

C.S. Momoh criticizes the Golden rule principle, stating that it has a ring of immediate reciprocity. He opined further that: 'This principle is responsible for some of the problems in our society because it is always

nursing and fanning the prospects of immediate personal returns without consideration for any larger interests of the society or the world' (Momo, 1991: 127-128). The point is that the Golden rule principle is too personal and neighborly. But the Golden rule is more than reciprocity; it is also about empathy, understanding and participating. It portrays that no one is an island unto himself – it makes for harmony and interrelatedness in the scheme of things. Hence, the African proverb: 'if you want to go *fast*; go alone, but if you want to go *far*, then go with others, go together, speak together; let your minds be of one accord'.

Finally, it has been suggested that Kant in making his formulation on the universalizability theory was influenced by Rousseau's doctrine of the 'General Will', which he (Kant) purified by his categorical imperative. For Rousseau, the general will is necessarily moral but Kant purified this by making the categorical imperative bid us to will only those maxims which are in conformity with the law in general.

## **Conclusion**

The foundation of morality for an African Golden rule principle is *empathy*, that of Kant is in its categorical imperative dovetailing into the universalizability principle, reason, duty and goodwill. Although religion and the Gods have their roles and place in African morality/ethics, man as a rational being also has a role to play in formulating patterns of behavior and moral principles to regulate human life and conduct. The foundation for morality must be linked with human interest. So, human interest as posited by the Golden rule not just human reason, goodwill, duty and the maxim underlying it, or universalism as Kant's theory wants us to believe, describes morality. In morality, there are no uniformities but differences, there are no *absolute* but the *objective*. There are no absolutes because morality can change, depending on whether or not it serves human interest. It is objective because it is not based on personal predilections and subjective enterprise.

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# L'éducation selon Mounier<sup>1</sup>

## Une philosophie pratique au service du développement

par Jacques Nanema

**Résumé :** L'éducation selon Mounier: Une philosophie pratique au service du développement. L'éducation est la chose la plus commune au monde ; ici et là, elle s'affirme comme la mère de toute société et de l'idée qu'elle se fait de l'humanité. Cependant sa pratique n'est jamais à l'abri des dérives idéologiques de telle sorte que ses protagonistes ne sont pas toujours mieux que des otages inconscients d'une « organisation » ou d'un « système » donné avec ce qu'il comporte de défauts subjectifs et objectifs. C'est contre tous les risques de « mort de la personne » inhérents à tout système idéologique et à la reproduction qu'il organise, que Mounier, dans le sillage de Nietzsche avec qui il entretint une gigantomachie significative, a pensé et écrit une philosophie pratique au service du développement et de l'épanouissement de la personne dans la relation de l'homme à lui-même, à ses semblables, au monde qui l'entoure et à la transcendance. Mon propos sera de : (1) rappeler la vision iconoclaste que Emmanuel Mounier se faisait de la philosophie; (2) indiquer la critique qu'il mena contre les dérives idéologiques de l'éducation, afin de démontrer en quoi et comment la dynamique du personnalisme, en tant que philosophie pratique, est au service d'un développement holistique de l'homme, de la société et du monde actuels, en proie à un écartèlement historique sans précédent. Cent ans après la naissance de Mounier et cinquante ans après sa mort, le personnalisme demeure pour ceux qui savent en goûter la substantifique moelle, une énergie nouvelle qui pousse la civilisation au-delà d'elle-même, à transcender toute forme d'auto-satisfaction et de complaisance, à se dépasser en imaginant et en réalisant dans une synergie inter-personnelle et inter-culturelle un monde toujours plus humain.

**Abstract.** Mounier's conception of education: *a practical philosophy that supports development.* Education is the most common thing in the world. It is often believed to be the mother of all society, as well as the source of its perception of humanity. However, the practice of education is never free from

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<sup>1</sup> Cet article a fait l'objet d'une communication au colloque de Madrid organisé lors de la célébration du centenaire de la naissance du philosophe Mounier (en Juillet 2005). Il a subi quelques légères modifications.

ideological pitfalls, with the result that its protagonists are hardly better than unconscious hostages of an 'organization' or a 'system', including subjective and objective shortcomings of such 'organization' or 'system'. In that respect, against all risks conducive to the 'death of the individual', which are inherent to any ideological system and the reproduction cycle it produces, Mounier thought through, and wrote a practical philosophy (following Nietzsche with whom he engaged in a polemical gigantomachy) that supports the development and the well-being of the individual in his or her relationship toward himself or herself, other individuals, the world surrounding him or her, and the transcendent world. The purpose of this paper is: a. to recall the iconoclastic view that Emmanuel Mounier had of philosophy; b. to emphasize the critique he formulated against the ideological pitfalls of education, in order to demonstrate to what extent and how the dynamics of personalism, as a practical philosophy, support the holistic development of the individual, as well as the society and the world today, which fell prey to an unprecedented historic agonizing struggle. A hundred years after Emmanuel Mounier's birth, and fifty years after his death, personalism remains for those who are able to taste its profound substance, a new energy that drives civilization beyond itself to transcend any form of self-satisfaction and complacency, to surpass itself by imagining and accomplishing, through an inter-personal and an inter-cultural synergy, a world that is more and more human.

**Keywords** : philosophy, education, ideology, person, culture, development

**Mots-clefs** : philosophie, éducation, idéologie, personne, culture, développement

## ***Introduction***

L'éducation est la chose la plus commune au monde ; ici et là, elle s'affirme comme la mère de toute société et de l'idée qu'elle se fait de l'humanité. Cependant sa pratique n'est jamais à l'abri des dérives idéologiques de telle sorte que ses protagonistes ne sont pas toujours mieux que des otages inconscients d'une « organisation » ou d'un « système » donné avec ce qu'il comporte de défauts subjectifs et objectifs. C'est contre tous les risques de « mort de la personne » inhérents à tout système idéologique et à la reproduction qu'il organise, que Mounier, dans le sillage de Nietzsche avec qui il entretint une gigantomachie significative, a pensé et écrit une philosophie pratique au service du développement et de l'épanouissement de la personne dans la relation de l'homme à lui-même, à ses semblables, au monde qui l'entoure et à la transcendance.

Mon propos sera de :

1. rappeler la vision iconoclaste que Emmanuel Mounier se faisait de la philosophie,
2. indiquer la critique qu'il mena contre les dérives idéologiques de l'éducation, afin de démontrer en quoi et comment la dynamique du personnalisme, en tant que philosophie pratique, est au service d'un développement holistique de l'homme, de la société et du monde actuels, en proie à un écartèlement historique sans précédent.

Cent ans après la naissance de Mounier et cinquante ans après sa mort, le personnalisme demeure pour ceux qui savent en goûter la substantifique moelle, une énergie nouvelle qui pousse la civilisation au-delà d'elle-même, à transcender toute forme d'auto-satisfaction et de complaisance, à se dépasser en imaginant et en réalisant dans une synergie interpersonnelle et inter-culturelle un monde toujours plus humain.

***Mounier, un philosophe à part (entière) : enjeux pratiques d'une critique de la tradition spéculative.***

*« Se moquer de la philosophie, c'est vraiment philosopher (...) il n'y a rien de si conforme à la raison que ce désaveu de la raison » (Pascal).*

Figure archétypale du doute, de l'examen critique des préjugés et de la remise en cause des évidences premières, convictions et certitudes idéologiques, sociales, morales, religieuses et politiques, le philosophe est un personnage dont l'essence est de déranger. Il dérange en ce sens que la pratique de l'activité philosophique, en tant qu'exercice critique de la raison, faculté polyvalente de présence (à soi, au monde) et de distance (vis-à-vis de soi et du monde), de représentation (raison pure) et d'action (raison pratique), le place aux antipodes d'une société beaucoup plus encline à la reproduction et à la consécration de ce que Nietzsche appelait les

« idoles du jour » et que Mounier appelle le « désordre établi ». Par son sens aigu des problèmes, le philosophe représente en effet, une voix qui proteste contre l'état actuel des choses dont ses contemporains semblent se contenter. S'il entre en contradiction avec les valeurs de son pays, de sa communauté culturelle ou de son époque<sup>2</sup>, c'est moins parce qu'il est lui-même armé de certitudes à établir en lieu et place de ce qu'il conteste, que parce qu'il perçoit dans la posture intellectuelle, morale ou politique de ses contemporains une imposture idéologique majeure qui risque, si on n'y prend garde, de compromettre l'idée que le philosophe se fait de l'humanité. Derrière chaque critique formulé par le philosophe à l'encontre de la société se fait audible l'idée selon laquelle, « l'homme est bien mieux que ce que vous donnez à voir, sortez de la suffisance, de l'auto-satisfaction et de la complaisance et soumettez-vous à une plus grande exigence pour devenir des pèlerins de l'excellence ». Chaque communauté met en œuvre un discours, un savoir sur lui-même (et sur ce qui n'est pas lui), qui lui permet de donner corps et sens à l'idée qu'elle se fait de l'humanité<sup>3</sup> pour lui-même

Mounier est l'un de ces philosophes qui dérangent, par la corrosivité de son questionnement, sa communauté d'appartenance religieuse<sup>4</sup>, po-

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<sup>2</sup> De ce fait, le philosophe n'est jamais fils de son temps, il reste profondément intempêtif, inactuel selon le terme de Nietzsche. Philosophie rime avec solitude comme l'ont signifié par leur vie, Nietzsche ou Cioran, et le philosophe est l'orphelin de son pays, de sa communauté, de son époque. Il est un homme à part, à l'écart de la bonne conscience ambiante qui est justement l'objet de son interrogation.

<sup>3</sup> Ce terme doit être entendu non au sens quantitatif général de l'ensemble des hommes peuplant l'histoire, de tous les temps et de tous les pays, mais au sens qualitatif spécifique de l'idée qu'on se fait de ce qui peut et doit être considéré comme étant « humain ».

<sup>4</sup> Lors du colloque de Rome, il avait été signifié que « Ce que Mounier rejette, dans sa polémique contre ces chrétiens bien-pensants, confortablement installés dans leurs possessions de petits bourgeois, c'est l'esclavage de l'homme, dominé par ses désirs de gain et de pouvoir » extrait de « Mounier et le christianisme en France » de Marie-Etiennette Bely, In *Emmanuel Mounier, Persona e umanesimo relazionale. Mounier e oltre, nel Centenario della nascita* (1905-2005), Atti del Convegno di Roma – UPS, 12-14 gennaio 2005, a cura di Mario Toso – Zbigniew Formella – Attilio Danese, vol II, LAS – Roma, 2005, p. 225. Voir aussi les dernières pages du texte sur *Le personnalisme*, consacrées au christianisme.

litique<sup>5</sup>, son époque<sup>6</sup>. Ce à quoi la philosophie critique de Mounier s'en prend, c'est à la fois une communauté chrétienne, catholique, une démocratie libérale, une puissance coloniale qui ronronne de bonne conscience et s'assoupit dans la certitude de la valeur de ses valeurs. Face à ce qu'il appelle le « désordre établi » et qui renvoie à une situation polymorphe, politique, morale, religieuse et intellectuelle<sup>7</sup>, de son pays, de sa communauté et de son époque, il prône la nécessité d'une « renaissance » qui ne sera pas le fait d'un miracle religieux, idéologique, technocratique, mais le fait d'une décision des hommes et des femmes de son temps, de sa communauté et de son époque, de changer l'ordre des choses en changeant la vision qu'ils ont d'eux-mêmes, de leurs relations réciproques, de leur situation/condition globale dans un monde qu'ils ont en partage et de leur avenir. C'est tout le sens du personnalisme que de se préoccuper plus des personnes que des appareils, des systèmes, philosophiques, religieux ou politiques, qui l'appriivoisent dans leur prétention même à le libérer.

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<sup>5</sup> Mounier s'est montré critique vis-à-vis de la démocratie libérale de son temps, de son pays, mais aussi de celle qui, à la faveur de régime colonialiste français, promettait de s'exporter et de s'installer dans les territoires sous tutelle. Contre l'expansionnisme colonial qui ne rêvait de que d'étendre les frontières physiques et culturelles de la France jusques en Afrique, Mounier a dénoncé le messianisme de/dans la vision européenne de la démocratie en Afrique, en rappelant un certain nombre d'urgences qu'il ne faut pas voir comme des conditions sine qua non, sinon on tomberait alors dans la politique du pire qui consiste à penser que pour l'Afrique il faut toujours attendre le « kaïros », sinon on laisserait croire que les Africains devraient mûrir pour la démocratie, pour la liberté (ce qui est, comme l'a indiqué Kant, une contradiction dans les termes).

<sup>6</sup> Même si Mounier opte pour la sympathie à l'endroit du marxisme / communisme, parce que dans cette posture idéologique et politique de lutte contre l'aliénation de l'homme dans l'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme, se cache un humanisme, il a su se démarquer de la violence aveugle qui animait ses appareils de répression des personnes. L'humanisme sans le consentement des personnes n'est pas mieux que la barbarie (voir le chapitre sur l'humanisme marxiste dans *Ecrits sur le personnalisme*, p. 50 et sq.).

<sup>7</sup> «Il l'a fait en réagissant contre la propension des intellectuels à croire que les mots sont des actes et que les raisonnements impeccables suffisent à rendre le monde plus humain» Communication au colloque de Rome, de Olivier Mongin, « Esprit (1932-1950), le combat pour la révolution personnaliste », *op. cit.*, pp. 109 – 125.

«Nous appelons personnaliste toute doctrine, toute civilisation affirmant le primat de la personne humaine sur les nécessités matérielles et sur les appareils collectifs qui soutiennent son développement »<sup>8</sup>.

Mais Mounier ne dérange pas à la manière de certains philosophes ordinaires qui se sont illustrés dans la critique de tout ce qui existe (politique, art, morale, science, religion) sauf de la philosophie elle-même. En effet, un regard rétrospectif sur l'histoire de la philosophie dite européenne, occidentale nous présente une discipline qui dès sa naissance se donne pour objet d'étude et d'interrogation plus ou moins systématiques tantôt l'ensemble des choses qui entourent l'homme (le cosmos), tantôt la singularité constitutive de l'homme en tant qu'être revendiquant une singularité/spécificité ontologique dans la chaîne des choses et des êtres qui peuplent le monde. S'intéressant à l'homme, la philosophie se préoccupe à la fois de sa nature complexe, apparente et réelle, de ses capacités d'action théorique et pratique, intellectuelle et morale. Pour elle, la vérité et la dignité de l'homme tiennent dans sa dotation spirituelle qu'on appelle tantôt, la conscience, tantôt la parole, tantôt la raison, faculté de représentation et de transcendance qui rend possible la distance de l'homme vis à vis du monde et surtout de lui-même. Du fait de la raison, l'homme s'affirme non seulement comme un être capable de connaissance méthodique, sûre, systématique, critique et réflexive, mais encore et surtout comme un être capable de valeurs pour guider sa conduite dans le labyrinthe de l'existence temporelle que l'on a pendant longtemps considéré comme une véritable propédeutique à la vraie vie qui serait, selon le mot du poète Rimbaud, «ailleurs».

Mounier marque sa différence d'avec la tradition philosophique, en retournant le questionnement de la philosophie sur et contre elle-même.

«Ce qui me guide sous le prétexte du problème historique, c'est le souci d'une philosophie humaine contre tous les abstrauteurs de quintessence orgueilleuse et vide, de quelque côté qu'il soit de la barricade (car c'est là une question de méthode, non de doctrine)»<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> E. Mounier, *Ecrits sur le personnalisme*, Paris, Seuil, 2000, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> *Mounier et sa génération, Lettres, carnets et inédits*, éditions parole et silence, 2000, p. 23.

Pour Mounier, il s'agit de prendre de la distance vis-à-vis de toute vision doctrinaire, dogmatique, « scolastique », universitaire de la philosophie :

«Personnalisme n'annonce donc pas la constitution d'une école, l'ouverture d'une chapelle, l'invention d'un système clos (...). C'est donc au pluriel, des personnalismes, que nous devrions parler ...»<sup>10</sup>.

Mounier, on le sait, à la manière de Nietzsche, s'est toujours refusé à embrasser une carrière universitaire, à perpétuer la philosophie comme discipline d'enseignement se nourrissant de sa propre histoire, de sa propre tradition au grand mépris de la vie, de l'histoire réelle. Comme celle de Mounier, la pensée de Mounier annonce et consacre le crépuscule d'une tradition philosophique. Cette tradition philosophique apparaît à ses yeux comme «unilatérale» parce que essentiellement préoccupée de construire une logique idéale, un système du réel que d'embrasser la complexité de l'expérience existentielle de l'homme. Mounier considère la tradition philosophique comme objectivante, peu attentive au vivant, au sujet humain irréductible. Pour lui l'homme n'est pas un objet de pensée mais d'abord et avant tout, et même après tout, un mystère vivant ici et maintenant, en situation, aux prises avec les événements historiques. L'homme n'est pas plus « objet » que le monde n'est «spectacle». Comme le rappelle Jean Lacroix<sup>11</sup>, la philosophie de Mounier est entièrement en phase avec la critique hégélienne de la « belle âme », c'est-à-dire, de l'âme sans le monde. Mais, il faut le préciser, Mounier pense aux antipodes de l'hégélianisme qui a promu l'esprit de système comme mode de compréhension rationnelle du réel. En ce sens, sa posture philosophique s'apparente à celle de Kierkegaard et de Nietzsche dont l'intuition majeure était de soustraire la philosophie, la pensée et la vie à la tyrannie de la représentation, à la «folie» du positivisme. Il s'agit pour Mounier, d'évaluer les enjeux pratiques de l'orientation spéculative dominante de la pensée philosophique en tant qu'elle s'appelle métaphysique spiritualiste, et en tant qu'elle s'affirme comme un rationalisme objectivant :

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<sup>10</sup> E. Mounier, *Ecrits sur le personnalisme*, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Préface de *Communisme, anarchie et personnalisme*, Paris, éditions du Seuil, 1966, p. 8.

« Conquérir le réel revient ainsi à « déspiritualiser, démoraliser, désabstracter » les problèmes »<sup>12</sup>.

Face à une pensée qui s'enferme ou se referme dans ses propres catégories, dans ses représentations du réel au lieu de s'ouvrir au réel, la question qu'on peut se poser est de savoir comment le levain peut faire lever la pâte s'il la tient à distance ? C'est là un des paradoxes de la théorie classique de la connaissance que Mounier aide à dissoudre.

Il s'agit par conséquent de s'interroger sur la possibilité et la nécessité de faire autrement la philosophie pour qu'elle intègre une dimension pratique, sociale, existentielle et devienne une théorie de l'action, que dis-je, une théorie de l'éducation, au service d'une promotion de l'humanité, de la personne en chacun de nous. La force de réflexion mise en œuvre par la philosophie en tant qu'exercice critique de la raison prend alors un sens nouveau qui favorise au sein même de la discipline philosophique comme une sorte de surcroît de conscience qu'on pourrait appeler le sens autocritique. Par Mounier, dans le sillage des grands critiques de la philosophie classique que l'Allemagne ait offerts à l'histoire des idées (de Kant à Heidegger, en passant par Nietzsche), la philosophie est en quelque sorte « subvertie », retournée de l'intérieur et « reprise » (selon le mot de E. Weil) à nouveaux frais pour déployer ses enjeux pratiques éclipsés par les enjeux spéculatifs classiques. Si pour Mounier,

« L'action est l'épaisseur de notre pensée. Agir, ce n'est pas ébranler des

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<sup>12</sup> Après avoir, dans un de ses premiers textes, refusé de lire les rapports entre Mounier et Nietzsche, autrement que sous le mode exclusif (cf. *Penser avec Mounier, une éthique pour la vie*), Jean François Petit rappelait au colloque de Rome une certaine proximité de vue entre Gabriel Marcel et Mounier dans leur lecture de la tradition philosophique. « *L'approche du réel de Gabriel Marcel est féconde aux yeux de Mounier : elle a le mérite de rompre avec plusieurs siècles d'une tradition philosophique privilégiant l'idée que le seul effort qui vaille serait celui de conquérir le réel au-delà (ou en deçà) des apparences, par un regard plus pénétrant. Comme Gabriel Marcel, Mounier pense que le réel n'a pas à être tenu comme à distance, parce qu'il fait justement partie de nous – mêmes* » *op. cit.*, I, p. 52. On ne peut trouver pensée plus semblable à la critique nietzschéenne de la tradition métaphysique et religieuse de la philosophie.



nerfs, dresser des torsos et des alignements. Agir, c'est gouverner et créer »<sup>13</sup>, cela doit s'entendre comme une volonté de faire de la philosophie une énergie fondamentale pour la vie, pour l'homme vivant ici et maintenant à la recherche de l'expression la plus grande et la meilleure de ses potentialités, de son humanité.

Avec Mounier, à la suite de Montaigne et de Nietzsche, la philosophie cesse, dans le mouvement même qui la constitue comme « fête de la raison », déploiement d'une rationalité spécifique, positive au détriment de toute rationalité de type mythologique, d'organiser la mise à mort du corps, les funérailles de la vie sur terre, l'enterrement de la réalité sous prétexte d'un « arrière-monde » qui renfermerait le sens du réel et de l'existence. Certes Mounier ne renonce pas à la transcendance, bien au contraire, mais il inscrit résolument sa pensée et sa vie aux antipodes de tout spiritualisme / angélisme d'ailleurs suspecté de lâcheté. Avec Mounier, la philosophie tourne en quelque sorte le dos à la complaisance dans la spéculation objectivante (qu'on peut appeler le théorétisme) pour prendre à bras le corps, prendre au sérieux l'homme en tant que sujet vivant parmi d'autres sujets, dans un monde marqué par la finitude mais aussi habité par une possibilité majeure de transfiguration, de spiritualisation. Remettant en cause le spiritualisme facile et idéologique de la philosophie classique, Mounier donne du sens à une philosophie active dans la mesure où celle-ci éduque l'homme en l'éveillant à son humanité :

« Une théorie de l'action n'est donc pas un appendice au personalisme, elle y occupe une place centrale »<sup>14</sup>.

On peut dans ce sens, préciser ici que la relation iconoclaste, critique que Mounier entretient avec la tradition philosophique, au lieu d'être la cause de la théorie de l'action, n'en est qu'une conséquence ; la charge critique du personalisme est donc un des premiers effets, une des premières expressions, manifestations de la théorie mouniériste de l'action. L'action n'est pas un appendice de la philosophie de Mounier, mais son âme

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<sup>13</sup> E. Mounier, *Refaire la Renaissance*, Paris, Seuil, 2000, p. 53.

<sup>14</sup> E. Mounier, *Le personalisme*, Paris, PUF, coll. « Que sais-je ? », 1995, p. 96.

même. Cependant, elle n'est pas agitation, activisme, mais réalisation pleine de soi, par les autres et des autres par soi, dans une dynamique de réciprocité inter-personnelle. Elle est d'abord et avant tout violence intérieure de l'homme pour ne choir dans la platitude ontologique des choses et des objets, pour réaliser la tension spirituelle qui le constitue dans son être au monde. Mounier a toujours pris soin de démarquer le personnalisme du messianisme politique et moral :

« Au moment où de toutes parts, sous prétexte d'urgence, on nous presse d'agir n'importe comment et n'importe vers quoi, la première urgence est de rappeler ces deux exigences fondamentales de l'action, et d'y satisfaire. Elles nous opposent aux idéologues aussi bien qu'aux politiciens »<sup>15</sup>.

Certes, à l'instar des autres philosophes, les grands classiques qui trônent dans l'agora philosophique européen comme des figures archétypales de la pensée critique, Mounier prend pour objet de son questionnement la société, le vivre-ensemble, la connaissance, la morale et tous les faits de civilisation, mais mieux que ces derniers, il questionne la philosophie elle-même, par exemple en tant qu'activité spéculative cristallisée en discipline d'enseignement, que dis-je, en système de reproduction ou pour employer un terme cher à Nietzsche, de « ruminant universitaire ». Le fait que Mounier ait vite renoncé à une carrière universitaire fait sens et parle en faveur de sa détermination à voir, à comprendre et à faire autrement la philosophie. Avec Mounier, un nouvel horizon de possibilités non encore explorées, se dégage pour la pensée philosophique. Prenant appui sur l'image de la philosophie socratique éclipsée par le soleil éclatant du monde platonicien des Idées, sur l'image des Stoïciens, Epicuriens et Cyniques, soucieux de faire de la philosophie plus un art de vivre qu'un simple système d'abstractions, Mounier fait de la philosophie un véritable levier pour l'éveil de chacun à sa personne et à celle des autres, un levier pour l'éducation de chacun et de tous à l'humanité. En ce sens, on peut entrevoir à l'avance que l'éducation véritable sera moins l'action extérieure d'un système de valeurs, aussi nobles soient-elles, sur le sujet, une violence du groupe sur la personne pour conformer la tenue de son

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<sup>15</sup> E. Mounier, *Ecrits sur le personnalisme*, op. cit., p. 20.

mental, de son langage et de son comportement aux exigences des adultes dominants, qu'une auto-promotion de la personne, s'appuyant sur une inter-promotion des personnes.

En suivant cette ligne de la liberté (ouverture à l'imprévisible) qui prévient contre toute dérive de l'éducation et de la philosophie pratique qui la fonde en système, on peut alors comprendre pourquoi Mounier n'a eu de cesse de prévenir contre toute chute du personnalisme dans l'idéologie :

« Le personnalisme n'est pas un système. Le personnalisme est une philosophie, il n'est pas seulement une attitude. Il est philosophie, il n'est pas un système »<sup>16</sup>.

Dans sa préface ci-dessus évoquée, Jean Lacroix avait souligné le fait que la philosophie chez Mounier résistait à la tentation viscérale des philosophes tels que Hegel, Marx et Auguste Comte :

« La philosophie n'était pour Mounier ni la construction d'un système abstrait ni la justification après coup de ce qui a été (...) »<sup>17</sup>.

Si la philosophie n'aide pas l'esprit humain à déjouer le piège de l'idéologie, du sectarisme et de l'exclusivisme (c'est le propre de l'idéologie de découper le réel et de l'enfermer dans une vision systématique, cloisonnée, fermée qui délaisse certaines dimensions du réel comme part du feu), alors, selon le mot de Pascal, elle ne vaudrait pas une seule heure de peine, il ne faudrait plus lui consacrer une seule heure de plus. Or telle que la pense Mounier, l'éducation véritable sera celle qui déjouera le piège de l'idéologie pour mettre en œuvre une vision et une pratique holistiques de l'homme et de son devenir. L'éducation ne saurait être un système d'appauvrissement, de mise à mort de telle ou telle dimension de l'homme ; bien au contraire elle devra tourner le dos à toute réduction / violence sectaire pour conjuguer les fils visibles et invisibles qui tissent la toile mystérieuse, singulière de l'être humain.

Mounier a dénoncé l'essence objectivante et le parti pris intellec-

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<sup>16</sup> E. Mounier, *Le personnalisme*, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Préface de *Communisme, anarchie et personnalisme*, Paris, éditions du Seuil, 1966, p. 3.

tualiste de la philosophie classique (cette caractéristique en faisait une philosophie de l'objet), au profit d'une exigence pour l'homme d'habiter son être entier, dans sa corporéité spirituelle et dans sa spiritualité corporelle, d'habiter la vie dont les vicissitudes tissent la toile de l'événement, à ses yeux, notre « maître intérieur ». Il s'agissait pour lui, en tant que héritier critique de la tradition philosophique, de tourner le dos à un style / type de pensée peu soucieux de son incarnation dans la réalité mouvante et incertaine de l'histoire, pour mettre en œuvre un nouveau type / style de penser qui assume la réalité historique dans ses inépuisables vicissitudes et la réalité humaine dans sa complexité.

« Cessons de nous représenter le «corps» et l'«esprit» comme les personnages d'une figure de danse. L'homme est à chaque moment, et l'un dans l'autre, âme et chair, conscience et geste, acte et expression »<sup>18</sup>.

Mounier stigmatise le parti pris spiritualiste qui s'exprime dans la tradition philosophique en préjugé défavorable au corps, au monde ; son propos prend en compte et en charge la nécessité d'assumer la complexité (la poly-dimensionnalité) de l'homme.

« Le personnalisme n'est pas un spiritualisme, tout au contraire. Il saisit tout problème humain sur toute l'ampleur de l'humanité concrète, de la plus humble condition matérielle à la plus haute possibilité spirituelle »<sup>19</sup>.

Pour Mounier, la personne immerge dans la nature,

« L'homme est un corps au même titre qu'il est esprit, tout entier « corps » et tout entier « esprit » (...) »<sup>20</sup>.

Contre les spiritualismes d'évasion, l'angélisme arrogant, il affirme, dans une tonalité phénoménologique remarquable l'ancrage viscéral de l'être humain dans le corps, dans le monde, une connexion fondamentale et irréductible entre l'être de l'homme et l'être en général

« Nous sommes embarqués dans un corps, dans une famille, dans un milieu, dans une classe, dans une patrie, dans une époque que nous n'avons pas choisi- »

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<sup>18</sup> E. Mounier, *Traité du caractère*, p. 62.

<sup>19</sup> E. Mounier, *Ecrits sur le personnalisme*, p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> E. Mounier, *Œuvres*, tome III, p. 441.

sis »<sup>21</sup>.

Face à cette condition / situation de l'homme, « être-embarqué », Mounier dressera une philosophie de l'engagement qui sollicitera à la fois la volonté, la conscience, la lucidité de l'homme et la complexité du réel, du monde, de l'histoire.

Pour Mounier, l'être-corps, et l'être-au-monde de l'homme sont loin d'être un simple vernis, un effet de surface, ce n'est pas un fait accidentel, mais au contraire un fait radical, capital parce qu'il y va de sa vie

« Être présent au monde. C'est à la fois un problème de vie spirituelle et de maîtrise psychologique »<sup>22</sup>. « L'homme est un être-dans-le-monde. Sa condition ne peut être saisie sans être aussitôt saisie comme condition incarnée et insérée »<sup>23</sup>.

C'est cette intuition première et fondamentale du philosophe soucieux de refaire la philosophie à nouveaux frais qui le rend d'ailleurs comparable à Nietzsche qui s'était aussi lancé dans une grande entreprise de déconstruction du rationalisme, du spiritualisme et du moralisme de la tradition métaphysique qu'il comprenait comme la forme achevée et pernicieuse du ressentiment et du nihilisme européens dans la mesure où un instinct pathologique de dénigrement<sup>24</sup> s'est emparé du regard jeté sur le monde, sur le corps, sur la réalité, la disqualifiant du fait même qu'elle n'est pas parfaite, éternelle :

« Un certain spiritualisme irritable et un certain mépris du corps sont toujours le signe d'un ressentiment dominé ou gauchement sublimé »<sup>25</sup>.

Comme Nietzsche, aux antipodes des spiritualismes platonicien et chrétien, Mounier aura en définitive substitué à la philosophie de la représen-

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<sup>21</sup> E. Mounier, *Œuvres*, III, p. 191. Ici, il est évident que Mounier assume la vision pascalienne de la condition humaine même s'il la mettra en relation avec la perspective existentialiste sartrienne.

<sup>22</sup> E. Mounier, *Œuvres*, III, p. 400.

<sup>23</sup> E. Mounier, *Engagement de la foi*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>24</sup> Voir le *Crépuscule des Idoles*, éditions Gallimard, coll. Folio essai.

<sup>25</sup> E. Mounier, *Traité du caractère*, p. 64.

tation, une philosophie de la présence au monde, à la philosophie de la connaissance (objectivante) une philosophie du sens de l'être, du sens de l'être-au-monde, du sens de l'existence humaine. Philosopher selon la perspective mouniériste, c'est entrer en discussion sérieuse avec le père de la philosophie moderne qui marqua clairement et distinctement la différence entre le corps, substance composée, complexe, et l'esprit, substance simple, homogène :

« Je ne suis pas un *cogito* léger et souverain dans le ciel des idées, mais cet être lourd (...) je suis un moi-ici-maintenant (...) un moi-ici-maintenant-comme ça-parmi ces hommes avec ce passé »<sup>26</sup>.

Mounier s'est démarqué clairement de la philosophie sorbonnarde dont il détestait la raideur arrogante :

« Je me crois imperméable à jamais au venin sorbonnard. Cela ne mouille pas, comme dirait Péguy. Il est subtile, mais il est dangereux surtout, à mon sens, pour ceux que la vie n'a pas suffisamment secoués, ou qui ne se sont pas suffisamment offerts à elle pour avoir un autre souci que le développement (et je précise universitaire) de leur intelligence. Je suis décidément incapable de l'attitude objective de ces jeunes hommes qui se placent devant les problèmes comme devant une pièce d'anatomie, et devant leur carrière comme devant un mécanisme à monter méthodiquement jusqu'au point réglé »<sup>27</sup>.

L'essence même du personalisme et le sens de sa relation critique à la tradition tiennent au fait que penser, loin de signifier une complaisance dans la spéculation désintéressée, désincarnée, ne détourne pas le sujet de la vie où il est en relation avec l'autre :

« Je ne suis attiré par l'intelligence qu'en tant qu'elle aboutit à plus de lumière dans la vie intérieure »<sup>28</sup>.

Philosopher, ce n'est pas entrer dans un jeu de rôle, dans une pièce de théâtre, c'est s'engager, c'est-à-dire, se déterminer pour comprendre et vivre l'être au monde de l'homme dans sa radicalité singulière, avec les ressources de la raison. Philosopher, ce n'est pas se mettre à la fenêtre et

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<sup>26</sup> E. Mounier, *Œuvres*, tome III, p. 192.

<sup>27</sup> *Mounier et sa génération, Lettres, carnets et inédits*, extraits de *Œuvres*, tome IV, éditions Parole et Silence, 2000, p. 33.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28.

se regarder marcher, passer dans la rue, ou observer le fil de la vie se dérouler depuis je ne sais quelle position extérieure, mais c'est prendre le vivre lui-même à bras le corps, renoncer à n'être qu'une feuille morte à la merci du vent. La philosophie est pratique chez Mounier, en ce sens qu'elle regarde et féconde la vie, l'enracinement de l'homme dans le monde et dans l'histoire. Mounier appartient à la génération des philosophes critiques de la tradition philosophique, mais aussi de la captation universitaire de cette tradition au compte d'un intellectualisme aveugle et méprisant pour le réel. C'est en fuyant le dogmatisme que la philosophie de Mounier se soustrait à la tentation du moralisme facile et pédant dans lequel tombent les illuminés :

« Une philosophie pour qui existent des valeurs absolues est tentée d'attendre, pour agir, des causes parfaites et des moyens irréprochables. Autant renoncer à agir. (...) Nous ne nous engageons jamais que dans des combats discutables sur des causes imparfaites »<sup>29</sup>.

Parce qu'il voulait que la philosophie se réconcilie avec le monde, le corps, le sujet vivant, l'action dans l'histoire, parce qu'il dépaysait en quelque sorte la philosophie, Mounier s'est affirmé comme un philosophe à part, mais pour les mêmes raisons, comme un philosophe à part entière, à la manière de Nietzsche. Dans son rapport à la philosophie, Mounier s'est, il me semble, mis dans la perspective qui était celle de Péguy selon qui

« On ne voit pas ce que serait une philosophie qui ne serait pas un parti de la raison ... Toute philosophie est évidemment et essentiellement un rationalisme. Même une philosophie qui serait, ou qui voudrait être, contre la raison, serait quand même rationaliste. Une philosophie ne peut jamais apporter que des raisons ... Il n'y a pas plus de philosophie contre la raison qu'il n'y a de bataille contre la guerre, d'art contre la beauté, de foi contre Dieu ».<sup>30</sup>

Il faudrait cependant mentionner que pour Mounier, même le rationalisme qui constitue l'acte philosophique, reste au service de l'humanité. Quand le travail de rationalisation du monde et de la vie humaine qui manifeste

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<sup>29</sup> E. Mounier, *Le personalisme*, PUF, Que sais-je ?, p. 105.

<sup>30</sup> Cité dans *Oeuvres*, tome I, « La pensée de Charles Péguy », éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1961, p. 30.

l'activité philosophique se transforme en « culte » des raisons, en culte de la raison, il devient évident que la philosophie perd de vue le fait que la raison elle-même n'est qu'une médiation, qu'elle ne saurait être à elle-même sa fin.

### ***L'éducation selon Mounier : pour un développement de l'humanité***

« On a pu dire de notre éducation qu'elle était sur une large échelle un « massacre des innocents » : méconnaissant la personne de l'enfant comme telle, lui imposant un condensé des perspectives de l'adulte, les inégalités sociales forgées par les adultes, remplaçant le discernement des caractères et des vocations par le formalisme autoritaire du savoir »<sup>31</sup>

La réalité humaine dont il est question dans l'œuvre de Mounier, qu'elle soit européenne ou africaine<sup>32</sup>, n'est rien d'autre qu'un fait éducatif, qu'un fait de l'éducation, que la résultante de systèmes éducatifs donnés que le personnalisme se fait un devoir d'interroger. Ce que sont les hommes ici et ailleurs n'est que la cristallisation d'habitudes culturelles particulières qui, sous le prétexte de sécuriser, apprivoise, domestique et prend en otage les personnes. Contre cette logique massive et fatalitaire des faits, Mounier reste un penseur de la liberté qui interpelle l'homme et la société à une audace majeure. En cela, la philosophie pratique que sa pensée met en lumière comme fondement de l'action éducative prend appui sur la philosophie des Lumières qui reposait elle-même sur le principe de la nécessité pour l'homme de s'émanciper au plus tôt et au mieux de tout état de minorité. Tant que nous ne sommes que les produits du système éducatif en place chez nous, nous ne sommes pas encore des personnes. Nous ne sommes que des otages, des marionnettes plus ou moins conscientes d'un ordre idéologique donné, tant que nous n'avons pas pris la décision de nous parfaire nous-mêmes et nous avec les autres. Mais, Mounier se montre plus réaliste que les philosophes des Lumières qui se

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<sup>31</sup> E. Mounier, *Le personnalisme*, PUF, Que sais-je ?, p. 123.

<sup>32</sup> «L'Eveil de l'Afrique noire» in *Œuvres*, III, éditions du Seuil, 1950.



sont laissés porter sur les ailes de l'enthousiasme de leur foi en la raison, puisqu'il affronte la pesanteur majeure qui grève le processus de maturation, d'émancipation et de libération des hommes.

«La masse des hommes préfèrent la servitude dans la sécurité au risque dans l'indépendance, la vie matérielle et végétative à l'aventure humaine»<sup>33</sup>.

Kant<sup>34</sup> et Nietzsche avaient soutenu que les obstacles favorisant le maintien de l'homme dans l'état de minorité étaient principalement la paresse et la lâcheté de l'homme en ce qu'il préfère toujours vivre, penser et agir par procuration, sous le couvert d'un tuteur réel ou fabulé, plutôt que d'affronter dans la solitude, la liberté et la responsabilité, son droit/devoir d'être homme. Si pour Mounier, renoncer à l'engagement, c'est renoncer à la condition humaine, cela doit s'entendre comme une exigence d'un auto-dégagement de la personne de toutes les situations subjectives ou historiques qui paralysent et compromettent le processus de son auto-réalisation.

Pour Mounier, la personne, du fait de sa connexion fondamentale avec l'histoire, du fait de sa compromission radicale avec le réel, se trouve en quelque sorte prise au piège de ses propres démissions ou même au piège de ses engagements imparfaits dans des causes elles-mêmes imparfaites. Mais il peut en sortir, se libérer du joug qu'il s'est lui-même, dans la lancée de son désir d'épanouissement, imposé. Mounier a foi en l'homme dans toutes ses dimensions, comme un être capable du meilleur alors même qu'il se trouve embourbé ici et maintenant dans la finitude de sa condition, dans le pire. Le pire est visible à plusieurs niveaux, mais il porte le même nom contraire à la dignité, à la liberté, à la responsabilité, à la personne. Contre l'embrigadement culturel, idéologique et politique des personnes, Mounier rappelle que :

« Une personne est un être spirituel constitué comme tel par une manière de subsistance et d'indépendance dans son être ; elle entretient cette subsistance par son adhésion à une hiérarchie de valeurs librement adoptées, assimilées et

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<sup>33</sup> E. Mounier, *Le personnalisme*, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>34</sup> «Réponse à la question : qu'est-ce que les Lumières ? » in *Opuscules sur l'histoire*, traduction S. Piobetta, Flammarion, Paris, 1985.

vécues par un engagement responsable et une constante conversion ; elle unifie ainsi toute son activité dans la liberté et développe par surcroît, à coups d'actes créateurs, la singularité de sa vocation »<sup>35</sup>.

L'éducation doit être rattachée à la renaissance ou à la révolution personaliste en tant qu'elle est mue par la vie de l'esprit que Mounier considère comme « une conquête sur nos paresse ». S'engager, c'est d'abord et avant toute précipitation dans l'activisme, savoir et pouvoir se dégager, se mettre en mouvement.

La réalité qui structure l'éducation en Europe est celle d'une double tradition, celle de la rationalité philosophique grecque conjuguée à celle du judaïsme et du post-judaïsme que représente le christianisme<sup>36</sup>, dans le croisement des unilatéralités respectives des différentes chapelles. Mounier comprend cette réalité européenne de son temps comme marquée par un certain nombre de défauts :

- elle est bourgeoise en ce sens qu'elle fait le vide autour d'elle en expulsant toute forme de pauvreté, de précarité et en s'emmurant dans une tour de l'avoir et du pouvoir. L'émancipation rime avec individualisme<sup>37</sup>, propriété et auto-

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<sup>35</sup> E. Mounier, *Ecrits sur le personalisme*, p. 67.

<sup>36</sup> Guy Coq a, en s'appuyant principalement sur « Feu la Chrétienté », admirablement stigmatisé la captation que le christianisme du temps de Mounier, replié dans l'auto-satisfaction d'un message évangélique qu'il a mis en cage, pris en otage, avait fait de la religion : « ... le catholique est convié à ne pas masquer sa foi, mais en même temps à admettre qu'il peut beaucoup apprendre des autres, qu'il n'a pas le monopole dans la recherche spirituelle tout en ayant l'obligation de prouver la fécondité humaine de sa foi », in « Actualité de la pensée de Emmanuel Mounier », opus cit., tome II, p. 81. Il importe justement de libérer le spirituel (la personne) de cet encrassement temporel qui s'habille du nom de civilisation, de libération alors même qu'il n'est que servitude (in)volontaire.

<sup>37</sup> « L'individualisme est un système de mœurs, de sentiments, d'idées et d'institutions qui organise l'individu sur ces attitudes d'isolement et de défense (...). Un homme abstrait, sans attaches ni communautés naturelles, dieu souverain au cœur d'une liberté sans direction ni mesure, tournant d'abord vers autrui la méfiance, le calcul et la revendication ; des institutions réduites à assurer le non-empiètement de ces égoïsmes, ou leur meilleur rendement par l'association réduite au profit : tel est le régime de la civilisation qui agonise sous nos yeux, un des plus pauvres que l'histoire

satisfaction ; il n'y a pas de place ici pour la solidarité et toute relation est médiatisée par le pouvoir de l'argent, par le pouvoir et l'avoir :

«Souveraine, il y a peu d'années, sur tout le monde occidental, la civilisation bourgeoise et individualiste y est encore fortement installée. Les sociétés mêmes qui l'ont officiellement proscrite en restent toutes imprégnées»<sup>38</sup>.

- La folie bourgeoise est justement celle-là même qui enterre finalement l'idée métaphysique de l'homme ; tout n'est plus que chose, objet, seule prévaut la logique des intérêts et du profit. Selon Mounier,

« Le riche, c'est l'homme à qui rien ne résiste ! L'argent a comme laqué sa vie. Il ne sent plus le contact des hommes. Il sent à peine, s'il le veut le contact des événements »<sup>39</sup>.

- Issue d'une insurrection historique de l'individu contre

«un appareil social devenu trop lourd et contre un appareil spirituel cristallisé»<sup>40</sup>,

la bourgeoisie finit par devenir si idolâtre du confort matériel, de la sécurité qu'elle lui subordonne tout jusqu'à l'homme. En ce sens, cette idolâtrie du confort matériel fait de la civilisation le lit d'une médiocrité spirituelle sans nom dans la mesure où l'homme ici perd de sa dignité du fait qu'il est pris au piège d'une vision qui le réduit à un pur et simple instrument, du fait qu'il est asservi à la poursuite ou à la production d'un prétendu bien qui étouffe le bien suprême qu'est la personne elle-même, d'une prétendue valeur qui dévalue et dévalorise la source même des valeurs. Elle est mercantile à en perdre l'âme :

« Le travail n'est pas une marchandise ; il ne peut être traité comme

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*ait connus. Il est l'antithèse même du personnalisme, et son plus prochain adversaire» in *Qu'est-ce que le personnalisme ?*, p. 31.*

<sup>38</sup> E. Mounier, *Ecrits sur le personnalisme*, p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> E. Mounier, *Œuvres*, tome I, p. 428.

<sup>40</sup> E. Mounier, *Ecrits sur le personnalisme*, p. 30.

tel » «Ce n'est pas l'argent qui est au service de l'économie et du travail, c'est l'économie et le travail qui sont au service de l'argent »<sup>41</sup>.

« L'argent sépare. Il sépare l'homme de la lutte avec les forces, en nivelant les résistances ; il le sépare des hommes, en commercialisant tout échange, en faussant les paroles et les comportements, en isolant sur lui-même, loin des vivants reproches de la misère, dans ses quartiers, dans ses écoles, dans ses costumes, dans ses wagons, dans ses hôtels, dans ses relations, dans ses messes, celui qui ne sait plus supporter que le spectacle cent fois réfléchi de sa propre sécurité »<sup>42</sup>.

- Dès lors, au regard des exigences mêmes de l'action au service d'une promotion de la personne, le personnalisme ne saurait se constituer en idéologie passéiste, conservatrice sans perdre sa vocation même :

« Le personnalisme n'a pas vocation d'être gardien de musée, qu'il s'agisse du musée occidental, du musée latin, du musée de l'humanisme bourgeois ou de celui des chrétientés révolues »<sup>43</sup>.

- elle est violente parce qu'écartée de la dynamique de la lumière :

« Ce n'est pas la force qui fait les révolutions, c'est la lumière »<sup>44</sup>.

Mounier tourne le dos ici à la vision marxiste de la révolution comme résultant d'une dialectique historique et matérialiste, comme résultant de simples rapports de production, résultant de rapports de forces économiques :

« Notre croyance fondamentale est qu'une révolution est une affaire d'hommes, que sa principale efficacité est la flamme intérieure qui se communique d'homme à homme, quand les hommes s'offrent gratuitement aux hommes »<sup>45</sup>.

Au-delà des conditions matérielles et historiques, ce sont toujours des

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<sup>41</sup> E. Mounier, *Refaire la renaissance*, p. 191.

<sup>42</sup> E. Mounier, *Ecrits sur le personnalisme*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>43</sup> E. Mounier, *Qu'est-ce que le personnalisme ?*, p. 36.

<sup>44</sup> E. Mounier, *Refaire la renaissance*, p. 51.

<sup>45</sup> E. Mounier, *Communisme, anarchie et personnalisme*, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

êtres vivants, conscients de leurs conditions de vie et soucieux de se dépasser, qui s'engagent pour eux-mêmes et pour l'humanité :

«... l'homme ne va bien que là où il va avec tout lui-même. L'unité d'un monde de personnes ne peut s'obtenir que dans la diversité des vocations et l'authenticité des adhésions. C'est une voie plus longue que les brutalités du pouvoir... Le totalitarisme est l'impatience des puissants »<sup>46</sup>.

La réalité qui structure l'éducation en Afrique est une ombre pâle de la réalité européenne en ce sens que l'Afrique a été dépossédée de son authenticité par la castration coloniale que Mounier appréhende comme une imposture majeure qui signe la tragédie d'une vision mono-culturelle du monde. L'altérité africaine est comme mise en congé forcé, puisque la plupart des Africains dits évolués qui secondent le Blanc comme son ombre dans sa compréhension de la réalité africaine et sa volonté de re-crée l'Afrique à son image, se voient eux-mêmes et comprennent l'ensemble de leur réalité selon le kaléidoscope idéologique et complexé du colonisateur.

De ce fait, l'éducation en Afrique s'affirme selon les traits suivants :

*(1) elle est grisée, mimétique et reproductrice d'un complexe d'infériorité<sup>47</sup> par rapport au Blanc.*

Mounier montre par exemple comment l'école coloniale en Afrique s'est imposée dans une inadéquation totale par rapport aux besoins réels de la société africaine. C'est une école plus au service de l'idéologie de la « blanchitude / dénigrification » que de la résolution des problèmes sociaux, économiques et politiques des Africains. Elle transfère et reproduit servilement l'Europe en Afrique comme on importe l'être dans le néant. Mais cette manière de réécrire l'histoire de l'Afrique tout en essayant de cacher ses mains prépare une tragédie que la démocratie que les disciples ou premiè-

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<sup>46</sup> E. Mounier, *Le personnalisme*, p. 54.

<sup>47</sup> Aimé Césaire dénonce dans son œuvre le fait que, outre la violence physique de la colonisation, celle-ci ait savamment inculqué en plus en Afrique, un complexe d'infériorité à des millions de gens.

res victimes d'une telle école souhaitent aussi importer comme remède magique à leurs problèmes, ne pourra vaincre. Sur ce point (l'importation de la démocratie<sup>48</sup>), Mounier a prévenu à la fois les Africains et leurs amis d'Europe, si persuadés de la qualité de la trouvaille de la révolution française, qu'ils en deviennent aveugles et dogmatiques, en des termes sans équivoque et sans appel :

« Faire la démocratie en Afrique, ce n'est pas y étendre la souveraineté du café du Commerce. C'est d'abord équiper l'Afrique, qui est encore une affaire de mauvais rendement, afin de donner progressivement à tous un niveau de vie honorable. C'est multiplier l'école et ne pas craindre, par esprit de système et sous prétexte de certains abus, de l'adapter aux premiers besoins d'un peuple qui s'éveille, notamment le besoin de cadres paysans. Faire la démocratie en Afrique, c'est donner à partager aux Africains, progressivement et selon les capacités réelles, le pouvoir effectif, et non pas exporter la démagogie, la concussion, le mandarinat électoral, le bavardage de l'impuissance »<sup>49</sup>.

Quand on sait par quelles turbulences l'Afrique est passée depuis les indépendances concédées à partir de 1960, on mesure ici la fraîcheur de la pensée de Mounier qui dénonça l'engrenage de l'illusion démocratique dans lequel le colon et ses fidèles serviteurs post-indépendances ont plongé la plupart des pays africains. La fin de sa lettre à son ami africain, en l'occurrence Alioune Diop, est d'une lucidité sans appel ; Européens ou Africains, nul ne peut se dérober à l'exigence que symbolise la voix de Mounier sur la condition africaine et sur ce qu'il faut faire pour que le changement prenne corps chez nous au profit des hommes et des femmes :

« La démocratie formelle n'est rien sans la démocratie réelle et la démocratie réelle s'appelle en Afrique (...) irrigation, électrification, instruction. L'humeur méridionale a déjà quelque peu pourri la démocratie européenne ; ne faites à l'Europe un immense ventre de démagogie ; vous basculeriez avec elle »<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Voir si besoin, «La démocratie en Afrique : malentendus, ruses et alibis» publié dans les *Annales de l'Université C.A. Diop* de Dakar, 2003.

<sup>49</sup> E. Mounier, *Œuvres*, III, p. 311.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 338.

Il ne faut ni se tromper de combat, ni se contenter de mener de faux combats, de faux-débats, et faire attendre encore plus longtemps les Africains pris au piège des infortunes historiques (esclavage, déportation, colonisation, subordination, domination néo-coloniale) et réduits au simple statut de damnés de la terre.

(2) *elle est caractérisée par un élitisme<sup>51</sup> à double-tranchants (dangereux pour le colon et pour la masse analphabète).*

A la veille et aux lendemains des indépendances, en Afrique et sous la pression de l'école<sup>52</sup> coloniale française, se développe une classe de privilégiés qui ont vite oublié leur devoir historique d'être la locomotive du développement de leur communauté tout entière. Ils ont créé par on ne sait quel génie, une tête sans corps de telle sorte qu'on pouvait prédire un suicide collectif imminent. Mounier s'en est inquiété lors de son périple africain en 1947 et il y a vu une grave menace pour le développement réel du continent. Sur ce point, on peut concéder que Mounier a certes raison de craindre l'érection d'une élite locale sans scrupules, individualiste et bourgeoise dans l'âme, se soucie plus de s'enrichir (même au prix de compromissions inconcevables avec la métropole) que de travailler à un développement solidaire, à l'émancipation effective de la communauté. Mais il nous faut rester prudent dans cette affaire car à craindre systématiquement l'émergence d'une élite, on peut en venir à priver l'Afrique de la locomotive dont elle a besoin pour aller au-delà de la médiocrité. Décourager en Afrique l'érection d'une élite intellectuelle, ce serait comme prescrire à un patient de se soigner par l'auto-décapitation. Tout est une question d'équilibre entre la tête et le corps ; selon que l'un ou l'autre est atrophié, l'Afrique restera impotente. Dans sa lettre à Alioune Diop, Mou-

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 310.

<sup>52</sup> Voir si besoin notre étude sur les enjeux de l'école en Afrique dans « *Philosopher aujourd'hui en Afrique, obstacles et enjeux pour un développement approprié* », in *Pour une pensée africaine émancipatrice*, L'Harmattan, Alternatives Sud, Mars 2004.

nier reconnaît que :

« Il faut à l'Afrique des cadres techniques, et il lui faut des cadres intellectuels, de tout échelon. Il ne lui faut pas tant d'orateurs. Si révolution il doit y avoir, les révolutions du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle se montent à l'atelier, au champ, à l'école, non pas sur la place publique »<sup>53</sup>.

Tout est donc une question d'éducation de cette élite pour qu'elle comprenne son rôle moteur et sa mission de service. On est en droit de craindre tout aussi bien la constitution d'une élite que son absence, sa mort car on se retrouverait devant une situation de nation « décapitée ». Si le problème de l'élite tient au fait qu'elle est forgée à l'école coloniale, et qu'elle ne sait rien faire d'autre que de reproduire son modèle, alors tournons-nous vers l'idée d'une éducation proprement africaine. Mounier<sup>54</sup> s'est toujours opposé à la captation scolaire de l'éducation ; cela est d'autant plus vrai en Afrique que ce « mors » colonial n'a souvent rien fait d'autre que de la pure et simple instruction, du vernissage des enfants qui lui étaient confiés, les transformant de ce fait en personnages ridicules, ennuyants pour l'Occident et dangereux pour leur pays. C'est alors que l'on rencontre une autre difficulté qui menace la constitution même des Etats et la possibilité d'une conscience nationale. L'éducation traditionnelle en Afrique n'est rien d'autre qu'une éducation de type ethnique, tribal, c'est-à-dire, une éducation fermée, repliée aux seules limites de la famille plus ou moins agrandie, dont nous savons qu'elle porte la guerre dans ses flancs. Ce type d'éducation, du fait de son éclatement géo-culturel, fait de l'homme en Afrique, à la fois un otage et un soldat de son groupe social, une copie de l'ancêtre, du grand-père, du père, l'installe dans une logique du même qui compromet toute ouverture à l'altérité.

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<sup>53</sup> E. Mounier, *Œuvres, tome III, op. cit.*, p. 338.

<sup>54</sup> «Le problème de l'éducation ne se réduit pas au problème de l'école : l'école est un instrument éducatif parmi d'autres, il y a abus et erreur à en faire l'instrument principal ... », in *Le personnalisme, op. cit.*, p. 123.



«Nous sommes toujours embarqués dans un corps, dans une famille, dans un milieu, dans une classe, dans une patrie, dans une époque que nous n'avons pas choisis»<sup>55</sup>.

On comprend alors tous les dangers qu'il y aurait dans tous les cas à vouloir soit importer en Afrique le système éducatif colonial, soit retrouver en-deçà de l'école coloniale pour la remettre en perspective, une école des traditions proprement africaines.

Face à cette double imposture éducative, le personnalisme représente un appel à se dépasser, à transcender toute position culturelle pour entrer dans une dynamique nouvelle que Mounier désigne par le terme de renaissance. Je signifie par là qu'on ne naît pas personnaliste mais qu'on le devient, tant il y a un travail à faire, d'abord sur soi et ensuite sur la qualité de ses relations avec les autres, avec l'histoire. Là encore, au-delà des choses et des faits, on en revient à l'engagement des personnes à assumer leur responsabilité historique de transfigurer leur condition.

«Nous pouvons dire (...) qu'une civilisation ne tient pas son âme et son style essentiel ni du seul développement de ses techniques, ni du seul visage de ses idéologies dominantes, ni même d'une réussite heureuse des libertés conjuguées. Elle est d'abord une réponse métaphysique à un appel métaphysique, une aventure de l'ordre de l'éternel, proposée à chaque homme dans la solitude de son choix et de sa responsabilité»<sup>56</sup>.

Ce dont il est question, c'est de montrer que l'éducation en Afrique aujourd'hui, si elle veut s'inspirer de la dynamique du personnalisme, doit se libérer de deux catégories de chaînes :

- d'abord du culte de l'individu (l'individualisme) à l'européenne qui nous séduit quand nous étouffons sous les couvertures de la solidarité africaine qui favorise et entretient le parasitisme des irresponsables (la fraternité-alibi, la famille-sans-frontières), mais qui, au bout du compte, prépare pour le monde entier en passe de reproduire la folie de la modernité européenne, une tragédie sans

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<sup>55</sup> «Qu'est-ce que le personnalisme ?», chapitre 2, 1947, *Œuvres*, III, p. 194 et sq.

<sup>56</sup> *Ecrits sur le personnalisme*, p. 22.

nom, la non-communication.

- ensuite du culte de la communauté qui nous fascine et nous console de nos mésaventures européennes car il se révèle en réalité comme le cimetière de la personne libre et responsable, ouverte et disponible pour l'autre. Mounier avait prévenu contre la violence des systèmes éducatifs, qu'ils soient politiques, culturels ou religieux :

« Par définition, une personne se suscite par appel, elle ne se fabrique pas par dressage. L'éducation ne peut donc avoir pour fin de façonner l'enfant au conformisme d'un milieu familial, social ou étatique, ni se restreindre à l'adapter à la fonction ou au rôle qu'adulte, il jouera. La transcendance de la personne implique que la personne n'appartient à personne d'autre qu'à elle-même : l'enfant est sujet, il n'est ni *Res Societatis*, ni *Res Familiae*, ni *Res Ecclesiae*. »<sup>57</sup>

Pour que l'enfant ne soit ni chose de la société, ni chose de la famille, ni chose de l'Eglise, il faut que ce que Nietzsche appelait un «vent de dégel» souffle sur les dites-valeurs qui tapissent les sociétés et les cultures dans leur différences et dont on a tendance à se contenter quand bien même leur valeur est en question, simplement parce qu'elles servent d'alibi à l'impuissance ou à la frilosité collectives, à la peur du changement.

Contre la folie du collectivisme et de ses violences qui ruinent le droit des personnes à disposer d'elles-mêmes, Mounier dans le sillage de l'existentialisme qu'il épousait en certaines de ses vues, avait rappelé en son temps, la nécessité irréductible de défendre la liberté (sans pour autant céder à l'individualisme). En plus de s'être dressé contre l'embrigadement culturel, idéologique ou politique des personnes (le personnalisme est irréductible au communisme, au christianisme), Mounier avait inscrit le personnalisme aux stricts antipodes de l'individualisme<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> E. Mounier, *Œuvres*, III, pp. 521-522.

<sup>58</sup> C'est d'ailleurs un point de rupture entre lui et Nietzsche qui craignait l'ensevelissement de l'individu dans le troupeau : «*nous portons tous en nous des plantations et des jardins secrets ... nous sommes tous des volcans en croissance qui attendent l'heure de leur éruption ... quant à savoir si elle est proche ou lointaine, nul assurément ne le sait, pas même le bon dieu* » in *Le Gai Savoir*, I, 9 « Nos érup-

Il s'agit à présent d'imaginer et de réaliser, dans la dynamique rendue possible par le personalisme entre ces deux excès qui ont ici et là, régi les pratiques éducatives dans le monde, une éducation qui conjugue au mieux à la fois la liberté des personnes et leur solidarité dans l'humanité. Les valeurs dont vivent les hommes et les sociétés sont non des «choses en soi», des réalités impersonnelles, intemporelles, mais des réalités subjectives, intersubjectives que Mounier<sup>59</sup> dit « transpersonnelles » parce que liées aux personnes vivantes, dans leurs relations réciproques, et parce qu'elles hissent les individus au-dessus de leur isolement, au-delà de leur particularité pour les inscrire dans un engagement plus global, communautaire, universel. C'est dire qu'au-delà des personnes et des relations interpersonnelles, Mounier a pris en compte les sociétés, les cultures et les continents dans la dynamique holistique du personalisme qui réconcilie l'homme avec lui-même, avec la transcendance, avec les autres hommes et avec le monde qu'ils partagent.

En guise de conclusion, faut-il rappeler que le personalisme, que Mounier s'était toujours en toute lucidité, refusé d'ériger en système, en doctrine, demeure incompatible avec le fait de prescrire de façon unilatérale et définitive un système éducatif qui devrait s'imposer au risque de réduire la part d'imprévisible reconnu à l'humain ? De même qu'il s'inscrivait aux antipodes de la démocratie de son temps qui se défaisait et en faveur de celle à faire, de même, le personalisme ne s'inscrit-il pas contre l'éducation qui se défait<sup>60</sup> au profit de celle qui est à faire ? Celle-là même qui prend au sérieux le fait que l'enfant n'est pas à dresser conformément à des idoles du jour ou de nuit, que le but de l'éducation n'est pas de faire, de fabriquer en série des êtres bien sages et malléables à volonté par les pouvoirs culturels, religieux, économiques ou politiques :

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tions », Paris, CFL, 10/18, 1957, p. 84.

<sup>59</sup> Voir dans *Le personalisme*, op. cit, le chapitre VI sur « l'éminente dignité ».

<sup>60</sup> A la fois celle reproductrice de la dictature masquée des adultes sur les enfants, et celle bourgeoise, individualiste, libérale, toutes deux tissées de mensonges en ce sens qu'elles promettent une liberté alors même que, la première met la personne à genoux devant les idoles du groupe social, et que la seconde la jette sur les mirages d'un égo-centrisme narcissique et suicidaire.

«La transcendance de la personne implique que la personne n'appartient à personne d'autre qu'à elle-même : l'enfant est sujet ... Il n'est pas sujet pur ni sujet isolé. Inséré dans des collectivités, il se forme par elles et en elles»<sup>61</sup>.

Après la politique et l'économie, l'éducation, en tant que système, serait prétentieuse de vouloir se préoccuper de faire tout l'homme. Celui-ci doit bénéficier d'une marge de liberté et de responsabilité pour se faire lui-même, par et avec les autres dans des relations non soutenues par des rapports de force, non asymétriques. Mais à l'heure de la mondialisation qui est l'autre nom de la nouvelle domination du Nord sur le Sud et plus particulièrement du modèle américain sur le reste du monde, une telle vision de l'éducation ne frise-t-elle l'utopie ?

La reconnaissance de l'irréductibilité métaphysique de l'homme ne doit pourtant pas conduire à un repli sur soi, à un quelconque culte de l'ego. Après Husserl et tout ce que la phénoménologie nous a apporté comme éclairage sur la condition humaine (contemporanéité de la conscience et du monde, pluralité des consciences, intentionalité, être-ensemble au monde), le personalisme demeure une invitation personnelle à ne pas subir notre co-présence au monde, mais à la vouloir et à la construire chaque jour un peu plus, chaque jour un peu mieux, dans une disponibilité sans pression, consentie et dans une décision solidaire des personnes, pour grandir un peu plus, un peu mieux en humanité. Pensée ouverte à l'événement où se retrouvent et se rencontrent les personnes dans la cacophonie et où la symphonie de leurs efforts réciproques pour s'épanouir, en quête de leur dignité, de leur liberté et du sens de leur existence, pensée de l'action au cœur des incertitudes du monde et de l'histoire humaine, le personalisme ne représente-t-il pas pour nous aujourd'hui, au cœur d'un monde agité par les conflits politiques, économiques, culturels et religieux, le fil d'Ariane, le fil de lumière qui nourrit l'espérance d'une vie meilleure, d'un épanouissement personnel et interpersonnel ?

Pour finir, je reprendrai ici une idée de Guy Coq au colloque de Rome, à propos de la vision que Mounier se faisait du christianisme :

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<sup>61</sup> E. Mounier, *Le personalisme*, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

« Il est clair en tout cas que pour Mounier, le christianisme n'est pas lié définitivement à une civilisation. Il va à la rencontre de l'être humain partout et en tous temps quand il essaie de construire une humanité meilleure »<sup>62</sup>.

Si cela est vrai pour le christianisme (on peut en douter si tant est que nous autres Africains pouvons accuser d'avoir été, dans sa complicité historique et idéologique avec le système colonial de castration qui embrigada les peuples dits primitifs, une religion expansionniste, conquérante, catholique au sens grec du terme), ça l'est encore plus pour le personnalisme qui, parce qu'il n'est pas lié définitivement à un patrimoine culturel, encore moins à une patrie politique, ne saurait être capté, pris en otage par les Français en particulier, ou même par les Européens, alors que Mounier vivait de partir, de sortir de chez lui, de France et d'Europe, à la rencontre de l'autre, du monde, des personnes où qu'elles se trouvent, là où elles vivent et manifestent leur humanité : « *La personne est un dedans qui a besoin du dehors* »<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> *Op. cit.*, II, p. 80.

<sup>63</sup> *Le personnalisme*, p. 56.

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## **QUEST** Laboratory

# **Philosophie de la nature et sauvegarde écologique de la terre chez Teilhard de Chardin**

*par Dieudonné Zognong*

**Résumé: Philosophie de la nature et sauvegarde écologique de la terre chez Teilhard de Chardin.** La présente réflexion situe dans la société post-moderne marquée par les périls écologiques, l'actualité de la philosophie de la nature, dans une perspective teilhardienne. Prenant le contre-pied des technosciences en général, dans leurs praxis anti-écologiques, cette philosophie voit dans la nature une profondeur métaphysique, occultée par les sciences, et y entrevoit même un accrochage au divin. Teilhard de Chardin est revisité à cet égard comme une figure emblématique, à travers les thèses écologisantes majeures de son corpus philosophique, telle la thèse du panpsychisme, celle de l'anthropocentrisme corrigé, et celle du principe de planétarisation panhumaine. Celles-ci font du Teilhardisme la première contribution philosophique magistrale à la défense de l'environnement, et revêt de nos jours un regain d'actualité, dans divers mouvements écologiques voire de bioéthique. Vu l'évidence de la finitude et de l'incertitude écologique de la Terre, il s'agit à travers l'auteur du Phénomène humain de réconceptualiser la relation homme/nature, en ce millénaire où la renaissance du sentiment de compassion à l'égard des êtres non-humains s'accompagne toujours d'une dimension critique à l'égard de la civilisation technicienne.

**Mots clés :** Philosophie de la nature, Teilhard de Chardin, environnement, péril écologique, anthropocentrisme, panpsychisme, civilisation technicienne, post-modernité, éthique écologique, vitalisme.

**Abstract:** The present reflection situates (in the post-modern society marked by ecological peril), the actuality of a philosophy of nature, in a Teilhardian perspective. Taking the opposite of techno-sciences in general, in their anti-ecological praxis, this philosophy sees in nature a metaphysical depth, which is being overlooked by the modern sciences of nature. Teilhard de Chardin is

revisited in this respect as an emblematic reference, because of the major ecological thesis of his philosophy, brought out in such themes as pan-psychism, new anthropocentrism, panhuman planetisation. Because of these themes Teilhardism can be called the first major philosophical contribution to the protection of the environment, adopted as such in various ecological and bioethical movements. Given the evidence of the ecological finitude of Earth, Teilhard's thought is a locus for reconceptualisation of the relations between mankind and Nature.

**Key words:** Philosophy of the nature, Teilhard de Chardin, environment, ecological threat, anthropocentrism, panpsychism, technological civilization, post-modernity, ecological ethics, vitalism.

## **Introduction**

La protection qualitative de la nature, tant humaine que matérielle est un enjeu capital et cependant peu valorisé par la normativité globale, en comparaison avec la forte codification des droits de l'homme. Contre cette déficience, Michel Serres a eu à plaider pour un contrat naturel<sup>1</sup>. Face aux angoisses écologiques de notre temps dues à la praxis humaine, en quoi les qualités de visionnaire et les thèses avant-gardistes de Teilhard de Chardin s'imposent aujourd'hui à l'attention des politiques et des théoriciens ? L'eugénisme et le péril écologique expriment pareillement des manipulations dangereuses de la nature, face à quoi Teilhard de Chardin s'avère un philosophe de la nature avant-gardiste répondant aux angoisses écologiques depuis le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle, à travers notamment ses thèses du panpsychisme, puis de l'anthropocentrisme corrigé. La phénoménologie teilhardienne de la matière ne porte pas sur autre chose que l'étude de la nature. Ses thèses ne sont-elles pas en état d'être largement mises à contribution dans les milieux scientifiques, idéologiques et philosophiques dans différents argumentaires au compte des entreprises de sauvegarde écologique de la Terre ? Chez notre auteur le thème de la nature, à la fois redondant et fécond est insuffisamment élucidé et mis à contribution dans les voies de l'écologie. La question est de savoir si les thèses écologisantes de son corpus, qui se révèlent comme une figure ra-

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<sup>1</sup> Voir M. Serres, *Le Contrat naturel*. Paris, Flammarion, 1992.



dicale de la philosophie de la nature ne constituent pas à l'analyse, une base radicale de ré-conceptualisation de la relation homme-nature. Éclaircir l'éthique écologique à travers le Teilhardisme et sa posture dans la philosophie de la nature, telle est l'intention des présentes lignes. Mais avant toute chose il convient de présenter les inquiétudes écologiques actuelles.

## ***I. L'impératif écologique aujourd'hui***

L'un des défis planétaires majeurs de l'Humanité depuis le 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle se signale comme le défi écologique. L'influence néfaste de l'homme sur la biosphère et les équilibres naturels de la Terre étant déjà très marquée, l'environnement a pris rang parmi les grandes inquiétudes de notre temps. L'homme semble s'être définitivement confirmé dans son image d'animal excrémental (producteur de déchets), selon le mot d'Edgar Morin. Les gâcheries écologiques ne se comptent plus ; elles remettent en cause la civilisation industrielle et autorisent même à craindre la disparition pure et simple de notre Humanité, dont elles engagent la destinée entière. Il n'est que de se rappeler que ces erreurs écologiques sont par exemple à l'origine de la perte de l'antique civilisation Maya en Amérique centrale. Pourtant, l'indifférence semble s'enliser, qui porte Jean Rostand à regretter que

« défendre la nature sur tous les fronts est une chose malaisée car on se heurte à l'indifférence, à l'ignorance, au scepticisme et surtout l'on a contre soi plus ou moins ouvertement, tous ceux qui donnent aux convoitises personnelles le pas sur l'intérêt commun, tous ceux qui, prêts à compromettre le futur pour un avantage immédiat, ne font pas objection au déluge, pourvu qu'ils ne soient pas là pour y assister »<sup>2</sup>.

Jusqu'où la civilisation techno scientifique et industrielle arrivera-t-elle dans son action dépravante? Même l'Afrique qui s'est longtemps prévalu d'être une «terra incognita» de la tourmente écologique n'est plus une table rase en la matière, et prend une vive conscience des enjeux

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<sup>2</sup> J. Rostand, cité par Roger DAJOS, *Précis d'Écologie*, Paris, Bordas, 1985, p. 476.

de sa relative virginité environnementale pour l'avenir global de la planète. En soulignant l'incertitude et la finitude écologiques de la Terre, hommes de sciences et philosophes s'accordent pour constater qu'un seuil critique est depuis longtemps atteint. Il faut réconceptualiser le sens de la relation de l'homme à la Nature dans la civilisation développementaliste moderne. La conscience écologique, sœur de la bioéthique, en donnant lieu à l'écologisme est née de ce souci.

### *A - Clarifications notionnelles et historique*

Dans le langage scientifique moyen, les mots écologie et écologisme ont généralement été employés indifféremment pour désigner le mouvement de contestation d'un ordre politique, social, économique et technique peu soucieux des ressources naturelles. C'est en 1886 que le mot écologie est défini pour la première fois par le zoologiste allemand Ernst Haeckel. Mais en 1854, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire s'était déjà servi du vieux mot français « éthologie » pour désigner l'étude des relations entre l'être vivant et son milieu. Pour l'étymologie, écologie vient de deux mots grecs *oikos* et *logos* qui signifient respectivement « demeure » et « science ». Littéralement l'écologie est ainsi la science de l'habitat, de notre environnement en tant que cadre de vie ; et par extension, l'espace global, voire la biosphère cosmique considérée comme une enveloppe d'inter et rétroactions entre tout ce qui existe. D'où en définitive la définition qu'en donne Haeckel comme la science qui étudie les conditions d'existence des êtres vivants et les interactions de toutes sortes qui existent entre elles d'une part, et entre ces êtres vivants et le milieu, d'autre part.

L'écologisme, d'essence plus sociale et militante, insistera sur des exigences normatives, notamment en établissant une communauté de destin entre le vivant et son environnement physique, voire social. D'après Dominique Simonnet, dans son ouvrage *L'Écologisme*<sup>3</sup> ce mouvement nourrit le projet d'inculquer conscience et sensibilité environnementales à l'homme : l'homme doit alors envisager la Terre et le cosmos toujours de

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<sup>3</sup> D. Simonnet, *L'Écologisme*, Paris, Puf, 1991.

façon holistique, comme un tout dont les parties se tiennent systématiquement. C'est ce qui explique l'introduction en écologie de la notion de cybernétique (la théorie des systèmes). Pour l'éthique écologique, l'homme doit se considérer comme appartenant à un espace global, au sens où les Anciens voulaient vivre en harmonie avec la nature. L'espace global ici implique non seulement l'espace planétaire, mais aussi l'espace cosmique sidéral dans son ensemble. Science et conscience écologiques (celle-ci étant fondée sur celle-là), font alors partie d'une même réalité, dans un ordre de complémentarité.

Les concepts d'écologie et d'environnement s'emploient généralement aussi indifféremment, du fait du déficit de définitions du concept d'environnement. Seul le texte du Pacte international sur l'environnement et le développement élaboré par la Commission du droit de l'environnement de l'Union Mondiale pour la Conservation de la Nature propose une définition de portée générale:

« On entend par environnement l'ensemble de la nature, des ressources naturelles, y compris le patrimoine culturel et l'infrastructure humaine indispensable pour les activités socio-économiques »<sup>4</sup>.

Au total, la réalité écologique présente de multiples facettes qu'il faut faire tourner ensemble dans un même éclairage pour en comprendre la cohérence: une discipline strictement scientifique, une théorie critique de l'économie quantitativiste, véritable plaidoyer pour un *autre* développement; une analyse de la société industrielle; des esquisses de propositions politiques fondées sur la décentralisation des pouvoirs étatiques et le rééquilibrage des rapports Nord - Sud; la promotion d'une citoyenneté planétaire, cosmopolitique (l'écocitoyenneté); une sensibilité morale, un mouvement social; une certaine joie de vivre. Tout cela constitue un véritable bouillon de culture, ce que Dominique Simonnet nomme le puzzle écologique.

Mais le caractère le plus fondamental de l'écologie est d'être à la fois éthique et comportement. L'idéologie écologiste intervient alors dans

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<sup>4</sup> Cité par Maurice Kamto, *Droit de l'environnement en Afrique*, Paris, EDICEF / AUPELF, 1996, p. 16.

le double champ philosophique de la connaissance et de l'action. Elle remet profondément en cause le déterminisme scientifique et technique qui conditionne le développement des sociétés modernes, s'interroge sur l'influence de la pensée scientifique et sur celle de la technologie dans le choix des sociétés et des modes de vie. Le mouvement écologiste pose avant tout la question du rapport entre la nature et la société à une époque où l'Homme dénaturé, enfermé dans son rôle social est la principale victime du rétrécissement de son horizon axiologique. Il médite sur les notions de bonheur et de liberté, dissociant l'une de l'abondance et associant l'autre à l'autonomie, et il formule en même temps une morale du comportement quotidien. Au tournant du nouveau siècle où l'économie est devenue la religion de notre temps selon la formule de Serge Latouche<sup>5</sup>, les écologistes, s'en prennent à l'idéologie développementiste, remettent en cause la civilisation technoscientifique, et cherchent à travers les symptômes d'une crise de la science, les symptômes de la crise de l'Humanité.

Depuis le plus profond passé grec, la conscience écologique a existé avant la lettre chez les philosophes de la nature. L'épistémologue Jean-Marc Drouin relève ainsi dans son ouvrage *L'Écologie et son histoire* que l'écologie est un très vieux sujet :

« Que l'on fixe la naissance de l'écologie scientifique à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle, ou en 1859, date de la parution de *L'origine des espèces* de Darwin, ou en 1866 avec Haeckel, l'écologie a existé avant que quiconque songe à en faire un parti ou à la considérer comme un phénomène sociologique »<sup>6</sup>.

En effet, une connaissance empirique des exigences écologiques est identifiable chez l'homme préhistorique et dont les anciens philosophes grecs se sont fait l'écho. Ces philosophes grecs dans l'antiquité vénéraient et adoraient la Terre sous le nom de Gaïa. La déesse Terre avait une âme et un corps. Elle était capable de beaucoup de générosité; mais aussi, elle était susceptible de souffrir des sévices et des lésions qu'on lui infligeait en polluant ses rivières et ses lacs, en pillant ses richesses, en

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<sup>5</sup> S. Latouche, *L'Occidentalisation du monde*, Paris, La Découverte, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> J.-M. Drouin, *L'Écologie et son histoire*, Paris, Flammarion, 1994, p. 10.

décimant les animaux de son domaine. Elle se vengeait alors en provoquant la sécheresse, les tempêtes violentes, les tremblements de Terre, la famine et les épidémies. Aujourd'hui, la Terre a perdu de sa superbe sacrale, l'homme ayant profané le sol et le sous-sol et en a fait la victime de toutes ses activités prédatrices, productrices et destructrices. Parfois par imprudence, souvent par égoïsme et toujours par insouciance. Encore fallait-il qu'un jour l'humanité prît conscience de ce qu'elle fait partie de la Nature et que la vie dépend du fonctionnement ininterrompu des systèmes naturels qui sont la source d'énergie et des matières nutritives.

Cette antique conscience écologique subsiste encore de nos jours chez les campagnards des sociétés et civilisations africaines. Il règne ici une écologie sacrée ; et ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler *l'endocentrisme* et le *maatisme* renvoient à la reconnaissance de l'interconnexion de tous les êtres de la nature. L'Africain, a-t-on pu dire depuis Senghor, communique, sympathise avec tous les êtres non humains qui l'entourent, et porte un regard amical sur la nature. Il existe un panpsychisme africain dans la mesure où toute la nature est considérée comme vivante et animée.

### ***B. La Terre outragée par la civilisation industrielle***

La communauté internationale a pris une conscience décisive, dans la deuxième moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle<sup>7</sup> de l'existence, de la permanence et de l'importance d'un certain nombre de périls menaçant l'environnement naturel. Menaces sectorielles, mais surtout menaces globales, avec des phénomènes tels que l'accroissement de l'effet de serre, la diminution de la couche d'ozone, les pluies acides, les pollutions à grande échelle, les fortes canicules, la destruction des écosystèmes ou l'appauvrissement de la biodiversité, lesquels phénomènes se trouvent aiguisés par les appétits de puissance des États, leur acharnement à la supercompétitivité, les égoïsmes nationaux, la tentation de la croissance pour la croissance, la frénésie de l'industrialisation, divers projets de conquête et de domination de la na-

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<sup>7</sup> Conférence internationale de Stockholm de 1972 sur l'Environnement Humain, et celle de Rio de Janeiro de 1992, sur l'Environnement et le Développement.

ture, la surconsommation des richesses naturelles, l'inflation des activités polluantes ou destructrices des écosystèmes. Autant de phénomènes qui dans leur projection prospective, semblent annonciateurs de catastrophes, quand ils ne sont pas porteurs de visions apocalyptiques. Étant entendu, aux termes du deuxième principe de la déclaration de Stockholm du 16 Juin 1972 sur l'environnement,

« que les ressources naturelles du globe, y compris l'air, l'eau, la terre, la flore et la faune, et particulièrement les échantillons représentatifs de la biodiversité doivent être préservés dans l'intérêt des générations présentes et à venir par une planification ou une gestion plus attentive ».

Dans une biosphère de plus en plus stérile et triste, dans une humanité désenchantée eu égard aux dégradations de l'univers naturel et même culturel, l'environnement a pris rang parmi les préoccupations majeures de la post-modernité, et la nature se trouve à la croisée des chemins de plusieurs préoccupations disciplinaires, avec en premier plan la préoccupation philosophique. A la suite des penseurs vitalistes, le retour de plus en plus perçu vers la philosophie de la nature depuis le XX<sup>e</sup> siècle se présente comme une exigence née des progrès même des sciences, au regard de leur incapacité à fournir une théorie satisfaisante de la nature, face aux dérives de la civilisation technoscientifique, qui donnent aujourd'hui un élan de radicalisation au mouvement écologiste. Car, si les technosciences dans leurs conceptions mécanicistes et utilitaristes, dans leurs perceptions intéressées du réel, échouent dans la tentative de percer le mystère de la nature, c'est grâce à son orientation vitaliste que la philosophie de la nature peut fournir une compréhension normative de cette nature, pour autant que l'écologie qu'elle sous-tend se veut une apologie moralisante de l'environnement, au sens de Hegel : la philosophie naît du déchirement. Et précisément pour notre siècle, il s'agit du déchirement écologique.

Le tableau est hautement préoccupant, et renchérit la nécessité de réconceptualisation des rapports homme-nature. Cette tâche revient au philosophe. Consulter aujourd'hui la philosophie de la nature s'avère pour ainsi dire un impératif catégorique pour l'Humanité. Il importe en particulier d'élucider pour en dégager les enjeux, l'évidence d'une philo-

sophie de la nature chez Teilhard de Chardin, non sans avoir restitué les orientations du souci écologique chez les philosophes en général.

## **II. Le souci écologique dans la philosophie de la nature**

Le souci écologique au cœur de la philosophie de la nature s'éclaire à partir d'une sémantique éclairante et d'un questionnement spécifique. La pensée de Teilhard qui s'exprime à travers une phénoménologie qu'il entend lui-même comme « compréhension systématique de toute la Nature »<sup>8</sup> tient une place charnière dans cette perspective.

### *A - La nature, un concept polysémique*

Le concept de nature connaît une telle polysémie en philosophie qu'un même auteur l'emploie souvent dans plusieurs sens, la diversité des définitions allant de pair avec la diversité des systèmes philosophiques. Que ce soit la profondeur métaphysique que Présocratiques et Aristotéliens voient dans la nature ; la nature connaturelle à l'homme ou comme pratique humaine dans la tradition marxiste, il y a place pour des considérations plus normatives. Il convient de présenter quelques principales définitions reçues dans le langage philosophique, auxquelles s'attachent principalement les noms d'Emmanuel Kant et de John Stuart Mill.

D'abord au sens large, avec Lalande, le mot nature désigne « *ce qui se produit dans l'univers ou dans l'homme sans calcul ni réflexion* ». La phénoménologie de la nature de Teilhard épouse cette définition. Ensuite le mot désigne « *l'ensemble des êtres autres que l'homme, considéré comme l'agent de vie consciente et volontaire* ». La nature renvoie là à l'être à l'état brut, inerte. Puis, la nature désigne aussi chez Lalande « *le monde visible en tant qu'il s'oppose aux idées, aux sentiments, etc.* ». Dans les trois sens, la nature fait référence à ce qui n'appartient pas à la

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<sup>8</sup> P. Teilhard de Chardin, *La Vision du passé*, Paris, Seuil, 1957, p. 228.

subjectivité et à la liberté humaines, et renvoie à un être massif, inerte, un en-soi au sens sartrien.

On se réfère implicitement à la première signification lorsqu'on parle de « *la nature des choses* » tandis que la seconde se retrouve dans l'expression de « *lois de la nature* ». Dans le premier sens, celui de « *la nature des choses* », la nature semble avant tout se définir comme ce qui résulte d'une nécessité interne, en d'autres termes ce qui, en nous et en dehors de nous, ne dépend pas de notre intervention, de notre activité, de notre volonté. Prise dans ce sens, la nature n'existe que par référence à ce dont elle est la nature. Elle n'est pas en elle-même une réalité, mais seulement un caractère d'une réalité. D'où la distinction de John Stuart Mill:

« Le mot nature a plusieurs sens principaux: ou bien il dénote le système total des choses, avec leurs propriétés; ou bien il dénote les choses telles qu'elles seraient en dehors de toute intervention humaine »<sup>9</sup>.

Certes, l'homme ne peut faire autrement, par définition, que de changer « *le cours spontané des choses* », mais jusqu'où doit aller ce changement? Au-delà de la morale individuelle et à l'impératif de protection de la biosphère et de la biodiversité, à laquelle semble penser surtout le philosophe anglais, la question se pose aujourd'hui à propos de la bioéthique: maîtrise de la fécondité, soins aux mourants, transplantations d'organes, procréation assistée, manipulations génétiques, clonage, etc. Mais limitons-nous au questionnement philosophique.

### *B. État du questionnement écologique chez les philosophes*

Afin de mieux cerner la perspective teilhardienne, commençons par situer l'état actuel du questionnement écologique chez les philosophes. La philosophie de la nature se veut une représentation cohérente de l'univers, un système du monde dont on dévoile la profondeur métaphysique au sens d'Aristote, dont on veut décoder le texte afin de le comprendre tel qu'il a été créé par une décision divine. Il y a donc remise en cause d'un monde réduit à la facticité et aux artefacts de la science, au déterminisme méca-

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<sup>9</sup> Cité par J.-M. Drouin, *L'Écologie et son histoire*, Paris, Flammarion, 1993.



niste, au quantifiable, un monde monolithique et sans complexité que proposent les sciences de la nature. La philosophie de la nature envisagera des niveaux et des seuils de complexité, passera du quantitatif au qualitatif.

Fidèle à la fonction critique et normativisante de la philosophie, la philosophie de la nature, en tant qu'effort de réconceptualisation normative des rapports homme-nature, prend d'office fait et cause pour l'éthique de la vie véhiculée par l'écologisme. Cette éthique écologique, pour modérer le scientisme ambiant allie rigueur de la science et rigueur de la morale, chaleur de la vie et profondeur de la réflexion. Ainsi loin de se réclamer d'une seule discipline, elle se veut interdisciplinaire et requiert de la part des chercheurs une certaine polycompétence, selon la formule de Édgar Morin. En effet, l'ultraspécialisation des savoirs s'est de plus en plus révélée comme une sorte de semi-ignorance et de crétinisme, à l'heure où le savoir se veut davantage unitaire face aux périls de notre temps. Après avoir été pendant longtemps scientotechnophobe, l'écologie peu à peu cesse d'être une simple indignation bavarde pour se révéler concrètement comme un aiguillon pour les consciences individuelles. Elle se situe aux antipodes de la vision Galiléo-cartésienne du Monde.

Descartes et Galilée sont en effet, comme le constate Émile Bréhier dans ses *sommes philosophiques*, précurseurs d'une «*théorie universelle du mécanisme*» caractérisée par le retrait de l'homme de la nature à laquelle il s'oppose en se posant, pour la dominer et en devenir comme «*maître et possesseur*». C'est pourquoi la philosophie veut rendre justice à la nature. Et déjà, réagissant contre Descartes, Spinoza montrait la difficulté à situer Dieu au-dessus et en dehors de la nature, et fondait en retour un panthéisme mystique. Son *Deus Sive natura* implique précisément que la nature a une profondeur métaphysique, et qu'il existe un lien organique entre la *natura naturans* et la *natura naturata* (la *natura naturans* : Dieu en tant que principe de la *natura naturata* qui est nature, créature). Dans le même esprit, Leibniz reproche à Descartes de tout réduire à l'étendue et au mouvement, négligeant par-là le caractère vivant de la nature. Les critiques de Spinoza et Leibniz ressortissent d'un *système du monde* où on

peut suivre l'ordre de dépendance de toutes les parties de l'univers, où l'idée de finalisme n'est pas absente.

Si la conscience écologique actuelle s'est développée avec beaucoup de retard, les causes de ce retard, bien que multiples, sont d'abord d'ordre philosophique. Entré assez tardivement dans le vocabulaire philosophique, l'écologie est apparue pendant longtemps sous sa forme militante comme l'affaire de quelques naturalistes et autres marginaux, puis sous sa forme scientifique comme celle des seuls écologues et autres spécialistes des sciences de la nature. L'intérêt porté récemment par les philosophes à la matière était regardé comme une intrusion. Dans une attitude dubitative, d'aucuns, parmi les philosophes eux-mêmes, percevaient l'écologie philosophique (l'écologie profonde ou *deep ecology*) comme une lubie de quelques confrères marginaux. Cela atteste d'un retard de la conscience écologique, qui au moins en partie est lié au mode de pensée antiholiste et à l'anthropocentrisme qui ont marqué la pensée occidentale depuis Aristote jusqu'à la tradition positiviste héritée d'Auguste Comte, en passant par le cartésianisme. En effet si Aristote présente l'homme comme un Sirius<sup>10</sup> surplombant la nature et constitué d'une étoffe matérielle d'un autre ordre, la théorie séparabiliste cartésienne du « clair et du distinct » est sans conteste au fondement de la conception antiholiste qui a jalonné pendant longtemps la civilisation technoscientifique occidentale. En soutenant que l'homme devait se rendre maître et possesseur de la nature, Descartes a crédité l'action conquérante et dépravante de l'homme sur la nature. La théorie cartésienne du « clair et du distinct » prépara ainsi le positivisme d'Auguste Comte qui impose une conception des phénomènes naturels comme s'ils étaient indépendants les uns des autres.

Au XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle toutefois, les philosophes et les penseurs qui se sont passionnés pour les questions écologiques sont nombreux et divers dans leurs approches. Ainsi il est de nos jours impossible de parler d'écologie philosophique au singulier, surtout dans le monde Anglo-saxon. La France est à la traîne. Ici, tradition cartésienne oblige, l'écologie trouve à

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<sup>10</sup> Sirius est une étoile, la plus brillante des étoiles fixes, à la *constellation du Chien*.

peine des théoriciens comparables à ceux du monde anglo-saxon ou germanique. Au demeurant partout où les débats écologiques ont pris une forme philosophique cohérente, ils se sont structurés en trois grands courants, lesquels, comme l'explique Luc Ferry, tournent autour de la question de l'anthropocentrisme ou de la place de l'homme dans la hiérarchie des êtres dans la défense de la nature.

Le premier courant, qu'identifie le philosophe Luc Ferry est sans doute le plus banal mais aussi le moins doctrinaire. Ce courant part de

« l'idée qu'à travers la nature c'est toujours l'homme qu'il s'agit de protéger. L'environnement n'est pas ici doté d'une valeur intrinsèque. Simplement la conscience se fait jour qu'à détruire le milieu qui l'entoure l'homme risque bel et bien de mettre sa propre existence en danger »<sup>11</sup>.

C'est donc à partir d'une position qu'on peut dire humaniste, voire encore anthropocentrique que la nature est prise sous un mode seulement indirect en considération. Elle ne possède donc pas une valeur absolue en elle-même.

La seconde figure de l'écologie franchit un pas en attribuant une signification morale à certains êtres non humains: il faut non seulement rechercher l'intérêt propre de l'homme mais de manière plus générale tendre à diminuer au maximum la somme des souffrances dans le monde ainsi qu'à augmenter autant que faire se peut la quantité de bien-être. Dans cette perspective très présente dans le monde anglo-saxon où elle fonde l'immense mouvement dit de *libération animale*, tous les êtres susceptibles de plaisir ou de peine doivent être tenus pour des sujets de droit et traités comme tels. A cet égard le point de vue de l'anthropocentrisme se trouve déjà battu en brèche, puisque les animaux sont désormais inclus dans la sphère des préoccupations morales.

La troisième forme de l'écologie philosophique est celle souvent présente dans la revendication d'un droit des arbres, c'est-à-dire la nature comme telle, y compris sous ses formes végétale et minérale. Non seulement elle tend à devenir l'idéologie dominante des mouvements écologi-

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<sup>11</sup> L. Ferry, *Le Nouvel ordre écologique : l'arbre, l'animal et l'homme*, Paris, Grasset, 1993, p. 11.

ques en Allemagne et aux États-Unis, mais c'est elle aussi qui, dans *l'environnemental philosophy* aux États-Unis, pose dans les termes les plus radicaux la question de la nécessaire remise en cause de l'Humanisme classique. Ses intellectuels organiques sont Léopold Aldo aux États-Unis, Hans Jonas en Allemagne et Michel Serres, philosophe français professeur en Californie, qui au nom du droit de la nature, mène une grande croisade contre l'anthropocentrisme classique.

Telles sont les trois formes principales de l'écologie en vigueur chez les philosophes, pour qui du reste la renaissance du sentiment de compassion à l'égard des êtres non humains s'accompagne toujours d'une dimension critique à l'égard de la post-modernité, désignée selon les registres de référence comme capitaliste, occidentale, technicienne ou consumériste. Teilhard de Chardin en tant que philosophe chrétien, évoque et indexe en particulier « l'incroyance moderne ». Léopold Aldo, Hans Jonas, Michel Serres, Luc Ferry, Pascal Acot, Jean Marc Drouin et Teilhard de Chardin, sont donc les principaux philosophes dont les noms s'attachent aujourd'hui à l'écologie.

Toujours est-il qu'en l'état actuel de la question, l'écologie, au-delà des slogans à la mode invite le philosophe à procéder à la racine à une révision conceptuelle et à une réévaluation paradigmatique, au sens où Luc Ferry pense qu'

« adossée à l'idée d'un ordre cosmique, l'écologie renoue avec une notion, celle de système que l'on croyait discréditée à la racine. C'est à l'évidence à ce prix qu'elle peut prétendre au statut d'authentique vision du monde »<sup>12</sup>.

Cette idée de système actualise l'enjeu du regard totalisateur qu'ont toujours jeté les philosophes de la nature sur le Cosmos depuis la Grèce antique jusqu'à la cosmovision de Teilhard de Chardin. Toutes choses que Bacon semble avoir si bien résumées dans son célèbre « *on ne commande à la nature qu'en lui obéissant* ». On sait que chez les Anciens, la philosophie se définit toujours essentiellement comme une vision du monde, une cosmovision. Et le sage est toujours celui qui, comme Teil-

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<sup>12</sup> L. Ferry, *Le Nouvel ordre écologique : l'arbre, l'animal et l'homme*, Paris, Grasset, 1993, p. 2.

hard, veut jeter un regard totalisateur, holiste, sur l'univers considéré comme une enveloppe totale et vivante.

### **III. Le vitalisme Teilhardien et son enjeu écologique**

La philosophie de la nature, qui est un fondement théorique du mouvement écologique, se particularise de façon fort radicale dans la phénoménologie de la matière de Teilhard de Chardin, à travers le concept de « dedans des choses ». Ce concept fonde le panpsychisme teilhardien. Il convient de s'en instruire.

#### **A - Le panpsychisme teilhardien**

La catégorie de « *dedans des choses* » de la matière mise en lumière par Teilhard de Chardin implique que l'étoffe de la nature est biface : une face externe, « *le dehors des choses* » et une face interne, vivante, « *le dedans des choses* » douée de conscience. De ce constat, Teilhard dément la notion de matière inerte, pour affirmer que tout est vivant dans l'univers. Toute portion de l'étoffe cosmique possède, même à un degré infinitésimal un germe de conscience, de pensée rudimentaire. Il s'agit là assurément d'un vitalisme, voire d'un panpsychisme. Plus globalement, la planète Terre elle-même est également douée d'une conscience individuelle. La normativité écologique ne trouve-t-elle pas ici un fondement radical à travers le panpsychisme de l'auteur du *Milieu divin* ? En effet dans cet ouvrage Teilhard soutient par ailleurs que le monde est plein du souffle de Dieu : tout le cosmos est un milieu divin. Revisiter aujourd'hui cette catégorie de « dedans des choses » implique une révision de notre conception de la hiérarchie des êtres dans la nature, hiérarchie restée par trop anthropocentrique au sens aristotélicien. Si tout est vivant dans l'univers, la science est donc enjointe de prendre acte de ce fait fondamental et se rendre moins sacrilège envers la nature. Teilhard constate ainsi pour le regretter que

« l'apparente restriction du phénomène de conscience aux formes supérieures de la vie a servi pendant longtemps de prétexte à la science pour l'éliminer de

ses constructions de l'univers. Exception bizarre, fonction aberrante, épiphénomène, sous quelqu'un de ces mots, on rangeait la pensée pour s'en débarrasser »<sup>13</sup>.

Bien entendu, le concept de pensée est compris ici au sens de conscience.

Pour Teilhard, au cœur le plus physique du Réel, dans la matière même, il est inévitable d'admettre l'existence non seulement d'une semence impersonnelle de pensée, suivant le terme stoïcien, mais surtout d'une pensée concrète, douée d'un début, fût-il minime, de conscience sinon de réflexion. Il s'explique:

« là même où des valeurs soit très petites, soit même moyennes, de complexité nous la rendent strictement imperceptible (je veux dire à partir et au-dessous des très grosses molécules), nous sommes logiquement amenés à conjecturer dans tout corpuscule l'existence rudimentaire (à l'état d'infiniment petit, c'est-à-dire d'infiniment diffus) de quelque psyché, - exactement comme le physicien admet, et pourrait calculer les changements de masse (complètement insaisissables pour une expérience directe) se produisant dans le cas de mouvements lents »<sup>14</sup>.

Il n'est aucune réalité qui n'ait un « dedans », à côté de son « dehors », et

« le cosmos entier est une interaction de ces éléments, de ces graines d'intériorité »

renchérit Émile Rideau qui pense aussi, commentant Teilhard que,

« bien observé, fût-il en un point, un phénomène a nécessairement, en vertu de l'unité fondamentale du monde, une valeur et des racines ubiquistes »<sup>15</sup>.

Par ailleurs la planète Terre est dotée d'une conscience planétaire, ce que Teilhard appelle le « dedans de la Terre »<sup>16</sup>. Cela implique que cette planète est perçue comme un véritable être vivant doué d'une biologie et d'une conscience autonomes. Cette intuition de la Terre comme être vivant retrouvera un écho retentissant chez James Lovelock<sup>17</sup> avec

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<sup>13</sup> P. Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Phénomène humain*, Paris, Seuil, 1955 p. 103.

<sup>14</sup> P. Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Phénomène humain*, Paris, Seuil, 1955 p. 335.

<sup>15</sup> E. Rideau, *La Pensée du père Teilhard de Chardin*, Paris, Seuil, 1965, p. 176.

<sup>16</sup> P. Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Phénomène humain*, Paris, Seuil, 1955 p. 56.

<sup>17</sup> J. Lovelock, *La Terre est un être vivant : l'hypothèse gaïa*, Monaco, Éditions du

l'hypothèse Gaïa. La macrobiologie qui est une science actuellement en pleine émergence conforte cet ordre d'idées. Teilhard explique :

« La terre n'est plus simplement une sorte de grand corps qui respire. Elle se soulève et s'abaisse (...) Mais plus important que cela, elle a dû commencer à quelque moment ; elle passe par une suite liée d'équilibres mouvants ; elle tend vraisemblablement vers quelque état final. Elle a une naissance, un développement et sans doute une mort avant »<sup>18</sup>.

Et il renchérit :

« l'idée d'un esprit de la Terre ne résiste pas à l'expérience ».<sup>19</sup>

En somme, tout objet dans l'univers doit être conçu, en terme d'énergétique, comme un centre de radiations. Chaque entité individuelle se trouve activement et passivement présent simultanément à la totalité des mers et des continents, coextensif à la Terre entière, constamment à la hauteur des trésors spirituels de l'Humanité. À vrai dire, la conscience pour Teilhard se manifeste comme une propriété cosmique universelle, bien que de grandeur variable et soumise à une transformation globale. Cette thèse d'une matière animée jusque dans ses formes et forces élémentaires par une conscience obscure rejoint certains thèmes de Leibniz, de Schelling, de Ravaisson et de Bergson:

« La matière, dit celui-ci, ne peut être qu'un assoupissement de l'esprit. Nous devons nous représenter au début d'une distension de l'esprit, une diffusion dans l'espace et dans le temps qui constitue la matérialité »<sup>20</sup>.

Le panpsychisme teilhardien implique en définitive et fondamentalement une reconsidération-revalorisation à la fois du statut des êtres dits inertes, des espèces dites inférieures, et de l'action prédatrice de l'homme sur le reste de la création. La thèse panpsychique rejoint la définition de John Stuart Mill de la nature :

« les choses telles quelles sont en dehors de toute intervention humaine ».

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Rocher, 1990.

<sup>18</sup> P. Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Phénomène humain*, Paris, Seuil, 1955, p. 105.

<sup>19</sup> P. Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Phénomène humain*, Paris, Seuil, 1955, p. 282.

<sup>20</sup> H. Bergson, *La Pensée et le mouvant*, Paris, Alcan, 1934, p. 305.

C'est cette compréhension de la nature qui est mise en exergue par la philosophie de la nature dans sa croisade contre l'illusion positiviste, laquelle essaye en vain de rendre caduque la « *naturphilosophie* » allemande et ses concepts de panthéisme, d'animisme, de vitalisme, de finalisme et de téléonomie. Toutes choses qui sont subsumées comme par enchantement dans la philosophie teilhardienne de la matière, laquelle est par ailleurs le fondement de dénonciation de l'anthropocentrisme classique.

### *B - L'anthropocentrisme corrigé*

La deuxième thèse écologisante, qui découle de la première, consiste dans l'objection de Teilhard à l'anthropocentrisme classique qui s'est longtemps posé comme pourvoyeur de significations aux praxis technoscientifiques occidentales dont l'écologie indexe aujourd'hui les effets néfastes. De fait, dans la cosmologie teilhardienne, l'homme n'est plus comme dans l'anthropocentrisme classique le centre statique du monde, mais il en devient un centre dynamique et contingent. L'homme n'est que le sommet momentané d'une anthropogénèse couronnant elle-même une cosmogénèse. Notre auteur l'affirme nettement :

« L'homme non plus centre statique du monde comme il s'est longtemps cru, mais axe et flèche de l'évolution ».<sup>21</sup>

L'entité humaine ne saurait donc se voir complètement en dehors de la nature ou de l'humanité, ni l'humanité en dehors de la vie, ni la vie en dehors de l'univers. Contre l'anthropocentrisme scholastique et même contre un certain « *galactocentrisme* », cette cosmologie démontre que l'homme est indissociable du cosmos, entendu au sens des Anciens comme totalité d'ordre et d'harmonie, dans lequel tout se tient. Le phénomène humain est le produit d'une Nature foncièrement anthropogène. L'ensemble multiple des phénomènes dans l'espace et dans le temps forme une totalité physiquement liée par une interdépendance organique

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<sup>21</sup> P. Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Phénomène humain*, Paris, Seuil, 1955, p. 30.



de ses éléments. C'est dans cet ordre holiste que Teilhard dans *L'Esprit de la terre* prévient :

« Là où il y'a désunion complète de l'étoffe cosmique, il n'y a rien »<sup>22</sup>.

L'homme n'est plus un super-être, un *Sirius* surplombant la nature de façon hautaine.

S'ensuit alors la vanité de toute perspective qui chercherait à rendre compte des éléments en dehors du tout, comme c'est le cas dans la civilisation actuelle à qui sont imputables les périls écologiques. Car à tout degré de l'être, il n'y a rien qui ne soit unité de pluralité (*unitas multiplex*). L'univers est structuré dans une interdépendance organique de ses éléments, dans une cohérence unitaire. Le sujet humain sera dorénavant reconnu comme un élément de l'univers parmi tant d'autres. De plus, le terme biosphère inventé par le géologue autrichien Suess pour désigner la couche vivante de la Terre renvoie à une évidente solidarité entre tous les êtres composant la biosphère : le genre humain a appris à ses dépens ce qu'il lui en coûte de perturber l'équilibre biologique. Les êtres vivants pris ensemble forment un seul système lié à la surface de la terre, système dont les éléments sont organiquement interdépendants les uns les autres. L'idée est qu'il existe un lien étroit entre les couches physiques et la couche vivante de la terre, car la biosphère n'est en réalité que la zone chimiquement la plus active de la terre. Des liaisons physicochimiques rattachent la naissance et les développements de cette nappe vivante à l'histoire planétaire.

Au demeurant, l'hypothèse de plus en plus persistante de l'existence d'une humanité extraterrestre remet radicalement en cause l'anthropocentrisme classique, qui est à la base des praxis anthropocentriques actuelles, peu soucieuses du reste de la création. De la sorte, la révision de la place de l'homme dans le cosmos ne va pas sans engager la révision du regard que ce dernier doit poser sur la nature ambiante, chère aux écologistes.

Au total, vu l'urgence de reconceptualisation des rapports homme-

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<sup>22</sup> Cité par Émile Rideau, *La Pensée du père Teilhard de Chardin*, Paris, Seuil, 1965, p. 176.

nature, de la matérialisation écologique d'un sursaut de conscience planétaire et d'une opinion commune indignée face aux pratiques anti-écologiques, on ne saurait sous-estimer le rôle fondamental de la philosophie en tant que promoteur d'éthique face aux urgences écologiques actuelles, dans notre époque dangereusement marquée par le déclin de la pensée pure et de la conscience théorique. Teilhard de Chardin dans son *Phénomène humain* se révèle comme le modèle des penseurs chez qui s'identifie avant la lettre les premiers linéaments, voire les fondements d'une écologie philosophique, à travers ses thèses écologisantes : celles du panpsychisme et celle de l'anthropocentrisme corrigé.

## **Conclusion**

À l'analyse, le souci écologique se dégage clairement de la phénoménologie de la matière de Teilhard de Chardin. Il nous devient clair que ce souci écologique, qui est un aboutissement des conceptions naturicistes du monde se révèle le creuset d'une éthique s'appliquant à tous les éléments de la nature et non plus seulement à l'homme. La thèse panpsychique de Teilhard se présente comme fondement théorique de ce souci. Si l'impératif écologique tend à conférer des droits moraux aux espèces non humaines, avec l'ambition de mettre fin au programme de domination de la nature qui a cours en Occident depuis René Descartes et Francis Bacon, cet impératif se particularise chez Teilhard à travers les thèses du panpsychisme et de l'anthropocentrisme corrigé, résultant de sa phénoménologie de la matière, et imprimant un élan de radicalisation à la normativité écologique. Teilhard se révèle donc sans conteste comme l'un des premiers philosophes précurseurs de l'éthique écologique, et partant, de l'écologie philosophique actuellement développée en France par François Dagognet et Luc Ferry. Toutefois la *deep ecology*, concept anglo-saxon, qui est un aboutissement des conceptions naturicistes du monde affirmant le primat de la vie (*biocentrisme*), ne peut être assumée chez notre auteur malgré la thèse panpsychique. En effet Teilhard est fervent apologiste de la grandeur de l'homme. Or la *deep ecology*, de par son aspect biocentré, qui s'articule autour de considérations éthiques

s'appliquant à tous les éléments de la nature et pas seulement à l'homme, est antinomique à l'apologie teilhardienne de l'homme. En effet l'homme constitue le centre de perspective du système teilhardien. La nature n'est pas étudiée pour elle-même et il n'y a pas primat de la nature sur l'homme. De même d'après le principe anthropique corroboré par le Teilhardisme, l'environnement n'a pas de valeur intrinsèque, détaché de tout usage, même futur comme le veut la *deep ecology* qui pose l'égalité et l'équité biocentriques entre tous les êtres humains et non humains, par delà les considérations utilitaristes et anthropocentriques.

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# Pierre Meinrad Hebga (1928-2008)

## Un maître d'Afrique

par Jean Bertrand Amougou

**Résumé : Pierre Meinrad Hebga (1928-2008): Un maître d'Afrique.**

L'article vise non seulement à rendre hommage à l'éminent penseur Hebga en contribuant à faire connaître davantage sa pensée, mais aussi à introduire dans la plage analytique de *QUEST*, un ton et un style bien déterminés de pluralisme méthodologique adossé à la pensée complexe. L'auteur s'occupe de prendre la pensée d'Hebga comme un tout, c'est-à-dire en en manifestant à la fois la profondeur et le tranchant à travers une mise en relief de sa différence par rapport à l'articulation / ordonnancement incantatoire de la rationalité cognitivo-instrumentale et à une reconnaissance de la légitimité, de la validité et de la pertinence des moyens conceptuels déployés par Hebga pour souscrire à l'exigence de penser philosophiquement les problèmes auxquels se trouve confronté le monde de notre temps et notamment l'Afrique contemporaine. En effet, la figure de Hebga éclaire non seulement des chapitres les plus captivants de la théologie, de l'anthropologie et de la philosophie africaines dans la deuxième moitié du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle et à l'aurore du 21<sup>ème</sup> siècle, mais aussi la vie historique et la vie existentielle du Négro-africain. Cette réflexion sera ponctuée par une explicitation cursive mais exhaustive de la vie de Hebga et de la matrice de son œuvre.

**Abstract.** This article seeks to render homage to the eminent thinker Hebga, and to make his thought more widely known and understood. Thus it hopes to call attention, within the *QUEST* environment, for Hebga's typical style and tone of methodological pluralism in the context of complex thought. The author approaches Hebga's thought as one whole. This brings out its profundity, whilst throwing in relief the points in which that work is so different from the trance-like expressions / stipulations of cognitive-instrumental rationality. This also allows the author to recognise the legitimacy, the validity and the relevance of the conceptual means which Hebga has deployed in order to address the imperative of philosophically thinking through the problems that confront the modern world and especially Africa. In fact, the figure of Hebga throws light not only on the most captivating chapters of African theology, anthropology and philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twentieth-first century – it also helps us understand the historic

life-forms and the existential dimension of life in Black Africa. In the course of this argument, we will occasionally stop to briefly examine the essentials of Hebga's life and the scope of his works.

**Mots clefs :** pluralisme méthodologique, rationalité cognitivo-instrumentale, approche philosophique aux problèmes de l'Afrique contemporaine, la théologie africaine, l'anthropologie africaine, la philosophie africaine, histoire africaine, l'existiel Négro-africain, la biographie

**Key words:** **methodological** pluralism, cognitive-instrumental rationality, philosophical approach to the problems of Africa today, African theology, African anthropology, African philosophy, African history, existential dimension of life in Black Africa, biography

En me demandant de prendre la responsabilité d'élaborer un article spécial sur la pensée de l'éminent penseur Pierre Meinrad Hebga, le professeur Wim van Binsbergen avait conscience non seulement de rendre hommage à cet éminent penseur en contribuant à faire connaître davantage sa pensée, mais aussi d'introduire dans la plage analytique de *QUEST*, un ton et un style bien déterminés de pluralisme méthodologique adossé à la pensée complexe. Ainsi dans cette offre d'opportunité de réflexion sur cette pensée si dense, si intense et si complexe, je m'occupe de la prendre précisément comme un tout, c'est-à-dire en en manifestant à la fois la profondeur et le tranchant à travers une mise en relief de sa différence par rapport à l'articulation / ordonnancement incantatoire de la rationalité cognitivo-instrumentale et à une reconnaissance de la légitimité, de la validité et de la pertinence des moyens conceptuels déployés par Hebga pour souscrire à l'exigence de penser philosophiquement les problèmes auxquels se trouve confronté le monde de notre temps et notamment l'Afrique contemporaine.

En effet, la figure de Hebga éclaire non seulement des chapitres les plus captivants de la théologie, de l'anthropologie et de la philosophie africaines dans la deuxième moitié du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle et à l'aurore du 21<sup>ème</sup> siècle, mais aussi la vie historique et la vie existentielle du Négro-africain.

Pour faire court, précisons que cette réflexion sera ponctuée par une explicitation cursive mais exhaustive de la vie de Hebga et de la matrice de son œuvre.

Né le 31 mars 1928 à Edéa (région du littoral – Cameroun) d'une famille très chrétienne († Marc Hebga et † Xavérie Ngo Ka), Pierre Meinrad Hebga fit de brillantes études primaires et secondaires à Edéa et à Akono de 1935 à 1945. De 1946 à 1952, il suit les cours de philosophie scolastique et de Théologie au Grand Séminaire de Yaoundé et à l'Université Grégorienne (Rome) et obtient une maîtrise en Théologie. De 1959 à 1964, il est admis à la Sorbonne, Paris IV et à l'Université Catholique de Paris, pour suivre respectivement des cours de philosophie, de psychologie et de Sciences Sociales. Après l'obtention d'une licence ès Sciences Sociales (1962) et d'un certificat de psychologie (1964), il est admis à l'hôpital Sainte Anne pour suivre un stage en psychopathologie. En 1968, il obtient le grade de docteur 3<sup>ème</sup> cycle en philosophie, à Rennes et il est admis à l'Institut des Sciences et Techniques de Paris, où il approfondit ses connaissances en philosophie des Sciences et entraînement à l'analyse mathématique. En 1971, il suit les cours de Linguistique Bantu à Duquenne University de Pittsburgh, aux Etats-Unis d'Amérique et obtient le certificat de linguistique Bantu.

Enfin, en 1986, il obtient le grade de docteur en philosophie à la Sorbonne. Ladite thèse porte sur La rationalité d'un discours africain sur les phénomènes paranormaux.

Après avoir occupé plusieurs postes de responsabilité pastorales au Cameroun (Supérieur de la Région SJ., Recteur du collège Libermann de Douala), il est tour à tour, professeur à l'Institut Catholique d'Abidjan (anthropologie, 1971-1985), à John Carroll University de Cleveland, aux Etats-Unis (anthropologie, 1972); à Loyola University de Chicago (Théologie, 1975), à Western College, jumelé avec Harvard Divinity School, (1976), à l'Université Grégorienne (anthropologie, 1977-1978), puis à l'Université de Yaoundé (philosophie, 1985-2007) et à l'Université Catholique d'Afrique Centrale (philosophie, 1997-2005). Il est nommé pour le prestigieux titre *Man of the Year* – 2007 par l'American Biographical Institute pour sa contribution au développement de la société. Il reçoit également une récompense de l'UNESCO pour sa contribution à la promotion de la science et de la culture.

Certes, nous ne nous préoccupons pas ici de prendre en charge la vie de Hebga d'une manière plénière, compte tenu de son large spectre temporel et de son espacement pluridimensionnel. C'est pourquoi nous ne nous attarderons pas sur certains points inessentiels ; car comme nous le suggère très opportunément Pierre Trotignon : « La vie d'un philosophe n'a pas grand intérêt ; mieux vaut lire et méditer ses œuvres. »<sup>1</sup>

La rationalité dans la culture, la rationalisation en œuvre dans la culture  
Les Africains doivent de ce qu'ils sont. Ils ne peuvent inventaire faire l'économie d'un réfléchi de partir leur être au monde. Ce qui leur permette d'assumer, à bon escient, leur passé toujours présent en eux et autour d'eux<sup>2</sup>. La thèse est radicale et ardente dans l'œuvre hebgaenne. Cette proposition a pour corollaire l'assignation de la matrice de son œuvre à la réflexion sur la rationalité de la pensée africaine, la détermination de toute pensée philosophique dans un particulier étendu par induction vers l'infini, parce que les langues exercent des contraintes linguistiques qui écartent toute prétention à l'Universel. L'universalité n'est donc (re)pensable philosophiquement qu'à la condition de l'envisager dans sa connexion à la diversité / pluralité des traditions culturelles, d'essentialiser son idée comme expression d'une œuvre collective.<sup>3</sup>

D'où le problème existentiel de la liberté couplée avec la dignité et subséquemment, le devoir de le penser en tenant compte du principe contexture.

L'option hebgaenne constitue et institue une approche théorique et pratique à travers certains aspects du traitement quasi-expérimental de la philosophie comme programmation possible qui intègre, dans une même plage textuelle : l'essai, le dialogue classique, les atours d'une fresque romanesque et l'investigation quasi scientifique, à l'instar de son ouvrage : *La rationalité d'un discours africain...* Et de la sorte, sa figure

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<sup>1</sup> Trotignon, P., *Heidegger. Sa vie, son œuvre avec un exposé de sa philosophie*, P.U.F., 1965, pp. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Hebga, P.M., *La rationalité d'un discours africain sur les phénomènes paranormaux*, L'Harmattan, 1998, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Hebga, P.M., *ibidem*, p. 342.



épouse des passerelles décisives de la vaste tradition philosophique profondément marquée par les figures de Platon, Nietzsche, Heidegger, et où la pratique philosophique ne manque pas d'emprunter des effets allégoriques.

Ainsi comme toute recherche herméneutique et dialectique cette réflexion requiert un travail de recension de l'oeuvre de Hebga. L'on peut donc mentionner entre autres « Christianisme et négritude », in *Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent*, ouvrage collectif, 1956, Editions du Cerf ; « une seule pensée, une seule culture », dans *Présence-Africaine* n°14-15, pages 301-306. Dans cette publication, Hebga démontre la spécificité de la représentation africaine du monde. Une vision du monde qui selon lui, mérite le même respect que les autres; « Plaidoyer pour les logiques d'Afrique noire », in *Recherches et débats*, Fayard, 1958, pages 104-116, la quintessence de l'originalité de sa pensée; « Aspects sociologiques du développement Economique », in *Afrique documents*, 1964, pages 3-26 ; « Acculturation et chances d'un humanisme africain moderne », in *Présence Africaine*, 1968, n°68, pages 164-174 ; 'Le concept de métamorphose d'hommes en animaux chez les Basaa, Duala et Ewondo, Bantu du Sud Cameroun', thèse de troisième cycle, multigr. Inédit, Rennes, 1968 ; « Les étapes des regroupementsafricains (1945-1965) », in *Afrique documents*. Numéro spécial. 3è et 4è Cahier, 1968 ; « L'homme vit aussi de fierté », dans *Présence Africaine*, 1976, n°90/100, pages 19-42 ; « Émancipation d'Églises sous tutelle », *Présence Africaine*, 1976 ; « Sorcellerie, chimère dangereuse ? », *nades*, 1979 « Sorcellerie et maladie en Afrique noire », in *Telema*, Kinshasa, 1981, pages 5-48 ; « Éloge de l'Ethnophilosophie », dans *Présence Africaine*, 1982, n°123, pages 20-41 ; « Universality and inculturation », in *Bulletin of African Theology*, 1983, vol.V, n°10, July - December, pages 179-192 ; « Guérir l'homme », in *Telema*, 1987, n°3, 4, pages 11-22 ; « La guérison en Afrique », in *Concilium*, 1991 n°234, pages 82-96 ; « Santé et salut », dans *Les Racines de la santé, Christus* 118, 1983, pages 155-190; *Afrique de la Raison, Afrique de la foi*, Editions Karthala, 1995 ; *Le chrétien face à la Rose † croix*, Imprimerie Saint Paul, 1996; *La rationalité d'un discours africain sur les phénomènes paranormaux*, L'Harmattan, 1998; *Mouvements Reli-*

*gieux et Sectes à l'Assaut de la planète : le cas de l'Afrique*, Editions AMA, 2001 ; *Initiation élémentaire à l'analyse. Pour le 2<sup>ème</sup> cycle de l'Enseignement secondaire en Afrique Noire et Madagascar*. Méthode facile, progressive et attrayante. Ouvrage déposé à l'OAPI et protégé en mai 2006.

Ces titres sont suffisamment suggestifs de la visée du combat de l'illustre penseur. Il s'agit du combat pour la dignité, la légitimité et la validité de toutes les cultures, à l'instar de la rationalité d'un discours africain sur les phénomènes paranormaux (sorcellerie, action à distance, etc.)

Ainsi la figure de Hebga apparaît comme l'une des figures majeures de la déconstruction de l'espace rhétorique de convention qu'est l'opposition entre rationnel et irrationnel, l'expulsion du paranormal du normal, du rationnel, la distinction de l'irrationnel du sur-rationnel et du transrationnel. Car, en dégager l'imbrication, tel est l'objectif ultime de la rationalisation hebgaenne puisque d'une part,

« La critique philosophique doit créer des « abstractions rationnelles » pour mieux saisir « les lois de solidarité, de parenté, d'harmonie et d'unité » qui régissent le champ de la connaissance. »<sup>4</sup>

D'autre part,

« opposer rationnel et irrationnel nous apparaît particulièrement absurde, car nous ne jugeons irrationnel que ce dont nous ignorons encore les lois... L'univers de notre ignorance est effroyable, comparé à la plage étroite de nos connaissances. L'irrationnel pris dans cet univers sans fin... l'irrationnel ne paraît riche que de rationalité potentielle, et la « raison » n'est pas une chose, mais une humain, fonction qui se transforme avec les connaissances qu'elle traite.»

L'on pourrait donc souligner que le caractère pertinent et nouveau de l'analyse hebgaenne, c'est qu'elle déchiffre, dans le contexte de l'histoire de la métaphysique occidentale, des formulations qui surprennent la « rationalité en actes » en flagrant délit dans « l'irrationalité ». Ainsi, à partir de sa conception des langues, il élucide le choc des interprétations locales / globales du composé humain : le dualisme (corps/esprit) contre le tria-

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<sup>4</sup> Chatelet, F., *La philosophie du monde scientifique et industriel de 1860 à 1940*, Histoire de la philosophie VI, Hachette, 1973, p. 22.

disme ou pluralisme (corps/esprit/ombre) et des expériences ou phénomènes parapsychiques. Il est clair que l'attitude d'un individu ou d'un groupe vis-à-vis des phénomènes paranormaux est fonction de leur schéma du composé humain. D'où la légitimité et la validité de la pluralité et la relativité des signes et des significations, c'est-à-dire du discours logique.

### ***Leçons sur les histoires de la philosophie***

S'appuyant sur l'errance et les apories sérieuses de la rationalité dans le monde moderne, et ce en dépit de l'affirmation de l'universalité de la subjectivité par René Descartes, Hebga montre qu'il est temps de sortir des ornières d'un dialogisme indiscutablement superficiel gouverné par la confusion entre l'origine de la philosophie occidentale qui est en Grèce et la source des philosophies des régions / provinces non occidentales du monde. Il convient donc de retenir que pour Hebga, l'une des tâches les plus importantes dans ce temps qui est le nôtre est la déconstruction de l'édifice de la métaphysique hégélienne de l'Histoire dont les axes et les passerelles idéologiques des investigations philosophiques allaient obtenir la nécessité de lancer un dialogue inter-philosophique. En effet, en décidant de la division du monde en deux sphères humaines distinctes l'une de l'autre, à savoir : l'espace de la sous humanité (le monde négro-africain) et l'aire de l'humanité parfaitement accomplie (la plage culturelle indo-européenne), Hegel restreint par là - même l'Universalité du « bon sens » au seul groupe humain et à l'unique espace culturel indo-européens. Et à partir de là, l'on peut entrevoir la non-pertinence non seulement de son interprétation de la « raison universelle », mais aussi des histoires de son « Histoire » de la philosophie.

Il en résulte ainsi une obturation de la raison qui hypothèque l'existence de plusieurs noyaux de sens à partir d'une interprétation de l'Histoire comme étant la résultante de la rationalité moderne comprise comme nécessairement et exclusivement située et appliquée. Face à ces hypothèques, la quête de nouvelles passerelles impose non pas l'invention d'un nouveau socle, mais bien plus l'esprit de profondeur en direction de

l'ancien : le « Logos », tant au niveau de la meilleure compréhension de cette notion que dans le sillage de sa pleine interprétation : *oui au rationalisme, pourvu qu'il aille jusqu'au bout de ses exigences et relève le défi de tous les phénomènes, même de ceux qu'on appelle paranormaux*. Or, la recherche d'une meilleure compréhension exige que nous empruntions les réseaux culturels sous-tendus par les langues qui l'expriment. Certes, Heidegger, à travers son examen de la question de l'être dans son Introduction à la métaphysique, expose le sens primitif et profondément pluri-voque du terme *Logos* : *Ce mot signifie: poser une chose à côté d'une autre, les mettre ensemble, bref: rassembler; dans cette opération les choses sont en même temps distinguées les unes les autres.*<sup>5</sup> Autrement dit, *Logos* renvoie à l'ordre, à l'appréhension, au domaine du noétique. Cependant, cette démarche heideggerienne s'achève paradoxalement dans une posture « logotrophique ». Car les stratégies de promotion de la thèse sur la « héliénité » du *logos* relèvent non pas du miracle mais plutôt de la magie de l'idéologie aryenne qui les sous-tend. Heureusement, Gadamer, à travers les grandes lignes de ses investigations herméneutiques, balise avec rigueur les axes et les passerelles d'une approche nécessairement intégrative des contenus particuliers des traditions culturelles des peuples comme figures de la vérité. Ainsi, s'enfermer dans une approche linguistique ethnocentriste est un conventionnalisme anti-philosophique car :

« le passé, le nôtre comme celui des autres vers lequel se tourne notre conscience historique, contribue à former cet horizon mobile dont vit toujours toute vie humaine, cet horizon qui la détermine comme origine et transmission. »<sup>6</sup>

Bien entendu, à travers la centralité du concept de tradition culturelle, G. Gadamer nous fait pénétrer l'historicité de la vérité. Et dès lors, il devient clair que l'on ne peut mieux comprendre le présent que si l'on a une maîtrise du passé. En outre, l'on ne peut pertinemment innover que si l'on est possesseur des contenus, des limites et des défaillances de ce qui préexistait. C'est dans cette optique que J. Habermas souligne :

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<sup>5</sup> Heidegger, M., *Introduction à la métaphysique*, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>6</sup> Gadamer, G., op. cit., p. 326.

« La tradition culturelle doit autoriser une relation réflexive à elle-même ; elle doit être dépouillée de son dogmatisme de façon à permettre que les interprétations alimentées par la tradition soient fondamentalement mises en question et soumises à une révision critique. »<sup>7</sup>

Conscient donc du fait que la double articulation euro-centriste et instrumentaliste de la Rationalité malaxe et désaxe à dessein d'autres formes de pensées qui constituent le patrimoine culturel universel, Hebga constate et prend en charge les insuffisances méthodologiques ainsi que l'inconsistance logique qui la sous-tendent. Aussi repère-t-il, à partir de certaines figures emblématiques (Platon, Aristote, Saint Thomas d'Aquin, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Kant, Hegel, Bergson, Heidegger, voire Kagamé), les éléments basiques de cette orientation. Et c'est de là qu'il peut dégager la nécessité de (re)construire une nouvelle perspective théo-rico-praxique de la philosophie ; car elle appelle non seulement l'éclosion d'un *logos* transversal, mais aussi la transcendance de la modernité occidentale.

Une orientation nouvelle, en fait *primitive*, qui tienne compte de la non contingence de la pluralité des formes culturelles, elles-mêmes soutenues par la pluralité des compréhensions / interprétations. La thématique hebgaenne se présente ainsi comme un dépassement des apories auxquelles nous a conduit la rationalité universelle, cognitivo-instrumentale et exclusivement euro – centrée.

C'est ce que montre déjà la perspective philosophée - philosophante adossée précisément au binôme complexité/pluralisme où Hebga met en lumière les préalables à toute entreprise de restitution rationnelle ayant pour horizon, l'émergence et la formulation d'une pensée philosophique dont l'efficiace s'origine dans la compénétration entre la raison et la foi comme base de toutes cultures. Hebga identifie ainsi la culture à la rationalisation. En fait, la pluralité des systèmes culturels et le principe contexture se présentent comme expression des prétentions à la légitimité de la pluralité des logiques. Et dès lors, l'objectivité et la pureté de la raison dans son itinérance deviennent assez problématiques. Ainsi, la ratio-

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<sup>7</sup> Habermas, J., *Théorie de l'agir communicationnel, Tome 1, Rationalité de l'agir et rationalisation de la société*, Fayard, 1987, p. 87.

nalité dans sa plurivocité est convoquée à la séance du nécessaire dialogue avec la vie réelle d'un peuple donné, dans une région donnée et à travers une forme symbolique donnée. Car en dépit de la décision philosophique cartésienne de la reconnaître comme l'humanité de/en tout homme, la philosophie hégélienne prolongée par ses défenseurs la présente comme une invention exclusive de l'Occident.

Autrement dit :

« la plupart des colons et des missionnaires blancs s'indignaient que l'on pût prêter une pensée philosophique à des primitifs ignares et frustes, à des gens dont Lévy-Brühl avait montré qu'ils étaient incapables de raisonnement logique. »<sup>8</sup>

De cela, l'on peut noter que le recours à l'idéologie en lieu et place de l'épistémologie met nettement en lumière les insuffisances méthodologiques de la rationalité universelle. Pour Hebga donc il cette situation aporétique nécessite l'instauration d'une rationalité conséquente d'elle-même. En fait, ce qui fait problème ici, c'est l'objet et surtout les protocoles / normes érigés comme axes inaliénables de la philosophie, depuis l'émergence de la philosophie moderne.

Or Hebga est convaincu que la philosophie n'est pas définie par son objet. Aussi fait-il remarquer que les ancêtres de l'entreprise philosophique européenne, Platon, Aristote et les autres, entendaient par philosophie, le corps de toutes les connaissances. Ainsi le *Timée*, par exemple, est un ouvrage d'érudition, où se chevauchent, pêle-mêle, mythologie, arithmétique, musique théorique, métaphysique etc.<sup>9</sup> De plus, les problèmes actuels sont indéniablement pluriels : structurels, infrastructurels, écologiques, politiques, éthiques, spirituels et culturels. Et pour les résoudre, il convient de suggérer particulièrement aux tenants de la philosophie pure de s'accorder :

(...) la même liberté de mouvement que s'accordèrent jadis Gorgias, Platon, Hegel, Heidegger ou Bergson qui, uniquement soucieux d'exprimer leur pensée le plus correctement possible, ne s'embarrassaient pas de purisme, ne

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<sup>8</sup> Hebga, P.M., *Émancipation d'Églises sous tutelle. Essai sur l'ère post – missionnaire, Présence Africaine ...*, 1976, p. 116.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 120-121.

s'interdisaient pas de longs développements mythologiques, psychologiques, anthropologiques, linguistiques, philosophiques voire mathématiques. Et ce sont leurs œuvres, mêlées, composites, que nous appelons leur philosophie. »<sup>10</sup>

Car comme le fait clairement remarquer J. Ladrière, dans un ouvrage collectif :

« *C'est dans le système de ces rapports complexes que se fonde la possibilité et, peut-être, la nécessité d'une articulation et une communication entre science, philosophie et théologie.* »<sup>11</sup>

Ainsi Hebga, au cours de longues, parfois difficiles, mais rigoureuses démonstrations indique la nécessité de converger vers la trêve à tout triomphalisme antireligieux, mais trêve aussi à toute spéculation hasardeuse, à tout optimisme naïf chez les croyants.<sup>12</sup>

Somme toute, face aux incertitudes et au brouillage des repères que comportent les concepts de Raison Universelle et de théologie Universelle, Hebga oppose la raison particulière à coefficient universel : *Toute théologie, en effet, est située dans un espace, une époque, une culture, une ethnie, une tradition, une langue, une idéologie. Elle est nécessairement estampillée, marquée, tout comme le théologien qui la met en forme.*<sup>13</sup> On peut donc comprendre pourquoi Pierre Meinrad Hebga établit la nécessité de promouvoir une forme de rationalité neuve, intégrative. Dans cette perspective, je voudrais insister ici sur l'idée *qu'une rationalité nouvelle appelle une communauté théorique nouvelle, où il soit réellement possible de réfléchir sans œillères et débattre sans exclusives.*<sup>14</sup>

En somme, le renouvellement théorico-praxique de la philosophie et la révision de l'anthropologie philosophique explicités par Hebga introduisent indéniablement de nouvelles perspectives philosophiques, théologiques et scientifiques. Car comme le souligne Martin Heidegger

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 127.

<sup>11</sup> Ladrière, J., *Les chemins de la raison*, ouvrage coll. ; Desclée De Brouwer, 1972, p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> Hebga, P.M., *Afrique de la raison, Afrique de la foi*, Karthala, 1995, p. 159.

<sup>13</sup> Hebga, P.M., *Émancipation...*, *op. cit.* p. 126.

<sup>14</sup> Sève, L., « La dialectique », in *Le Monde aujourd'hui... op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

dans son ouvrage *Être et Temps : Le mouvement véritable des sciences se produit dans la révision plus ou moins radicale et transparente pour elle-même des concepts fondamentaux*.<sup>15</sup>

Tout semble donc confirmer que la problématique hebgaenne de la philosophie, non pas seulement considérée dans l'illimitation de son objet, mais prise aussi dans le sillage d'une réflexion nécessaire sur la subjectivité, la liberté et la transcendance, la totalisation cognitivo – instrumentale, se ramène à la repensée qui prend en charge le recentrement de la plénitude de sens à l'être au monde, c'est-à-dire au présent et à l'avenir du composé humain. Bien entendu, cela requiert l'établissement des fondements pédagogiques repensés.

Mais il est certain toutefois que cette repensée n'est pas en droit séparable de la culturalité/transculturalité fondamentales comme disponibilité à la raison plurielle, essentialisée comme potentialité dans toutes les traditions culturelles. Si l'on peut parler d'un dépassement de la forme seulement cognitivo-instrumentale de la rationalité dont l'œuvre de Hebga est sujette, c'est bien dans cette considération de sa pensée comme œuvre en œuvre, avec des axes majeurs: plaidoyer pour la transdisciplinarité, sans laquelle les chances d'innovation adossée à l'originalité dans son œuvre auraient été obturées. C'est la tension féconde dans la pensée de Hebga entre une réflexion radicalement ontologique touchant la consistance de l'être humain et des préoccupations qui embrassent les freins pluriels au re décollage pluri dimensionnel de l'humanité lestée d'aliénation et de *décréation*, c'est-à-dire de néantisation ontologique. Hebga témoigne clairement de cette transcendance de la rationalité close dans l'ouragan de l'âge technologique voire de l'âge électronique articulé par l'apartheid intellectuel, véritable source d'oppression liquidatrice des premiers grands penseurs de l'humanité (Égypte, Asie, voire Mésopotamie) et colonisatrice de l'avenir ainsi que de l'espace qui l'entoure. Hebga témoigne enfin de l'impossibilité pour la science d'éteindre la foi comme le prétend un scientisme dogmatique et sclérosé ; car l'existence est une tension croissante vers la pression du sens qui implique quête vo-

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<sup>15</sup> Heidegger, M., *Être et temps*, op. cit., p. 31.



lontariste de la compréhension de l'origine et de la destinée ; et parce que, comme l'écrit Hebga dans *Afrique de la raison, Afrique de la Foi*, d'une certaine façon, il est illogique de récuser la foi au nom de la raison scientifique ou philosophique, ou au contraire rejeter les propositions de la cosmologie mathématique au nom de la Bible.

Hebga nous avertit donc contre toutes formes de triomphalisme monothématique / disciplinaire en prenant en charge des thématiques cosmologiques, théologiques, humanistes (traditions, cultures, civilisations, universalité) ; mettant ainsi en lumière la nécessité du dialogue des cultures dans la quête de la vérité face à la pression du sens.

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## *Reviews section*

# **Kwame Anthony Appiah, 2006, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers***

**A review by Mohammad Hossein Seifikar**

*Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers.* Kwame Anthony Appiah, 2006. New York: W. W. Norton, 196 pp.

Appiah begins by noting that our human world is becoming smaller because people have more access to each other than ever before in history through migration, international trade, tourism, exposure to mass media and particularly the internet. He thinks that we now have the unique opportunity to affect the lives of others everywhere and to learn from them. Appiah asks: how are we to deal with these new circumstances? What ideas and institutions can help us to live together in our new global tribe? Appiah proposes cosmopolitanism.

Appiah's cosmopolitanism combines two inter-related strands. One is the idea that we have obligations to those who are beyond the people who are close to us like our kin or compatriots. A cosmopolitan is a citizen of the world and it suggests belonging to the human community, believing the oneness of humanity, and universal concern. The second is taking interest in the lives, practices and beliefs of others. It is openness and receptiveness to art and literature of other places. It is an obligation to

understand those with whom we share this planet. Appiah believes that there is much to learn from our differences. According to Appiah, cosmopolitanism begins with conversation across boundaries.

Appiah defends what he calls a partial cosmopolitanism. Appiah is critical of those he thinks are immoderate cosmopolitans. These are thinkers who deny the importance of nation-states, national boundaries, and borders and they regard their friends and fellow citizens with icy impartiality. He is sympathetic to the view that local loyalties and allegiances are important because they determine who we are. So he encourages us to embrace both local and universal loyalties and allegiances and denies that they necessarily come into conflict with each other.

These are some of the main ideas in Appiah's book. They can be all found in the *Introduction* which is a good summary of the book. The ten chapters that follow try to shed light and to expand on them. In the first chapter called *The Shattered Mirror*, Appiah argues that looking at the world clearly shows that there are a variety of ways of life and thought. He points out that not all disagreements can be resolved and urges us to accept differences, embrace pluralism, and adopt a live-and-let-live attitude.

In the second chapter called *The Escape from Positivism*, Appiah argues that relativism, positivism, and in particular the fact and value distinction, often get in the way of the cosmopolitan project and undermine conversation across boundaries, getting to know others who are different, and learning from them. Simply put, if when we disagree we are both right, then there is nothing to talk about. Appiah also emphasizes the way our values are shaped by conversations with others, in which we try to shape each others' views and feelings.

The third chapter *Facts on the Ground* is an attack on the positivist notion of fact. Appiah argues that facts are not as solid as we may suppose. He tries to show that facts are in no more solid ground than values. He uses the example of trying to persuade a traditional Asante (his kinfolk) that witchcraft can not harm people, to show that facts largely depend on what you already believe and what ideas you already have.

In chapter four *Moral Disagreement*, Appiah looks at the various ways we can come in conflict over values. His main insight is that value terms are essentially contestable and that they will always be argued about both across cultures and within them. Even when we share the same moral vocabulary, we can disagree if we interpret the same values differently and weigh them differently.

In the fifth chapter called *The Primacy of Practice*, Appiah argues that even though moral disagreements can happen and are real, cross-cultural conversations about values do not have to end in disagreement because it is often possible to agree about what to do even when we do not agree on the reasons behind it. For example, we can live in peace and harmony without agreeing on the underlying values. Appiah discourages us from insisting on reaching agreements on values by means of reasoned arguments and persuasion. These very often fail to move people. Moreover, if we make this insistence, then we will lose what is worth while about conversations across boundaries. When Appiah proposes conversations between people, what he has in mind by conversation is really an engagement with the experience and the ideas of others. In this sense, conversations do not have to lead to agreements about values.

In the sixth chapter called *Imaginary Strangers*, Appiah notes that human beings everywhere have so much in common. These include everyday activities, such as buying things, eating, reading the paper, laughing, going to movies, parties and funerals. They also include universal values such as kindness and generosity. He argues that these can be entry points to cross cultural conversations. Once we see that we have some shared ideas, we can open up more to other ways of thinking, feeling and acting.

In the seventh chapter called *Cosmopolitan Contamination*, arguing against those who criticize globalization for producing homogeneity and getting rid of cultural differences, Appiah claims that globalization is also a threat to homogeneity because it creates new forms of difference. He thinks that instead of the talk of preserving diversity and trapping people in conditions they want to escape from, we have got to let people choose for themselves. Appiah believes that people everywhere make

their own use of global commodities. They are not blank tablets on which global capitalism can write whatever it wants, they are not fools but they can resist.

In chapter eight entitled *Whose Culture Is It, Anyway?*, Appiah begins by pointing out that some of the museums of the world, particularly in the West, have large collections of objects and artefacts which were looted from poor and developing countries. He then asks: who owns these cultural artefacts and properties? Our first answer may be that since they make up the cultural heritage of a people, they belong to the people and culture from whom they were taken. Appiah disputes this and argues that if some cultural artefacts are of potential value to all human beings, they should belong to all of humanity. He thinks that when they make contribution to world culture, they should be protected by being made available to those who would benefit from experiencing them and put into trusteeship of humanity. Appiah argues that rather than focusing on returning stolen art and putting a lot of money and effort into it, it may serve the interest of those whose artefacts were stolen better to be exposed to a decent collection of art from around the world, like people everywhere else.

In the ninth chapter called *The Counter-Cosmopolitanism*, Appiah begins by drawing a picture of the kind of quests for universal community which we should be wary of and reject because they can lead to bloodbaths. He is thinking of global religious fundamentalism which insists on one version of universal truth. Islamic and Christian fundamentalists who seek a community of those who share their faith and reject all national and local allegiances have no tolerance for religious difference. Appiah argues that their universalism is contrary to cosmopolitanism which embraces pluralism and promotes the view that our knowledge is imperfect and provisional and that we might learn something from those we disagree with. The other enemies of cosmopolitanism are those who reject universality. They claim that not everyone matters. They tell us why. Such and such people are destroying our nation; they are inferior; they have earned our contempt and deserve it.

One aspect of cosmopolitanism is obligations to strangers. In the tenth and last chapter called *Kindness to Strangers*, Appiah looks at the

question of what do we owe strangers? His answer is mainly negative. He begins by observing that cosmopolitanism can not and does not demand from us to have more sympathy and concern for strangers than those close to us. It can not make impossible psychological demands. He then examines the view of thinkers like Peter Unger and Peter Singer which suggests that we should give most of our money and property to groups like OXFAM and UNICEF to help the very poor. Appiah believes that these thinkers are mistaken to burden us with incredible obligations which would dramatically reduce the quality of our lives. According to Appiah, whatever our obligations are to strangers, they must not be too burdensome because these are not the only obligations that matter.

Of course, Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism* is more than just this catalogue of arguments and views. It is a clear and well-written book which is enjoyable to read. Appiah skillfully blends his philosophical ideas with anecdotes about his own life and background. Kwame Anthony Appiah is a Ghanaian-American philosopher who was raised in Ghana and educated in England. He belongs to the Ashanti tribe and Akan people. In reading this book, we travel to many places and we come to know him a little and also his father, mother, and various other kinsfolk and tribe members. Appiah introduces us to many traditions, practices and ideas of his African ancestry to clarify his ideas on human interactions, conversations, and globalization.

Some of Appiah's chapters are better researched and more insightful than others. I think that, for example, Appiah's chapter on globalization could have been stronger. He is too dismissive of those who are critical of globalization and focuses only on one aspect of their criticisms, namely their worry that globalization wipes out local cultures. So he does not address the worry that the global financial institutions and multinational corporations want to expand the world markets for their own interests and that they undercut and weaken local governments, laws, and decision-making. Western industrial nations promote free trade, but this in fact benefits them and makes them richer and more powerful. The agriculture and export subsidies in the West are one of the main causes of agricultural decline in many developing countries. So globalization per-

petuates and worsens the unequal balance of power between rich industrial and poor developing countries, rather than addressing it in any way. Appiah casts the critics of globalization as people who are afraid of change, but some of the critics are legitimately concerned with global justice and local sovereignty.

Appiah's chapter on cosmopolitan justice is also weak. One of the main components of Appiah's cosmopolitanism is ethical commitment to strangers. But his view of what this amounts to is very thin. Instead of speculating about what commitments do we incur if we want to make the world a substantially better place, Appiah comes up with a list of constraints. He is very critical of the idea of world government as a vehicle for upholding and guaranteeing people's basic rights. For Appiah the primary mechanism for ensuring basic rights is the nation-state. Appiah then warns us about those who want to burden us with too much and urge us to overlook our obligations to those close to us and to our own self and projects.

It is difficult to see how the concerns which underpin cosmopolitan ethics or justice can be addressed solely in the context of national politics. Those who are passionate about cosmopolitan justice are concerned about extreme poverty, tyranny, oppression, and environmental degradation. Seriously addressing these seems to also require working with international organizations which go beyond national borders and forming connections and associations with others elsewhere who have similar goals.

Moreover, despite Appiah's legitimate worries about establishing a world government, it is clear that world governing bodies and institutions, such as United Nations and World Bank, already exist, deal with cosmopolitan justice issues, and have much power. At the least, making the world more just would demand that these institutions become more democratic and fair and do a better job of protecting people's rights.

In the final analysis it is unclear what obligations does Appiah think each person has to strangers, except perhaps to converse with them and respect their differences. For Appiah the current global circumstances somewhat resembles the original position of Rawls, in which a variety of people who live together are coming together to discuss and decide what



sorts of rules and institutions would be best for coexistence and living well. But Appiah never ventures to speculate about what rules and institutions would best serve everyone's interests and protect their rights and freedoms.



## **Barry Hallen, 2006, *African philosophy: The analytic approach***

**A review by Frederick Ochieng'-Odhiambo**

Barry Hallen, 2006, *African philosophy: The analytic approach*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006, viii + 361pp. (ISBN 1-59221-370-7)

The text is made up of 16 chapters plus a conclusion. Eight of these chapters had been published earlier but substantially revised, updated, and interrelated so as to make the text a coherent composite. It is divided into 4 broad parts. Part I, consisting of 4 chapters, revolves round the question of the nature and status of African philosophy. The views of Robin Horton, Richard Rorty, and Paulin Hountondji are explicated and analyzed. Part II, made up of 3 chapters and entitled 'Methodology', challenges the view that assumes or presumes that African conceptual systems, like the Western ones, divide up human beings into rational and emotional components. The author also demonstrates that what is essentially the same methodological technique may be used and viewed in a radically different manner in different cultures. The gist of part III (containing 4 chapters) is that African (Yoruba) discourse reflect individual and artistic sophistication and genius: that the misguided attempts to impose equivalents of Western notions of witchcraft upon African conceptual systems have only seemed to sustain the image of African societies as primitive. Part IV (made up of 5 chapters) is essentially an extension of part III. Whereas part III deals with 'Moral Epistemology', part IV is anchored on 'Aesthetics'. Here the concern is to show aesthetic links to ethics as well as epistemology among the Yoruba.

Chapter 1 engages certain assessments by social and cultural anthropologists regarding the nature and character of indigenous African thought. In particular those assessments that hold that: (1) in indigenous African thought, religion and worldview exercise virtually an absolute monopoly over the minds of the traditional community and; (2) as a consequence therefore, that Africans in the traditional set-up employ logic in a nonreflective and noncritical manner. On the basis of his research conducted among the Yoruba, the author argues that these assessments are not accurate for they are premised upon certain 'exotic' and 'bizarre' theoretical elements that have been attributed greater explanatory significance than they merit (24). Despite the fact that the main argument of the chapter has been part of the 'deathless' discourse and debate regarding the nature of African philosophy, the author's examination of a Yoruba onisegun's statement is refreshing.

The second chapter is a detailed representation and interpretation of Rorty's contention that philosophy is Western and, additionally, that it does not translate. Despite the fact that the view expressed by Rorty is not novel, in that the issue of the philosophical character of indigenous or traditional African thought and of the role of philosophy in Africa generally have been subject of debate for many years and given rise to rigorous and emotional exchanges, Hallen gives reasons why he raises the issue again. The main reason being, Rorty's increasing influence in contemporary philosophical and cultural circles hence making his views difficult to ignore despite their attendant ethnocentric leanings. The other reason given is the originality in Rorty's arguments. To a reader who has not had the benefit of a thorough reading of Rorty's views on the relation (or disconnect) between philosophy and indigenous African thought, the chapter would be quite encapsulating. Also, anyone whose concern is simply to grapple with the general question of the nature of philosophy would find the chapter indispensable and fairly resourceful.

Whereas chapter 2 is an exposition of Rorty's contention that philosophy is Western, chapter 3 is a critique of that contention or if I may borrow Kwasi Wiredu's words, it is a surgical critique of Rorty's theory of the absence of philosophy from all cultures except those of the West.

The chapter also evaluates the status Rorty grants anthropology in African studies. Regarding Rorty's contention, Hallen argues that its implications point to a wrong direction; it mistakenly or unnecessarily narrows down the import of philosophical works to culture. And according to Hallen

‘from Plato through Quine, philosophers’ ruminations and arguments are concerned with human understanding rather than with species they regard as peculiar to the Greeks or to the West’ (63).

On the status of anthropology, Hallen argues that though it is professionally entitled to speak for and about African cultures to the West, in reality, this has unfortunately not been the case. Contrary to Rorty's belief that the role of anthropology is to promote ‘dialogue’ between African and Western cultures, in actuality, Hallen thinks that it has been the vast chasm separating the two cultures.

Chapter 4 is an analysis of Hountondji's view expressed in his paper entitled ‘Scientific Dependence in Africa Today’. The gist of the paper, according to Hallen, is Hountondji's rather controversial suggestion that

‘the encouragement of academic philosophy in Africa should not be a priority. Precious resources and personnel would be better allocated to developing a scientific infrastructure for research and development’ (106).

Expressed enthymematically, the basis of Hountondji's reasoning is that once the latter is established then it would engender the former since philosophy is a second order of science in its empirical practice. Hallen cautions against this view; his argument being that the continued insistence of philosophers in seeing their discipline as essentially and only a second order discipline is what has hindered the development of African philosophy. They see African philosophy as a first order activity and hence are reluctant to engage in it. They consign it to the periphery with the result that it is the anthropologists who have ended up guiding African philosophy. Yet, ironically, according to Hallen, academic (Western) philosophy has developed and legitimized its own form of ethnophilosophy (108). Hallen is also distressed by Hountondji's hostility towards orality and insistence on only written texts as the basis of intellectual exchange and in-

novation. He argues, as well, that Hountondji's use of the term scientific is counterproductive

'because it invokes the orthodox view of cognition—that there is a single cognitive or rational norm that different cultures must more or less approximate...thereby attracting adjectives such as prelogical and protorational' (113).

In chapter 5, the author recognizes that both the philosopher and the anthropologist should play complementary roles in the attempt to understand non-Western cultures, the role should not be left only to the anthropologist. The philosopher because of his or her interests and training definitely has a role to play. However, he warns that the philosopher in his or her endeavours

'must take care not to distort the non-Western view by unfairly reducing it to a theoretical alternative already developed by, for example, Western philosophy' (121).

In the chapter, the author also explicates three points which he thinks ought to govern the relationship between the informant and the scholar (whether an anthropologist or a philosopher) if the encounter between the two and the results stemming there-from are to be representative and objective (123-4). There is no doubt in my mind that those scholars who are engaged in philosophic sagacity as an approach to African philosophy would find this chapter quite enlightening. More specifically, if they adhere to Hallen's three points when conducting their researches, then it would enhance the relationship and encounter between the researcher (philosopher) and the informant (interlocutor), and this would in turn have positive effects on the production and explication of sagacity.

Sometime in the early 1980s, Hallen together with John Olubi Sodipo undertook some research on the epistemological discourse among the Yoruba. To them, the results of their research proved the existence of African philosophy beyond what Placide Tempels had earlier presented. However, some critics dismissed their efforts as another exercise in Tempelsianism. Chapter 6 may very well be construed as Hallen's reply to such critics. Using Quine's Indeterminacy Thesis, he argues that the Hallen-Sodipo exercise, unlike ethnophilosophy, is certainly of philosophical

substance (144), and hence Hountondji's complaint about ethnophilosophy does not and should not apply to the Hallen-Sodipo exercise.

The essence of chapter 7 is to show that the use of the scientific method as a paradigm of thinking has led to misleading comparisons, obscuring rather than illuminating the methodologies of non-Western systems of knowledge. According to Hallen, the methods of non-Western systems may be not only different from their Western analogues, but are coherent and objective in their own terms (153-4). To illustrate the point, he uses Awo (secrecy) in the Ifa system of knowledge among the Yoruba, Edo, Ibo, Igala, Jukun, Nupe, Fon, and Ewe peoples of Nigeria, Benin, and Togo. To Hallen, the error defenders of science make is failure to recognize that Awo is a different species of secrecy from what they (defenders of science) have in mind.

In chapter 8, the opening chapter of part III, the author advises academic philosophers to take another look at indigenous African abstract or theoretical thought. He suggests that they would find it of greater philosophical interest (in its own right) than certain stereotypes within the social sciences may have (mis)led them to believe. He argues against the stereotype of oral tradition as frozen and resistant to change, and disagrees with Horton's assertion that African systems of thought are closed, relatively inflexible, and have frequent recourse to secondary elaboration. To illustrate the point, he shows that the Yoruba distinction between imo and igbagbo as classifications of information disprove Horton's position, for while imo is relatively inflexible because it is so certain, igbagbo is not.

Lately, there has been a concern among African and Africanist philosophers that the discourse on African philosophy has been more of a second order talk about whether there had been and was 'philosophy' in indigenous African cultural contexts. This, they argue, has been at the expense of actually doing African philosophy. Chapter 9 in particular (and one may say the text in general) has this concern in mind; it proceeds to produce individualized, specialized philosophical studies that arose from those cultural contexts. In the chapter, which is a follow-up of the previous chapter, the author argues and shows how amongst the Yoruba

knowledge is intricately connected to morals, hence the coinage of the expression 'moral epistemology'. The comparison and contrast that the author draws between Yoruba (moral) epistemology and Western epistemological theory is intriguing.

Chapters 10 (focusing on divination) and 11 (embedded on the notion of witchcraft) lend themselves well to chapters 8 and 9. The gist of chapter 10 is that among the Yoruba, in addition to appreciating divination as ritual and performance, a further essential dimension to the process is the intellectual prowess of the diviner; a dimension that generally goes underreported. In chapter 11, Hallen argues that the Yoruba 'aje' and its English translation 'witch' are not equivalent contrary to what people have been made to believe. The chapter is an effort to restore the intellectual and social standing of what has been (mis)interpreted as the witchcraft phenomenon in Yoruba culture; the 'aje' should not be portrayed or stigmatized as the 'witch' (212).

While the focus of part III (chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11) is on Yoruba moral epistemology, parts IV revolves round the domain of Yoruba aesthetics. Chapter 12 is a critique of Robert Farris Thompson's contention that when he undertook research among the Yoruba he set out to let Africans finally speak for themselves. Hallen's concern is the extent to which Thompson allows the Yoruba to speak for themselves and how much he speaks for them. He is critical of Thompson's introduction of the word *emotional* as criteria of sculptural excellence among the Yoruba. In Western personality theory the assumption is that emotion is rigidly distinguished from intellect or reason. Thompson assumes that his informant's reference to the heart refers to his feelings or emotions in the same way a Westerner would. On the contrary, according to Hallen, the heart for the Yoruba is to act as the repository of mind or consciousness—it describes something much more like the Western concept of mind or reason. Hallen also warns that Thompson's usage of

'such specialized English-language terms as proportion, composition, and symmetry are too full of Western theoretical connotations to represent a Yoruba point of view' (224).

In chapter 13, the author argues that in academic scholarship the



systematic study of indigenous African aesthetic criteria begun only in the latter decades of the twentieth century, and even then the aesthetic standards used to evaluate 'African art' by connoisseurs for and in Western culture were not of African origin as such (237). He also notes that it was during the African Primitive Art exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 1984 that pieces that were unabashedly accorded the title 'masterpiece' were displayed (238). And even then, he observes a paradox here in that

'the relationship between the African aesthetic masterpieces and Western connoisseurs...that this sculpture [masterpieces] was said to have been created by primitive tribesmen who were incapable of substantive aesthetic sensitivity' (238).

Drawing from the Yoruba, the author enunciates an alternative approach to the study of African aesthetic sensitivities. Using the Yoruba word *ewa*, he argues that for the Yoruba, beauty is seen primarily in terms of human beings rather than associated with the arts and crafts. Unlike in Western cultures, he argues that in the Yoruba culture, the episteme, the moral, and the aesthetic can not be separated. *Handsome is as handsome does*.

Chapters 14 and 15 are a bit strange and stand out. They do not fit well in the sequential outlay of the chapters. In fact, a critical reader may soliloquize if it was really necessary that the two chapters stand independently. Nevertheless, chapter 14, which is basically a critique of Kwame Anthony Appiah, has as its mainstay advice to scholars working in African studies. The author believes that the scholars would learn as much from one another if they were to concentrate as much upon writing on the problems and confusions as they do upon the 'solutions'. Chapter 15, which is fairly brief though laden with endnotes, compares and contrasts the two relative latecomers to the general field of African studies namely African art history and African philosophy. The chapter is

'meant to suggest that professionals reconsider the notion of overlapping meanings between languages as a basis from which to work' (271),

other than consider one language as a paradigm for others.

Chapter 16 scrutinizes the meaning of the term traditional and de-

lineates three schools. Scholars who belong to the first school 'hold fast' and insist that the word does refer to something about the mentality and/or social practices of some societies, and these mentalities and social practices are unique (275). This is the orthodox view of 'traditional'. The second school consists of those who view it as a relic of Western ethnocentrism that should be eliminated from the technical vocabulary of African studies (276). In the third school, the feeling is that it can still be of use and value if its terms of reference are clarified and stripped of pejorative elements (276). Without being judgemental and decisive as to which one of the three schools offers the most appropriate meaning, Hallen proceeds to examine the ramifications of each of the schools and contends that the process of refining the meaning of traditional is ongoing and that each of the schools is making a contribution. He opines that it would be foolhardy for any of the schools to think that it can independently 'fix' a new definition.

In the concluding chapter of the text, the author notes that the combined onslaughts of the postcolonial, the multicultural, and the postmodern has succeeded in putting Western scholarship on the defensive. Disciplines whose aims and methods were hitherto thought to be culturally transcendent and universal in principle are being reevaluated as ideological tools meant to disseminate Western beliefs and values. And according to the author, this is desirable because a basis can now be established for a more clear and more fair understanding of the arts, literature, and philosophy as elements of African cultures (315).

On the whole *African Philosophy: The Analytic Approach* sets out to demonstrate that the analytic approach is not a monopoly of the West; that it is both applicable to and derivable from Africa's indigenous cultural heritage. Though the amount of literature on African philosophy has in recent years increased, none of them would rival this text in terms of the numbers of issues raised and discussed to justify the analytic approach to African philosophy. The explication involved lends itself to historical detail while the analysis is that of surgical and logical precision. The text is representative and reflective of the many years of patient and painstaking research and fieldwork that the author has undertaken

amongst the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria on some aspects of their culture. Besides being ruminative, instructive, and engaging; the text is relevantly multi-faceted and consequently one that would attract a wide and diverse readership. These would include philosophers, social and cultural anthropologists, art historians, literary critics, linguists, ethnographers, scholars of divination and religion, and scholars of performance studies.



## Jean Fonkoué, 2004, *Cheikh Anta Diop au carrefour des historiographies. Une relecture*

Révisé par Lusala lu ne Nkuka Luka, S.J.

Jean Fonkoué, *Cheikh Anta Diop au carrefour des historiographies. Une relecture* (Etudes Africaines), Paris : L'Harmattan, 2004, 85 p.

Jean Fonkoué est docteur en sociologie de la Sorbonne, chercheur au CEA de l'EHESS-CNRS. Il a enseigné à l'Université Paris X-Nanterre. Actuellement, il est professeur à l'Université Paris 7-Denis Diderot. C'est donc un scientifique confirmé. Son livre, fort bien écrit, se divise en 6 chapitres.

L'introduction qui donne le ton à l'ouvrage fait une mise au point sur *Le Diopisme Cheikh Anta comme phénomène sociologique* (pp. 9-14). L'œuvre de Diop peut être qualifiée, selon l'auteur, de phénomène sociologique dans la mesure où il « fait l'objet de toutes sortes de critiques » (p. 9). Œuvre dense en effet, ou selon les mots de l'auteur « complexe, encyclopédique, multidimensionnelle » (p. 9), où il n'est pas facile « pour le lecteur de tenir la balance égale entre science et culture, entre culture et histoire » (p. 9). Diop a créé une argumentation qui vise à « modifier, bousculer les approches usuelles de l'histoire en général, celle de l'Afrique en particulier » (p. 9).

Le premier chapitre étudie *La doctrine de l'œuvre* (pp. 15-18). La doctrine est rendue par le mot « Antériorité » (p. 18). Car il s'agit bien d'antériorité de la civilisation égyptienne sur la civilisation occidentale : L' « assimilation de l'Égypte par le monde grec produira le légendaire

‘miracle grec’ devenu par la suite le socle ‘idéologique’ du modèle de la science et de la culture du monde gréco-latin. Donc, et pour reprendre le dit et l’occulté de tous les temps : ‘la civilisation vient d’Egypte’. L’Egypte est alors, pour cette raison majeure, la ‘mère des Arts et de Sciences’ (...) » (p. 15). Beaucoup d’auteurs ont reconnu cet « apport de l’Egypte au monde gréco-latin » (p. 17).

Le second chapitre examine *L’épaisseur du temps comme paramètre de l’analyse historique* (pp. 19-26). Ce chapitre nous apprend que les Grecs n’avaient pas de « mémoire historique de leur passé » (p. 19). Pour corriger ce défaut, ils se tournèrent vers l’Egypte qui « grâce aux grandes œuvres, trois fois millénaires réalisées par les savants mathématiciens et architectes (...) avaient su conserver la mémoire de son passé, conserver ses institutions politiques dans leurs stabilités (...)» (p. 25).

Le troisième chapitre analyse *Le regard fondateur de l’historien Diop* (pp. 27-30). Ici l’auteur nous rappelle quelques faits : d’abord, la fécondité du travail de Diop. Lorsqu’on étudie l’œuvre de Diop, l’on se rend compte que chez lui,

« plus la recherche avance dans l’investigation, plus les apports de la découverte se révèle d’un intérêt considérable pour confirmer les ‘intuitions initiales’ » (p. 27)

et ensuite, la reconnaissance par quelques écrivains occidentaux récents de la véracité des propos des auteurs grecs sur l’importance singulière de la civilisation pharaonique (pp. 27-29).

Le quatrième chapitre porte sur *Le mythe de l’Egypte pharaonique dans la France du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle* (pp. 31-37). Diop a reçu sa formation d’égyptologue en France.

« Dans cette trajectoire de formation, écrit l’auteur, il hérite du mythe français de l’Egypte tel qu’il est répandu dans la France du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle avec tous ses avatars » (p. 31).

En cette France du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle, en effet, deux positions majeures occupent le devant de la scène à propos de l’Egypte. L’une, positive, est représentée par Bossuet dans son *Discours* qui traite de l’histoire universel. S’inspirant de Diodore de Sicile, Bossuet « relève plusieurs traits qui font de l’Egypte un pays ‘fondateur’ et ‘civilisateur’ ». L’autre, négative, est re-

présentée par Voltaire dans sa *Philosophie de l'histoire*. Dans cet ouvrage,

« il récuse une quelconque grandeur historique à l'Égypte. Les Égyptiens ne lui semblent pas mériter cette reconnaissance de 'peuple fondateur' de civilisation. Leur territoire était trop petit et soumis à des inondations périodiques. Les Égyptiens étaient un peuple inculte qui s'adonnait à la pratique des cultes aux dieux fétiches » (pp. 32-33).

La vision négative de Voltaire a eu un impact profond et durable sur l'intelligentsia française. Elle l'a littéralement plongée

« dans l'obscurantisme dont même la Sorbonne ne sera pas épargnée » (p. 33).

Le cinquième chapitre parle d'*Une méthodologie pour rétablir l'histoire de l'Afrique* (pp. 39-47). Dans ce chapitre, Fonkoué nous montre les « quatre catégories d'étude qui sous-tendent les structures de (la) pensée méthodologique » de Diop (p. 39), à savoir : « - Antériorité des civilisations noires / - Nations nègres et culture / - Civilisation ou barbarie / - Antiquité négro-africaine » (p. 40). Ces catégories sont importantes pour « comprendre et expliquer l'histoire » de l'Afrique (p. 40). Par ailleurs, Fonkoué nous fait découvrir que la pensée de Diop est caractérisée par « l'esprit positiviste » (p. 41).

« Le positivisme cherche à réaliser l'unité de la pensée en partant des données réelles. Le privilège de l'unité étant alors d'aboutir à interpréter toute diversité comme dénaturation du système, soit comme somme des éléments éclatés d'une unité antérieure. Il devient alors légitime, pour apprécier le sens véritable des situations et des événements, de conclure à une cohérence, cohérence sans laquelle il n'y a point d'entendement ni de science possibles » (p. 46).

Enfin, le sixième chapitre traite de *L'importance de l'argument linguistique* (pp. 49-62). « La langue, écrit Fonkoué, est en effet un référent culturel de première importance » (p. 50). Cela apparaît clairement chez Diop qui, cherchant « à fonder un domaine de recherche, (...) postule la parenté génétique de l'égyptien pharaonique et des langues négro-africaines » (p. 50). La langue est un dépôt, voire une bibliothèque de l'histoire d'un peuple. Diop le dit d'une manière lumineuse :

« Dans le fond, la langue même non écrite doit être considérée comme la cristallisation en énigmes plus ou moins difficiles à déchiffrer de l'histoire d'un

peuple ; elle porte nécessairement les traces de tout le passé du peuple qui le véhicule » (p. 51).

Dans la conclusion de son livre (pp. 63-70), Fonkoué revient sur la manière dont Diop utilise les sources égyptiennes. La citation suivante en dit long :

« Cheikh Anta Diop, à la différence des égyptologues amateurs dont le penchant pour l'égyptomanie pousse souvent à exhumer et à exhiber des aspects de l'Égypte ancienne, cherche lui à convaincre comme quelqu'un qui plaide une cause et sa raison. Aussi n'aspire-t-il en la circonstance qu'à la vérité scientifique quant à sa portée générale dans l'histoire de l'Afrique et son intérêt universel. Aussi recherche-t-il les preuves qui en sont dignes. Les exigences de son exposé de l'histoire de l'Afrique l'obligeant ainsi à considérer tous les points de vue et leur combinaison, le forcent à considérer que cette histoire-là ne peut se faire que par une redécouverte et un retour aux valeurs de l'antiquité négro-africaine » (pp. 64-65).

La bibliographie (pp. 71-83) est divisée en trois parties : 1° les œuvres (ouvrages et articles) de Cheikh Anta Diop (pp. 71-73), 2° les titres cités dans le livre (pp. 73-80), et 3° quelques œuvres (ouvrages et articles) qui mettent en perspective l'Égypte ancienne, la Grèce antique et les Civilisations africaines (pp. 81-83).

Un livre indispensable pour les étudiants et les chercheurs en sciences humaines en Afrique.



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