Cosmopolitanism or cosmopolitics? The choice of the latter as the title of this volume reflects the bottom-up, let a thousand flowers bloom, ethos of the Open Anthropology Cooperative, an online forum dedicated to, “open access, open membership, open to sharing new ideas, open to whatever the organization might do or become; open to everyone, as in ‘open source.” This openness attracted the contributors to this volume, who have found in OAC seminars a place to write and think anthropologically in a forum where the academic straitjacket is loosened but serious thinking and writing encouraged. The topics are varied, but “cosmos” and “politics,” consensus and conflict, one world or many, humanity and what it means to be human are always at stake.
Cosmopolitics:

The Collected Papers of the Open Anthropology Cooperative, Volume I

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION:
COSMOPOLITICS AS A WAY OF THINKING

Huon Wardle and Justin Shaffner

From its launch in 2009, the Open Anthropology Cooperative (OAC) and its publications series were shaped by what we can reasonably call cosmopolitical concerns. Weeks after its creation, the OAC gathered hundreds, then thousands, of visitors and members from every region of the world — everywhere there is a networked computer at least. A flurry of discussion immediately took place on the OAC forum around what to make of the fact that within a few months an unprecedented global assembly of anthropologists had sprung into being. The whole world of anthropology seemed to have arrived at one virtual site, and the question was what to do with this singularity. From this point of view, the numbers proved illusory — perhaps a disappointment — if the expectation was that, like Venus on her seashell, a new kind of global anthropological politics would also spring up out of the waves. Many people visited, read what was offered, and left comments — perhaps modeling their behaviour on how they used
other social network sites – but, for most, the OAC was simply a launch pad to “go” somewhere else. (It is worth remembering that like other websites the OAC is only metaphorically “a place”, but then it is not “just a place” either). The OAC had proved its global reach, sure enough, but this did not initiate any definable architecture of social change itself. Thus, arguably the OAC has not built on its initial promise of creating a globally articulated forum, and in that sense, the ideas fomented by this venue for openness and cooperation have been more a sign of the times than an expression of a realizable social future (Barone and Hart 2015).

One of the acknowledged successes of the OAC, though, has been its open access publication series. From the beginning, the aim was to make anthropological work available online without copyright restriction and to use the social media platform to open these essays (and now books) to discussion by anyone who wants to participate. In principle at least, from the start, this was anthropology for, and open to, the “people”; the idea being that, since anthropology is the study of humanity, anyone who is human would have an interest in what that fact implies. Again, of course, the results were more limited than the hubristic expectation. The papers and surrounding dialogue that the OAC has gathered together are nonetheless fascinatingly diverse, all of them offer at least a sideways (and often a front on) view on the stroboscopic display of global humanity that, in just a few decades, the new digital technologies of mass communication have set in motion.

So, when the time came to put some of the OAC papers together in edited form, this awareness of the shifting meaning of the words “cosmos” and “politics” immediately emerged as a key theme shaping our editorial perspective. It is for this reason that with our first volume of collected papers we have brought together work by Alberto Corsin Jimenez, Daniel Miller, Huon Wardle, Jean La Fontaine, Joanna Overing, John McCreery, Lee Drummond, Liria de la Cruz, Martin Holbraad, Paloma Gay y Blasco, Philip Swift, Sidney
Mintz and Thomas Sturm, that foregrounds the “cosmopolitical” dimension of contemporary experience. But what does this venerable compound word signify? In contemporary social science we find that at least two distinct uses of the word are in play.

**Kant and the cosmopolitical**

The initial sense of the word is Kantian. It is fair to say that from its beginnings the aims of the OAC were imbued with a Kantian spirit. Thomas Sturm in this volume explores Kant’s cosmopolitanism and his anthropology in detail (“What Did Kant Mean…”). Nonetheless, even now, Kant’s ideas on anthropology and cosmopolitanism are not widely known (or understood) within contemporary social science, so it is worth giving a brief light-and-shade sketch of the Kantian position and its contemporary relevance before entering more complicated terrains of debate.

For Kant cosmopolitanism, and the cosmopolitics that goes with it, delineates a firmly anthropocentric set of problems ([1795]1988). First, at issue are the political struggles of human beings who, whatever their differences (and also because of them), must inevitably come to recognise themselves as occupying a common world. Secondly, there is the historical awareness that an already existing global community is ever more integrated in politically complex ways; perhaps primarily due to war, conquest and human displacement, but also through mutually beneficial commerce and peaceful movement. So, thirdly, questions arise about the transformation in the thought and practice of individual human beings as they become aware that, whatever local communities they feel they belong to, whatever local common sense they may adhere to, whether they wish it or not, they are part of a human community at large. The cosmopolitical sphere is, then, a scene of emergent mutual recognition of this interconnection. In turn, the cosmopolitical describes an arena for debating and contracting certain general principles – rights, freedoms – that should apply to all humans as such. Hence Kant’s
ius cosmopolitanicum postulating a basic extension of hospitality to all humans as citizens of a common humanity in-the-making ([1795]1988:112fn).

The role of anthropology in this Kantian picture is to discuss the pragmatics of what it means to be human in the light of the cosmopolitical framework; in particular to find out what humans can make of themselves as “free acting” beings who are nonetheless destined to share the same world for better or worse with others akin to themselves. Anthropology offers a guide both to the meaning of the diversity involved in this cosmopolitics but also, crucially, regarding what humans have in common, including their “unsocial sociability” — their tendencies toward both love and violence. As Thomas Sturm summarises Kant here:

We are citizens of the world in the sense that our nature is partly plastic, and more specifically that we ourselves produce our rules of action and, thereby, our social world. This is a fact that holds, in principle, for each of us, and which each of us better recognizes in social interaction (Sturm, "What Did Kant Mean...").

Kant’s sphere of cosmopolitical debate and action, and the anthropology that goes with it, are, of course, emblematic of an enlightenment view. Humans, belonging as they do to one species, have an obligation to care for their own kind. Recognising myself as an instance of humanity becomes a duty toward human beings at large. At the same time, by universalising the significance of my individual life, this recognition offers a kind of personal liberation of my individuality from pure historical contingency, while giving onto a genuinely informed politics. Incorporating the cosmopolitan project as a dimension of personal world-knowledge (weltkenntnis) is, meanwhile, a matter of developing one’s own schemas and ideas for life and in this way arriving at “maturity” (acquiring a “character” is another way Kant puts it [1798]2006). What Kant opens for the
kind of study we call anthropology, then, is the realisation
that the human being is a self-interpreting, self-
conceptualising, hence a self-making, creature. How this
human comes to interpret its own life – creating
schemas, analogies, symbols and concepts for it – is
inextricable from how its politics grow and take shape.

Because human nature is partly plastic, and the ideas
people live by are significantly an expression of their
freedom from natural constraints, anthropology is not a
natural, but rather a moral, science (an argument
developed by Dilthey). By reflecting on their own ideas
people can change them. This, in turn, means that human
thought is not susceptible to the same kind of analysis
that natural objects are. Anthropology is itself an
extension of the desire and freedom people have to
understand and change themselves. This reflexive
insight, in turn, gives the ground from which Kant argues
that, as they strive to define who they are, humans must
sooner or later arrive at an awareness that they are
citizens of a common cosmos since this is the necessary
horizon for defining their own humanity. This rethinking
takes place in the midst of fundamental uncertainty
about the nature of the world as it is outside the
conventions of human perception and conceptualisation.
Hence, for Kant, anthropology has as its central concern
the creation of a cosmopolitan conceptual toolkit that can
be put to use to rethink the pragmatics of our everyday
individual experience. To adapt a phrase, whether we are
consciously aware of it or not, “the personal is
cosmopolitical”.

The utopianism in Kant's account – a peaceful world
society is possible – is justified by his awareness that this
ever-intensifying social interdependence of human beings
globally – the inevitably inter-indemnifying struggles of
hospitality and hostility that humans engage in – has the
potential to lead toward moral institutions with greater
and greater inclusivity. From this stance, cosmopolitan
interaction (reasoned or unreasoned) is unavoidable, as
is the cosmopolitical debate that travels with it
([1795]1988). Hence, Kant gives the possibility of
peaceful cosmopolitan co-dwelling, within diverse ways of life and out of particular conceptions of freedom, as the widest ethical frame for his anthropology ([1798]2006). Living “wisely, agreeably and well” (as Keynes would later put it) at a global level is not only conceivable, there are some existing facts in favour of its achievability.

In this way, cosmopolitanism is not just a provocation constantly to review the global anthropological situation: more than this, the as-if utopia offered by a cosmopolitan end-state provides anthropology with its outer meaning as a type of knowledge and inquiry (wissenschaft) directed actively at the self-making of world citizens. It should be noted that the ethical framings of the kind Kant gave to anthropology were for the most part deemed irrelevant or anathema (if they were noticed at all) by the logical-positivist social science established in the Twentieth century with its unrecognised outer stabilising frame – nationalism. They were periodically picked up by anthropologists, notably Malinowski in his last manuscript, Freedom and Civilization. However, this short nationalist Century – 1918-1989 – is long gone and with it the implicit idea that the national boundary is also a boundary on morality and truth, albeit recent global events have again foregrounded a politics of isolationism or ‘nativism’ as it is now sometimes termed.

Acquiring a cosmopolitan orientation becomes the guiding ethical principle through which anthropology as a search for knowledge gains meaning, as opposed to being simply a pursuit of the Machiavellian or meaningless in human experience. At the same time, knowing that it is in the character of human beings to create new distinctive ideas for life, Kant presents anthropology as a quest on the part of humans through which they acquire new understanding of the concepts they are using, thereby gaining new insights and widening the scope their own freedoms. To know or understand something is to gain some autonomy with regard to that thing (cf. Lino e Silva and Wardle 2016). However, significantly, Kant's theory of the human is a
theory of the limits on human comprehension: some of these limits are set by the natural human capacity to sense the surrounding world, some by the limited hold humanly created concepts have on reality once human sensations are schematised into thoughts.

Clearly, many of the ideas and freedoms humans create for themselves and live by are delusional judged by their incompatibility with the larger principle of free and peaceful community with others world-wide; but who is to decide which ideas and on what grounds? An intercommunicating world entails a complexly, chaotically interconnected politics whose radical uncertainty threatens the rights and freedoms of all humans in contingent and variable ways. Kant's answer is cosmopolitan (self-)education (Hart 2010): learning to live in the same world. Each individual educates themselves to the best of their capacity in elements of a common ethics for a global type of life in the midst of fundamental mutual human uncertainty.

"A transgression of rights in one place in the world is felt everywhere" states Kant in support of his demand for a constantly re-initiated cosmopolitics ([1795]1988:119). Equally, a growth of freedoms in one place may also herald a like emergence elsewhere. We are wise to be alert to either of those potentials. These are ideas Simmel develops in the early Twentieth Century in his neo-Kantian theory of fission and fusion in social circles and the networks that connect them; and that Ulrich Beck extends in the end of that century with his conception of globally dispersed risks to the individual (Simmel [1922]1955, Beck 1992). For Kant, anthropology and cosmopolitanism answer a demand of rational self-interest; they supply the kind of knowledge individuals need to co-dwell in an increasingly interconnected and politically threatening world. His view is also crucially dialectical: new schemas, symbols and judgements about life appear out of the often hostile interaction between people and peoples. Hostility between ideas and communities is never absolute though; the constant need for re-envisaging humanness within a global frame comes
about because there are no absolute boundaries on human interchange and community. Certainly, cultures have some general, but not absolutely defining, characteristics. Likewise historical epochs do not place defining perimeters on human interchange, conceptual elaboration, or on the kinds of relations of ethical answerability that go with these.

Whatever the intensity of local common-sense metaphors, sentiments and aesthetic judgements, the real value of these are as conventional signposts expressing the contingent relationship of the diversely placed individual to their universal situation – the ramifying network that is the human cosmos taken as a whole (Kant [1790]1952, Wardle 1995). In his anthropology and elsewhere Kant makes use of the ethnological evidence provided in his day, but ethnology is not an end in itself. We need to know about the ideas and ways of lives of others, not because of their fascinating linguistic or conceptual differences to us as such (themes developed by Herder and Humboldt for example), but instead because the continuance and development of their distinctive conventions, social rules and freedoms are intrinsically interconnected with the future of our own. Here begins Kant's daunting (some will say impossible) task of cosmopolitan self-education.

Cosmopolitan awareness does not, then, rest in knowledge of sui generis differences, rather it involves an exploration of difference toward a continuous imaginative expansion of the area of our common human truths and common human goods. In this way, the narrower horizon of responsibilities to an immediate circle of relationships widens into a duty to humans in general allowing of highly diverse ways of thinking and acting. Every individual has a stake in this kind of cosmopolitical knowledge whether they realise it yet or not (Wardle 2000, 2010, 2015). Kant would respond to the oft reiterated jibe that cosmopolitanism is merely the language of the elite or the narcissistic by answering that we are all cosmopolitans (Josephides and Hall 2014). Logically, and as a matter of fact, as humans we are all
involved in creating the cosmopolitical institutions of the future. What kind of future that will be, what our place in it will be, we cannot yet tell. The common cosmos is always an object of search and variable judgement, but we can assume that our acts of moral imagining and choice now will effect the outcome – the “kingdom of ends” as Kant puts it.

**Building a picture of the new cosmopolitics** – ontologies, non-human agents and “decolonisation of thought”

Whatever we make of Kant’s cosmopolitics, there is, however, a second, newer use of the “cosmopolitical” that builds on a deep-seated modernist sense of anthropocentric uncertainty and anxiety, one that casts doubt on both the perceived unity of the human and also the possibility of a shared common world. Puzzlingly this newer cosmopolitics has tended to deny any relation to the old. Stengers, who coined this newer usage, states that she was unaware of Kant’s use when she first developed her own and that her alternative view denies Kant’s applicability:

“I’m very likely to be told that... I shouldn’t have taken a Kantian term... I was unaware of Kantian usage... the cosmopolitical proposal, as presented here, denies any relationship with Kant or with the ancient cosmopolitanism” (2005:994)

Given that what she is describing claims no connection to the older significance, what, then, do Stengers and those who draw on her work mean by “cosmopolitics”? As we will see, the question extends to this: is there in fact a connection between these two distinct understandings of cosmos and politics despite the claim to epistemological distinctness; and if there is, what does this relation consist in? What kind of dialogue can be established and on what terms? The question demands a further explication of the newer usage. This will also give us an opportunity to see where the papers for this
volume fit into, or offer a perspective on, a revised concept of the cosmopolitical.

If the kind of cosmopolitical awareness described by Kant has been with us for so long, traceable to the Stoics and beyond, why does the goal of intra-species recognition and responsibility still seem so far away? This turns out to be a key implicit quandary for the newer cosmopoliticians. It is one which they answer by pointing to the fact that for humans there is not a single cosmos but rather many cosmologies, multiple changing worldviews, and as such, there is no singular knowable world or humanity. Rather, there are as many ways of knowing what it means to be human as there are projects of knowing. From Stengers viewpoint and those who have expanded it such as Latour, the enlightenment politics of human recognition is founded on a transcendental illusion of foundational common knowledge. The very capacity for self-interpretation that Kant shows is key to understanding what we have in common is also the ground for a fragmented, multi-dimensional, multi-foundational politics. “Perspective” thence acquires the uttermost significance in this approach; diverse perspectives offer up multiplex and chaotically juxtaposed ontologies, but no simple vista onto a common world, nor a simple picture of the human. In this newer view the “cosmos” in cosmopolitics becomes charged in a way not seen since Diogenes and the Cynics in ancient Greece (Turner 2015).

Questions of metaphysics, ontology and cosmology are, indeed, in the air in Twenty First Century philosophy and anthropology. The engagement with the ontic, with what people studied by ethnographers take to exist, amounts to something of a revitalization movement for an ethnographically-driven anthropology if we are to judge by contemporary heated debates (cf. Carrithers, Michael, et al. 2010, Holbraad and Pedersen 2014), or the newly formed journal *Hau*, whose stated aim is “to reinstate ethnographic theorization in contemporary anthropology as a potent alternative to its “explanation” or “contextualization” by philosophical arguments”.

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literature has grown voluminously in this area, but one symptomatic feature is the heightened awareness of the “other-than-human-agents” active in the ethnographic worlds in which anthropologists travel. We have become attuned to identifying new kinds of entities, in particular, new types of agents in places where they might not have been noticed before; or where, in the past, we might have dismissed their presence as poetry or reification (trying in this way to reduce them to prefigured philosophical “contexts” or “explanations” such as “myth”, “belief”, or even “representation” itself perhaps). The newer cosmopolitics is above all about rethinking inter-entity relationships. We are no longer guided by looking at how humans live in what we take to be “their” environment, “their” umwelt; the other beings and things involved will have their say. Their viewpoint must be taken into account, including on what constitutes an environment or unwelt in the first place. Other than human entities can no longer be thought of as mere supports for “our” world, or as symbols for human thought-consumption in general.

We will recognise too, though, the distinctly human agents whose ideas are feeding these debates, especially Bruno Latour and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro who have become its main figureheads and provocateurs, at least within anthropology. These two have different, but in some areas compatible, theoretical agendas. Latour is working with a theory whereby agency (the capacity to create effects) appears as a facet of participation in a network (originally ethnographically centered on the actor-networks of scientists, e.g. Latour 1988). Some of the agents involved are recognizably human and some are not. One of Latour’s points is that the particular capacities of the humans would be impossible without the assistance of the non-human agents and “actants”. Having established the great diversity of these networks, he has called on Isabelle Stengers’ cosmopolitics to talk about what happens at the boundary between different projects and the cosmoses they bring into being, as well as the work of translation that mediate them (Latour 2005a, 2005b).
Viveiros de Castro takes as his starting point lowland Amazonian societies where human relationships with other animal and spiritual beings are of the essence, and the capacities of humans are again integrated with the capacities of non-human-agents in the task of regenerating society. Crucially, he has repositioned a generic and defining feature of animist worldviews: humans, animals and certain objects, despite their outward appearance (their skins), share soul stuff (and hence a single culture or worldview) and are thus capable of transforming and exchanging their multiple natural outer forms. The particularities of the “human condition” are thus discovered through contrasts (and transformations) with the condition of “beasts” and “gods” (1992:304). This animist insight has a central status in his specialised social theory, “Amerindian perspectivism” (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 2012).

The importance of these ideas for an understanding of cosmopolitics comes from their power in combination. Latour’s extension of network theory to include non-human-agents gains strength from Viveiros de Castro’s revised exploration of an animist worldview. Viveiros de Castro’s theory, specific to Amazonian societies, takes on much greater significance as part of Latour’s reappraisal of modernity (Latour 2004, 2009), and vice versa. Latour's critique of the moderns (1993) is newly mobilized in Viveiros de Castro's generalized symmetrical perspectival anthropology (see his “Manifesto Abaeté”5) and in his emphasis on the “controlled equivocation” needed for conceptual translation and ethnographic description (2004). Of itself, animism is hardly news in the world of anthropology (even taking into account the special turn Viveiros de Castro gives it) but Viveiros de Castro’s ideas gain much greater force if it turns out that, in one way or another, we are all animists, which is effectively what Latour has been arguing for some years, that “we have never been modern” (1993).

By removing the hierarchical order that makes a singular nature the measure of every subordinate worldview (cf. Wagner 1981), the new cosmopoliticians,
in principle, democratize cosmology opening the door to an infinite number of further universes. Rather than trying to eliminate inadequate worldviews in the name of nature, each cosmos is welcomed for the project it describes; there is no best cosmology that all could aim towards partly because there is no “totality”, only many transforming networks and communities of actors and entities. Even Hilbert’s hotel (Benardette 1964) with its infinite number of rooms is full sometimes, but this can easily be remedied — the guest in room 1 shifts one room down along the corridor ad infinitum. Here, we can knock on the door of Humanity1, H2, H3..., H∞. Thus, theoretically at least, space is made for each new entry in the cosmological encyclopedia – a splendidly baroque scene of endless refractory courtyards, staircases and corridors. At the same time, of course, the cosmopolitical anthropologists present themselves in the special role of describers, translators, negotiators and diplomats (Latour 2005b) when it comes to neighbourly relations between all these “rooms” or cosmoses. This image of infinite space crumpled into the form of rooms is central to Deleuze's account of the Leibnizian fold (1993), whose language Vivieros de Castro transposes to his own theory of “Amerindian” and “anthropological” perspectivism (e.g. 2007:160). It is also the theme that Corsin Jimenez takes as his starting point in understanding anthropological knowledge practices (this volume).

Combined, a central feature of these new perspectives is that they remind us how humans depend on other-than-human agencies for their social projects. These relationships are not peripheral. They are of the essence in understanding how people gain a cosmological perspective. In particular these relationships should be understood as constitutive of what it means to be a human actor because human capacities transform in concert with the changing relationships between human and non-human actors. Taken even further, then, humanness (subjectivity) is relative to whatever particular networks and relationships appear situationally. We are reminded of Wagner's image of the “fractal person” — “never a unit standing in relation to
an aggregate, or aggregate standing in relation to a unit, but always an entity with relationship integrally implied” (1991, p. 163). Hence, we may view these new developments as, on the one side, subtracting from the ethics of human recognition and hospitality that guided the older cosmopolitics. However, perhaps we may come to see them as having promethean qualities too. Certainly (some) human voices will lose their right to speak for everyone; but at the same time it may come about that others gain a voice (cf. de la Cadena 2015). And there may be similar losses and gains when we place the two kinds of cosmopolitics in a conversation.

Both Viveiros de Castro and Latour are working out of a structuralist-post-structuralist trajectory which involves decentring and relativizing human subjectivity. Of course, we have known about the relationships between humans and other-than-human entities for a long time in anthropology – as the extensive literature around totemism, taboo animals and liminal objects shows. In his book *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, (1935) Bergson indicates that when we stare at the spinning roulette wheel and rotate our hand to “make it” stop where we want, then we are, in a generic way, invoking the same kinds of animistic-magical-pantheistic forces that we humans have always enlisted in pursuing our life projects. Bergson adds that what we call religious experience can lead both to “closed” and to “open” ways of experiencing the material world and its psychic properties. In an ecstatic open mode,

> the soul opens out broadens and raises to pure spirituality a morality enclosed and materialized in ready-made rules: the latter then becomes, in comparison with the other [the open mode of experiencing] something like a snap-shot view of movement … Current morality is not abolished; but it appears like a virtual stop in the course of actual progression (1935:46).

However, leaving the history of thought entailed here
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aside, combined, these newer expositions have allowed us to clear some of the intellectual overgrowth; perhaps enabled us to see some new wood beyond.

One key issue is this: as anthropologists our focus often narrows to particular people and their relations with each other, but for the people in question, their world is not made up solely of other people or of human relationships: it is engaged with a panoply of diverse significant entities and relationships between them. In this volume (“An Amazonian Question of Ironies and the Grotesque”), Joanna Overing tells how the Piaroa of the Amazon, must continuously try to clean up the poisons left behind by the gods Wahari and Kuemoi in Mythic Time so that they can live a human life now. The practices of ingestion, excretion and cleansing involved are absolutely of the essence in living a beautiful life of wit and laughter in their present day cosmos. In a different vein, but with a comparable degree of ethical and aesthetic concern, Sidney Mintz’ gathers together decades of his own interest in kinds of food and ways of eating (“Devouring Objects of Study: Food and Fieldwork”). All this offers him the ground for a global vision of human beings united in their dependence on foodstuffs (we know ourselves through what we eat); and of the anthropologist as, in turn, a “devourer” of these varying “objects”. Humans, we come to see, are unified by their fragile relations with a diversely edible world. And, we may think here of the efforts made by space scientists to domesticate extraterrestrial environments in light of anthropocenic awareness that the earth may soon become too toxic to support human life (Battaglia 2016).

The older cosmopolitics understood that the subject knows itself by way of the objects that preoccupy it – that make up its world. The aim is an “enlarged mind” (to use Kant’s phrase; [1790]1952:153) capable of extending the scope of its preoccupations. However, the newer cosmopolitics goes further; subjectivity is co-dependent — it is the kinds of exchanges between humans and other agents and entities that are key to a cosmos: “humans”, “beasts”, “things”, “gods” together compose particular,
mutually defining, worlds (collective “nature-cultures”).

Some of the entities we encounter in these worlds, as strangers or guests, will feel familiar, others much less so. Adjusting our ethnographic focus can, then, offer rewarding perspectives and remind us to consider, in any given field situation, “for this person, or for those people, how is their community, their cosmos, made up?” And, in talking of a community we will include not just the relationships of human beings, but also all the other agents and crucial objects that are clearly participating and contributing to whatever meaning “society”, “community” and “cosmos” comes to encompass.

The basic question that the newer cosmopolitics has revitalized, then, is how do all these beings and things (which were taken to have a merely semiotic status in previous “cultural” accounts) participate actively in the lives of the people anthropologists are studying? For example, if someone says in a tragic tone that “society”, “the healthcare system” or “the banks” have failed, then the ontologically-oriented reader will feel entitled to raise the question “what kind of other-than-human-entitites are these that they can ‘fail’ a given person, shared project or cosmos?” In this vein, Mitt Romney claimed during the 2012 US presidential elections that “Corporations are people too my friend”. Corporations do indeed increasingly present themselves as persons politically and economically, but, of course, this is actually not new (see Bashkow n.d. for an anthropological understanding of modern corporations as a transformation of “house societies”): social persons of this kind have long been able to invoke their jural right to freedom of worship, for example. The (quasi-)political claims of “bodies corporate” were a prime object of enlightenment critique, of course, as *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) exemplifies. This was because the political power of the corporations in their day stood directly at odds with how enlightenment thinkers understood individual freedom and human moral agency. Adam Smith exemplifies this stance, but it is integral too to Immanuel Kant’s view and hence to his understanding of how a cosmopolitics should
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proceed. So it seems worth our while (both as anthropologists and as human beings) to treat claims on behalf of corporations very seriously, and to treat the power of other-than-human-agents likewise. Above all, Stengers asks that, as makers of claims about a “good common world” or of one yet to be composed, anthropologists and others should “slow down”, and exercise a certain Dostoievskian “idiocy”; we should recognise and pay attention to the many participants and cosmological interests involved in a situation before assuming we can already know “who can be a spokesperson of what, who can represent what” (2005:995).

As ethnographers, if we can shape what is involved in these kinds of concerns and questions into a method, then the answers we uncover are likely to be revealing: we will gain new concepts and frames for anthropological comparison – new accents on what reality can be like for a human being. Even for Viveiros de Castro, this seems to be what is motivating his theory; he is interested in what the world is like for Amazonians precisely because they too are human. Their world is interesting “to think with” precisely because it too is a “human” world, hence his interest as an anthropologist (Viveiros de Castro 2014). As we might expect, this kind of striving curiosity lies behind many of the chapters in our volume: for example John McCreery (“Why Do the Gods Look Like That”) asks why, when divinity is known to be immaterial, there are human-like statues of Chinese deities and why do the gods differ as they do in the ways in which they are depicted? Wei-Ping Lin has provided one answer: “statues make the formless omnipresent gods settle down and build a stable connection with the villagers” (2008:460): McCreery tests the implications of this. Again, questions of cosmos are answered by exploring the inter-entity relationships involved, but the knowledge derived is still very much knowledge about a human perspective.

A few years ago, the BBC released a film made by Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi called *The Village that
Emad Burnat, a one time Palestinian farmer, is the narrator and the film is made up of video footage edited to show the struggle between people in Bil’in and the Israeli army and Israeli settlers in this part of the West Bank. The film foregrounds the effects this has on the villagers, many of whom are arrested, some shot and one is killed by Israeli soldiers, and on Emad Burnat himself. The “five cameras” of the film are quite explicitly presented as protagonists in Emad’s narrative since they are either shot at or otherwise broken. Emad’s compulsion to film, and the fact of the camera constantly “filming”, become cruxes for understanding the reality of the situation. Other key agents include the Israeli jeeps, the bulldozers and excavators, the wire mesh wall that divides the Palestinians from their former farmland, the newly built high rise settlements that tower over the surrounding landscapes, the olive trees that are torn up at the roots or set alight. In the unfolding visual description we see different objects acquiring prominence as components of the “struggle”: the villagers build an “outpost” on what they consider to be their own land and this building then takes on a certain life of its own.

Looking at a situation of this kind, the new ontologists will have us attend to the objects and people that are cooperating (or otherwise) immediately in the unfolding of this particular reality, this specific montage of shots. They would have us see all this, not in terms of the mechanisms and structures of a static society, but as elements of a process through which reality is constantly being sutured together. There is clearly value in this way of looking, because it takes us closer, in certain ways, to what the people involved actually perceive. What they envisage acquires greater significance than if we claim that this is a “representation”, an “identity” or the expression of a “system of symbols”. And, so, anthropologists may be able to jettison some of the heavy machinery of interpretation by which they mediate between “reality” and “ideology” – structure, semiosis, episteme, doxa, whatever. So far so good we may think. This, for example, is a central concern of the chapter.
“Can the Thing Speak?” by Martin Holbraad, who has taken a key part in arguing for a revised kind of ontological awareness in anthropology. And here he makes a further step. We should no longer perhaps think of what we do as a study of (or an) “anthropos” — perhaps what we need instead is a deep “thing-ology”, one that gives us much more direct access to things as they are, not as they are mediated by human-oriented concerns about belief or representation.

That “things” can act independently of human intentions should hardly come as too much surprise; the question is of course which, when and where and who is in control. In particular how is this awareness operationalized and theorized in an ethnographic account? Daniel Miller gives us one answer in his “Extreme Reading of Facebook” (this volume). Facebook is a body corporate, a “big bang”, whose powers of engrossment may seem mind-boggling to anyone (perhaps those very few remaining persons) of a fusty enlightenment mind-set. Miller makes a crucial point when he argues from Nancy Munn that the power of a body like Facebook lies in its command of “negative transformations of spacetime... any cultural form that creates expansion has to have within itself the opposite quality which would destroy and shrink spacetime”. Titanic powers of this type may well remind us of Overing’s account of the Myth Time struggles of Kuemoi and Wahari strewing behind them a world full of poisons for the people of Today Time to sort out, re-ingest and turn into a beautiful “human life”. However, these questions of scalar expansion and contraction are taken up in another register by Alberto Corsin-Jimenez in his chapter (“How Knowledge Grows”) to talk about the “optics of volumes” involved in being able to envisage the state as a large body, specifically as “Leviathan”. The most individualist of thinkers will accept that the State is “something big”, it has “large proportions” thus its effects on humans are large — how has this knowledge of the state body come about? Corsin-Jimenez offers an erudite survey of the intellectual-technical means by which the modern state acquired space and embodiment.
His intervention also reminds us that in the background of the new ontology are “hyperobjects” — objects such as “global warming” or “finance money” that are so large, and whose effects are so ungovernable, that they defeat traditionally “modern” scales of human thought and action (Morton 2013).

The ideas underlying the new cosmopolitics are clearly potent and have reach, but a few initial sounds of caution are warranted. At the ethnographic level, applying the kinds of insights that Latour and others are developing via this programme still presents us with a politics of explanation when we decide to generalize – when we make claims at the “cosmological” level. In Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead’s joint research project – *The Study of Culture at a Distance* – there is a case where former Shtetl jews are being interviewed, and one of the lines of inquiry concerns whether women have souls or not. The male interviewees seem unanimously to take the view that women do not have souls. When a woman is interviewed about whether women have souls she replies “certainly, more than men” (Mead et al. 1953:135-137). So immediately we can witness how friction regarding the way the cosmos is constituted is not just friction between different peoples and their cosmologies, but also takes place within groupings and it scales down to the level of individual meaning (see Radin’s *Crashing Thunder* for more on this, 1926). Joanna Overing, who has worked for many decades with the Amazonian Piaroa, has indicated that Viveiros de Castro’s interpretive emphasis on predation and certain kinds of relationship with spirit-beings amongst the Araweté has the effect of giving analytical preeminence to adult men (shamans and warriors) in that world – because prioritizing the significance of certain kinds of ritual exchange with spirit-beings also foregrounds the power of male human beings to make society (e.g. Viveiros de Castro 1992:142; note the contrast with Overing 1999, 2004, n.d.). Anyone who has read Evans-Pritchard’s The Nuer (1940) carefully will notice that the point of view that predominates is that of a young adult Nuer man. So, again, alongside the issue of subjective
change and personal transformation, we are left with dormant questions about how the community or cosmos might be constituted otherwise from other subject-positions.

In fact, many ethnographic accounts are written out of the experiences of young, often single (or at least alone in the field), graduate students of perceived affluency, already given to occupying certain social categories and networks, both at “home” and in the “field”, positions that thus limit their perspectives and understandings. When it comes to a vision of a kind of fieldwork that might collapse these predictable categories of field and home, questioner and questioned, friend and informant, the discussion here (“Friendship, Anthropology”) by Liria de la Cruz and Paloma Gay y Blasco precisely helps us reconsider the fieldsite and the ethnography that awaits it as analytical artifacts built out of the experience of particular kinds of human relationship. We are reminded that the notion of “the gypsy woman”, the “middle class Spanish woman” are precisely operationalized by the type of intellectual apparatus that is an ethnography. In this way, we come to recognise this artefactual character of the ethnography when it comes to rethinking our individual experiences of friendship, of being categorized, of categorizing; and the part these play in our notion of “our” world.

What is valuable in all this “ontological” discussion, then, is at least twofold: it reminds us of the purpose of ethnographic work as Malinowski described it, which is to understand “their” (the people with whom we as anthropologists work) “vision” of their “world”; and, in addition, when it helps clear out of the way some of the mediating theoretical language. We cannot achieve the basic Malinowskian insight if we have already decided in advance what a “rationally” structured world looks like and what kinds of actors are existent or non-existent and how they really are, or ought to be, ordered and interrelated. This is what the newer cosmopolitics is challenging. Arguably, the highpoint of the rationalist stance in anthropology came in the late 70s and early
80s. By then ethnography had become far less engaged with understanding how people in a certain setting viewed their world, and much more concerned with identifying where those people fit in preconceived theoretical templates, whether that be Structuralist, Marxist, Cognitivist, or Semiotic-Interpretive.

In this particular sense, the more rationalistic and linguistically orthodox ethnographic writing became, the more circular it became too; since it ceased to matter how the particular people involved thought about and acted on the questions at issue. The post-modern trend certainly undermined confidence in what theory could do by itself in that respect: but, as has often been noted, post-modern writing, if anything, took us further away from people and instead attended to the life and concerns of the ethnographer, and a lot of what resulted was facile and narcissistic. One positive reaction to this has been to argue much more vigorously for the phenomenological validity of informants’ concepts with the aim of “rendering [their] categories analytical” (Toren and Pina Cabral 2009:10). Ethnography thus becomes the apparatus for an analytical “rendering” of local terms – baloma, baraka, cargo, the corner, crab antics, mana, mayu-dama, moka, naven, offcomers – concept-words which, for all their specificity in capturing a world outlook and a pattern of action, still yield insights into universal human capabilities for the perspectives they offer on different “spaces of reason”. The new cosmopolitics could be described as “neo-rationalist” in this regard, highlighting the creative work that concepts – whether “etic” or “emic” – do in different knowledge practices (Crook and Shaffner 2011). For instance, they can enable us to put in question ideological principles that have a similarly reified status in our outlook (e.g. marriage, productivity, mental illness, and welfare), including those that act as an analogic base for modern anthropology and ethnographic description, such as “kinship” (Schneider 1984), “culture” (Wagner 1981), or the “relation” (Strathern 1995). Cosmopolitics, then, involves putting a more varied, and more jaggedly juxtaposed, range of concepts into play to test out the
parameters of our supposedly common world and the experience of being human in it.

Given this awareness of the analytic value of terms like these, what seems to be strikingly absent in the ontological approaches we have discussed so far is a consideration of *imagination*. For an anthropologist, questions of the kind “which agents are participating in the world of the people we work with?” fundamentally comes back to a concern with how those people – individually and in aggregate – *imagine their world*. So, in asking that type of question, we are giving an epistemological value to their ways of imagining and reasoning. We are, after all, hoping to answer why these people do the things they do; not from our preformed theoretical template, but from what we understand to be their pattern of thought and action. There is a problem involved here that philosophers describe in terms of “internalism” versus “externalism” (e.g. Williams 1981). Are people’s reasons for action best understood in terms of their motivations (internalism) or by reference to the layout of the field they find themselves in (externalism)? We can cut a long story short here by asking how far we anthropologists will go in crediting our own external gaze, and our capacity to model the given situation (including its ontic properties), with the power to explain the internal motivations and understandings of those we are encountering (Wardle 2014: 280).

Concerns akin to these (and to those described by John McCreery) are explored by Philip Swift (in his chapter on “Cosmetic Cosmologies in Japan”). At Ise, Buddhist and Shinto shrines “[e]verything happens as if the invocation is simulated, seemingly going no further than the curve and contact of surfaces – clapping, bowing, and the pressing of palms together.” There is indeed “*something happening here/What it is ain’t exactly clear*” since responses to questions are frequently equivocal, but whatever “it” is demands an inspection of our intuitively held topology of internal versus external, motivation versus outcome. This awareness of “*something happening*” seems, in turn, to depend on a particular
understanding of the “surface” which, while it is literally “superficial”, its very artificiality is also “efficacious”. We are led to ask what notional self or motivational state (for example, what manner of “prayer”) is implied by this particular mode of relationship to divine objects whose divinity is often disavowed. A Protestant “man of action” may feel uncomfortable here we guess, but there is nothing inactive about Japanese social life; indeed the gods do not want offerings that have not been “fabricated by means of a device”. We are left with a puzzle and a challenge.

We have seen that Latour’s interest in ontology has to do with describing what kinds of coalition of human and non-human agents are at work in creating a particular reality - and hence what it is like to be a subject or agent in this or that arrangement or assemblage, which is where “cosmopolitics” has also entered the picture. If particular situations throw up distinct coalitions of subjectivity and agency, then these will show up as a distinct “cosmology”. It is not obvious from Latour’s description how the transition or translation involved, from network to cosmological gestalt, comes about — how the cosmological boundary is formed. Nonetheless, different coalitions and cosmologies clash where some key feature of their world is at stake. A mining company conflicts with a group of forest users over the capacities, meaning and value of the entities and forces present in that setting. Latour points to the fact that this kind of clash is not just one between Western technological civilization and a “local culture” over the same resource; it is a clash between two entirely distinct assemblages of people and things for whom reality coheres in fundamentally distinct ways. They cut the network differently (Strathern 1996).

In Tristes Tropiques, Levi-Strauss mentions a case where Spanish colonists torture Amerindians to see if they have souls, while Amerindians drown a conquistador to see if he has a body: their worlds and their world-hypotheses - their cosmo-ontologies - are fundamentally distinct. It should be noted though that the logic of the
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differences involved indicates, for Levi-Strauss at least, a common manner of structuring thought (1973:91). It is a shared logical foundation of this kind that Jean La Fontaine (this volume) draws on in her chapter here when she critically assesses our fear the others are engaged in profane acts of human sacrifice (“Ritual Murder?”). Ironically, inhumanity is ascribed to others according to a universally available human thought-scheme.

The outcome of clashes of understanding like these will be, Latour suggests, that either one of these realities is erased, or there will develop some kind of negotiation and redefinition of terms. Notice that Latour is not an internalist – the reasons the individual gives for whatever is going on are insufficient because the truth of their cosmology is not to be found in what one person thinks about the matter, but is rather distributed across the network, particularly in the co-activities of all the other agents. But, nor is Latour an externalist either – that which is exterior to the actor only makes sense if we take into account what this actor is aiming at, who they are trying to enlist and wherefore. The perspective on reality is itself a fold of reality: what appears to be internal knowledge is external seen from the adjacent position that overlaps and encloses it. A lot of this feels quite paradoxical and we may feel that this adds to its attraction.

In his chapter here (“Cosmopolitics and Common Sense”), Huon Wardle comments on this aspect of the Latourian viewpoint. Indeed the question of “viewpoint” is curious in all this. Latour is always careful to avoid a claim to any special analytical position from which to understand some other person’s network or cosmology. He is certainly arguing against the possibility of any type of “externalist” or transcendent stance from where we might judge what is “really” going on. Me (and “my” knowledge) are always inside the “social” according to Latour. In this regard, he likes to use metaphors from computing: as subjects we are always plugging in new connections and downloading new signifiers that will
help us extend our network capabilities, nevertheless we cannot reach beyond the horizon of our own particular knowledge state because this knowledge is integrated in a supportive network. We would, so to speak, be tearing our own knowledge out of its own fabric of meaning by doing so. We may add components and programmes to enhance our capacity: either way, there is no view “outside” our networked subjectivity. Following the philosopher Leibniz, Latour thinks that I/we is always already occupying whatever optimal reality it can at any given moment.

This may remind us of Voltaire’s satirical creation, Dr Pangloss, who lives “for the best in the best of all possible worlds”. And, if we have understood Latour, there really is no universalisable standpoint from which subjectivity can take a view on and then critique its own understanding in any foundational terms; which also means there is no transcendent position from which an anthropologist can critique the conditions of experience of another person or group of people. The role of the anthropologist is rather to describe the enfolding and remaking of reality with certain actors in view. But let us remind ourselves that the politics of cosmology, both between cosmologies and amongst groupings of people is usually precisely aimed at organizing and ranking certain ways of understanding the world, and, in some cases, at the extreme, this will involve the intentional eclipsing, or erasing, of particular points of view.

Latour does, though, praise the potential in anthropology to show that there are many ways of living a life. This side-by-side diversity seems to offer an opportunity for a kind of critical appraisal; the process of comparison involved might also contribute toward the peaceful negotiation between cosmological views. Sometimes Latour points to a special role for anthropologists in mediating between clashing cosmologies (a kind of disinterested third party?), but it is not clear at what point this mediation might become an externalist view vis-à-vis each side; hence the anthropologist would be making claims to intellectual
transcendence which Latour has seemingly already ruled out of bounds within the game of asking and giving of reasons. In what seems like a similar vein, Viveiros de Castro has urged anthropology to be “as the practice of the permanent *decolonization* of thought” (2014).

This, however, taking into account Latour’s argument, feels incoherent. Viveiros de Castro appears to be asking that we should relinquish “our” *given* view in favour of its constant variation and transformation through encounters with others’, and particularly, that we should halt the colonisation of other people’s worlds through the superimposition onto theirs of our own cosmological models and concerns. We may well sympathise with that proposition, but it does not seem compatible with what Latour is telling us. Latour argues that we can negotiate about our mutually incomprehensible cosmologies, but we cannot absolutely “decolonise” our view because this would involve jumping out of our conjunction in the network into some kind of transcendent position. At best we can adapt our view into something else: innovation and transformation necessitate convention as an analogic base, or starting point (Wagner 1981). Perhaps, then, we would colonise in a new way but, it would seem, we do not decolonise, *per se*. Maybe this is what Viveiros de Castro already means by that phrase, one can only guess, since here we are at the outer limits of understanding the programme that they are laying out, sometimes in a shared, sometimes in a distinct, register.

**Some final Remarks on subjectivity and imagining; and the beginning of a critical response**

There is a lot that is useful food for thought in the approaches that “the ontologists” (Holbraad and Pedersen 2014) are making available. We have mentioned some features; the focus shifts from deploying a heavy theoretical machinery vis-à-vis social reality toward closely observing the kinds of aggregates of people and things that fieldwork affords. All this is grist for the mill of following the lines of interconnection that the people that we are working with in the “field” have themselves
established as important. Researching the field from the point of view that we are all animists may well yield rewards – though further questioning is necessary when we ask on behalf of a particular situation, “in what way is that true? And how is it important?” Or, how to recompose an understanding of the world or the human in the singular from all of these different multiple perspectives. Do they add up, and if so, how? So, epistemologically, there are other kinds of concern too.

It is striking that, despite Latour’s claims, particularly his insistence that subjectivity is always network-specific, there is in fact a universal capacity at stake here (already mentioned) – imagination. Human beings live in distinct worlds, at least in part, because they imagine them distinctly. Some particular human being may recognise agency in a stone or in their i-device; this will change from scene to scene. In contrast, we know that all human beings imagine things and that this activity is constitutive of what the world is like for any given human being. Imagining is a universal capacity of humans (distinctive, though, we might add, not exclusive). My empathic ability (or inability) to orient myself in another’s world, a world that is foreign to me, is likewise an imaginative capacity and a limiting condition (or an absence of one; see Stein 1989). In contrast, the particular agency of stones or i-phones varies depending on the social set-up. Imagining and reality are sometimes opposed to each other (as are empathy and psychological naturalism), but we should also remind ourselves that imagining is the ground from which reality is constituted via experience – there is no experience that does not involve imagining. To quote Mimica, “What we call “reality” and “rationality” are its works” (2003: 282). They are literally after the fact of the imagination.

If one is not philosophically a Leibnizian, one may find it hard to take Latour’s claims that objects have intentionality as seriously as we do the fact that human beings imagine and thence they conjure into being highly diverse human scenarios. The imagination is constitutive of our perception and experience of reality – and often
realities clash: we are not calling here on the distinction imagination versus reality, but rather on the synthetic relation imagination-and-reality. However, when considering Leibniz’ central place in contemporary “ontological” framings of the project of anthropology, his role as a founder, *arguably the founder*, of ethnology in the Seventeenth Century should also be acknowledged (Vermeulen 2015); likewise the deep-seated differences from the very beginning between the projects of ethnology and anthropology despite their common origins in Enlightenment thought. Here, then, we may note an antithesis: between infinite perspectival extension of intellectuality versus the limits of reason, between ethnology and anthropology, between Leibniz and Kant.

*We are all animists, then*, in the sense that, in figuring the world, and in living in it, we recognise ourselves as enlisting the assistance of innumerable things, people and non-human-agencies that help us continue the project of a life with others. Our claim then is the capacity for imagination is a human universal; one possessed by anthropologists *in common* with the people they work with. In contrast, the sense in which cockatoos, *khipu* knots, corporations, i-phones, or financial instruments act and have intentionality varies from fieldsite to fieldsite. This is not at all to dictate *what* people *should* imagine, or to prejudge how their worlds *should* look to them, let along why – certainly not to rule out certain worlds or particular formations of reality *a priori*. Nor is it to deny that other animals have their own respective cognitions (e.g. de Waal 2016). There is plenty of room to debate and celebrate *how* the imagination participates in making reality. But it is clear that the fact of imagining does offer a universally available position of (cosmopolitan) critique because all human beings share this faculty. And here one is reminded of a comment by Hannah Arendt:

> Imagination... is the only inner compass we have, we are contemporaries only as far as our imagination reaches. If we want to be at home on
this earth, even at the expense of being at home in this Century, we must try to take part in the interminable dialogue with its essence (1953).

Anthropocentric anxiety is also anthropocenic uncertainty. The older comforting perception of the protecting hand of Leviathan supporting mid-Twentieth Century anthropology’s notion of culture has fragmented – with mechanical bits and pieces left in its place. Meanwhile, intensified awareness of being part of the same human species beyond the older circles of sympathy accompanies and triggers contemporary fears that humans have altered the balance between themselves and nature to such a degree as to set off ungovernable ontological effects; perhaps most of all irreversible chaotic environmental change forced forward by the unstoppable financialiation of the common human landscape. Anthropologists were quicker than most to diagnose the “runaway” character of global society and the human as a “fearful god” in the midst of its creations (1968); but in the interim the world ran away even faster leaving the expert and their expert knowledge ever further behind. The individual human, once mechanically severed from those it loves, hates, eats and kills – beasts, plants, things, gods – is also a homeless being, one incapable of hospitality. This modernist insight, accelerated by contemporary facts, surely underlies part of the urgent activity of the newer cosmopoliticians.

What the clash between the old and new cosmopolitics highlights, then, is a central and continuing problem for anthropology — one that is at least as much a matter of epistemology as of ontology: ways of knowing have their own “ontogenesis” (Gow 2011), but our capacity to comprehend this fact is epistemic. How, imaginatively, are anthropologists to localize the places, people, concepts and experiences that compose the intellectual apparatus that is “a fieldsite” within a larger local-global topology, or a common cosmos writ large? What kinds of ideas of cause and effect should ground our accounts — a scientific conception of the cosmos? Our “common
sense”, folk conceptions? Is it instead the cosmos as expressed in the words and actions of our informants that counts? In a world of massive human movement we can hardly expect ethnographic concepts to stay in place. And if so is the “informant” a specific category of person or can they truly be “anyone” (Rapport 2012)? The motto that Leach adopted for anthropology was “only connect” (1967), but how should we place their cosmology in relation to our own? Should theirs be bridged to ours, and if so, at what point? How to keep one from taking the other hostage? Do we anthropologists have, anyway, anything approximating to a unified cosmology? Ultimately, we may ask, what is cosmology? This renewed problem of localization (cf Fardon 1990, Negarestani 2014), with its concern for how to establish a ground for anthropological understanding, and hence ethnography, in many ways re-plays the inaugural moment of “modern anthropology”, which has haunted the history of the discipline ever since, and here we return to Kant and his original grounding of cosmopolitics in universal history.

“Humanness” is both given by nature and also a thing of the human’s own making, Kant argues, saying this in an era where other enlightenment thinkers, like Hume took the make up of the human to be universal and given. What we call “culture” is precisely the visible byproduct of this human self-making, for Kant. He thus makes room for freedom in his argument: there is freedom to make different manners of life, distinct kinds of social truths on top of, out of, and in addition to what is naturally given. But his formulation has come back to haunt us in an “anthropocenic” world, as Lee Drummond shows in his chapter for our volume. When it comes to an athlete like Lance Armstrong, whose seemingly “naturally given” athleticism has been enhanced by drug use, the fault-line is laid bare at the tense intersection of what is given and what is plastic: the horizon where, as Kant would have it, what humans may freely “make of themselves” comes up against what nature “makes of them”. But to critique Kant via Armstrong is, of course, to read Kant’s view of the nature-culture distinction anachronistically. Indeed, the Armstrong case exemplifies a world where new
entities and their chaotic effects appear constantly and ideas about how to humanize the conflicts that arise are themselves diverse; branching off toward distinct possibilities for a common human future.

Sturm's chapter (“What did Kant Mean... “) offers a context for Kant's pragmatic and cosmopolitan viewpoint on history, placing it within discussions taking place in the late 18th Century. He points to tensions that existed during the enlightenment concerning the possibilities for a cosmopolitan history. Amongst these were central questions for historical inquiry such as: “what is human nature?” and “how malleable is it?” “What constitutes a cause in history?” “What part do human motives play in historical change?” Figures such as Herder came to the fore at this time to decry an enlightenment tendency to project current values onto the history of other peoples and epochs. Sturm proposes that Kant’s cosmopolitan viewpoint simultaneously accepted human plasticity without relinquishing the claim for a universal human nature. He shows how Kant's intervention in debates of his time about what constitutes a rigorous science or discipline of history, precisely problematises the givenness of the "human". In this sense, Kant, by introducing the idea of mediating “categories” and “concepts”, inaugurates the possibility of a modern anthropology, one that could take humanity and human society in all of his variability across all time and space as its subject matter.

In that sense, Kant's opening move – his cosmopolitics – is modern anthropology's facilitating and limiting condition. All of the founders – Herder, Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt, Durkheim and Mauss, Boas, and Levi-Strauss – wrote in relation to his anthropological concern. Contemporary critiques, even of Kant, are enabled by his intervention. Kantian thought remains the horizon of modern anthropology, even if remain mostly unaware of it (Viveiros de Castro & Goldman 2012: 426), just as we are unaware of Leibniz’ role in initiating ethnology (Vermeulen 2015). In this way, one could, to borrow a phrase from Whitehead, say that the safest
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general characterization of the Euro-American anthropological tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Kant. We may think here of Foucault’s comment that while anthropologists may feel that they can “do without the concept of man, they are also unable to pass through it, for they always address themselves to that which constitutes its outer limits” (see Piette 2015). Hence, the necessity to come to terms with our own Kantian heritage, affirming rather than disavowing it, making it explicit.

Modern anthropology works from an implicit assumption of a universal human architectonic, of the constituting role that concepts play in mediating human thought and experience. The assumption of the concept, and of our particular image of it, both facilitate and limit our capacity as anthropologists and ethnographers to orient and navigate what we take to be others’ “worlds”. “Localization is the constitutive gesture of conception and the first move in navigating spaces of reason” (Negarestani 2014). For anthropology, this concerns the problem of how to locate oneself in the field, and subsequently, the “field” internal to ethnographic description, with the added twist of having to describe others’ concepts in terms of our own. It is a topological problem through and through. As Wagner notes, “every understanding of another culture is an experiment with one’s own” (1981: 12).

Our accounts of others’ “concepts” are only as robust as an anthropological concept of the concept (Viveiros de Castro 2003; cf. Corsin-Jimenez & Willerslev 2007), since the former is invented in terms of the latter (Wagner 1981). Our image of the concept acts as a control on the kinds of concepts we allow ourselves to imagine to exist. The moment we think we know a priori what a concept is, ethnographic understanding is forestalled. We do not yet know fully what a concept is, which is why it should be a site of ongoing inquiry, rather than remaining given and implicit. But what a concept is, is relative to where it is within a general ecology, or space, of concepts (Negarestani 2015). What the Kantian turn does then is
make explicit the assumption of the concept as both the facilitating and limiting condition of modern anthropology (Zammito 2002), as both a means to and an object of knowledge.

What is unique about the grand project of ethnography is, hence, that it highlights or foregrounds other people’s capacities – imaginations, gestures, practices, and ideas – not as sites of intervention, per se, but rather as places, moments or vantage points from which to recursively intervene and transform our own concepts and thinking (Holbraad 2012, Holbraad and Pedersen 2017). The assumption that the other is analogous to us, that their capacities (in particular their capacity for concepts) are not only universal but also contemporaneous and symmetrical with ours (Fabian 1992), rather than subordinate, allows us radically to extend our understanding of concepts as such, and thus to transform our anthropological image of what it is to be human, or of what is possible for humanity.

After Kant ([1798]2006), the hope has been that a distinctively anthropological intervention in knowledge about human nature will allow us not only to better understand the unfolding of human history, but also to make better interventions in it. “Our” here, in Kantian terms, ultimately indexes no particular society, culture or nation state, but rather a cosmopolitical anyone and "all of us". The idea being that by reflecting on human self-knowledge – the limits of humanity's momentary conception of itself and its world – may allow human history to become a site of intervention that opens up pragmatic potentials for further human co-dwelling in a common world: earth. Here the two senses of cosmopolitics, Kant's and Stengers' are not only closer than they originally appeared to be, but also come full circle in the historical moment where the anthropocene and “world society” emerge as new universals (Hart 2010); ones that both implicate but also transcend any given particular locale or region.
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Notes

1. For a full list of the OAC series see: http://openanthcoop.net/press/publications/


3. Our account of the “new cosmopolitics” intends neither to be comprehensive, nor to imply that it exists as a homogenous approach or field. There are significant differences say between Descola’s program and that of the “recursive” anthropologists (e.g. Wagner, Strathern, Viveiros de Castro, etc), or between them and Latourian inspired “science studies”, or even object oriented approaches. What we intend instead is an account of the intellectual implications of these positions, exploring what they have in common in relation to the older Kantian sense of the “cosmopolitical”, in order to bring them back into dialogue with each other.

4. See http://www.haujournal.org/index.php/hau/index

5. See https://sites.google.com/a/abaetenet.net/nansi/abaetextos/manifesto-%C3%A9

6. Lyrics from “For What It's Worth” by Buffalo Springfield

7. ‘a subject will be that which comes to a point of view... the transformation of the object refers to a correlative transformation of the subject’ (Deleuze 1993:21).

8. “The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato” (Whitehead 1929).

References


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