

Tim Ingold and Gísli Palsson (Eds.), 2013, *Biosocial Becomings: Integrating biological and social anthropology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 281.

Old beings new becomings: Neo-Darwinism and Descartes dualisms are dead—again!

Biosocial Becomings advances the integration of the “two radically separated subfields of biological-physical and social-cultural anthropology” (p. vii), dissolving tensions between gene and meme theory and avoiding the colonisation of one over the other. The contributors explore how the study of life could be extended, by rejecting past dualisms and assuming worlds of *becoming* rather than *being*.

Fields such as cultural studies, psychology, and sociology have wrestled long with the questions of *becoming* and *being*, and the dissolution of Cartesian dualisms by mapping the space between the bio-nature/socio-culture binary. What editors Ingold and Palsson present in this collection, is a substantive and diverse account of concerns in the current state of play in twenty-first century anthropology, and related fields. As Ingold’s opening says, “*The scale of re-thinking we are calling for here can scarcely be overestimated*” (p. 9), human becoming is contingent on “*laying the Cartesian dualism finally to rest*” (p. 88). Yet, Ingold seems somewhat unaware that other disciplinary streams have previously declared dualisms dead, such as French post structuralism, Latour (Bruno Latour, 1993, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge and Massachusetts, Harvard University Press), and Haraway’s (Donna Haraway, 2003, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness*, Chicago, Prickly Paradigm Press) work on *nature/cultures*. Perhaps combined disciplinary pronouncements of the death of the dualism may indeed render it an archaic motif and enable the integration of anthropology and its trans-disciplinary affiliates, to grow this work.

The concepts of becomings, biosociality, and multiple agency have garnered active epistemological reflection across fields, provoking a genuine shift in approach from the natural selection ideals of traditional anthropology. Yet it is natural enough for the neo Darwinian paradigm to act as a referent to the disruption of traditional anthropological theory. As Ingold’s opening proclaims: “*Neo-Darwinism is dead*” (p. 1). He calls for radical re-visioning of the Darwinian legacy and biosocial future, wondering: “*If only we ... could open up a new synthesis in the study of biosocial relations*” (p. 14), that Palsson calls a “*rhizomatic notion of relations*” (p. 29). Here perhaps is the core of the project: to create a new paradigm, predicated on the “*simple structure, complex process*” approach (p. 17).

From Götsch’s “Reflections on a Collective Brain at Work” (Chapter 7) to Praet’s “Humanity and Life as the Perpetual Maintenance of Specific Efforts: a reappraisal of animism” (Chapter 10), the collection does not disappoint. Laterza, Forrester and Mususa bring the embodied life of wood and its biosocial networks to new meaning in “Lines, Flows and Materials in a Swazi sawmill” (Chapter 9). The authors favour “*a perceptual engagement with life that privileges flow, flux and process grounded in the constant production, transformation and dissolution of materials*” (p. 163), associated with real movements “*as endogenous to meshwork*” (p. 167) of productive life. Chapter 11 “Being-in-the-world and Falling-out-of-the world” by Al-Mohammad presents a philosophical approach through a re-reading of Heidegger and teasing apart being-in-the-world-ness along with evolving dualisms into confluences. The ethnographic case studies in these chapters demonstrate a decisive move towards fluid becoming, and a conceptual return to Anaximander’s original iteration of the dualisms as an indefinite continuum of complementary motion (*aiperon*).

Chatjouli’s sensitive yet radical attempt to “*problematize and historicize biology*” (p. 88) in “Thalassaemic Lives as Stories of Becoming” (Chapter 5) is disquieting in terms of epigenetic effects of biomedical interventions, through an examination “*the embodiment of*

transfusions” (p. 90). Cutting across the Australia turn to the ecological humanities, are the compelling chapters from Palsson (Chapters 2 and 11), Fuentes (Chapter 3), Ramirez-Goicoechea (Chapter 4) Vaisman (Chapter 6) and Mangiameli (Chapter 8).

In “Ensembles of Biosocial Relations” (Chapter 2), Palsson affirms that: “*Human becoming is a thoroughly relational, biosocial phenomenon, collective history embodied and endlessly refashioned in the habitus*” (p. 40). He provides a tidy history of ideas on ensembles and biosocial becomings that cross-examines the nature/culture divide. Palsson’s epigenetic Foreword and Retrospect, and Ramirez-Goicoechea’s “Life-in-the-making: epigenesis, biocultural environments and human becomings” (Chapter 4) actively dissolve lines that separate the sociocultural from the biophysical, and re-iterate the propositions of the collection with the specificity of epigenetic inquiry.

Ramirez-Goicoechea views the epigenetic scenario as a convergence of agents and environments. Echoing Ingold’s propositions about niche construction, unfolding and enfolding, she suggests: “*Engineering their environments through niche construction, organisms become agents of change for themselves and for others*” (p. 70). The territory surveyed here is compelling. However, the spectre of eugenic perfectionism haunts epigenetic research and this chapter warns of possible new marginal subjectivities, ever cognizant of the “*biopscho-sociocultural and political framework*”, of life “*in-the-making*” (p. 81).

Fuentes (Chapter 3) “Blurring the Biological and Social in Human Becomings” also tussles with Odling-Smee’s (2003) work on “*niche construction and multiple inheritance ... and the synergistic interactions between organisms and environments*” (p. 49-50) presents the niche construction approach as unified rather than separated as discrete spheres (p. 50), thereby untangling notions of fixed determinism. Niche construction and the biosocial, echo Mauss’ (Marcel Mauss, 1979 [1934], “Body Techniques”, in *Sociology and Psychology: essays*, translated by Ben Brewster, London, Routledge) treatise on the inter-relatedness of the biological, social and psychological from his essay “Techniques of the Body”, later inherited by Bourdieu,¹ whose concept of *habitus*, field and agency is here, given new life. Palsson’s research here and prior is particularly worthy.

Vaisman’s “Perspectivism, the Bounded Subject and the Nature/Culture Divide” (Chapter 6) navigates the temporo-spatial world of reciprocal relations, ever engaged in a matrix of *unfolding* and *enfolding*. She argues convincingly “*that our original point of reference – the organism as a physically bound entity – may be flawed*” (p. 113) and suggests thinking instead of “organism-human” relations more as an assemblage as the Maussian corpus of knowledge implies, aligned with Ingold’s uptake of the complementarity thesis, and cultural studies concomitant investment in generative confluences, binary dissolution, and becomings.

This bleeds into the poetics of Mangiameli (Chapter 8). Entitled “Marginality and the Sacralization of Non-Humans in North-Eastern Ghana”, it textually renovates Bourdieu’s *habitus*, field and agency. It is a surprising chapter with insightful trans-disciplinary elements that along with Palsson’s exploration of epigenetics, does the most exciting work in the collection. Mangiameli begins with an interpretation of Thoreau’s poetics and failure to find the perfect finite text called nature, exploring nature as engaged in a *becoming* rather than fixed as a completeness of *being*. His semiotic approach to the “sacralization of nature” is suggestive of a textual biosocial poesis – a generative mingling of ensembles, through which

¹ See Pierre Bourdieu, 1977, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, translated by Richard Nice, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, for the clear explanation of *habitus*, field and agency that has recently enjoyed resurgence in sociology, minority discourse, and cultural studies as well as social anthropology.

the habits of water and attendant relations become operationalised through ecological meshworks of inter-related becomings.

Mangiameli's research is produced through observation of the Kasena people, whose version of "sacralisation of nature" is embedded "*in the unpredictable and multifactorial process through which the world takes shape... and in which the human is a relevant component but not the director*" (p. 147). This leads Mangiameli to a refracted Bourdieurian analysis of the abiotic agency of water and its co-relations that while brief, is astute. Through the queried agency of water, this chapter charts a radical and generative new course.

Biosocial Becomings reassures current research of the ongoing currency and diverse application of Mauss and Bourdieu's concepts through the biosocial optic, and "distributive agency" (Palsson, p. 244), that re-imagines creatures of all kinds not "*for what they are, but of what they do*" (p. 8). This intersects strongly with recent theoretical work in fields like Social Archeology and Human Geography that have reconfigured the relationship between the animate and inanimate as one of "co-producers". Hail a new paradigm of rich trans-disciplinary inquiry that champions the *biosocial*, and the notion of *becoming* that may lay the Cartesian dualisms finally to rest.

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