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Cosmological Counterinduction: Feyerabendian Explorations in Anthropology

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Abstract:
This paper is an attempt to reckon with Feyerabend's engagements with socio-cultural anthropology, an area which has so far remained unexplored. After tracking some of his recurring anthropological reference points, I argue that anthropology was important to Feyerabend's philosophy in two related ways: first, as a model for a flexible and situational form of theorizing; second, as a critical method for the relativization of different modes of understanding. Ultimately, I argue that anthropology was central to Feyerabend's conception of cosmological criticism, his radically comparativist means of critiquing established modes of being and thinking.

Keywords: Anthropology; Cosmology; Feyerabend; Hans Peter Duerr; Witchcraft

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> "[E]ach situation demands the particular pattern of thought appropriate to it".
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> Evans-Pritchard 1937, 349.

Introduction

This essay attempts to explore an area that remains almost entirely overlooked, namely Paul Feyerabend's employment of the theory and materials of socio-cultural anthropology. To be sure, Feyerabend was famously a prodigious reader (Hoyningen-Huene 2000, 8); he could quite capably refer equally to Goethe's theory of colours, quantum mechanics, Brechtian dramaturgy, and medieval demonology, all within the space of the *same* argument (see Feyerabend 1965). Thus, given the extensive range of his preoccupations, it is perhaps unremarkable that he should reference anthropology as well. And yet, the neglect of his interest in this discipline is still surprising, given the relation of anthropological theory to his key contentions regarding the theoretically inflected nature of perception, the issue of

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incommensurability and the problematics of translation between conceptual schemes, and – perhaps most importantly – the more extensive question of cosmology.

In their recent – and excellent – compilation, *Feyerabend in Dialogue*, Stefano Gattei and Roberta Corvi (2024) have expertly assembled a wide range of studies devoted to Feyerabend's numerous influences and interlocutors, but what remains critically underexamined is precisely Feyerabend's dialogue with anthropologists.[2] Indeed, I will suggest here that Feyerabend's usage of anthropology is not merely additive to his arguments but is, in fact, formative to the fieldwork-based approach he recommends in *Against Method.* This point has been more or less recognised, but defectively analysed, by John Preston, who holds that the "extravagant claims" which Feyerabend makes in the name of anthropological methodology actually follow from a *misapplication* of it (Preston 1997, 186). I intend to show, however, that just the opposite is true: for Feyerabend demonstrated a keen appreciation of anthropological procedures. Indeed, more than this, Feyerabend's anthropological axiology evinces a kind of "back to the future" quality; at once cutting edge and retroactively classical inasmuch as it constructively canalises the radical critical potential which has characterised the anthropological enterprise from its very beginnings.

But the neglect of Feyerabend's anthropological engagements extends beyond philosophy. For where, once upon a time, according to Eric Oberheim (2006, 21, 25-26), Feyerabend's work was seen to be foundational to the constructivist approach in science studies, his contributions have since been systemically side-lined, to the extent that Graham Harman can simply assert that the "anthropology of sciences" squarely begins with Bruno Latour (Harman 2009, 11).[3] But Feyerabend's *Against Method* was instrumental to the establishment of this endeavour. Harman's hagiographic but mistaken accreditation ironically confirms Feyerabend's own point about the scholarly politics of perception: that the misattribution of academic arguments extends from the tendency to "forego historical accuracy in favor of hero worship" (1965, 227). In fact, as Terence Blake has pointed out in many places (2013a; 2013b; 2014a; 2014b, 7-8), Latour's work is itself heavily indebted to Feyerabend, although he nowhere acknowledges this obligation. Quite the contrary: Latour was highly critical of Feyerabend's whole approach (see Latour and Crawford 1993, 254-255), but, at the same time, could straight-facedly claim that what he had learned from working with scientists was their "total indifference to questions of method"; that "*Anything goes* as long as it leads to what you want to find" (in Godmer and Smadja 2012, 124-125; my emphasis). Anything goes, we might say, up to and including the unattributed appropriation of the observation "anything goes", for Latour simply lifts Feyerabend's dictum and passes it off as his own discovery.

But if Feyerabend's engagement with anthropology has been generally neglected, I want to do something more than simply register this fact of the matter. For, if philosophers

[2] Another recent collection of papers edited by Karim Bschir and Jamie Shaw (2021) contains many illuminating contributions, but, once again, makes no mention of anthropology. But there must be something "anthropological" currently in the air, as it were, for, just when I'd finished writing the present paper, I discovered the existence of Adam Woodcox's (2025) fine paper on Feyerabend's "conceptual anthropology". Regrettably, the discovery came too late for me to be able to address Woodcox's excellent argument.

[3] Thus, Ian James Kidd notes that Feyerabend "rarely has any substantive place in the work of postcolonial science and technology studies scholars" (Kidd 2015, 344). Elisabeth Lloyd has suggested that Feyerabend's ideas have become so central to the assumptions and operating procedures of science studies that "his name is virtually never mentioned" (1996, 258). Like a sort of Latourian "black box", Feyerabend's work has been "made invisible by its own success" (Latour 1999, 304); seemingly becoming invisible even to Latour himself. But Kidd is surely right to argue that Feyerabend's arguments ought once more to be returned to observability (Kidd 2015, 346; 2010, 127).

have largely passed over Feyerabend's engagements with anthropology, so too have anthropologists generally failed to engage with Feyerabend's theoretical investments in their own undertakings (but see Swift 2022a). This is a pity, since he articulates principles which are, I think, vital to the basic conception of anthropology as an intrinsically anarchistic discipline; an anti-method methodology, whereby theory is generated by the empirical problematics of fieldwork, such that, what Evans-Pritchard had to say of Zande thought applies equally to the procedure of anthropology itself: that anthropological thinking is – or *ought to be* – particular to the problem situations imposed on it by the ethnography. Hence, when Latour similarly speaks in favour of the flexibility of the form of social scientific analysis, the importance of "the adaption of the device to the object" (in Godmer and Smadja 2012, 125), he is undoubtedly right, but he's also an absolute latecomer to the conversation. For, by the time he arrived at the idea, the anthropologists had already written up their research, and Feyerabend had long since finished his argument and gone to the movies.

Just as importantly, however, this notion of a mode of inquiry which draws its conceptual resources from the situation to be investigated is crucially connected to the operation which Feyerabend terms "cosmological criticism"; the analytical attempt to leverage other configurations of reality as a means for critiquing "our" own settled certainties. Such an operation entirely accords with the critical spirit of anthropology conceived – in Bruce Kapferer's (2013, 819-820) powerful formulation – as a "discipline of the minor discourse wherein marginalized, subordinated, supressed, or outrightly dismissed practices from the perspectives of dominant power, its conventions of opinion, as well as the ruling authority of science, are given serious expression and consideration". In what follows, I will try to demonstrate the transfigurative, anthropological ambition of Feyerabend's work by contrasting it with what a few other philosophers have to say about dismissed practices and otherwise subordinated knowledges. The limited space available precludes anything other than a cursory examination, but I hope I can at least sketch out a sense in which philosophical work can often be merely confirmatory of the onto-epistemic status quo. As Feyerabend (1987, 107) provocatively (and typically) puts it, "most theories of knowledge are longwinded defences of existing or incipient routines".

But before continuing further, I ought to issue the following disclaimer, which is that, given my own background and training in anthropology, some (perhaps all) of what I want to say about Feyerabend's anthropological engagements will not necessarily mesh with the interests and commitments of philosophy of science. I hope, anyway, that it might offer an unexpected perspective on Feyerabend's work. And, if nothing else, I will at least try, in Feyerabendian fashion, to tell a good story (see Feyerabend 2000, 162; 1987, 112-115; 1991a, 141).

Anthropology / Philosophy

The relationship between anthropology and philosophy has always been somewhat one-sided. Although anthropologists often read philosophy, philosophers rarely return the compliment. Even in instances where philosophers have engaged in theorisation about specifically anthropological areas of interest – notably, issues of translation and the understanding of alternative schemes of reason – they have mostly overlooked concrete cases of ethnography in favour of a priori speculation.[4] At the same time, there is a prevailing

[4] For example, Vincent Descombes (1985, 434) points to the entirely speculative and stagey nature of the way that Quine sets out his doctrine of "radical translation", relying as it does on "tribes of the laboratory, theoretical fictions". Equally, Michael Forster (1998, 154, 157) has quite justifiably observed that Donald Davidson's related theory of "radical interpretation" is a thesis conceived in the absence

understanding that anthropology itself comprises a kind of subdivision of philosophy or else is otherwise encompassed by it. For instance, Peter Winch (1958, 43) could affirmatively argue in the late 50s that the problems of sociology (and surely anthropology as well) were properly the property of philosophy, given the latter's ultimate concern with conceptual questions.

Then came Rodney Needham's anthropological apologetics in the early 1980s; an oddly diffident defence of the relevance and respectability of anthropology as a tenably academic subject that amounted to the rather beggarly justification that, since the philosopher Stuart Hampshire (of All Souls College, no less) thinks that anthropology is alright, then there must be something to it, after all (1981, 30).[5] More recently, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has suggested that philosophy is nothing less than the "encompassing discursive source and conceptual matrix" of anthropology (2017, 256). Although, in complete contrast to Needham, his notion is much less deferential than it is immanently critical, for I take him to be saying that anthropology is capable of destabilizing philosophical certainties from the inside, in a manner comparable to Feyerabend's "undercover agent, playing the game of Reason in order to undercut the authority of Reason" (Feyerabend 1975, 33; 1993, 23).[6]

But what I want to emphasize is that Feyerabend himself is quite unlike his philosophical compeers, for not only does he frequently refer to ethnographic theory in formulating his own arguments regarding translation and cultural comparison, but he also articulates a critical conception of the relation between philosophy and anthropology. For, as with Viveiros de Castro's postulation, Feyerabend understands anthropology to operate as a kind of force multiplier of reality that works to subvert the conformist and univocalist tendencies of much philosophical thinking. Where Viveiros de Castro holds that anthropology productively generates variations of the real (see Viveiros de Castro 2015a, 85), Feyerabend maintains that anthropology "has returned to the abundance philosophers… tried to overcome" (1987, 119 n. 27).

Feyerabend's references to anthropologists and their arguments are copious and continuous throughout his work, but they tend, nevertheless, to cluster around a select group of favoured authors: principally Edward Evans-Pritchard, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Benjamin Lee Whorf (although there are also occasional citations of the work of Marcel Griaule, Bronislaw Malinowski, Robin Horton, and Carlos Castaneda).[7] But Feyerabend's

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of any reference to *actual cases* of interpretation, as practised by historians and anthropologists. It is true that Davidson refers to Benjamin Lee Whorf, but he can hardly be said to have read Whorf's work with any care, since he invents a reference (Davidson 2001a, 184) and, on the basis of that mistaken citation, ascribes to Whorf a position which he did not hold (see Leavitt 2011, 178). At least the later Wittgenstein, who often engaged in thought experiments about how we might understand communities of practice with radically different methods of conceptualization, had carefully read (and perceptively commented on) J. G. Frazer (see Forster 2004, 29-30). For an authoritative edition of Wittgenstein's remarks on Frazer, including some excellent anthropological commentaries on his annotations, see Da Col and Palmié (2018).

[5] Needham's deference to philosophy is all the more curious given that, in places, his own understandings of philosophy were seriously defective. As Joseph Streeter has decisively demonstrated (2020), Needham's (1972) widely cited critique of the concept of belief is based on a completely specious reading of Wittgenstein.

[6] Just so, in Viveiros de Castro's terms, "anthropology [...] proves to be a powerful philosophical instrument capable of expanding the still excessively ethnocentric horizons of 'our' philosophy" (2014, 192).

[7] This is by no means a comprehensive concordance, but references to Evans-Pritchard occur in Feyerabend (1975, 250 n. 87-89, 251, 269, 272 n. 129, 302; 1981b, 1 n. 1, 22; 1987, 7-8, 74, 105 n. 4, 267, 269; 1999a, 66 n. 5, 143 n. 15; 2018, 6, 8). References to Lévi-Strauss in Feyerabend (1975, 50 n. 8, 302; 1978, 75, 103 n. 32, 206-207; 1987, 38 n. 21, 106 n. 5, 112 n. 14, 298; 1999a, 181; 2018, 7 n. 5, 45 n. 18, 46-

purpose in referring to anthropology was unfailingly related to its capacity to sabotage or circumvent our conventional apprehensions of reality, to take seriously the "possibility of perceptions radically different from our own" (Feyerabend 1993, 211).

Consider, for instance, his longstanding interest in Whorf, which can surely be taken as a decisive indication of Feyerabend's realization of the counterinductive possibilities afforded by anthropology.[8] When Feyerabend speaks of the necessity of stepping "outside the circle" of our "customary concepts" (1975, 68; 1993, 52-53), the analytical obligation that we adopt a standpoint of exteriority so as to expose our innermost cosmological suppositions, he is expressing a profoundly Whorfian thought. As Whorf remarked, "It is the 'plainest' English which contains the greatest number of unconscious assumptions about nature". And so it is that our idiom, "with its concealed premises working harder than ever, is to be fobbed off on an unsuspecting world as the substance of pure Reason itself" (Whorf 2012, 313). He adds that "Western culture has made, through language, a provisional analysis of reality and [...] holds resolutely to that analysis as final" (313). But Whorf's recommended method for challenging this finality was by means of the conceptual "correctives" afforded by other languages (313). Something like this was also the crucial manoeuvre championed by Feyerabend: "We must choose a point *outside* the system or the language defended in order to be able to get an idea of what a criticism would look like. We must use an alternative" (1965, 151). What this means is that criticism, and the possibility of radical comparison, is premised on a position of externality. It is only by means of adopting such "an external measure of comparison" (1975, 76; 1993, 61; italics removed) that we may come to "discover the kind of world we presuppose when proceeding as we do" (1975, 31; 1993, 22).

Cosmological Criticism

Feyerabend's preferred term for referring to the kinds of worlds we presuppose, as well as the realities we enact by means of our procedures, is cosmology.[9] In ordinary parlance, cosmology is either taken to refer to the study of the structure of the physical universe, as undertaken by astronomers and astrophysicists; or else to the mythical composition of the metaphysical universe, as studied by anthropologists and scholars of religion. Feyerabend deliberately exploits and disrupts these two usages, to enable the semantic inter-contamination of both. Thus, on the one hand, he regards mythic practices as so many forms of rigorous knowledge (in the sense of "science"); on the other, to borrow the phrasing of

49, 79). As for Whorf – sometimes misspelled "Whorff" in earlier publications, such as the first edition of *Against Method* – see Feyerabend (1975, 223-4, 237, 249, 270 n. 127; 1981a, 59; 1987, 164; 1999a, 44; 2018, 41, 63).

[8] Regarding which I note that an early and affirmative reference in a paper from 1960 to Whorf and his thesis of linguistic relativity (Feyerabend 1999a, 44) – that is to say, the idea that our concepts and percepts are, in important respects, inflected by the languages we speak – surely undermines Preston's contention (1997, 6-7, 139; 2000, 85) that Feyerabend's work can be characterised in terms of a radical shift (pivoting around the publication of the initial iteration of *Against Method* in 1970) from a former position of scientific realism towards a more historicist and culturalist outlook. In this respect, Oberheim's argument (2006, 210-211, 281-283) is much more persuasive – that Feyerabend's thought is marked above all by continuity, rather than by any alleged epistemological break. I should also note here that Woodcox (2025, 618) equally argues that Feyerabend's interests in anthropological method long predate the publication of *Against Method*.

[9] In the first edition of *Against Method* (1975, 206 n. 66), Feyerabend characterises cosmology as comprising "history, sociology, psychology and all other factors that may influence the success of a certain procedure" But it is also absolutely clear that he includes scientific activities within its purview (see Feyerabend 1993, 241, 242).

Abramson and Holbraad (2014, 7), he underscores the "thoroughly cosmological character of science" (in the sense of "myth').[10] Taken all together, Feyerabend's combinatory conception of cosmology is intended to call attention to the infrastructural aspects of reality, or what the anthropologist Philippe Descola calls "the composition of worlds" (2024; see 2014, 437). At once background and outcome, it refers to the diverse realities that are simultaneously assumed and effectuated by our activities (Feyerabend 1987, 126), all the way from the quantum universe to the world of Odysseus.

What Feyerabend calls cosmology has a counterpart in what Collingwood (1951, 66) generally meant by "metaphysics"; namely, the totality of a people's beliefs "about the world's general nature; such beliefs being the presuppositions of all their 'physics'". Or else it resembles Wittgenstein's idea of a "world picture" as the "substratum of all my enquiring and asserting" (cited in Monk 1990, 572). Either way, it ought to give an indication of the radical cast of Feyerabend's argument in *Against Method* (1975), for his concern was not (as it was for a number of anthropologists at the time) with the comparative mapping of worldviews conceived as static analytical totalities, but with the serious consideration of alternative cosmologies as a means of undercutting the authority of our own.[11] That is, for Feyerabend, cosmology is an instrument of criticism, not an object of cartography.

Indeed, he gave the name "cosmological criticism" to this very procedure (1978, 31-39; 1993, 233-235; 1999, 68), deploying cosmology as conceptual leverage for the critique of our own assumptions. Precisely because we are, in a sense, inside them, we find it hugely difficult to *see* the contingency of our conventions. Hence the exigency of the encounter with an "entirely different cosmology" because "prejudices", says Feyerabend, "are found by contrast, not by analysis" (1975, 31; 1993, 22).

Following Oberheim (2006, 280), I suggest that it is for this reason of critical comparison that Feyerabend frequently appealed to (what might seem to be) shockingly unorthodox philosophical examples, apparently irrational practices and marginal knowledges. It is why he invited astrologers, satanists and creationists to his seminars at Berkeley, and why, alongside Aristotle, Descartes and Lakatos, he also introduced his students to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the gonzo ethnography of Carlos Castaneda and the angelology of Thomas Aquinas.[12] Then there was also Evans-Pritchard, whose classic monograph on the logic of Zande witchcraft was a set text in Feyerabend's introduction to philosophy course (see Duerr 1995, 11). But, if Feyerabend was famous for the range of his provocations, he could also be very funny in the way he went about making them; his decision, for instance, to have his own horoscope depicted on the dust jackets of both *Against Method* (1975) and *Science in a Free Society* (1978), which was more or less the equivalent of giving the finger to any critical rationalist who happened to pick up either

[10] In arguing that "*First-world science is one science among many*" (1993, 3), Feyerabend often leans on Lévi-Strauss to demonstrate the rigour of indigenous knowledge (see Feyerabend 1987, 37, 38 n. 21). As for the mythic character of science, see Feyerabend 1975, 295-299; 1999, 55-72.

[11] Abramson and Holbraad (2014) give an excellent account of the career of the concept in anthropology and its diminished status in more recent times. Hence when Feyerabend remarks that cosmology has long "been in the doghouse" (1999, 155), his statement is especially apt if applied to anthropology. But equally, when Abramson and Holbraad suggest that the most productive contemporary direction is the critical use of cosmology as a means of altering our concepts (2014, 10), it shows how far ahead of his time Feyerabend actually was.

[12] I take this from Feyerabend's correspondence with Lakatos. For warlocks and astrologers, see (1999, 302); satanists (259); creationists (181). Teaching the *Malleus maleficarum* (311); Castaneda (351); Thomasian angelology (193).

volume.[13] Feyerabend's enthusiasm for Evans-Pritchard's study of Zande witchcraft and divination also led him to construct a working model of a Zande rubbing board oracle. "When I am lazy", Feyerabend explained, "I ask the oracle in public, in front of my class, whether I should give a lecture, and if the oracle says no, we all go home" (cited in Duerr 1995, 11).

But Feyerabend always had a more serious, and epistemologically seditious purpose. For if J. L. Austin used to say that his pedagogical aspiration was to "tamper with your beliefs a little" (Berlin and Hampshire 2006), then Feyerabend had a more radical ambition, for he wanted to alter them altogether – or at least get you to see the counterinductively conceptual benefits of arrant alteration. All this was for the subversive purpose of breaking the circle of certitude, in order to scrutinise its inner configuration from the outside.

That is, we can decentre our conceptions only if we first distance ourselves from them; an act that recalls Brecht's dramaturgical deployment of the "estrangement-effect" (*Verfremdungseffekt*), which Feyerabend was, of course, well aware of, since he nearly ended up working as his assistant (see Dusek 2024, 142-143; Feyerabend 1995, 73). But it is also absolutely central to the critical conception of anthropological method as such – and Feyerabend knew this too. For, here again, the use of ethnographic alternatives is intended to expose the contingency of our own notions *as* alternatives to exactly the same extent; to demonstrate the possibility that our concepts could always be "other than what" they are, as the anthropologist Ghassan Hage would put it (2015, 54-55, 70). Given that this is the "driving idea behind critical anthropological thought" (62), it is therefore highly significant that Feyerabend conceived *Against Method* – his anarchist's bomb of a book primed to blow a hole in the rampart of Reason – explicitly in terms of an exercise in anthropology (1975, 249-260; 1993, 188-197). Ethnographic fieldwork is his paradigm of inquiry, not only because it enables the inquirer to witness the construction of scientific knowledge in actual practice (as opposed to those logical reconstructions of it, concocted by philosophers (Feyerabend 1975, 253; 1993, 191), but also because the intensive immersion in the realities of others is a powerful comparative procedure for breaking the circle, allowing for the potential destabilization of official convictions and apparently substantiated observations.

This action of comparativist confrontation – a "much needed *move* in the game of science" (1975, 68; 1993, 53) – is what Feyerabend calls "counterinduction", a critical operation that is activated by the encounter with alternative worlds. For as Feyerabend goes on to remark, in a striking formulation of his visionary philosophy: "*we need a dream-world in order to discover the features of the real world we think we inhabit* (and which may actually be just another dream-world)" (1975, 32; 1993, 22). This passage, to my mind, recalls nothing so much as the judgement of the Yanomami shaman, who observed that "Whites sleep a lot, but they only dream about themselves", the implication of which, as Viveiros de Castro cogently comments, is that, "those who are not capable of dreaming about otherness will never be able to think along with those thinkers who do, whose image of thought is extrospective oneiric 'hallucination' rather than introspective 'rational' lucidity" (Viveiros de Castro 2017, 260).

Something like this oneiric, shamanic rationale is also the motivation behind Feyerabend's own extrospective imperative, for he urges that were we to take the dream-worlds of others more seriously, it might turn out that "we" rationalists are the real somnambulists.

[13] Although there is also an interestingly philosophical precedent for Feyerabend's action. In answer to his publisher's request for some biographical details, Wittgenstein sarcastically asked if he should also "print the date and hour of my birth in front of the book" so that readers could cast his horoscope (see Monk 1990, 208). It strikes me as entirely likely that Feyerabend knew about this. In any case, he clearly decided otherwise.

Enter Hans Peter Duerr

But this mention of extrospection brings us to another one of Feyerabend's anthropological influences: the German anthropologist Hans Peter Duerr. For perhaps even more so than Feyerabend, Duerr has explored the transfigurative potential of the "outside", as a dynamic space of reconceptualization and a kind of vital *imaginarium* of novel ontological possibilities (see Duerr 1985a). Duerr first met Feyerabend quite by chance, in a bookshop in Heidelberg in 1965, and they remained friends ever since, as is attested by their published correspondence, spanning some thirty years (see Duerr 1995). But, as with the double-ended neglect of the connectivities between Feyerabend's work and anthropology, so too, the lack of attention to Duerr's association with Feyerabend extends in both directions. Where Anglophone anthropologists have mostly ignored Duerr's work, scholars of Feyerabend have yet to explore his dialogue with Duerr.[14]

There are numerous affinities in thinking between Feyerabend and Duerr; not least their attachments to anarchism, but also their respective argumentative styles; for their contentions and references are characterised by a kind of riotous, yet impressively erudite, transversality.[15] Just like Feyerabend, but in reverse, as it were, Duerr's anthropological arguments, which happily zigzag between different disciplinary territories, are in almost continual contact with philosophy. As I have noted elsewhere (Swift, Forthcoming) Duerr's perspective is importantly informed by Wittgenstein, Kuhn, and Feyerabend himself. But to say that Feyerabend and Duerr's positions are similar is not to imply that they always align.[16] Thus, Duerr is less convinced by the validity of the idea of multiple worlds (see Duerr 1995, 50; 1985a, 326 n. 68), which Feyerabend sometimes supports, along with Kuhn (Feyerabend 1987, 70; Kuhn 1996, 120, 150). More broadly, however, both hold to the view that if reality is not uninterruptedly multiple, then it is manifold; that, if there are not "worlds", then the world itself is certainly pluriversal.[17] In this sense, both Feyerabend and Duerr would surely

[14] Preston (Preston and Oberheim 2025), in his entry on Feyerabend in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, confuses Hans Peter Duerr the anthropologist, with Hans-Peter Dürr, the German physicist. The mistake is understandable given that even Google (in English language searches) often fails to disambiguate them, but it is nevertheless representative of the general situation. Fortunately, that situation is now changing. In a recent volume, Matteo Collodel and Luca Guzzardi have not only taken note of the connections and collaborations between Feyerabend and Duerr (2024, 17-18), but have also included a number of translations of Feyerabend's essays that originally appeared in works edited by Duerr. For my part, I have attempted to address the anthropological attention deficit with regards to Duerr's work (Swift, Forthcoming; see Swift 2022a; 2022b). For an excellent account of Duerr's works, career, and anthropological activism see Haller 2012, 189-190, 194-195, 204-205, 269-271, 273-277).

[15] Feyerabend (in Duerr 1995, 67) spoke of the sense of vertigo one gets from reading Duerr's footnotes: "you rush from one to the other, forgetting space and time and the main theme, and in the end collapse from sheer physical exhaustion". Although this seems a bit rich, given that Feyerabend's own writing was just as capable of causing dizziness. As noted above, his "Problems of empiricism" (1965) encompasses everything from Newton's law of inertia and the procedures of Galileo to European witchcraft, woodcuts by Dürer, Hegel, Heisenberg, Wittgenstein and Einstein.

[16] For instance, Feyerabend teased Duerr for his over-reliance on Wittgenstein (see Duerr 1995, 125). Duerr, for his part, thought that Feyerabend's espousal of anarchism was too superficial (Duerr 1985c, 138).

[17] In view of this, it seems to me in this case that there is little analytical difference between speaking either of "worlds" (plural) or "world" (singular); that is, this distinction between Feyerabend and Duerr's views is much of a muchness, is so far as reality, for both authors, is characterised, precisely, by *muchness*, by abundance and multiplicity. As Otsuki et al. (2019, 2) suggest, "the question of how

assent to the Jamesian statement that "Profusion, not economy, may after all be reality's key-note" (James 2000, 85). This is, again, where the discipline of anthropology enters the picture, operating as a kind of proliferation engine which allows the world to become populated with entities and their associated knowledge practices that technoscience, in alliance with "our" own common sense, would be led to reject as unreal.[18]

Equally, this is what is particularly anarchistic about Feyerabend and Duerr's respective positions; for, against the tendency of modernity towards what Hage (2015, 200-201) calls "mono-realism" – the idea that reality has a single consistency which happens to conform to "our" Euro-American apprehensions of it – both authors posit an ontology in which every entity is, in principle, given equal freedom of speech. This is their analytical countermeasure which – like a Whorfian "corrective" – is intended to undercut the assumption that knowledge only consists in recognition, or the reduction of the foreign to the familiar (Duerr 1985a: 129); the idea, as Duerr puts it, that "Things are understood as soon it can be shown that we have always virtually understood them" (Duerr 1985a, 126). Or, as Feyerabend (1991a, 88) similarly criticises the methods of logicians: "instead of trying to learn they assert that the things they do understand are the only things that can be understood". It is on account of this deadening mono-realist premise that diverse beings and procedures can only be rendered intelligible at the expense of their efficacy and existence, forever measured against the standards of technoscience as the ultimate adjudicator of the really real.

Just so, Ernest Gellner, a once prominent mono-realist loyalist, as well as heavy-hitting critic of Feyerabend's anarchist epistemology,[19] could self-assuredly assert that "If a doctrine conflicts with the acceptance of the superiority of scientific-industrial societies over others, then it really is out". As Duerr – who supplies the citation – goes on to sardonically remark, "If Gellner intends to say that our civilization has managed to silence other societies, then he is, of course, right" (Duerr 1985a, 311). But, as Duerr further indicates, the natives long ago got wise to the effects of this silencing stratagem, for he refers to the following cutting judgement of a Tuscarora Indian: "The uncounted voices of nature… that for the Whites are dumb, are full of life and power for us" (Duerr 1985a: 90).[20] Hence, when Gellner (1982, 187) subsequently says that science is distinguished by its ability to pay unprejudiced attention to all such numberless utterances, in assuming the "Equality of ultimate civic rights of all ideas and evidence", one can only conclude that some ideas must be more equal than others, since he goes on to state, in the same essay, that it is *our* version of the world that has turned out to be the winning vision, and that "Within it, and on its terms, we carry out investigations into the other visions which were once its rivals" (Gellner 1982, 191). Commenting on this kind of ethnocentric ringfencing of reality, Duerr observes that "*what* reality is like becomes evident *within* the culture, our own, that is, and principally in science, but at any rate within

many worlds there actually are is of little importance. What matters more is to make sense of the complex and multidimensional realities" that people inhabit (see Swift 2022b, 289).

[18] As Feyerabend (1987, 176) says of Popper, "he takes his conception of reality from the (Western) sciences and from (Western) common sense".

[19] As Matteo Moterlini explains (in Lakatos and Feyerabend 1999, 349 n. 201), Lakatos, as editor of the *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, had originally wanted Noretta Koertge to review *Against Method*, but with Lakatos' untimely death, the review ended up being given to Gellner (1975). Feyerabend's response to it (reprinted in 1978, 141-153) is a masterclass in polemical refutation.

[20] A teasing observation of Feyerabend's (1987, 7) is pertinent here: "Occasionally 'primitives' used argument to turn the tables on anthropologists who tried to convert them to rationalism".

the fence" (Duerr 1985a, 90).[21] And so we remain securely inside the circle, and there is no earthly reason why we should ever try to step outside it.[22]

It should be obvious that Feyerabend's expansive and anarchistic frame of reference is the very opposite of this imperious and triumphalist ontology. While Feyerabend absolutely does not deny the importance and effectiveness of science, what he vehemently rejects is the reductive presumption that "scientific objects *and they alone* are 'real'" (1987, 126). To accept that "the sciences cease to be the only disciplines to be consulted in ontological matters" (Feyerabend 1991b, 97) is thus to open up the field to numerous other consultants armed with a vast array of alternative ontological technics. It is to allow for the proliferation of diverse actors and practices which, although deemed marginal or illegitimate from the dominant perspective of science, are just as capable, in their own ways, of contributing to the polymorphous composition of the real. Witches *as well as* scientists, demons *as well as* neutrinos – all are to be endowed with powers of interference in the contexts in which they operate. To the extent that scientific entities exist independently of the practices that discovered them, then, says Feyerabend, the same goes for gods: "There is no way out: we either call quarks and gods equally real, but tied to different circumstances, or we cease to talk about real things altogether" (1987, 125; see 1987, 89; 1991b, 92, 95-97).

As I have argued in another place (Swift, Forthcoming), in this regard Feyerabend and Duerr strikingly anticipate the thinking of the philosopher Isabelle Stengers (2023), who maintains that both the Virgin Mary and the neutrino equally exist, but they differ in the conditions required to support their specific existences.[23] Or in Feyerabend's nearly identical terms: their existence is tied to differing circumstances and keyed to particular procedures (1978, 70; 1991a, 43, 108). This idea – that reality is capable of accommodating, say, both Polynesian *mana* and subatomic matter – is extremely congenial to anthropological deliberations, but it is more or less heretical from the perspective of much philosophy.

Philosophical (and Other Types of) Witches

A case in point is Feyerabend's abiding interest in witchcraft, both in its medieval and early modern incarnation in Europe, as well as in its distinct Zande instantiation in Southern Sudan, as it was consummately documented by Evans-Pritchard (1937). Feyerabend's interest lies in the fact that witchcraft in either instance presents us with a stable and verifiable onto-epistemic system, a system which "works" in the contexts of its application and is "therefore not at all divorced from reality" (1999a, 57). Indeed, in so far as it contributes to the structuring of affects and perceptions, it is formative of the very reality that supports it.[24]

But, of course, most philosophers would hardly likely take witchcraft as seriously as this – if they ever gave thought to it in the first place. Tibbetts' view is surely typical:

[21] I have slightly modified Goodman's translation, based on Duerr (1985b, 147).
[22] Or, as Feyerabend remarked (in 1963): "many contemporary philosophers seem to take it for granted that such boundaries can be explored *from the inside.* They assume that the insuperability of commonsense can be discovered by procedures which move wholly inside commonsense" (2018, 214).
[23] A connection can also be drawn between Feyerabend's (1987, 169) view of the "'relative' or 'regional' character" of the existence of entities and Latour's "modes of existence" project. But as Blake points out (2014a), Latour's programme is curiously restricted, in a way that Feyerabend's arguments are not. Elsewhere (Swift 2022a, 247-250), I have taken aim at the limitations of Latour's project, particular with regard to his ontology of religion.
[24] That witchcraft is empirical, see Feyerabend 1999a, 58, 60, 95, 120. That it "works" (with reference to Evans-Pritchard's own employment of Zande oracular techniques), see Feyerabend 1987, 74. My sentence above draws on Feyerabend's assertion that "Far-reaching practices and views have been supported by a 'reality' that was shaped by them in the first place" (1987, 107).

"Undoubtedly much of what passes as witchcraft in primitive communities is nonsense" (1977, 272).[25] Somewhat more measured, but, in the end, no less dismissive, Feyerabend's former colleague John Searle, in an exchange with anthropologists regarding his arguments on the construction and composition of social reality, maintained that some basic assumptions, such as the facticity of witchcraft in parts of Africa, may well be widely held, but for all that are still massively false. And he concluded that "on the standard supernatural definition of 'witch' there are no witches and there never have been any" (2006, 115). Although one might likewise reply, in the spirit of Barbara Herrnstein Smith (2005, 95-96), that on the standard academic definition of "relativist", there are no relativists either; nor have there ever been any.[26] More seriously, Searle justifies his project by arguing that "At the outset we have to assume that we live in one world and we [...] need to explain everything from the fact that hydrogen atoms have one electron, to the fact that we are conscious, to the fact that George Bush is president, as part of one world, using a common explanatory apparatus" (Searle 2006, 113). We *have to assume* one world and *explain everything* using a general explanatory apparatus. I can well imagine Feyerabend being repelled by such a sentence. Why assume any such thing? Feyerabend's whole categorical approach is against the necessity of assuming that a single method is capable of explaining everything, from presidents to chemical elements, in a single world. Where witches are just as real in Feyerabend's philosophy as tables and elementary particles, Searle's blanket blueprint reduces witchcraft to an illusion.[27]

Even a philosophical scheme as ontologically accommodating as Markus Gabriel's "fields of sense" approach seems to run into trouble when it comes to admitting witches into its system. Gabriel's argument, in short, is that the existence of objects is contextually dependent on the particular field of sense in which they appear. In this regard, his open ontology respects the existence of everything, including false objects/entities which also exist, whether in books, films, or in our imaginations. Gabriel accordingly appeals to the example of witches: they appear in the field of sense "Goethe's *Faust*" but not, he says, in the field of sense "earth", for while witches indeed exist, they do so merely as figures of fantasy (Gabriel 2015a, 91; 2015b, 255). On the basis of this, Gabriel goes on to offer the following formulation: "It is indeed true that it is false that witches exist. Witches appear in the false thought that they exist in Northern Europe" (Gabriel 2015a, 66). But this can't be right. On the contrary, it is true that it *is* true that witches exist in Northern Europe. After all, you can just contact them on Facebook.[28]

But Gabriel goes on to insist that since witches exist only in a false or fictional sense, they cannot become objects of knowledge (2015b, 187), and that medieval and related texts

[25] Tibbetts made this remark in a review of *Against Method*. Unsurprisingly, it was met with a blistering reply from Feyerabend (partially reprinted in 1978, 190-192), who asked exactly which system of witchcraft Tibbetts had actually studied before he decided to dismiss it as nonsense.

[26] Smith's spirited assaults on the phantom menace of relativism, or the twisted image of it, as it is configured in the criticisms of rationalist objectors, are arguably even more cogent than those of Feyerabend, who himself often features as something of a lodestar in her arguments (see Smith 1988, 151-152, 216 n. 3).

[27] As Viveiros de Castro has noted (2015a, 255), a major reason why Searle's all-encompassing ontological theory hasn't gained much traction with anthropologists is surely that it is premised on a metaphysical distinction between the given and the constructed ("brute" versus "institutional" facts) which may have little relevance to the kinds of indigenous metaphysics anthropologists are trying to understand. If we invert our gaze, of course, then Searle's scheme itself constitutes a sort of indigenous metaphysics (Californian with a modicum of Oxford).

[28] They sometimes even give lectures at the LSE, as did Joan McKenna, Feyerabend's friend as well as a "certified witch" (see Feyerabend 1995, 124; Lakatos and Feyerabend 1999, 198).

regarding witchcraft are for the same reasons mere "babble" or "idle talk" (2015a, 37). What he means by this is that such texts are now tied to empty or error-strewn domains of language in terms of our own current belief system, becoming matters of investigation for historians, but "not documents that contain knowledge about witches" (2015a, 37). Instead, witchcraft, or any other such fallacious domain once held to be true, is to be accounted for in terms of the "socio-economic or psychological contingencies" that caused it (2015a, 38). But most competent anthropologists and historians working on witchcraft absolutely do *not* attempt to explain it away as an effect of psycho-socio-economic determinants, but instead try to understand it in its own terms. Nor do they deny that it can be an object of knowledge. In his monumental study of the epistemology of witchcraft in early modern Europe, Stuart Clark is much more in accordance with Feyerabend's understanding of the matter when he contends that "witchcraft was thought to have an objective existence with all the certainty that any knowledge system can convey" (Clark 1997, 28).[29]

Nor again do anthropologists in Northern Europe need to be told about fictional witches, for they often work with actual witches.[30] But efforts to explain their practices in terms of Gabriel's "psychological contingencies" have proven to be analytically unsatisfactory. For instance, Tanya Luhrmann, in her early study of neo-Pagan practitioners in London did just this, confining herself to the question of how people come to "accept outlandish, apparently irrational beliefs" (Luhmann 1994, 6). But Susan Greenwood has accurately observed that Luhrmann's psychologizing approach fails to take "the magicians' ontological reality [...] seriously, because it does not fit into her explanatory framework" (Greenwood 2000, 42). This is exactly the problem with Gabriel's scheme itself. For, looked at from a Feyerabendian perspective, it is as if Gabriel can allow witches into his own ontological framework (as fictional existences), but not the actualities or ontologies of witches themselves.

Transforming Vision / Expanding Reality

These brief forays into philosophy ought to remind us once more of the radical nature of Feyerabend's outlook, since, as Duerr suggests, he is one of the few philosophers "to propose seriously that 'he who has eyes to see' actually does see spirits and comparable beings" (Duerr 1985a, 347). In Feyerabend's own formulation, "To see the right things you need the right instruments. To see distant galaxies, you need telescopes. To see gods you need men, properly prepared" (1991a, 108). His point is that perception, and the "apparent objectivity of familiar 'facts'" is a function of socialization and training (1987, 106-107). But it is important to emphasise that the efficacy and visibility of particular facts and entities are not simply dependent on perception or the free play of language games, as Latour unjustly insinuates.[31] On the contrary, Feyerabend is quite clear that they are thoroughly imbricated

[29] Indeed, elsewhere (Swift, Forthcoming) in trying to elucidate Duerr's ontological anthropology, I have loosely drawn on Gabriel's argument to suggest that the analytically interesting question (which is, I think, also Duerr's and arguably Feyerabend's question as well) is less *whether* witches exist but instead *where* they exist, in terms of the material-affective infrastructures that allow them to do so.

[30] Gabriel (2015a, 37) makes the light-hearted suggestion that anyone who wants to get information on witches is better off reading the story of Hansel and Gretel. But Jeanne Favret-Saada, who worked in a situation wherein witchcraft was an active and deadly presence – in northern France, no less – remarks that this was exactly the kind of jocular response she received when urbanites asked about her findings: "tell us tales about ogres or wolves, about Little Red Riding Hood. Frighten us, but make it clear that it's only a story" (1980, 4).

[31] Without naming names, Latour detects what he says is "the weak point of the relativists" – their insistence that there are "'language games' and nothing more" (1993, 169). Since he holds that the

in material practices and instrumental technologies, in the way that a fault in a misperforming circuit board becomes "directly observable" to an experienced electrician who uses only his wetted finger (Feyerabend 1999, 18-19; see Couvalis 1989, 22-24). In fact, it was one of his criticisms of Whorf that his approach was overly focused on the constitutive effects of language, at the expense of affective and technical relations with the real (non-verbal artforms, the mediation of perception by instruments, and so on; see Feyerabend 1993, 210).[32] As George Couvalis concisely glosses Feyerabend's position, depending on the form of apprenticeship involved, "one can learn to 'observe' virtually anything" (1989, 22). Therefore, with the right conditions, the right equipment and the requisite pedagogy, ancient Greek gods or neutrinos are equally capable of becoming detectable presences (Feyerabend 1991a, 104-108). And, in so far as Feyerabend's thesis agrees with Ruth Benedict's venerable premise that the seeing eye is "conditioned by [...] tradition" (cited in Stocking 1968, 145), his argument is acutely anthropological. This focus on the constitutive effects of training on conceptual and perceptual schemas therefore surely explains Feyerabend's interest in the accounts of that most notorious of sorcerer's apprentices, the anthropologist Carlos Castaneda. In the first edition of *Against Method*, Feyerabend describes the ideal attitude of the epistemological anarchist, who concerns themself with

> procedures, phenomena and experiences such as those reported by Carlos Castaneda, which indicate that perceptions can be arranged in highly unusual ways and that the choice of a particular arrangement as "corresponding to reality", while not arbitrary (it almost always depends on traditions), is certainly not more "rational" or more "objective" that the choice of another arrangement. (Feyerabend 1975, 190)

Although Feyerabend allows that perception "cannot be bent in any direction one chooses" (1975, 237; 1993, 176), he infers, nevertheless, that the intensely transfigurative experiences that Castaneda documents demonstrate the extent to which perceptual alteration is implicated in ontological modification. One can become the inhabitant of another world, Kuhn says similarly, only "after a number of such transformations of vision" (Kuhn 1996, 111). In this respect, although their procedures and cosmologies may be utterly unalike, there is otherwise little difference, in principle, between the trainee sorcerer on a peyote trip who learns to see the spirit-being Mescalito, and the student physicist who learns to see the signatures of subatomic particles in a bubble chamber photograph (111).[33]

On the other hand, to understand that the activities of sorcerers and scientists access and effectuate incommensurable realities is not to imply, as critics of relativism so often suppose, that these realities are indefinitely and hermetically sealed off from each other, with no possibility of interaction and translation between them (see Smith 2005, 36; Swift

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strength and stability of actors (including, of course, objects) is dependent on their assemblage and associations with other actors, discourse on its own is not enough to mobilise alliances. Hence, he concludes "Anything does not go" (168). Latour does not reference Feyerabend explicitly, but the inference is obvious enough. But if Latour's wider point is, as Harman puts it, that "the world *does* resist human fabrication" (2009, 22), then Feyerabend would hardly disagree, and for the same reasons, because he is quite clear that not all approaches to reality necessarily succeed, for sometimes reality "*offers resistance*" (1999, 145). For more on this, see Kidd 2010, 134-136.

[32] I would associate Feyerabend's expansive and pragmatic notion of training with his wider idea that science comprises a complex meshwork of practices, rather than (as the Vienna Circle supposed) a system of propositions (Feyerabend 1993, 210; see Preston 2000, 86).

[33] As Duerr perceptively remarks, "One might say that initiation consists in *teaching* the perceiving initiate how to *see*, in the same way as a physicist is taught to see things that a lay person cannot" (1985a, 346).

2022a, 242; 2022b, 288). To slightly adapt a very similar argument advanced by Descola, there is no reason why the sorcerer may not learn the language and practices of the physicist; just as the physicist is capable of acquainting herself with the methodology of sorcery. All it means to say that they operate in incommensurable realities is simply that the sorcerer and the physicist "live in worlds that are different because they are peopled by different beings whose existence is predicated upon different ontological premises" (Descola 2014, 434). If anthropologists like Descola are generally unperturbed by talk of different worlds, it is because the engagement with incommensurability is a constant occupational hazard of the anthropological workspace. But it is also much more than that. For, just as the existence of ones and zeroes is indispensable to the operations of a software engineer, incommensurability is the condition that makes possible the very occupation of anthropology. As Michael Herzfeld asserts, anthropology is the study of common sense, based on the "mutual incommensurability of different notions of common sense" (quoted in Viveiros de Castro 2014, 90). This is a position which again resonates with Feyerabend's arguments and ethical inclinations. "There is not one common sense", he says, "there are many" (1995, 143).[34]

On that account, anthropology can be defined, along the lines suggested by Viveiros de Castro, as the art of comparing incommensurables (2014, 90), a problem situation that Feyerabend (along with Kuhn, of course) was instrumental in conceptualising, even if anthropologists, in focused discussions on the subject, have tended to forget it.[35] In giving depth and definition to the concept of incommensurability, Feyerabend was not inventing a doctrine so much as spelling out something that was always already an aspect of practices. As both Feyerabend and Clifford Geertz argued independently of each other, relativism is not some illogical construct wilfully inflicted on the data but a theoretical product of the engagement with that very same data.[36] That is to say, it is less a speculative projection imposed from above than it is a consequence of the considered recognition of the facts on the ground; the empirical acknowledgement of the variegated configurations of common sense and the clashing apprehensions of what counts as "real" in diverse activities and experiences.

The Composition of Obviousness

In total opposition to this, the mono-realist position is predicated on the claim that common sense everywhere is massively invariant, since it is supported by an enormous Strawsonian

[34] Michael Forster (2009, 64) likewise suggests that the idea of an invariant "'common sense,' however amply or meagerly conceived, is really just an illusion".

[35] For example, the respective assessments of Handler (2009) and Povinelli (2001) of the meanings and uses of incommensurability in anthropology are undoubtedly illuminating, but neither author makes mention of the two philosophers who formally framed the concept. Povinelli (2001, 321) does indeed reference Kuhn, but more or less as an afterthought to what she sees as the signal philosophical contributions of De Mann and Derrida. Povinelli also goes on to suggest that Donald Davidson connected his conception of "radical interpretation" to "representations and understandings of colonial and postcolonial history" (2001, 321). But it is not clear to me that there is any such connection. In fact, I have argued (Swift 2022a; 2022b) that his ideas are entirely antithetical to historical and anthropological forms of understanding.

[36] Thus, Feyerabend makes clear that his relativism is "not a philosophical position; it is an empirical fact supported by the multiplicity of approaches and results within and outside of science" (1999b, 215). Compare Geertz: "it has not been anthropological theory [...] that has made our field seem to be a massive argument against absolutism in thought [...] it has been anthropological data" (Geertz 1984, 264).

core of obviousness which is universally shared.[37] As a consequence, the kinds of radical differences explored by Feyerabend and so many anthropologists are simply illusionary. Thus, Stephen Lukes, in responding to Feyerabend's argument regarding the ontological effects of different epistemic activities – that such procedures are capable of remaking even "the most solid piece of cosmological furniture" (Feyerabend 1978, 70) – counters by asserting that "not all the world's furniture is movable" and that much of it "is anchored in theory-neutral, if not theory-free, observations of a boring, mundane sort" (Lukes 1982, 271). But, of course, the idea that observation is theory-neutral is precisely what Feyerabend denies (Oberheim 2006, 200, 228; Feyerabend 1993, 211), and he is deeply sceptical of the notion that any such rivetted components of the world's furniture can be identified and decided by philosophical fiat. As Feyerabend recalls:

> Austin, with whom I had many arguments over this matter always seemed to take it for granted that people took tables much more seriously than they took daemons and that the usages connected with table words were a much more solid part of "the" common idiom than were the usages connected with daemon words and he thought that daemons, therefore, occupied a rather peripheral place in the manifest image. (Feyerabend 2018, 212)

But try telling Saint Augustine, say, that tables should be taken more seriously than demons (see O'Neill 2011). As Feyerabend correctly saw, the particular composition of the world – in other words, its cosmology – is hinged, in important respects, to our interests and activities. Nor can the carpentry of the world ever be definitively "nailed down". For that matter, not even the tables themselves. For, as Daniel Cottom has demonstrated, these "exemplary philosophical objects" (1991, 42) began to behave very strangely in the nineteenth century with the emergence of the spiritualist movement, becoming, if not quite demonic, then certainly essential affordances during séances for the communication of spirits. If we, now, find it implausible that spirits could use tables to communicate their intentions, it was once, nonetheless, "a real, passionate controversy, with a scope that extended from the outermost reaches of the universe into the very grain of the furniture in people's homes" (23).[38] Just so, the behaviour of the humble table momentarily threatened to upend the seemingly inert furniture of the world itself.

Like Lukes, Donald Davidson also finds it impossible to imagine radically alternative versions of obviousness, and he criticises Whorf, Kuhn, and Feyerabend for supposing otherwise (2001a, 183-198). Davidson not only holds that communication and translation take place "against a background of massive agreement" in true beliefs, but also that these beliefs must be "largely consistent and true by *our own* standards" (2001a, 137; my emphasis). It follows that criteria of obviousness are determined by a single standard, which just so happens to be common sense as it is instinctively pictured by an American philosopher.[39] To illustrate his claim, Davidson appeals to the concept of the "earth" as a model of the obvious:

> To take an example, how clear are we that the ancients – some ancients – believed that the earth was flat? *This* earth? Well, this earth of ours is part of the solar system, a

[37] I am obviously referring to Strawson's famous claim that "there is a massive central core of human thinking that has no history" (1959, 10).

[38] It is also worth observing that Cottom's examination of the antinomies of reason affirmatively refers to Feyerabend in a number of places (1991, 63, 88).

[39] In Simon Blackburn's satirical depiction, it is an outcome of Davidson's "transcendental deduction of late twentieth-century American hegemony over the world of thought" (Blackburn 2004, 249). I am grateful to Joseph Streeter for mentioning this reference.

> system partly identified by the fact that it is a gaggle of large, cool, solid bodies circling round a very large, hot star. If someone believes *none* of this about the earth, is it certain that it is the earth that he is thinking about? (Davidson 2001a, 168)

Here, as elsewhere, Davidson demonstrates his preference for a priori speculation over the employment of actual concrete cases (see Forster 1998, 154, 157). Although, in fairness, if your premises are based on "common sense" examples of this sort, then any empirical counterexamples are simply wrong by definition. But some ancients exactly *did* believe that the earth was flat, and they could back up their beliefs with argument. Feyerabend himself liked to refer to the Latin Church Father Lactantius, who mocked the idea of an antipodal earth since it would illogically entail a place on the other side of world where rain fell "upwards towards the ground", populated by "people whose feet are above their heads" (*Div. Inst.* 3.24.1; Lactantius 2003, 213). In other words, the idea that the universe was oriented according to an "absolute direction" was just what obviousness *looked like* to this Christian rhetorician. It "enters the 'grammar' of common sense", says Feyerabend, "and gives the terms 'up' and 'down' an absolute meaning" (1975, 86 n. 12; 1993, 68 n. 6; 1999, 43; see Couvalis 1989, 17-18).

Davidson's inflexible interpretative directives require that Lactantius' beliefs must somehow be made to agree with mine, when the striking fact is how much they so often *do not*. Any analysis of Lactantian native reason according to these stringent principles could only end up with a freakishly antipodean caricature – a Lactantius stood on his head, as it were – since so little of what he says makes sense according to our standards. For instance, Lactantius held the view, like Augustine, that demons were fundamentally real and ubiquitous existences that "roam all over the earth" and "fill everything with… fraud, deceit and misguidance" (*Div. Inst.* 2.14.11-12; Lactantius 2003, 160). One can't help wondering, then, whether some of these same demons have infiltrated the pages of Davidson's misguided argument.

Indeed, Davidson's position is the consummate philosophical obverse of Feyerabend's approach. For Davidson very much resembles Feyerabend's stringent logician who relies on "abstract injunctions" as opposed to his adopted model of the anthropologist whose arguments are the informed outcome of the "study of concrete episodes" (1975, 260; 1993, 197). Moreover, in explaining his rejection of relativism and its attestation of radical conceptual contrasts, Davidson declares that "Trouble comes when we try to embrace the idea that there might be [such] comprehensive differences, for this seems (absurdly) to ask us to take up a stance outside our own ways of thought" (Davidson 2001b, 40).

In spite (or more properly *because*) of the negative framing of his statement, it is as insightful a description of Feyerabend's positive program as one is likely to find. For his repeated entreaties that we should try to attain an external standpoint on our own thinking exactly define the kind of counterinductive trouble that Feyerabend aimed to make, often in collusion with anthropology as radical agitator. Given that, as Ghassan Hage insists (2015, 52), the transfigurative ambition of anthropology is to "take us outside ourselves", then the real absurdity is surely Davidson's incapacity to imagine that our "ways of thought" might have any sort of outside at all.

Conclusion

With his suspicion of schools and systems, his lack of "allegiance to any philosophical *isms* other than pluralism" (Oberheim 2006, 277), Feyerabend was a kind of wandering philosophical *rōnin*, a masterless samurai equipped – it must be admitted – with trickster sensibilities. But he was also against all fixations with fixity and conceptual closure; a relentless objector to implacable standards, finished visions, and immovable cosmological

furniture; for he maintained that *nothing*, neither our most cast-iron theoretical constructs, our cultural schemes or customary idioms can forever be definitively delimited. The boundaries and contents of our knowledge are never "nailed down" once and for all (1993, 272), but are always capable of rearrangement.

On the other hand, Feyerabend argued that much of what passes as professional philosophy is in the grip of a particular image of thought which assumes that our existing idiom is already exhaustively equipped with the resources necessary for making sense of all other idioms (Feyerabend 1987, 267). Accordingly, everything is commensurable with and assimilable to the system as it is, and whatever does not fit – whether flat earths, phlogiston, or witches in Northern Europe – is deemed either fictitious or non-existent. Endorsing a version of this position, Richard Rorty (of all people) remarks that "every sentence anybody has ever used will refer to the world *we* now believe to exist (e.g., the world of electrons and such)" (Rorty 1991, 51). But Feyerabend who, to borrow a phrase from the anthropologist Stuart McLean (2017, 152), was forever "challenging and extending the parameters of what is understood to comprise reality" would claim, to the contrary, that the sentences we use must be counterinductively investigated in terms of all those worlds *we* don't yet believe to exist. Or as Viveiros de Castro similarly and specifically makes the case for the counterinductive operations of anthropological translation, the anthropologist gambles with the stability of their own ontological suppositions "by letting them be counter-analysed by indigenous knowledge practices", the latter constituting "a counter-metaphysics with its own requisites and postulates" (Viveiros de Castro 2015b, 7). Once again, Feyerabend is ahead of the game when he states that "a good empiricist" – he might as well be saying "a competent anthropologist" – should also be "a critical metaphysician" (Feyerabend 1999a, 102) in so far as the serious consideration of radical metaphysical alternatives becomes an instrument of criticism of our own as yet unquestioned cosmological frameworks.

But also owing to Feyerabend's entirely realistic commitment to the existence of incommensurability, there is little possibility that our existing grammar is adequate for the understanding of (what Rorty would grandly call) "every sentence ever spoken". We can, of course, assume that our existing idiom is good enough, but doing so will only be to produce *bad* translations; a conceptually conservative method that forever "leads back to the familiar ideas and treats the new as a special case of things already understood" (Feyerabend 1975, 256; 1993, 194). On the contrary, to attempt to understand any particular cosmological domain, its logic of practice and "the structure of the field of discourse" (1975, 253) necessitates the transfiguration of our idiom, for "without a constant misuse of language there cannot be any discovery" (1975, 27; 1993, 18).[40] Hence, to seriously engage with the premises of an alternative cosmology is to open oneself up to a "language of the future, which means *that one must learn to argue with unexplained terms and to use sentences for which no clear rules of usage are as yet available* (1975, 256; 1993, 194). Margret Grebowicz (2005) has usefully pointed to the parallels between Feyerabend's radically pragmatic and anarchistic analytic and Jean-François Lyotard's conception of "judgement without criteria", since for Lyotard also (in the words of Geoffrey Bennington), "the situation is not that the rules already exist, with the task of the [investigator] being to produce 'cases' fitting these rules, but to 'experiment', to produce cases for which the rule must subsequently be discovered by the reflexive judgement" (cited in Grebowicz 2005, 125).[41]

[40] Again, in similar terms, Viveiros de Castro speaks of the "deformation-translation-variation of certain conceptual certainties of the analyst" (2015b, 11).

[41] In an earlier paper (Swift 2022a) on anthropological translation, I also noted the similarities between Lyotard's pragmatics of "paganism" and Feyerabendian proliferation. I regret not having known about Grebowicz's argument at the time.

It bears repeating that, for Feyerabend in *Against Method*, the paradigmatic instance of a procedure which is open-ended, experimental, flexible and situational, is anthropological inquiry itself. "There is no way of predicting what an anthropological inquiry will bring to light", he writes (1975, 260; 1993, 197), because theory is not imposed on particular problem situations but is instead immanent to those very situations themselves. Theory is emergent in the ethnographic material, and it is "this material and not [the anthropologist's] logical intuition that determines the content of the concepts" (1975, 251; 1993, 189).[42] In describing the major alterations of interest and perception that are attendant on immersion in the worlds of others, Evans-Pritchard famously stated (1976, 242) that in order to understand the socio-economic aspects of Nuer life he was obliged to become "cattle-minded"; just as, we might add, in turning his attention to Nuer conceptions of divinity he was compelled to become *kwoth*-conscious. The point is simply that neither the concepts to be specifically investigated nor the outcome of the investigation can be determined in advance (see Viveiros de Castro 2015a, 46).

And yet, if anthropological inquiry presents Feyerabend with a prime example of a powerful counterinduction engine,[43] then he is surely guilty of an inconsistency, because, as Preston argues, he advocates a "single correct anthropological method" while simultaneously maintaining that the adoption of a single correct method is anathema to insight (Preston 1997, 188). The question, however, is whether anthropological investigation *does*, in fact, depend on a single such method, as Preston supposes. Evans-Pritchard, perhaps the most celebrated of British anthropologists, certainly thought so, but his way of framing it was deliciously (and deliberately) paradoxical: "There's only one method in social anthropology, the comparative method – and that's impossible" (cited in Candea 2019, 29). What he assuredly meant is not that anthropology cannot be done, but that, beyond the ethnographic precondition of immersion, there is no *single* stipulated way of doing it. Anthropology's single method is impossible because it is multiple.

Viveiros de Castro has made what I take to be an analogous argument, regarding the crucial notion that anthropological theory is contingent on the problem situations of ethnography. He remarks that "the procedures characterizing the investigation are conceptually of the same kind as those to be investigated" (2015a, 46); hence, to the extent that such procedures are superabundantly multiple, so too is the anthropologist required to adopt a motley methodology; a thinking fitted to a situation that crucially becomes formative of that very thought.

But perhaps to state that anthropology's singular method is multiple is just another way of saying that it doesn't exist as such. The anthropologist of Melanesia Maurice Leenhardt, who had immersed himself in the lifeworld of the Kanak of New Caledonia and came back to Paris to lecture on the counterinductive nature of Kanak cosmology, was once asked by a philosopher what his method consisted in. Leenhardt briefly feigned astonishment, before offering a properly Feyerabendian reply: "My method… But I don't have one!" (cited in Clifford 1982, 155).

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[42] Bruce Kapferer (2018, 1) similarly contends that "Sociocultural anthropology comes to theory rather than starting with it" since the concepts "it develops should at first be demonstrated as organic to the realities its practitioners engage in". In closing, I should note that, although he hasn't touched on the specifics of the argument I am making here, Kapferer is one of the few anthropologists I know to have engaged seriously with Feyerabend's philosophy. And, indeed, it was in Kapferer's own electrifying lectures at UCL in the late 90s that I learned of Feyerabend's work in the first place.

[43] It was, of course, not the only apparatus of comparative criticism in Feyerabend's armoury; Dada and dramaturgy were two such others.

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