

Bi-cultural knowledge production, categorical fetishism, and food governance.

‘Zero Hunger: Partnerships for Impact’

Deconstructing Development Rationales and Knowledge Stream

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Climate change appears to be reinvigorating an epistemological divide between science and indigenous knowledge that stands to impinge upon the just governance of food, as envisaged by the UN’s second Development Goal. This finds debates returning from a decade ago, regarding the relative value, purposes, and aptitudes of the different knowledge forms. Notwithstanding previous attempts by scientific communities to recognise traditions of indigenous knowledge in their own terms, the reasserted divide sees a tendency towards the relegation, again, of indigenous knowledge to tasks that (merely) supplement those of scientific inquiry. Those tasks include activities such as local resource management, climate change adaptation, recording of climate in data-deficient regions, and so on. Science, for its part, then does the heavy lifting. Ontologically, it establishes orders amongst objects in ways that may identify trends in atmospheric change, sea ice levels, acidification of oceans, etc. Epistemologically, it acts as guardian for the purposes and qualities of knowledge itself (typically through emphases upon hypothesis generation, prediction, reliability, and so on). It is as if climate change is now ‘too serious’, and that ‘serious science’ alone can carry the day. At least two effects flow from this. First, expectations are relaxed on the practitioners of science to reflect upon those elements of the logical-deductive method that produce premature closure around findings (Baert 1998). Such closure matters in socio-political terms: it annuls for consideration deeply-embedded social and political variables whose causal potential prevailing empirical proclivities can render invisible (e.g. globalised financial capital; liberal democracy, etc). This lays seeds for ‘unanticipated consequences’ from interventions that are made in keeping with empiricist research findings. Second, closure occurs around the normative meaning of knowledge, relative to the processes of knowledge production that have purposes and qualities which run askew to those central to empiricism (such as inter-species adaptability, social inclusiveness, justice, and so on). Discussions that police knowledge in this manner can see indigenous communities excluded.

This piece intervenes in the situation via consideration of ecological knowledge and its production under the conditions of colonial capitalism. It does so by examining a well-documented programme of bi-cultural ecological collaboration in Aotearoa/ New Zealand. The archive comprises a set of reflections on a 14-year alliance between ecologists at Otago University and the indigenous Māori of Rakiura, on the sustainability of the *sooty shearwater* (Moller 2009). The relevance of this archive to the issue of food governance lies with a proposition it embodies, that the governance of knowledge production within a given field

seeds the governance to follow of that field. Intervention in the dominant practices of knowledge production may help avert the re-production of the racism intrinsic to bio-political management under colonial capitalism (Waldmueller 2015).

The archive reveals a gap within the understandings each party seemingly brought to the study of the *sooty shearwater*. That gap relates to a divergence between competing forms of time implied in each groups' research mythologies – between synchronic and diachronic forms of temporality. Preferences for one or other of these temporal forms influenced how each community approached the matter of causation. Relations of cause and effect were held as either being a primarily linear phenomenon (mapped by experimental means) or primarily a retroactive phenomenon (mapped by discursive means). The contributions from scientists to that archive each sutured the divergence between these forms of causation with an object which psychoanalytic political analysis calls 'ideological fantasy' – seemingly innocuous 'as if' postulates (Žižek 2008). Postulates of this kind enable a fusing to occur between apparently simple descriptive statements and normative expectations tacitly held regarding future social arrangements. With regard to the reflections of the scientists, nuanced descriptions of the relationships between science and indigenous knowledge fused with normative assumptions as to the continuing ascendancy of the scientific method. The value of science over indigenous knowledge systems didn't thereby need to be argued for in any direct manner: the descriptions themselves performed the task.

The analytic reason for identifying the operation of ideological fantasy is to determine how scientific communities might dismantle the obstacles that obscure from their view indigenous knowledge in its own terms. That possibility will emerge, here, through three related moves: (1) recognition of the role ideological fantasy unavoidably plays in the construction of scientific insight (to do with the dynamics of fetishisation and disavowal); (2) identification of the particular form that ideological fantasy takes within the scientific reflections under review (temporal disorder); (3) evaluation of the possibilities that lie within those ideological formations for their progressive reconfiguration (neo-Spinozian political ecology). The discussion below elaborates upon these points.

Analysis of the work played by ideological fantasy in the production of cross-cultural knowledge production comes from the relation of fantasy to a set of dynamics that are associated more readily with the psychoanalytic clinic than with scientific reflection: fetishism and disavowal. With regard to science, 'fetishism' refers to a state of affective attachment to a given suite of ideas associated with a field of study (frequently attributed to an imagined body of writing – 'the literature'). The dynamic of 'disavowal' refers to a state of forgetting as to the historically contingent nature of the socio-political formations within which those ideas have emerged (nation-states, well-resourced communities of professional and/or of economic interest). Together, these dynamics of fetishism and disavowal give rise to a state of 'categorical fetishism' (Kordela 2007). Corresponding to Marx's description of 'commodity fetishism', categorical fetishism refers to a set of social arrangements (a way of life) that assumes, for the people involved, the fantastic form of a set of relations between ideas. It is 'as if' the ideas have always now existed and can be taken as true. What is taken as true are not simply the ideas, however: it is the way of life from which they have emerged (and whose

perspectival specificity is disavowed). The suite of ideas thereby acquires a normative impulse related to the preservation of that way of life, and in a way that exceeds any pulsion the descriptions of their content could ever provide. The goal of analytic criticism thereby becomes not only the generation of insight into how this dynamic affects the production of scientific findings: it also comes to include the construction of insight into how scientific explanation might form in ways that avoids this (subjectivising) effect.

With regard to the operation of categorical fetishism within the scientific reflections, the scientists positioned the retroductive idiom of Maori explanatory strategies in supplementary positions relative to the (fetishized) logical-deductive processes of the scientific method. The means by which they have done so, however, do not follow the conventions of the logical-deductive analysis. Rather, they emerge (ironically) through a retroactive interpretive process. The (seemingly arbitrary) starting point of each discussion finds itself validated only as discussion precedes, with that latter moment retroactively establishing the text's opening as the only possible beginning for the reflection. What is thereby put 'in its place' by the analysis (retroactive analysis, as *content*) thereby reappears over and over 'out of place' (as argumentative *form*). This recurrent (and disavowed) element of the texts thereby systematically contradicts the argument made for the pre-eminence of the logical-deductive method in the formal production of knowledge. Moreover, each of the discussions establishes a specific form of ideological fantasy that sutures the impasse, thereby rendering the operation of categorical fetishism almost invisible. Postulates at work in this way include 'it is reasonable that ...; 'if ... when...', and so on.

Intervention at the level of the postulates will not eradicate their role in the production of scientific discussion. Ideological fantasy mediates each field of formal knowledge, with every such province building upon a 'web of belief' (McLennan 2007). The goals of intervention need be more modest: intervention may instead constructively interrupt the normative status given to explanations that take as given the historically contingent social conditions through which they themselves emerge (colonial capitalism, in this instance). This has the effect of keeping the field of explanation open to the 'political unconscious' of its own socio-cultural structure (Harding 2006).

Neo-Spinozian political ecology suggests two possible kinds of intervention capable of interrupting the politically conserving effects of ideological fantasy in science writing (Guattari 2000; Žižek 2008). The first suggests that we substitute ideological fantasy with concepts associated with 'immanence'. In the present archive, such a move would challenge the fetishized 'positions' that have been produced by the science (the reification of a methodological hierarchy) and, in the process, suspend of the truth of such positions. Gilles Deleuzes' identification of a state of 'empty time' (Deleuze 1997) – that exists 'between' the linearity and retroactivity of the logical-deductive and retroductive methods (respectively) – exemplifies a concept suited to this particular case.

A second (and preferred) approach supports the staging of a time/place from which movement between texts' divergent temporal systems can be imagined. A form of this analysis is well-known to film theory, and is used to analyse divergences in space within works of art (Silverman 1996). It is not a common approach, however, within the analysis of scientific

practice, let alone for the analysis of temporalities within scientific inquiry. A platform already within the field of social science with the potential to enable this, and in a manner that could engage science in its state of co-evolution with the decolonisation of settler societies under conditions of climate change, is that of the ‘vanishing mediator’ (Jameson 1988), or ‘vehicular idea’ (McLennan 2004) – in concert with academic subject-positions of a ‘mediatorial’ kind (McLennan). It is to the identification of such mediators in the field of international deliberation on the cross-cultural production of climate change knowledge – at the level of both vehicular ideas and of mediating academic personas – that the present inquiry turns.

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