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Places Proper and Attached *or* the Agency of the Ground and the Collectives of Domestication

Michael Cuntz

1. Spatiotemporal latitude: the dead among us

Some years ago, I detected certain affinities between a novel by the rather famous French author Jean Echenoz, *Au piano*, and a film by a not so famous French director, Robin Campillo, *LES REVENANTS*, that intrigued me.¹ Both of them deal with what I called a mixed zone where the living and the dead—no longer segregated into two different spheres, their respective proper places, one of earthly existence and one the hereafter—interfere in complicated and problematic ways because the spaces they move in superpose, producing novel spaces and places. Both works of fiction raise questions concerning the way the reconfiguration of space and the constitution or re-constitution of a collective, the conditions of its re-assemblage, official or actual, through its extension beyond living humans to other entities with a presumably different mode of existence, are intertwined. By doing so, both of them also raise fundamental questions concerning current strategies and procedures of governmentality and bio-politics.

Whereas in the case of *LES REVENANTS*, the sudden return of the dead from their graves as a mass phenomenon is an undeniable reality that is visible to everyone and demands reactions from the living on both an institutional and a personal level, in *Au piano* the fact that the dead dwell among the living remains hidden. The revenants in Echenoz' novel cannot be identified as such and nobody knows how long they have already been there and mingled unnoticed.

¹ Jean Echenoz: *Au piano*, Paris 2003; *LES REVENANTS* (F, 2004, Robin Campillo); Cf. Michael Cuntz: *The Gentle Irruption of the Hereafter into this Life*, in: María del Pilar Blanco, Esther Peeren (eds.): *Popular Ghosts. The Haunted Spaces of Everyday Culture*, New York 2010, pp. 118–132; Michael Cuntz: *Mixed zone. Wie man den Toten begegnet*, in: Ilka Becker et al. (eds.): *Unmenge – Wie verteilt sich Handlungsmacht?*, Munich 2008, pp. 191–226. Recently, *LES REVENANTS* has drawn some indirect attention through the eponymous TV series that is based upon it, *LES REVENANTS* (F, 2012–, Fabrice Gobert).

What also remains hidden is the reason for the reconfiguration of the here-after—it is simply there, managed and maintained by a rather cynical bureaucracy. In the case of *LES REVENANTS*, on the other hand, it is the mass return of the dead that transforms space. They thus behave like particles entering into an electromagnetic field and thereby radically transform this field as well as themselves and the elements present in the field during its preceding state. This corresponds to one of the descriptions Gilbert Simondon gives for what he calls processes of transduction and transindividuation.² Yet, eventually, transindividuation fails to take place in *LES REVENANTS*. Why so, if the dead and the living seem to share the same space, the same places? The obstacle lies in the very insistence of the living to fully reinsert the revenants into their spatiality and temporality in order to fully regain possession of those they lost and to act upon them in order to interact fully with them—according to their notions of interaction.

So what does »the same place« and »the same time« mean? Is it actually the same place and the same time and does sharing the »same place,« being assembled in the »same place« automatically mean »being with«? Both fictions, in different ways, problematize what being with, coexistence as cohabitation and assemblage mean. If the dead do not exist in the same mode the living do, they go either unrecognized or there is no place for them. Putting it that way, I point to Bruno Latour's repeated statement in his *Enquête sur les modes d'existence* that the Moderns do not find any room for certain beings, e.g. those he calls »beings of metamorphosis«, exactly because they cannot account for their mode of existence which differs from that of those beings the Moderns are able to conceive of as existent.³

Latour himself declares Euclidian space to be unfit to contain all those different entities with different ontologies. So should one not conclude from this that the different modes of existence cannot be synchronized, cannot share the same frame of space and time, and that the persistence of a certain lag, a certain interval, displacement, a certain detachment add some latitude that could help to attach them to a more inclusive and comprehensive collective? In *LES REVENANTS*, what comes to naught is precisely the livings' urge to repair this asynchrony, to synchronize the dead and to include them fully into their proper spaces. It even provokes or at least precipitates their retreat.

Skepticism about the notion of a collective that assembles in one place at the same time (and even concerning the possibility of constructing perfect synchronization between different places in long networks) can be fueled by concepts such

² Cf. Gilbert Simondon: *Forme, information, potentiels*, in: Id.: *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information*, Grenoble 2005, pp. 531–551.

³ Cf. Bruno Latour: *Enquête sur les modes d'existence*, Paris 2012, chapter four: *Apprendre à faire de l'espace*, pp. 105–130.

as Derrida's *différance*⁴ and Rancière's *mésentente*,⁵ but also by Maurice Blanchot's delineation of communities that only exist in radical spatiotemporal dispersion.⁶ But further arguments for reluctance against the productiveness of assemblages without lags, intervals, or displacements could also be gathered from theories that lie close to the center of our debates: One could think about Gabriel Tarde's clear preference for the spatiotemporally dispersed public over the crowd.⁷ Or one could think of the crucial role that Gilbert Simondon ascribes to the technical object in the facilitation of transductive and transindividual processes: Not only because a genuine technical object contains considerable non-human agency, but also because it works as a medium connecting points situated in different spatiotemporal positions.⁸ It seems that, to him, this twofold breaking up of a continuum of *similarity* works as the best remedy against the reproduction of sameness that characterizes the routine of inter-individual interaction.

But, reflecting upon places of assembly and, more generally, on producing places, another concern arises: It is difficult to find examples in which those assembled and the place of assembly actually *constitute* each other *at the same time*. Instead, I came across scenes that fall into one of two different categories of *transformations*:

On the one hand, descriptions of assemblages of collectives that (at least officially) take place by taking over a place, regardless of what the place involved is like and what it offers; a sort of appropriation or *prise de possession*; an act of production that treats the place as the substance or matter a form is imposed on. And, on the other hand, those in which the place is understood as something that contains beforehand a certain potential, that very potential allowing it to establish an affinity with those assembling into collectives or networks. In this second category, the distribution of agency is more symmetrical, since agency is granted to the places themselves. A place, a ground, is considered as an agent in its own right, as a producing, productive place.⁹

⁴ Cf. Jacques Derrida: *La différence*, in: Id.: *Marges de la philosophie*, Paris 1972, pp. 1-29.

⁵ Cf. Jacques Rancière: *La mésentente*, Paris 1995.

⁶ Maurice Blanchot: *La communauté inavouable*, Paris 1983.

⁷ Cf. Gabriel Tarde: *L'opinion et la foule* [1901], Paris 2009.

⁸ Cf. Gilbert Simondon: *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, Paris 1958, pp. 70-82.

⁹ For a theorization of such productive potential of places cf. Simondon's notion of key-points (*points-clé*) cf. *ibid.*, pp. 164 sqq. For the Chinese, »vitalist« appreciation of privileged places where the energy pervading the landscape concentrates cf. François Jullien: *La propension des choses. Pour une histoire de l'efficacité en Chine* [1992], Paris 2003, p. 90.

2. Foundations and feuds: the dead and the ground underneath

Departing from these observations and premises, one encounters more skepticism concerning co-present and synchronized assemblies in Michel Serres, who has intensely explored various relations between collectives and places, ranging from the appropriation of a place to the complete disregard for a place: What is probably the most striking scene of presence and synchronization one can find in his writings is described extensively in *Rome: Le livre des fondations*.¹⁰ It is the gathering of the collective that first constitutes itself in a founding act of violence, then corroborates its existence in serial repetition of this act. His book revolves in circles or spirals around the ritual lapidation and the *diasparagmos*, the dismembering of a scapegoat, often identical with the king himself, by the crowd that gathers to circle him. Serres describes the assembled crowd as a pulsating corona moving back and forth around the crowned victim, or as the circumstance creating the substance that lies beneath, stable and hidden, through collective murder.

That the dead should return among the living is not that surprising at all if we follow Serres' analysis of how the foundation of human collectives works through acts of appropriation of places: The dead actually never dwelled so much in a hereafter beyond, but rather underneath the stones of the very *polis* that was founded upon corpses: The corpses not only of the victims of sacrificial rites but also of heroes of wars fought against other poleis, or martyrs killed for their beliefs in local or universal Gods—and it is precisely to the underground underneath the city and not to the cemetery where the revenants in Campillo's aforementioned film return.

What arises with this founding act of political and social order and with the founding of cities as (necro-)poleis, as the blood- and flesh-stained proper places of the (exclusively) human collective, is also the foundation of philosophy and epistemology, a line of thought that Serres pursues in *Statues. Le second livre des fondations*.¹¹ Practices, in his understanding, create conceptual frameworks—they are also the foundation of the concepts of subject and object as discrete and separate entities: separated from each other and from the world that surrounds them. This produces a specific understanding of spatiality Serres himself, e.g. in his reading of Guy de Maupassant's *Le Horla*,¹² but also Bruno Latour¹³ criticize as reductionist: a binary logic of the inside and the outside, interiority and exteriority, spirit and

¹⁰ Michel Serres: *Rome. Le livre des fondations* [1983], Paris 1999.

¹¹ Michel Serres: *Statues. Le second livre des fondations*, Paris 1989.

¹² Cf. Michel Serres: *Etre hors là*, in: Id.: *Atlas*, Paris 1996, pp. 61–85.

¹³ Cf. Bruno Latour: *Petite réflexion sur le culte moderne des dieux faitiches*, Le Plessis-Robinson 1996, Latour: *Enquête* (as note 3), pp. 187–210.

matter that fails to leave room for a more complex (and more realistic) topology thwarting this split that breaks the genuine symbol into pieces.¹⁴

In these processes of foundation, the place itself, the soil and ground, does not seem to be granted or to unfold any agency. It is merely receptive to sacrificial corpses, crypts, foundation walls, stones, and statues, another object hosting the primordial object, the corpse. What Serres discovers in some of the foundation myths is not respect for the potential of the ground itself, but only a fatal reduction of a potential of metastability to the stability of subject and object positions and definitions: Such is the symbolic marking of the soil by the inscription of a first writing.¹⁵

Several years later, Serres took a different or rather a complementary approach to the relation between human gathering, violence, and a place as concrete ground or soil. In *Le contrat naturel*, it is our common perception of a fight between two human opponents or parties he calls into question: Usually, the ground they stand upon is only perceived as scenery; it is reduced to a ground or background (*fond*) made of cardboard¹⁶ and even to »an abstract space.«¹⁷ Serres urges us to change our perspective and to recognize the ground, the concrete terrain itself, as a concrete actor involved in and affected by human aggression, as a third warring party against its will: Only from a global perspective, this local ground eventually becomes visible as an enemy and an actor with the ability to contract, since the menace of human artifacts with their impact on a global scale urges us to go beyond our binary logic, opposing humans only.¹⁸

And yet, if we consider Serres' analysis of what comes to lie in the ground in the acts of foundation he describes with outright repugnance, should we not think about how collectives are constructed on very concrete, local ground and why they are constructed this way? In doing so, we should also be aware of a blind spot in his narration of foundations. Serres is very concretely demarcating the large geographical area he is referring to in his reconstruction of political, religious, and epistemological foundations: It is an area that comprises Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Near East, that is the cradle of all traditions that have played their part in the formation of the Occident, but also of all three monotheisms: Egyptian

¹⁴ This refers to the concept of the symbol in Plato taken up by Serres as well as by Simon-don: The symbol is an entity broken in two (here into subject and object). We only focus on the extremes and not on what lies in the middle and what *links* what we conceive of as separate unities, cf. e.g. Serres: Rome (as note 10), pp. 177-178.

¹⁵ Which is also the transition from the pluri-positionality of (oral) myth to scripture, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 21-53.

¹⁶ Cf. Michel Serres: *Le contrat naturel*, Paris 1992, p. 27.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

and Babylonian, Judeo-Christian, and Greek and Roman. Nonetheless, he does not hesitate a second to extend his observations beyond this area, to generalize them in order to make an overall anthropological argument. But could one find something else, something different, looking elsewhere? It could be that actions, gestures, techniques at first sight more banal and more innocent might be involved in this foundation of politics, epistemology, and ontology. And they could involve still more non-human agents.

3. Distant resources: the dead nearby

Looking for such resources, one comes across those who, in order to relativize, call into question or simply to better understand Western or Modern attitudes and practices, turned to non-Western collectives. Some, like Philippe Descola, have turned virtually everywhere in order to give an exhaustive tableau of the construction of ontologies and collectives.¹⁹ Some have turned—or rather have always been located—more specifically southwest, like Eduardo Viveiros de Castro with Amazonian multi-naturalism or perspectivism, which became widely known through his *Métaphysiques cannibales*.²⁰

But already in one of his early texts, Viveiros de Castro describes customs that vary significantly from the foundations in the »Old World«: As his informants report, in former times, when an adult died, the Amazonian Arawete quit their village and constructed a new one *nearby*: The name of the dead came to serve as a toponym, but for the former settlement. At the time the article was written, the Arawete still abandoned their village for several weeks when an adult died, dispersing into the forest, before returning to it. The dead were buried at quite a distance, »a boa distância,« along a path established before—which was abandoned henceforth. Their slight dislocations somehow thwart the dichotomy between sedentariness and nomadism. Rather incidentally, Viveiros de Castro also mentions what seemed to keep the Arawete nearby: their *roças*, or clearings transformed into fields.²¹ What is thus produced is a tri-partite space involving not only the dead and the living, but also domesticated plants, and thus a collective existing on three adjacent and thus affine grounds, a repartition forming a pattern that thwarts

¹⁹ Cf. especially Philippe Descola: *Par-delà nature et culture*, Paris 2005.

²⁰ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro: *Métaphysiques cannibales*. Lignes d'anthropologie post-structurale, Paris 2009.

²¹ Cf. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro: *Os deuses canibais. A morte e o destino da alma entre os Arawetê*, *Revista de Antropologia* 27/28 (1984/1985), pp. 55–90: 67 sqq.

any clear nature/culture dichotomy.²² Not only are the fields nature and culture at the same time, but the places of the dead consist of abandoned settlements on the one hand, and of their graves in the forest on the other.²³

4. Eastern dislocation: domestication as a practice that disposes being

Some have turned to the East either to imagine alternatives in a ludic way or to look for them more seriously (ranging from Latour's Korean fiction in *Petite réflexion*,²⁴ to Andrew Pickering's recent references to Chinese concepts of agency²⁵ and to François Jullien's opposition between Western concepts of creation and Eastern concepts of processuality).²⁶ To quote another, very well-known example, in their introduction to *Mille plateaux*, Deleuze and Guattari developed the concept of the rhizome in order to oppose it, as an Oriental model, to the Western model based on the forest.²⁷ I do not intend to grapple with the rhizome and not even with *Mille plateaux* here, although Viveiros de Castro would invite us to do so. I mention this text because it is also the likeliest place by far to come across the name of André-Georges Haudricourt on whose remarks on domestication in general and the cultivation of yam clones in South-East Asia

²² As perceived according to *our* notions and standards. That the forest is a space of nature for the Arawete is far from obvious.

²³ For a systematic exploration of such topographic and topological entanglements of nature/culture with an entire section on sites such as »Fields,« »Suburbs,« or »Floodplains« cf. Stephan Harrison, Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift (eds.): *Patterned Grounds. Entanglements of Nature and Culture*, London 2004. Interestingly and oddly enough, although churches are included, cemeteries are missing from the volume.

²⁴ Latour: *Petite réflexion* (as note 13), pp. 11–12.

²⁵ Andrew Pickering: Art & Agency, IKKM Lecture held on January 30th, Weimar, <http://ikkm-weimar.blogspot.de/2013/02/ikkm-lectures-20122013-andrew-pickering.html> (20 February 2014).

²⁶ François Jullien: *Procès et création*, Paris 1989; Jullien: *Propension des choses* (as note 9); François Jullien: *Traité de l'efficacité* [1996], Paris 2002. Jullien also provides explicit refutation of the accusation of Eastern »exotism«: Differences should not be overstated, China is not »the other« of the West, does not offer the unknown, but other »resources of intelligibility.« Jullien: *Traité*, pp. 177–178. Nor does he idealize Chinese thought, a point I will come back to at the end of this paper. Or as Viveiros de Castro puts it, referring to Jullien: »It is about actualizing the innumerable becoming-others that exist in our thought as virtualities [...] Each experience of another mode of thought is an experiment on our modes of thinking.« [translation MC] Viveiros de Castro: *Métaphysiques cannibales* (as note 20), p. 61.

²⁷ Gilles Deleuze/Félix Guattari: *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2*, Paris 1980, pp. 9–37.

in particular Deleuze and Guattari draw upon for the elaboration of their concept.²⁸

Unlike Descola and Viveiros de Castro, Haudricourt does not come from a Lévi-Straussian, structuralist background. Like André Leroi-Gourhan, Haudricourt was a disciple of Marcel Mauss and, like both of them, he was interested in the relation between gestures, techniques, and technology and their coevolution. But his contribution to the exploration of cultural techniques goes even further. Besides also being an expert on Southeast-Asian languages, Haudricourt, originating (like Serres) from a rural milieu, was one of the founders of ethno-zoology and ethno-botany and was interested in the comparative or translative histories of domestication of animals and plants.²⁹

Writing his seminal texts on the subject in the 1950s and 60s, Haudricourt had made out at least two different »dispositions of being«³⁰ long before Descola established his differentiation between modern naturalism and the three alternative ontologies of totemism, analogism, and animism. Though less explicitly, extensively, and comprehensively, he nonetheless outlines some fundamental characteristics of a Western versus an Eastern disposition, »Eastern« mainly referring to Melanesia and traditional China, and explicitly excluding Japan. To this, one might add a third model, depending on whether one considers India as an autonomous case or rather as a zone of intersection combining the Eastern with the Western.³¹

I can only interpolate a brief and superficial hint regarding methodological considerations, but I think that Haudricourt's project is close to what Viveiros de Castro is describing in categories such as *dislocation*—certainly an alternative concept with regard to deterritorialization—translation, and misunderstanding (*équivoque*), all of which are both ineluctable and productive.³² This means that there is no safe pre-established ground and position the anthropologist could work from, but that the concepts (and practices) of the observed collectives rewrite the conceptual (and practical) framework of the observer: »The most interesting use consists not so much in classifying cosmologies that appear to be exotic, but in counter-analyzing the anthropologies that are only too familiar to us,« as Viveiro de Castro

²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁹ Cf. e.g. André-Georges Haudricourt and Louis Hédin: *L'homme et les plantes cultivées* [1943], Paris 1987.

³⁰ Cf. Descola: *Par-delà nature et culture* (as note 19), pp. 181 sqq.

³¹ Except if one includes it, via language and metaphysics, within the same frame of thought and action as the Western tradition, as does Jullien: *Propension des choses* (as note 9), p. 111; *Id.*: *Traité de l'efficacité* (as note 26), pp. 137–138.

³² Viveiros de Castro: *Métaphysiques cannibales* (as note 20), pp. 43–61. One could associate especially the *équivoque* with Rancière's *mésentente*.

puts it.³³ Thus, dislocation remains permanent, insofar as there is no underlying true or common ground one could uncover underneath »intercultural differences.«

Is there an explanation for these different »dispositions of being«, or modes of thinking? According to Haudricourt, who speculates on the basis of very concrete observations, the practices of domestication of animals and plants (and therefore, of the *de facto* integration of non-human actors into their collective) affect and influence in a very decisive way what he calls the *mentalité*, the fundamental overall mentality or attitude of different cultures.³⁴ We could follow Latour's re-assembling of the broken symbol, filling up the lost continuum between sign and referent, but also Viveiro de Castro's claim that the distinction between epistemology and ontology has become obsolete, a claim in turn inspired by Amerindian perspectival multi-naturalism, and call this »practical ontologies« that dispose being.³⁵

This seems highly justified in Haudricourt's case. Not only does his description account for the *quantity* of all the respective entities assembled into collectives, but also for the *quality* of these relations.³⁶ Moreover, it offers what I consider an advantage compared to Descola's model: Whereas the latter remains a genuine structuralist in supposing invisible, underlying structures of thought, abstract formations that model concrete practice; for Haudricourt, as a disciple of Mauss, it is clearly the collective practices and operative chains, that precede and inform thought and the representation of the world.³⁷ As a result, Haudricourt also takes a close look at the very concrete ground these collectives are built upon. In other words: It is the seemingly banal practices, the little things that tend to be overlooked, that shape our systems of thinking and reflecting upon the world. And since this is the case for every collective of humans and non-humans, this also helps to avoid any classical a-symmetry between allegedly reflexive Moderns or Westerners and allegedly non-reflexive »non-modern societies.« Last, but not least, this involves collectives that assemble more than exclusively human actors.

³³ Ibid., p. 44.

³⁴ Cf. André-Georges Haudricourt: Recherches de bases d'une étude comparative des mentalités extrême-orientale et occidentale [1949], in: Id.: Des gestes aux techniques. Essai sur le techniques dans les sociétés pré-machinistes, ed. by Jean-François Bert, Paris 2011, pp. 167-176; Id.: Une lecture commentée de l'Essai sur l'origine des différences de mentalité entre Occident et Extrême-Orient, in: Bernadette Lizet and Georges Ravis-Giordani: Des bêtes et des hommes: Le rapport à l'animal, un jeu sur la distance, Paris 1995, pp. 30-53.

³⁵ A concept derived from Post-ANT itself, cf. Casper B. Jensen: A Nonhumanist Disposition: On Performativity, Practical Ontology, and Intervention, in: Configurations 12 (2004), pp. 229-261, quoted *ibid.*, p. 74.

³⁶ This is precisely the claim of Latour's EME project, cf. Latour: Enquête (as note 3).

³⁷ »Man is not a religious, but a culinary species. It is cooking and the domestication of fire that is at the origin of the initial religions,« Haudricourt: Lecture commentée (as note 34), p. 33. All translations of Haudricourt by MC.

5. Direct positive action vs. indirect negative action

As Haudricourt points out, the process of domestication produces »inter-species« co-existence in a very strong sense. Thus, for him, human collectives never appear as exclusively human and most human collectives do not consider themselves as such. As he states, the radical differentiation between man and animal placing the animal below the human is specific to the Western tradition. Already in India, which he considers, for the best and for the worst, as an intermediary space between West and East, things are different:

»Animals are not separated from human beings and each animal species forms a caste itself. It is well known that cows are infinitely more respectable than humans of certain castes. They enter into the houses where they eat what they want; to beat them is sacrilege. Whereas there are human beings that the priests cannot touch, and, worse, not even look at.«³⁸

In his view, the relationship of human societies to plants and animals is a fundamental part of their natural-cultural existence. What is at stake is not simply the very material basis of their subsistence, but specific ways of assembling-with and being-with these non-human entities in mixed collectives. Like Serres, he states that these collectives of domestication precede exclusively human collectives, that they are constructed by man and beast alike and that the adaptive effects of domestication are reciprocal.³⁹ But, as we shall see, he is more circumspect in stating, as does Serres, that this process always creates a common place (*lieu commun*), the »same human-animal space«⁴⁰—obviously, *plants* do not attract Serres' attention.

In any event, the association of humans with plants and animals that marks the transition from hunting and gathering to domestication creates amicable relations⁴¹ and thus genuine *attachments*, to take up Antoine Hennion's concept,⁴² between human and non-human beings.⁴³ Yet, when animals are slaughtered and plants are

³⁸ Ibid., p. 40, »Les bovins forment une caste infiniment plus respectable que bien des castes humains,« André-Georges Haudricourt: *Domestication des animaux, culture des plantes et traitement d'autrui* [1962], in: Id.: *La technologie science humaine. Recherches d'histoire et d'ethnologie des techniques*, Paris 1987, pp. 277-285.

³⁹ Cf. Michel Serres: *Hominescence*, Paris 2003, pp. 127-136.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 131, 133.

⁴¹ Cf. Haudricourt: *Domestication* (as note 38), p. 277.

⁴² Cf. Antoine Hennion: *Those Things that Hold Us Together. Taste and Sociology*, in: *Cultural Sociology* 1 (2007), pp. 97-114.

⁴³ For the importance of milk, of lactating and »inter-species« adoption rites cf. André-Georges Haudricourt: *Note sur le statut familial des animaux*, in: *L'Homme* XXVI/3 (1986), pp. 119-120. To use the term »inter-species« already grants a distinction that does

cropped, these attachments must be untied. From Haudricourt's remarks, we can infer that in Western societies the untying of the attachments with domesticated species has become permanent. The conflict between two contradictory states is ›resolved‹ by completely forgetting these attachments.⁴⁴ This has a twofold consequence: Non-human beings are officially excluded from the collective and the relation towards them becomes merely instrumental—as does the relation to certain human beings. Haudricourt quotes the famous passage from Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* that poignantly sums up this transformation of the continuous chain of being into a discontinuous chain of command:

»For where there is nothing common to ruler and ruled, there is not friendship either, since there is not justice; e.g. between craftsman and tool, soul and body, master and slave; the latter in each case is benefited by that which uses it, but there is no friendship nor justice towards lifeless things. But neither is there friendship towards a horse or an ox, nor to a slave *qua* slave. For there is nothing common to the two parties; the slave is a living tool and the tool a lifeless slave. *Qua* slave then, one cannot be friends with him.«⁴⁵

Despite the exclusion of non-humans from the collective, their treatment characterized by domination and possession proves to be contagious to inter-human relations: The deepening of the divide between humans and non-humans only exacerbates the logic of domination and possession,⁴⁶ which is also grounded in a logic of similarity and imitation (not only in Aristotle or Plato, but also in the Christian notion of man as an *imago Dei* as opposed to the rest of creation), ever narrowing down who is to be considered similar enough to be taken into account and treated as an equal.⁴⁷

not exist as such in other cultures: In New Guinea or Siberia, pigs and bears become family members through lactation. Their eventual butchering is characterized by Haudricourt as a »kind of anthropophagy within the family,« *ibid.*, p. 119. Of course, one would have to add that hunters and gatherers often have at least respectful relations to those they hunt and gather. Cf. on predation Viveiros de Castro: *Métaphysiques cannibales* (as note 20), *passim*.

⁴⁴ Although in a rural context, as e.g. Serres reminds us, this is never entirely the case, cf. Serres: *Hominescence* (as note 39), p. 127.

⁴⁵ Aristotle: *Nichomachean Ethics*, translated by David Ross, Oxford et al., 2009, VIII, 11, pp. 156–157 (1161a–b). Quoted in French in Haudricourt: *Domestication* (as note 38), p. 282.

⁴⁶ Cf. Haudricourt: *Lecture commentée* (as note 34), p. 42.

⁴⁷ Cf. on the contrary the Amazonian model of personhood according to Viveiros de Castro: personhood precedes humanity and thus: »La ressemblance ou la congénérarité surgissent par suspension délibérée, socialement produite, d'une différence prédatrice donnée; elle ne la précède pas,« Viveiros de Castro: *Métaphysiques cannibales* (as note 20), p. 24.

According to Haudricourt, this way of assembling beings derives from several factors that had a decisive influence on the evolution of domestication in the Western Sphere, comprising Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Near East, and thus precisely the geographical area Michel Serres is writing about in his books on foundation.

Haudricourt is careful to distance himself from any easy determinism deriving social evolution directly—without mediation, translation, but also the abduction and theft he reflects upon—from climate. He nevertheless maintains that the question of which non-human entities could be integrated into the collectives had significant influence on the way those relations are constructed. Yet, significant regional differences in flora and fauna are due to geographical and climatic factors. He thus ascribes strong agency in the formation of mentalities not only to animate beings other than humans, but also to other non-human factors. Paradoxically, this is the case even where eventually this mentality evolves into a mode based on domination and the denial of such agency.

Haudricourt mainly opposes two models of human agency, *direct, positive action* and *indirect, negative action*, both linked to a triad of a) a rural profession, b) the domesticated beings and c) the place that is laid out and that to him is equivalent to the respective type of society: To describe the Western model of direct positive action, he chooses the sheep and the shepherd, and, consequently, as their space, *la bergerie*, the sheepfold.⁴⁸

In this context, one might recall Foucault's reconstruction of Western governmentality presented mainly in his lectures on *Sécurité, Territoire, Population*, which revolves precisely around the figure of the pastorate and the governor as the shepherd.⁴⁹ To Haudricourt, this is more than a metaphor. A certain type of overall conception of the relation between the rulers and subjects, based on commands, stems from the way sheep behave and have to be treated when domesticated. He characterizes them as over-domesticated, a property he ascribes to their transplantation from the mountain to the plain and thus into an unfamiliar milieu.⁵⁰ The henceforth insecure and thus passive sheep must therefore be constantly and positively or actively guided, protected, and watched over. This treatment of the

⁴⁸ For what follows cf. Haudricourt: Domestication (as note 38).

⁴⁹ Cf. Michel Foucault: *Sécurité, territoire, population*. Cours au Collège de France, 1977–1978, Paris 2004, but cf. also Michel Foucault: »Omnes et singulatim«: vers une critique de la raison politique [1981], in: Id.: *Dits et écrits II, 1976–1988*, edited by Daniel Defert and François Ewald, Paris 2001, pp. 953–980. The parallels between this text and Haudricourt's *Essai sur l'origine* are striking and would require further examination.

⁵⁰ Cf. Haudricourt: Domestication (as note 38), p. 278. Wild sheep indeed *do* live in the mountains.

domesticated animal proves contagious: It fashions a treatment of humans according to the shepherd model.

Haudricourt's main counter-example is the Melanesian cultivation of the yam root, a clone. It is performed by gardeners who transform woodland into secluded garden areas. A second plant he adds to illustrate this type of cultivation is wild rice, an aquatic plant, which allows him to connect New Caledonia to ancient China, in his eyes a horti-culture par excellence in its treatment of all members of its collective, humans included.

It would be misleading to think that for Haudricourt the difference between the Western and the Eastern model is exclusively a difference between domesticating animals on the one side and cultivating plants on the other. Things are more complicated in Haudricourt's writings on domestication, although he does not reflect on this explicitly. While the main opposition he introduces is between yam and rice on the one hand and mutton on the other, he also opposes yam to grain. Finally, he deals with the specificities of animal domestication in the Far East. To understand his description, we need to disentangle several superposed arguments, some of which require more explication than Haudricourt provides himself: First, the absence of command structures in the East is due both to the fact that there, domesticated animals have more agency or activity than the paradigmatic mutton *and* that one does not communicate with plants through orders. Thus, plants are paradigmatic for the Eastern attitude, also, a second important aspect, because the cycle of plant growth involves per se periods where one cannot act directly on the domesticated species. Hence, the treatment of plants is paradigmatic for indirect negative action. But in order for this to establish an attitude, another factor has to come into play through very *specific* plants with specific qualities: Yam, rice, and taro needs require intense care and careful handling. This is what differentiates them from grain that is robust and grows by itself. Therefore, there is a sharp distinction between action and non-action in the Western model corresponding to (and stemming from) the difference between animal and plant treatment. In exchange, only because the yam etc. require such intense care, their treatment, although indirect, can be perceived as a kind of action or rather the effective exertion of agency by the gardener, an agency which does not contradict the attribution of agency to the growing plant. And, finally, the indirect treatment of these Eastern plants relies upon intense preparation of the soil they are supposed to grow upon (e.g. rice terraces).⁵¹

These aspects tend to superpose: Domesticated animals, but also some plants in the gardening parts of the world, are much more active. Whereas the shepherd

⁵¹ Of course, one can wonder what Haudricourt would have made of vineyards. Then again, the grapevine is manipulated very directly.

protects his sheep, the buffalo protects his keeper against the tigers. Dogs and pigs, the most important domesticated animals in the Far East, both were *attracted* by human excrement and auto-domesticated themselves rather than being summoned into their collective like sheep. But even sheep, when domesticated there, are treated in a *faire faire* mode. Likewise, rice is attracted by humans: Haudricourt thinks it most probable that it first appeared as a bad weed in taro culture, in other words, as a parasite that invited itself to the collective.

Cultivation of aquatic rice and yam can only be achieved through indirect, negative action. Negative, indirect action is an interesting concept, because it does not mean passivity, but rather thwarts our conceptual dichotomy of activity and passivity. Since they do not simply collect what grows without their intervention, the gardeners are far from remaining passive.⁵² One might take up Latour's minimal definition of an actant, which he uses to argue for the agency of non-human beings, to describe what these gardeners are doing: They are not just doing something, but by offering favorable conditions to the plants, they make do, *faire faire*.⁵³

6. Affine places

The yam requires a lot of care and, since it is fragile, it must not be neglected, but at the same time it must not be touched directly nor the ground it grows in be tread upon by man or animal. Haudricourt speaks of a relationship of »respectful friendship« not required by crops descending from steppe grasses.⁵⁴

Gardening thus means to lay out a reserved area, as it were. Haudricourt observes the liminality of this space and, one could add that, although thoroughly cultivated, it is not fully appropriated—the garden remains a place that is (almost) *let alone* without being *left alone*, as it were. After the preparation of the ground and the planting, the gardeners patiently wait for the plants to do something—from a distance.

If we consider, with Haudricourt, yam—or wild rice—as part of the collective of these gardening societies, then we could say that we face another form of assemblage in which, in contrast to the shepherding model, being with is not characterized by co-presence and synchronization, be it mediated in a trivial sense.

⁵² With an important difference to *laisser faire*: It is not based on a naive belief in 'natural' forces. There is a lot of work to be done: *Faire faire* is much more active than *laisser faire*.

⁵³ Cf. Bruno Latour: *Re-Assembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford 2005, p. 217. In this context, Latour quotes François Jullien, consequently *make do* seems to be directly influenced by his characterization of Chinese thought, and so we come full circle.

⁵⁴ Cf. Haudricourt: *Domestication* (as note 38), p. 279.

«There is never any brutal contact in space nor simultaneity in time between the gardener and the yam,» Haudricourt states and he lists the gestures that are required to establish and maintain this indirect relationship with the fragile plant successfully.⁵⁵ Yam evolves in a place and time zone of its own, or rather, not in its own, proper, independent place and time zone, but in an *attached* place and time zone. Instead of being fully *incorporated* into an encompassing spatio-temporality of humans as gardeners, it is *attached* to their spatio-temporality, since it depends on it – and vice versa. One could also call it a place of affinity if we follow Viveiro de Castro’s reminder that affinity is a spatial category, the affine is »that whose domain is bordering mine.«⁵⁶ It would be *out and there* at the same time, *hors là*. Its spatio-temporal logic would correspond much more to what Michel Serres is trying to prove in his reading of Maupassant’s novel *Le Horlà* than to his description of the habitat of domestication: The yam root would not so much root the gardener in a common proper ground, but exist within an interval, attached and *apparenté*,⁵⁷ in parental relations rather than fully possessed. As such a relative, the yam root is indispensable for the constitution of the collective. It is not decisive who treads or lives on the same ground with the Melanesian gardeners—Cook and his men were thought to be revenants the Melanesians did not dare to address—⁵⁸ but who eats the fruit grown on attached and affine garden ground. Haudricourt maintains that it does not make any sense to impose our nature/culture dichotomy on the inhabitants of New Caledonia: Space and beings are organized along the lines of culture and »un-culture« (*in-culture*) instead. Uncultured are all those who do not eat the yam roots, with no need to further distinguish between animals, foreigners, gods, and the dead. Whoever can be made or forced to eat yam belongs to culture and thus to the collective. Haudricourt insists on the fact that, whereas crop culture is based on selection of the best seed, and thus on *exclusion*, clone cultures like that of yam are based on the *collection* and exchange of the best clones—and this is precisely what all New Caledonians do with all plants, as he observed—they adopt whatever they can grow in their gardens. What at first sight seems to be based on sameness—the reproduction of the same clone-individual—in fact allows for genealogies that do not work according to the tree and lineage model.⁵⁹ The genealogy of each clan can be traced

55 Haudricourt: Domestication (as note 38), p. 278.

56 Viveiros de Castro: Métaphysiques cannibales (as note 20), p. 40.

57 Haudricourt: Nature et culture dans la civilisation de l’igname, in: Id.: La technologie science humaine (as note 38), pp. 287–298: 294.

58 Cf. Maurice Leenhardt: Les Gens de la Grande Terre, Paris 1937, quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 292–294.

59 For Deleuze and Guattari this is the main point they use to contest the European arboreal model.

back to an »un-cultured« person who was acculturated by ritual feeding of yam and thus collected into the collective. The clan chiefs systematically seem to be recruited among such acculturated persons and considered gods.⁶⁰

7. The ground as medium

One could speculate a little more. In his writings, Haudricourt repeatedly insists upon what is implied in the cultivation of plants: an absence of constant control, a time lag between doing something and the response other entities give to this action. This leaves more room for non-human agency and, since control is not exerted constantly, the forces at work are not as controllable and visible as in the herding of cattle. Isn't there also more room for invisible processes and beings? Could it be that the problems of making a place for certain beings Latour observes in Western culture has to do with the fact that we stem from a shepherd culture, not a horti-culture?

There is a second aspect I wish to point out: The *faire faire* model of yam culture or of Chinese gardening is not to be misunderstood as a model in which »nature« has its own way. It requires immense cultivation work. And this is where the place in a very material sense comes into the foreground of the constitution of this collective. Yam culture and Chinese gardening mean taking care of plants through care and attention for the soil itself—as opposed to the carelessness towards the soil in the Western growing of grain cultivated from very resistant grasses. This might, in the case of yam culture, be supported by the fact that yam roots are clones. The same individual is copied and reproduced again and again, there is no degeneration through generation: »The farmer knows that when a harvest is bad, only the ground, his work, and the rain can be held responsible.«⁶¹ The cultivator of yam thus focuses on his interaction with the soil. Therefore, in the cultivation of yam and Chinese gardening indirect negative action on the plants means that the soil is not just a medium in the sense of more or less passive matter that is summoned to lend itself as a substrate to formative processes attributed mainly to the cultivator (or nature). Neither is it forced into a preconceived form. It is a medium in a very strong sense; it is the mediator between gardener and plant, the medium of communication, a third entity, milieu through which the gardeners negotiate with their plants, make them offers or suggestions for their growth.⁶² In a second step,

⁶⁰ Cf. Haudricourt: *Nature et culture* (as note 57).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

⁶² Chinese dwarf plants are produced by acting upon the soil, not by cutting off branches as with Japanese bonsai (Haudricourt: *Domestication* (as note 38), p. 279), a strong contrast not only to French baroque gardens, but to the practices of plant orthopedics as

this ground and its produce become the mediums through which beings are integrated into the collective. This would be a more open, experimental process in which the ground is itself a tool and contains information and potential the gardener works with. I think this has some resonance with what Andrew Pickering described lately when pleading for a different ontology that redistributes agency and gives up violent, one-sidedly formative action on landscapes, for example when trying to force the Mississippi off its course again and again in order to keep it from flooding New Orleans.⁶³

8. Unwelcome affinities: A different form of power relations

As for Pickering, it is obvious to Haudricourt which model he favors when opposing the Western ontology based on domination, orders, slavery, and transcendence—and, one has to add, a very asymmetric distribution of agency—to a, geographically very patchy, Eastern, Chinese–Melanesian ontology which he believes to favor explication and immanence—and a more symmetric distribution of agency. In his most speculative text, *Essai sur l'origine des différences de mentalité*, he makes the boldest statement on the consequences of domestication that prevailed in the West:

»The organization of work between the master who commands and the slave who carries out was the origin of occidental dualism; difference between the plan and its execution; theory and practice, ideas and things, spirit and matter. In the world of the spirit, everything is perfect, the master always imagines and thinks up things well; he is always right; in the world of matter, things are imperfect: the slave does not understand, thus he works badly or he sabotages.«⁶⁴

There is a striking resonance in these lines with the philosophy of Gilbert Simondon. I think the role attributed to the place as soil implied in Haudricourt's description of Eastern horticulture arises from a ground that has an affinity to Simondon's critique of hylemorphism.⁶⁵ Hylemorphism ascribes agency and activity only to form, considering matter and ground as passive and receptive, remaining ignorant to its energetic and formative potentials. Even if Simondon does not turn

presented in Michel Foucault: *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Paris 1975, figure 30.

⁶³ Cf. Andrew Pickering: New Ontologies, in: Id./Keith Guzik (eds.): *The Mangle in practice. Science, Society, and Becoming*, Durham/London 2008, pp. 1–14.

⁶⁴ Haudricourt: Lecture commentée (as note 34), p. 38.

⁶⁵ Cf. Simondon: Du mode d'existence (as note 8).

east in order to look for alternatives, his diagnosis of a fundamental solidarity between an attitude of domination, asymmetric distribution of agency, and the hubris of the master-philosopher who commands the slave and does not deign to enter the craftsman's workshop, let alone explore what happens within the mold where the brick comes into being, is not alien to the scarce remarks formulated by a rather laconic author.

Simondon shares the philosophical project to elaborate an alternative to the dominant Western mode of thinking that, one could add, does not only fail to describe accurately the mode of existence of technical objects. But he mainly works from within the Western tradition, finding resources for renewal in minoritarian lines of thought within that tradition. One major advantage of his approach is that it does not lure us into thinking that simple adoption of ready-made concepts will do. The same caution should prevail when dealing with alternative models from other cultures and their importation. I can only sketch this here in broad strokes.

To begin with, it would be naive not to see that Haudricourt's predilection for the Eastern model was *strategic*⁶⁶—a dispositive against the limitations of the proper grounds or the xenophobia of the Darwinist descendants of the »selectors.«

Then, one has to differentiate: Whereas Haudricourt knew New Caledonia, the French overseas territory, from his own observations, he relied on written sources for China—and on his Marxist sympathies. Maybe New Caledonia actually is or was one of those Fortunate Isles Occidentals have dreamt about for thousands of years, where indirect negative action is tantamount to amicable relationships. At least concerning China, one might be rather skeptical about an inherent friendliness of this type of action. But the antidote to Western conceptions it provides has to be seen as a *pharmakon*. It *does* grant more agency to the »subjects« and to non-human entities in general.⁶⁷ To a certain extent, but to a certain extent only, it is compatible with a revision of hylemorphism and even with Simondon's conception of the invention of technical objects. And yet this certainly does not mean that we would deal here with relations outside of power relations, as Isabelle Stengers makes clear when she proposes a reconceptualization of the strategies precisely of what she calls sciences with an »appétit du terrain,« an appetite for a concrete and local ground, terrain, or field they work upon or within without the pretense of obtaining results that could be generalized as all-terrain.⁶⁸ To describe this reconceptualization, she refers to the Chinese concept

⁶⁶ This strategy is very often associated with Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*. In fact, it is much older and goes back to Mandeville's *Livre* from the 14th century.

⁶⁷ And yet: Activity and passivity are conceived of differently. Active is not the one who acts and expends his energy, but the one who maintains the initiative in the manipulation of the propensity of things and thus can spare his efforts.

⁶⁸ Cf. Isabelle Stengers: *Cosmopolitiques II* [1997], Paris 2003, pp. 213–214.

of propensity or *che/shi* as presented by François Jullien.⁶⁹ It is another power relation that abhors open or direct violence and confrontation not because of moral scruples, but simply because they are considered to be an ineffective waste of energy, blocking the flow of things instead of going with them, adapting to them in order to better foster, exploit, channel, and manipulate them for one's own purposes.⁷⁰ Jullien's own analysis of Chinese efficacy is both consistent with Stenger's reading and with Haudricourt's characterization of the gardener paradigm. The model of efficacy is drawn from the growth of plants, and it is thus indirect: Do everything to let them grow, prepare their ground. One lets grow—but even if the activity in this is minimal and invisible to others, this letting is something active, a manipulation of the course of things.⁷¹ But the strategy of manipulation and conditioning is also designed as a means of automatizing power relations: It can lead to the construction of a machinery of power, a dispositive that generates anticipatory obedience because it pushes the subject in the direction favorable to the ruler before the subject even started to act.⁷² Long before sovereignty become an obsolete mode of government in Europe, power in China was based on surveillance by an invisible emperor.⁷³ But if surveillance existed in China long before it became dominant in the West, what do we make of *laisser pousser*, *laisser-passer*, *laisser-faire*,⁷⁴ when we think about the reconstruction of the birth of modern governmentality out of the spirit of security as described by Foucault and that starts, curiously enough, with a shift of focus from urban space to rural space and the cultivation and commerce of crops?⁷⁵ Does not the Chinese model of indirect negative action resemble very closely the new, negative directive of liberalism: Do not interfere in the natural course of things, populations, goods, etc.? Yet, there are important differences. Despite these affinities, Western security governmentality works in a different conceptual framework. As for its temporality, it is within the categories of prevision, planning, projects (»travailler sur l'avenir«⁷⁶—hence the importance of statistics), and cause–effect relations, even if feedback processes are discovered. As for its spatiality, at least it does not resemble that of an affine, attached ground. One simply needs to take seriously, literally, Foucault's own char-

⁶⁹ Stengers refers to Jullien: *La propension des choses* (as note 9). Jullien elaborates further on this in Jullien: *Traité de l'efficacité* (as note 26).

⁷⁰ Cf. Stengers: *Cosmopolitiques II* (as note 67), pp. 252–254.

⁷¹ Jullien: *Traité de l'efficacité* (as note 26), p. 116. But references to indirectness as the Chinese paradigm of action are numerous throughout both *La propension des choses* and the *Traité*.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 125, pp. 184–185.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁷⁵ Foucault: *Sécurité* (as note 49), pp. 349–351.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

acterization of the space of society, where *laissez-faire* is only the flip side of constant intervention for the sake of security:

»A l'intérieur du champ ainsi délimité va apparaître tout un domaine d'interventions, d'interventions possibles, d'interventions nécessaires [...] Il va donc falloir encadrer les phénomènes naturels de telle manière qu'ils ne dévient pas ou qu'une intervention maladroite, arbitraire, aveugle ne les fasse [pas] dévier. C'est-à-dire qu'il va falloir mettre en place des mécanismes de sécurité [...] L'intégration des libertés et des limites propres à cette liberté à l'intérieur du champ de la pratique gouvernementale, c'est devenu maintenant un impératif.«⁷⁷

The field in question is a field embedded within the field of governmentality that frames and surrounds it and from which the forces of deviation—delinquency, abnormality, etc. —and its agents have to be removed immediately in order to guarantee the free play of »nature.«

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 360–361, emphasis added. »An entire domain of possible and necessary interventions appears within the field thus delimited [...] Natural phenomena will have to be framed in such a way they do not veer off course, or in such a way that clumsy, arbitrary, and blind intervention does not make them veer off course. That is to say, it will be necessary to set up mechanisms of security [...] The integration of freedom, and the specific limits of freedom within the field of governmental practice has now become an imperative.« Michel Foucault: *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, edited by Arnold I. Davidson, translated by Graham Burchell, London/New York 2009, pp. 352–353.