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# From Cultural Studies to Cultural Analysis

The following situation will be familiar to many. A philosopher, a psychoanalytic critic, a narratologist, an architectural historian, and an art historian are talking together in a seminar about, say, *signs and ideologies*. They are eager young scholars, excited, committed. The word *subject* comes up and keeps recurring. With growing bewilderment, the first assumes the topic is the rise of individualism; the second believes it is the unconscious; the third, the narrator's voice; the fourth, a human confronted with space; and the fifth, the subject matter of a painting or, more sophisticatedly, the depicted figure. This could be just amusing – if only all five did not take their interpretation, on the sub-reflective level of obviousness, to be the only right one. Not because they are selfish, stupid, or uneducated, but because their disciplinary training has never given them an opportunity or reason for considering the possibility that such a simple word as *subject* might in fact be a concept. No one participant questions the other's use; they simply assume the other is confused. Each fictive participant in this everyday drama uses the pronoun *we*, without specifying to whom it refers. The other members of the seminar who are listening just don't get it and drift off. It is with this situation in mind, and in the hope of remedying it a bit, that I have undertaken to organise a series of seminars the first of which is reflected in my book *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (2002)[1], from which the following is drawn.

While trying to think of a single term to describe this kind of activity, I came up with the name *cultural analysis*. Not literary studies; not *theory*; not even cultural studies. It was the latter intuitively articulated negation that surprised me most. In the wake of women's studies, cultural studies has been responsible for an absolutely indispensable opening up of the disciplinary structure of the humanities. By challenging both methodological dogma, and elitist prejudice and value judgement, it has at least been uniquely instrumental in making the academic community aware of the conservative nature of its endeavours. Cultural studies has forced the academy to realise its collusion with an elitist white-male politics of exclusion and the subsequent intellectual closure.

Inevitably, this new inter-discipline has suffered from the unforeseeable difficulties, the hardships that every pioneering activity encounters. In defying disciplinary boundaries, cultural studies have had to contend with three problems.

First, the major innovation of cultural studies has been to pay attention to a different kind of object. But, as a new field averse to traditional approaches, cultural studies have not been successful (enough) in developing a methodology to counter the exclusionary methods of the separate disciplines. While the object, *what* you studied, changed, the method, *how* you do it, did not. But, without the admittedly rigid methodologies of the disciplines, how do you keep analysis from

floundering into sheer partisanship, or from being perceived as floundering? This is the major problem of content and practice we are now facing. It creates problems, especially in teaching situations.

Second, cultural studies has involuntarily *helped* its opponents to deepen, rather than overcome, the destructive divide between *les anciens* and *les modernes*, a binary structure as old as Western culture itself. This is unfortunate, for that opposition tends to feed an oedipally based psychosocial mechanism that is unhelpful when it comes to changing predominant power structures. The problem is primarily social, but in the current situation, where academic jobs are scarce and hierarchies returning, it entails a tendency to a monolithical appointments policy which, under the name of backlash, threatens everything that has been accomplished. A recognisably responsible practice based on reflection about the first problem may create a more nuanced academic environment.

Third, the inevitable consequence of the first two problems combined is even more mundane yet equally dangerous. At a time of economic crisis, the interdisciplinarity inherent to cultural studies has given university administrators a tool with which to enforce mergings and cancellations of departments, which might turn out to be fatal for the broad grounding cultural studies needs.

Why is the idea of *cultural analysis* helpful in remedying these three problems? I contend that this small change in terminology, entailing a decisive, programmatic change in methodological orientation, is a possible direction in which to look for a solution. By fundamentally changing the way we *think* methodology within the different disciplines, it is possible to overcome the three drawbacks of cultural studies. Against the first, concepts will be brought in against the idea of *coverage*. Within an interdisciplinary setting, *coverage* – of the classics, of all periods or centuries, of all major theories used within a field – is no longer an option. But *sloppy scholarship* is not the alternative. If a different alternative can be articulated, the *divide*, which is the second drawback, can be lessened. The need for a methodological common ground, a need that becomes all the more urgent as the self-evidence of coverage is challenged, is the only unified answer we can give to administrative attacks on staff.

Rethinking the use and meaning of concepts as a methodological principle is thus a high priority. My own interest in concepts as a tool for, at first mainly literary, analysis determined my intuitive selection of *narrative* as my first area of specialisation. I considered the theory of narrative – narratology – a relevant area of study precisely because it is *not* confined to any academic discipline. For narrative is a mode, not a genre. It is alive and active as a cultural force, not just as a kind of literature. It constitutes a major reservoir of the cultural baggage that enables us to make meaning out of a chaotic world and the incomprehensible events taking place in it. And, not to be forgotten, narrative can be used to manipulate. In short, it is a cultural force to be reckoned with.

Narrative is thus a transdisciplinary concept. But narratology, the systematic study of the phenomenon that concept names, has been developed within the disciplinary niche of literary studies. As a result of the move towards more interdisciplinarity, many have alleged narrative as important. One example is the narrativist movement in historiography. Yet, as long as such movements remain efforts within a discipline, very few of its participants can afford the time investment needed to study the theoretical work of the other discipline. Narrativism

has had little exposure to narratology. Just borrowing a loose term here and there does not do the trick of interdisciplinarity. Conversely, the narratology that came to the attention of narrativists was so narrowly based on fiction that they saw little point in it for the historiographic project. This is a major setback for both.

This realisation set me thinking about concepts: concepts not so much as firmly established univocal terms, but as dynamic in themselves. While groping to define, provisionally and partly, what a particular concept can *mean*, we gain insight into what it can *do*. The valuable work is already in that groping. This is why I have come to value concepts as the backbone of the interdisciplinary study of culture primarily because of their potential *intersubjectivity*. Not because they mean the same thing for everyone, but because they don't.

Intersubjectivity is a concern that binds procedure with power and empowerment, with pedagogy and the transmittability of knowledge, with inclusiveness and exclusion, thus connecting heuristic with methodological grounding. The power of concepts to facilitate invention cannot be thought of without the intersubjectivity of which power is a factor. Intersubjectivity itself also happens to be a good example of a flexible concept of the kind I find most helpful. The notion came into currency in the humanities' part of the academy, during the 1960s. Humanists became interested in methodology beyond their strict disciplinary concerns in the context of attempts to make the humanities less philological and critical, and more scientific. Although most of us moved on from the illusions and ill-conceived emulation, some things stuck. I myself took the concept of intersubjectivity with me and cherished it for its insistence on the democratic distribution of knowledge. For me, this concept became a word again, one that I unpacked: into *inter-* as in interdisciplinarity, international, and intercultural, and *subjectivity*, as in Lacan, Althusser, or *person*. The two elements were then inflected into narratology, as in *interpersonal*. From there on, *inter-*regained a place in my own private methodology, but without the authority of master.

I was interested in developing concepts we could all agree on and use, or at least disagree on, in order to make what has become labelled *theory* accessible to every participant in cultural analysis, both within and outside the academy. Concepts, I found, become the sites of debate, of awareness of difference, and of tentative exchange. Agreeing does not mean agreeing on content but agreeing on the basic rule of the game: if you use a concept at all, you use it in a particular way so that you can meaningfully disagree on content. Intersubjectivity in this sense remains the most important standard for teaching and writing. Whatever else it does, cultural studies owes it to its principles of anti-elitism, to its firm position against the exclusion of everything that is non-canonical and everyone who is not mainstream, to take this standard seriously. In the bargain considering intersubjectivity made me understand the difference between a word and a concept.

**Why Concepts Travel**

Concepts are the tools of intersubjectivity; they facilitate discussion on the basis of a common language. Therefore, they must be explicit, clear, defined in such ways that everyone can take them up and use them. At the same time, concepts are flexible: each is part of a framework, a systematic set of distinctions, *not* op-

positions, that can sometimes be bracketed or even ignored but never transgressed or contradicted without serious damage to the analysis at hand. Concepts, often precisely those words that outsiders consider jargon, can be tremendously productive. They can help articulate an understanding, convey an interpretation, or enable a discussion on the basis of common terms and in the awareness of absences and exclusions. Hence, concepts are not just labels easily replaced by more common words.

But concepts are neither fixed nor unambiguous. They offer not a clear-cut methodological legislation but a territory to be travelled. As Deleuze and Guattari noted in their introduction to *What is Philosophy?* (1994), some concepts need etymological fancy, archaic resonances, or idiosyncratic folly to do their work. Others need to look like their relatives. Still others are the spitting image of ordinary words.[2] *Meaning* is a case of the latter. *Meaning* is a word that casually walks back and forth between semantics and intention. The pervasive predominance of intentionalism – the conflation of meaning with the author's or artist's intention – with all its problems, is due to the unreflective conflation of words and concepts.

Concepts are not ordinary words, then, even if they are named by words. One other thing concepts are not, is labels. Concepts (mis)used as labels lose their working force. They are subject to fashion and quickly become meaningless. But when deployed as I think they should be, concepts can become a third partner in the otherwise totally unverifiable interaction between critic and object. This is very useful, especially when the critic has no disciplinary traditions to fall back on and the object no canonical or historical status. But concepts can only do the methodological work that disciplinary traditions used to do, on one condition: that they are kept under scrutiny through a confrontation with, not an application to, the cultural objects one is seeking to understand, which themselves are amenable to change and apt to illuminate historical and cultural differences. This shift in methodology is founded on a relation between subject and object that is not predicated on a vertical and binary opposition between the two. Rather, the model for this relation is interaction, as in *interactivity*. This potential is why every academic field, but especially one that has so little in the way of binding traditions, should be serious about concepts.

But concepts are not fixed once and for all. They travel: between disciplines, individual scholars, historical periods, and geographically dispersed academic communities. Between disciplines, their meaning, reach, and operational value differ. These processes of differing need to be assessed before, during, and after each ‹trip›. Between individual scholars, each user of a concept is constantly wavering between un-reflected assumptions and threatening misunderstandings in communication with others. These two forms of travel – group and individual – come together in past practices of scholarship. Disciplinary traditions did not really help resolve that ambiguity, although they certainly did help scholars *feel* secure in their use of concepts, a security that can, of course, just as easily turn deceptive. As I see it, disciplinary traditionalism and rigid attitudes towards concepts tend to go together, along with the hostility to jargon that is, more often than not, an anti-intellectual hostility to methodological rigour and a defence of a humanistic critical style.

Between historical periods, the meaning and use of concepts change dramatically. Take *hybridity*, for example. How does a concept from biology, one which

implies as its *other* an authentic or pure specimen, presumes that hybridity leads to sterility, and was current in imperial discourse with racist overtones, come to indicate an idealised state of postcolonial diversity? Because it travelled. With its background in nineteenth-century biology, it was first used in a racist sense. Then it changed, moving through time, eventually to Eastern Europe, to encounter literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin. Travelling back West, it eventually came to play a brief but starry role in postcolonial studies. There, it was taken to task for its disturbing implications, including the historical remnants of colonial epistemology.[3] Far from decrying the long journey of a concept to a provisional dead end, we ought to see its importance in the development and innovation of the field that now rejects it. History – here, the history of the concept and its successive networks – can be a dead weight if it is endorsed uncritically in the name of tradition. But it can also be an extremely powerful force that activates rather than stultifies the interactive concept.

Finally, geographically dispersed academic communities each have their own traditions in which concepts function differently. This holds as much for the choice and use of concepts as for their definitions and the traditions of the disciplines themselves, even the newer ones, including cultural studies. The concepts used in all of these disciplines, called cultural studies or something like it, vary greatly, as do the uses they are put to. All these forms of travel render concepts flexible. Their changeability is part of their usefulness for a new methodology that is neither stultifying and rigid nor arbitrary or ‹sloppy›. Instead, in my view the travelling nature of concepts is an asset, not a liability.

**Travel Between Words and Concepts**

In the cultural disciplines, a variety of concepts are used to frame, articulate, and specify the diverse analyses. Depending on the background in which the analyst was initially trained and the cultural *genre* to which the object belongs, each analysis tends to take for granted a certain use of concepts that others may not agree with or may not even perceive as specific enough to merit arguing about. This confusion tends to increase with concepts that are close to ordinary language. A convincing example of this state between word and concept is the *concept of text.*

A word from everyday language, self-evident in literary studies, metaphorically used in anthropology, generalised in semiotics, ambivalently circulating in art history and film studies, and shunned in musicology, the *concept of text* seems to ask for trouble. It invokes disputes and controversies that can be wonderfully stimulating if *worked through*, while if such working through fails to take place, the same disputes and controversies can become sources of misunderstanding or, worse, enticements to ill-conceived partisanship including discipline-based conservatism. There are, for example, many reasons for referring to images or films as *texts*. Such references entail various assumptions, including the one that images have to produce meaning, and that they promote such analytical activities as *reading*. The advantage of speaking of *visual texts* is that it reminds the analyst that, like words, lines, motives, colours, and surfaces contribute to the production of meaning; hence, that form and meaning cannot be disentangled. Neither texts nor images yield their meanings immediately; they are not transparent, so that images, like texts, require the labour of reading.

Many fear that speaking of the image as text turns the image into a piece of language. But shunning the linguistic analogy in turn entails resistance – to meaning, to analysis, to close and detailed engagement with the object. And that resistance, we should, in turn, resist or at least discuss. The *concept of text* helps rather than hinders such a discussion *precisely because it is controversial*. Hence, its use should be encouraged, precisely in those areas where it is not self-evident, so that it can regain its analytical and theoretical force.

But *text* is perhaps already an example that leads too much. What about *meaning*, then? No academic discipline can function without a notion of meaning. In the humanities, it is a key word. A key concept, perhaps? Let me call it a word-concept. Its casual use, now as a word, then as a concept, has two major drawbacks. One is the accompanying reluctance to discuss *meaning* as an academic issue. The other is its over-extended usage. More often than not, scholars and students speak of *meaning* without even specifying whether they mean (*sic*) intention, origin, context, or semantic content. This is inevitable, in the same way as I could now not avoid using the verb without being able to choose between intending and referring. Nevertheless, this confusion is largely responsible for a major problem throughout the humanities. For, as a result, students are trained to say that ‹the meaning of a picture› is identical to the artist's intention, or to what its constitutive motifs originally meant, or to the contemporary audience's understanding, or the dictionary's synonym. My suggestion here is that students ought to be trained to choose – and justify – one of these meanings of *meaning*, and to take that choice as a methodological starting point.

Other concepts or sets of concepts that come to mind are history (and its relation to the present); identity and alterity; subject(ivity) and agency; ethnicity; individual, singular, different; cognitive, scientific, and technological metaphors; medium, mode, genre, type; fact and objectivity; and last but not least: culture(s). To develop such concepts for cultural analysis the most productive way to keep connected to the traditional disciplines is to proceed through case studies as examples of a practice where concepts are elaborated in the context in which they most frequently occur: through the analysis of an object. In other words, through case studies, through samples of the contributors' own practices of cultural analysis.[4]

There is a social aspect to the intersubjectivity created by concepts. That social aspect is my primary concern here. Concepts have always been important areas of debate, and as such they promote consensus. My point is that concepts, and the debates around them, have greatly increased in importance with the advent of interdisciplinary study, in other words, thanks to the cultural studies movement. The mission of concepts is vital if the social climate in the academy is to be maintained and improved so that its disputes do not preclude the production of knowledge and insight but promote it. It is around concepts that I see cultural analysis achieving a consensus comparable to the paradigmatic consistency that has kept the traditional disciplines vital, albeit, simultaneously, dogmatic. Rejecting dogmatism without sacrificing consistency is one way of improving the human *ambience* while increasing the intellectual yield. This is why I consider the discussion of concepts as an alternative methodological base for cultural studies or analysis. My first point, then, is a plea for the centrality of conceptual reflection, for the following reasons.

Concepts are never simply descriptive. They are programmatic and normative. Hence, their use has specific effects. Concepts are not stable. They are related to a tradition yet their use never has simple continuity. For tradition, closer to a word that moves about, is not the same as paradigm, a concept threatened with word-status when used too casually. Tradition appeals to *the way we always did things* as a value. Paradigm makes explicit which theses and methods have acquired axiomatic status so that they can be used without being constantly challenged. This rigidity is strategic and reflected. But tradition does not question its tenets, and as a result, they become dogmatic. Traditions change slowly, paradigms suddenly; the former without its inhabitants knowing it, the latter against their resistance. It is the same difference as that between subliminal change and revolution. Concepts are never simple. Their various aspects can be unpacked; their ramifications, traditions, and histories conflated in their current usages separated out and evaluated piece by piece. Concepts are never used in exactly the same sense. Consequently, their usages can be debated and referred back to the different traditions and schools from which they emerged so as to assess the validity of the implications thereof. This would greatly help the discussion between participating disciplines. Concepts are not just tools. They raise the underlying issues of instrumentalism, realism, and nominalism, and the possibility of interaction between analyst and object. Precisely because they travel between ordinary words and conceptualised, condensed theories, concepts can thus trigger and facilitate reflection and debate on all levels of methodology in the humanities.

**Travel Between Science and Culture**

Let me plot a first possible route for our travel. Working with concepts is by no means confined to the cultural field. Although concepts function differently in the sciences than in the humanities, there is something we can learn from the travel of concepts in and among the sciences. In our culture, science is taken more seriously than the humanities. This deserves some attention. Science is taken seriously in at least one of two distinct senses. The first is *de jure*, by law: scientific is what obeys the rules of scientific procedure. Concepts are legitimate as long as they avoid the status of *mere metaphor* or ideology and follow the rules of scientificity in terms of demarcation of and application to an object domain; the epistemology here is normative. Mainstream scholarship in the humanities implicitly works with a consensual endorsement of this normativity. Nevertheless, this normativity has a problem of temporal logic. The legalistic normativity proclaims beforehand what is in need of explanation and analysis. In this sense, it embodies the rhetorical figure of *proteron hysteron*. For it is literally pre-posterous, putting first what in fact comes later, in terms of both temporality and causality. Thus untangled, the problem can be productively reframed as narratological: its founding figure is analepsis, the narration of what comes later before what comes earlier. As a consequence, causality is rendered opaque, if not suspended.

The second is *de facto*, in fact, or in reality: here, by contrast, scientific is what is recognised as such within the social-cultural field of scientific practice. A very practical example of this situation is the institution of peer review for grant applications. In this conception, norms of what is acceptable move, are unstable,

are elaborated by the same actors whose status as scientists depends on the judgements about what is scientific. Here, the epistemological problem entails a different narratological logic. It is primarily not temporal but actantial.[5] The first epistemological problem is the actantial conflation, the double role of the social actors – practising scientists – as subject and object of evaluation. Numerous others follow.

Often, scientific communities try to disavow the fundamental interestedness of all actors in the outcome of the evaluation of the process by giving priority to the normative epistemology. To do so, they (must) disavow the problem that inheres in it by attributing a kind of a temporal permanence to the criteria, which takes the guise of universalism. But it is precisely the rhetoric of universalism, which flies in the face of everything we know about the history of science, that suggests that the *de jure* argument is, in fact a *de facto* argument. For, the *interest* in disinterestedness becomes blatant in the process, thus shifting the debate irresistibly from legitimate to factual truth, from law to practice, and from temporal to actantial logic. For, the second epistemological problem – the actantial one, based on the illusion of a universal validity of norms – is prohibitive only as long as norms such as neutrality and disinterestedness, including the criteria by which these are established, are inscribed in stone – or interest.[6]

But this is where concepts demonstrate their key role in methodological discussion. For they demonstrate that this neutrality is an actual rhetorical strategy rather than just a theoretical possibility. Lack of interest is, in fact, deadly for scientific inquiry – as it is for humanistic or any other inquiry. Reflection on the nature and effectivity of concepts makes this particularly obvious because, above all, the role of concepts is to focus interest. Once the fiction of neutrality has been cleared away, judgements still need to be made. And the only remaining domain of analysis that allows us to make judgements on concepts as keys to scientificity is the social-cultural field of scientific practice. The legal, normative epistemology can only be subordinated to that practice, and indeed, as the history of science amply demonstrates, its rules are constantly changing.

According to Isabelle Stengers's *D'une science à l'autre* (1987), which focuses on the interdisciplinary mobility of concepts, concepts imply an operation that involves the redefining of categories and meanings, an operation in both the phenomenal and social fields. *De facto*, concepts organise a group of phenomena, define the relevant questions that can be addressed to them, and determine the meanings that can be given to observations regarding the phenomena. *De jure* – but I would insist on the subordination of the second part of this problematic to the first – adequacy must be granted, hence, recognised. A concept must be recognised as adequate to the extent that it produces the effective organisation of the phenomena rather than offering a mere projection of the ideas and presuppositions of its advocates.[7] The point of discussion in the practice of science is, of course, to minimise the risk of taking the latter – projection – for the former – production. Among the criteria that tend to be applied are, for example, the requirement that the concept give a sense of providing «authentic access to phenomena»[8], that the new organisation be compelling, and that it yield new and relevant information. Obviously, all these criteria are of a relatively subjective nature, the subjectiveness of which is gauged by the interest the concept and its yield solicit. Hence, they solicit, at least provisionally, a standpoint-epistemological position.

Stengers devotes a good part of her introduction to the notion that *nomadic concepts* have the power of *propagation*, a word she uses to avoid conflation with its negative element, propaganda.[9] The propagation of a concept in another field from the one in which it emerged, which changes its meaning, and whose meaning it, in turn, changes, constitutes the concept's primary feature, both as asset and liability, or risk. It is only by a constant reassessment of the concept's power to organise phenomena in a new and relevant way that its continued productivity can be evaluated. In the natural sciences, this re-organisation may be much more visible than in the cultural fields. Nevertheless, even within a single culture artefact, the re-organisation of phenomena, aspects, and elements through a concept brought to bear on the artefact, can be innovative, and conducive to relevant insights beyond the artefact itself. For, in the reorganisation it facilitates, a concept generates the production of meaning.

Stengers explains this standard by differentiating two meanings of *propagation*: diffusion, which dilutes and ends up neutralising the phenomena, as in the propagation of heat, and epidemic propagation, where each new particle becomes an originating agent of a propagation that does not weaken in the process.[10] Diffusion is the result of an unwarranted and casual ‹application› of concepts. Application, here, entails using concepts as labels, which neither explain nor specify but only name. Such labelling goes on when a concept emerges as fashionable without the search for new meaning that ought to accompany its deployment. Propagation, in the sense of contamination, despite the negative connotations – and, indeed, the fear that such a metaphor solicits – keeps the meaning of the concept constant in its precision, so that instead of diluting, it functions as a strong, well-delimiting searchlight.

A final defining element of a concept is the foundational capacity inherent in its discovery. Enabling both description of and experimentation with the phenomena that allows actual intervention, a new concept founds an object consisting of clearly defined categories.[11] In the humanities, the foundational capacity comes with a new articulation, entailing new emphases, and a new ordering of the phenomena within the complex objects that constitute the cultural field. In a somewhat grandiose interpretation, one could say that a good concept founds a scientific discipline or field. Thus, one might claim that the articulation of the concept of narrativity within the humanities and social sciences founded the discipline of narratology. This is an inter-discipline precisely because it defines an object – a discursive modality – present in many different fields.

Concepts play their crucial part in the traffic between the disciplines because of two consequences of their power to propagate and define an object domain. They are able to *capture*, in a conflation of epistemology and scientific practice, the scientificity of the methodology they ground. And, moving in the opposite direction, they *harden* the science in question by determining and restricting what counts as scientific. This can bring false comfort to those distressed by the kind of pedagogical situations I described at the beginning. For in those situations, the work that needed doing was precisely that of unhardening the concept, denaturalising the self-evidence that each disciplinary group had unreflectively adopted.

If interdisciplinary discussions sometimes seem to become parochial and fussy, it is not so bad, as long as the situation is dealt with through explicit dis-

cussion. Each participant is answerable both to his or her own disciplinary community back home and to the ‹foreigners› in the country she visits, in whose language she is not yet fluent. Even if the participant has already been trained in an interdisciplinary field, this field will not cover all the ground covered by all the other fields involved, members of whom participate in the discussion. This double answerability is a good, albeit demanding, situation. The self-protection of the mono-disciplines, however, is not only negative for the mono-disciplines themselves but also for interdisciplinarity. As long as the boundaries are kept permeable, a certain protectiveness is also a useful protection against dilution, a dilution through which universal fuzziness threatens to undermine the very feature through which the concept, precisely, serves analysis.

Let me end this reflection by returning to the introductory chapter of Deleuze and Guattari's *What Is Philosophy*? From that text I would draw the following *beginnings*, suggestions for how to think concepts. Concepts are:

– signed and dated (hence, have a history)
– words (archaisms, neologisms, shot through with almost crazy etymological exercises, sketching a philosophical ‹taste›)
– syntactic (of a language within language)
– constantly changing
– not given but created.

Hence, concepts are always in the process of becoming. Every concept relates back to other concepts. Yet a concept's components are inseparable within the concept itself. As a result, a concept can be seen as a point of coincidence, condensation, and accumulation of its own components. Hence, a concept is both absolute (ontologically) and relative (pedagogically). And, while it is syntactic, a concept is not discursive, for it does not link propositions together.[12] To understand, then, what our travel has consisted of, I will invoke their statement that concepts are centres of vibrations, each in itself and every one in relation to all the others.[13] They resonate rather than cohere.

In a shorthand formulation whose usefulness parallels its common-sense recognisability, the authors characterise disciplinary tendencies when they write that from discourse, or sentences, philosophy extracts *concepts*, science extracts *prospects*, and art extracts *percepts and affects*. As the title of their book already intimated, this attributes to philosophy the task and privilege of devising and designing concepts. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari begin by stating that «[p]hilosophy is the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts».[14] The point is that specialisation is presented implicitly as collaboration. And this collaborative element prevents specialisation from being foreclosed. I would, for example, consider this formulation of *what is philosophy* to hold for the humanities as a whole. What is described here as *science* could also be seen as a long-term motivation for academic work. And *art* can be reconfigured as *practice*. From this rewriting of their suggestive sentence, an attractive programme for the humanities emerges.

Deleuze and Guattari reveal a fondness for the figure of the teacher. In philosophy, this figure is mostly a lover. In her book *What Can She Know? Feminist Epistemology and the Construction of Knowledge* (1991), Lorraine Code takes this tradition up and turns it around. For Code, the concept-metaphor that best embodies her ideal is the friend, not the lover. Moreover, the conceptual persona of the

friend, the model of friendship, is not embedded in a definition of philosophy but of knowledge. This definition is necessarily one that takes knowledge as provisional. If the authority of the author/artist as well as that of the teacher is unfixed, then the place it vacates can be occupied by *theory*. Paul de Man defined theory a long time ago as «a controlled reflection on the formation of method».[15] The teacher, then, no longer holds the authority to dictate the method only to facilitate a reflection that is ongoing and interactive.

Code's apparently small shift from lover to friend is, at least provisionally, a way out of the philosophy-humanities misfit. Friendship is a paradigm for knowledge production, the traditional task of the humanities, but production seen as interminable process not the preface to a product. Such knowledge

- is not achieved at once, rather it develops
- it is open to interpretation at different levels
- it admits degrees
- it changes
- subject and object positions in the process of knowledge construction are reversible
- it is a never-accomplished constant process
- the ‹more-or-lessness› of this knowledge affirms the need to reserve and revise judgement.[16]

This list helps to distinguish between philosophy in the narrow sense, as a discipline or potential inter-discipline, and the humanities as a more general field rhizomically organised according to a dynamic *interdisciplinary practice.* Philosophy creates concepts, analyses them, and offers them. Analysis puts them together with potential objects that we wish to know, while pursuing its goal, which is to articulate the best – most effective, reliable, useful – way to *do*, perform, the pursuit of knowledge. Disciplines *use* them, *apply* and deploy them in interaction with an object, in their pursuit of specialised knowledge. But, in the best of situations, this division of tasks does not imply a rigid division of people or groups of people. For, such a division deprives all participants of the key to a genuine practice of *cultural analysis* – a *sensitivity to the provisional nature of concepts.* Without claiming to know it all, each participant learns to move about, travel between these areas of activity. In our travel, we will constantly negotiate these differences. We will select one path and bracket others, but eliminate none. This is the basis of interdisciplinary work.

## Notes

**1** Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities. A Rough Guide,* Toronto 2002.
**2** Cf. Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?,* London 1994, p. 3.
**3** Cf. Robert Young, *White Mythologies. Writing History and the West*, London 1991; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present,* Cambridge, Mass.1999; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith, Helen Tiffin (ed.), Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies, New York 1998, pp. 118–121.
**4** Cf. Mieke Bal, *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation,* Stanford 1999.
**5** The narratological concept ‹actantial› refers to positions in a fixed structure of roles that can be filled by different ‹actors.› See my *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative,* Toronto 1997, pp. 196–206. It was a structuralist elaboration by French linguist A.J. Greimas (1966), of a model contrived by the Russian folklorist V. Propp in the 1930s.
**6** The ambiguity of *interest*, here, is purposefully left hanging. Money is often a (side) issue in the academic dynamic. Not only grants come to mind here, but also the financial earthquakes of dis- and re-attributions of old master paintings, and the less obvious financial consequences of critical attention paid to a constant litany of artists somewhat arbitrarily included in the canon, along with their anonymous counterparts.
**7** Cf. Isabelle Stengers (ed.), *D'une science à l'autre,* Paris 1987, p. 11.
**8** Ibid., p. 11.
**9** Averse to the currently fashionable romanticising of nomadism for its trivialisation of the plight of homelessness and expatriate existence, I prefer to use the metaphor of *travel,* thereby gaining in voluntariness what I lose in the sense of (mobile) habitat.
**10** See Stengers 1987 (cf. footnote 7), p. 18.
**11** Ibid., p. 29.
**12** Cf. Deleuze, Guattari 1994 (cf. footnote 2), p. 22.
**13** Ibid., p. 23.
**14** Ibid., p. 2.
**15** Paul de Man, «The Resistance to Theory», in: *Yale French Studies*, 1982, vol. 63/3, pp. 3–20, p. 4.
**16** Cf. Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Epistemology and the Construction of Knowledge,* Ithaca/London, 1991, pp. 37–38.