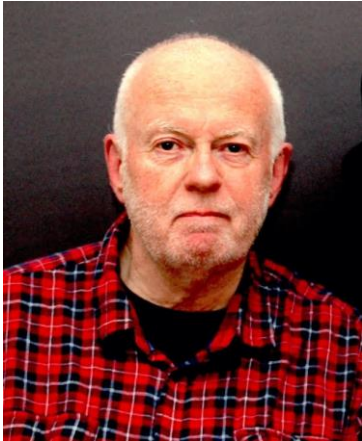# Steps to an ecology of agency

Organising to live well together - a 'grammar' of collective well-being(s)

Chris Blantern

Prologue

'Ego to eco' is a witty aphorism that draws our attention to the way [some] humans have exploited the natural environment, over the past 200 years or so, without giving much thought to the ecological consequences. Many, especially the young, are anxious and united about the need for change but what is it that needs to change? This paper proposes that we humans, particularly in the techno-driven industrial 'north', are not only responsible for the condition of the planet and biodiversity but also for the ways we treat each other.

Exploitation of 'others' is a normalised style of thinking and action that applies equally to the condition of society, the cultural environment, as well as the so-called natural environment. These spheres cannot be separated. They are the entangled outcome of normalised, taken-for-granted, social [micro] practices. Feminist theorist Donna Haraway suggested that 'nature has long been culture's 'Other'' and this paper proposes that 'othering', of the planet, other life forms and other humans, is central to our anxieties, distress and yearning for living better together – for sustainable wellbeing.

Culture is reconfigured as including not only humans but also other life-forms, materiality and the planet. If the era of the Anthropocene is to be shouldered then it must include a human sense of responsibility – not only for the planet but for a social environment in its more thoroughgoing ecological sense.

> "I want to defend society and all its inhabitants from all ideologies, science included. All ideologies must be seen in perspective. One must not take them too seriously. One must read them like fairytales which have lots of interesting things to say but which also contain wicked lies, or like ethical prescriptions which may be useful rules of thumb but which are deadly when followed to the letter."
>
> (Feyerabend, P. 1981, p 156)

Cultural ecology

We are confronted daily with news of what were once called 'natural disasters'. Now such climatic disasters are more likely to be characterised as 'man[xxxi]-made' rather than natural. Such is our generalised growing awareness of the effects of humankind's[xxxii] activities on the planet and biodiversity – our developing eco-consciousness. The devastating effects of the Covid pandemic too, reinforce the re-cognition that our wellbeing is connected to the wellbeing of others. In this industrialised, digitally observed and communicated era we are more globally sentient than our ancestors had the opportunity to be. Our cultural conditions and technological artefacts have foreshortened time and space and we are increasingly confronted with the global as well as local effects of our activities – our connectedness.

This shift towards greater eco-consciousness is resonant though it has more extensive implications than the contemporary sharp focus on 'environmentalism'. Here I want to explore how that awareness might inform the development of a 'cultural ecology' that could enable us to live well, or at least better, together. There is no dearth of texts and missives that implore us to inherit the 'sustainable' earth but doing it, animating joint and several agency, is of a different order of change – for this is an ecological issue too. An important question is: 'what constitutes joint and several agency?'

To talk about cultural ecology is to re-cognise some issues that may well challenge our assumptions about the world and the ontological status we grant to, for example, facts, truth, objectivity, the role of science, what's real, what's natural, hierarchies, human nature, things, selves and society, what's [ab]normal, what's right/wrong, rights and obligations, anthropocentrism and the role of non-humans and the material world – and so on. These are the kinds of phenomena that both characterise and animate or enervate our capacities to co-exist well – or not.

> "To call something ecological is to draw attention to its necessary implication in a network of relations, to mark its persistent tendency to enter into a working system."
>
> (Bennett, J., 2004, p 365)

First, a cultural eco-consciousness recognises the inhering performative action of relationships. Relations are not seen as passive and inert coexistences – but as generating vibrant intra-active[xxxiii] effects.

> "... reality [is] made up of relations rather than objects."
>
> (Baggini, 2021)

So, secondly, such relations are not so much seen as being occupied by already existing entities - like humans, animals, plants and physical things – but rather that relations per-form, come to constitute, what we take to be entities.

> "NAME OF ACTION: An expression used to describe the strange situation – such as experiments – in which an actor 'emerges out of its trials'. The actor does not yet have an essence. It is defined only as a list of effects – or performances – in a laboratory. Only later does one deduce

from these performances a competence, that is, a substance that explains why the actor behaves as it does. The term 'name of action' allows one to remember the pragmatic origin of all matters of fact."

<div align="right">(Latour, 1999, p. 308)</div>

We humans are acculturated into communities of relational practices – where our learning - how we are informed – is bound up in cooperation with cultural actors including other humans, non-human beings, cultural artefacts and materiality, in the everyday cultural relations that "participate"[xxxiv], or "real-ise", us.

> "[Dewey] rejected the idea that humans have a fundamental essence, and all that this involves in terms of the ends towards which their lives are directed, and the means employed to attain these ends, arguing instead that human beings are constituted in their interaction with the multiple aspects of their environment. Humans are through and through the product of a lived practice."

<div align="right">(Independent Premium,2021)</div>

Thirdly, our active relations with each other, non-humans and the material world are integral to who, even what, we are and as such we do not stand above or beyond these 'others' in our worlds. We are co-constituents. A classical, humanist anthropocentric view of existence is turning out to be both arrogant and counterproductive.

> "This is not a world, in the first instance, of subjects and objects, but of various materialities constantly engaged in a network of relations. It is a world populated less by individuals than by groupings or compositions that shift over time."

<div align="right">(Bennett, J., 2004, p354)</div>

Fourthly and consequent upon the above, cultural eco-consciousness is inherently political. Hierarchies, priorities, sense of worth/value, status, rights and obligations and what we take to matter – are not pre-existing, structural features of the cosmos. When we describe the effects of our actions in the world we are not discovering the way nature speaks – but rather using our cultural sensibilities and tools, especially (but not exclusively) language, to attribute competence. The meanings of actions that endure are those that serve the most influential and powerful and in those normalising accounts we elide, or contribute to the forgetting of, the [micro] intra-actions, attributions and actors that constitute the detail of relational cultural performances.

> "… the bodily disciplines through which ethical sensibilities and social relations are formed and reformed are themselves political and constitute a whole (under-explored) field of "micropolitics" without which any principle or policy risks being just a bunch of words. There will be no greening of the economy, no redistribution of wealth, no enforcement or extension of rights without human dispositions, moods, and cultural ensembles hospitable to these effects."

<div align="right">(Bennett, J., 2010. Preface xii)</div>

Truth – a false prospectus

There is much to be gained by examining the taken-for-granted character of 'truth' – that is the everyday assumption that there is only one way of talking about phenomena and events. This is not a proposition in support of conspiracy theorists or anti-science proponents – but it is an invitation for us to be more discerning about the way we use science and claims to truth. More specifically I refer to truth of the 'natural kind'[xxxv] – the assumption that worldly phenomena exist prior to, and in character identical to our subsequent descriptions. More, that we have found the very pre-existing vocabulary of which the cosmos is made. For many, and it is the stance taken here, this kind of realism is seen as a bizarre pretension and one that has furnished an arrogance and a sense of legitimised mastery for and of the human condition – a supremacy which measures all difference from it as in some way inferior.

To begin with here is a vexing exemplar of this kind of thinking. Let's suppose there are privileged people who see their 'success', status and exceptional worth as a capacity, even a genetic pre-eminence, of the individual themselves.   Unnoticed or dismissed is the assemblage of cultural networks - such as well-furnished upbringings; inherited wealth and opportunity; favourable opportunities arising from attending elite schools; privileged systemic power (I can get you a job in 'X' or know someone who can); access to the latest technology and possibly servants (people as 'our things'); social mobility - the choice to migrate between social networks ('social capital'); conveying and conferring membership of such networks through material possessions and clothing (status passports), skin colour and modes of speech; proximity to markets (business owners/first and first-hand knowledge of investment opportunities); having the reinforcement of historical accounts (written by the privileged); enjoying superior living conditions (diet, lived environment, health care and choice) and, of course, having money and time at their immediate disposal (non-human actants – 'money talks'; 'time waits for no-one'?). Like the fish that doesn't know it's in water these features of cultural assemblages generally go unnoticed by those who dwell therein.

We do not need to 'suppose'. If you are not already familiar with this video take a look at this footage, from a 2012 BBC documentary series 'The Guest Wing', of Baronet Sir Edward Humphry Tyrrell Wakefield espousing the 'natural' inevitability of elitism. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWwxiiuIv_A

Here is the salient passage.

> "Quality is everything but in general, to be elitist, I think the quality climbs up the tree of life
> [gesture: hand moves from low to high position] and therefore, in general, higher things in the tree
> of life have quality, have skills and they get wonderful degrees at university - and they marry each
> other and that gets them better again. ….. one is the subject of one's genes and I like the idea of
> them being successful genes."

This ideological stance is known, more formally, as eugenics. It is a stance that social reformists say is used to justify hierarchies of worth, acts of injustice, horror and suffering and even genocide. I use the present participle, 'is' because the doctrine of eugenics is not confined to the past. As recently as 2019 it made its way into the heart of the UK Government as espoused by the Prime Minister's former 'special advisor'

Dominic Cummings[xxxvi]. Another adviser, whom Cummings recruited, Andrew Sabiski proffered even more entrenched eugenicist[xxxvii] views. Oh, and Sir Edward Humphry Tyrrell Wakefield is Cummings' father-in-law.

If elitism is claimed as innate then so is the condition of the poor[xxxviii].

> "If he is blue collar, he is likely to be drunk, criminal, aimless, feckless and hopeless, and perhaps claiming to suffer from low self-esteem brought on by unemployment … If he is white collar, he is likely to be little better."

(Boris Johnson, Spectator, 1995)

Conventionally, the opposition to eugenics and its claims that there is scientific foundation for a 'natural' hierarchy of worth, has been the invocation of 'nurture' or socialisation. What we take to include as nurture - accident of birth, the historical accumulation of an individual's experience, childhood support, life path, social and economic positioning and opportunity, access to education and health care and so on, are seen as more formative – yet still culminating in the individual as the locus and fount of agency. More, these encounters and opportunities are most often explained in terms of underlying social structures within a domain of predominantly human agency. Not much attention is given to the present, momentary assemblage of relations with humans and non-humans and their performative effects arising in events. Typically, proponents of the 'socialised' view will turn, too, to natural and social science, or at least to some non-human authority like 'reality', to assert the truth that legitimises this stance. Vocabularies of emancipation, including management and organisation development often refer to 'true', 'core' or 'essential' selves – as if the nurture argument gives way to a natural, given essence or structure at some point - what point? However, what sets the respective legitimacy of these two positions apart is not their ontological foundation (which truth is true?) but rather their performed effects and our purposes in adopting one or other of these positions.

Clearly the latter stance promises respect for all humanity, as distinct from being restricted to the 'naturally worthy' or 'chosen few', and is the foundation of humanistic approaches to social progress, social psychology and of course the human relations school of management and organisation development. However, summoning scientific realism as the ultimate warrantor of validity is the 'Modern' equivalent of going to war with the assurance that 'God is on our side'. Each side mirrors the other's appeal to a non-human, higher authority for ultimate legitimacy.

In the more acculturated, humanistic view we are orientated towards respect for all – except those who don't agree and who seek to undermine us. We have respect for all humanity – as long as they endorse our view!

Convinced that our science, our truth, is the correct and only one, and therefore exhaustive of all other characterisations, how are we disposed to positioning 'others' in our encounters who do not speak like we do or do not seem like us?
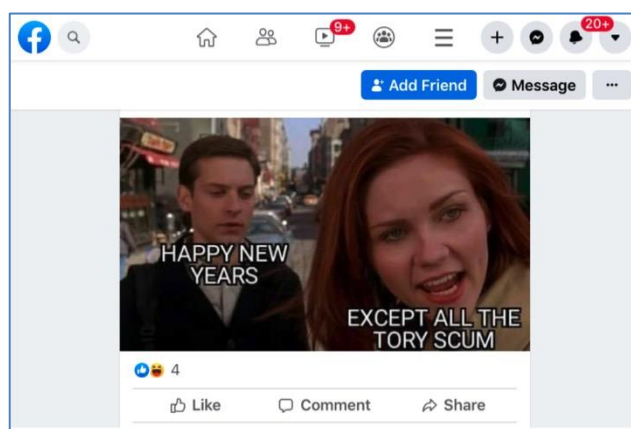
Retrieved from a Facebook feed at the time of writing

What position can we offer them in our world(s) once we have evaluated them against this self-evident 'truth'? Most likely we choose from a 'worthiness' menu to place them as mistaken, indolent, ignorant, unprincipled, stupid, devious, malevolent, evil or mad. Of course, such a reckoning does not only apply to the exemplar chosen here – but to all treasured 'matters of fact', or even points of view, in dispute - especially those arising in our everyday encounters which the adoption of social media seems to have amplified.

In a world witnessing enormous social challenges - from the climate crisis, industrial pollution, mass migration, extreme poverty, political and armed conflict, through to racism, misogyny and other hate crimes - are these just the unfortunate consequence of truths, warranted by some higher, non-human authority, or have we fashioned, like the eugenicists, a cultural prosthesis to support our various privileged claims to exclusive legitimacy – to power and control? The point here is that the unexamined deployment of claims to natural truths (phenomena of a 'natural kind') are, though quite normalised in our everyday affairs, problematic and divisive.

> "… the term "intrinsic nature" is one which it would pay us not to use, an expression which has caused more trouble than it has been worth."

> (Rorty, R., 1989, p8)

Again – this is not a denial of science or its value – but a critique of the misappropriation of what science does.

> "The best way to get into this way of thinking is to become an epistemological sceptic — to start worrying about whether human language is capable of representing the way Reality is in itself, whether we are calling Reality by the right names."

> (Rorty, R., 2021, p 8)

We cannot know what words nature would use to describe herself. We have deluded ourselves if we can be so easily convinced that nature speaks in grammatically correct sentences and has chosen the vocabularies we use.

> "The world does not speak. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak. Only other human beings can do that."

> (Rorty, R., 1989, p. 6)

Rorty's explication casts further relief on Latour's notion of 'the name of action' (above) yet the implicit, operative belief that we are 'speaking Reality' is deeply embedded. As long ago as 1616 Galileo was sure that nature's language is mathematics[xxxix]. More recently Bill Clinton opted for a different language when he said, upon the announcement of the initial sequencing of the human genome, …….

> "Today, we are learning the language in which God created life. "

> (Clinton Whitehouse Archives)

Once we think we know how nature speaks then the explicit or implicit author-ity of universal objectivity is assumed by many, including many trained scientists, to be supreme. We are excused, even dissuaded, of further inquiry. It has been exhausted and we are taught to sanction against it ('you can't argue with the facts!').

> "For once we have discovered truth – what else can we do but follow it?"

<div align="right">(Feyerabend, P., p157)</div>

Endemic divisiveness and otherness – look what 'truth' made me do

But here's the problem. When our ideology is sacrosanct "others" (people, other life forms and the material planet) measured against it, are easily reduced to instrumental objects in our worlds – resources to be controlled, used and exploited.

A recent BBC radio 4 programme (Archive On 4) exploring the relationship between scientists and popular culture included an excerpt from 1960s TV series 'The Ascent of Man' presented by Dr. Jacob Bronowski. He was featured lifting human ashes from a waste pool at Auschwitz and passionately imploring…

> "Into this pond were flushed the ashes of some 4 million people…. ... it was done by arrogance; it was done by dogma; it was done by ignorance. When people believe that they have absolute knowledge – with no test in reality – this is how they behave. This is what men do when they aspire to the knowledge of gods. Science is a very human form of knowledge…."

<div align="right">(Archive on 4, 09/10/21, 41.47 mins)</div>

Characterising others as worth-less has a self-fulfilling trick. It blames others for their otherness, so doubling-down on their difference. Not only are 'they' not like us we are also, rationally, not defending our rights if we don't treat them as 'less than' us. America First?

'Otherness' is created – even when the intention is to do good. We should not be exonerated from our own othering talk just because we believe our line is more true or more moral. By doing so we are affirming the rules of the game – the social grammar[xl] that propagates the normalised cultural practice of treating others as 'less than'.

Here, Rosi Braidotti offers a poststructural, feminist, posthumanist view of the way the configuration of 'others' serves to bolster the historical human ideal of the Eurocentric, straight, white male and 'his' naturalised entitlement.

> "These others were constitutive in that they fulfilled a mirror function that confirmed the Same in His superior position (Braidotti, 2006). This political economy of difference resulted in passing off entire categories of human beings as devalued and therefore disposable others: to be 'different from' came to mean to be 'less than'. The dominant norm of the subject was positioned at the pinnacle of a hierarchical scale that rewarded the ideal of zero-degree of difference. This is the former 'Man' of classical Humanism."

<div align="right">(Braidotti, R., 2013, pp. 27-28).</div>

"… social theorist Donna Haraway has suggested, nature has long been culture's 'Other'"

(Fox and Aldred, 2020, p. 122)

From 'otherness' to inclusive solidarity

We would be better off revising the endemic idea, that the language of science offers us a superior, God's-eye view of worldly phenomena.

> "There is nothing wrong with science, there is only something wrong with the attempt to divinize it, the attempt characteristic of realistic philosophy."

(Rorty, 1991, p. 34)

> "Scientism is a matter of putting too high a value on natural science in comparison with other branches of learning or culture."

(Sorell, 1994, pp. 1)

The divination of science, as universal objectivity (nature speaking universal truth), has the effect of excluding, ignoring, forgetting, eliding, that how we come to know the world is through our engagement in relational encounters – cultural ecologies. If we think we have bypassed culture and found the 'true', authoritative expression of worldly phenomena our moral sensitivity to the effects of what we do – to each other, to other life forms and the planet, stops right there. There is no need to ask further questions and in such acquiescence we have also given away the vibrancy and acuity of our own agency. Hierarchy, as a principal tenet of social grammar, relies on the squandering of local agency and, along with it, the abandonment of social responsibility and the passive yielding to 'otherness'.

> "The tradition in Western culture which centers around the notion of the search for Truth, a tradition which runs from the Greek philosophers through the Enlightenment, is the clearest example of the attempt to find a sense in one's existence by turning away from solidarity to objectivity."

(Rorty, 1991, p. 21)

What we regard as 'facts' are seen, more usefully, as the performance of cultural ecologies – replete with their human and non-human actors, emphases of power, control[xli], explicit-implicit cooperation and resistance. Instead of seeing knowledge as revealing of the neutral 'nature of things' we would be better off recognising that established knowledge, that which has survived its political challenges so to speak, functions as the operative grammar of social organisation. Objectivity is re-viewed as intra-objectivity[xlii] or 'agential-realism' and relies on cultural, micro-political cooperation to sustain it and maintain its regularity.

> "Discursive practices produce, rather than merely describe, the 'subjects' and 'objects' of knowledge practices."

(Barad, 2003, p. 819)

The function of inquiry, then, is not the pursuit of 'truth about reality' but of how we can find the experience of better ways of living cooperatively, living well together.

Here's Rorty, again, writing about the origins of American Pragmatism and in particular the contribution of William James and John Dewey...

> "Pragmatists do not think inquiry can put us more in touch with non-human reality than we have always been, for the only sense of "being in touch" they recognize is causal interaction (as opposed to accurate representation). So in their view the only question is: will human life be better in the future if we adopt this belief, this practise, or that institution? "

(Rorty, R. 2021, p 16)

'Ego to eco' or from autonomous selves to agency as cultural ecology – 'only connect'

In addition to inviting us to reflect on what our self-ish activities have done to the planet, 'ego to eco' is also a solicitation to inquire into the intra-activities that lead us to characterise cultural phenomena as 'natural' – as just the way things are. Principally, the conception of cultural ecology is an overture to shift from seeing selves, the 'I', ego or mind and society as 'given things', natural kinds – plastic but existing independently of human characterisations, towards a notion of such 'realities' as per-formed, in ongoing dynamic relationships – intra-active events. As Rorty points out, there is no way of characterising a neutral reality for to do so is to attempt to bypass the detailed politics of our relational, cultural activities. This is the poststructural shift – that what we take to be neutral observations of the structural features of reality are revised as cultural practices – and inescapably political.

Over the last 130 years or so, scholars have invited us to give more attention to how and what is performed in relationships with others. From this kind of noticing the micro cultural practices constituting events and their participants are more apparent. Initially we might look to the 1970s and a prescient warning from Gregory Bateson in his seminal work 'Steps To An Ecology of Mind' in which he sought to collapse the destructive distinction between nature and human society.

> "If, now, we correct the Darwinian unit of survival [individual organism, species or subspecies][xliii] to include the environment and the interaction between organism and environment, a very strange and surprising identity emerges: the unit of evolutionary survival turns out to be identical with the unit of mind.
>
> Let us now consider what happens when you make the epistemological error of choosing the wrong unit; you end up with species versus other species around it or versus the environment in which it operates. Man [sic] against nature.
>
> There is an ecology of bad ideas, just as there is an ecology of weeds, and it is characteristic of the system that the basic error propagates itself. It branches out like a rooted parasite through the tissues of life, and everything gets into a rather peculiar mess."

(Bateson, 1972, pp 491-492)

We have been talking about the wrong units[xliv], the independent 'nature of things', including autonomous 'Man', for at least the last 250 years.

When it comes to noticing what cultural relations participate there have been different emphases. Perhaps the more readily accessible are characterisations of the way language-in-use resolves agency.

J L Austin, in his seminal work 'How To Do Things With Words' (1962) illuminated the difference between the descriptive use of language ('constative' - how the world 'is') – ego-laden and hitherto dominant, and the enacting function of language ('performative' - what we, knowingly or unknowingly, make happen). Here are some examples to highlight this distinction.

> "I think I am, actually, humble. I think I am much more humble than you would understand."
>
> (Donald Trump – CBS, 60 Minutes, 2017)

...and one for devotees of self development….

> "Don't you see? Your learning should be self directed."
>
> (Overheard on a self-managed learning programme, circa 1990)

These kinds of utterances make us smile because they illuminate both constative and performative functions of speech. We might not be able to name them – but we recognise that the statement of how the world is, or should be, is directly contradicted by the act performed; Trump claiming humility but acting arrogantly; the programme tutor directing the learner to be self-directed! Talk and texts are intra-action and constitutive of participants.

Others have recognised this function of language. Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian philosopher of language, offered the difference between 'dictionary meaning' and 'the sense of the situation'; Bruno Latour spoke of the difference between talking 'about' organising and talking 'for' organising (i.e. doing organising); John Shotter characterised 'aboutness' (descriptive) in contrast with 'withness' (our exchanges making a difference to our worlds) and linguistic pragmatists generally refer to the difference between 'dictionary meaning' and 'people meaning'.

Sociolinguists like Erving Goffman, Norman Fairclough, Rom Harré and Bruno Latour too, recognised that the performative function of utterances and texts shapes the kinds of responses available and that are expected, from the ways we are positioned in exchanges. Along with them, and their contingent disciplines of social grammar, an emergent, contoured sense of agentic identity and 'event reality' is occasioned.

Goffman explored the performance of agency and social order through the concepts of 'face' (presentation of self) and 'frames' (type of situation – frame of reference)

> "He [sic] must ensure that a particular expressive order is sustained – an order that regulates the flow of events, large or small, so that anything that appears to be expressed by them will be consistent with his face"
>
> (Goffman, 1982, p 9)

Fairclough developed the notion of 'subject positioning' to account for the affordances of situational agency – a concept echoed by Rom Harré in his exposition of 'positioning theory'.

> "The discourse types of the classroom set up subject positions for teachers and pupils and it is only by 'occupying' these positions that one becomes a teacher or a pupil. Occupying a subject position is essentially a matter of doing (or not doing) certain things, in line with the discoursal rights and obligations of teachers and pupils – what each is allowed and required to say…."
>
> (Fairclough, 1989, p38)

> "Presumptions about rights and duties are involved in fixing the moment-by-moment meanings of speaking and acting, while both are influenced by and influence of the taken-for-granted story line."
>
> (Harré and Moghaddam, 2014, p 134)

… and Latour on how texts, signs, images and objects inscribe place-holders for participants…

> "I invented possible readers whose reactions and belief I anticipated … In doing so, I built up an inscribed reader to whom I prescribed qualities and behaviour, as surely as a traffic light or a painting prepare a position for those looking at them. "
>
> (Latour, 1995, p 230)

Other leading post-structuralist philosophers like Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault were concerned with how power is established, distributed and maintained through social encounters and, in particular, how social discourse positions participants in both the historical and contemporary flow of events.

> "Even the simplest linguistic exchange brings into play a complex and ramifying web of historical power relations between the speaker, endowed with a specific social authority, and an audience, which recognises this authority to varying degrees…"
>
> (Bourdieu, 1989, p46)

Bourdieu was sure that it is our 'mis-recognition' of the political function of all social relations that enables power and its effects to be manifest and legitimises them as – 'just the nature of things'. Because of this mis-recognition we fail to see our own role in the social reproduction of domination and subordination.

> "Therefore, symbolic violence can occur through the mundane processes and practices of everyday life."
>
> (Thapar-Björkert, Samelius & Sanghera, 2016, p9)

Similarly, Michel Foucault understood hierarchy and the formation and maintenance of power not as given structures but as real-ised in the intra-actions of cultural cooperation.

> "The summit and the lower elements of the hierarchy stand in a relationship of mutual support and conditioning, a mutual hold (power as a mutual and indefinite 'blackmail')."
>
> (Foucault, 1980, p159)

However, once we begin to dwell in (as distinct from 'dwell on') a post-structural sensibility of the world around us and are increasingly open to noticing a world 'made up of relations rather than objects, then what kind of sense does it make to see our realities, our actions and behaviours as somehow separate from a material world? Nearly 75 years ago Ludwig Wittgenstein was asking these questions ...

> "What does behavior include here? Only the play of facial expression and the gestures? Or also the surrounding, so to speak, the occasion of this expression?" "... the word 'behavior' as I am using it, is altogether misleading, for it includes in its meaning the external circumstances"

> (Wittgenstein, 1980, no.314).

Remember Bruno Latour's reference to the way a traffic light 'prepares a position' for us, how it acts-into a social situation? Latour, through the devices of Actor-Network-Theory, has insisted that to see our cultural relations as existing only between humans is to ignore the 'vehicles' of transformation[xlv] that we would find useful to take into account (Latour, 2005, pp 130-131). For Latour the non-human and the material act into events and participate in the performance of any active political ecology.

> "...the word "politics" is not limited to humans but includes all the elements or entities deemed part of the composition of the common world. This is what allows one to speak, for instance, of the "politics of the soil" because the world to consider is made just as much out of humus as it is made out of EU subsidies for maize, fermentation in the gut of earthworms, pluviometry[xlvi] or the consumers' appetite for "bio" food."

> (Latour, 2014, p 1)

'Society' then is taken to include the multiform relations with other living things and the material world. Here experimental psychologists, Hajo Adam and Adam Galinsky (2012) assert the difference wearing a lab coat can make to the wearer's behaviour.

> "In Experiment 1, physically wearing a lab coat increased selective attention compared to not wearing a lab coat. In Experiments 2 and 3, wearing a lab coat described as a doctor's coat increased sustained attention compared to wearing a lab coat described as a painter's coat, and compared to simply seeing or even identifying with a lab coat described as a doctor's coat. "

Here's a link to an audio extract from a BBC Radio 5 Live feature on the 45th anniversary of the Ford Transit van (May 2010) and its contribution to 'white-van-man' syndrome.

> Click: White van man

In this recent piece, also from BBC radio, Will Coleman is talking about the assemblages that establish and maintain 'Cornishness'.

> "When you ask 'em why they love Cornwall 'the landscape' is usually in the first sentence or two – and of course that landscape is rooted in the geology, which then leads to the biology, and all of

that incredible geological and biological diversity has shaped 'agan tavas, nei' (our tongue, us) -
our language, it's shaped our music, our song; it's shaped our sport; it's shaped our culture our
very identity."

<div align="right">(Open Country, 2021)</div>

This inclusion of the non-human world in a cultural ecology is, after Latour, a theme taken on by feminist posthumanism and 'new materialism'. Here Karen Barad, affirming the link between the vocabularies of quantum physics and the humanities, extends the constitutive performance of cultural relations beyond the linguistic.

> "Discursive practices produce, rather than merely describe, the "subjects" and "objects" of knowledge practices … And the primary semantic units are not "words" but material-discursive practices through which boundaries are constituted. This dynamism is agency. Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world."

<div align="right">(Barad, 2003, p 819 & 818)</div>

In a more cautious inclination we could say that the extension of cultural performances to include other entities does no more than to re-invoke a historical convention of merely reflecting on humans' active adaptation to items caught up in our inter-actions – 'things get their meaning from the way they are used'. This is a traditional view that determines things and people to be 'complete' prior to their encounter (inter-action) rather than the encounter in some way expressing their immanence and capacity to transform and per-from each other (intra-action). If we do settle for this former, traditional stance then we might equally say the same about language-in-use and other humans – 'they're just objects caught up in my world' - 'less than'. Are non-verbal objects-in-use any less capable of acting into the constitutive performance of any context, any event? Once we act in relation to some-thing, words or material objects, they 'participate' agency – a 'persistent tendency to enter into a working system'. These non-humans were acting before we came into the world (mostly) and they are acting now in our every-day activities. Think of the co-relating effects, for example, of religious icons, of food and drink, electricity, water-supply and sewage systems, domestic appliances – like refrigerators and vacuum cleaners, modes of transport and traffic management (e.g. double yellow lines and give-way markings), walls and fences, manufacturing machines, hand tools, medical equipment etc., etc., and the now ubiquitous digital devices - oh yes, and the climate! We all have, too, very recent experience of how viruses can participate in the flux of ecologies that realise our agency. We have, historically, drawn an arbitrary line between humans and language on the one hand, and the rest of existence. Whether we have been talking about the wrong semantic or ecological units and pushed the non-human and material into a passive world – we have got ourselves into trouble by ignoring their performative effects. For Bruno Latour – a sociologist of sociology – this is a criticism of traditional sociology in general…

> "They are still strongly Durkheimian: the social is the social made of social ties among social humans. Period. So they have never been able to see social movements in science, technology,

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law, and of course not in ecology. All of that is exterior to the social. No wonder nothing moves much in their view! "

<div align="right">(Latour, B., 2018, p360)</div>

Towards a grammar of ecological well-being(s)

When it comes, then, to reconfiguring a sustainable, mutually liveable world, we might rethink the normalised, obsessive quest of 'discovering the language of nature' (truth of the 'natural kind') is all there is and worth the consequential damage we do to each other and the planet. The insatiable deferment to some higher authority beyond ourselves has left us with an endemic sense of 'look what it made me do!'. As Paul Feyerabend has noticed, a rigid obedience to the phantasm of realist ideology has relieved us of any responsibility for whether our activities are deadly or not. If the era of the Anthropocene is to be shouldered then it must include a human sense of responsibility – not only for the planet but for a social environment in its more thoroughgoing ecological sense.

So, adopting Karen Barad's material-discursive view of agency, how might we re-configure our ways of configuring the world – our social grammar - in particular the ways we organise for our collective well-being(s). First, we are invited to embrace this political, eco-consciousness.

> "It is to do with re-situating ourselves—as spontaneously responsive, moving, embodied living beings—within a reality of continuously intermingling, flowing lines or strands of unfolding, agential activity, in which nothing (no thing) exists in separation from anything else, a reality within which we are immersed both as participant agencies and to which we also owe significant aspects of our own natures. …………. then we can no longer think of ourselves as the only organizing agencies at work in the larger world within which we live out our lives; other agencies than the "one" we each (mis)name as "I" are at work within us, and all around us."

<div align="right">(Shotter, J., 2014, p306)</div>

Mindful of Paul Feyerabend's fear and Bateson's warning of the 'ecology of bad ideas', the following are suggested as heuristics rather than tablets of remedial truth. In the Pragmatic tradition of John Dewey and William James – they are, perhaps, hopeful rules of thumb, or cultural grammars, worth trying for better ways of living well together. As William James reminds us "truth is what is good for us to believe", and to so believe we are encouraged to enhance the acuity of our agency in the form of local inquiry rather than settling for the superficiality of the headlines of life. The irony of 'taking back control' of 'taking back control' is not lost!

> "Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects."

<div align="right">(Paulo Freire, 1973, p 85)</div>

a) From 'the name of action' to 'the effects of action' (from 'thing' to 'relational effects').

> "… the only sense of "being in touch" they [Pragmatists] recognize is causal interaction (as opposed to accurate representation)."

To grant 'the name of action' (static order), rather than the 'effects of action' (dynamic events), universal legitimacy is to abandon our responsibilities for and of our own agency – and to normalise everyone/thing that doesn't speak, or speak 'the truth' (like me), as 'less than'. To continuously reproduce and reinforce the social grammar that bestows 'otherness', masquerading as 'the given truth about the world' is to continue to generate the turbulence of divisions that erect constraining boundaries, and even deny the value of life.

Hierarchies are not 'natural kind' – as Foucault and Bourdieu pointed out - they are cultural. Here Nick Fox and Pam Aldred refer to the work of Latour and also feminist Post humanists and their 'new-materialist' stance.

> 'A flat ontology also marks a re-focusing of attention away from hierarchies, systems or structures beyond or beneath the surface of everyday activities and interactions. In new materialist ontology there are no structures, systems or mechanisms at work; instead there are 'events' – an endless cascade of events comprising the material effects of both nature and culture that together produce the world and human history. Exploring the relational character of these events and their physical, biological and expressive composition becomes the means for social science to explain the continuities, fluxes and 'becomings' that produce the world around us, rather than via structural or systemic 'explanations' of how societies and cultures work.
>
> (Latour, 2005: 130).

> This has implications for research, requiring a focus upon the specific inter-actions that occur within events.
>
> (2018, p3)

We would be better off if we regarded 'facts' and 'findings' as potentially being of some value – rather than 'true'. We have come to believe that only experts, the anointed, can do science and its divination has given it a rarefied and opaque character somehow beyond our reach. For Dewey, science emerges from and is continuous with everyday processes of trial and error – localised inquiry. Cooking and small-engine repair count as "scientific". Arguably, we have squandered this vital aspect of our agency. Certainly, asking questions in organisations is often seen as subversive. The history of whistleblowing might endorse that. In any kind of social hierarchy, too, questioning norms or inviting people to be curious is too easily frowned upon. However, as Feyearbend, Bateson, Frere and Bronowski strikingly pointed out, if we stop evaluating the performative effect of others' (and our own) intra-actions we can find ourselves, our brothers and sisters, other life forms and the material world in a deadly mess.

Perhaps that's where we are and it is what the era of the Anthropocene is coming to mean? We should reclaim science as normalised, everyday practice for the sake of social hope. This is not to say that expertness is bad – on the contrary it is enormously helpful so long as we remember it is not impervious to scrutiny and socially amenable to local inquiry. We would be better off seeing everyday inquiry, rather than universal objective truth, as a principal feature of social grammar.

To make the shift to inquiring into effects gives us opportunities that the assumption of universal objectivity denies us. After the Pragmatists we are more able and likely to ask, when presented with models, facts and theories, – 'who/what benefits and who/what is worse off?' and give ourselves permission to explore the ecological implications – if you like, exhuming the [micro] actions elided or forgotten in the course of their original naming (see Latour above).

> "Thus a critical question to be put to various accounts of the world, is what kind of practices do they support? Do they enable us to live in ways we hold valuable or do they threaten these patterns? For the social epistemologist, a major question to be asked of, let us say, Skinnerian behaviour theory, is not whether it is objectively valid; it is, rather if we adopt the theoretical language proposed in this domain, in what ways are our lives enriched or impoverished?"
>
> (Gergen, K., 1994, pp130)

Put another way – wherever our discursive actions wield the instrument of 'natural truth' in order to dominate others, wherever we seek to deny others their voice and contribution, we should 'fess-up' and acknowledge that this is an act of bald political power rather than disguising the idea that 'this act is moral because it is true'. 'It's not me mate, it's the cosmos.' or, more outwardly, 'this is for your own good'!

The universalising of truth leaves no room for other accounts, rendering unremarkable that we, with the 'right names' for reality, think we can know others better than they know themselves. This is experienced, for example, by mental health 'survivors' when they are attributed with an 'illness' of a 'natural kind' granting institutions the authority to know them better than they know themselves and with it the loss of the ability to determine the legitimacy of their own story – to be heard, to matter. We will find it in our systems of justice too and indeed wherever power and authority is deemed unquestionable.

b) Empathy, severality and participation

We might then be more wary of the routine obsession with single storylines and instead be more open to the idea that others' accounts – especially of their experience – have the same validity as ours. We may think we know more – but we can choose to avoid the implicit convention that this means we know better. We can allow ourselves to see difference as augmentary rather than conflictual. Once the notion of regularity in the world shifts from the implication of 'underlying universal structures and systems' to material-inclusive cultural performances then events and their dynamic composition become increasingly important. Micro political functioning becomes more apparent normalising, rather than problematising, differing accounts and their significance. However – this is a strength. Hearing multiple and detailed accounts of what participants,

near and far, are 'struck by' helps us to assemble usefully, as Fox and Aldred point out, 'the relational character of these events and their physical, biological and expressive composition'. Our attention then, shifts from the arrogance of defending a single, ideological storyline to one of openness to gathering the effects of our collective relational activity. There could be no 'gaslighting' if the endemic, implicit grammar of the power-laden single storyline was expunged.

Letting go of the single, true storyline also enables us to be more predisposed to empathising with 'others' – especially if we are trying to collaborate. We are more able to hear their stories – **and believe them**.

This is a [social]grammatical insight expressed by the Russian sociolinguist Mikhail Bakhtin who, over 60 years ago, drew attention to the distinction between monologue and dialogue. Monologue is similar in its ontological warranting to Austin's 'constative' function of language - an assertion of how the world is with the authoritative implication of universality.

> "With a monologic approach (in its extreme pure form) another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness. No response is expected from it that could change anything in the world of my consciousness. Monologue is finalized and deaf to other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any force. Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word."

...in contrast with 'dialogue' with its situational and empathetic performative force….

> "To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his [sic] whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium"

> (Bakhtin, M.,1984, pp.292-293)

This is a manifest echo of the shift from dwelling on a world of described, 'discovered' order of things to dwelling in a world of mutual performance. It is an affirmation of Bronowski's rejection of God-like knowledge and if we want to enrich our lives, live better together and, importantly, ground our knowledge in 'testing' the effects of our actions then we would be better off adopting an inclusive approach to our more detailed cultural noticings.

The standard, and possibly lazy, critique of such an inclusive orientation is that it all takes too much time and creates indecision. Well, that can be a valid appraisal if we continue to think that the task is to find the truth before we can do anything differently. The search for a unitary truth also has the capacity to anchor us in the past. It seems we are inculcated with the idea that historical accounts of events must be agreeable and singular before we can look forward, predisposing us towards a persistent focus on making differences

troublesome – making them barriers rather than gateways. The more we hold up troublesome differences as the frame for our engagement the more likely it is that they are deemed irreconcilable – with command and control or win-lose the only way out.

So when parties espouse the need for collaboration hopes rise, in an invitational spirit, that others might not be quite so immovable in their stance. I feel less defensive when others seem to be making an offer. Yet those hopes are dashed when collaboration turns out to mean 'just cooperate with what we/I want.'[xlvii] – a semantic 'Trojan horse' and just monologue in disguise. So now, not only are there irreconcilable differences but we now know we cannot trust them. With such prevailing conditions the turn to hierarchy and control – as distinct from a more dialogic collaboration – becomes a self-justifying, self-fulfilling grammar with the most powerful fixing the meaning of what has taken place[xlviii], determining what can happen – and delegitimising or ignoring any other consequences (more 'less than'). That's us choosing the wrong ecological unit again!

However, participative approaches orientated towards exploring the effects of action, like action research, dialogue groups and action inquiry, are forward facing, avoid dwelling on differences and their associated othering and invite people to be more agentially engaged with their situated, political ecology. There are many quick and effective practices predicated on more dialogic grammars where curiosity is preferred over the destructive editing of instant judgement. When it comes to social and organisational change there is much to be gained by desisting from rejecting these approaches 'on ideological sight' and, instead, trying them out for the mutual enhancement of agency – for better living. Neither do we, in general, need to invest in heroes and the myth of special people to generate leadership….

> "We can have leadership without pre-establishing the occupants of leadership roles. We are not dependent on particular individuals to mobilize and make decisions for others. Leadership can be a process of co-creation. The effort is intrinsically collective. The parties to the practice engage in dialogical and nonverbal exchange, in particular, they display an interest in listening deeply to one another, in reflecting upon new perspectives, and in entertaining the prospect of changing direction based on what they learn."
>
> (Raelin, J., 2020) p 1.)

In so doing, together we generate and migrate towards the vocabularies that are 'good for us to believe' and that meet our dim[xlix] sense of purpose. (Rorty, R.,1989, pp5-8)

> "The dialogue in a collaborative agentic leadership not only considers its democratic and emancipatory processes but the effects of the practice under consideration so as to preserve a sustainable future. This is likely to occur because the outcome of any dialogue is often a new or unique way that had never been conceived prior to the collaborative engagement."
>
> (Raelin, J. A., 2016, p 255)

> "People support what they create"
>
> (Gergen, K., 2009, p323, quoting Stephen Littlejohn & Kathy Domenici)

There are implications, of course, for the ways we organise and manage and for how we organise as societies. Formal organisations, their legal constitutions and their practices act into our cultural activities. Just as the political ecology of the self, 'I', shows us how we, as embodied individuals, are not separate entities so it is the case for organisations. They remind us, through organisational schooling (Blantern, 2021), what hierarchical, monological games we are 'supposed' to play and what the taken for granted cultural grammars are. Cultural ecologies are political organisations at large.

c) Propagating cultural eco-practice

In light of the foregoing then, there are some rules of thumb, social grammars that we might want to give more attention to.

First, as we have explored, is the idea of lifting the camouflaged notion of universal objectivity – 'natural kind' – from its seemingly matching surroundings. As Bronowski pointed out, science is a very human activity not an Almighty one, and as Rorty advised we might want to start worrying about whether human language is capable of representing the way Reality is in itself. It this grammatical reflexivity that draws back the curtain on cultural ecological relations. It is this move that helps us to remember that what we take to be the inherent nature of things is produced and reproduced in 'material-discursive' cultural relationships. It opens the door to a reality structured not so much by the world – but by our living in it! There is no higher authority insisting that truth is more legitimate, more valuable than our concerns for each other and the planet.

To reiterate, this does not devalue science. Rather we should treat findings, models and theories like Dr Johnson's notorious hot potato. That is, it is likely to be nutritious but we shouldn't swallow it whilst it might burn us. As Gergen, in the shadow of James and Dewey, pointed out above, we can benefit from asking 'in what ways are our lives enriched or impoverished?' We are then, more likely to seek more detailed information about effects and to bring the abstract into our situational, living and responsive political ecologies (Shotter, 2006).

We should worry about what we have created and what we are generating. None of our knowing is neutral, value free but rather the political grammar of social organising and we should take responsibility for it. We should be concerned that we are creating and sustaining deep divisions in our societies from eugenics, hate crimes, 'othering' and even the idea of meritocracy. Merit is not an exclusive attribute of individuals – it owes more to our entanglement in cultural ecologies.

> "You are only a good person because your life has let you live that way."
>
> (You don't know me. Episode 2, BBC 1 drama, 06.12.2021)

> "82% of offers from Oxford and 81% from Cambridge went to students from the top two socio-economic groups in 2015."
>
> (The Guardian, 19th October, 2017)

We should be disturbed too that our systems of justice owe more to the views inherited from the 'entitled', privileged elite than they do to understanding how situational, [micro] political relationships function.

> "The rich get richer and the poor get prison"

<div align="right">(Reiman, J. and Leighton, P. 2016, book title)</div>

Even in our organisations we individualise poor performance (see 3 Ways To Manage, Blantern, this issue). Though there's a humanistic influence and a more empathetic consideration of employee's circumstances, very little account is given to the local, micro ecology. The individual is regarded as being 'in deficit' and requires, however sympathetic, remedial correction either through training and development or discipline. Quite often they are synonymous. Organisations are hierarchy's production line.

That the task is to 'fix' what has been characterised as errant behaviour – as distinct from forging new and potentially better ways together has elicited critique from the field of psychotherapy. Former president of the British Psychological Society, Dr. Peter Kinderman, and postdoctoral researcher, Dr. Kate Allsopp, in 2018, wrote to the Lancet…

> "It is well known that poverty and social inequity are major determinants of our mental health and the United Nations Special Rapporteur characterizes mental health care not as a crisis of individual conditions, but as a crisis of social obstacles, which hinders individual rights. It is important, therefore, that the circumstances that have given rise to distress should be formally recorded alongside the distress itself."

and…

> "Imagine if it were as serious to fail to document extreme poverty as it would be for a clinician to fail to identify severe depression."

The same goes for managers and supervisors in organisations. Imagine if the failure to give attention to the situational ecology, events and their politics, was seen as important and demanding of management as the requirement to preside over traditional characterisations of individual competence.

Similarly training and development in organisations might be better to include ways of characterising the configurations, effects and possibilities of local political ecologies when it comes to intervening in the effectiveness of agency. Such considerations might go some way to explaining the challenge of 'learning transfer' – why people do not reproduce in context what they have 'acquired' on a training course. From the eco-conscious point of view the goal of self development is not individual autonomy – but rather the propitious reconfiguring of the affecting ecology. This may seem novel given our traditional understandings of what 'development' might mean though, as the new materialists (Fox & Aldred, 2021) point out, this is not a new way of going on for many indigenous people.

Teju Ravilochan has suggested that Abraham Maslow, who spent 6 weeks living with the Blackfoot First Nations people at Siksika, formulated his model of the human hierarchy of needs after this experience.

However, according to Ravilochan, Maslow interpreted it in a lean Eurocentric way. First Maslow proposed a hierarchy whereas the people of Siksika thought more about life as sustainable, renewable circles. The Blackfoot people regarded the propagation and maintenance of supportive and inclusive community as the pre-eminent 'grammar' and wealth was thought of as the strength of the social network. Basic needs were a community rather than individual responsibility. In their world self actualisation was taken as the inherent participation of an inclusive community rather than the quest of the individual. Perhaps the very idea of self actualisation is symptomatic of societies that have forgotten how to enact 'cultural perpetuity'?

> "For instance, if Maslow had more fully integrated Blood First Nations perspectives, the model would be centered on multi-generational community actualization versus individual actualization and transcendence.

(Blackstock, C. 2011, p 4)

Finally then, as if to emphasise the barren convenience of historical, Euro-anthropocentrism, here are the words of Thich Nhat Hanh a Vietnamese Buddhist Zen master, poet, scholar, and peace activist…

> "Everything relies on everything else in the cosmos in order to manifest—whether a star, a cloud, a flower, a tree, or you and me.

_____

About Chris

Chris is an independent researcher and practitioner specialising in 'organisational change and learning'. He has a particular interest in participative approaches to organising and has developed many practical methods for effective and swift, inclusive and sustainable decision-making (*'people support what they create'*). These methods are informed by foregrounding local inquiry and an increased sensitivity to the effects of joint and several action – for example participatory action research and dialogic practices.

After 30+ years' experience of working in a variety of public sector and commercial organisations Chris has noticed that many, maybe most, organisations tend to promote discipline and control at the expense of curiosity and inquiry – quite often to their detriment. Informed by this experience Chris has, latterly, become interested in the politics of organising, the effects on employees and the role of organisations in propagating cultural norms in society at large.

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[xxxi] 'Man' – made. This is not an insensitivity to gendered issues. On the contrary women and girls are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change. https://www.actionaid.org.uk/our-work/emergencies-disasters-humanitarian-response/climate-change-and-gender

[xxxii] The use of the generalised 'humankind' obscures a political argument – that saying 'we' - all humans - are responsible for the climate emergency does not distinguish between the powerful and the powerless, the wealthy and the poor, the industrial nations and the 2/3 developing world. *In just 2.3 days the average American or Australian emits as much as the average Malian or Nigerian in a year.* " https://ourworldindata.org/per-capita-co2

According to the Climate Accountability Institute 20 multinational and state owned companies are responsible for 35% of all energy related methane and carbon dioxide totalling 480 billion tons of 'carbon dioxide equivalent' since 1965. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/09/revealed-20-firms-third-carbon-emissions

[xxxiii] Karen Barad used the term 'intra-action to emphasise the inter-objective realisation of 'discursive' practices.

"The notion of intra-action (in contrast to the usual 'interaction', which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata) represents a profound conceptual shift. It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the 'components' of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful." (Barad, 2007, p.139)

xxxiv This archaic use of *"participate"* as a transitive verb is taken from Owen Barfield's concept of "original participation" (Treinen, 2020)

xxxv 'Natural kind' - a term used by philosophers to distinguish between entities that are deemed to exist in character prior to the human descriptions of them.

xxxvi https://dominiccummings.com/tag/iq/

xxxvii *"There are excellent reasons to think the very real racial differences in intelligence are significantly – even mostly – genetic in origin, though the degree is of course a very serious subject of scholarly debate."* https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/feb/17/andrew-sabisky-boris-johnsons-ex-adviser-in-his-own-words

xxxviii *Compared to households on incomes above £50,000, those on incomes below £10,000 are*:
- *Considerably more likely to be attacked by someone they know and far more likely to be attacked by a stranger;*
- *Twice as likely to suffer violence with injury;*
- *Twice as likely to be burgled;*
- *Three times as likely to be robbed and mugged;*
- *Three times as likely to suffer rape or attempted rape;*
- *Six times as likely to be a victim of domestic violence.* (Cuthbertson, 2018)

xxxix *Galileo exclaimed in 1616…"I mean* the universe - which stands continually open to our gaze, but it cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend the language and interpret the characters in which it is written. It is written in the language of mathematics..…"

xl Just as we have an ongoing sense of the conventions of language – of grammar, we have an ongoing, consolidated sense of the norms of cultural encounters – of what seems socially 'fitting' in any given situation and what seems universal – a sense of social grammar. "I call social norms the grammar of society because, like a collection of linguistic rules that are implicit in a language and define it, social norms are implicit in the operations of society and make it what it is." (Bicchieri, C., 2005, p Preface ix)

xli French sociologist and philosopher, Pierre Bourdieu characterised these dominating forms of 'social grammar' as 'symbolic violence'. "Symbolic violence is the imposition of systems and meaning (i.e. culture) upon groups or classes in such ways that they are experienced as legitimate. This legitimacy obscures the power relations which permit that imposition to be successful." *(Jenkins, 2007, p. 104)*

xlii See Barad. K. and also Shotter. J. on '*agential realism*'.

xliii My parentheses.

xliv Perhaps the very notion of 'unit' is inappropriate. Even Bateson uses the unbounded metaphor of the *'root branching out through the tissues of life'.*

xlv Latour illustrates what is afforded when we think of human and non-human social actors not so much as pre-existing, separate entities, but rather as partners in the dance of agential realism by deploying this example of a 'citizen with a gun'.

*"Which of them, then, the gun or the citizen, is the actor in this situation? Someone else (a citizen-gun, a gun-citizen). … You are different with a gun in your hand; the gun is different with you holding it. … ….If I define you by what you have (the gun) and by a series of associations that you enter into when you use what you have (when you fire the gun) then you are modified by the gun – more or less so, depending on the weight of the other associations that you carry." (*Latour, 1999, p179)

xlvi Branch of meteorology that deals with the measurement of rainfall

xlvii A practice discernable in the UK Government's 'negotiations' with the EU over the application of the Northern Ireland Protocol and again with the French Government about the policing of migrants attempts to cross the English Channel from the shores of Northern France.

xlviii Thus History is written.

xlix 'Dim' here means 'not well illuminated' rather than unintelligent.

A note about AMED

Sadly, so far, nobody has expressed a willingness to take over from the outgoing AMED Council. So in the circumstances, the EGM on 26 May is likely to confirm that AMED will finally cease to operate as an educational charity by the end of 2022 at the latest.

AMED stands for the Association for Management Education and Development, www.amed.org.uk. We are a long-established membership organisation and educational charity devoted to developing people and organisations.

Our purpose is to serve as a forum for people who want to share, learn and experiment, and find support, encouragement, and innovative ways of communicating. Our conversations are open, constructive, and facilitated.

Through AMED, we strive to benefit our members and the wider society. Exclusive Member benefits include excellent professional indemnity cover at a significant discount, free copies of the quarterly journal *e-O&P*, and discounted fees for participation in a range of face-to-face events, special interest groups, and our interactive website. We aim to build on our three cornerstones of *knowledge*, *innovation* and *networking* in the digital age. Wherever we can, AMED Members, Networkers and Guests seek to work with likeminded individuals and organisations to generate synergy and critical mass for change. www.amed.org.uk, or contact **Linda Williams**, our Membership Administrator, E: amedoffice@amed.org.uk, T: 0300 365 1247