

1. Posthumanist Cultural Studies: Taking the Nonhuman Seriously

The Nonhuman Turn

In recent years, there has been a pronounced (re-)turn to questions of ontology, matter, and realism in the humanities and social sciences. While theoretical formations such as actor-network theory, object-oriented ontology, speculative realism, or new materialism should by no means be conflated, what they have in common – and what they share with other intellectual developments like affect theory, animal studies, or new media theory – is their profound challenge to human exceptionalism. Taken together, these approaches have productively been described as constituting a ‘nonhuman turn’ which “is engaged in decentering the human in favor of a turn toward and concern for the nonhuman, understood variously in terms of animals, affectivity, bodies, organic and geophysical systems, materiality, or technologies” (Grusin 2015: vii). They can thus be said to be continuing and radicalizing the project of ‘decentering the subject’ pursued most consistently by (post-)structuralism, and to have ushered in a new, *postanthropocentric* phase of posthumanism. Now, the liberal-humanist tradition is dealt a finishing blow as the remaining foundational dualisms inherited from modernity such as nature/culture or nonhuman/human are definitely discarded – though this time not primarily through a deconstruction bringing to light their inherent instability and slippage (cf. Derrida 2016), but by revealing the fundamental co-existence, interdependence, ‘intra-action’ (Barad 2007), and ‘entanglement’ of human beings and their living and non-living ‘companions’ (Haraway 2008). As is becoming ever more evident in the present, ‘we have never been modern, individuals, human’ (Gilbert/Sapp/Tauber 2012; Haraway 2008; Latour 1993b). “[N]either biology nor philosophy,” Donna Haraway has pointed out, “any longer supports the notion of independent organisms in environments, that is, interacting units plus contexts/rules” – instead, “sympoiesis is the name of the game in spades” (2016: 33). As Haraway has put it, beings are thus always “knotted beings” (2008: 5), and becoming is necessarily a ‘becoming-with’. Consequently, ‘flat ontologies’ replace the former distinctions between subject and object, human and ‘other(s)’. Toppled from his (sic) self-erected pedestal, the human finds himself caught up in the

'mesh' of things (Morton 2010), hybrid networks in which he is just one being *among* beings. In the provocative words of Timothy Morton: "my being is not everything it's cracked up to be – or rather [...] the being of a paper cup is as profound as mine." (2013: 17) There is a strong ethico-political dimension to much of this work, which can generally be seen as a symptom of and/or response to the socio-ecological crisis widely referred to as the Anthropocene.

How do these important theoretical developments affect Cultural Studies as an intellectual and political practice? What contribution can it make in its turn to the most pressing issues of today, an era marked, among other things, by the generalization of biopolitics and planetary challenges such as global warming? What could a *Cultural Studies for the Anthropocene* look like?¹

These are big and complex questions and I will not attempt to provide answers. Taking my cue from Alexander Dunst, Elahe Haschemi Yekani, and Anja Schwarz (2014), who have encouraged Cultural Studies to allow itself to be challenged and transformed by new theoretical influxes, I will, however, argue that Cultural Studies should take a genuine interest in these new approaches and that it should engage with, put to the test, and, when needed, 'translate' and 're-articulate' them. I believe that such a theoretical 'encounter' or 'contact zone' (Haraway 2008) could prove to be tremendously fruitful, both intellectually and politically: For one thing, I am convinced that it has the potential to significantly enrich Cultural Studies by opening up new areas and means of analysis, adding a whole number of perspectives and concepts to the discipline's theoretical-methodological 'toolbox'². For another, it would seem that such a 'Cultural Studies-in-encounter' would have a lot to contribute to the critical (cultural, political, social, economic) struggles being fought today. The allusion to Stuart Hall's classic essay "Popular-Democratic vs Authoritarian Populism: Two Ways of 'Taking Democracy Seriously'" (1980) in my subtitle is thus no mere play of words. Taking the nonhuman seriously is today an urgent political task and, in fact, one way of, or even requirement for, taking democracy seriously – and this in at least two regards: On the one hand, it seems that a radical rethinking and reconstitution of the *demos* is now in order. As proponents of the notion of 'political

1 In this context, cf. Grzegorz Czemiel's (2019) recent call for 'speculative Cultural Studies'. Czemiel's interest and approach are, however, very different from mine, as he is only concerned with the study of popular culture and focuses chiefly on speculative realism, especially object-oriented ontology.

2 This metaphor, derived from a comment made by Gilles Deleuze in a now-famous interview with Michel Foucault (Foucault 1996: 76), has always seemed to me to be a productive one, especially with regards to the heterogeneous, inter- or transdisciplinary, syncretistic character of a (non-)discipline such as Cultural studies. Cf. also Gregory Lobo, Jeffrey Cedeño, and Chloe Rutter-Jensen's description of Cultural Studies (in the Latin American context) as "an admittedly mixed but terribly useful bag of critical tools" (2012: 3).

ecology' such as Bruno Latour, Jane Bennett, and Levi Bryant have argued, the theory and practice of democracy need to be revised so as to make room for nonhumans as members and participants in the polity. This process is explicitly cast in terms of a struggle for empowerment: Thus, Bennett maintains that "surely the scope of democratization can be broadened to acknowledge more nonhumans in more ways, in something like the ways in which we have come to hear the political voices of other humans formerly on the outs" (2010: 109). For Latour, to eschew this process is to thwart democracy itself: "*By defending the rights of the human subject to speak and to be the sole speaker, one does not establish democracy; one makes it increasingly more impracticable every day.*" (2004a: 69)

On the other hand, for Cultural Studies to take the nonhuman seriously also means gaining a fuller understanding of democracy regarding hitherto largely neglected aspects such as its affective and material dimensions. While, for instance, there has of course always been a strong materialist current in Cultural Studies, more often than not this only meant a focus on 'history' and 'practices' (and frequently *discursive* history and practices), but not an actual concern with 'stuff', 'physicality', 'things', and with the ways in which they contribute to structuring social relations (cf. Bryant 2014: 1–4). In contrast, recent materialist theorizing has convincingly unsettled the idea that political systems are primarily shaped by discourses, ideologies, attitudes, and ideas and instead treated them as "socio-technical worlds" (Mitchell 2011: 8), shaped by material agencies. Thus, democracy or capitalism, for example, need to be rethought as 'carbon democracy' (Mitchell 2011) and 'fossil capitalism' (Angus 2016; Malm 2016), a process that not only significantly extends and alters our analytic work but can also in various ways affect political struggle.

Finally, the reference to Hall's article reminds us that, as in the late 70s and early 80s, once again a powerful 'new right' is presently on the rise, trying to exploit the overdetermined crises of the present in order to continue its already partly successful project of manufacturing consent for the erection of a new statist authoritarianism. Taking the nonhuman and democracy seriously today is not least also linked to the fight against this populism of the right.

Cultural Studies-in-Encounter

At first sight, a productive encounter between Cultural Studies on the one hand and the approaches associated with the nonhuman turn on the other may seem highly unlikely. After all, the former, heavily influenced by (post-)structuralism in the wake of the 'linguistic turn' and itself a major influence in the late 20th-century 'cultural turn', has for a long time now championed social constructivism, which, however, has of late become a target of critique. For most speculative realist and new materialist critics, constructivism is really a form of an undead, "ethereal idealism" (Bryant/

Srnicek/Harman 2011: 3), a variant of what Quentin Meillassoux has termed ‘correlationism’, that is, “the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other” (2009: 5). Many contemporary thinkers thus distance themselves from the (more radical) constructivist discourses of the cultural turn and their “allergy to ‘the real’” (Coole/Frost 2010: 6). In their eyes, this anti-realist stance has lost its radicalism and is now largely exhausted. In particular, they argue that the constructivist paradigm is generally inadequate for tackling the crucial matters of the present, be it the (ontological, epistemological, ethical, political) challenges thrown up by recent technoscientific developments, the contemporary context of biopolitics, the complexities of global capitalism, or the looming ecological catastrophe. To be able to face up to such issues, these critics maintain, what is needed is a theoretical rapprochement with realism and materialism. As they see it, such new approaches would also be able to avoid further shortcomings of the focus on language, text, discourse, ideology, and subjectivity entailed by the cultural turn. Chief among these is the paradox that, in spite of constructivism’s often anti-humanist orientation, that is, its resistance to the privileged status of the sovereign, unified subject of the ‘Western’ liberal tradition, it nevertheless frequently ends up reaffirming the central position of the human. For, as Diana Coole and Samantha Frost point out, “to claim that something is constructed often has the unintended effect of recentering the human subject as the locus of agency despite the intention to undermine such claims” (2010: 26). The nonhuman here only ever appears as a site of inscription or projection for *human* meaning, never as a locus of value, meaning, or agency in its own right.³

In view of this critique, can or should Cultural Studies and the nonhuman turn really be brought into the contact zone? I believe so. While Cultural Studies scholars may tend to respond in an antagonistic manner to the criticisms levelled at the cultural turn and to the realist and materialist arguments of the new approaches, we would do well to remember that constructivism, even as there were – and still are – good theoretical as well as political reasons for it, is by no means essential or inherent to Cultural Studies. In fact, even when its institutionalization gained pace in the

3 In this context, the update of Raymond Williams’ classic *Keywords* project (1976/1983) for the 21st century, edited by Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris (2005), can perhaps be considered as somewhat symptomatic. Even though the humanism of Williams’ original work is here distinctly qualified or even displaced by the influence of, among other things, poststructuralism, critical race studies, gender and queer theory, and disability studies, there are no entries on, say, ‘animal’, ‘plant’, ‘climate’, ‘object’, or ‘thing’, and the notes on ‘nature’ and ‘environment/ecology’ – the latter newly added – remain largely discursivist. The book, a ‘vocabulary of culture and society’, can therefore be said to largely remain within the conceptual hold of what Bruno Latour (1993b) has called the ‘Great Divide’.

1980s and 90s, Cultural Studies has always tried to preserve its status as an ‘anti-discipline’, in the sense of resisting the ‘disciplinary’ power of academic disciplinarity (cf. Foucault 1972, esp. 222–24, and 1995). “[I]t refuses,” said Hall, “to be a master discourse or a meta-discourse of any kind.” (1996a: 263) As I understand it, its goal, to borrow Michel Foucault’s words, has always been “a sort of autonomous and noncentralized theoretical production, or in other words a theoretical production that does not need a visa from some common regime to establish its validity” (2004: 6). Importantly, this intellectual independence and refusal of the form and content of established traditions has involved a willingness to be unfixed, an embracing of fluidity, a dedication to becoming. Cultural Studies, in other words, has always remained delightfully undogmatic, open to new theoretical and methodological influxes, and ready to self-critically reconsider and, if need be, revise its own approaches, willing to adopt or adapt new ideas and concepts whose origins lay elsewhere. The result has at all times been a markedly plural, dynamic, and hybrid intellectual formation – “theoretical noise” (Hall 1996a: 263). Cultural Studies, Hall insisted, “is not one thing; it has never been one thing” (1990: 11).⁴

Considering all of this, an encounter between Cultural Studies and the nonhuman turn may turn out not to be so counter-intuitive or difficult after all. Indeed, there are a number of further factors that facilitate and, perhaps, even call for such an encounter: One of these, related to the heterogeneity of the field just pointed out, is the fact that, from quite early on, different, even conflicting, theoretical trends coexisted and vied with each other within Cultural Studies. In an important essay from 1980, Hall identified what he considered to be the two most important ones: the ‘culturalist’ paradigm, largely derived from the work of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, and E.P. Thompson, on the one hand, and the ‘structuralist’ paradigm on the other. Hall went on to contrast the respective strengths and limitations of the two approaches, concluding that, by itself, neither one of them was sufficient for the study of culture and that what was needed was “to *think forwards*” (1986a: 48) from the best elements of both of them. In the work of many succeeding scholars, this is certainly what has happened. What is important in our context is that the culturalist influence within Cultural Studies, in its productive antagonism with post/structuralism, has fueled a more or less persistent skepticism towards social constructivism, especially in its more radical varieties. That is to say, even as Cultural Studies generally came to adopt many of the tenets of the constructivist paradigm, it still mostly kept its distance from the latter’s “idealist, neo-Kantian, distinctly postmodernist brand” (Malm 2020: 27). Not least, this is evident in the work of Hall himself,

4 While my reflections on ‘Cultural Studies’ can consequently not claim to adequately describe *everything* that has been happening within the field, I would claim that it nevertheless pertains to *a lot*, in particular to strands and manifestations that have often been considered as defining (cf., e.g., Marchart 2008; Turner 2003).

who, on numerous occasions, criticized what he saw as the exaggerated textualism or discursivism of many deconstructivist thinkers or the later Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.⁵ While aware that such categories could no longer be employed in a naïve, straightforward manner, many Cultural Studies scholars nevertheless refused to give up notions such as ‘experience’, ‘agency’, or ‘material reality’. Instead, along the lines of the fruitful tension between the two paradigms envisaged by Hall, these concepts were struggled with⁶, reworked, put ‘under erasure’ (Derrida 2016), or used ‘strategically’ (Spivak 2009).

A good illustration of this tendency is Angela McRobbie’s instructive 1997 essay “The Es and the Anti-Es: New Questions for Feminism and Cultural Studies.” The text skillfully negotiates the friction between the anti-essentialism (the ‘anti-Es’) of feminist critics such as Judith Butler or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak on one side and the ‘three Es’ of the *empirical*, the *ethnographic*, and the *experiential* on the other. McRobbie explicitly makes the case for “a reconciliation of sorts” (1999: 75) by, on the one hand, “grounding” poststructuralist theorizing and urging it “to loo[k] outside theory and as[k] some practical questions about the world we live in” (86, 75), and, on the other, by recasting the ‘three Es’ in the light of constructivist arguments. The essay argues that Cultural Studies itself should “be deconstructed to show how poststructuralist work has occupied a position of authority” (88), and makes a powerful – albeit qualified – call for going ‘back to reality’ (83) by once again embracing the ‘three Es’, though now in a non-totalistic and non-essentialist way. McRobbie’s defense of a focus on “more materialist matters” and of a “more applied or practical feminist cultural studies” (76, 84f) is representative of a lot of work done within Cultural Studies. This line of work stresses the interventionist character of the discipline (cf. paradigmatically Hall 1996a), arguing that the purpose of theory, as Hall once put it, is merely that of “a detour” – though a necessary one (Hall 1996a: 270) – “on the way to something more important” (1997: 42) – working on the ‘real world’.

The overemphasis on textuality, representation, and discourse has thus never been as severe in Cultural Studies as in other fields. Instead, the semiotic and the discursive were frequently considered in their complex interrelations with the material. A case in point is the now famous model of the ‘circuit of culture’, developed in 1997 by Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay, and Keith Negus in

5 It is of course no contradiction that Hall also admired and was greatly influenced by both, Jacques Derrida and Ernesto Laclau. Interestingly, as he once said while discussing his relation with the thought of the latter, he tended to “prefer people’s less complete works to their later, mature and complete ones”, the texts, that is, in which “their thought has not yet hardened into a system” (in Grossberg 1986: 56) – a remark that not only itself seems to be made in the spirit of deconstruction or poststructuralism, but that is also revealing with regards to the nature of the oeuvre of Hall himself.

6 As Hall (1996a: 265f) once declared, theory should always involve, indeed, *mean*, struggle.

the context of a series of textbooks based on a course taught at the Open University, at which most of the authors were then working. They argue that whenever a cultural artifact is to be analyzed, there are five major processes, as well as their always specific articulation, that need to be taken into account: representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation (du Gay et al. 1997). Taken together, these processes constitute the aforementioned ‘circuit of culture’. Though questions of signification and meaning are characteristically central to the book in which the model is introduced, what is significant in our context is precisely the insistence that to focus on just one aspect of the circuit – whether it is the process of production, as in Marxist economism, or of representation or identity, as in varieties of the cultural turn – is never enough. Here, as elsewhere, it thus becomes clear that the neglect of the economic realm of which many contemporary materialist critics accuse post-cultural turn Marxism (cf., e.g., Bryant/Srnicek/Harman 2011: 4) was not so pronounced in Cultural Studies. In fact, to dedicate an entire book to the analysis of one particular object, as du Gay and his colleagues did with the Sony Walkman as the subject of their exemplary case study, might in some ways even be seen as congruent with the more recent ‘turn towards things’ in material culture studies, thing theory, and object-oriented ontology.

Beyond this, another factor encouraging and facilitating an encounter between Cultural Studies and the nonhuman turn is the former’s preference for a type of analysis dedicated to the concrete rather than the abstract and to the complex, differentiated, and contextual rather than the general. I have already pointed out that Cultural Studies has always had a rather “strategic relation to theory” (Hall in Scott 1997: 152). Hall, for one, once said in an interview: “I don’t regard myself as a theorist in the sense that that is my work. I am interested always in going on theorizing about the world, about the concrete, but I am not interested in the production of theory as an object in its own right. [...] I think my object is to think the concreteness of the object in its many different relations.” (in Scott 1997: 152) This ‘radical contextualism’ which, as Lawrence Grossberg (2010: 20–43) has pointed out, is at the heart of Cultural Studies, distinctly chimes with certain strands of the more recent theoretical developments. Thus, for instance, Levi Bryant declares that “the first and most important principle of [his] onto-cartography lies in the dictum: ‘avoid abstractions!’,” and that it is hence “motivated by a plea for the *concrete*” (2014: 257, 282). To give just one other example, this call to attend to the concrete rather than dealing with reified abstractions is also evident in the brilliant anthropological work of Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2015). The attention to the concrete in such work manifests itself in a number of ways, each of them illuminating in the way it reconfigures analytical practice, but one of the most instructive cases is perhaps the mode in which capitalism is studied. Instead of treating it as a unified, homogeneous, and total system, these authors prefer “to tackle capitalism with a theory that stresses ephemeral assemblages and multidirectional histories” (Tsing 2015: 61). What is thus brought to

light is, for one thing, the actual complexity and heterogeneity of 'capitalism', really a sort of 'assemblage'⁷ or, as Tsing has it, a "translation machine" that connects diverse economies, "producing capital from all kinds of livelihoods, human and not human" (133). For another thing, by imbuing our understanding of the economy with what Tsing calls 'arts of noticing', we sharpen our awareness for the 'patches of livelihood', that is, the enormously varied concrete rhythms, dynamics, and ways of life that are part of the global economy but are usually hidden from sight by the dominant capitalist imaginary and the abstractions of political economy (cf. 131–35). In both regards, "a world of difference" (134) emerges.

I would argue that such new approaches are eminently compatible with Cultural Studies, which likewise has typically rejected abstract generalizations about capitalism and instead concentrated on the analysis of specific 'conjunctures', which are similarly conceived in terms of an always just temporary "articulation of multiple, overlapping, competing, reinforcing, etc., lines of force and transformation, destabilization and (re-)stabilization, with differing temporalities and spatialities" (Grossberg 2010: 41). Thus, underlying the thought of someone like Hall, we can detect an analogous conviction that capitalism can be considered "one thing" only "at the simplest level" (Hall in Hall/Massey 2010: 67). In contrast, always aiming at historical specificity, Hall, for instance, argues with regards to neoliberalism that it "has many variants. It is not a single system. And by no means all capitalisms are neoliberal. [...] It combines with other models, modifying them. It borrows, evolves and diversifies. It is constantly 'in process'." (2011: 708) In the same way, in view of the "triumph of finance capital over industrial capital", Hall wonders: "can we still speak of Capital as a unified entity?" (in Hall/Massey 2010: 66, 63) Similarly, particularly the culturalist strand within Cultural Studies has always encouraged attention to the diversity and lived concreteness of what Tsing calls 'livelihood patches', to the associated practices, affects, the "stories about life and livelihood" (Tsing 2015: 132), and their relation to the kinds of stories connected with what Michel de Certeau would refer to as the abstract "space of visual, panoptic, or theoretical constructions" (1988: 93). In fact, Tsing's concern with 'lifeways' (2015: 23) resonates in stimulating ways with Raymond Williams' interest in 'ways of life' – an interest that Tsing and others extend to include non-human and non-living 'ways of being'.

Finally, I would argue that the 'special relationship' Cultural Studies has generally had with Marxism constitutes another factor enabling a rapprochement with certain variants of speculative realism and new materialism. On the one hand, Marxism has always been a very important theoretico-political force within Cultural Studies, whose influence can hardly be exaggerated. On the other hand, as Hall has pointed out, there was never a straightforward, "perfect theoretical fit" (1996a: 265) between the two. On the contrary, "the encounter between British cultural studies

7 On this point, cf. ch. 6.

and marxism has first to be understood as the engagement with a problem” (Hall 1996a: 265), not a solution. That is to say, Cultural Studies, like Hall himself, “came into marxism backwards” (Hall 1996a: 264). In fact, it could be said that it was precisely through a *critique* of particular elements of Marxist theory – its economic determinism, the model of base and superstructure, its understanding of ideology, etc. – that Cultural Studies first began to constitute itself as a distinct project. As Hall has put it, Cultural Studies has always been “working within shouting distance of marxism, working on marxism, working against marxism, working with it, working to try to develop marxism” (1996a: 265). Thus, in a series of often long and dense theoretical meditations, Hall himself continued to ‘wrestle’ with Marxism⁸, rethinking and reworking a number of its theoretical formulations. The result was what he famously termed a ‘Marxism without guarantees’ (1996c), a Marxism, in other words, which decidedly embraced *contingency* (cf. Cord 2018) – regarding both, content and form, that is, in terms of its assumptions and analyses concerning reality as well as its own theoretical models. This is a distinctly open, non-dogmatic mode of theorizing, which includes a willingness to critically examine, adapt, translate, and revise its own concepts and categories.

This, I think, makes it a suitable candidate for the kind of “revised”, “open Marxism” (Coole/Frost 2010: 30, 29) some contemporary materialist critics call for. As several commentators have pointed out, the Anthropocene should perhaps more appropriately be termed ‘Capitalocene’ (cf., e.g., Bonneuil/Fressoz 2017: 222–52; Haraway 2016: 47–51, 184fn50; Moore 2015, 2016).⁹ For it was precisely not some abstract, universal ‘man’ that brought about the drastic changes in geology, climate, etc. we are now observing, but ‘Western’ capitalism. As this world-system continues to lay waste to the planet and systematically produce ever starker inequalities, close and critical analyses of global capitalism are today more urgently needed than ever. For this task, Marxism remains indispensable. Yet, this has to be a Marxism that does not rigidly repeat received verities and simply ‘apply’ established concepts. Above all, this must not be a “fundamentalist Marxism, with all its trappings of Modernity, Progress, and History” (Haraway 2016: 50). Instead, it needs to be adaptable, ready to modify itself in view of new theoretical as well as historical developments. This, as Donna Haraway, drawing on the work of James Clifford, has argued, involves telling ‘big-enough stories’, stories, that is, which are neither ‘too big’ nor ‘too small’. What we need, says Haraway, are “stories (and theories) that are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections” (2016: 101). It seems to me that one could hardly find a better fit for all of this than the programmatically “open’ marxism” (Hall 1986b: 6) of a Cultural Studies

8 Hall 1977, 1985, 1996c, and 2003 are only some of the most incisive examples. Key texts are now collected in Hall 2021.

9 For a helpful critical analysis of the discourse of the Anthropocene, cf. Crist 2016.

scholar like Hall: shifting and flexible, rejecting the false ‘guarantees’ of any simple determinism and teleology, and – as a distinct form of ‘low theory’ (cf. Halberstam 2011: 15–18) – constantly operating at “different levels of abstraction” (Hall 1986b: 7), aiming at analyses that would always be neither too big nor too small, but ‘big enough’.¹⁰ It is therefore not surprising that, in a brief endnote to her 2016 book on the Anthropocene, Haraway has explicitly named Hall, along with Marx and Gramsci, as the “most likely Western Marxist allies [...] for nurturing the Chthulucene [her counter-concept] in the belly of the Capitalocene” (2016: 185fn56).

One concrete example of how Cultural Studies and the ‘critical’ varieties of new materialism (cf. Coole/Frost 2010: 24–36) could productively be brought into dialogue concerns methodology. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost have suggested that what is required in order to be able to adequately address the complex realities of 21st-century global capitalism is a “multimodal methodology” (2010: 32). In particular, they argue, such a methodology needs to make possible an analysis of the manifold and intricate ways in which the micro-level of the everyday and the macro-level of structures are today interlinked in the continuous reproduction of the social order. I believe that Cultural Studies can safely be said to be one of the richest theoretical sources when it comes to developing multimodal methods of analysis. Among other things, the reasons for this lie in the already mentioned coexistence of a culturalist and a structuralist paradigm within the discipline as well as in the import and combination of diverse theoretical agendas, such as a post-Foucauldian attention to ‘micro-politics’ and a Marxist focus on political economy and the state. Even though Cultural Studies has – in part rightly – been criticized for ‘cultural populism’ (McGuigan 1992), that is, for exaggerating the micro-political potential for resistance, and for overemphasizing the micro- at the expense of the macro-level, even in those areas of research in which this has been most pronounced, especially the study of subcultures and the media, other examples are easily found which more or less consistently draw both levels together.¹¹ In fact, within Cultural Studies, there is a rich tradition of such combined analysis of “the capitalist economy, the juridico-political domain, and the material quotidian” (Coole/Frost 2010: 34), so much so that it can even convincingly be argued that the joint exploration of the various levels of the social formation and of their shifting interrelations constitutes the signature mode of Cultural Studies analysis (cf. Kramer 2018). This can to some extent be traced back

10 Importantly, in the essay quoted from here, virtually all of Hall’s remarks in his interpretation of the thought of Antonio Gramsci also characterize his own work. In fact, the first part of the essay reads almost like a ‘program’, laying out the basic principles for a ‘low, open Marxism’ (cf. 1986b: 5–8).

11 Here, I am thinking for instance of the long, programmatic introduction to *Resistance through Rituals* (Clarke et al. 1993) or Hall’s rich work on the media (e.g., 1981, 1999), for both of which the study of their respective object – subcultures and the mass-media – is part of a larger study of the conjuncture.

to the very ‘beginnings’ of Cultural Studies in the 1950s and early 60s, but an early high point is certainly the 1967/68 *May Day Manifesto*. In the brief methodological second chapter of this text, the authors explicitly reject ‘monomodal’ forms of study and instead opt for an inquiry that starts with “the social realities, in day-to-day living” and then “move[s] out from that, in a widening analysis and description, until we can see the outlines of [...] a world-system” (Williams 2018: 6). The aforesaid circuit of culture could be mentioned here as another model for multimodal methodology, yet, the *locus classicus* for this type of analysis is surely the brilliant, collectively authored *Policing the Crisis* from 1978, which programmatically refuses “to abstract individual effects from the contradictory structures which produce them” (Hall et al. 1978: x), and whose extremely complex investigation moves from a minor social incident, a ‘mugging’, to the social formation as a whole, the crisis of hegemony and the gradual emergence of a ‘law-and-order society’ in Britain in the 1970s. As Grossberg, whose study *Caught in the Crossfire* (2016) is yet another good example, has pointed out, in works such as these, “small moments” are always treated as “point[s] of crystallization” that need to be connected “to the contradictions at work in the various domains of the social formation [...] and the relations among them” (2010: 26).

There are, thus, a number of points of contact which could be used as starting points for bringing Cultural Studies and the nonhuman turn into encounter. While skepticism and critique are doubtlessly always important, I believe that Cultural Studies should be open to these novel developments – not because they are fashionable, but because both theoretically and politically, they possess the potential to enrich the discipline. As Hall asserted, “historical conjunctures insist on theories: they are real moments in the evolution of theory” (1996a: 270). Consequently, in the Anthropocene, as the “Titanic of modernity hits the iceberg of hyperobjects” (Morton 2013: 19) such as global warming, our models for theory and politics (should) change.¹² Which is of course not to say that all older models are now obsolete – far from it! But there are new issues today that need to be addressed – partly because they really are new, partly because they previously could not properly be thought within older theoretical horizons and languages – new frameworks for understanding and interpreting phenomena, new points of application, strategies, and, indeed, forms for political struggle.

Cultural Studies has always been a discipline dedicated to critical self-examination. In the brief genealogy of the field developed in his celebrated essay “Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies”, Hall explains that “[a]gain and again, the so-called unfolding of cultural studies was interrupted by a break, by real ruptures, by exterior forces; the interruption, as it were, of new ideas, which decentred what looked like the accumulating practice of the work” (1996a: 268). Like the theoretical

12 McKenzie Wark (2016: 169) and Andreas Malm (2020: 16) have even claimed that climate change constitutes something like the ‘litmus test’ for theory in the Anthropocene.

'moments' discussed by Hall – feminism, the 'question of race', the linguistic turn – and like others that followed later, I believe that the nonhuman turn has the capacity to become another such interruption, and to reorganize the field in some significant ways. Not least, this will involve a critical engagement with the 'question of anthropocentrism', that is, the question of how far, in spite of its critique of the self-enclosed Cartesian subject, the discipline has nevertheless tended to reaffirm humanity's central place in the world. Cultural Studies, in other words, will further be 'posthumanized', becoming a driving force of the emerging 'posthumanities' (cf. Badmington 2006).¹³ It has to be stressed that the posthumanism I have in mind here is not of the kind which dreams of the 'enhancement' or 'transcendence' of the human and in this way effectively perpetuates the notion of the autonomous liberal subject and the anthropocentrism of the humanist tradition (cf. Hayles 1999). The 'post' of the posthumanism I am thinking of could not possibly mean a simple break or straightforward succession, a self-positioning 'after' humanism or the human. Rather, like the 'post' in postmodernism discussed by Jean-François Lyotard (1993), the meaning of the prefix would above all signify a critical 'working through'. This, in other words, would be a 'critical posthumanism'¹⁴, which "inhabits humanism deconstructively" (Herbrechter 2013: 7) and subscribes, not to an *anti-human* ontology, but to one "where humans are no longer monarchs of being but are instead *among* beings, *entangled* in beings, and *implicated* in other beings" (Bryant 2011: 40). Whereas the 'human' "functions to domesticate and hierarchize difference within the human (whether according to race, class, gender) and to absolutize difference between the human and the nonhuman," the 'posthuman' thus understood "participates in re-distributions of difference and identity" (Halberstam/Livingston 1995: 10). While such redistribution has long been on the agenda of Cultural Studies with regards to the human, an engagement with the relations with the nonhuman has largely been missing.

13 Clearly, this encounter with the nonhuman turn has the potential to remake Cultural Studies in fundamental ways. In no way can it be a question of merely *importing* certain concepts and ideas into its established theoretical horizon. Rather, to be-in-encounter means being entangled, knotted, and co-shaped in inter- and intra-actions. Thus, many of the central notions and assumptions of the field will need to be reworked (yet again), not least the key concept of culture itself, which has largely remained anthropocentric until today (cf. Badmington 2006) and will now have to be rethought, among other things, with regards to the assemblage of the human and the nonhuman and the continuum of the material and the immaterial. Concerning the latter aspect, cf. especially the important debates within media theory regarding recent information and communication technologies, social media, digitalization, etc., but also 'medianatures', 'media ecologies' and 'archaeologies', or 'digital materialism'. For some reflections in this direction, cf. ch. 2.

14 On 'critical posthumanism', cf. especially Braidotti 2013, 2019; Herbrechter 2013; and Nayar 2014.

In engaging and ‘wrestling’ (Hall 1996a: 270) with the nonhuman turn, we should be fair to these new approaches and take them as what they are: forays into largely un- or underexplored theoretical territory, first investigations and probings, not finished solutions. In fact, the challenge speculative realist or new materialist critics are facing today is in some ways not unlike the one thinkers like Jacques Derrida were confronted with at an earlier moment in the history of ideas, namely the necessity of having to think against and beyond many of the received categories and ‘truths’ not just of common sense, but also of theory, and, since lots of these ‘truths’ are inscribed into our very linguistic codes, of having to struggle with language itself.¹⁵ These “difficulties of employing inherited epistemological and ontological terms and vocabularies in order to describe realities whose complex, multiply stranded constitution, [sic] is simply not rendered sensible or understandable by them” (Joyce/Bennett 2010: 11) are evident everywhere today. Hence, as in the case of Derrida, the frequent coining of neologisms in contemporary theory, the resignification of existing terms, the rather heavy use of metaphor. Hence also the willingness of some authors to appear naïve or foolish, and to engage with and take seriously what seems to be silly (cf., e.g., Bennett 2010: xiii; Morton 2017: 159f). After all, one of the things we have learned from Foucault is certainly that the ‘foolish’ or ‘silly’ is only that which is *made* or *designated* as foolish or silly by dominant discourses, by the “discursive ‘policy’” (Fr. *‘police’ discursive*) (Foucault 1972: 224) anxious to enforce its constructions of reality.

To some extent, the ‘political’ could well function as a ‘relay’ for the theoretical encounter between Cultural Studies and the nonhuman turn. While some critics associated with the latter have accused continental philosophy, and Marxism in particular, of having become largely depoliticized in the wake of the cultural turn (Bryant/Srnicke/Harman 2011: 4), and while Cultural Studies too may perhaps to some extent be charged with having fallen into a kind of “dogmatic slumber” (Grossberg 2010: 4), in which it has somewhat lost its commitment to social change, Cultural Studies has nevertheless never really ceased defining itself in terms of what Hall called its “worldly” vocation, seeing itself as a “political project”, which “aims to make a difference in the world” (1996a: 272, 271, 264). On the other side, scholars have similarly been worried about whether the intellectual developments of the nonhuman turn do not “evacuate the ground for all intentional action, thereby proposing a sort of political quietism” (Bryant/Srnicke/Harman 2011: 16). As Richard Grusin has pointed out, particularly practitioners of politically emancipatory disciplines, often motivated in

15 As, for instance, Jane Bennett writes towards the end of her book on ‘vital materiality’: “In composing and recomposing the sentences of this book – especially in trying to choose the appropriate verbs, I have come to see how radical a project it is to think vital materiality. It seems *necessary* and *impossible* to rewrite the default grammar of agency, a grammar that assigns activity to people and passivity to things.” (2010: 119, emphasis added)

part by social constructivism, tend to believe that any appeal to reality or nature, especially if the latter is seen as possessing agential force, “could only operate in service of a defense of the status quo” (2015: xviii). “But”, he continues,

this does not have to be the case. A concern with the nonhuman can and must be brought to bear on any projects for creating a more just society. If following Latour and others we take society as a complex assemblage of human and nonhuman actors[,] [...] then the question of political change becomes a question of changing our relations not only to other humans but to nonhumans as well. To extend our academic and critical concern to include nonhuman animals and the nonhuman environment [...] should be a politically liberatory project in very much the same way that earlier, similar turns toward a concern for gender, race, ethnicity, or class were politically liberatory for groups of humans. (2015: xviii)¹⁶

I think that Cultural Studies scholars, who may well intuitively tend to consider the nonhuman turn as regressive or reactionary, would do well to heed these words and look closely: For much of the intellectual work connected with the nonhuman turn, sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, is in fact (at least to some extent) political in nature and committed to emancipatory change.¹⁷ Even a field such as object-oriented ontology (OOO), which may not at first seem amenable to liberatory projects, or even to politics generally, has been developed in just such a way. Thus, OOO theorists such as Timothy Morton or Levi Bryant have explicitly understood their thinking in political terms. As Morton has pointed out: “Ontology [...] is a vital and contested political terrain.” (2013: 20) More than that, whereas an OOO philosopher like Graham Harman does indeed subscribe to a politics that is very docile and unsympathetic to radical change (cf., e.g., 2014, 2018: 134–46, esp. 146), Morton (2017) and Bryant (2014) have more recently produced works in which they explicitly attempt to make OOO fruitful for emancipatory and decidedly left politics.¹⁸

For Multiple Vision: Theory as Muddle

Even though an important thinker like Bruno Latour has gone beyond so many of the dichotomies that have long characterized the philosophical tradition in the ‘West’, he himself and his followers as well as his (Marxist, constructivist, etc.) critics still doggedly cling to the dualism of ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ – whereas I am arguing that it would

16 In this context, cf. also the related, powerful argument made by Cary Wolfe (2003: 7f).

17 Though I will also argue in the following chapters that a still greater politicization is precisely one of the effects of an encounter with Cultural Studies.

18 In this context, cf. also the emergence of an object-oriented feminism (Behar 2016).

in fact be very fruitful, to use Leslie Fiedler's words, to 'cross the border' and somewhat 'close the gap', that is, to look for the points where compatibility exists and to make these productive for theoretical work. In other words, here too, speaking in the idiom of actor-network theory (ANT) itself, we should spend our energies on the work of 'translation' rather than 'purification' and on the creation of new, potentially stronger 'networks'. For instance, as others have already pointed out, regarding the oeuvre of Latour himself, there actually seem to be a whole number of such points at which the task of constructing a plane of encounter may be begun.¹⁹ This is a task of '*articulation*'. As has often been the case with such endeavors in the past, this will certainly involve reinterpretation, 'translation', and 'appropriation'. It will also mean, not only tolerating, but working with and through *tension* – epistemological, ontological, conceptual, methodological, and more. Yet, as Hall has pointed out, living and working with tension has always characterized Cultural Studies (1996a: 268, *passim*). Tensions can be (made) productive. Among other things, they encourage a self-reflexive skepticism regarding one's own certainties by obliging us to see from two (or more) perspectives at once. As Haraway has emphasized: "Single vision produces worse illusions than double vision" (2010: 2196).

Such 'double vision' will, for instance, be required when it comes to the vexed question of the status and value of *critique*²⁰. As is well known, many authors associated with ANT, new materialism, or speculative realism have been rather dismissive

19 These are too numerous to be discussed here in detail, and I refer the reader to Matthias Wieser's study on ANT, which, in one short chapter, helpfully lays out some of them (2012: 241–54). In this context, cf. also the work of Tony Bennett (e.g., 2007), who has already significantly furthered the effort of bringing ANT and Cultural Studies into dialogue. A rapprochement is perhaps particularly easy with regards to the parallels between, on the one hand, the diverse theoretical work surrounding the Gramscian notion of 'hegemony' in Cultural Studies and, on the other, Latour's conceptualization of the process of 'gathering' or 'composing' the 'collective', whose incarnations are always just temporary, a result of the combined working of the 'power to take into account' and the 'power to arrange in rank order', and hence always open to change as new entities or 'propositions' clamor to be heard and to be admitted (2004a, esp. 108ff). Here, as elsewhere in Latour's work, collective or political identities are never given, but always the contingent outcome of processes of 'association' and 'articulation'. The latter term, which is so central to Cultural Studies (cf., e.g., Grossberg 1986, esp. 53ff; Slack 1996), is actually used by Latour in *Pandora's Hope* (1999, esp. 142ff), though typically in a way that challenges anthropocentrism by incorporating non-human actants (cf. Bennett 2007: 613). This also applies to other terms, such as 'translation' or 'hybridity', which are likewise crucial both to Latour and Cultural Studies (esp. in the work on 'race', ethnicity, and cultural identity by Hall, Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, and others). Bringing the discourse-analytical thought of theorists such as Laclau and Mouffe on the one hand and the realist and materialist work of someone like Latour on the other into an 'encounter' may result, among other things, in the 'materialization' of the former and a stronger politicization of the latter.

20 *The Value of Critique* is the title of a recent collection of essays dedicated to this question (Graw/Menke 2019).

of what has variously been termed 'critique', 'demystification', 'paranoid reading', or the 'hermeneutics of suspicion'.²¹ If not quite another 'turn', there is nevertheless a distinct 'postcritical', 'reparative', or 'reconstructive' (as opposed to deconstructive)²² trend today.²³ Needless to say, these attacks on critique have in their turn elicited critical responses – 'a critique of the critique of critique' (Toscano 2011).²⁴ Yet, as several scholars have argued, it does not have to be a question of either/or. Instead, rather than to *choose* the task should be to *combine* both approaches.²⁵ In fact, it's not a question of *being*, but of *doing*. Cultural Studies does not have to *be* critical or postcritical; depending on the situation, it can *perform* both, critical *and* postcritical labor.²⁶ Pragmatism suits Cultural Studies better than dogmatism. Thus, the guiding questions should always be: How can the issue at hand best be tackled? Which approach, or combination of approaches, is most promising to illuminate the subject under consideration? In this sense, to return to the metaphor I invoked earlier, the novel concepts and methodologies should perhaps best be treated like so many new hammers, screwdrivers, and pincers, which can be added to the Cultural Studies 'toolbox'.²⁷ Following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2006) and Angela McRobbie

21 For some of the most influential moments of this 'postcritical' discourse, cf. Bennett 2010: xivf; Felski 2015; Latour 2004b, 2010; Sedgwick 2003: 123–51.

22 As an aside, let me point out that in 1986, Stuart Hall similarly opposed what he saw as the dominant deconstructive approach to Marxism with an essay devoted, as he said, to the "work of 'reconstruction'" (1996c: 30).

23 Emblematically, we can mention the striking proliferation of references to *caring* in much current writing (cf. programmatically in Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). In view of this, it seems safe to say that care has recently, not replaced, but been added to critique as one of the key functions of political theory and practice. In this context, cf. Rosi Braidotti's assertion that what she terms the Critical PostHumanities "combine understanding and knowledge with training and pastoral care, thus fulfilling both a critical and a healing function" (2019: 104). On the theoretical 'modes' of 'critique' and 'repair' (as well as 'escalation'), cf. the chapters of part II.

24 Representatively, cf. the powerful criticism levelled at Latour by Benjamin Noys (2010: 80–105, 2014, 2016, 2019).

25 In this context, cf. David Scott's fascinating book on Stuart Hall, which engages Hall's work through a focus on his 'voice' as disclosing the ethos of his unique 'intellectual style'. In particular, cf. Scott's observation that as both, 'critical self' and 'listening self', Hall to some extent combined a critical sensibility with a postcritical one (2017: 4f).

26 As with the 'postmodern' or 'posthuman', the prefix in 'postcritical' similarly does not have to signify a radical break, but could be taken to signal a continuation of sorts, under different, generally more self-reflexive, conditions.

27 Thus, while it may be true that, as Latour proclaims in his "Compositionist Manifesto", "*what performs a critique cannot also compose*", there is no reason why our theoretical bag of tools should not nevertheless comprise both, instruments like hammers that "break down walls, destroy idols, ridicule prejudices" as well as those that can be used to "repair, take care, assemble, reassemble, stitch together" (2010: 475). Cf. Cord 2026.

(1999), we should, in other words, not be afraid to use concepts ‘strategically’, in response to the requirements of the respective context. While this may involve theoretical friction, it will, more importantly, also yield new insight.

Another source of tension will undoubtedly be the question whether we need a notion of the social ‘totality’. Latour’s rejection of this and his famous injunction to ‘follow the actors themselves’ instead (2005: 179) has, unsurprisingly, earned him the hostility of many, especially Marxist, critics, who have felt that a conception of the totality is indispensable for their varied critical and emancipatory projects. Yet, the categorical pronouncements of Latour and others notwithstanding, it should not be taken for granted that some sense of the totality is necessarily incompatible with elements of ANT.²⁸ Perhaps, both rather need to be somewhat reworked. As a matter of fact, received understandings of totality had already come under attack earlier, by poststructuralism and particularly Derridean deconstruction (cf. esp. Derrida 2001), which had already led to a number of revisions – not least within Cultural Studies itself. Its key notion of the ‘conjuncture’ is certainly central here. I think that these revisions could today be drawn upon and developed further in light of the new criticisms articulated by ANT and elsewhere. It seems appropriate to adopt words Hall once wrote concerning the concept of ‘identity’ and to say that totality is today “an idea which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all” (1996b: 2). I believe that for an intellectual and political enterprise such as Cultural Studies, what Fredric Jameson (1991, esp. 51–54) termed ‘cognitive mapping’ is still crucial, as it is almost “a precondition for identifying any ‘levers,’ nerve-centres or weak links in the political anatomy of contemporary domination” (Toscano/Kinkle 2015: 8). We are in the Anthropocene, in the age of global warming, of global inequality – it would surely be paradoxical to relinquish the thinking of the totality now, of all times. Even an OOO philosopher like Timothy Morton still asserts a need for cognitive mapping (2013: 133) – though for him, what has to be mapped are what he calls ‘hyperobjects’. Yet, maybe this could already be one inspiration for the reconceptualization of the totality that is required today. Among other things, what we need is a thoroughly materialized totality, one that includes the nonhuman in its various manifestations, and that is no longer in any way ‘organic’ or ‘centered’ (Edwards 2010: 286f), a “de-totalized totality” (Coole/Frost 2010: 29; cf. also Wark 2016: 219), so to speak.

Thus, against Latour (1993b: 173), unlike God, capitalism does exist. Yet, as was already indicated earlier, it can no longer be understood along traditional lines. Instead, I would suggest that we conceive of it as an (‘overcoding’ or ‘meta-’) *assemblage*²⁹ – an approach that will allow us to combine political economy with ANT and

28 On this topic, cf. ch. 6.

29 In my view, the concept of the assemblage is central for the task of articulating Cultural Studies and the nonhuman turn. I pursue this in more detail in ch. 2.

its focus on performativity³⁰, that is, to link the micro-sociological study of markets, artifacts, and practices – what Latour calls “doing the footwork” (2005: 178) – with that of the macro-dynamics of contemporary capitalism more generally. Benjamin Braun, for one, has advocated just such an approach, pointing out that “a more horizontal analytical framework – or flatter ontology –” involves a significantly extended conception of the political since “the ‘micro-institutions of capitalism’ feature not only as epiphenomena, but as *sites of politics*” (2016: 258). Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle seem to have something similar in mind when, in their engagement with Latour as part of their defense of social theory’s attempts to ‘see it whole’, they explain that “the theoretical desire for totality is not incompatible with a painstaking attention to traces, objects and devices” and that hence, “great dialectical writing would constitute precisely the kind of panorama that would [...] present both the totality and its constituent devices, as well as the attendant gaps and dislocations” (2015: 48, 55). Conceiving of capitalism as an assemblage, without teleology, determinism, reductionism, and the assumption of uniformity or homogeneity, means focusing on ‘partial connections’ (Strathern 2004) and proceeding from the Harawayian maxim “Nothing is connected to everything; everything is connected to something” (2016: 31). It means thinking the totality in terms of complex, dynamic relations and various interlinked levels, layers, practices, and elements, including all sorts of ‘actants’ (human as well as nonhuman), and explicitly as a problem of representation or figuration. I believe that such an approach is eminently compatible with the work of Latour, especially if we opt for a ‘weak’ reading of it (cf. Castree 2002) which ignores his more flippant remarks (such as the one just alluded to) and regards his thought not in terms of a discarding, but rather of a fundamental *reworking* of the concept of capitalism (in fact, Latour never really ceases working with it).³¹ An extended elaboration of the notion of the capitalist totality as an assemblage will have to wait until chapter 6, but let me just indicate that such an endeavor can find important theoretical resources and support in ANT’s understanding of capitalism in terms of an organizing of markets and of long-distance control achieved through interlocking extended networks (Latour 1993a: 173; Latour/Callon 1997); in the work of Marxist geographer David Harvey, who explicitly views capitalism as an assemblage (of what he terms ‘activity spheres’) (2011: 119–39), as well as that of Noel Castree (2002), Erik Swynedouw (2006a, 2006b) and others who, often in dialogue with Harvey’s thought, have developed a radical political ecology programmatically synthesizing Marxism with ANT; in Jason Moore’s (2015) redefinition of capitalism as a ‘world-ecology’; or

30 Cf. especially the influential work on the economy by Michel Callon.

31 In this context, we could also note that Latour’s later work (2017, 2018, 2019; Latour/Schultz 2022) on the Anthropocene or what he calls the ‘new climatic regime’ is much more openly political and seems to represent something of a moderation of his earlier, harsher statements regarding the tradition of critique, the term ‘capitalism’, etc.

in the writings of new materialist critics such as William Connolly (2013) or Anna Tsing (2015), who, each in their own way, likewise approach late capitalism as an assemblage or ecology.³²

Finally, to give just one more important example, ‘double’ or ‘multiple vision’ will also be necessary when it comes to the tension between social constructivism and material realism. Yet, as some commentators have already pointed out, these do in fact not inevitably have to be irreconcilable opposites. Instead, through the work of translation and articulation, Cultural Studies can come to profit from the best of both. What, I think, needs to be realized is that “discursive and material forms are inextricable yet irreducible”. Thus, “society is simultaneously materially real and socially constructed: our material lives are always culturally mediated, but they are not only cultural.” (Coole/Frost 2010: 27) “It is,” as Coole and Frost explain, “entirely possible, then, to accept social constructionist arguments while also insisting that the material realm is irreducible to culture or discourse and that cultural artifacts are not arbitrary vis-à-vis nature.” (2010: 27) I would therefore want to join Levi Bryant, who declares: “What we need is a post-humanist framework that is able to synthesize the findings of the linguistic turn, Marxist thought, Foucaultian thought, media theorists such as McLuhan, Kittler, and Ong, as well as the post-humanist thought of the ecologists, the new materialists, the actor-network theorists, and the work of thinkers such as Diamond and Braudel.” (2014: 286) In this context, Bryant’s *Onto-Cartography*, among others, is particularly helpful, as it not only calls for such a new, hybrid framework, but also already takes some significant first steps in the direction of its development. I am convinced that only within such a framework will we be able to adequately respond to the pressing political demands of our time.

Now, if, in view of my suggestions regarding the joint practice of critique and postcritique, the conceptualization of a ‘de-totalized totality’, and the combination of constructivist with realist and materialist approaches, some readers object that this sounds an awful lot like having your cake and eating it too, then I can only respond: So be it! Low theory is willing and able to tolerate and work with incongruities. It even tries to make them productive. Its orientation is, as I said, pragmatic. It has no truck with old-style *grands récits*, with the production of totalizing, consistent systems of knowledge that are free of contradiction – not only because these are often ‘impractical’, useless for tackling concrete phenomena, but also because, epistemologically and ontologically, they are too far removed from, to

32 In this context, another helpful tool to think with may be the proposed distinction between the ‘globe’ (stable, total, unified, centered, and perceived from without) on the one hand and the ‘sphere’ or the ‘planetary’ (marked by complex, heterogeneous, and dynamic networks of interdependency and interaction, and perceived from within) on the other, as two alternative topologies of environmental awareness (Ingold 2000; cf. Horn/Berghaller 2020: 151f).

use Haraway's (2016) words, the messy 'tentacularity' of 'Terrapolis'. Cultural Studies, by contrast, has always been committed to this messiness (cf. Cord 2018). What counts, therefore, is not perfect theoretical purity and consistency – inappropriate for studying a world everywhere characterized by hybridity – but *practicality*. In other words, the criterion by which a concept, method, or theory is judged is, to steal Graham Harman's (2002) term, its 'tool-being', that is, the question in how far it can be made useful for 'working on' a given issue. This is theory not "as a policing faculty flying high as a drone over all the others," but as "interstitial, its labor communicative rather than controlling. [...] It refracts affects, perceptions, and concepts from one domain of labor to another using whatever apparatus is to hand."³³ (Wark 2016: 218) Such is the theory we need today; not the clear and total vision from the clean air high above – theory as 'seeing like a state' (Scott 2020) – but "theory in the mud, as muddle" (Haraway 2016: 31). Here, in the dirt, the mud, the compost, the humus, beyond speciesism, can we compose a Cultural Studies for the Anthropocene.

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33 Alongside Jack Halberstam's methodological reflections on 'low theory' cited earlier (2011: 15–18), McKenzie Wark's comments on some necessary 'reversals of perspective' regarding Marxism in the present (2016: 213–25) are very helpful in this context of thinking about theory for the Anthropocene as well.

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