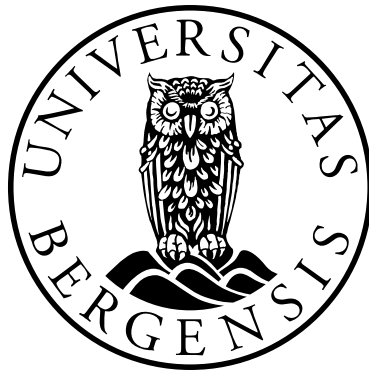


«Branchements» and «translation» as approaches to culture

An epistemological reflection on some aspects in the thinking of

Jean-Loup Amselle and Paul Ricoeur

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Abstract

In this dissertation I reflect on the concept of culture from a political, philosophical and anthropological angle. The perspective from where I attempt to analyze them all together is epistemological. This means two things: first of all it consists in a critical reflection that focus on the concepts and logics that constitutes *the way* we understand culture. One tendency is that the view of culture as something closed and static is being reproduced despite the intention or conviction that the opposite is true. This means that we have not fully comprehended that which hinders us in developing a non-essentialist thinking, or that we comprehend it but still have difficulties of articulating an alternative. A central objective in the dissertation is thus the description of the problem or epistemological obstacle that hinders the development of our thinking. Secondly, an epistemological perspective implies an attempt at taking this epistemological obstacle into account in order to supersede it and thus indicate a thinking about culture which does not work on essentialist premises. The question of obstacle and superseding this obstacle is a question of what kind of language we should use when we discuss culture. In order to do this I am scrutinizing the metaphor *branchements* as it is used by anthropologist Jean-Loup Amselle, and translation as it is discussed by philosopher Paul Ricoeur. Together they intervene into two aspects, or themes, central in the constitution of culture: identity and language. As I try to show do we need both a genealogical account for the constitutive role of identity and language on culture, and alternative ways to conceptualise them. The thesis aims at elaborating *branchements* and translation further by looking at the epistemological implications these notions could have for both understanding the hindrance and the overcoming of the hindrance.

Culture seems to have a rather confused meaning depending on who discusses it, where and how it is discussed. Culture is conceived as both a problem and as a solution, as significant and insignificant to human beings, and it is conceived as both static and as dynamic. My philosophical contribution to this is to reflect on what we mean by the concept of “culture” when we discuss these questions and why the

mixing of levels creates confusion as to what we are discussing and what kind of concept of culture we end up with. One central question in these discussions is if culture is static, pure and closed, or open and dynamic. If it is so that culture is open and dynamic, why is it still so difficult to break with the idea that it is closed? Why does a view of culture as something pure and closed seem to be reproduced? This question takes us into a philosophical and epistemological discussion on the conditions for thinking culture in a culturally diverse society.

One of my claims is that the reason why the view of culture as closed is reproduced is the way culture is discussed in the political discourse. Because, here, in the political discourse, culture is linked to identity or a certain version of it: identity is placed within an oppositional logic. And this oppositional logic recognizes only that which is identical or different. Furthermore, when linked to culture identity becomes closely connected to the idea of origin suggesting that human beings must be understood as having a pure source as point of departure. It is when re-invoking identity and origin that culture can receive a role in the exclusion and inclusion into a society and thus becomes an obstacle to how we can think an open society.

Even though the perspective of the dissertation is epistemological in the sense that I want to reflect critically on the link between culture and identity in the political discourse, I also want to go further than just describing this problem. Since what is at stake concerns the question of building and living in a society together this obstacle must be surpassed. Another kind of thinking should at least be attempted. In order to develop thinking that does not work on purity and closure as premises, we must be critical to the conditions that allow us to continue to think in terms of purity and closure, at the same time as a change of language for understanding culture is in order. The problem then becomes whether it is possible to think culture without purist and essentialist premises. The driving hypothesis of the dissertation is that the metaphor *branchements*, as used by Amselle in anthropology, and *translation*, as it is understood by Ricoeur, represent notions that can help us with this. Breaking with the idea of origina and identity-thinking in the early anthropology's comparative method,

raciology and the hybrid as metaphor for culture, *branchements* describes a network without a pure beginning or end. Translation on the other hand breaks with the obstacle of seeing languages either as diverse and untranslatable or as already united and translatable.

It is my intention to discuss the obstacle of culture as an interlacing of anthropology and political discourse. I discuss how the use of metaphors and alternative terms (*branchements*, translation) in relation to practices (anthropological fieldwork, the practice of translation) helps anthropology to overcome its epistemological obstacles, how this obstacle has partly been transferred to the political discourse, and finally how the theoretical-practice of *branchements* and translation can help us to develop another kind of thinking.

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1. Introduction

This dissertation examines the concept of culture as a joint political, philosophical, and anthropological problem. Culture seems to be extensively used to describe some of the most central questions in our time: How can we live together in a culturally diverse society? How far should a society go in recognising a cultural minority? What will happen to the Norwegian cultural identity when we allow increased immigration? These are some of the questions where “culture” is used as a way of articulating a problem. My philosophical approach to this is to reflect on what we mean by the concept of “culture” when we discuss these questions. Taking some ideas and thoughts offered by philosopher Paul Ricoeur and social-anthropologist Jean-Loup Amselle as points of departure, I reflect critically on the logic and concepts that constitute culture, how we think of it, and the role it plays in contemporary debates. In these discussions a view of culture as something static seems to be repeated although many would hold that it is not. In fact it seems, despite the opposite intention, difficult to establish an alternative to the view of culture as static and closed. So why does a view of culture as something pure and closed seem to be reproduced? This question takes us into a philosophical and epistemological discussion on the conditions for thinking culture in a culturally diverse society. When I say condition I mean concepts with which culture is connected and from which it receives its meaning. And one such condition is identity. The link between culture and identity seems to be central to ensuring a reproduction of culture as closed. Now, since the static and closed view plays a role in the exclusion and inclusion into a society and thus is an obstacle to how we can think an open society, this obstacle must be surpassed. Another kind of thinking should at least be attempted. And in order to develop another kind of thinking, this partnership could be described as the obstacle that must be surpassed. The problem with the view of culture as something closed and pure is the role it plays in understanding human beings and the consequences this has for the question of whether we can live together. So in order to develop thinking that does not work on purity and closure as premises, we must be

critical to the conditions that allow us to continue to think in terms of purity and closure, at the same time as a change of language for understanding culture is in order. The problem then becomes whether it is possible to think culture without purist and essentialist premises. The driving hypothesis of the dissertation is that the metaphor *branchements*, as used by Amselle in anthropology, and *translation*, as it is understood by Ricoeur, represent notions that can help us reflect on culture without taking essentialist notions as the point of departure.

1.1 Culture in political discourse: identity, rights, and a new racism

Culture is difficult to define, but has nevertheless sufficient rhetorical force to be used when some of the most central issues in our societies are being discussed. Culture is given the power to explain human behaviour and conduct, it is related to people's identity, to the identity of nations, and for some it is linked to rights. Culture is used both when articulating the problems that our societies are facing (multicultural society and the question of rights, the crisis of national identity) and the solution to these challenges (multiculturalism, interculturalism, transculturalism, *Leitkultur*). Recently David Cameron and Angela Merkel have declared multicultural society as a failure and we are one way or another led to believe that the problems are cultural, and not for instance social (The Guardian 2010, New Statesman 2011). But why does the concept have such a place? Even though the concept of culture to a large extent has been abandoned by anthropologist today, it still seems to have a strong hold in the political discourse. What other signs are there that may indicate that "culture" is alive and well?

For one, in the last thirty years research on racism has pointed to a displacement from race to that of culture. Few, if any, refer today to a quasi-biological entity called race or claim the existence of a hierarchy of races. But that does not mean that the idea that humankind is divided or all kinds of hierarchy have disappeared. New hierarchies based on transformation of old distinctions are silently

raised. Few want to be called a racist these days, but exclusion and inclusion based on prejudice, cultural origin, and identity are still relevant.

Even though few people will explicitly hold that culture is pure and static, the logic and the concepts to which culture is linked nevertheless ensure the reproduction of such a view. Identity and origin are concepts that co-constitute culture and thus ensure the continuation of a static and pure understanding of culture. As the late Norwegian anthropologist Marianne Gullestad writes, the play of inclusion and exclusion is governed by what she calls an “imagined sameness” (Gullestad 2002, 2004). She shows how there is a strong link between equality in a constitutional sense and the idea that in order to be equal one must also feel that one is similar to others living in the same society. This sameness is thus a cultural sameness and refers to a certain notion of identity. A discussion of culture thus almost inevitably leads to a discussion and critique of identity.

Through the linking of culture and identity emerges the question of (cultural minority) rights on the one hand, and the debates on norms on the other. Since culture is (part of) my identity as an individual, culture becomes part of the question of individual rights. The discussion of norms is important. However, it entails an image of culture as a set of norms that stand in opposition to another set of norms. This abstract notion of culture which reduces culture to norms is detached from the practices of everyday life, of interactions, interconnections, and transgressions of so called boundaries. It is the same with cultural rights: since culture is part of my identity it becomes something abstract and closed which defines my being.

Vital to my argument is to show how culture nevertheless is linked to and constituted by a series of other concepts and terms. Culture is entangled, explicitly and implicitly, with identity, purity, and origin on the one hand and language on the other. And it is this chain of concepts that reproduces a view of culture as closed. I wish to undo this entanglement by critically analysing the language through which we discuss culture or through which culture is related.

1.2 *Branchements* and translation beyond the pure and closed

But I want to go beyond the level of criticism and indicate a thinking which is conscious of the pitfalls and which to a certain degree is able to overcome the obstacles. The thesis rests mainly on two related but different notions which both help us question cultural closure and purity of origin: On the one hand the metaphor “branchements”, taken from electronics and informatics and introduced into social anthropology by Jean-Loup Amselle (Amselle 2001). *Branchements* is a way of reflecting upon culture which, contrary to the metaphor hybridity, does not suppose purity and closure. The other notion is “translation” as it is understood by Paul Ricoeur (Ricoeur 2004a). Translation gives us both a deconstructive perspective on the logic of closure and a model for thinking openness in domains that resemble languages.

The link between Ricoeur and Amselle is both implicit and explicit. Amselle refers to Ricoeur as someone who substantiates his anthropological theory-practice. What they are both dealing with is a discussion of identity. However, if one follows this link, it is not entirely clear whether they are talking about the same thing. Having said that, they have many points in common that make examining the link worthwhile, and the reason for seeing them together goes beyond this explicit reference. The implicit reference to Ricoeur is when Ricoeur’s thinking is also applied as a more general reading of Amselle. The second theme with which they are both occupied, and which is neither explicit nor implicit, is translation. Translation is a joint problem for both Amselle and Ricoeur and this strengthens the consistency of seeing Amselle and Ricoeur together. Furthermore, the problems Ricoeur discusses regarding translation and language run parallel to, or could be even called identical with, the problems Amselle discusses regarding culture and language. Having said that, by turning to the theme of translation as it is understood by Ricoeur the dissertation takes a slight turn. Whereas the metaphor *branchements* is here seen primarily as a deconstructive and critical notion, translation also takes us in a constructive direction by seeing it as a paradigm for thinking openness.

In addition to the themes they have in common, their similarity of approach is also interesting: both Amselle and Ricoeur emphasise practice rather than theory, or rather see practice as the point of departure for theory. And secondly, both localise comparativism as an intellectual operation that ensures the reproduction of static non-relational identities. Although I will discuss the theme of comparativism only to some extent, it strengthens the reasons for analysing and including them both.

The two notions at play, *branchements* and translation, do to a certain extent overlap. For Amselle translation is an aspect of *branchements* and translation, as it is described by Ricoeur, has many of the same “qualities” that *branchements* has. Why do I include both of them and as two separate notions? I here want to make some important distinctions as to what we may achieve by using these notions and at what level they are relevant. First of all *branchements* and translation intervene into two of the concepts or logics that constitute how we see culture: identity and language. This will be analyzed genealogically in the first part. I then intend to show how *branchements* intervenes into the identity-thinking, and translation intervenes into how we think language. Secondly, whereas *branchements*, at least to a certain extent, could be called a *metaphor* and primarily aims at questioning our understanding of culture, translation is in line with Ricoeur a *paradigm* for thinking openness in domains that resemble languages. Thirdly, I take *branchements* primarily to be a metaphor that helps us deconstruct a view of culture as closed, whereas translation has a broader scope that takes us into an ethical problematic that also focuses on construction: translation helps us overcome misunderstanding or the lack of understanding.

The context of the dissertation is both a general concern and an attempt at locating this concern in a Norwegian context. I do not aim to scrutinise the Norwegian context as such but I do from time to time draw on some examples from Norway. This does not mean that such reflections are primarily relevant for Norway. On the contrary, many of the points may perhaps be even more relevant elsewhere. It matters not, since I see the relevance of theoretical reasoning to be local: some

theoretical reflections might be more relevant than others depending on the context. Even though this work could very well be read and criticised from a theoretical angle, I think that the reader's specific context might determine to what degree my ideas and reflections are relevant. Having said that, in the light of the economic crisis and the reemerging of the extreme right all over Europe, a critical approach to culture, identity, and origin seems to be relevant everywhere.

Why is it important to develop this kind of thinking? At the same time as culture is an admittedly difficult term which is linked with anthropology and has caused epistemological problems internal to the discipline, it is at the same time part of a political discourse and rhetoric shared by both proponents and opponents to culture. In other words, it is part of the political and social imaginary and the metaphysical assumptions therein.

In addition to treating the subject of culture and bringing *branchements* and translation into the discussion of this subject, I also aim at making some points concerning theory. As will be discussed, I think that the question of what theory is in the social sciences and the humanities, and what it could be, merits some consideration. When we think development of theory we tend to think that this is meant to supplant other theories, that it is a kind of solution to the problems in previous theories. And to some extent this is right. My claim is that translation and *branchements* are interesting because these notions do not work on essentialist premises. But I do not claim that these notions solve the problem the way new theories in science may solve problems. Neither will I claim that this constitutes the only alternatives to essentialism.

When I discuss the theme of culture and whether or not it is closed, I am neither the first to take this up nor the only one to defend a view that cultures are open. In fact, the literature in this field has turned into a small library and all kinds of positions are represented. So why go into this again, and what is innovative about it? First of all it seems that even though we seem to be progressing, we keep falling back into old ways of thinking, both at a practical and a theoretical level. In practice we see

it when the origin and identity of man is invoked in everything from everyday language when we use the concept of immigrant to the discussion of the identity of the nation. Theoretically it seems like it- despite the opposite intention- is difficult to escape the language of purity. This indicates to me that we are still not, and perhaps never can be, done with these questions. Secondly, the innovative aspect does, I think, neither lie in identifying the problem of the closing of culture nor in the claim that cultures are open and dynamic. These points have already been made by others. It is rather my explication and interpretation of translation and *branchements* and the way I try to show how they may help us reflect that is interesting. This has, as far as I know, not been done to this extent with these two notions. But if this has been pointed out by others, why should we take up this discussion again? This way of continuing to return to the basic and fundamental question is essential to philosophy and keep doing this as long as we are dealing with questions that has not been or can not be solved. This thesis could thus be read as a way of elaborating on an old problem of culture as closed and open, but in a new way. And, I hope, this new way also can commence another kind of thinking and not only point to old problems.

The reemergence of racism- as an almost universal tendency to differentiate and hierarchise humans- dressed as “culture” rather than “race”- indicates to me that these problems go deep. History is not just past events but also a way of articulating both problems and answers. As long as the obstacles that we face are not overcome, history is as much present as it is past. This thesis and the innovative aspect of it are more an elaboration of the problem than a claim of having solved it. The way I see it this gives us another approach to what it means to develop a new thinking. *Branchements* and translation help us to develop our thinking but neither is a substitute for other ways of thinking nor will they make the problem disappear forever. This is intended not as an attempt to escape all criticism nor will I disregard the state of the art. I think it is still possible to claim that one way of thinking is preferable to another even though one does not stand in the same tradition. And some

works are better and more interesting than others. My point is just to underline to the reader what kind of project this dissertation is.

1.3 Epistemology as approach and structure

Now, the approach to the problem is not just philosophical but more specifically epistemological. Epistemology can, however, mean several things, and what does it mean here? I want to stress two main points regarding epistemology. First of all, the tradition of thinking within which I am writing is influenced by French philosophy of science. In France this tradition is called French epistemology and it is this meaning of the word epistemology that I refer to throughout the dissertation. French epistemology is a way of thinking philosophy of science where the role of philosophy is not to determine the premises for justification in scientific activity. The task of philosophy is rather to examine the development of a science historically by looking at how methods and techniques are developed, how obstacles hinder scientific development, and how these obstacles are overcome. One of the most well-known representatives of this tradition, and whose reflections I draw on throughout the dissertation, is Georges Canguilhem (Canguilhem 2000, 2002). With Canguilhem this study of obstacles, methods, and objects becomes a question of the inside and outside of science: the language of science does not (always) come from science itself. The language and concepts which science uses to articulate both its problems and answers are non-scientific, so in order to do philosophy of science one must reflect critically on the relation between language, methods, and objects. What Canguilhem observes is that science must sometimes change its language or conceptual frame in order to be able to progress. The reason I find this tradition and the works of Canguilhem relevant to the question of culture is that they can help us reflect critically on the reasons why we tend to fall back into essentialist thinking on the one hand, and to see what it takes to overcome this problem on the other. My point is not that no one else has seen that an essentialist view of culture is problematic. This is an old observation discussed by many. But what I think is fruitful and innovative with such an

epistemological take is that it is both a way of reflecting on the obstacles and on what it takes to overcome these obstacles.

With the two notions in the dissertation, *branchements* and translation, at the center I claim that they help us develop a thinking that can transgress an essentialist view of culture precisely because the epistemological perspective is taken into account. In addition to elaborating on what Amselle and Ricoeur say about *branchements* and translation, my contribution is to analyse their work from an epistemological perspective. *Branchements* and translation both have practices as the point of departure: the establishment of N'ko in West-Africa and translation of texts in general. These practices show openness one way or another. Translation and *branchements* are thus theoretical tools that articulate such openness. But this openness is scrutinised on different levels and in different ways by translation and *branchements* respectively. Whereas *branchements* helps us go beyond an essentialist understanding of culture, I introduce translation as an assessment of the parallel between culture and language.

Both translation and *branchements* are involved in a process which transfers something from linguistics, informatics, or electricity into another domain. I think a reflection on this process itself is worth spending some time on. And this is where an epistemological approach is particularly fruitful. I think we have something to learn from Canguilhem in the observation that the overcoming of obstacles may depend on a change of language. And when it comes to understanding culture the obstacle is purity and closure.

If I most of the time draw on the work of Amselle, Ricoeur, and Canguilhem what does my contribution consist in? First of all I think that this particular epistemological approach to *branchements* and translation is interesting as a way of working with this problem. My point is to see the parallel between the epistemological problems in *branchements* and translation on the one hand, and the epistemological problems we are facing when we discuss culture as a political concern. Secondly it is a reading of Amselle and Ricoeur from an epistemological

angle which has not been done before. And thirdly I elaborate on some points where they are silent but where I think there is more to be said.

Regarding epistemology I also want to say something to the reader about the relation between theory and practice and the different levels the dissertation operates on. My overall aim is to reflect on the possibility for developing a thinking around culture which does not run on essentialist assumptions. And in order to do this I draw on Ricoeur and Amselle whose work may be said to be situated in practices in some way or another. The first part of the thesis also takes as its points of departure contemporary society and history. At the same time my focus is not on practice but on a theoretical reflection on the language we use. And I will, in large parts of the text, remain in a theoretical mode. And although I consider some of the innovative aspects of the dissertation to be just these internal theoretical elaborations, I do not wish to remain there. The aim of the epistemological approach is to point beyond epistemology and theory and back into practices, even though the operationalisation of these epistemological findings will not be elaborated here.

The second point regarding the meaning of the word epistemology is that it is a way of structuring the dissertation. The specific French epistemological approach requires a specific procedure which focuses on the notion of epistemological obstacles. The aim is to develop a thinking which does not operate on essentialist or purist premises and in order to do this we must both change language and see whether this change works on such premises. It thus becomes essential to understand the obstacle. Differently put, I will spend most of the first part describing the problem or obstacle before going on to the second part to indicate ways to overcome the obstacle. In other words the epistemological aspect in the dissertation concerns both an analysis of conditions for thinking culture and a way of structuring the attempt at challenging these conditions.

1.4 Plan for the thesis

As stated above, epistemology is not just a perspective on the problem: it is also a way of structuring the work in the examination of the obstacle and the attempt at overcoming it. The dissertation thus consists of two main parts. In the first part (chapters 2-5) I try to localise the problem or obstacle: culture as something pure and closed and how the concept of culture becomes closed. The focus of the link between culture and identity- which is found in the political discourse or rhetoric- aims at examining the reason why culture is perceived as something closed and raises the question why these notions have been linked in the first place. This takes us to a reflection on the history of their unity where I want to see the constitution of the obstacle. I will provide a chapter of transition between the first and second part where I elaborate on the epistemological aspects. In the second part (chapters 6-10) I try to reflect on how one may overcome the obstacle through *branchements* and translation. Both notions will be treated with a chapter on epistemology and then discussed in connection with the overall problematic.

The second chapter attempts to localise the way culture is presented within the political rhetoric and discourse. My point is here to reflect on how the linking of culture and identity is constitutive for our understanding of culture as something closed. In debates on multiculturalism, recognition of minorities, the idea of national cultural identity, the reawakening of the thesis of clash of civilisations, cultural differentialism, cultural racism, and through normative and constitutional debates, culture is seen as an inevitable topic and challenge. The broad tendency is that culture is thought of as closed and static. This observation is in itself not innovative. A view of culture as static has been challenged for a long time in both theory and practice. However, it seems difficult to shake it. In this chapter I aim to show that this has something to do with the link between culture and identity and the specific way we think identity. In order to develop another kind of thinking it is vital to understand how this link between identity and culture could come about. This leads us to the next chapter.

In chapter 3 I want to see how culture, identity, the nation, and biology (or rather the quasi-biology of raciology) are intertwined. The concept of culture in the public debates is constituted in this mix of identity, colonial and political history, ideology of race, and the myth of the origin. The notion of culture borrows ideas from raciology on the difference and original separation of the peoples of the world. At the same time the notion of identity seems to be involved in a kind of double constitution where identity constitutes the logic of raciology and is constituted by the myth of origin.

In chapter 4 I return to the question of identity as term and as logic. But where identity in the first chapter is treated from a descriptive angle, I aim in this chapter to be more critical. Why is culture linked to the term “identity” in the first place? And what kind of identity-thinking is at play when we discuss culture? Here Ricoeur in the continuity from Heidegger and Arendt represents an initial attempt to examine identity critically.

In chapter 5 I reflect on the aforementioned epistemological tradition and the role it plays in this dissertation: as an approach to the problem and as a structure of reasoning in the dissertation. I explain how the ability to find another path for thinking culture is linked to an historical account of the problem of thinking culture and the obstacles of closure. In other words, the chapter connects the two first chapters with the rest of the dissertation. It is here that the two main notions in the dissertation are introduced; *branchements* from the work of Jean-Loup Amselle and translation as it is thought by Paul Ricoeur. The emphasis on problems rather than theory allows me to make another point which concerns the core of humanistic and in particular philosophical research. Canguilhem makes a distinction between theories and problems in the study of science. Whereas studying science from the perspective of theory closes the object of study, problems and concepts remain open. So, contrary to seeking an alternative theory of culture, *branchements* and translation are not theories or parts of theories, but concepts that allow us to ask questions, not to find

solutions or answers. The point is to question the notions that steer our perception, not to replace them with our own.

In the second part I go into *branchements* and translation and present a theoretical approach to the problem of culture. In chapter 6 I present the metaphor *branchements* from an epistemological perspective by analysing how Amselle, in order to escape the language of pure origin, change metaphor from hybridisation or mestizo to *branchements*. This renders it necessary to reconstruct parts of the context for Amselle's anthropological thinking and to look into his anthropological fieldwork.

But I think there is more to be said about *branchements* theoretically speaking. And this is what I undertake in the seventh chapter. Here I read *branchements* as a kind of dialectical thinking that draws on Hegelian thinking on the one hand and the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur on the other. This is the first opportunity to reflect on the relation between Amselle and Ricoeur and takes this chapter in a somewhat exegetical direction. Ricoeur or themes discussed by Ricoeur are implicitly and explicitly present in Amselle's thinking at the same time as I want to underline some nuances. The theme of dialectics goes, however, beyond the theoretical elaboration of Amselle and into the overall problem. Dialectics is, as I see it, an important way to criticise purity and closure and takes us into a question of genesis and culture. Central to *branchements* is that a clear cut inside and outside of cultural identity are not assumed but that *the relation* is more fundamental than identity. But the discussion of dialectical aspects in the thinking of Amselle takes us into some problems as well. Since Ricoeur, whom Amselle refers to, is informed by the dialectics in Plato's Sophist and *branchements* is described as a third element, this does not take us in the same direction. This has consequences for how we can examine *branchements* theoretically.

But in order to develop *branchements* further, the notion must be discussed and analysed critically. In chapter 8 I do this in three steps. I commence by contrasting *branchements* and hybridity as metaphors that due to their different

premises have different outcomes as far as thinking is concerned. I continue by discussing origin and I contrast *branchements* with an expressionist theory of genesis. Ricoeur, Canguilhem, Hegel, Spinoza, and Taylor are vital in this elaboration. In the last part I raise some critical questions regarding the idea of *branchements*.

The second main point in the second part and in the whole dissertation is translation, which is the topic of the next two chapters. In chapter 9 I follow the same structure as with *branchements*, commencing with epistemological considerations on translation. In Ricoeur's account of translation, a vital part of his approach is the displacement from the theory of translation to the practice of translation. The practice of translation renders it possible to question any theory of translation or whether it is possible or not to translate. Translation is thus linked to the question of culture in more than one sense. Translation has many relevant levels. Linguistic translation reflects the aspect of language in culture. But translation also reflects human existence as a being in search of understanding of himself. In order to become selves (culturally and individually) we must translate what is foreign to ourselves and ourselves to what is foreign. Translation thus articulates a continuum between self and other, or between different cultures, which does not take substantial distinctions as point of departure. Furthermore, translation reflects the relation between different languages, as well as those internal to one language. Translation is equivalent to reflection as translation is to say the same thing in another way. In this operation *the same-* in the sense of an original meaning the translation was a translation of- escapes the horizon. The original meaning is lost, but does continue to have a reinterpreted and translated meaning. Hence, translation helps us to question two notions of culture: Since translation is practically possible, the cultural difference between different peoples cannot be an ontological distinction. If cultural diversity was like biodiversity, translation would not be practically possible.

In the tenth chapter I discuss translation in relation to hermeneutics and tradition. Translation is connected to hermeneutics and tradition. However, translation takes us into another kind of understanding of hermeneutics and tradition

than Heidegger and Gadamer. With Gadamer's and Heidegger's ontologisation of hermeneutics, tradition becomes something closed and homogenised. From the perspective of Ricoeur and translation we do not always already understand ourselves. Misunderstanding and plurality are as much hallmarks to tradition as understanding. It thus seems to me that translation is a way of articulating nuances between Gadamer and Ricoeur, nuances that have relevance for how we think culture as tradition.

In the conclusion in the eleventh chapter I present the general conclusion drawn from my reflections. In addition to summarise the main points in the dissertation I will also comment on some limitations which take us beyond this thesis. In order to develop this project further, or rather in order to initiate new and fruitful projects, practice should be taken more into account. And since I am writing on the border of both epistemology and politics, this could take us in several directions. Whereas translation has already been used in anthropology, *branchements* has to my knowledge not been extensively used. I would have liked to work with them both in relation to an anthropological or historical material. I think then that I could get an even better understanding of the epistemological aspects of these notions at the same time as they might shed light on new materials. When it comes to the more political or social implications I see that translation and *branchements* could be put to work in a way that could shed some light on historical and contemporary examples where kinds of cultural exchanges have been parts of a successful integration. As part of the reflections on both the political implications and the question of what language we should apply when dealing with culture, comes the question of whether the term intercultural could be developed as an alternative to multicultural.

All quotes originally in French and German, except the translations accounted for in the bibliography, has been translated by me. I take full responsibility for the content and shortcomings of the thesis.

Part 1: The epistemological obstacle of culture

2. Culture and identity as political rhetoric and discourse

Introduction

Alongside identity, religion, and ethnicity, the notion of culture is presented in the media and public debates as central to the analysis and understanding of democratic societies and the problems they face (Tibi 2000, Wieviorka 2005, Süssmuth 2006, Gahr Støre 2007). This is further linked to questions of immigration and integration. I will here leave religion, ethnicity, immigration, and integration aside and focus on why and how we use culture and identity—often in the combination *cultural identity*—as a way of articulating both the problems and the solution for our societies. Culture and cultural identity seem to be notions that at the same time *define human beings* and which might be part of his or her rights (Taylor 1992a, 1992b), are parts of *political solutions* such as multiculturalism and interculturalism (EYID 2008), as well as *what threatens a society* to disintegrate when the cultural diversity becomes too large (Andersen and Tybring-Gjedde 2010, Hustad 2013), and may be used as an argument for keeping people separate (Taguieff 2010). Regarding this last point in particular, it is interesting to look into why it is precisely “culture” which is perceived as a threat to society. It seems to me that a view that cultures initially stand in opposition to each other underlies this perception and that this oppositional thinking is in need of a critical examination.

But why are cultures thought as oppositional? Most people agree that culture is not static and closed, and yet it seems as if this view is present in the political discourse where culture is presented as a challenge. As far as I can see all this has something to do with how culture is linked to identity. The aim in this chapter is thus to show how the political discourse draws on a specific notion of culture that joins culture with identity. The Norwegian anthropologist Unni Wikan shows how the extensive use of the notion “culture” has led to a culturalisation of human beings and that this has resulted in a hierarchical treatment of immigrants. This is covered in her

expression that “culture is loose on the street” (Wikan 1999). To me it seems that the same goes with identity, that identity too is “loose on the street”.

I want to show how culture and identity are linked by looking at two different contexts: on the one hand the discussion about politics of recognition and cultural rights, on the other the re-emergence of racism in the form of cultural differentialism. The coupling of culture and identity to rights is something that has been present in the discussion of multiculturalism; a discourse which still seems to have a hold on how we think the challenges related to culture. This discussion is closely linked to how we perceive the (identity of the) individual and the rights ascribed to the individual. Parallel to the discussion of culture, identity, and rights, a number of researchers claim that culture is the new concept of race and that this is a new way of reintroducing old distinctions and hierarchies (Balibar and Wallerstein 1997, Wikan 1999, Gullestad 2002, Taguieff 2010). As Pierre André Taguieff points out, in the struggle between racists and anti-racists in the post-Nazi era the questions concerns the fear of or defence of the right to be culturally different. The outcome is that they co-constitute cultural difference. My claim is that these two contexts are part of a broader political discourse where they both draw on the same logic: the binary logic of sameness and difference, and that it is this logic that should be questioned.

2.1 The confusion about culture and cultural identity

Even though culture has been on the political agenda for some years now¹, increased immigration, the hardening of cultural identities in the aftermath of 11th September 2001, the debate on the caricatures of the Prophet Mohamed in 2005, and the subsequent violence have given culture a strengthened position as a main concern in Western societies.² Most European countries have had a debate on values, identity,

¹Cultural particularism is not a new subject in European history with its religious wars, linguistic purification etc. However, in modern times the political debates on Multiculturalism in Canada goes back to the 70ties, UNESCO presented its rapport on cultural diversity in 1995, Samuel Huntington wrote his famous book the *Clash of civilizations* in 1996.

² Recently, these questions have taken a particularly tragic turn for Norway, in view of the terrorist attack on Oslo and the massacre at the Norwegian Labour Party's youth camp 22. July 2011. Even though there is an on-going debate on whether

and the role of culture. France has had a debate on national identity for quite some time, the Germans have discussed the need for a German or European *Leitkultur*, and in Norway the foreign minister launched a debate in 2008 on the need to enlarge our national identity to encompass new citizens with different cultural backgrounds. All this somehow implies a discussion and debate on national and/or European culture on one side, and foreign and non-European culture on the other (Süssmuth 2006, Tibi 2010, Noiriel 2007, Støre 2008). An attempt at a positive approach to cultural diversity was launched with the European year of intercultural dialogue (EYID) in 2008. Being outside the European Union, the Norwegian government followed this up with a White paper *Mangfoldsåret 2008* implementing the main aims and values of the European event.

The discussion of the term culture is often but not always guided by identity. In a debate on Norwegian values in 2009 Knut Olav Åmås argued that a debate on Norwegian values is important as such values are about identity and who we define ourselves to be (NRK, 2009). In the same debate the politician Abid Raja claims that "it is important to be accepted and recognised as Norwegian for young people, as many minorities' feeling of self and identity is related to the Norwegian." Then Norwegian Foreign minister Jonas Gahr Støre stated in an article that "our loyalty goes in several directions, our belonging is complex. One type of identity does not exclude another...Our identity is complex" (Støre 2008). It seems that we are all postmodernists now, as it is not at all clear to me what this talk of identity means. But even though the use of identity and complexity is rather superficial, we can still try to make some sense of it. Identity is here on one side connected to the Norwegian in the sense that it is important to Norwegian society to know its own identity and to those with minority background to feel they belong to what is Norwegian. For some this diversity of cultural identities poses a threat to a given Norwegian cultural identity,

the terrorist Anders Behring Breivik should be held legally accountable for his actions or whether he is psychotic, Breivik claims to be motivated by ideas and values which are held by a larger audience. These ideas include conspiracy theories such as that the Arab world attempts to invade Europe in order to establish Muslim rule of law.

i.e. the politicians of the Progressive Party Kent Andersen and Christian Tybring-Gjedde. They wrote in 2010 that: “We, who love Norway, and appreciate the belonging and identity that the country’s cultural community represents, are astonished and concerned with regard to how this community is deteriorating and undermined by an unsustainable immigration politics” (Andersen and Tybring-Gjedde 2010). This begs the question of whether a country and a culture can have an identity, and if so, what does this entail? On the other hand identity is something connected to individuals and there are several competing or complementary identities, even for one individual. In the following paragraphs I will look at these two themes where culture and cultural identity are expressed beginning with identity and rights.

2.1.2 Culture, identity, and rights

In this first part I want to lay emphasis on how the focus on identity, the individual, and its rights is a way of constructing a view of culture as something static, abstract and closed. When culture becomes a right it is because it is part of our individual identity. The recognition of particular minority groups which one way or the other comes under multiculturalist thinking draws on a view of culture as synonymous with identity. What is more, the reduction of culture to a question of rights strengthens the tendency to see cultures as opposing each other and not as related to each other.

2.1.3 The fixing of identities?

Central to the debates on cultural minorities in the previous decades has been the debate between the so-called liberals and the communitarians. The point of departure for the whole debate was the launching of John Rawls’ monumental work *A theory of justice* (1999). Here Rawls continued the tradition of contract theory as an approach to the problem of distributive justice. How should scarce resources be distributed in a just manner? In order to arrive at a neutral point of view from where we can view things and where there is justice for all, it is necessary to bracket any knowledge of one’s own or others’ actual situation. Now his book was attacked by thinkers who did

not subscribe to Rawls' view of man. Among them was Michael Walzer who in *Spheres of justice* writes that the real problem is: "What would individuals like us choose, who are situated as we are, who share a culture and are determined to go on sharing it" (Walzer 1982: 5)? An important problem with Rawls' thinking is thus his understanding or the assumption of the human being as abstracted from his or her tradition, history, and context. The so-called communitarian point of view is that human beings first and foremost share a culture and that this must be taken into consideration when we discuss political theory.

We shall not dwell on this debate here but only mention that within this debate culture became a political issue in an unfortunate way. The French sociologist Michel Wieviorka expresses in his comment on the philosophical approaches to cultural difference the limitation and paradox of philosophers' attempt to construct the debate. The limitations in the philosophers' reasoning is that they, according to him, deny the unstable, dynamic, and moving character inherent to all cultures and rather fixes it as a given entity. The paradox is that philosophy has a too central a role in the making of the premises (Wieviorka 2001: 52). The problem for philosophy is that it grasps the problematic concerned at a political and juridical level and misses out on the processes. It is difficult to disagree with Wieviorka's critique. What Wieviorka proposes is a sociological approach that entails taking into account "processes of mixing, of mestizo, of hybridization" (ibid). So how should a philosopher respond to this? Should we leave the question of cultural difference to sociology, or social-anthropology, or may philosophy have something to add after all? I do not think that the only alternative for philosophy is a purely theoretical and/or normative reflection which leaves the understanding of the processes of hybridisation to the social sciences. Neither do I see philosophy and social science in opposition to each other. But the problem for empirical science- more sensitive to processes than theoretical and normative political philosophy-is that no empirical fact speaks without a language. In order for empirical findings to make sense they have to be interpreted or ordered according to a conceptual frame. And it is this scrutinising of language that

opens up for philosophy. And when it comes to metaphors such as mestizo and hybridity which Wieviorka uses in order to conceptualise the cultural processes, I will claim that they do not escape what he sees as the problem of fixed identity. The question is whether it possible to speak about identity at all without always already having fixed it. Hybridity might be a more complex and elegant way of approaching identity, but I do not think the problem is solved. Hybridity is dependent upon an idea of initial purity: in order to mix something you have to have pure elements to mix. So even if I agree with Wieviorka that the empirical is vital, I find the theoretical reflection insufficient. Hence it is in the intersection between theory and practice that I situate my reflections. In other words, the relation between theory and practice must be thought in another manner.

The way I see it Wieviorka's criticism is not merely a critique justified by empirical studies. It is in itself a philosophical critique of abstraction, a line of thought which goes back to Hegel. I think it is possible to take up Wieviorka's challenge without doing empirical fieldwork, through reflecting on the language which grasps the processes of hybridisation. Even though I subscribe to Wieviorka's concern that the politics of recognition abstracts cultural processes, there is no reason to accept the image Wieviorka gives of philosophy as only capable of thinking substances and static entities. Having said that, the link between culture and identity that Wieviorka points to but does not question further is central. I think it is impossible to develop such a process oriented approach to culture (that is also needed in order to take empirical findings into account) that Wieviorka calls upon without questioning the oppositional thinking within which we see identity and difference.

But if we leave the question of theory and the empirical aside and look at the point of departure for Wieviorka, we notice that the reason why culture becomes something static is that the philosophers turns it into a question of rights. Consequently this implies that rights are a way of turning culture into something static. How so? This link between rights and cultural identity is what underpins much of the discussion about multiculturalism which I will now go on to talk about.

2.1.4 Multiculturalism and the question of rights

Republicanism and multiculturalism are two political models or lines of thought in the modern Western political theory and have been presented as alternatives in coping with cultural diversity. These two models have been mixed, must be thought in relation to the various national traditions and histories, and have thus many versions. Even though they comprise more than models for political government, such as philosophical anthropology, ideology, and norms and demographical description (Wieviorka 1998), I limit myself to the political aspect and its consequences for the understanding of culture.

On the one hand we have modern Republicanism, with its different modes, in the Western world. Developed and constituted through the French Revolution it became the establishment of a political order in which no groups or individuals have economic and juridical privileges. A vital hallmark for our discussion is of course the separation of the private and the public sphere where the public sphere should not be dominated by private interests or by the interest of particular groups. Cultural belonging is hence deemed as a private matter and should be kept separate from the public sphere.³ The atom of society is the free and equal citizen which the state shall protect by securing a public sphere separate from the private sphere. To open up for public recognition of a cultural group through rights is thus absurd and dangerous as it undermines the idea of neutrality.

On the other hand we have the multicultural approach which partly overlaps the debate between liberals and communitarians in political philosophy.

³This can, as Elaine R. Thomas writes, be interpreted in different ways. In the US the separation is thought of as the protection of the private sphere from governmental intervention in line with the liberal protection of the individual. In France it is the protection of the private sphere from private interests. "Whereas Americans historically sought to protect religion from the state, France's combat for *laïcité* sought to free the state from undue religious influence" (Thomas 2006: 241). In what concerns the coping with difference, the French republican tradition "oscillates between assimilation, the dominant position, and tolerance" where both despise communitarian thinking (Wieviorka 1998:899). At least for the French republicanism cultural difference represents a threat of undermining the political foundation of society. A vital motive for the French Revolution was the limitation of the church's political power. However, the faith itself also represented a threat to the state and was from the point of view of the Enlightenment regarded as part of the society built on superstition.

Multiculturalism is a concept used in Canada and the US at the beginning of the 1970s but has not been particularly developed until the last twenty years (Wieviorka 1998). Much of the literature on multiculturalism concerns the question of minority rights. An important contribution to the debates on multiculturalism is the essay of Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor: *The politics of recognition* (1992a) which context is the multicultural society of Canada. In 1982 Canada undertook a review of its legislation on all levels of government. What is of importance was how this judicial schedule was related to the demands of different groups for a certain degree of autonomy due to a desire for survival as a group.⁴

What does it mean for citizens with different cultural backgrounds to be recognised, and why is it important? These questions are addressed in Charles Taylor's text. By exploring the anthropological aspects of recognition, Taylor tries to distance himself from the limitations of liberal approaches to cultural identity: "The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition" (Taylor 1992a: 25). A multicultural approach in the liberal tradition is the Canadian philosopher Will Kymlicka who in *Multicultural citizenship* (1995) writes about different kinds of minority rights and is positive to those minority rights that ensure the integration and participation of individuals into the democratic society and economic life. He does not go as far as Taylor in ascribing to culture a worth of its own, but limits himself to seeing culture as something that "provides its members with meaningful ways of life

⁴Quebec, for instance, has, in order to survive as a French speaking community, passed laws that limit the impact of Anglophone culture. Children with Francophone parents cannot attend English-speaking schools. Businesses with more than fifty employees must be run by French management. All signposts must be in French. The constitutional amendment that treated these cases, The Meech Lake, concluded that Quebec was a "distinct society". This led to an opening up for other areas as well, which for some was totally unacceptable. As most constitutions the Canadian Charter constitutes on the one hand a set of individual rights, and on the other protection against discrimination. Both these elements contradict the Meech Lake amendments. It is the philosophical reflection upon and defense of cultural rights through recognition that are Taylor's concerns.

across the full range of human activities” (Kymlicka 1995: 76). But analytically speaking the individual can be separated from the culture it is part of.

How does the position of Taylor differ from such a liberal approach to cultural belonging? Taylor thinks here as often elsewhere through an historical account of the ideas that constitute the modern man, and central here is recognition. Recognition is a vital human need, Taylor states, or at least is at the center of the constitution of modern identity. For Taylor, Rousseau established an account of recognition by establishing the notion that all men are free and equal. It amounts to saying that what is universal is that we are all of equal worth. This is the *politics of equal dignity* (Taylor 1992a: 38). However, with the insight from Herder in mind, what is universal is that we are all different depending on the context that we stand in. Acknowledging this is vital for what he calls the *politics of recognition*. So far Taylor argues for culture through the development of the modern individual. And Taylor is clear when it comes to how far a government should go in recognising a cultural minority that basic human rights cannot be violated.

So the individual is both what has priority for protection as well as being the perspective through which culture is understood. However, Taylor also seems to go beyond this when claiming that “the further demand we are looking at here is that we all *recognize* the equal value of different cultures; that we not only let them survive, but acknowledge their *worth*” (Ibid: 64). To recognise equality is to recognise difference in itself and not only as a means to something else such as the individual’s self-realisation or the role of culture in a competition. The value of difference is what is at stake. We should, according to Taylor, approach another culture with the presumption that “all human cultures that have stretched over time have something important to say to all human beings” (Ibid: 66).

It seems to me that culture in Taylor’s thinking is both constituted by and through the individual at the same time as it has a worth of its own. Taylor thus argues from the individual as does Kymlicka, but in order to avoid the detachment of the individual and culture, he ascribes to culture a status of its own. My point is not to

intervene into the discussion between a liberal defence of minority rights and Taylor's philosophy of recognition but to reflect on how Taylor's understanding of culture draws on identity. As far as I can see, both the argument from the perspective of the individual and from culture's own worth draw on an oppositional logic of identity and difference. From the perspective of the individual culture becomes, like the individual, something un-dividable. Like the individual, by being un-dividable, by being identical to itself and stand in opposition to (being different from) another individual, the culture - as far as it determines the identity of the individual- is identical to itself. That is why culture on a second level can be abstracted from the individual and be given "a worth of its own". In other words, culture draws, in Taylor's account, on an explicit and implicit notion of identity which makes culture a closed entity regardless of whether this is the intention or not.

What then about Wieviorka's critique of philosophers who fix identities by turning culture into a question of rights? Does it strike Taylor? And how do rights fix anything? The discussion of cultural rights is, as far as I can see, dependent upon identity which seems to underpin the multicultural discourse in the sense that cultures are linked to the identity of persons, and secondly that cultures are discernible and differentiated from each other. Briefly put: since rights are something we attach or ascribe to individuals who are fixed by being identifiable, and culture is part of this identifiable individual, then culture becomes fixed too. When Taylor talks about culture's own worth it seems to me that he tries to distance himself from the liberal representation of human beings which detaches humans from their cultural context. This abstract operation draws, however, also on the same logic in which culture is abstractable from the individuals and cultures are abstractable from each other and presented as diversity. When it comes to giving cultures a right to survival, it is clear that this have to presuppose a fixation of what is to be protected.

2.1.5 The problem of abstraction

From what has been said so far about culture, the fixing of identities, and the way this draws on a binary logic, I want to say something about what kind of operation underpins this thinking, namely abstraction. One problem that pervades the dissertation is abstraction, and culture as an abstract entity. How can we say that what we have seen so far are examples of abstraction? When Wieviorka claims that Taylor and the likes of Taylor are constructing their problematic from an image of identities as fixed and disregard the cultural processes, this is due to a procedure of abstraction. The localisation of cultural identities and differences is possible through abstraction. As we shall see later, this is present in the comparative method in anthropology: In order to understand something we must compare it with something else. From this we derive similarities and differences. But this assumes that what we compare can be clearly distinguishable from each other. My point is not that we can do without abstraction altogether but rather to see the limitations of such thinking and if it is possible go beyond it. This leads us of course to the question of what an abstraction is.

I will discuss this more thoroughly in later chapters, but for now it suffices to say that this is a thinking for which Hegel has been an important critic. When I draw on Hegel I do not talk about the system of Hegel or the idea of the absolute, the end of history etc. It is rather Hegel's thinking as a way of questioning abstraction that I seek. The Hegel interpreter Herbert Schnädelbach presents the problem of abstraction as the founding problem and key to understanding Hegel's philosophy. And central to the problem of abstraction is the relation between the whole and the parts. Schnädelbach writes that the idea of the whole, where the whole is something more than the sum of its parts, becomes problematic when the whole is thought of as an entity which exists independent of its parts. Examples of this are the soul or the German people (Schnädelbach 2007: 14). What is the soul in itself (without the body)? What is the German people in itself (without the Germans)? The question is whether we have seen a version of this on a theoretical and practical level concerning

culture in the political discourse. When one discusses the Norwegian culture or the Norwegian cultural identity on the one hand (Andersen and Tybring-Gjedde 2010), and minority rights and cultural minorities on the other (Taylor 1992a), we abstract the entity we discuss and compare it: we compare Norwegian and Pakistani cultures and find similarities and differences among them. And if we find a sufficient amount of differences we might draw the conclusion that it will be difficult to live together. In a debate about “Norwegian culture” the journalist Jon Hustad writes, addressing himself to the minister of culture:

Next time she gets a question about what Norwegian culture is, Tajik can compare Pakistani and Norwegian culture. I feel sure she will find differences. And then she can tell us which model for society she thinks will give the best results, and if she does not have the slightest worry (Hustad 2013).

Mind you, it is not people who are compared, but the structure through which people live.⁵ However, the consequence of comparison is that people are reduced to culture. I will from time to time throughout the dissertation reflect on the theme of comparison as a joint practical and epistemological problem. The discussion of translation in chapters 9 and 10 tries to elaborate a thinking that does not start from the abstract premises in comparison.

From all this we see that culture is seen as an entity which is independent of its parts and, might I add, independent of the historical and dialectical processes (which I will return to later) with which a culture is involved. The reproduction of the view that culture is something closed depends on this operation of abstraction. When I want to address the problem that culture is seen as something closed and static, it is to show that this depends on its link to identity and that we abstract. What we lose in the discussion of culture by thinking abstractly is that we miss out on the historical processes that led us to where we are, and secondly we lose the processes that

⁵ There are of course more things to be said about this quote. For instance that Hustad mixes culture and model for society.

continue to play out in front of our eyes. These processes are the exchange between the parts (the different inhabitants of Norway, the different kinds of symbolic and normative expressions of these inhabitants) and the whole (Norway). We cannot know Norway (the whole) without going through its parts (the inhabitants of Norway, the symbolic expressions etc.). So why is it that we speak as if we could draw out the Norwegian culture from this process? As long as we think of culture as linked to identity and abstraction, this seems inevitable. It ensures, even for those who have the opposite conviction, the view that culture is and has been identical to itself (it is the same) throughout time and space.

Now, having located the problem of abstraction as a tendency in the political discourse on culture, the next question is how we proceed in order *not* to place ourselves in a position where we abstract. Is it even possible? Do we not have to fix what we are talking about in order to discuss it? First of all, the problem, as I see it, is the status we give to that which we fix. Secondly, it seems difficult to establish an alternative which does not embrace change as an anti-thesis to the closed and static. In Hegelian terms the opposite of abstract thinking is concrete thinking. And in concrete thinking the parts and the whole are thought together. It is not possible to have the one without the other. For Hegel nothing can be articulated without the mediation through something else: the whole cannot be understood without its parts and vice versa. Hegel is in this sense most interesting as a critic of abstraction.

Seeing the whole and the part together allows us to see culture as temporal and as relational. And it is this relational aspect of culture that I will try to develop by reflecting on the metaphor *branchements* (Amselle 2001). What we take as a culture is a process stretched out in time and space and where the unity we call culture is the result of a persistent reinterpretation. On the one hand this takes us into a problem: For if the parts that culture is composed of on the one hand and the whole that comprises or encompasses all the parts on the other should be seen together, then this must implicate that there is something third that holds together and separates parts and whole at the same time. This is the problem of all such entities such as humanity,

Norwegian cultural identity: They depend on something third which is a metaphysical entity. On the other hand this opens up to a reflection on more pragmatic approaches that neither presupposes thirdness as a metaphysical entity (the Spirit of culture so to speak), nor refutes the relative existence of culture. Entities such as the nation and the cultural identity of a nation depend upon the narratives that constitute these entities. Their identities are, as we will discuss, narrative with all their problems and shortcomings (Ricoeur 1992). But before we get there, we will dwell some more on the representation of culture in the political discourse.

2.2 Cultural sameness, differentialism, and origin

In this second part we are still examining a political discourse which reproduces a view of culture as static and closed. As seen in the first part, the precondition for this view seems to me to be the link to identity. In the second part I will go into a theme that is linked to this joining of culture and identity, but which takes us more into the work on anti-racism.

2.2.1 Differentialism and cultural racism

Sociologist Jan Nederveen Pieterse mentions in his book *Globalization and culture* (2009) differentialism as one of three paradigms for approaching culture in a globalised world, with Samuel Huntington's book the *Clash of civilizations* (2003) as being emblematic for such a position.⁶ Various versions of differentialist thinking go through the history of ideas. The German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte's view of the nation is regarded by some as a kind of differentialism. To him the spiritual essence of the German people was to be found in the German language. To Fichte the language presents a totality to which the language users adhere. The German language does not evolve, but is only repeated by its users. An individual user of language is, on the contrary, a threat to the purity of the language (Vincent 2009).

⁶ It does not seem to matter to Pieterse that Huntington writes about civilisations and not cultures.

The point here is not to remain in history, but to see how these ideas have persisted into modern times. A thinking akin to differentialism is racism, not in an explicitly biological sense but in a cultural sense. Among others, Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (1997) were early with warnings against the change of racist thinking from a biological racism to a cultural racism. Similar to the old differentialism this new racism feeds on the notion that there are given cultural differences that do not communicate or change, but exist side by side and which will result in violence when confronted.

2.2.2 Culture as the new concept of race

As Pierre-André Taguieff has shown in several of his books, it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand the concept and phenomena of racism (Taguieff 2010). Racism shares hallmarks-such as stigmatisation, discrimination, and exclusion- with ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and other doctrines. It might be a universal anthropological trait or a phenomena emerging in a particular historical context. And can we speak of racism despite the fact that traditional biological racism is no longer held by anyone? Due to the works of, among others, Taguieff, a “new” field of study has appeared: new racism. New racism is among other things a transformation of racism in which the old quasi-biological hierarchisation of races is abandoned in favour of the concept of culture. In other words, racism is hard to locate and thus hard to prevent. However, this does not mean that racism does not occur or that it is impossible to get an intelligible grasp of it. And even though the notion of race has been de-legitimised, has this resulted in the disappearance of distinctions between men, of hierarchical thinking, stigmatisation, and exclusion? No. And yet, with this problem of defining racism we have difficulties discussing it.

So, how then should we act to prevent racism if there is a consensus that there races do not exist? For Taguieff, this abandoning of the concept of race has nevertheless led the anti-racism movement into an impasse. On the one hand race is abandoned as significant concept by all. On the other hand, open discrimination of

minority groups cannot be comprehended without a collective understanding of this group. After all, the individuals in a group must have something in common to make them a group and which becomes the “reason” for discrimination. And since it is not race; what is it? This “new”⁷ name for the interpretation of the collective is culture and has, according to Taguieff, led the anti-racism movement into a defence of (cultural) difference. This notion of cultural difference is, however, shared by these neo-racist proponents.⁸ Or as Taguieff discusses in his major work *La force du préjugé*, the heterophobic and the heterophile (neologisms created by Taguieff) share an understanding of difference. Now since racism is a difficult phenomenon and concept to understand, it makes it perhaps even more dangerous. On the one hand the existence of racism can be rejected since there is no way to prove the existence of races. On the other hand discrimination and exclusion of groups occur. It thus seems like Taguieff claims that the displacement from race to culture is a co-construct of neo-racists and anti-racists.

The revitalisation of cultural differentialism has also a historical root going back to the work of UNESCO from the fifties. As Alana Lentin shows in the article “Replacing ‘race’, historicising ‘culture’ in multiculturalism”, “culture” as a concept met the need to find an alternative to the concept of race (Lentin 2005). The turn to culture was thus part of the anti-racism of UNESCO. However, this need revealed a certain notion of men and the difference between them. Or rather, it revealed a focus on difference as such. Culture was thus used on the one hand to replace the notion of race and on the other hand as “an adequate mean of describing human difference”, Lentin writes. And she continues: “UNESCO wanted to be able to answer questions about why human groups differed from each other in appearance, in tradition and in

⁷ The study of cultural racism as a new kind of racism is not exactly new, but has been going on for some thirty years.

⁸ Taguieff writes that: “New racism, symbolical or hidden, is the racism of the antiracist age itself. That is a racism adapted to the post- Nazi era characterized by a basic consensus of rejecting racism” (Taguieff 2010: 55).

levels of “progress”” (Lentin 2005: 385). It is this difference and the role it plays that I seek to understand and question.

Central to UNESCO’s fight against racism in the postwar period was, as is well known, anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss who presented the outcome of this process in the book *Race et histoire* (2003). Here he replaced race with culture and racism with ethnocentrism. Levi-Strauss took on both the hierarchical aspects and the opposition between the civilised and the primitive- a remnant from colonial thought- as key concerns. Furthermore, in order to avoid the evolutionary aspect of racism where the level of development among the races could be measured, he introduced cultural relativism where the reduction to one evolutionary scheme would be impossible. There is a cultural diversity where the one culture is not reducible to the other. According to Lentin the best way, in Levi-Strauss’s view, to handle ethnocentrism was by stimulating intercultural exchange. However, it is a solution that makes us repeat the same mistake of reducing human beings to culture. As Lentin states, the problem for the reemerging of racism is the very notion of culture itself:

It is now increasingly obvious that culturalist policies have not brought about the end of racism. This is because neither multiculturalism nor its updated version- interculturalism- questions the very reason for the focus on culture (Lentin 2005: 394).

As I understand her, an open and dynamic understanding of culture does not do the trick but makes us repeat the same mistakes. Why? Because the prerequisite for diversity and its ethical consequence is a kind of conservation of identity and origin. As I see it, the notion of difference is linked to this thinking. What is interesting to me and what, as we shall see throughout the dissertation, makes dialectical thinking so relevant is not just the understanding of difference, but what kind of concept of difference we use. One thing I want to look at is how dialectical thinking can question how we may be able to think beginning without mistaking it for origin.

In this sense I agree and disagree with Lentin's critique of the concept of the intercultural. For if we take intercultural to be a "solution" to the question of ethnocentrism (as Levi-Strauss does), then it is difficult not to repeat the thinking of origin. Since cultural diversity is the precondition for interculturalism, this nevertheless takes us back into an origin where cultures are separated. But if we take the intercultural as a reconstructive concept then the intercultural is a way of showing that the relational and dialectical aspects are more fundamental than separation. In other words, the critique of the intercultural oversees the relational aspect in the constitution of culture. Whereas Lentin sees it as a teleological concept, I see it as a reconstructive concept. Furthermore, this is pivotal to how we perceive culture. It might take us back to an origin, but on the other hand it might be seen as an outcome of a more fundamental relational exchange. In other words, I am not sure if it is the concept of "culture" itself that is the problem, or rather the concepts and intellectual operations with which it is related: identity, origin, abstractions, comparison.

Now, how does this resonate within the Norwegian context? Do we find cultural differentialism and racism here? One the one hand every case and context is similar and different at the same time. We may perhaps not "find" cultural differentialism in a purified form anywhere, and maybe not in Norway. On the other hand this new take on racism has also led to new research here. But just to give a hint I quote an example expressed by representatives from the right wing party FRP. It has always been easy to attack this party for holding a negative attitude towards immigrants. As a result of the increasing number of refugees entering Europe and in the aftermath of 11th of September 2001, the rhetoric has hardened and the idea of multicultural society has come under pressure. The argument is here as elsewhere not skin colour or biology, but culture. A much debated and criticised article written in 2010 by two central members of FRP-Oslo, Kent Andersen and Christian Tybring-Gjedde, expresses some of these notions (2010). The authors insist on the concept of Norwegian culture: "what is wrong with Norwegian culture, since you [the government] are determined to replace it with multicultural? What is the aim of

stabbing our own culture in the back?” Further, this multiculturalism is threatening to “tear our country to pieces.” This article does not directly evoke a cultural differentialism. It does, however, draw on a nationalist aspect of culture where what is perceived as alien is a threat. What is Norwegian is based on an implicit idea of generalised kinship or a kinship beyond the bloodline of an individual. Plurality is not something positive, but subversive and destructive to an evolved yet original national identity. This kind of conceptualisation of cultural identity marks a clear cut distinction to what is different. I.e. all that is different is potentially subversive to the identity.

Returning to the more academic contributions, one of the few anthropologists to work on the theme of racism in Norway is the late Marianne Gullestad. She draws on ground-breaking works on racism (Barker, Stolcke, Balibar and Wallerstein, Taguieff, Wieworka etc.). Two articles from her hand are particularly interesting to our discussion of “culture” and “difference”. In “Invisible fences: Egalitarianism, nationalism and racism” (Gullestad 2002) she takes on the relation between egalitarianism and racism in Norway. She states that “I see the egalitarian logic as one of the reasons why the perception of incompatible cultural differences has so quickly entered the general common sense” (Ibid: 60). Gullestad perceives Norwegian egalitarianism (that we are all equals in terms of worth and rights) as a concealed (and imagined) sameness (that we feel that we are the same or identical) and the other way around. This feeling of being the same that she describes is linked to the “imagined” and refers to the historian Benedict Anderson’s ground-breaking study of nationalism (Anderson 2006). Anderson included the imagination as an analytical tool for rendering account of how it is possible that a large amount of people that have never met and who are geographically spread out on an enormous territory have a feeling of belonging together. Now Gullestad utilises Anderson’s reflections on the function of the imagination to shed some light on mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Referring to Alexis de Toqueville she writes that “people have to feel that they are more or less the same in order to be equal of value” (Ibid:

46). Gullestad's point is, as far as I understand it, that even though egalitarianism is an ideological value, we do not leave the play of exclusion and inclusion which is based on origin. Even though equality is supposed to be a universal and individual value, equality is nevertheless linked to a common culture, ancestry, and origin. And this "'culture' is somehow regarded as completed" (Ibid: 53).

This is interesting to us in the sense that identity (as sameness) and difference are not seen together but as separate. Linking culture to identity (as sameness) and origin makes it impenetrable from the inside and the outside. Or differently put, a clear cut distinction between outside and inside is thus made. And as long as this cultural sameness is equivalent with society it makes it impossible for new citizens to enter the society and to co-constitute our societies. But must this be so? A philosophical deconstruction of the binary opposition between identity and difference might lead us in another direction. My claim is that this is an example of the link to origin and identity (as the same) that generate an understanding of culture as static and closed. Even though the Norwegian context is not identical to the French, the British, or any other, it has nevertheless inherited its thinking from somewhere. And it is this historical path that I want to retrace in the following chapters.

In the second part of reconstructing a political discourse I have been looking at a particular variant of new racism which does not focus on race or hierarchy, but which is nevertheless concerned with origin. Culture is the new concept of race which is used to reintroduce distinctions between human beings and which controls the play of inclusion and exclusion. The sameness that Gullestad describes as imagined I interpret as a *cultural* sameness. Secondly, sameness can also be interpreted as a synonym for identity. In other words, we see here that identity reappears but here as an imagined entity.

2.2.3. Why is culture linked to identity?

What I have tried to do in this chapter is to localise culture in a political rhetoric or political discourse, and show that culture is conceived of as something static and

closed. As I have tried to show, what constitutes this view of culture- and ultimately makes it legitimate to understand the concept of culture as a challenge- is that it is linked to identity. The point has so far been to give some examples from political discourse of how identity and culture are linked and to show how the link to identity is what first and foremost constitutes culture as a closed entity. The fixing of cultural identities in the claim for cultural minorities' rights, the culturalisation of human beings in both politics of recognition and in a new racism, and the debates on national cultural identity are all tendencies of this. Abstraction constitutes cultural identities and is constituted by identity (they are in other words correlated). Abstraction and identity are thus the main components in the epistemological obstacle to understanding culture. And I have already indicated how I intend to exceed it. However, in trying to describe the obstacle we have only passed through phase one. We have seen how culture and identity have been linked in the political discourse and the public debates. But we have not looked at *why* they are linked. Culture seems to both explicitly draw on the concept of identity and implicitly on some kind of identity-thinking. But are these two connected elsewhere than in the political discourse? Is there a link between identity and the social science that has dealt most with culture, anthropology? The questions when and how these two terms did come together take us into the genealogy of culture and phase two in describing the epistemological obstacle.

Why is it important to understand the historical circumstances for the concept of culture? In order to undo the entanglement of culture, identity and origin, and reflect on other ways of seeing culture as something more open, we must first of all understand how deep the link goes. This takes us almost inevitably into a critical discussion of identity. I am not sure if it is possible to detach culture and identity, but it is possible to question the way we think identity. Secondly we must thus understand how our understanding of cultural identity is marked by a certain understanding of identity. This implicates a historical and critical approach to both

culture and identity which takes the historical constitution of the concept of culture into account. These are the questions I will discuss in the next two chapters.

3. Genealogy⁹ of culture.

Introduction

In chapter 2 I tried to show how culture is presented as a political problem and that it, in this presentation, is linked to identity. In this chapter I am tightening the noose as I try to come closer to the answer why and how the view that culture is something static is being repeated. In order to do this I will look at the entanglement of culture, nation, race, and identity. The discussion of culture takes us inevitably into the history of anthropology. There is and has been a debate within anthropology on whether culture is a good analytical concept or describes anything real (Fischer 2006). Does culture exist, and does it render account of anything? Culture has been denaturalised or de-essentialised by anthropologists for a long time (Barth 1994). And many anthropologists do not use the concept at all. What I am looking for here, however, is not so much to enter into an anthropological discussion as it is to trace culture within the history of anthropology. By tracing the genealogy of culture through the lexical definitions we see that cultural anthropology inherited a certain idea of culture from the 18th century. In the tradition from Herder, *Kultur* was meant to substitute *Cultura* by offering a less ethnocentric and more divers understanding of human beings. But in doing so it also lost the active aspect imbedded in *Cultura*.

Another aspect which concerns the genealogical relation between culture and identity is raciology. The abstract gaze of raciology claiming to find and compare races is not far from the early 20th century anthropologist's gaze comparing cultures. And the question is if the comparison of cultures in the political discourse when talking of cultural diversity draws on this aspect in anthropology. How far is the way one previously thought races from the way we think culture in political discourse?

⁹ When I call this chapter "Genealogy of culture" this is very loosely built on a genealogy à la Foucault who again draws on Nietzsche. Having said that, it draws just as much on the French epistemological tradition of analysing the history of scientific concepts. When I call this genealogical it is to draw attention both to the other concepts to which it is linked as well as the institutional circumstances that were part of the constitution of this concept.

The play of cultural identities and differences is within the same logic of identity as the discussion of different races in raciology. They both treat their object of study as a thing which draws on a certain notion of identity.

3.1 Culture, nation, and raciology

I want to make two points in this part. The first emphasises the “internal” developments of culture as idea and as concept. The second traces the logic of culture to raciology. In the first part of this reconstruction of how the concept of culture is viewed as static and closed, I want the reader to keep in mind what Marianne Gullestad discusses and the context of the so-called new racism in which culture is the new concept of race. What I want to show is how culture is related to versions of raciological thinking and to the concept of nation emerging in the 19th century. If we follow Amselle’s account, this displacement that Gullestad, Taguieff, and others discuss does not become so surprising after all.

3.2 The concept of culture

In order to reflect critically on the concept of culture, we must look into its genealogical emergence. For in order to understand how the concept of culture is problematic, we also have to understand the other ideas with which it is connoted. There is of course not enough space and time to give an exhaustive account of all these aspects ranging from linguistic over institutional to philosophical and scientific aspects here. Furthermore, culture has a different meaning in the humanities, in the social sciences, or in the more general sense. The word culture comes from the Latin *Cultura* (past participle of *cultus*) which has a double significance as both cultivating the soil related to agriculture, and to develop the faculties of the spirit. Cicero used the cultivation of the soil as a metaphor for spiritual education in “*cultura animi*”. In this sense culture is an activity, a process, a development. Culture acquired, however, a new meaning in the 18th century with the German *Kultur* meaning the set of values, symbols, ideas, beliefs, and behavior patterns of a social group. This new definition was intended as a correction of what was thought of as an ethnocentric Universalist

understanding of human beings: There is not only one way to develop the human spirit, but many, depending on historical context. And it is this latter meaning that has been transported into ethnology, sociology, and cultural anthropology. As far as I can see a part of the problem lies in this opposition between the humanist and the social scientific concept of culture. For by negating the cultivation of the spirit as an untenable ethnocentric universalism, one also lost the dynamic and active element in the concept. By going through some of the lexical definitions I will try to show how this opposition corresponds with the two views of culture as an activity and as fixed.

Even though both meanings are nouns they both describe, contrary to the current use in debates on cultural diversity, activities or actions. *Le Petit Robert* has two main uses where the second contains both a dynamic and a static notion. Culture is: the action to cultivate the soil and the range of operations for taking vegetables from the ground. Secondly it is the development of the faculties of the spirit, and “the unity of the intellectual aspects belonging to a civilization, a nation” (Le Robert, 2000).

When it comes to the first definition, both the agricultural and the spiritual cultivation are activities. Whereas the second, which is the definition commonly used in the conceptualisation of culture in the notion of multicultural, is static. To cultivate the soil or one’s spirit implies a process where the crops growing in that field or the spiritual capacity are the results of that process. The “unity of the intellectual aspects” goes on the other hand in the direction of something given which is not procedural.

Raymond Williams, in his article on culture in *Keywords* (1983), ends up distinguishing three active categories of use: “(i) the independent and abstract noun which describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development, from C18; (ii) the independent noun, whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general, from Herder and Klemm...(iii) the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity” (Williams 1983: 90). Now, even though the first category is a kind of historical

background for the second, it is the second category which is pivotal for our epistemological reflections on culture. Culture as “a way of life” might take us further in the direction of practice. However, a “*particular way of life*” renders it less dynamic and refers to a *certain* people, period or group.

In *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen*, “Kultur” is described as: „the state of spiritual-social development as well as the unity of acquisitions (Errungenschaften) on an artistic and humanistic level as well as on the level of society (often linked to an ethnical unity in a historical limited time-space)“ (Akademie, 1989). What is interesting here is that, with the common use of the notion, state of development (Entwicklungsstand) based on or associated with an ethnical unity (etnische Einheit), is included in the definition of culture. This is perhaps more in accordance with a common use than an etymological root, but the connotation with ethnicity renders it more substantial and static. Furthermore, *Entwicklungsstand* indicates something frozen in time. A *Stand* or *state* is not a process. Or, the process that led to it is not included in the definition.

If we go to *Brockhaus Wahrig Deutsches Wörterbuch*, „Kultur“ is defined as: „The unity of the spiritual...and...material forms of humanity’s life-expressions of [and to] a certain people in a certain time“(Brokhaus, 1982). *Lebensäußerungen* might take us in an expressivist direction. On the other hand *bestimmten Volkes* and *bestimmte Zeit* de-temporalises and substantialises culture. It is *this* people and *this* time, which are different from another people and another time.

In all the definitions of culture we find the active element. To cultivate something is not just to develop what is already there (human faculties) but also involves a process of production (Pflege, Errungenschaft, cultiver). Multiculturalism, cultural diversity, and cultural pluralism on the other hand are exempt from this initially dynamic element in the concept.¹⁰ So It must be derived from the

¹⁰E. Ortigues writes in his article on *Culturalisme* that: “what makes the use of the word « culture » is that it institutes a relation between the state of a tradition, or a social acquisition, and the process of an individual intellectual and moral acquisition.”(*PUF, 2004: 188*)

substantialist notion widely accepted in the definitions: *Ensemble des aspects intellectuelle, Entwicklungsstand, bestimmtes Volkes*. A culture is given as a positive fact, or so we are led to believe, that can be discussed as a substance we can have a positive or negative view of. On the other hand there are those who claim that culture is dynamic. As I see it, the interesting point does not lie in making this latter claim, which anyone can make, but rather in questioning why it is that we continue to think culture as something closed. And if culture is dynamic how should we describe it?

M. Izard writes in the article *Culture in Dictionnaire de l'ethnologie et de l'anthropologie* (PUF, 2004) that culture has mainly two kinds of meaning, the two are nevertheless linked: Culture in general and the forms of collective cultures thought and experienced in history. This last form gives a plurality to the concept. Regarding the first some hallmarks are vital. First of all, culture was separated from nature. The turn from nature towards the cultivation of the spirit (*cultura animi*) was regarded as a universal trait for human beings, as something that separates us from animals. The distinction between nature and culture is interesting but will not be further discussed in the thesis. Another more relevant point is the transmission of culture through time. Is the transmission of cultural traits, practices, customs, etc. the transmission of the same? Here we touch upon the problem of temporality which is one of the main problems with the notion of culture. Is the temporal flux a potential threat to the concept of culture or not? Is the permanence of the same a condition for talking about culture?

The second main meaning of culture is the diversity of cultures. But even though diversity is a fact, what it is that separates cultures, in order to make them diverse, becomes more difficult to define. Now what goes through the definitions which are important for us is culture as a metaphor taken from agriculture to describe a spiritual activity. This spiritual activity was sedimented into the western cultural tradition. However, as we shall see, the problem articulated by Herder and others was that different people at different times also deserved the status of culture, so the concept had to be plural. Now, my point is that this plurality does not take us out of

abstract thinking. That plurality takes cultures out of their historical processes where the boundaries of identity and difference are not so clear.

I will sum this up by making two remarks. First there is an internal ambiguity in how the notion is understood in the dictionaries where the one leans towards an activity and the other towards a fixed spatio-temporal entity. Secondly, what this second meaning draws on is an unthematized understanding of identity. How so? What I claim to see through the lexical definitions of culture is that it is described through closed entities such as “a people”, “a group”, “etnische Einheit”, “in einem begrenzten Zeitraum”, “bestimmtes Volkes”, “bestimmte Zeit”. This is perhaps not a surprise. However, it stands in contrast to the dynamic aspect of the first group of definitions. I find the link between cultural and ethnic unity particularly interesting because it underlines both the link to the nation and to race. The general problem that I seek to shed some light on is why a view of culture as static is repeated. As far as I can see this must be due to the way we think and that our thinking has problems with capturing that which is not clearly discernible but dynamic. But even though we can make some interesting observations regarding the etymology we must go broader in order to reconstruct culture.

3.3 Ideas on culture

Ideas on culture make up a large field, and all aspects cannot be included here. I therefore rely on some primary and some secondary sources. Regarding the latter I build on Adam Kuper’s book *Culture: The anthropologist account* (1999) and Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Alf Sivert Nielsen’s *A history of anthropology* (2001).

The roman politician Cicero was one of the first to use the term culture from the domain of agriculture on the domain of spiritual matters. In *Tusculanae Disputationes* Cicero speaks of *cultura animi* or the cultivation of the spirit. As we saw in the lexical definition the human mind or spirit can be cultivated like the soil can be cultivated into a cornfield. However, if we make a jump in time to an understanding relevant to both the political and the anthropological concept of

culture, it was in the 18th and 19th century that the concept *Kultur* came into use in the German tradition. It was implemented in the German language around 1700, and Herder established the modern understanding of the concept. According to Herder culture is an autonomous unity related to a specific nation or people and must be understood on its own terms, a precursory idea to the anthropological principle of cultural relativism. Herder argues against the idea of history of the Enlightenment thinkers as these came to understand it as the realisation of a universal reason. It was Voltaire and Kant and their representation of history as the progression of humanity that provoked Herder. The contempt that the Enlightenment nurtured toward previous centuries led Herder to propose that every epoch as well as the culture by which it is characterised cannot be compared to any other, let alone be judged as a level of progress (Alain Renault 2000). It is in his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* and *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* that he argues that every culture must be understood on its own premises. In other words, Herder pluralises the notion of culture against the arrogance in the concept of culture in the Enlightenment. Raymond Williams writes, quoting Herder, that nothing is:

more indeterminate than this word, and nothing more deceptive than its application to all nations and periods". He attacked the assumption of the universal histories that "civilization" or "culture"-this historical self-development of humanity- was what we would now call a unilinear process...It is then necessary, he argued, in a decisive innovation, to speak of "cultures" in the plural (Williams 1983: 89).

As we have already touched upon and will return to later, the pluralisation of cultures in modern times is an operation that tries to escape the evolutionist understanding of humankind. The rejection of universalism (that humans are part of one and the same history) in the shape of evolution (that this history has different steps placing different peoples on different hierarchical levels) led to a fragmentation and separation of humankind which in modern times underpins racist thinking. In other words, the rejection of a racism based on evolution, and the distinction between the

civilised and the barbarians, led to another kind of racism based on cultural differences. More on this later, but for now it suffices to mention that the idea of a cultural diversity was born with Herder's ideas. The point is that the emphasis on cultural diversity as a counter-racist strategy has parallels to Herder's critique of the Enlightenment.

Hegel is often mentioned as a proponent of the idea that each period of history has a spirit not reducible to another. Still there seems to be a difference between Hegel and Herder in that Herder does not hierarchise the different epochs or spirits. If one reads Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* he hierarchise the different peoples according to the step on which they belong in the development of the universal spirit (Geist), and some people are not even worthy of entering history. For Hegel, as for many others in his time, the development of a state and the development of writing and poetry integrate peoples into world history. The Africans do not have writing or a state so they cannot enter world history. The Indians have writing, but no state, so they cannot enter either. It is interesting to see how Hegel and Herder thus have shaped our way of thinking cultural difference. Whereas Hegel deems some people or cultures to be outside of universal history, the history of progress, Herder refutes this judgment by defending other people's irreducibility. They both confirm, in one way or the other, the notion that there is heterogeneity (in history) between cultures.

There is a long debate on the difference between the concept of culture and the concept of civilisation. E. Ortigues writes in his article on *Culturalisme* that "it is true that the Greek civilization does no longer exist, however the Greek culture can always be transmitted (peut toujours se transmettre)" (PUF, 2004). According to this definition culture is something transferable through time, whereas civilisation is not. This distinction takes us into the difference between the French and German traditions. Whereas the Germans utilise the concept of culture, French scholars emphasise civilisation. E.B. Tylor's book *Primitive culture* was, for instance,

translated into *Civilisation Primitive* in the French edition. But the question is whether the concepts refer to different objects as well.

As the *Annales*-historian Lucien Febvre notes in a conference talk on civilisation, this concept contains the same kind of ambivalence as culture: It is both the set of characteristics that an observer might record studying a human group, and it connotes civilisation as a distinction to that which is not civilised. Progress is also vital to the latter sense. In the account of Norbert Elias, however civilisation and culture are linked to the distinction between the French and the German tradition where civilisation for the Germans did not contain authenticity but mere form. Civilisation transcended national boundaries whereas culture was related to identity and the self-consciousness of a nation and thus preferred (Kuper 1999).

Another branch in the genealogy of culture which also took its point of departure from the debate between the French and the German traditions is the social science of Talcott Parsons. He tried to establish a kind of synthesis between positivism and idealism in his account of human action. On the one hand he agreed with the utilitarian positivists that human action is rational, on the other hand he also recognised that this same action is part of an organic whole and related to ideas and values that make up the motives for human action (Kuper 1999: 49). This latter aspect became one of the three systems which, according to Parson, govern human action. In addition to the social and physical system, the cultural system dealt with ideas and values entangled in action: “Cultural objects are symbolic elements of the cultural tradition, ideas or beliefs, expressive symbols or value patterns” (Parson in Kuper 1999: 53). For our part it is interesting to note that the representation of culture as ideas and values is precisely what takes us out of the concrete practices and into abstraction. This understanding of culture haunts us still, as it is the values and ideas of a culture that is debated in multicultural societies. But through such a representation culture becomes ahistorical and abstracted from its practice and process of constitution. As I will try to point out throughout the dissertation, this

process of constitution is relational in the sense that distinctions are not clear cut between cultures.

E.B. Tylor is said to be the first to define an anthropological concept of culture when he in 1871 defined culture in the book *Primitive culture* as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society” (Ibid: 56). According to Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn (*Culture: a critical review of concepts and definitions* 1952), it is unsatisfactory that Tylor did not distinguish between social and cultural organisation. Having in mind that Kluckhohn had collaborated with Parson this is perhaps no surprise, as he too emphasised this division. Anyway, the vital aspect of modern understanding of culture was the relativisation made by Kroeber and Kluckhohn of these values. This leads us again to the point which is the abstractionist account of culture. A relativisation of values does take us out of ethnocentrism- and the view that the western culture is the only thing we can call culture- and the evolutionism imbedded in this. It does not, however, take us out of the problem of culture as static: on the contrary, it takes us deeper into it.

Until now we have barely touched upon the distinction between a humanist and scientific understanding of culture. The opposition had its point of departure in the more general debate between the natural sciences and the humanities, where the humanists claimed that the realm of human spirit could not be treated as things in nature and required specific methods. The consequence for the understanding of culture was that it could not be analysed through universal explanatory laws, as the social scientists in the late 19th and early 20th century were looking for, but had to be understood through interpretation. A second trait that separated the scientific and the humanist approach was that the social scientist in the school of Talcot Parson separated the cultural and the social.

Now, one of Parson’s Students, Clifford Geertz, came out to take a middle position between the humanist and the anthropological view on culture. Geertz introduced an interpretative symbolic anthropology which drew on philosophy and

literary theory. It is particularly interesting to note the implementation of Paul Ricoeur's thinking. Ricoeur's idea that human actions convey meaning rendered them possible to read in a similar manner as written texts. Symbols not only express a worldview but structure action as well. Geertz states in *The interpretation of cultures* that "an exact understanding of what it means...to say that our formulations of other people's symbol systems must be actor-oriented" (Geertz 2000: 14). The analysis of culture thus had to be in line with Max Weber's methodological individualism:

Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search for meaning (Ibid: 5).

Following the trail of Parson culture was still distinguished from the social as a system that structured human action. Kuper writes that in the end culture came to mean for Geertz: "the epitome of the values that rule in a society, embodied most perfectly in the religious rituals and the high art of the elite" (Kuper 1999: 120). Following Kuper's account, when turning culture into values we detach ourselves from practice. Geertz's view of culture is thus idealistic and contains the same problem of abstraction that I question. What is sympathetic and interesting about Geertz and his interpretative approach is that he tries to understand and not explain, and thus does not arrange "abstracted entities into unified patterns". Having said that, what he tries to understand is what is nevertheless attempted abstracted from action. He proposes that "The essential task of theory building here is not to codify abstract regularities but make thick description possible, not to generalize across cases but to generalize within them" (Geertz 2000: 20). The question is, however, to what extent the "inside of cases" here sediments a non-dialectical and atemporal understanding of culture. If the point is not to generalize across cases, the problem of generalisation remains as generalisation disregards processes.

A name that cannot be bypassed and whose influence has been great is of course Claude Levi-Strauss. With him as with everyone else it is not possible to cover

all implications of his thinking. What is interesting with Levi-Strauss is the tension between a universalistic and particularistic view of man. On the one hand there is a Levi-Strauss represented in *Race et histoire*. Even though Levi-Strauss here underlines the fact that almost no culture is isolated, his focus on the dangers of ethnocentrism takes him in the direction of a non-universalist attitude. The ethnocentric and racist distinction between the cultivated and the savage refuses to see the cultural diversity (Levi-Strauss 1996: 383). The alternative to a racist attitude, according to Levi-Strauss, is not to ascribe to all humans an abstract equality. This is, as Levi-Strauss writes, something deceiving to the spirit because it neglects the fact of diversity (Ibid: 385). On the other hand there is a structuralist Levi-Strauss that, despite observable differences, focuses on discerning a formal social organisation shared by all humans that is understandable from a notion of the brain as binary structured. Levi-Strauss's comparison of different alliance systems leads to a conclusion that gains status as a universal insight.¹¹ Amselle remarks on Levi-Strauss: "in his study of "kinship atoms," "kinship structures," or "mythemes" [Levi-Strauss] took the side of universalism; by contrast, in *Race et histoire*, he adopts a culturalist position"(Amselle 1998: IX). In the first case the cultural variation is meant to illustrate a universalistic point (that all myths have at deep level a dichotomous structure, and that all kinship relations in the end are regulated by the prohibition of incest), in the second cultural variation illustrates an anti-ethnocentric point. However, in both cases, culture, whether it expresses a diversity or universality culture, "is seen exclusively in terms of the world of rules" (Ibid: 20).

The evolutionary tradition in anthropology maintained a separation between culture and nature in the sense of a theory where not all human beings had left the state of nature. This goes against the universalist claim of for instance Claude Levi-Strauss that culture is a distinctive attribute to man. In this sense a notion of *diversity*

¹¹Lévi-Strauss writes that the structure of parenthood results from a universal fact that in all human societies, in order for a man to find a wife she is lost by another man who has the relation to her as a father or brother (Ibid: 104).

of cultures was necessary to question the idea that some people were underdeveloped and thus could be subjected to violence. To pluralise the notion of culture could from this perspective be seen as necessary to universalise the nature-culture distinction to all human beings. The question is, however, if the right way to do this was to focus on a unity called culture, and not on the individuals. Claude Levi-Strauss's promotion of cultural diversity against a racism of the One (occidental) culture towards the primitives living in nature may unintentionally have provided the differentialist or cultural racism with an argument.

Our understanding of culture does not come from an internal historical and linguistic development alone, but from relations to other disciplines, ideologies, practices, and historical circumstances. In this sense a *genealogy* of the concept of culture is perhaps preferable to a history of culture as it enables us to see the impure genesis of its concept and phenomenon and not just an "internal" development of it. But perhaps the anthropological tradition that has dealt most explicitly with culture is cultural anthropology.

3.4 Cultural anthropology

Vital to the understanding of anthropology is of course the division into different schools, traditions, themes. Central to the concept of culture is the distinction between social anthropology, with a strong base in Great Britain, and cultural anthropology, widespread in American anthropology (Hylland Eriksen and Nielsen 2001: 39). Pivotal to the development of the American cultural anthropology was the German-American anthropologist Franz Boas. As Hylland Eriksen and Nielsen write, Boas was as a German immigrant influenced by the German tradition from Herder in the 18th century to Adolf Bastian in the 20th, and subscribed to the principle of *historical particularism* which took into account that each culture contained its own values and history (Ibid: 40). This tradition goes as mentioned back to Herder in particular. In the 19th and 20th century this opposed the evolutionary tradition in anthropology which reduced all human cultures into one evolutionary scheme. But

like Herder, Boas was skeptical to attempts to reduce the cultural diversity. He saw it as problematic to establish similarities between societies that were, according to him, fundamentally different. It is thus interesting to note that the concept of cultural relativism, a common term today, was coined by Boas. Vital to the tradition that Boas was part of was diffusionism which saw cultures as developed and spreading from the same origin and source. This countered the evolutionist view that history was “a unilineal movement through well-defined stages” (Ibid: 27). Boas heavily influenced the next generation of great anthropologists like Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead. They looked at the relationship between psychological factors and culture and worked on the Boasian assumption that human mental characteristics were acquired rather than inborn (Ibid: 61).

An example of a contemporary anthropologist who still finds the notion of culture relevant is Marshall Sahlins. Still he warns us against a simplistic representation of diffusionist anthropology. He writes in the article “Two or three things that I know about culture” that “The American anthropological codgers who spent a good part of their lives studying historical diffusion hardly believed that cultures were unchanging and rigidly bounded” (Sahlins 1999: 305). And in a footnote on Boas, Sahlins rephrases Boas stating that “a commitment to tradition entails some consciousness; a consciousness of tradition entails some invention; an invention of tradition entails some tradition” (Ibid: 417).

Now what is interesting with drawing this particular line in the development of cultural anthropology is to understand how culture can become something closed. The principle of historical particularism which underpins the cultural relativism of Boas and of today, and which seems to have been inspired by the ideas of Herder, gives us some clues. Central to the genesis of culture is, as will be discussed a bit later, that Herder, or a certain *Wirkungsgeschichte* emanating from him, is a precursor to both the nation and to cultural relativism. If anthropology has had something to do with shaping our view of culture as closed, then the development of cultural anthropology from Boas is vital. Having Sahlins’ words in mind and without

claiming to have located the big bad wolf: the boasian principles of cultural relativism and historical particularism are, as far as I can see, what we find a remnant of in parts of the political discourse that we looked at in the previous chapter. The discussion of cultural minority rights by Charles Taylor draws on the same source as cultural anthropology: Herder.

However, I do not think that culture could have become a political issue in the way that it has without its link to the concept of identity. This point is affirmed by Vincent Descombes (2011, 2013) who traces the genealogy of identity to the works of psychoanalyst Erik Erikson: “The link between (American) cultural anthropology and the theory of Erikson is decisive” (Descombes 2013: 34). Erikson joins, according to Descombes, the psychoanalysis of Freud and American cultural anthropology with the backdrop of *Bildung* (Descombes 2011: 7). Descombes mentions Erikson’s meeting with Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Gregory Bateson- and their works on the relation between psychology and culture (“culture et personnalité”) - as “having an important consequence for his conception of personality” (Descombes 2013: 28). As I understand it, Erikson was influenced by studies that tried to show culture’s effect on personality. Then what Erikson does is to substitute personality with identity. Descombes writes that ““Identity” is [from now on] often a word which takes the place terms like “character” (caractère), “personality” (personnalité), or in English “Self” used to take“(Ibid: 29). In other words Erikson is influenced by cultural anthropology’s view of the link between culture and personality, but influenced in his turn this relation as he substituted personality with identity. In this way culture and identity became conceptually be linked.

Even though not exhaustive, I have so far tried to bring together a lexical account of culture, alongside a brief history of the ideas of culture culminating with cultural anthropology. With cultural anthropology we touch for the first time upon identity which I will discuss in the next chapter. So far this has been a history of culture, merely seeing culture from the inside. In the next section of this first part I

will present a more genealogical take on culture by looking at its outside and how culture is shaped also by the notion of race.

3.5 Raciology and culture

Raciology is the study of races. And even though this discourse might draw on prior ideas, notions, and attitudes, its commencement is first and foremost related to the European discovery of the non-European world. Torgeir Skorgen denominates in his book *Rasenes oppfinnelse* (The invention of the races) Francois Bernier (1625-1688) as the author of the first attempt to give a classification of all peoples of the world. These early classifications of humans into races seem to have gone hand in hand with the wider classificatory logic, the logic that Foucault analyses in *Les mots et les choses* with the concept of episteme (Foucault 2003), in natural history. One of the founding fathers of 17th century botanical classification, Carl von Linné (1707-1778), was also a kind of proto ethnologist doing field studies among the Sami people in the north of Scandinavia. He delivers the first hierarchical classification of races based on morphological traits (Skorgen 2002: 55).

Later, the implication for the young European social sciences in the late 19th and early 20th century was a division of labor. Sociology and political studies (Statswissenschaft) were to study modern, western societies organised in states, whereas anthropology was to study the non-modern stateless societies. Modern anthropology has turned this study of different life forms into its ethos by striving to describe the humans studied, not through the judgmental eyes of the West, but as equal to the Western way of life. Modern anthropology has rejected the normative distinction cultivated or civilised-primitive and elevated all people to the level of civilised but added a diversity of cultures. It has thus conserved the notion of difference in the original opposition. Anthropology has maintained the distinction between cultures, but was nevertheless forced to operate within the logic of difference (between races, cultures, peoples etc.) fixed by the opposition modern-primitive and by the comparison of species and races. The question, which is our

main hypothesis, is whether there under this concept of difference lurks another notion, that of origin. To multiply the origin by rendering it plural is not, however, to question origin. However, the challenge today is increasingly how to account of change and dynamics.

The development of the notions of race can be reconstructed through a history of ideas the way Skorgen does. In addition to this, history attempts to trace the development of the ideas which culminated in the genocides during the Second World War. A vital trait in this understanding of races is the hierarchy of races. Firstly, for our part a mere history of ideas is not sufficient as this is linked to political and historical happenings in European and, in particular, in French history. The colonial history imbedded in French history developed another branch of raciological thinking which not merely took its foundation from an idea of races, but also from the intertwining of institutional and political problems in the aftermath of the French revolution. In the books *Vers un multiculturalisme français* (1996) and *Branchements* (2001) Amselle addresses modern raciological thinking, its relation to the constitution of anthropology and to the French revolution. Secondly, in this context it is not merely the hierarchical racism that is the problem, but also the opposition between what is pure and what is mixed. In other words, what kind of concept of difference does this opposition allow for? Amselle here draws up the historical lines of what he calls the French multiculturalism. Going back to the 18th century this period was permeated by the idea of society's "second birth". Arthur Joseph Gobineau (1816-1882) was one of the most important adherers to the idea of a *regeneration* of the French nation. However, the theories of regeneration drew on the ideas of the historian Comte Henri de Boulainvilliers (1658-1722), who claimed that the French nobility descended from a different, a German, race than the Gallo-roman peasants. Gobineau's claim was that the mixture of the German and the Gallo-roman races was to blame for the degenerated state of the nation (Skorgen 2002: 124-125). Now, not only was it vital to change the political institutions of society, it was also paramount to find the men that could live there. As the man living in *l'ancien régime*

with its feudal institutions had become a morally and physically degenerated kind of being, society had to be regenerated by finding a man not infected by the feudal institutions and its despotism.¹² Such men, untouched and pure, le bon sauvage, was to be found in the outskirts of the French soil and in different parts of the world. However, as these people did not know feudal law, neither did they know natural law. So primitive man, contrary to the man of *l'ancien regime*, had a potential but was not yet enlightened. In theory at least this goes against Gobineau who according to Skorgen had a “pessimistic view on the chance for the Europeans to civilize the lower races” (Ibid: 131). What is interesting in the French colonial context is that enlightenment and raciology actually go hand in hand. Gobineau on the other hand seems to have found adherers in German anti-semitism.¹³

Now, enlightenment as a mission became the legitimation of the colonial expeditions to Egypt, Algeria, and Senegal. But in order to find the non-corrupted people one needed to establish a knowledge of who were pure and who were mixed or impure. Amselle writes that:

The first colonial enterprise prior to the Enlightenment and the French revolution was the Egyptian expedition that constituted a true laboratory for the French expansion in the 19th century. It is exemplary in the sense that it rests on three contradictory logics which nevertheless were closely depending on each other: the regeneration, natural right, and the raciological and linguistic classifications. One can observe the presence of these logics throughout the French colonialisation (Amselle 1996: 55).

This is a quite significant quote for the problematic in this dissertation because it indicates the problems that the two main terms in the dissertation, *branchements* and translation, are dealing with. Whereas *branchements* is a way of escaping the hold

¹²Another French anthropologist, Bruno Latour, elaborates on this problem of regeneration in relation to physical health in 19th century France (Latour 2001).

¹³ Claude Levi-Strauss places Gobineau too in the problematic of the pure and the mixed. The problem was more the mixing of races rather than the superiority of one pure race over others (Levi Strauss 2003: 17).

that raciology still seems to have, translation is an alternative way of understanding language. In other words raciology and its certain logic of identity and difference on the one hand, and linguistic classifications on the other are central for how we think culture. In this dissertation it is first and foremost the connection between raciology and *branchements* that I have developed, whereas translation is thought more in the direction of an analogy to culture. I hope to return to the effect of linguistic classification and translation more thoroughly in a future work.

This entanglement of regeneration, natural right, raciology, and linguistic classification was the institutional, political, and ideological legitimation of raciology in the French context. Not initially a hierarchy of strength between the pure races (as is more the development of the Nazi ideology), but a hierarchy of the most original and pure people. The point is not to say that these two branches of racism are not related, but merely to underline that at least on the surface it was possible to argue that the source of man was not in the West. In other words, Napoleon thus found a quasi-rational reason for his expeditions to Egypt. Napoleon found the foundation in the thinking of Count Volney (1757-1820): “Bonaparte and his army rests on the knowledge accumulated by Volney during his voyage to the Orient in order to formulate their conquest and administrative project in Egypt” (Ibid: 60).

So, the problem is that people in l’Ancien règne were degenerated in a wide sense. An explanation was found in the mixing of races (which as we have seen was supported by among others Gobineau). The solution to this problem of degeneration was the regeneration founded in a new and pure man. But in order to find something pure one needs a principle or a discipline that can separate the pure from the impure or mixed. Raciology thus becomes a sort of supportive science that at the same time could establish a knowledge of races and a distinction between the pure from the impure or mixed.

An interesting and vital aspect of raciology is the affirmation of the pure and original which, following our working hypothesis, in its turn also affects our notion of culture. Amselle writes that:

Raciological thinking has this interesting point that it takes up related concepts such as race, nation or ethnicity and by closing them gives them an additional vigour which confer them the quality of substance. When these substances have been constituted is it necessary to unite them through two kinds of problems; on the one hand comparativism and the systems of oppositions on the other. (Amselle 2001: 91).

Both the system of opposition and the method of comparison produce the idea of a mutual heterogeneity from one racial or cultural unity to another. Or rather, it takes the difference as a point of departure and not as the result of an analysis. Thus comparativism assumes what it is meant to elaborate on. Amselle's point is, as I understand it, that this is a dehistorisation, a de-dialecticalisation of something historical and dialectical. However, this dialectic is a dialectic without the absorption of the Other into the Same. It is rather a dialectic without the assumption of an initial opposition and separation of the Other and the Same. So, there is no radical Otherness to this dialectics. On the other hand the movements of this dialectics, and communications, create variations where it becomes clear that there is no such thing as the Same.

A thinking akin to the logic of pure-mixed in raciology is what is called differentialism. A precursor to such thinking is Johann Gottlieb Fichte's nationalism. For Fichte human beings are social. Thus society, the state, and the nation represent stages in a development of the collective that constitutes human beings. For Fichte this took, in his late thinking, a truly nationalist turn. In the text *Reden an die Deutsche Nation*, Fichte claims that the Germans in order to become humans must seize their common spiritual origin which is still in the German language unspoiled by interaction with other languages. The German language is conserved identical to itself through time through being independent of other languages and does not have a dialectical relation with its speakers. As Gilbert Vincent writes: "There is no trace of dialectics between the spoken language and the language system... Nothing that resembles the dialectics of the rule and the use" (Vincent 2009: 60).

Besides the unacceptable idea of a division of all human beings into a hierarchy of races comes the idea of difference. The question is what kind of concept of difference supports our notion of culture. For it might be possible to be a proponent of a kind of apartheid, where for instance Muslims and Christians cannot live together, without claiming one culture to be superior to another in a hierarchy. The problem is, however, still the notion of cultural difference as framed within a language of purity. The African raciology was for instance in part promoted by Africans as a negation of a western raciology. The works of the American-Liberian politician and writer William Blyden is, according to Amselle, the first in the contemporary period to give a systematic foundation to raciology (Amselle 2001: 85). Blyden's thinking seeks an origin of the black people refusing the white and occidental view of the black man, but accepting the logic of racial origin. Blyden branches, Amselle writes, the black people on the Hebrew lineage.

In his work on the concept of culture anthropologist Adam Kuper writes that central to the modern idea of culture is that it is not derived from race and that it is learned, "not carried in our genes" (Kuper 1999: 227). Thus few claim any link between biology and culture anymore. We cannot understand a certain culture with reference to a certain biological nature to which culture corresponds. My point is that the link between culture and race should continue to be questioned. The danger, however, does not lie in a claim of correspondence between race and culture, but in the logics of language. If we are to establish another understanding and language of culture, we must question the language with which the prior understanding was shaped. And the traditional language of culture was immersed in the language of race. Kuper pinpoints this too:

Contemporary American anthropologists repudiate the popular ideas that differences are natural, and that cultural identity must be grounded in a primordial, biological identity, but a rhetoric that places great emphasis on difference and identity is not best placed to counter these views. On the contrary, the insistence that radical difference can be observed between peoples serves to sustain them (Ibid: 239).

A biological notion of human beings and the distinction between identity and difference are intertwined so that they constitute each other. Our task is thus to question both in order to understand the concept of culture. The hypothesis of the dissertation is that *branchements* and translation are concepts which allow us to question biology and a clear cut distinction between identity and difference as a point of departure for understanding culture.

The impact of and the problem with raciological and differentialist thinking must be underlined because they colour our understanding of difference. Difference in this sense is a substantialised and non-dialectical difference. This is not merely a theoretical point, but an idea that supports our imagination of whether cohabitation in a pluricultural society is possible or not. The democratic unity of a nation, polis, cannot be founded on the idea of cultural difference as given, pure, original, or non-historical, i.e. non-communicating. In this sense it does not help to add diversity to culture, since diversity is still within the logic of origin and abstraction. However, a concept of difference outside of the opposition pure/identical-mixed might help.

Another problem which makes the link between race and culture relevant in another way is the so called “new racism” which no longer emphasises biological traits but cultural. Michel Wieviorka refers to Martin Barker as the first to discern a new racism: “From now on the racist way of arguing is no longer mixed up with with hierarchy but with “difference”, no longer with natural attributes ascribed to a group which is racialised but with culture, language and religion” (Wieviorka 1998: 32). Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein were, with their book from 1988 *Race, nation, classe. Les identités ambiguës*, pioneers in the research on racism. Again it is not the hierarchical superiority of one group over another, but the insistence on an irreducible cultural difference that is an issue. Balibar writes that this is a racism that does not concern biological inheritance but the irreducibility of cultural differences by underlining the incompatibility of traditions and ways of life (Balibar 1997: 33).

Superiority and biology are no longer the arguments, but rather the incompatibility between cultures. According to this discourse, racism, in the form of

violence, is a phenomenon that emerges out of the *mélange* of cultures. This is consistent with, as Levi-Strauss points out, Gobineau's idea that the problem of the races arises when they are mixed in a wrong way. The discourse itself is not racist, but natural. Here the concept of races seems to have been altogether replaced by culture. So by ridding oneself of the concept of races it makes the argument cleaner so to speak. This makes it even more paramount to question the concept of culture. The problem is that this kind of racism nurtures itself on a certain kind of difference which in its turn is supported by a notion of heterogeneous origin. Origin is no longer one but plural, but it is still an origin. The concept of culture has inherited some of the ideas of classical racism, which it becomes vital to address.

3.6 Biology and anthropology

Even though cultural racism has replaced biological racism, the concept of culture in anthropology has nevertheless been forged within a biological or quasi-biological language. Levi-Strauss comments in his text *Race et l'histoire* that the original sin of anthropology was the confusion of a biological notion of race and the sociological and psychological products of the human cultures (Levi-Strauss 1996: 378). As seen above the classification of races based on morphological traits was an adaptation to a broader structuration of knowledge in natural history. The object of study thus became an object of nature. With the establishment of social and cultural anthropology, race was replaced by culture but the classificatory logic remained. The concept of cultural diversity, which still is to be found in documents from UNESCO, borrowed its language from the diversity in nature.

Today this classificatory understanding is partly abandoned in biology as it has become more difficult to defend a clear distinguishable identity. "Looking at recent works by biologists...these works leave aside morphological classification [and] biochemical classification, which characterize bacteria in terms of their capacity for decay or for generation" (Amselle 1998: xi). The rise of the field of immunology also

draws similar conclusions. But should a philosophical and anthropological understanding of man be based on biology at all, no matter how radical it is?

Instead of speaking about cultures within the logic of identity, many have abandoned this in favour of concepts with emphasis on a mix of identities or collapse of boundaries between them. Hybridity is one such notion which according to Thomas Hylland Eriksen is a: “synthesis of cultural forms or fragments of different origin. It stands in opposition to pluralism by emphasizing flux and mixing rather than demarcation” (Hylland Eriksen 2010: 197). One problem with this is that one is still within the logic of identity of the same which will be discussed in later chapters. Hybridity is still marked by origin. Another is the origin of the notion itself. The notion of the hybrid stems from pre-genetic biology. Amselle writes that: one cannot mix that which exists already (Amselle 1996: x). As far as I understand, the problem is that hybridity is a biological concept for the mixing of two animal or plant species. As seen above, and as Skorgen points out, racism was partly founded on a blurring of boundaries between race and species. There is no scientific foundation for speaking about different human races like there is different species in nature. There are no genetic differences that make it possible to speak about different human races. Thus the concept of hybridity, taken from the mixing of species, cannot be used to analyse different human beings as belonging to different races. Now, even though it is to a lesser degree acceptable to speak of biological races, the question is whether we nevertheless should continue to shape our imagination in a language of raciology. Amselle warns us against the relationship between the life-sciences and anthropology: “We must abandon the language of medicine and biology if we want to think mixing and go to literary or philosophical metaphors“(Ibid). The question is thus if it is fruitful or even dangerous to relate the development of anthropological language to biology, be it ideological or scientific, and whether an analogy between the domain of nature and the domain of human interaction should be avoided altogether. The language of hybridity does still constitute a notion of the origin and the original separation of human beings. Abandoning biology in favour of culture

does not make it any less actual. It is still a biological thinking applied to a non-biological domain which tends to continue to essentialise our thinking. Hybridisation or mixing of cultures, even though one might be positive to such phenomena, nevertheless supports a notion that cultures are separated.

Another notion that is evoked to comprehend culture, but which lays emphasis on its plurality, is diversity. Here the point is not that of mixing, but that the cultural diversity as a fact requires openness and respect. But here, as elsewhere, Amselle writes in *Branchements* that even though we add diversity to culture we do not escape the imagination of origin: “Thinking in terms of origin, whether it is one or multiple, has the effect that it essentialises the elements that it attempts to relativise or deconstruct” (Amselle 2001: 82).

However, we should here distinguish between diversity as norm and fact. This is perhaps also the problem with the term multicultural which at the same time describes a certain politics of a government and an empirical description of a society.

To summarise the aspects of race and culture, it seems that, when following Amselle’s account, the logic for understanding culture is the same as the one constructing and comparing races and that this way of reasoning goes deep into the western imagination: that of (diversity of) origin. Even the language that is meant to challenge the idea of purity and origin (hybridity) is caught in the same language that it tries to escape. Is it possible to reflect on and discuss culture in any other way, in a non-essentialist, purist way? If this is possible it seems that a change of language is necessary to substitute the language of biology with notions from other domains. But this will be discussed in the next part.

3.7 People, nation, and culture

A theme or concept that until now has only been touched upon, but which is central to how we understand culture, race, and identity in Europe, is the nation. As indicated in the previous chapter the nation is what can constitute a political discourse that joins the question of culture, of race, and of identity. As I will discuss in part two of this chapter, the link to identity is what constitutes and reproduces the view that

culture is closed. What holds culture and identity together, and constitutes the political discourse despite globalisation, is the nation. The nation is furthermore connected to other concepts such as spirit and people. And all seems to be historically linked to Herder's ideas.

Without taking a stand on the question of whether Johann G. Herder was a precursor to modern nationalism, one might say that Herder was important for the development of the concepts of nation and people. Herder's thinking takes its point of departure from his travels and experiences of different cultural customs on the one hand and from the critique of the French based Enlightenment thinking on the other. Even though he was an adherer to the Enlightenment he was critical to an enlightenment that saw tradition as something backwards and undermined the human diversity of cultural expression (Læg Reid and Skorgen 2006: 56). Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Finn Sivert Nielsen write in their book *History of anthropology* about the confused link between the politicised concept of people in the tradition from Herder and Fichte and the academic concept of culture: "Herder's concept of the Volk was refined and politicized by later philosophers, including Fichte...But the same concept also entered academia, where it reappeared...as the doctrine of cultural relativism"¹⁴ (Hylland Eriksen and Nielsen: 13). It seems like the politisation of culture and cultural relativism go hand in hand when it comes to constituting culture as a closed notion.

Opposing the Enlightenment Herder developed a thinking that put the individuality of cultures and nations at the centre. Torgeir Skorgen writes about Herder that "the development of the national collective subject is thought analogous to the development of the human individual" (Læg Reid and Skorgen 2006: 64). Herder uses, as the historian Reinhardt Koselleck writes, people and nation

¹⁴If we look at Fichte it is important to notice that his *Reden and die deutsche nation* seems directed at the German nation and not at a general conception of nation. Leaving that aside what he proposes is that the nation must cultivate itself and connect with its own source: the people. The people which is something first and original is an original people (Urvolk). There is in other words a continuity from the original people carried on through the generations to the present (Fichte in Koselleck 2004: 332).

interchangeably and as synonyms and thus lifts the word people up from its connotation to a social class.¹⁵ Culture in its turn is not only something that each people have but the essential property of the people or the nation. This version of the nation spread throughout Europe and is also found in the Norwegian context. A representative for such a view is the Norwegian linguistic and creator of the „New Norwegian“ language Ivar Aasen.¹⁶ The philosopher J. Peter Burgess writes in his book about Aasen that Aasen insists „that culture is not simply one „possession“ among others, but rather an essential possession, the fundamental property. It is what makes the people a people“(Burgess 2005: 51). I find this an interesting and highly relevant remark for a more general discussion of culture because it emphasises the link between nation, people, and culture. But what is more it stresses the Norwegian tradition for thinking nation and culture going back to Aasen. Aasen defends the view that the Norwegian people is a people. And in order to do this he has to prove that it has a culture, the hallmark of being a people. Burgess writes about Aasen that:

Aasen insists both on (1) the foreignness or exteriority of “culture” and (2) its complete interiority. The Norwegian people- supposing there is one- consists, like any other people, of the double movement of the internal and the outside (Ibid).

Why do I emphasise this? I think this is interesting from a general discussion of the nation and culture in Europe in general and Norway in particular. What is important to us is to see how different peoples and nations are thought of as distinguishable from each other and how this affects our understanding of culture. For if culture is related to people in this way it becomes something that has a clear cut inside and

¹⁵Reinhart Koselleck writes in his article “Volk, nation” that for Herder: „ „People“ signifies no longer a social group- or below the nation, but rather the nation itself; both concepts were used as synonyms“(Koselleck 2004: 318).

¹⁶Aasen claimed to have rediscovered the old but lost Norwegian language in the Norwegian dialects. Through the collection of dialects all over Norway in the mid 19th century, Aasen provided a New Norwegian grammar which in its turn was a proof of the Norwegian nations modern character. By acquiring a written language it could be included in the European modernity (Burgess 2005).

outside. Regardless of whether this is representative for other cultures it is part of the grid for understanding cultural diversity. My point throughout the dissertation is to critically examine our perception of culture. And what reproduces the view that culture is closed is, as mentioned, the link to identity.

But why is culture linked to a question of identity? And what does culture and identity have to do with the nation? It seems like the way culture and the nation become a question of identity is through the nation's connotation to individuality. The same way as a person has an identity, the nation receives an identity. Herder writes that nature has distinguished people from each other through language first and foremost and thus received its character (Herder in Koselleck 2004: 318). And character is in its turn a hallmark of an individual person. So what distinguishes the different nations from each other is their individuality. From the perspective of German 18th and 19th century thinking which includes concepts such as Spirit and People, nations receive hallmarks similar to that of an individual person. Here the reflections of Louis Dumont are interesting because they can explain the nation's closing of culture (as we saw with for instance Ivar Aasen) from the perspective of modern individualism. For Dumont, Herder and Fichte take individuality as a way of understanding that which is collective. The nation thus becomes a collective individual (*la nation comme individu collectif*) (Dumont 1983: 151). For Dumont this underlines the paradox that the nation is a version of a modern individualist ideology (where all nations, like persons, are equals) which in its turn reintroduces hierarchy (that some nations are greater than others). What is vital for our part is however that the nation as a collective takes the form of an individual. This individual on the other hand is hallmarked by being undividable and standing in an oppositional relation to other individuals.

Even though the link between identity and culture on a conceptual level does not come about until the mid-20th century with Erik Erikson- the concept of identity does not until then have such a widespread use- one could hold that identity is a concern in the different romantic movements. In order to articulate the problem of

identity of a nation where the central identity property is culture, as we saw with Ivar Aasen who develops ideas from the German tradition, the collective that one tries to define and defend takes on characteristics that are associated with an individual. In other words, when it comes to determining the identity of a nation or people it must have a distinguishable culture. And in order to be described as distinguishable one needs a criterion or image. This image was the individual person. As far as I can see it is when the nation and culture are linked to an individual that the nation can receive an identity.

4. Culture between identity and «identity»: a critical account

Introduction

In this chapter I will return to the question of identity. But whereas I in the second chapter locate and describe the link between identity and culture, and in the third chapter show how they are genealogically linked, I will here go into a more critical discussion of the term itself. Identity is present in the discussion of culture, both implicitly and explicitly. As already seen in the previous chapter, identity-thinking is implicit to the project of raciology and the nation without necessarily being articulated explicitly. Here I want to take on both the implicit and the explicit kind of identity and give a critical examination. Even though I will develop the critical aspect further in the next part of the dissertation, I will commence my critical approach to identity here.

Identity could be examined on at least three different levels that are all relevant to the notion of culture: Identity is a problem that concerns how to decide what something is: How should we classify something as part of a larger class of things? How do we know that different experiences of an object are of the same object and not of different objects? As an example of this I will show how the comparison of cultures- which was once part of ethnological and anthropological reasoning and now is reintroduced into political discourse as a way of discussing cultural diversity - draws on a certain identity-thinking which is unfortunate when it comes to understanding human beings. When it comes to persons it is not a question of what but of who: when it comes to persons one asks “who am I?” and “who are we?” The confusion between the question what and the question who is central to the critical reflection on identity and cultural identity. A second level is the notion or concept of “identity” itself. Why do we use “identity” when we want to understand culture? Does “identity” mean anything, does it describe something given? A third level is that of modernity and the historical development. A hallmark of modern society since

the collapse of the feudal order, its cosmology, and the establishment of industrial and urban society is that the identity of the individual and its place in the world, as well as the identity of society itself, have been problematic. But here we are at the core of the challenge with this notion: it is and has in itself been problematic from the start, or as Zygmunt Bauman writes: “since at no time did identity “become” a problem; it was a “problem” from its birth” (Bauman 1996). Now, even though all these aspects are different they are at the same time related. As I will try to show, the understanding of culture inherits the problems that hinges with the theme of identity. The critique of culture thus becomes a critique of identity.

4.1 “Identity”: some questions

What we have discussed so far is a link between culture, identity, and race as within a kind of entanglement. It seems as if a kind of non-articulated identity is at play in the conceptualisation of race and culture. And it is this implicit understanding of identity that I will question later with the aid of Heidegger and Ricoeur. However, this question concerns the more ontological problem of differentiation between things and persons, perhaps with an extension to collective entities like cultures and societies. We will return to these questions. But for now I will pause at the word “identity”. As we saw in chapter 2, “identity” is widely used, also in relation to culture. Some say that people need an identity and a sense of belonging which in their turn depend on the identity of the society or the culture (Andersen and Tybring-Gjedde 2010). In France there has been a debate going for years about national identity. But why is it that we articulate the problem of culture as a question of “identity”? Why do we use the word, term, or concept “identity” when it is difficult to determine what it is? Or, as Philip Gleason puts it:

Its very obviousness seems to defy elucidation: identity is what a thing is! How is one supposed to go beyond that in explaining it? But adding a modifier complicates matters, for how are we to understand identity in such expressions as "ethnic identity," "Jewish identity," or "American identity"? (Gleason 1983: 910).

As the historian Lutz Niethammer points out, “identity” is, despite its success, without content (Niethammer 2000). That does not, however, render it any less interesting. Identity is, according to him, a plastic word (Plastikworte) which has an extensive use comprising psychology and social entities: Everything and everyone must have an identity. Identity is also weak in content since it reduces all differences in something which is the same. This is clearly problematic when the various aspects of a person are overlooked and when only the aspects shared with other persons belonging to a certain group are emphasised. This is part of the problem of comparison that I will discuss at the end of this chapter. But the point is that this is a reductionist way of thinking and a paradox for those who want to understand difference: Difference is reduced to the same. Thirdly, it is positively connoted in the sense that it is something that defines persons and something we want more of. Niethammer writes that a crisis or loss of identity is by no means a stigma, on the contrary it gives an appetite for more identity: “The concept comes prior to the need it creates” (Niethammer 2000: 36). It is perhaps a paradox, but the lack, the search, and the crisis of identity are all meaningful ways to describe human existence: it is what gives life meaning.¹⁷

In a paper presented at *Société française de philosophie*, published with the title *Réflexions sur les questions d'identité* (2011), Vincent Descombes gives some interesting reflections on the theme of identity. “Identity” covers, Descombes here states, a double meaning which draws on two different logics. At the same time they are connected with the use of proper names: On the one hand we have the common way of thinking identity which we use to determine which object we are talking

¹⁷ There are, as far as I can see, a number of examples of this. One is the already mentioned discussion on national and cultural identity. This is the collective identity. Another example is the proliferation of TV-programmes focusing on the identity and origin of persons. “Who do you think you are?” is a television-show going in several countries where a famous person traces his or her genealogy by going back in his or her family history. Other examples are programmes where people, often adopted, search for their biological family. The answer often given to the question why these persons are participating in these shows is that “it is a question of knowing who you are.”

about. Are we talking about one and the same object, or two distinct objects? This is identity as identical (*identique*). On the other hand there is a new meaning, psychologically related, that is connoted to feelings. Identity is when someone says that: “to speak this language, to do this work, to declare this membership, this is part of my identity” (Descombes 2011: 6). This is identity as identifying (*identitaire*). Whereas being identical is a matter of yes and no, to identify oneself with this and that community or group is a matter of degree. Descombes’ question is whether we really know how to use this latter meaning of identity. Do we know what identity (as *identitaire*) means?

What is particularly interesting with Descombes’ reflections in relation to our own topic is his critical examination of plural identity or plural belonging. For if plurality or complexity is the most tenable way to render account of identity, how should we separate identity from its attributes? Keep in mind what minister Gahr Støre wrote in his article: “our belonging is complex. One type of identity does not exclude another...Our identity is complex” (Støre 2008). This is a mainstream statement; however, it is not clear to me what it means. If someone declares himself or herself white, Russian, homosexual, Christian, or a parent when can we elevate one of these attributes to the rank of identity of this subject? By speaking the way Støre does, we are, according to Descombes, led into a dilemma: If we say that one of these attributes constitutes identity, “we seem to be saying that the attribute defining the individual in question is sufficient for defining him” (Ibid:13). But such an implication is undesirable since the other properties or attributes are equally defining. If we, on the other hand, give a plural response, then we weaken the force that is attached to the word identity. He draws up the dilemma of attributes and identity:

If the multiple attributes of a thing are compatible with each other, one cannot present them as identities [then they are just attributes]; but if they all are going to have a value as identity (*une valeur identitaire*), they have to be mutually exclusive. In both cases, the idiom identity (*idiome identitaire*) seems to condemn us to either insignificance or incoherence (Descombes 2011: 29).

In other words, we have to choose one attribute as identity which does not account for plurality, or decide that all attributes should count as identities but then the very term “identity” loses its force (which in reality means that they remain attributes).¹⁸ Is this merely a theoretical point that Descombes is making? Even though his reasoning is technical and theoretically brilliant, I find it also highly relevant for practical questions: The question of how we are going to live together depends partly on the premises for this question. Whether we think of cultural identity as singular or whether we think of it as something plural we are led into this dilemma that Descombes has presented us with.¹⁹

Now, as we shall see in the second part of the dissertation, the question of identity is discussed by Paul Ricoeur in *Temps et récits* and *Soi-même comme un autre* on the one hand and by Jean-Loup Amselle on the other in ways that reflect some of the challenges given by Descombes. Amselle’s metaphor *branchements* and Ricoeur’s concept narrative identity are, as I see it, meant to question this logic of unity and diversity (plurality) that lies beneath this dilemma. For now I will go further into the idea of identity.

4.2 From personal to collective identity

Identity comes from the Latin “idem” and means the same. In the Oxford English dictionary it is defined as:

the sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality. Personal identity (in Psychology), the condition or fact of remaining the same person throughout the various phases of existence; continuity of the personality (Oxford English dictionary quoted in Gleason: 911).

¹⁸ I cannot go further into this here, but for solving this we need a principle for a composed identity (identité composée), Descombes writes. And this is partly to be found in the concepts of *will* and *decision*: “What the moral psychology of identities pinpoints (ce qui relève d’une psychologie morale des identités) is not as much identity as it is the will to have one in first person” (Ibid:29). The identity in question in the pronoun “we” rests on a will and a decision of a person to express a unity and that this unity includes other persons.

¹⁹ I do think it is possible to say both yes and no to the question of whether we can live together from both these “positions”. The point is rather to show the dilemma.

One of the founding texts on personal identity is found in John Locke's book *An essay concerning human understanding*. In the chapter "Of identity and diversity" Locke commences a reflection on how we ascribe identity to our ideas about substances. In addition to God we have ideas of two other substances: finite intelligences and bodies. Whereas the latter are simpler substances, the former are compounds. A plant is a compound substance where the identity of the plant, what makes it the same plant, is determined by "that continued organization, which is fit to convey that common life to all the parts so united" (Locke 1997: 298). So, all the parts of the plant are united through the *continued organization* and *common life*. This is the identity of the plant's substance.

But when it comes to human beings *and the identity of man* this is not the identity of a substance but of a person²⁰: "'Tis not therefore unity of substance that comprehends all sorts of identity...but to conceive, and judge of it aright, we must consider what idea the word it is applied to, stands for'" (Ibid. 299-300). Substance, man, and person are three different ideas to which correspond different ideas of identity. Rationality is not sufficient for being a man, otherwise a rational animal could be a man; he or she needs a human body. Concerning the person the soul cannot make the identity of a person. If this was so, how could we then say that people living in different times is not the same man, Locke asks. So, what is it that makes a person the same person? Whereas a man may modify his substance by losing a limb, the personal identity does not change over time. The personal identity is not dependent upon a substance but on consciousness. Personal identity is defined by Locke as "a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking" (Ibid: 302).

²⁰ Locke takes the concept of person from law referring to moral and legal responsibility: "It is a forensic term appropriating actions and their merit" (Locke 1997: 312).

Personal identity is by Locke distinguished from identical substance. Since we might lose memory or forget, “doubts are raised whether we are the same thinking thing”, but this does not concern personal identity at all (Ibid: 303). Personal identity concerns consciousness which is the relation to oneself. Even though consciousness of past actions is important it is not reducible to memory. Furthermore, for Locke memory is an active process playing a part in the person’s relation to him- or herself. The sameness of a person is dependent upon a kind of continuity through time, but this is the result of the person’s active relation to herself. Locke thus establishes personal identity as a relation of self to self where the primary event is that the person is no longer defined as a substance à la Descartes, but precisely as *relation*. By doing this he also empties or de-substantialises the interiority. In Locke the Self, or personal identity, is not defined by a particular content or quality. So, having the quote from Oxford English dictionary and Locke’s relational definition of personal identity in mind, it seems to me that the way sameness is described in the dictionary looks like a substance-definition and not a relational definition à la Locke. The reason for this is perhaps that persons and things are described in equivalent terms, and does thus not account for the active element in Locke’s definition of personal identity.

It is interesting to compare Locke’s account with David Hume’s account. In Hume’s *A treatise of Human Nature* the empirical approach is even more radical. Hume states in the chapter “Of personal identity” that the idea of self is not derived from any impressions and can thus not have an identity. But since he does not distinguish between personal identity and substance, like Locke does, he cannot give identity any other content than the “idea of an object, that remains invariable and uninterrupted thro’ a suppos’d variation of time” (Hume 2000: 165). His definition of personal identity is, accordingly, the continuation of an impression through the whole course of our lives (Ibid: 164). And since there are no such impressions, then there is no self or personal identity. Even though Locke would agree with Hume that the Self is not a substance, Locke does not define personal identity according to a definition of identity like the one given by Hume: “a distinct idea of an object, that remains

invariable and uninterrupted thro' a suppos'd variation of time" (Ibid: 165). Since Locke gives consciousness an active characteristic, he does not have to accept that the general definition of identity, given by Hume, is transposed to persons. Locke does not accept the idea of the person as something uninterrupted, but will still claim that there is something called personal identity. Hume, on the other hand, could answer to this that this activity of the person's relation to him or herself is nothing but the result of our passions and "the concern we take for ourselves" which might make us believe that there is something called personal identity. Anyway, what is interesting is to question identity, and the definition of identity as sameness, since it seems to continue to be part of how we think identity.

Now, to understand its modern significance we must make a jump to the 1950ies and the merging of social science and psychology. Identity in its extensive use, transported from logic to psychology and social sciences, owes much of its success to Erik Erikson. As Gleason shows, the breakthrough of Eriksonian psychology is what stands between the absence of the term identity in the dictionaries in the thirties and its extensive use from the sixties and onwards (Gleason 1983). In the 20th century and with the establishment of psychology, identity has become a scientific question. Identity and Self are notions that have been developed in a fusion of psychology and American social science with the likes of Erik Erikson and George Herbert Mead. Erikson developed the notion of identity in the direction of describing different stages and coined the transition between the stages as "identity crisis" in the development of a person's life: "An identity crisis is a climactic turning point in this process" (Gleason 1983: 914). For him identity was deeply seated in the individual, whereas the sociological use of the term saw identity as constituted by society and potentially shifting in accordance with society and social life. Gleason writes that:

Sociological traditions of usage in role theory, reference-group theory, and symbolic interactionism constituted important feeder streams supplementing the principal source of popularisation, Eriksonian psychology (Ibid: 918).

But it was a somewhat confused constitution and the term was bent in two different directions: those who saw identity as continuous and primordial (as Erikson himself did) on the one hand and those who saw it as discontinuous and a result of interaction with the surroundings on the other. What is particularly interesting for us is the link between Eriksonian psychology and the social scientist who saw ethnicity as something primordial. Here we touch upon a central point in understanding the link between culture and identity which underpins the politics of recognition that we touched upon in the previous chapter. Gleason confirms this:

The linkage [between Eriksonian psychology and primordialists] has important implications from the viewpoint of advocacy, for the intimate association thus established between personal identity and ethnic heritage makes plausible the argument that ethnic cultures require some sort of official recognition if the self-esteem of individuals is not to suffer damage. The respect for the dignity of the individual demanded by the democratic ideology is thereby extended to cover ethnic cultures that sustain the sense of personal self-worth (Ibid: 921).

This is very interesting considering Taylor's reasoning from the second chapter. Gleason's article is also written before some of the most important works on multiculturalism. But there is yet another stage in the development of identity in the social sciences which is relevant to our discussion and which merits attention: the connection between Erikson and the students of Franz Boas, Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict. Mead was central in the studies of the so-called "national character", and she and Erikson influenced each other when working with these questions.²¹ And it is in the reworking of his book *Childhood and Society* that Erikson uses (American) identity as an equivalent to (American) character.

It is this leap in the significance of the term identity which is interesting to us when we reconstruct the genealogy of culture. This takes identity from being limited

²¹ Gleason writes that "American-character studies dealt directly with the relationship of the individual and society and explored the problem of whether, to what extent, or how the individual's personality, character, or "identity" was shaped by the culture in which he or she was a participant" (Gleason:925).

to an individual to comprising communities. Hence a society can be analysed as an individual with an I-consciousness. It is the identity which gives a society its individuality. However, this second definition did not emerge until after the war when notions such as identity crisis and identity problems came into wider use. So it is not until the latest decades that it has been possible to use the concept identity of a collective. That being said, concepts related to personal or individual identity became key notions in the founding of sociology already at the turn of the 20th century. This brings us into the early French sociology of Émile Durkheim.

As we recall, Locke was one of the first to reflect critically on the notion of personal identity. He found that personal identity was not a substance but consciousness (which is reason, reflection, and self-consideration), and yet this was described as “the same thinking thing”. Now consciousness reemerged within the sociology of Émile Durkheim through *De la division du travail social* (2004) with the introduction of the notion *conscience collective*. There is not just one consciousness in us, Durkheim states, but two: there is one private which states are personal and one which states can be understood by others and which are common to the whole society. This latter consciousness is coined *collective* by Durkheim and is “the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average member of a society” (Durkheim 2004: 46), and this has taken on a life of its own. In other words, it is independent of the particular conditions that the individuals are situated in. Further, this collective consciousness represents a personality of a collective kind (type collective) (Ibid: 74). When one speaks about social identity it is not merely that there is something shared, the social, by individuals, but also that the social has a life of its own.

It is important to be precise and acknowledge that Durkheim does not speak about culture, but about society. And the main concern of the dissertation is to question the link between identity and culture, not society. However, I do not claim to give a full account of Durkheim’s thinking here, only to pinpoint the use of concepts. What is central and what I find interesting is the transportation from the language used in the reflections on individual identity to reflections on collective entities. Is it

possible to describe a collective in an analogous way to an individual person? And secondly, if- following the tradition of Locke-(personal) identity is “the same thinking thing”, should sameness then also be a characteristic of collective identities as well? It seems to me that the definition of identity as sameness does not take into account the dialectical aspect of identity. And since identity is linked to culture in the political discourse it seems difficult to shake the idea that cultures are static and the same throughout time, but more on this later.

The idea that communities, like societies, have an identity seems widespread. Following the definition from the Norwegian language council, identity is the sum of elements which constitute individuality, and individuality is something that both individuals and societies have.²² This brings in another element that complicates the matter further: when we talk about the identity of a nation, culture, or community we describe the individuality of this entity. Does this mean that what justifies the use of the notion “identity” on collective entities is that such entities are already thought of as having “individuality”? I do not wish to complicate matters further by also discussing individuality. However, this concerns both questions posed in the last paragraph: is it possible to describe communities as analogous to individual persons? And, does the link to individuality (as that which cannot be divided in time or space) ensure the view of identity as the same? As Louis Dumont points out, it is a paradox that the unity of individuals, a collective, can be presented in the same way as an individual. What we need to ask is what we mean when we say that Norwegian culture has an identity. Do we mean this in a descriptive and abstract way with reference to values and customs comparable to other countries and cultures, do we mean analogous to a person, as with Locke, where the cultural identity of Norway thinks or is self-conscious?

²² Identity is: “the sum of elements that give an individual, a society etc. individuality; i.e. I-consciousness” (the Norwegian language council)

To sum up the reflections on identity: we see from all this that if the way we think culture stems from its link to identity, and as we have seen, the theme of identity has a number of difficulties of its own, it is necessary to also present a critique of the concept of identity. But before I go there I will return to a theme touched upon in chapter two concerning comparison and abstraction in the constitution of identity.

4.3 Comparison and the abstraction of identities

I will here open up a reflection in the continuation from the theme of identity which brings the epistemological reflections further and which prepares the discussion in the forthcoming chapters: a reflection on comparison. Or, might I add, a certain notion of comparison as there seems to be more than one way of seeing this (Detienne 2009). But for now I will leave this unproblematised. Both the philosopher Paul Ricoeur and the social anthropologist Jean-Loup Amselle draw much the same conclusions with regard to the problem of understanding identity in philosophy and anthropology: A certain kind of identity is given through the intellectual and scientific operation of comparison. Comparison is an intellectual operation that produces or reproduces a notion that identities are separated, but at the same time graspable in such a manner that they can be seen together, either as same or as different. Could this method of comparison, as a technique for producing knowledge, at the same time be regarded as an epistemological obstacle and hindrance to develop the understandings of identity?

Locke links identity and comparison by stating that the ideas of identity and diversity are formed “when we consider anything as existing at any determined time and place, we compare it with itself existing at another time” (Locke 1997: 296). A similar logic follows the comparison in other fields and domains. The operation of comparativism as a designation of groups of people has roots that take us deeper than anthropology. For instance, in *The Politics* Aristotle uses the notion *ethnos* to designate the peoples who were not organised in villages in contrast to the

organisation of the Greek city-state *polis*.²³ In the early modern period comparativism was used from the point of view of the enlightened to compare the level of progress of all historical peoples in order to discover the route of political improvement. The reaction to this reductionism which was developed in the name of the Enlightenment's universalism was found in German romantic philosophy which claimed respect for the diversity of the historical and cultural expressions of human beings. Herder, for instance, reacted to how Kant "measured" the degree of enlightenment of different historical peoples by looking at what kind of political constitution each people had. Comparison was hence the measurement of level of enlightenment. Herder denounces, as Alain Renaut writes, comparativism in the name of a respect for the diversity of historical-cultural expressions of humanity (Renaut 2000: 12-13). Herder thus becomes one of the first cultural relativists to propose that every historical period and culture express humanity in their own manner. What is interesting, however, is that this diversity that Herder speaks of does not escape the universal comparativism he wants to get rid of.

Entering the history of ethnology and social-anthropology, comparativism is an important method or notion. Edmund Leach's article in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* states that cross-cultural comparison is an essential element in "inductive reconstruction of long term cultural history and the development of general propositions about culturally regulated human behavior" (Crowell Collier and MacMillan, 1968). Historically the comparative method in the social sciences was undertaken in order to produce knowledge of general laws that regulated human conduct regardless of cultural variation. Sociology and anthropology thus tried to unite mankind. Behind the series of chaotic cultural variation, one assumed there to be rules that could be exposed through comparing societies. For instance, when Emile Durkheim compares the catholic, protestant, and Jewish societies with respect to suicide-rate, it is not the suicide itself, nor, perhaps,

²³See (Amselle 2009:17).

the different societies that interest him. It is rather the discovery of a law of *collective force* that the different communities have in common. Durkheim writes that:

The conclusion from all these facts is that the social suicide-rate can be explained only sociologically. At any given moment the moral constitution of society establishes the contingent of voluntary deaths. There is, therefore, for each people a collective force of a definite amount of energy, impelling men to self-destruction. The victim's acts which at first seem to express only his personal temperament are really the supplement and prolongation of a social condition which they express externally" (Durkheim 1951: 299).

This is the explicitly universal tendency in anthropology. Underneath all apparent differences there is universality in the foundation. Comparativism in this way produced knowledge of the universal. Each singular case has thus an interest as long as it unveils broader and more universal traits of human existence. To compare in this sense is to reduce the singularity of a particular culture or extract certain features vital to the finding of universal laws.

On the other hand comparativism produced knowledge of contrasts between societies that rather showed a variety of what the human spirit could do. Or differently put, comparativism produced knowledge of difference. This leads in its extreme to non- reducibility in that the recognition of differences renders the universal reduction and finding of universal laws impossible. As we saw with Herder, the idea is here that the different peoples and cultures are heterogeneous in relation to each other and must be studied separately, on their own premises, and not on the premises of a universal reason. Respect for difference and the renouncing of universal truth and reason necessitate a primordial separation of the different ethnic identities or cultural diversity.

Social-anthropology has had a tendency to fluctuate between these two strands- universalism/unity vs. culturalism/relativism/diversity- and both may be found in the works of a singular writer. According to Jean-Loup Amselle, both these tendencies can be seen in the writings of Claude Levi-Strauss. On the one hand there

is a culturalist Levi-Strauss represented in *Race et histoire*. Even though Levi-Strauss here underlines the fact that almost no culture is isolated, his focus on the dangers of ethnocentrism takes him in the direction of a non-universalist attitude. The alternative to a racist attitude, according to Levi-Strauss, is not to ascribe to all humans an abstract equality. This would, according to him, be something deceptive for the spirit since it would ignore the diversity given in observation (Ibid: 385). On the other hand there is a structuralist Levi-Strauss that, despite observable differences, focuses on discerning a formal social organisation shared by all humans that is understandable from a notion of the brain as binary structure. Levi-Strauss' comparison of different alliance systems leads to a conclusion that gains status as a universal insight.

These two tendencies are linked to an inductive and a deductive method (Amselle 1996). The *inductive method* consists in gathering information of customs. The anthropologist has an inductive or empirical approach, founding her knowledge on experience alone without reducing and reconstructing complexity. Each custom receives hence its own value and remains non-reducible to a universal principle. The *deductive method*, however, consists in the reduction of reality to simple elements and then a reconstruction of the material through synthesis. This is the approach which the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss undertakes in order to understand kinship and alliance systems. Observable surface variations between societies are regulated by deeper universal structures such as kinship.

And in this fluctuation lies the problem of understanding cultural identity. *If we want to investigate the possibility of escaping a clear cut distinction between understanding cultural identity as either subsumable under deeper universal traits or as something really heterogeneous and different, we must understand what principle constitutes this distinction. Comparison may be a part of the problem here.* The enterprise of discovering universal laws may be more or less abandoned by social science today, but a comparison in order to find similarities and differences is alive and well when we speak of cultural diversities. Another thing is that cultural relativism or an insistence on the heterogeneity of cultures is also a current tendency.

In order to say that two things are subsumable under the same principle (universal humanity) or different (the different and heterogeneous expressions of humanity) have we not treated them as equals, and secondly as always already separated?

Now, this draws as far as I can see on a principle of identity which is linked to abstraction. As long as we compare in this manner, the entities that we compare must be ordered in such a way that the entities are either the same or different. But the question is when this becomes a principle or a way of thinking through which we understand the relation between human beings in a society. If the question is how we should understand culture and how we are going to live together, then I would express this philosophically as an *epistemological obstacle*. Because, if people are perceived first and foremost through their cultural identity and this appears to us through this kind of comparison, then we cannot form relations with each other. But what is an epistemological obstacle?

4.4 Comparison as epistemological obstacle?

It is Gaston Bachelard who introduces the notion of obstacle épistemologique in *La formation de l'esprit scientifique* (Bachelard 2004). An epistemological obstacle is a hindrance that makes it impossible for the scientific spirit to develop further, to produce further solutions and to contemplate new problems. Such an obstacle may emerge as a result of, I think, two elements. First of all there is an obstacle in the experience itself. We do not know what we see. In order to understand we must make theories of what we see in order to overcome this obstacle. However, in a second stage these theories, supposed to be solutions, might become hindrances for understanding the phenomena we want to understand or for developing new ideas and theories. So in order to develop a scientific understanding, one must overcome the first theories. This is where an epistemological break or rupture might take place. If we manage to overcome the obstacle in the old theory, then new objects, theories, and

even sciences might emerge that would be incomprehensible within the framework of the old theory.²⁴

Further, this *obstacle épistémologique* is what the philosopher, according to Bachelard, should make science aware of. That does not mean that philosophy knows what good science is, but neither does the scientist. Since the scientist's self-understanding is informed by a certain silent philosophy, we cannot trust philosophy or science in the attempt to understand scientific activity. But it has a role in, so to speak, psychoanalysing the sciences for the blockings that exist inside it. *Epistemology or philosophy hence has the role, according to Bachelard, of purging or making science aware of its own obstacles and prejudices which keep it from developing.* So, in Bachelard's thinking there is still an element of scientific realism. Science achieves truths in the end. The study of the history of science is, according to Bachelard, the study of how the sciences rid themselves of these blockings historically. By learning from history we can get a better understanding of contemporary science.

Returning to the initial problem, how then is this relevant for understanding cultural identity? As Bachelard gives the philosopher the task of reflecting on what hinders a science from developing further, or an idea to become a science, the same could be said in relation to other domains or themes. This is, I think, what Paul Ricoeur does in his book *Oneself as another (Soi-même comme un autre)* concerning the function of comparison in philosophy's ability to reflect on identity. Here Ricoeur tries to displace the understanding of identity from an identity understood as *idem* or the same to an identity understood as *ipse*. We will not touch upon this distinction here, but only note that a certain understanding of identity is connected to a certain

²⁴ As an example Pasteur launched theories on microorganisms as cause of putrefaction and contagious diseases. But in order to do this he had to overcome the obstacles in the medical philosophy of Claude Bernard. For Bernard a disease had to be understood as a lack or as an excess, and thus rendered any notion of disease as caused by organisms external to the body impossible (Canguilhem 2000).

kind of operation. The cause for understanding identity as idem is in the act of comparison:

As long as one remains within the circle of sameness-identity, the otherness of the other than self offers nothing original : as has been noted in passing, “ other“ appears in the list of antonyms of “same” alongside “contrary”, ”distinct”, ”diverse”, and so on. It is quite different when one pairs together otherness and selfhood. A kind of otherness that is not (or not merely) the result of comparison is suggested by our title, otherness of a kind that can be constitutive of self-hood as such (Ricoeur 1992: 3).

Comparison is thus what makes the difference, according to Ricoeur, between an identity where other, contrary, distinct, diverse *do not* offer something original, and an identity where they *do*. In bachelardian terms comparison is thus an obstacle that hinders us from seeing or which leaves anomalies in the empirical field. As we saw in the second chapter this was part of Wieviorka's critique: that philosophers fix identities. And he proposed hybridity as an alternative way of understanding identities in order to escape this opposition between identity and difference. But as I will try to show, with Amselle, this does not avoid the obstacle after all.

If we turn to the social sciences and social-anthropology, the same picture is discerned. Jean-Loup Amselle underlines the problem of comparativism as methodological point of departure in anthropology when he states that *comparativism assumes diversity, and thereby guarantees that diversity will be found* (Amselle 1998: x). Even though Amselle here speaks of diversity he makes the same point as Ricoeur. Comparativism guarantees a diversity that is nothing but a series of static and closed identities. As long as comparativism is not removed or at least problematised, the development of concepts, frameworks for understanding, is difficult.

Jean-Loup Amselle on the other hand reflects on the notion of comparativism from the point of view of difference in his book *Logiques métisses*. For what about a comparative approach that does not focus on equality, but rather search differences?

Amselle investigates the notion of identity as an anthropologist, but at the same time remains critical to the philosophy or epistemology operative in anthropology. In bachelardian terms he tries to clean himself from the philosophy that informs the anthropologist. Amselle writes that:

It is thus not the notion of society that founds comparativism but the reverse: because I need to draw up classifications and typologies, I must have elements to classify, and if I can legitimately extract them from their context, it is because I have denied beforehand that these elements are political units situated in a sociocultural continuum (Amselle 1998: 10).

It is pretty clear that Amselle regards this as a prejudice describing it as something that is *denied beforehand*. Compared with the quote from Ricoeur that described the character of otherness in ipse-identity as “a kind of otherness that is not (or not merely) the result of comparison”, Amselle also emphasises the constitutive role of comparison. A certain way of thinking collective and/or individual identity is *founded* or *resulting* from comparison. At the same time as comparison gives insight by taking the empirical into account, it must be seen as a technique or as something that produces a certain kind of empirical data. What is the result of this?

First of all a certain knowledge is produced. Entities that were separated could be classified like species were classified in other sciences. Anthropology could then follow the *Linnaean* epistemology in the life sciences that claimed and claims that nature is dividable into a series of distinct species.²⁵ One consequence was that anthropology could gain status as science and be accepted.

Amselle's problem is relevant to a political philosophy that will try to get out of fixing identities. Given that ethnology and social-anthropology are supplying us with knowledge of human beings and that comparison and typologies of different kinds of human beings have been the sources of this knowledge, this is what had to or

²⁵The impact of the tableau as the organising principle for the “collection de papillon” was much due to the work of Swedish 17-century scientist Carl von Linnée.

have to be removed. By postulating that all peoples always already are separated, it is difficult to practically and theoretically grasp that which is between two or several identities or the process where these identities are constituted. *The obstacle is thus here that comparativism either exaggerates difference into a differentialism, or reduces variation to the same.* However, as I see it, the relational is primordial to identity.

4.5 Obstacle removed: from compared to non-compared identity

Now, what is the relation between philosophy and anthropology, or perhaps, what can they learn from each other? One relation between a philosophy of cultural identity and social-anthropology consists in taking historical/contemporary theory and empirical examples into account and at the same time develop new understandings. As Bachelard shows us, philosophy has no privileged point of view from where it can criticise. I think it is the same in relation to social-anthropology. It is not easy to say where anthropology begins and philosophy ends, but philosophy has a potential in its tradition for reflecting on concepts that might be fruitful here. At the same time a philosophy of cultural identity cannot do without anthropology. There is thus a mutual process of theory and practice where the one cannot do without the other.

What happens if the obstacle of comparison is removed? In anthropology some new phenomena are spotted or cease to be anomalies. At the same time this allows for new reflections on old phenomena and new phenomena. But it also renders it possible to develop new theoretical frameworks that do not necessarily fit with a specific material. There is still room for generality in philosophy. We will just indicate some directions here. Concerning identity both Ricoeur and Amselle have interesting alternatives to compared identity, but they nevertheless keep the notion of identity. Ricoeur proposes to substitute the compared identity, or identity as *idem*, with the

notions of ipsé identity and narrative identity.²⁶ Amselle proposes the metaphor *branchements* as a new understanding of cultural identity and genesis. These matters will be scrutinised later. The point is that the procedure of comparison in anthropology, regardless of whether it takes a universalistic or particularistic direction, abstracts the cultures from their concrete historical processes. This amounts to not only a stage in the history of social-anthropology but reveals, as Ricoeur shows, an understanding of identity as the same (*idem, mêmété*). But could it be otherwise? Without postulating the answer or an alternative to an abstract understanding of cultural identity, Ricoeur and Amselle give us some tools for a more “concrete” understanding.

4.6 A critique of identity

If it is true as Louis Dumont says, drawing on the ideas of Herder and others, that cultures are like persons and individuals- and that persons and individuals in their turn are linked to identity, it becomes vital to look critically into the notion of personal identity. And in order to understand Ricoeur's elaboration on the question of identity in the next part it is vital to look into the thinkers that initially opened up the reflection in the first place. More precisely I want to look at the thinker that broke with “sameness” as a criterion for thinking identity. Locke’s definition of identity is for instance sameness, whereas in the thinking of Martin Heidegger there is another way of critically analysing identity. Briefly, a vital mistake made in western philosophy is, according to Heidegger, that the questioning itself has a generalised character that imports prejudices towards the phenomena under scrutiny. One primary prejudice is that all phenomena can be questioned in the same way without taking into consideration that we are investigating totally different domains. This is evident when we for instance ask *what a human being is*. The questioning implicates an

²⁶Once again we see that what is new and innovative in philosophy does not come from philosophy, but from outside it. Ricoeur’s reflections are certainly involved in traditional philosophy, but nurtures particularly on historiography and psychology.

investigation that treats man like a thing, like any other thing or object. Heidegger goes on to displace the questioning of man from what to whom. Instead of *what is a human being?* one must ask *who is the human being?* Heidegger sees, among other things, Being as characterised by being *Selbst* (soi-même, one self). This is of course rather complicated and the subject for Heidegger's work in *Sein und Zeit*. We will not go into that work here but look at a seminar held by Heidegger in 1934, *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache*.²⁷ Here Heidegger also treats the question “who is the people?”

If we leave the question of whether it is possible to speak of collective entities in the same way that we talk about persons aside, we can read that one of the reasons the question of a collective self (*Selbst*), like the people, cannot be asked in terms of what, but as who, is that it involves a decision. Who, as opposed to what, is hallmarked by a kind of initial emptiness which receives its content following an action. And prior to this action is the decision. This is of course a complicated matter as there are more than decisions that those which constitute our actions. The question “who are the people?” leads to the question of what is a decision. Heidegger then exemplifies a decision by looking at the conditions for the choice of a winner in a competition. If two competitors are equal one can throw dice in order to decide who is going to win, but this is not a decision. Here one only gets elimination. But if the score is equal and the referee decides, there is a decision. Heidegger explains the reason why this is so as because the elimination can only take place as long as the referee decides (Heidegger 2008: 89). This is thus the explication of *Selbst* (one-self): It is *in this decision* the referee becomes himself. Before this decision the referee is not him-self, but becomes himself after or in the decision. It is only in this moment when he decides by turning away from all his inclinations and affective dispositions that we can speak of an authentic decision. In any other case where other

²⁷Again, these reflections have had much help from following Vincent Descombes' seminar *Idéité collective*, spring 2009 at École des hautes études en science sociale, Paris.

factors have played in, he has not decided anything, only eliminated. Now, Heidegger's authentic *Selbst* is pure decision and a state we are not in most of the time. Secondly and most important, this understanding of identity as *Selbst* is a *Selbst* without content.

If we ask the question: what is it to be Norwegian? Or what are Norwegian values? the answer is often a mixture of democratic and constitutional principles on the one hand, and hallmarks of specific regional behaviours and practices on the other. Love of nature and activities and skills developed through the encounter with this nature are numbered as elements of what is a Norwegian value alongside social and gendered egalitarianism, freedom of speech (which has caused a lot of debate). So if we should answer the question of what constitutes Norwegian identity, or less theoretically, what it means to be Norwegian, these points would often be mentioned.

Now Ricoeur localises a deficit in Heidegger's questioning, and this opens up for his own reflection on narration. These are the main themes in *Temps et récit I-III* and in *Soi-même comme un autre*. But they are also inspired by the works of Hanna Arendt. What is interesting with both Ricoeur and Arendt is that they both emphasise two aspects of *who* that is left unproblematic in Heidegger's analysis.²⁸ The question of who takes us to narration and Ricoeur. Ricoeur builds on Hanna Arendt's reflections in the *Human Condition* when he claims that it is the function of narration to determine the question "who has acted?" (Ricoeur 1990: 76). Without narration there is no who. In order to determine the identity of who performed an act it is necessary to tell the story of this individual. In other words, the answer to the question who is a unity that does not exist without permanence in time. This permanence is secured through narration.

²⁸ First of all, there is no who without an action. Whereas Heidegger wants to investigate Being in a radical manner and criticises the questioning for treating it as a thing, Ricoeur wants to investigate what triggers us to ask the question *who?* in the first place. He states this already in *Histoire et Vérité* being is the act which precedes and constitutes the very possibility of questioning in the first place (Ricoeur 2001: 58). First of all we notice with interest that Ricoeur claims Being to be an act, and not something that exists prior to acts. Secondly, in Heidegger the reason for which we investigate Being is not asked. Ricoeur, however, finds this a vital question. We do not ask the question *who?* without something prior which makes it a necessary question to ask? Prior to the question who there is an act.

We have localised a problem in the Heideggerian analysis of who. Even though Heidegger's genius lies in discovering the tendency in the questioning itself, his critique of the question *what?* and the displacement towards the question *who?* are still within being and do not comprise action. The first problem with the question *who are you?* is that we have already made an identification (are).

Another problem is that Heidegger does not give a content to the question *who?* Given Heidegger's emphasis on authenticity it is impossible to give a content to the question *who?* Because if the question *who* was reducible to some properties (like Norwegian, black, gardener) it would turn the question into a question of *what*, which is to deprive the essential hallmark of *who*: the decision. Thus we could say that Heidegger's notion of the Self is the dissolving of identity as such. So if we should transport these reflections to understand a cultural unity such as Norwegian culture, Norway not as being but as narrative, what would that mean? If we look at what Ricoeur says about identity in *Temps et récit III*, he states that the identity of an individual or a society is to answer the question *who* and that this answer cannot be but narrative (Ricoeur 1985: 242). Now could we use these general reflections on a concrete community like the Norwegian community? The Norwegian culture or community should neither be scrutinised through the question *what the Norwegian is* since this renders the entity Norwegian a thing where we are left with a clear identification and that action is not taken into account. Could we understand *who* without taking action as primary? How can we not end up with either an essentialisation of *who* that Heidegger has taught us to question, or an understanding without content, which seems to be Heidegger's answer?

What is it according to Ricoeur that could justify that we are taking Norway, as designated by that name, as the same throughout history? This is not due to some telos immanent in Norwegian history from the old Vikings to today; history could have turned out quite differently. But at the same time there is some continuity. The answer is narration. To answer the question *who?* is to tell a story. It is not until we

tell the story of the Norwegians, and of Norway, that we know who they are. Outside of a these narrations there is no Norway, no Norwegians.

The process of narration in both an individual and a collective sense is, however, a complex one and consists of several constitutive steps. In the sphere of individual subjectivity Ricoeur writes that a subject recognises herself in the history she tells about herself to herself (Ibid: 445). The same goes for collective identity as the relation between all these elements are circular. If we take the Norwegian community we could say that its identity is derived from the reception of the texts that it has produced. Throughout history a number of texts have been written that in themselves are singular and do not have anything in common. In addition there are of course events, actions, and geographical topography that have a role to play.²⁹ But the essential point here is that all these elements do not have any initial connectivity in the sense that they constitute a unity.

If the Norwegian identity is a narrative identity, and receives its identity *at the same moment as* its identity-constituting stories are being told, and this narrative identity might include change and mutability, then this means that this narrative identity never finds its finished form and that new changes, immutabilities, and stories might be incorporated into it. In other words, we are again faced with Heidegger's challenge of the emptiness of the Self. We stand as far as I can see before a decision, an eternal return perhaps, of who we are. The Norwegian identity is not a question of what, but a question of who we are. This might of course evoke reactive forces which cling to a mythological cultural origin. But it is this "imagined sameness" that can be challenged with the thinking of Heidegger and Ricoeur.

It seems like personal and collective identity- in opposition to the identity of things-is related to the question of *who* which is something else than *what*. So the question is not to which culture we belong, but who are we who belong to a culture.

²⁹We notice perhaps a limitation in Ricoeur's reflections from the fact that he stands in a protestant interpretation of logos as *word* and not for instance the catholic interpretation which is *verb* and hence action.

It is the collective identity which is at stake in the question of culture. It is not *what* is a culture, but *who* are we who claim to belong to a culture, which is the core question. What do we say and do when we say we? Regarding the question whether a culture exists or not, it is a question of what kind of pronoun one uses. Norwegian culture exists as a narrative identity, that is as someone who is asking *who am I?* and creates a unity of the practices, symbolic structures, experiences. But this entails that the who can never turn into a what or a thing which some attempt to do. And what does this really say about identity?

In both Amselle and Ricoeur's notion of identity the question who is vital, however not in as radical a manner as with Heidegger. Whereas Heideggerian authenticity becomes an empty being, Ricoeur opens up for a complex genesis of the Self constituted through the commencement of actions, the repetition of actions, the reiteration of symbolic orders etc. . However, Heidegger's distinction of who and what is precisely what is at stake when we speak about identity. So whereas Ricoeur fluctuates between a philosophical (where the self has no content, which itself cannot be established empirically) and an empirical approach (which can establish the relation between man and texts, facts about behaviour of the body, collective practices mediated through signs, symbols etc., but which cannot grasp the philosophical core of human existence), Heidegger is more of the "pure" philosopher.

4.7 From the politics of cultural identity to the epistemology of cultural identity

Before entering the next stage and part two of the dissertation we must make one more preparatory step. I located the link between culture and identity as part of a political discourse in the first chapter and found this link to be odd since culture and identity do not seem to have a historically strong link. Identity is a term that has relatively recent entered the political scene and the social sciences. As I have discussed in this second chapter my point has been to show that culture is constituted by identity in at least two respects. On the one hand culture is explicitly linked to the term identity and on the other to an implicit understanding of identity. The former is

exemplified in the political discourse where the two are often mentioned together in a pair. The latter is implicit in raciological thinking, in the heideggerian critique of the ordinary approach to being, and in the comparativism discussed at the end. I have here focused, and will continue to do so throughout the dissertation, on this second aspect of identity.

Identity is what reproduces the view of culture as something static and closed, or is it? What I want to do in the second part of the dissertation is to develop two arguments that question the oppositional logic of culture. But in order to do this we need analytical tools to do it with. These two arguments consist in developing these tools theoretically. Even though I have already commenced my critical take on identity as a way of understanding culture, I want to dwell in the next chapter on how I want to undertake this critique.

It has been attempted to trace a tendency- in the etymology, in philosophy, and within social anthropology- to understand culture as abstract.³⁰ The various attempts at displacing an ethnocentric concept of culture (culture as opposed to those assumed to live in the state of nature) by diversifying culture into cultures only leads to the strengthening of the impasse. Cultural relativism with reference to cultural diversity is vital in order to question ethnocentrism and racism.

When it comes to the often accompanying notion identity, its use strengthens this understanding of culture. Not necessarily due to the word itself, but by a particular conception of it. As it is presented by Heidegger the identity of a self, be it individual or collective, cannot be scrutinised in the same way as the identity of a thing. This thing does not act or decide. However, it is precisely what has happened in the history of social anthropology and which continues to be the manner in which we understand other cultures in the political discourse. The representation of culture as the third person's perspective is what renders the perspective abstract and turns it into a what. But the question of cultural identity is not of what, but of who. And by

³⁰Clearly I do not claim to give an exhaustive account of culture etymologically or historically.

asking the question who, a historical or temporal element can be introduced. Amselle, with the aid of Paul Ricoeur, continues in this line and develops an understanding of culture which takes it back to its genesis and gives a place to its history. This gives quite another take on identity.

At some point in the history of anthropology the concept of culture made, what Levi-Strauss calls the original sin of anthropology, a kind of alliance with the notion of race. This evokes something deep in the western imagination, that of the origin of man. The diversity of human expression did not lead to a questioning of this origin but rather to a multiplying of it in diversity. Continuity of this origin through time was secured by avoiding the mix of these different races, an argument that has returned in the shape of culture.

Now, the point with seeing culture, identity, and biology (or rather the quasi-biology of raciology) together is that they together constitute a tangle I wish to undo. Culture is constituted in this mix of logic of identity, colonial and political history, ideology of race and the myth of the origin. The notion of culture borrows ideas from raciology of the difference and original separation of the peoples of the world. At the same time the notion of identity seems to be involved in a kind of double constitution where identity constitutes the logic of raciology and is constituted by the myth of origin.

Now, in order to escape culture as identity, alternative concepts have been presented. We have here touched upon two of them, hybridity and diversity. And the hope is that this should take us out of essentialist thinking whether it be the identity of a person or a community. We live in a culturally diverse society where people have hybrid identities. The point is that they are caught within the logic of identity. And, furthermore, hybridity and diversity are concepts taken from biology and the realm of nature, which makes this a conceptual impasse. Hybridity and diversity are both linked to identity as pure origin and static identity. However, these will be looked at in later chapters.



5. Epistemology as approach, structure, and theory

Introduction

In the previous chapters I have tried to describe how culture is paired with identity in the political discourse and that this link is pivotal for reproducing a view of culture as static and closed. Furthermore, by looking at both culture and identity we see that there are some problems linked to both terms as well as to how and why they are joined. As indicated in the introduction and in the last chapter, this could be described as an epistemological obstacle. An obstacle to what? An obstacle to understanding human beings and the consequences this has for both social science and society. The aim in the dissertation is thus to overcome these obstacles. Even though few hold that cultures are static and closed, this view nevertheless seems to be repeated. To me this not only shows that it remains important to reflect on these problems, but more specifically that the conditions through which we reflect on these problems should be examined. Hence an epistemological perspective. What conditions do I refer to? The problems and the attempts to overcome these obstacles are here as elsewhere articulated in and through language. The obstacles are located in language, and the overcoming of these obstacles must be expressed in language. And it is this language that I see as the role of epistemology to examine. The overall thesis is that *branchements* and translation are two notions that help us to develop a thinking that does not take pure origin and closure as premises. This requires, however, that we see them in relation to what language we normally use to discuss culture. The aim in the first chapters has thus been to reconstruct the framework within which we normally think. A historical reconstruction teaches us not to repeat the same mistakes as well as shows us that what we take to be natural (for instance the link between culture and identity) has its history and point of constitution.

Even though I also argue against the view that culture is something closed and rather see it as open, this point is not the main concern in the dissertation. What I find more interesting are *the ways* this openness could be thought. What kinds of obstacles

are necessary to overcome? Is it possible to overcome these obstacles in the social sciences and the humanities? What does it mean to develop a thinking that reflects openness rather than closure? How do we do it?

We have, in the previous chapters, looked at some reasons why and how the static view of culture is repeated. Now we turn to the question of how we can overcome this obstacle. The dissertation seeks to explore the notions *branchements* and translation as the development of another kind of thinking which reflects openness rather than closure. But before going there I want to dwell on this transition from localising an obstacle to the attempt at overcoming it. This transition is a movement in thinking which is materialised in language: It is through examining how concepts, terms, metaphors, words, notions are historically linked and constitute obstacles, and how the substitution of this language with another enables the overcoming of these obstacles, that we can understand this process. A reflection on this process is therefore required.

One way to articulate the thesis of the dissertation is that *branchements* and translation in different ways question a view of culture as closed and help us develop a thinking of openness. But doing this, do we develop theory? Is it a theory of culture or of openness that I want to establish? My claim is in this chapter that it- at least to a certain extent- is fruitful to distinguish between theoretical reflections and the construction of theory.

In order to do this I situate my work within the French tradition of philosophy of science, in particular Georges Canguilhem (2000, 2002). Even though Canguilhem's objects of study (the history of the life sciences) differ from my own, his understanding of theory is fruitful and relevant to other contexts as well. Canguilhem does at least two interesting things. First of all he emphasises the problematical aspects in the history of a science and not its solutions. Secondly, he focuses on how the problematical and historical character of science is articulated in language. In other words, he reflects critically on the language through which scientific problems are articulated and solved. By no means is his thinking bent on

solving any problems. Accordingly, my proposition is that a fruitful way to elaborate the notions translation and *branchements* in the multicultural context is not as theories or parts of theories (of culture and language for instance), but as tools which help us to ask questions and to reflect. Even though the motive is related to the question of living together in a culturally diverse society, neither my aim nor my approach is to find a theoretical answer or solution.

How shall we proceed? Before giving a presentation of French epistemology as a way of thinking, I will give a brief outline of *branchements* and translation in relation to the question of culture. Then I will demonstrate how epistemological reflection, represented by Canguilhem, is applicable to *branchements* and translation. This is meant to shed some light on how Ricoeur and Amselle proceed, but primarily on what I myself make of it. In other words, the explication of approach is meant to explain what I want to do in the dissertation and why I do it this way. I will then open up a reflection on the difference between theoretical and theory. Even though the reflection upon *branchements*, translation, and culture is theoretical, I try to abstain from constructing a theory but try to remain in a problem oriented perspective.

5.1 Between identity and language: the epistemological obstacle in culture

Throughout the whole dissertation I am approaching the question of culture from an epistemological angle. The way I examine culture as a challenge, a problem, or an obstacle on the one hand, and the way I look at how to develop reflections to overcome these obstacles on the other, are all seen from an epistemological perspective. But why is this specific perspective so important?

It seems to me that even though one has attempted to develop non-essentialist theories of culture, an essentialist and pure notion of culture and human origin is still present in our reasoning. On the level of public discourse we fall back into notions of cultural origin, cultural identity, and ethnicity which make it possible to revitalise racism even though we have abandoned the term race (Gullestad 2002, Taguieff 2010). Intentionally or not, a notion of (pure) origin and essence underpins notions

such as cultural identity, ethnic (majority and minority), and immigrant: they emphasise origin. On the other hand, the theories meant to supplant ideas of origin and identity seem to be more or less dependent upon a notion of pure origin (hybridity, mestizo, creolization, and syncretism).³¹ I am not at all claiming that no one else sees this problem: on the contrary, most want to break with an essentialist and static view of culture. Still, the fact that it seems difficult to find a language which is not essentialist underlines the fact that this thinking has a strong hold on us.

Does this mean that I think I can solve these problems through introducing epistemology as an alternative approach? My claim is not that I can solve the problems in the sense that we once and for all can rid ourselves of the language of purity, closure, and origin. However, it seems like the conditions through which we reason - which basically is a question of what kind of language we use- have not been taken sufficiently into account. For instance, it was an interesting discovery to find that the link between culture and identity, which seems so natural in the political discussions, is of such a recent date. I think that shedding some light on these conditions is crucial in order to develop another kind of thinking. Or differently put, it is by taking the epistemological conditions into account that another kind of thinking can be developed. In other words, we cannot just develop new theory without taking the historical into account.

However, it is not enough to take the condition into account. When I introduce *branchements* and translation as two ways of articulating another kind of thinking, it is because we, with them, can take the epistemological conditions and obstacles into account at the same time as we are not limited to just pointing out these obstacles. *Branchements* and translation are another way of articulating the problematic of culture which does not work on essentialist premises. That being said, the essentialism plays out a bit differently in the two. They can both be related to culture

³¹ The discussion between Jonathan Friedman (1999) and Jan Nederveer Pieterse (2009) regarding the status of the term hybrid makes this clear. I will discuss the term hybrid in chapter 8.

in the sense that they intervene in constituting aspects of culture and they deal with much of the same problem. But the themes and the approaches are not identical.

To make this a bit clearer, we can return to what we saw regarding the genealogy of culture and how this is connected to the colonial background of anthropology. As Amselle wrote, one can see in the early colonial enterprise prior to the Enlightenment and the French revolution that:

it rests on three contradictory logics which nevertheless were closely dependent on each other: the regeneration, natural right, and the raciological and linguistic classifications. One can observe the presence of these logics throughout the French colonialisation (Amselle 1996: 55).

In particular, two points in this quote are important for our part: the impact of raciological thinking and linguistic classification. This is where the epistemological obstacle to thinking culture lies and where *branchements* and translation intervene. As far as raciology is concerned, it draws on a principle of origin which, when articulated in terms of culture and not race, still closes and essentialises. It matters not whether it is expressed in a simple form (identity as sameness) or a complex form (hybrid identity). Raciology uses a certain kind of identity-thinking where the epistemological precondition is “a system of oppositions”. *Branchements* is an intervention into this oppositional logic based on an idea of pure origin.

When it comes to the relation between language and culture, the diversity of human societies and cultures was, according to Amselle in the quote above, thought of in a similar way as one thought of the diversity of languages.³² As far as I understand Amselle the point is that the determination of a society corresponded

³² Michel Foucault shows in *Les mots et les choses* that the classification within the domain of plants and animals in the 17th century can be articulated as the Classical episteme (which is a specific relation between things and words) where the classification of things are based on principles of similarity and difference (Foucault 2003). Note that Foucault himself makes a quite different point when discussing the linguistic classification in the same period. So it seems like Amselle has something closer to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in mind. According to the strong version of this latter theory, language proposes that there is a connection between language and the world-view of a group of people, and that language by determining our thoughts makes inter-linguistic communication impossible.

with, and even depended on, the linguists' determination of language. In this sense culture is determined by the specific language spoken by a group of people. Secondly, the view of culture as distinguishable borrowed the logic of classification which, as Amselle writes, was based on a system of oppositions. In other words, linguistics guided the anthropological reasoning from the outset, and this still affects our view of culture. So, going into translation as a way of seeing a parallel to culture is not farfetched but is in fact an intervention into an understanding of culture that has haunted it from the outset and which has been transformed into a political and social way of thinking.

It now becomes clearer what kind of problem *branchements* and translation are facing and how they deal with different sides of the same problem or obstacle. They both relate to constitution of culture and how culture becomes something static and closed, but in two different ways. Whereas *branchements* intervenes in identity or the oppositional logic, translation intervenes in language. If we can develop another way of thinking identity and language than through the oppositional thinking of identity and difference and linguistic classification, then we can perhaps develop another kind of understanding of culture. I will here maintain the intention of limiting these reflections to an epistemological perspective because what I want to reflect on is still the conditions for thinking. And the question is whether these conditions can be challenged or questioned by a change of language. But before continuing the reflection on epistemology we will look at what *branchements* and translation are.

5.2 *Branchements* and translation

I will present this more thoroughly in the subsequent chapters and just give an outline of *branchements* for the time being. *Branchements* is a metaphor taken from electronics and informatics used by Jean-Loup Amselle in his study of West African societies and processes of identity constitution (Amselle 2001). In *electronics branchements* (Eng. connections) signifies the web of electronic circuits and networks. An electronic network is an interconnection of electric elements such as

resistor, voltage source, current source, and switches. An element in an electronic circuit does not work unless it is connected to the circuit, and the circuit does not work if there are no elements for electricity to pass through. One thus calls the interconnection between the different elements branching. But whereas an electronic circuit is closed, *branchements* describes a web of such networks. In *informatics* branching marks the point where the sequence in the enfolding of a programme is ruptured (Le Robert, 2000). *Branchements* in electronics and informatics thus refers to the web of connections and ruptures where the web and that which is connected and ruptured cannot be separated from each other. This articulates a fundamental openness in the sense that every element is connected to the electric network or to a programme of information. But it also renders the system or web itself open to ruptures in the way that every connection produces modifications. Now the main point is to see this as a metaphor or an analogy to culture and cultural identity in the sense that the articulation of any culture and/or identity is always already related or connected to a system or web. In other words, connectivity expresses an initial openness both of that which is being connected and the web itself.

For Amselle *branchements* is linked to a certain case, that of the N'ko, which is situated in a transnational west-African context and comprise of whole range of fields such as medicine, language, history etc. Central to N'ko is the Guinean philosopher, theologian, linguist, and historian Soleyman Kanté. Through his numerous works Kanté constructs the basis for N'ko identity in opposition to the former French and Arab colonial powers. N'ko is related to *branchements* as a case that demands an alternative conceptual or theoretical framework. Since Amselle's point is to avoid the epistemological obstacle of thinking culture as closed, he sees it as necessary to abandon metaphors and concepts such as mestizo and hybridisation which draw on notions of purity and closure. These metaphors are still captured by the epistemological obstacle described above. Hybridisation is marked by the racialological thinking which is premised on the diversity of pure origins. Now, Amselle is an anthropologist and is primarily focused on his empirical material. So in

order to develop a more philosophical reflection on *branchements*, I draw on Hegel and Ricoeur to explicate what I take to be dialectical aspects of *branchements*. But these matters will be thoroughly discussed in the next chapter so I will not go into these elaborations here. What I want to do here is to reflect on what kind of reasoning this change of language is. And should *branchements* thus to be considered a new theory?

Before answering these questions I will introduce the second notion that I use in the dissertation: translation. Translation is also thematised by Amselle as a way of articulating the processes of branching. However, it is with Ricoeur's reflections on translation in *Sur la traduction* that we can elaborate these matters further (Ricoeur 2004a). Ricoeur's reflections on the epistemology of translation stress that translation must be comprehended as a practice and not seen from a theoretical point of view: translation does not work with the problem of whether translation is possible or not, but with the problem of balancing faithfulness towards two languages. In other words a translator works on this balance. Now if this is the epistemological problem in translation, this says something interesting about language: In order for a translation to be a translation, the languages must somehow open themselves to each other.

This immediately subverts the emphasis on either a formal universality rendering all languages the same, or a linguistic relativity underlining the rupture between languages and ultimately of humankind. The question of whether it is possible to translate disregards the practical aspects of translations: translations are done regardless of their theoretical possibility or impossibility. Continuity and rupture must thus be seen from the perspective of practice and not of theory. Or, differently put, the practice of translation is in search of a theoretical reflection that takes its proper practice into account. And this practice is the faithfulness to the two languages. A case central to Ricoeur and anyone interested in the philosophy and history of translation is Luther's translation of the Bible to German. Luther demonstrated through the translation both continuity and rupture with the original Hebrew and Greek text on the one hand, and with the German vulgate language on

the other. It was vital to him that the Bible could be read by the man in the street in his own language, but at the time there were many German languages or dialects. Anyway, from the perspective of practice translation is, according to Ricoeur, “the creation of an equivalent without identity”. In the case of Luther German was lifted out of its particularity as oral language and acquired status as equal without breaking completely with its particularity. In other words, German could express the meaning in the original texts equally well without being identical to the Greek and Hebrew. They all remain different languages.

From this, another vital aspect of translation can be deduced. For if the same (as equivalent) can be expressed in more than one way this testifies to a reflexive dimension in translation. In other words, translation is not merely the transportation of words and meaning from one language to another, but an immanent dimension of one language. Translation is thus «to say the same in another way». When we misunderstand and must rephrase ourselves we translate ourselves: translation articulates reflexivity.

5.3 French epistemology as style of reasoning

How do we analyse *branchements* and translation, and to what end? One way to structure the questioning of *branchements* and translation is as an epistemological enquiry. Even though the purpose of questioning our understanding of culture might also be ethical and political- the dissertation is meant to give insights into the practical questions of how we are going to live together, the very structure and way of questioning is epistemological. In other words, it is a matter of reflecting critically upon what we mean when we discuss culture, the conditions for discussing it, and what *branchements* and translation imply in the questioning of culture. As we have seen in the previous paragraph, a problem that concerns them both is openness. So the question then becomes how openness can be scrutinised from an epistemological perspective. But first, what do I mean by epistemology? Epistemology might mean several things depending upon what tradition one stands in. In the French tradition it

is closely related to a field or science and consequently means different things depending on the nature of the field or science. For our part, the epistemological problems, the problems of translation and *branchements*, are linked to raciology, a psychological notion of identity, and linguistic classification. What kind of epistemological tradition is this?

Central to the French epistemological tradition, and to whom I relate my reflections, is George Canguilhem. Two lines of thought which partly overlap are central to his thinking. On the one hand he is occupied with the question of life as an irresolvable problem in the life sciences. Life as such here represents a perpetual obstacle which is non-reducible to quantifications such as statistics on the one hand and to a metaphysical life force à la Bergson on the other. On the other hand he studies the history of the life sciences' attempts at approaching living organisms. Central to the historical study is the analysis of the establishment of scientific concepts and their relation to specific contextual problems (Canguilhem 2000, 2002). By following the way problems formulated through concepts within one context are transferred into another context, he destabilises science's own auto-perception without lapsing into relativism. To say that science borrows, imports metaphors and concepts, from outside science, or that science changes content over time, is not the same as claiming irrationality. He studies the processes where concepts, in the history of the life sciences, become operational as scientific concepts. And it is Canguilhem's reflection upon the language of science and the way language shapes scientific problems and solutions that I find pertinent to my own investigation. Even though Canguilhem is working with concepts in the life sciences, two features in the thinking of Canguilhem are relatable and relevant to developing *branchements* and translation. First of all, philosophy is a problem-oriented and reflective activity and not necessarily directed at finding solutions. This has consequences for how Canguilhem thinks theory. Secondly, his study of the history and philosophy of science is centred around concepts and language in science. And it is Canguilhem's understanding of theory and concepts that I think might shed some light on my reasoning in the

following chapters of the dissertation. Or, to be a bit more precise, the relevant traits of Canguilhem's style of reasoning in this dissertation are: a) the historical localisation of obstacles and hindrances, b) the study of how scientific problems and solutions are articulated historically through language, c) how the overcoming of obstacles might depend on a change of language, d) and how the focus on concepts rather than theories gives us insight into scientific *problems* rather than solutions.

Looking at a) and b) one could say that I have already commenced an epistemological approach in the first chapters by localising the link between culture and identity. Immediately this link might seem obvious, but going into the genealogy of culture it is the certain historical circumstances that constitute the connection to identity. So the obstacle of the closed culture is historically constituted in a link to identity. It also seems as if the way Amselle describes the comparative method could be perceived as an epistemological obstacle in the understanding of culture and that this enforces the view of culture as static and closed. The question is then of course how to go from localising an obstacle to developing another way of thinking, which takes us to the next part of the dissertation and the c) aspect in Canguilhem's thinking. The development of translation and *branchements* could, in different ways, be characterised as the development of another kind of language that tries to break with the culture-identity obstacle.

And this takes us to a vital point for Canguilhem, d), and for this dissertation. For in breaking with this obstacle and developing another kind of language or another kind of thinking, does this mean that I develop a theory? The same way Canguilhem sees the development of concepts in the history of science, I want to ask if it is possible to scrutinise language in a similar manner in the domain of cultural science. A vital quality of concepts in this respect is the articulation of problems. The idea is not to find a solution or to establish a theoretical foundation; it is rather a new way of establishing a reflection and critical attitude. This reflection entails an elaboration of new ideas, however, without leaving the original problematic. It is by no means a new position, but remains in the problematic the concept seeks to illuminate. In order

to do this we must look at how Canguilhem distinguishes between theory and concepts. But before going into this we will try to bring the epistemological approach and the theme closer together.

5.4 *Branchements* and translation: why do we need them both?

To sum up the reflections in this chapter so far we have stated that *branchements* and translation stand at the core of the dissertation. They have some vital aspects in common at the same time as they say different things. And both answer the question of why bringing them both into the thesis is interesting. Methodically or as approaches they are both concerned with practices. In social-anthropological field work the point of departure is not *whether* it is possible to mix traits from different cultural traditions. Likewise, a condition for translation is not that we have to find a solution to the problem of *whether or not* translation is possible before we translate. Now there is a difference between translation and *branchements* regarding the relation of theoretical elaboration and practice. Whereas translation is a practice which more or less only can be examined through the word translation, the practice of cultural mixing, of cultural exchange, can be discussed through different kinds of metaphors such as mixing, hybridisation, mestizo, melting pot etc.

A second point they have in common- which is linked to the first- is the problem of closure and openness. For, by taking practice into account, interaction and exchange do not take the (theoretical) opposition between sameness (cultural and linguistic exchange is possible due to an underlying sameness) and difference (cultural and linguistic exchange is not possible due to an insurmountable difference) as their point of departure. *Branchements* and translation thus catch that which is *between* two places- neither the absolute same nor the absolute different- and not from the perspective of the one or the other of the poles. And this is the very point of the thesis. Instead of understanding culture as closed, pure, or original and remaining the same throughout time, culture and cultural expressions should be examined from the perspective of practice where it is constantly modulated. And it is here that Ricoeur and Amselle articulate different levels of openness. Whereas Ricoeur

describes the openness in translation as a paradigm, Amselle describes the metaphor *branchements* as an articulation of the openness between cultures. Before returning to openness I will introduce the perspective through which I will present the discussions in the dissertation which are related to the French tradition of philosophy of science.

As I will explain later, *branchements* is a kind of metaphor whereas translation could be called a paradigm which is not limited to the question of culture. *Branchements* goes directly into the concept of culture, whereas culture is one of many domains with parallels to translation. I will not go into the distinction between metaphor and paradigm here, but concentrate on the different levels on which they work in this dissertation. One way of articulating the difference would be to think *branchements* more as directly linked to the deconstruction of cultural purity. Translation, on the other hand, is something broader in the sense of being a paradigm and can work not only in a deconstruction, but also in a construction. After all, in addition to being a theoretical concept, translation is a practice, the result of an act. When it comes to overcoming the obstacle of cultural purity, translation shows how the purity of language can be overcome by constructing transitions between languages. This takes us, as far as I can see, into not just a deconstructive or reconstructive mode, but into a constructive mode: translation says something about the future. In the light of the idea that translation is a paradigm, translation points perhaps further than *branchements* when it comes to the construction of an intercultural thinking and intercultural society. Since translation is a conscious process it might be better suited to articulate a thinking that is not based on essentialist premises.

Branchements is, on the one hand, an analytical tool that analyses (past) acts. Furthermore, it is not possible to say that Kanté knew that he was branching. Whereas translation implies consciousness of translation, *branchements* is an interpretation of acts. Translation, on the other hand, does not go so efficiently and deeply into the particular domain of anthropology and culture as *branchements* does. Amselle's change of language from mestizo or hybridity to *branchements* is an

extremely interesting intellectual movement that intervenes directly in the perception of culture.

Having said this it still seems to be one aspect in particular that connects them and which still makes it relevant to include both. As we saw in chapter 3 and repeated earlier in this chapter, what unites *branchements* and translation is that they intervene in two aspects that are constitutive for how we think culture as something closed and static. On the one hand the link to identity, on the other the link to linguistic classification. Language and identity are topics to which culture is connected and which govern how we see culture. So the epistemological problems with identity and language are transposed into culture. By thus taking translation and *branchements* as points of departure we have analytical tools for seeing two aspects of the same problem as well as two ways to articulate an alternative. But when I say alternative, is this the same as saying that translation and *branchements* are solutions to these problems? This is the question I will now go on to discuss.

5.5 About problems and theories

Philosopher Pierre Macherey has written an interesting text about Canguilhem's epistemology and the latter's distinction between theories and concepts. Macherey underlines again and again the relation between concepts and problems: "It is about...recognizing the true sense of a notion, which supposes that it is put in its proper place and not in its simple retrospective theoretical context, but in its problematic" (Macherey 2009: 54). What does he mean by distinguishing the retrospective theoretical context of a notion and its problematic? Due to Canguilhem's rigorous method of comparing scientific texts from different periods, he manages to reveal that concepts that we imagine are shaped within a specific scientific discipline come from another scientific discipline or does not come from science at all. It is a kind of conceptual genealogy à la Nietzsche where the concepts we thought belonged to a certain domain originally belonged to another domain, another context or time. It is thus Canguilhem analyses the concept of reflex. Even

though the phenomena of reflex movement is understood within a mechanistic theoretical frame and the origin of the concept is accordingly ascribed to Descartes, it is by the vitalist Willis that the concept is articulated for the first time (de Cuzzani 2003). However, from the perspective of vitalism the phenomenon of reflex and its concept were incomprehensible, so it was not until it found a place within the theoretical frame of mechanist thinking that the concept could become operational. The problem arises when we reconstruct the history of science from theories and not from concepts because theories obscure our understanding of the non-linear and troublesome path of science. History of science, as a history of the concepts' strange wanderings, could thus be a critique of our own understanding of scientific rationality: it is not as homogenous or accumulative as we might think. This brings us to the distinction between concepts and theories. Macherey writes that "If concepts are at the side of questions, theory is at the side of answers" (Macherey 2009: 55). What does this mean? As far as I understand it, it means that at least when reconstructing the history of science from the theory in which a concept belongs today, we risk losing sight of the problem which it was originally meant to solve. Even though scientific answers might be understood as rational, that does not mean that we would see the link between problems and solutions as equally rational. As Canguilhem teaches us, problems which often come from the non- scientific or ideological, and scientific answers do not always correspond. Canguilhem writes, for instance, that Herbert Spencer tries to use Darwin's theory of evolution as a justification for the interest of industrial society against the theological and socialist understanding of human beings (Canguilhem 2000: 43). The point is that this problem is not the one evolutionary theory responds to, but a non-scientific or ideological problem. Another example could be the one we already have looked at: race. The problem raciology attempted to solve was, as Amselle shows, political.³³By

³³ Central to understanding the French society in the 18th and 18th century stands the concept of *regeneration*. Regeneration is a problem that commenced as a problem in the wake of the French revolution. The society needed to be regenerated (Amselle 1996). This problem could, however, also be transferred into a moral and physiological problem in the context of

studying science from the point of view of answers and theories the (sometimes uncomfortable) relation science has to non-science disappears. Any scientific attempt today of proving the genetic existence of races has to be confronted with the ideological, and not scientific, origin of this problem.

Even though he is not concerned with epistemological questions in the same way as Canguilhem, it is within such a tradition that I see the work of Michel Foucault and the concept of problematisation. Foucault's historical approach to knowledge and power and the focus on discontinuities and ruptures are learned from Bachelard and Canguilhem (Foucault 2003). The concept of problematisation is also closely related to this tradition. Foucault-scholar Judith Revel writes in her book *Foucault: une pensée du discontinu* (2010) that the term problematisation implicates the consequences that:

The true critical exercise of thinking opposes the idea of a methodical search for the "solution": the task of philosophy is not to resolve- understood in the sense of substituting one solution for another- but to establish a critical distance, to help liberate (*faire jouer la "déprise"*), to rediscover the problems (Revel 2010: 58).

Even though this might seem evident to some, it is interesting to see how close this is to the thinking of Canguilhem and Macherey. My point is that Foucault here articulates a similar distinction between methodical solutions and problematisations to Canguilhem's distinction between theories and problems. It is within such a tradition that I situate my own reflections. But what is so special about this, is not all philosophy oriented towards problems? Yes and no. The problem is that philosophy as theory too easily becomes foundation in the sense of a position or point of view from where one can perceive "how things truly are". Theory in this sense closes the

Louis Pasteur 100 years later (Latour 2001). So a vague articulation of a problem could be turned into a wide range of solutions like raciology and bacteriology which have nothing in common. The point is that what we see as rational is linked to something we do not see as rational.

question, whereas a problem remains a problem even after an elaboration. Another reason for pointing this out is that this kind of approach loses ground every day in a society that becomes more and more instrumentally inclined. What provocation it is to reflect without giving a solution or answer!

To develop theories and methods is to think answers and solutions (by either saying how reality is or how we should approach something), and this is not, as I see it, the role of the philosopher or epistemologist. So if what *branchements* and translation have in common is a reflection on openness and closure, I think it is important to maintain the problem oriented approach. It means that I should be critical to *branchements* and translation. But secondly it also means that translation and *branchements* should and could be read as ways of reflecting rather than as theories. So when we are faced with the question of how *branchements* and translation contribute to the discussion of culture in a multicultural society, they can help us reflect theoretically on openness. To use these notions could be described as a change of language which aims at overcoming the obstacle of the closed culture. However, unlike scientific concepts- or perhaps precisely like concepts in the history of science that aim at becoming scientific - the problems that translation and *branchements* are meant to articulate cannot be overcome in the same way as scientific problems are overcome. This lesson learned from Canguilhem is, as I see it, one of the main reasons why I do not want to describe this dissertation as a development of theory. Besides the philosopher's commitment to problems, the problems in multicultural society cannot be overcome in the same manner as scientific problems. Hence should the approach be equally open: even though we might develop our reasoning with a higher refinement and find the reflections of *branchements* and translation interesting, relevant, and more fruitful, this does not mean that we have solved anything or that the problem has disappeared. But that does not mean that we cannot localise a similar kind of procedure in the field of science and in political-ethical thinking. By a change of language and of notions, translation

and *branchements* help us in different ways to ask what openness is and how we know what it is. But in order to do that we must go into what openness could mean.

5.6 The obstacle of closing and the problem of openness

Now that we have looked at both the theoretical tools that I want to develop and the way I want to develop them, it is time to see how this is intended to be played out. Even though *branchements* and translation operate, as we shall see, on different levels, they both deal with the obstacle of the closing of culture and the problem of openness. The obstacle that we are dealing with is, as already repeated many times, the view that culture is closed. I think that we have also located the historical aspects that constituted this view. As long as culture is linked to identity or a certain notion of identity and to a certain degree to language, it is difficult not to close culture. I have said that both translation and *branchements* are dealing with the pair closure-openness.

How is *branchements* problem-oriented and not a theory? What is particularly interesting is the emphasis on the philosophical task of remaining on the side of problems rather than solutions. *Branchements* is in this respect *not a theory* of cultural identity, but a theoretical way of questioning what cultural identity is and how problematic it is, without refuting the term altogether. Since the thinking of *branchements* does not presuppose an initial purity or closing of culture, the distinction between what is inside and what is outside a culture becomes blurred. *Branchements* is, as I see it, a problematising of boundaries. And when this is taken as a reflection on cultural identity, it has critical potential in the sense that it questions the implicit closure in identity politics which assumes boundaries. The reason, however, why this is not the solution to the boundary- and closing of culture-problem, is that it cannot be solved the way scientific theories can solve problems. Importing a metaphor from electronics and informatics might help us think, broaden the reflection, and problematise how we think culture and identity. But it does not

exclude other approaches to the same theme nor is it in any way absolute in the sense of being complete or finished.

Concerning translation, the idea is that it can be thought more or less in the same line. Central to the problematic of translation is openness, but on perhaps several levels. In his account of Ricoeur's philosophy of translation Domenico Jervolino presents the hiatus between language (singular) and languages (plural) as the problematic of translation (Jervolino 2007: 75). And following Ricoeur and George Steiner translation goes between different languages as well as within one language. Translation thus mediates the diversity of languages as well as the diversity of voices within one language. This renders account of openness on two levels. Translation as balancing faithfulness to two languages presupposes an openness which the two languages must have in order to let the other language enter one's own language. As long as translation is necessary, a linguistic unity cannot be thought in a purified manner. It is a unity, but it is plural, not homogeneous. A linguistic classification is, on the other hand, based on such a purity where different cultures or societies correspond to different languages. A transition between languages is in a system of opposites either possible due to some common origin or impossible due to the insurmountable difference in languages. The second level is the internal openness due to the immanent plurality. It is perfectly possible to misunderstand and/or to interpret differently the same thing despite the fact that one shares a language. Another kind of openness is the one given by the fact that the perfect correspondence between the source language and target language (Ladmiral 1994) can never erase the potential for criticism through an alternative translation. It is evident that translation, due to the impossibility of the perfect translation, can never really come to rest. Criticism is always potentially present. And how is translation problem-oriented? In order to strengthen this aspect and see how Ricoeur is a problem-oriented thinker, I think it might be fruitful to open up a short parenthesis with reflections on Ricoeur's dialectical thinking. After all, Ricoeur is the main theoretical source in the dissertation and we should spend some time elaborating on the way he reasons.

5.7 Problematic and production in Ricoeur

In the book *Du texte à l'action* (1986) Ricoeur writes in the text *La fonction herméneutique de la distanciation* about the hermeneutical tradition ending with Gadamer. As an underlying alternative in Gadamer's *Warheit und Methode* we have to choose between ontology of understanding and the scientific objectivity of the social sciences (sciences humaines). In order to be scientific we must distance ourselves from what we study. But then we distance ourselves from the primordial relation which makes us participate in the historical reality (Ricoeur 1986: 113). According to Gadamer we have to choose between an alienating distance or belonging. But Ricoeur wants to see this in another way and states that: "My own reflection stems from a rejection of this alternative and an attempt to overcome it" (Ricoeur 2008: 72). The philosophical reflection does not seek an answer among the two alternatives either, but seeks to overcome the opposition itself. However, this is not a synthesis in the sense of a simple incorporation of both alternatives: "The first expression of this attempt consists in the choice of a dominant problematic that seems to me to escape from the alternative between alienating distanciation and participatory belonging" (Ibid). I will make two points out of this. In line with the focus on problems rather than theories the point is that the antinomy that stems from Gadamer is the presentation of a problematic. For Ricoeur this problematic is the text, which is something we can explain objectively and also understand through an engagement with it as readers. My point is that this fluctuation between the two sides of this problematic never comes to a halt in a synthesis, nor can any of the sides "win". Consistent with the epistemological tradition that is linked to Canguilhem the problem cannot find a solution to make the problem disappear because both the objectifying and the engaging approach continue to be relevant. Neither of them could be given an exhaustive account either. In other words we are always thrown back into the problem.

My second point, which is linked to both translation and the problem of openness, is that Ricoeur here anticipates the main point from *Soi-même comme un*

autre which takes its point of departure from this problematic. There is no self, without the other and/or an outside. If there is a self, this means that there is already another and/or outside to this self. If there is another, then that means that the self has already understood itself. There is, however, two different kinds of mediation of one's self. The problematic of *Soi-même comme un autre* is more a question of the mediation between self and others, whereas here Ricoeur focuses more on mediation through cultural signs:

In contrast to the tradition of the cogito and to the pretension of the subject to know itself by immediate intuition, it must be said that we understand ourselves only by the long detour of the signs of humanity deposited in cultural works (Ricoeur 1992: 84).

On the one hand, the fundamental hermeneutics, for which a scientific distance loses the primordial connection one has to an object, becomes an empty or non-dialectical hermeneutics. Interpretation is meaningless without the prior alienation that texts produce. On the other hand this alienation is overcome (but not completely) through interpretation. It is through this alienation that understanding is already achieved. As I see it, the choice of the word *problematic* indicates how this process of self and other than self, distancing and belonging, is a never ending story. The mediation never finds rest in an absolute synthesis.

The point is here that translation functions in the same way. As we will see through Luther's translation of the Bible to German, translation is a practice. However, it becomes conceptualised through the concept of translation. Just like the concept of text questions the opposition between participation (understanding) and distance (explanation), translation articulates what Jervolino calls the problem of the unity and plurality, identity and difference: "Translation actually confronts us with the problems of identity and otherness (alterité)" (Jervolino 2002: 42). I interpret Jervolino in the direction of seeing translation of languages as an analogy to how a person acquires his or her identity: in order to express myself I must "translate" my expressions into a language which is not mine. Thus I am letting something alien or

other (*alterité*) (another language, other signs) live in and with me. As far as I can see, this problem of identity and otherness is the problem of openness. And the same way as for *branchements* I think it is pertinent not to call translation a theory of openness. This helps us to reflect on openness between concrete languages or, more analogically, between identity and otherness. But it does not solve the problem of identity.

Now, the problematic of the text and the problematic of translation are both deduced from a concept of production. In *Du texte à l'action* Ricoeur writes, concerning the dilemma that we have seen between distancing and participation, that “The dominant problematic is that of the text, which reintroduces a positive and, if I may say so, productive notion of distancing” (Ricoeur 2008: 72). And in *Sur la traduction* : “In actual fact, the cultural kinship hides the true nature of equivalence, which is *produced* by translation rather than *presupposed* by it” (Ricoeur 2006: 35). The text and the translation *produce* a mediation (between author and reader or between author and translator), which simultaneously takes its point of departure from a problem (that of misunderstanding or lack of understanding), which in the same act is being articulated. My point is that the mediation (between author and reader/translator) as something produced articulates a problematic and that this problematic is linked to practice. Since translation-as the construction of an equivalent without identity- is a practice, a production, the problem never finds a final solution. This articulates another kind of openness than the one of letting the two languages live inside each other: a translation is never complete and always open to criticism.

But I want to return to the distinction between problem and theory. My point is to emphasise the problem-oriented aspect in Ricoeur’s thinking. The point is here not to claim a direct heritage from Canguilhem to Ricoeur or to say that they are the only philosophers who think in problems. However, Ricoeur is often associated with phenomenology and hermeneutics, thought of as a position or a certain approach. But what I find interesting is this problem oriented aspect in Ricoeur’s thinking where

epistemology is reintroduced into hermeneutical thinking. If understanding is a hallmark of the human, this can nevertheless not be the point of departure. Alienation is at the core of human existence. It all commences with obstacles, ruptures, problems, confusion, and not with reason. That is why translation is necessary, but also why it persists: there is no absolute criterion or truth to which our understanding can correspond so we have to continue to translate.

I will try to give an example of this in relation to Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity which I think could be read in the light of what Judith Revel wrote about Foucault. If it is as she, with Foucault, says, that the true critical exercise of thinking opposes the idea of a methodical search for the "solution" and that the task of philosophy is not to substitute one solution for another, but to establish a critical distance, to help liberate, and rediscover the problems, then this is a relevant challenge to how Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity is read. Narrative identity for Ricoeur is a concept that enables us to reflect on what personal identity is. I will discuss this in detail in the second part of the thesis, but for now it suffices to say that a person is "the same" throughout his or her life at the same time as he or she is changing. How is this possible? And this is where narrative identity reflects on how we as human beings express our self-consciousness through narration: The way I am self-conscious is as a historical and changing being that consciously and unconsciously creates a narrative that reconstructs the events as events in the life of the same person: namely me. Now, as I see it, narrative identity is, however, not a theory in the sense that it solves problems. It gives us some interesting thoughts on identity and may help us rediscover problems, but it is not a scientific answer or solution to the question of identity.

However, Ricoeur's thinking is reproduced as a theory in a scientific sense. This happens when researchers- with a sympathetic attitude, I must add- try to "use" and "find" examples of his "theory". For instance, the historian Gérard Noiriel does this in his book *À quoi sert "l'identité nationale"*, which draws on Ricoeur's thinking

in the discussion of the “mobilisation of the German unity” in the 18th and 19th century. They present:

Criteria for sameness (critères de “mêmeté”) (example: the German nation exists because all the members speak the same language) and criteria for selfhood (ipséité) (example: the German nation exists because it possesses a collective memory and specific traditions) (Noiriel 2007: 15-16).

First of all, this reduction of selfhood to memory has not taken into account the full scope of what selfhood is. Memory is necessary for self-consciousness, but not exhaustive for its meaning. And secondly, the reason for this mistake seems to be that selfhood is not a positively given entity that can be “found” but is itself problematical. Noiriel has here found a language that can explain two dimensions in German national-romantic thinking. But as I see it, narrative identity (as more than just memory) as the synthesising of sameness and change is not just descriptive. It also shows that this identity is a construction and that self-consciousness might be deceptive, that memory is selective etc. The point is not to “get” Noiriel but to reflect on how we think theory.

5.8 Summary

If we try to summarise what has been said here the aim in this chapter has been to bridge the dissertation’s two parts. Epistemology as the overall perspective in the dissertation comprises both a reflection on the conditions for understanding culture and a way of structuring the dissertation itself. *Branchements* and translation are two approaches to the same problem of closing culture. By intervening in the identity-thinking present in raciology on the one hand and in the linguistic classification on the other, *branchements* and translation reveal the obstacle and articulate an alternative at the same time. The structure of the dissertation as two parts corresponds to the two sides of what Bachelard calls an epistemological obstacle. In the first part the obstacle has been described going from political discourse where culture and identity are linked to tracing these concepts and their union historically. In the second

part, which we will get to in a moment, I will try to elaborate on in what way translation and *branchements* could be seen as alternatives to how we think culture. In the last part of this chapter I have also commenced a reflection on what theory means. When I talk about overcoming the obstacle by looking at new theoretical ways to reflect on culture, that does not mean that the obstacle can be overcome in the same way as scientific problems can be overcome by presenting new scientific theories and making them operational with an empirical material. Theories, as Canguilhem points out, close the problem, whereas the question of human beings cannot, as far as I can see, be closed. *Branchements* and translation are thus philosophical in a similar way to what Foucault states about the task of philosophy: they establish a critical distance and rediscover problems.

Part 2: *Branchements* and translation as problematization

6. Epistemology of *branchements*

Introduction

We have in the previous chapters localised an obstacle in the conceptualisation of culture which may be analysed epistemologically (the logic of oppositional thinking), institutionally (raciology and the nation-state), and genealogically (the unity of identity and culture). The result of this obstacle is the closing of culture. Now the task is to develop a thinking that can overcome this obstacle and articulate openness in relation to culture. And one such development is the metaphor *branchements* developed by Jean-Loup Amselle. This takes us back to Canguilhem and epistemology. In a famous text called “L’objet de l’histoire des sciences” (the object of the history of sciences), Canguilhem reflects on who, why, and how one should do history of science from an epistemological perspective. In order for epistemology to be something more than a repetition of scientific results he sees it as a critical reflection “on the present methods of a knowledge that is adequate to its object” (Canguilhem 2002: 11, Cuzzani 2003: 82). I think this resonates at least to some degree with what I want to do in this chapter. Amselle’s change of language or metaphor and ultimately a change of theoretical frame from speaking about hybrids to speaking about *branchements* could be read and examined from an epistemological angle which might shed some light on a parallel between the natural sciences and the social sciences. To paraphrase Canguilhem: how is the metaphor *branchements* more adequate to its object than the metaphor hybrid? This takes us at the end to a reflection about the metaphor in general and what kind of metaphor this is.

6.1 The problem of origin

Amselle refutes the idea that there is any such thing as a pure culture. However, the idea of pure origin or origins is at the core of the western imagination and not so easy to challenge. Amselle traces one root in the genealogy of pure cultures back to an idea emanating from the late 18th century raciological thinking within the context of

the French Revolution. In the aftermath of the revolution it was not sufficient to replace the feudal and religious institutions with secular rule and rights for the individual. The post-revolutionary society also needed a human being which was not corrupted by the feudal institutions. This human had to be sought elsewhere. Napoleon's expeditions to Egypt could be read as the search for such a man (Amselle 1996). Raciology aimed at distinguishing the morally and physically *degenerated* (i.e. mixed) races, beyond salvation, from the pure races, who were not yet enlightened but had the potential of becoming the "new man" in post-revolutionary French society. Society must be regenerated. The idea seems to be a correspondence between the physical and moral constitution of man. The pure man was the human being who was not mixed with other races and who was not morally corrupted by despotic institutions such as *l'ancien regime*. I understand Amselle here to claim that it is this tension between natural right and raciology that marks the French republican thinking.

So, it is in the framework of the French Revolution that Amselle places the early colonial expeditions and the quest for the new man. In order to *regenerate* society, a new humankind was needed. But in order to get this new humankind, "knowledge" of the new man was needed. How could one separate the regenerated from the degenerated? Thus, at its beginning, the theory of the races was not so much focused on proving the superiority of the white man, but was nevertheless a theory of man based on a notion of *origin*. And this idea continues to haunt us. As discussed in chapter 3, it is the notion of origin that lurks behind cultural racism and differentialism. This is where the understanding of pure culture comes from (Amselle 1996). Now, this is the idea I aim to question but which seems difficult to shake. What happens to the perception of ourselves and others if the idea of a pure origin falls? I will not discuss this here, but it seems evident that the obsession with identity and origin reflects an underlying existential agony for both the individual and for society. As I will try to show, identity is a problem rather than, as many seem to think, an answer.

There is an alternative to the understanding of cultures as pure or closed which perceives cultures as mixed. Amselle takes this position in *Logique métisses* (Amselle 1998). Here he takes on the question of cultural identity which he sees as an “syncretisme originaire“. However, this alternative is insufficient since the expression “syncretisme originaire“tends to reproduce the notion of the pure as a mix which is composed of something pure. As a result of this Amselle dissociates himself altogether from the notion of mixture and continues the search for a more fruitful term for understanding culture and cultural identity. And what he finds is the metaphor *branchements*. Now we will turn to another part of the contextualisation of culture, the post-colonial.

6.2 Soleyman Kanté and the N’ko movement

The context for the metaphor *branchements* and the book *Branchements* is field studies in West Africa. Even though the African continent has been influenced by western, Arabic and local traditions, it has struggled to find an identity of its own. The African continent needs an identity, Amselle writes. However, this may take different directions. One way is to embrace western thinking, language, practice, and rationality. Another is to construct African identity by finding its roots, its origin so to speak, prior to colonial rule. Central to this tension between ethnocentric and western universalism one the one hand, and traditional and African cultural particularism one the other, is that of language and literacy. Historian Dianne White Oyler points out in her book *The history of the N’ko alphabet and its role in Mande transnational identity* (2007) that political independence in the aftermath of colonisation has not given the African nations the ability to return to their African languages. Most people in the West African region still speak a version of French or English. That is what makes the making of the N’ko alphabet so interesting.

As a social-anthropologist, Jean-Loup Amselle has done field work in N’ko, a cultural domain and language in West-Africa (mainly Mali, Ghana and the Ivory Coast but stretches from Mauritania to Nigeria). In the Mande language N’ko means

“I say” (White Oyler 2007: 39). N’ko is first and foremost an alphabet invented and completed April 14 1949 by linguist, philosopher, theologian (and prophet!) Soleyman Kanté. The purpose for the invention of the N’ko alphabet was to provide an indigenous written form for Mande languages. Versions of Mande are spoken in the area from Mauritania to Nigeria and its heartland is on the border between Mali and Guinea. Mande is furthermore a complex of history, language, and culture. The centre of cultural continuity of Mande corresponds with that of the Mali Empire founded by Sundiata in 1235. Even though Islam was present since the eighth century, Sundiata was the first ruler to accept Islamic religion. Sundiata thus brings continuity to the faith of the majority in the region.

When it comes to language N’ko intervenes in a multi-layered context and history. In the pre-colonial era the Mande language was, besides being the mother tongue of a large number of people in the region, used as a language of trade for Mande and non-Mande speakers. With the dispersion of Islam, Arabic scripture acquired religious as well as administrative power. However, as White Oyler points out, Arabic also changed the Mande cultural identity: “it altered the Muslim, Mande speakers’ conceptualisation of time and space. The Muslims’ fixed calendar and their division of the day into prayer times regularised time, and new graphic techniques altered the approach of spatial relationships.” Furthermore: “For those possessing a first language...communication in a second language [like Arabic] at times resulted in the alteration of their indigenously constructed thought processes” (Ibid: 35). With the introduction of French colonial rule at the turn of the century, French substituted Arabic as the language of politics and administration. This makes the linguistic situation rather multilevelled.

Now, what is striking is the recognition of the value of literacy among Mande intellectuals. In a post-colonial context this is interesting as the rejection of literacy and the celebration of oral traditions are often used as strategies for escaping the colonial grasp (Amselle 2001, 2008). However, even though attempts were made at transcribing Mande, the Latin and Arabic languages and phonetics were not

sufficient. So another way was sought and the N'ko was constructed. N'ko is complex both in its origin and in its composition. It is first of all the written language of the Mande oral language. It is read, as is Arabic, from right to left. Its letters are as in Latin divided into vowels and consonants. However, in order to transcribe the fonetics of the local mandingian orals, Egyptian hieroglyphs are used.

We could, from one perspective, say that N'ko as cultural domain and as a language consists of heterogeneous elements. However, from the point of view of Kanté and the N'ko movement, N'ko language is a rediscovery of the lost African language. Now, the task is to find an analytical language through which this can be comprehended. Even though the N'ko alphabet is constructed within a certain cultural context, the mandingean oral tradition, there is, as in Latin, a universal pretention behind N'ko. As White Oyler states: "N'ko has been promoted as the universal written expression of all Mande languages" (White Oyler 2007: 39).

Why and how did the N'ko movement come about? An important first point of departure is when Kanté read an article by the Lebanese journalist Kamal Marwa who wrote about what he saw as the inferiority of the African languages in their being without grammar and useless for any intellectual articulation. Allegedly this provoked Kanté to initiate his work on the N'ko alphabet. Amselle writes that if N'ko is to be understood within an anti-colonialist context, it is not primarily directed against the occidental, but the Arab discourse. However, we do not have to leave European history in order to see the importance of language as a political instrument for power. The role of writing is thus central in anti- and post-colonial problematic. For example, a strategy chosen by some post-colonialists is to refute writing as a western colonial artefact altogether and embrace an "original" oral tradition in order to escape colonialism (Guha 2001). This sentiment is not absent in the N'ko tradition. But Kanté has a strategy which offers an alternative to the return to a pre-colonial origin without literacy. Writing is problematic in the former colonies as writing is the means by which a culture demonstrates its civilised character. But this is an occidental and colonial discourse. So the problem is whether one should embrace

western rationality or claim a rationality of one's own, rooted in pre-colonial times (Amselle 2008). Now, on the background of the myth that the Arabs or the Europeans have stolen writing from the Africans, Soleyman Kantés is interpreted as having rediscovered language. When creating the N'ko alphabet Kanté makes it possible to *connect* to the western discourses such as medicine and political philosophy without becoming western. N'ko-language is, in the light of Kantés acts, comprehended as a search for a lost meaning. A meaning lost through the western theft of writing. In other words, the creation of the N'ko language is not a copy or reflection of non-African civilisations, but a rediscovery of an original meaning. This imitation has, as Amselle points out, an ambivalent signifiacnce. As Aristotle explicates in his *Poetics*, the poet imitates human action, but the imitation is not the human action itself. This renders the mimetical act ambiguous, on the one hand linked to the material it imitates and on the other autonomous and not reducible to the material. As I understand it, it is within such an ambiguity that Kanté is situated.

Besides the reference to a mythical past of Mande, the re-appropriation of literacy has a huge significance on other levels of life. White Oyler writes that:

One accepted idea is that Kanté designed his alphabet to reclaim knowledge from those special interest groups [those literate in Arabic or French] and place knowledge in the hands of the general Mande-speaking population; this was a form of social liberation (White Oyler 2007: 14).

Knowledge is power they say. And literacy represents a vital aspect of knowledge. This is, however, not merely important in order to present local knowledge in a written form but also to acquire foreign knowledge. Central are the translations by Kanté of political, technological, and scientific materials into N'ko. What is particularly interesting is that N'ko and Mande are not thought in an opposition to foreign politics and technology. On the other hand Kanté advised Mande speakers to learn N'ko “for a purer understanding of what they possessed imperfectly in non-maternal languages and literacies” (Ibid: 15).

Concerning the relation between local and universal knowledge Amselle writes that “one can notice the demand for equivalence between the traditional African techniques and the modern western techniques” (Amselle 2001: 119). The demand for equivalence is, as will be pointed out later, what is at stake in practices of translation. For now, however, it is vital to understand the urge for the N’ko to be connected to universalistic traditions. As Amselle points out, a hallmark of N’ko is, instead of a refutation of western thinking, a demand for being equal with it. Equivalence is, on the one hand, not homogenisation in the sense of an abandonment of for instance the traditional medicine, but it is, on the other hand, not a refutation of western science. Or put differently, it is not merely a demand for recognition of cultural particularity but for equality. Amselle writes about this that “This demand for equivalence and equal dignity between the two cultural domains constitutes one of the principal characteristics of N’ko” (Ibid). By this we see another way of thinking cultural adherence which does not take refuge in a cultural particularism which rejects what is universal. The adherers of N’ko acknowledge universality but not the ethnocentric western version of it. As White Oyler also stresses, Kanté initiated the Mande Enlightenment which is universal and particular (my expression) at the same time. She writes:

While accepting the necessity that speakers of Mande languages learn knowledge in their maternal language, he also encouraged them to learn foreign languages. That Kanté recommends the latter is in itself a testimony to his own spirit of toleration (White Oyler: 85).

This linking of the local or the particular and the universal is affirmed by Amselle, and as I understand Amselle, this is what makes Kanté and N’ko interesting. N’ko proves that the mandingean culture is capable of having a rational discourse that is neither heterogeneous from, nor reducible to, the western and Arabic discourses. Amselle’s interpretation of all this is that N’ko is the result of, on the one hand, a complex of problems (political, linguistic, religious, and cultural), and, on the other, that Kanté handles these problems in a special way. For instance, Amselle claims that

Kanté's use of Latin vowel-consonant system, on the one hand, is to establish a distance to Arabic language and culture, and his use of Egyptian hieroglyphs, on the other hand, is to establish a distance to occidental culture. However, and most importantly, through N'ko, Kanté is able to make the Mande language express its singularity through the use of what Amselle calls universals like Latin and Arabic. N'ko makes the transcription of the Mande oral language into written language possible by combining elements from already existing languages, but without reducing Mande to any of them. So, the Mande culture thus forges a foundation of its own, using traits from other cultures without being absorbed by these and without seeking refuge in a notion of purity. This process Amselle calls *branchements* and I will soon begin to explicate this.

An interesting aspect with N'ko is that the adherents of Mande have many different ethnical identities but are united through N'ko. Many of the N'ko leaders "belonging to peripheric ethnicities in Mali (dogon, etc.), confirmed their Malien and Mandé identity at the same time" (Amselle 2001: 115). In other words, N'ko is multinational. What is more, it underlines what is at stake in the concept of *branchements*: that of articulating how elements which appear to be in conflict with each other (in this case Mande and dogon), are not. Or, perhaps even more radically, to question the very idea of identities as a diversity of origins.

The point has so far been to lay out the context both for the main topic in the dissertation of cultural purity and origin, and the specific background for Amselle's work. In the following we will leave the African, post-colonial context and the N'ko case, and concentrate on the metaphor *branchements*. For at the same time as *branchements* is an interpretative tool for analysing an empirical material and for understanding a political context, it contains interesting points as a tool for thinking. Or differently put: the metaphor *branchements* has an analytical value of its own, regardless of the N'ko case. So, I will now focus on the theoretical conceptualisation which Amselle gained from this case study. Based on what we have seen through Kanté and the N'ko movement, how can this be explicated and developed

theoretically? Amselle here links his interpretation of N'ko to the metaphor *branchements* which we will now go on to discuss. Despite being well developed in relation to the case of N'ko, there are several theoretical aspects concerning *branchements* which are not elaborated further by Amselle but which I think deserve to be pointed out. And these general traits are interesting to us. In the following we will take a look at *branchements* theoretically in different steps. As explained earlier, we will reflect on *what* Amselle does from an epistemological point of view when he transports a language from electronics to social-anthropology. *Branchements* could be understood as following a certain rationality procedure close to the kind that Canguilhem sees in the history of science.

6.3 *Branchements* from electronics and informatics to social-anthropology

There is a long tradition for transporting and translating terms from other sciences to the social sciences and the humanities, but also vice versa. Amselle used hybrid and métissage, both derived from genetics, in *Logique métissé*. In the book *Branchements* he wants to avoid the link to biology and genetics. However, it is not clear whether the problem for Amselle here is the biological association itself or the fact that a hybrid assumes two already separated entities. The biological link is relatively well presented in *Logique métissé* where he on the one hand draws on then recent works in biology where morphological classifications and biochemical classifications are abandoned. He also refers to immunology as a foundation for rethinking the relation between self (identity) and non-self (not-identity) (Amselle 1998: xi). In the end it seems as if the biological link, no matter how radical, represents a problem and an epistemological obstacle. It might be possible to present the hybrid as something positive, but the question is whether it is sufficient to question the idea of origin. As Amselle states in an interview with Nicolas Journet in *Science humaines*, the metaphor mestizo refers to an idea of cultural purity (Amselle 2000) and is linked to the theory of polygenism which is the doctrine according to which humankind comes from many distinct sources (Taguieff 2010). However, this we will discuss later. For

now let us just notice that the problems linked to biological classification hinges on an idea of purity which renders it an obstacle for someone who wants to present an alternative understanding of human beings. So Amselle continues to occupy himself with metaphors from other harder sciences. And in his book *Branchements* he turns to electronics which gives another approach to the genesis and constitution of identity. So what is *branchements* according to Amselle? He writes in an early paragraph that with the theme *branchements* he wants to:

distance myself from the theme of the “mestizo” which represented our previous problematic, and which today seems to us too marked by biology. By having recourse to the metaphor *branchements* taken from electronics or informatics-that is the derivation of signifiers in relation to a web of planetary signified (meanings), one succeeds in distancing oneself from the approach that consists in seeing our globalised world as the product of a mixing of cultures which themselves are seen as separated universes- one puts the idea of a triangulation at the centre for the reflection, i.e. having recourse to a third element in order to constitute one’s own identity (Amselle 2001:7).

This is how Amselle describes the theoretical approach for analysing N’ko and the work of Soleyman Kanté. As a reflection upon this case, the book *Branchements* is very exciting. And I think that the work rests on how he is interpreting this case. But as an understanding of the metaphor *branchements*, he does not give us too much to go on. I think there is more to be said about this, theoretically speaking, which may perhaps be fruitful for further use both in a social scientific way and as a critical tool for approaching how culture is understood in political debates. It is interesting to note a comment given by Éloi Ficquet in a review of the book. Ficquet writes that:

The technological image of *branchements* is referred to (est ainsi sollicitée) in order to designate the capacity of every society to connect themselves to channels of diffusion of goods and ideas...One may, however, regret that the connections and accomplishments (les tenants et aboutissants) of the metaphor are too quickly considered. The concept of network and its numerous corollaries (linked to the inflation of the contemporary terminology of informatics) are to be found at the heart of such a problematic, but Amselle does not dwell on measuring the heuristic significance or to signal the works that have tried to formalise them for the use in social sciences. The proposed tools are thus presented without an explicit manual (mode d’emploi) (Ficquet 2002: 92).

I find this an interesting remark which renders my thesis even more relevant. And even though I will not claim to present a manual for the use *branchements*, my aim is to elaborate some, but not all, of the theoretical elements.

There are three aspects of *branchements* that I see as important to emphasise: a) *branchements* as connection, b) *branchements* as reconnection, and c) *branchements* as system. A) In *Le Petit Robert* *branchement* is derived from *branche* which at its base comes from the Latin *branca* (the paw of an animal). The substantive *branche* is “the ramification or division (of an organ or an apparatus) which goes from an axis or a centre.” Another way of describing *branchement* in *Le Petit Robert* is by the use of a telephone. In order to use the telephone it must be connected with an electronic circuit (*brancher le téléphone*). But I do not think it is this kind of connectivity that Amselle has in mind. As mentioned in the previous chapter an electronic network is an interconnection of electronical elements. For any element to work it must be connected to the circuit, and the circuit does not work if there are no elements for electricity to pass through. One thus calls the interconnection between the different elements *branching*. Connection is central to how *branchements* is thought by Amselle and how he interprets the N’ko movement. The point is here, as I understand it, that the way the connection one sees in electronics is primordial to the elements that are connected, the connections between people are primordial to what we call cultures. Now, this connecting aspect of *branchements* claims that the basis for identity is the relation between two or more poles. Or rather, that these poles come into being through this relation.

B) But this does not quite cover the way Amselle uses *branchements*. In *informatics* *branching* also marks the point where “the sequence in the enfolding of a programme is ruptured” (Le Robert, 2000). *Branchements* in this meaning of the term includes *reconnection* which is an additional but different movement than connection. Something is ruptured and not only connected. This is also a central hallmark of the way Amselle uses *branchements*. Kanté not only connects Mande language and

culture to the Arab and western cultures, but ruptures this connection in a specific (Mande) way. In a simple way this is what happens when we use language. It is not possible to have a private language. We learn to express ourselves through an already existing language by connecting ourselves to this language. Or differently put, it is through this connection that we become ourselves. But as users of this language we can at the same time make modifications to this language. The use of a language is never a repetition but a modification of it. Connections immediately lead to reconnections either by combining words in new ways or by importing foreign words.

However, I want to add to this that Amselle seems to think *branchements* as describing a conscious and voluntary movement which perhaps draws on the definition given in Larousse. Here we can read that *branchements* is: “the choice between a number of possible instructions which allow, through the execution of a programme, for the selection of one or the other of its parts after having run a test” (Larousse). When studying N’ko, through the metaphor *branchements*, Amselle gives a lot of the credit to the person Soleyman Kanté. And, as the definition of *branchements* in Larousse emphasises, Kanté does make choices of what way to go after having tried and failed. The N’ko alphabet is constructed with vowels and consonants and Egyptian hieroglyphs because he fails in transcribing the Mande oral language with Latin letters. My point is that Amselle’s use of the metaphor is decisionist and conscious: *branchements* is the result of choices and processes of attempts and failures.

C) The two previous points are connected to a third level. *Branchements* stands throughout the work of Amselle in plural form which indicates that it is the plurality of connections and reconnections he is after. In *electronics branchements* signifies the web of electronic circuits and networks. But whereas an electronic circuit is closed, *branchements* describes a web of such networks. *Branchements* thus refers to the web of connections and ruptures where the web and that which is connected and ruptured cannot be separated from each other. As far as I can see this

makes *branchements* a kind of system that at the same time is composed of all the elements that constitute it and at the same time is something more than the sum of the parts. But at this point it seems more fruitful to describe *branchements* as a metaphor from informatics rather than from electronics. Information is closer to language and culture than electricity. However, *branchements* as a system articulates a fundamental openness in the sense that every element is connected to the electrical network or to a programme of information. But it also renders the system or web itself open to ruptures in the way that every connection produces modifications. Now the main point is to see this as a metaphor or an analogy to culture and cultural identity in the sense that the articulation of any culture and/or identity is always already related or connected to a system or web. In other words connectivity expresses an initial openness both of that which is being connected and the web itself.

6.4 Change of language as an overcoming of obstacles

We saw that the scrutinising of concepts stands at the fore in the epistemological analysis of George Canguilhem. My point is that this can also be a fruitful approach to *branchements*. Now, there is more to be said about the change of language by the importation of words, concepts, and metaphors from other domains. In the text “Le concept et la vie”, Canguilhem claims, in a passage concerning Wattson and Crick’s discovery of the double helix constitutive of our DNA, that in order to understand their discovery they changed their language from a mechanical, physical, and geometrical language to a language of communication and theory of language (Canguilhem 2002). Furthermore, this has had consequences for biological language in general. Biology has:

Ceased to use the language and concepts of mechanics, physics and classical chemistry: language which has as its base concepts that are more or less directly formed after geometrical models. It now uses the language of theory of language and theory of communication. Message, information, program, code, instruction, decoding, these are the new concepts of the knowledge of life (*connaissance de la vie*) (Canguilhem 2002: 360)

For Canguilhem this import of concepts and metaphors from one domain to another does not undermine the rationality of the discipline at hand. On the contrary, it is the change of language that might make a science able to overcome the obstacle it faced in the old language. Canguilhem's understanding of scientific rationality is thus dynamic in the sense that an unforeseen change of language, the import of concepts foreign to the traditional discipline, might solve problems and eventually transform the science itself. Thus the genesis of scientific rationality does not necessarily start from inside science or this specific branch of science. In the same manner we could analyse *branchements*. What is interesting is that Amselle, in order to find a language that is better suited to grasp the empirical findings in his field studies, imports a language that is foreign to social-anthropology just as Crick and Watson had to import a language that was foreign to the biology of the period. In the tradition of Canguilhem this is, as I have said, not the opposite of rationality but might even be a presupposition for it. It is the import of language from electronics to social-anthropology that enables him to articulate the empirical findings.

Now, Canguilhem's examples are always taken from the life sciences, so in order to come closer to the social sciences and the humanities we need examples from this domain. Such an example could be found in the field of historiography. One of the grand masters of French history, Jacques Le Goff, has written an interesting text about the notion of mentality.³⁴ Le Goff writes about the notion of mentality that "its function, as a concept, is to satisfy the historian's desire to go further" (Le Goff 1985: 167). We see here an example of a type of reasoning in the humanities that resembles what Canguilhem says about the life sciences. Le Goff finds that the concept of mentality originally comes from English 17th century philosophy "referring to the collective psychology, the ways of thinking and feeling which are

³⁴ Le Goff is part of the third generation within the French historical school *École des Annales*. History of mentality is linked in particular to Philippe Ariès who followed in the footsteps of the first generation and founders Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch.

peculiar” (Ibid: 171). This “desire to go further” is not necessarily without problems and obstacles. However, this is a commencement of a reasoning that develops its own methodology as we go, and not a methodology which is finished prior to our investigation.³⁵ The historian André Burgiere writes in the book *The Annales School. An intellectual history*, about the founders of the Annales School and the developers of the notion mentality, Lucien Fevre and Marc Bloch, that “In their eyes, it was not the sources that provided the historians with a new point of view but the questions asked of them” (Burgiere 2006:16). Concerning the question of theory I find this relevant. The concept of mentality equipped the historian with a tool that made him able to ask questions in new ways. Thus, with the concept of mentality, the historian can go further, but as Burgiere says, in asking questions and not in finding mentalities as a positivist reality. With *branchements* we can, as I see it, go further in thinking culture because it questions pure origin and allows us to interpret phenomena in new ways. But it does not show us a reality beyond interpretation.

I interpret Burgier and Le Goff here as saying that mentality is not a theory but a way of asking questions and developing humanist reasoning. Mentality thus becomes a concept with which one asks new questions or which can shed light on anomalies or problems in an empirical material. In following such an interpretation we do not gain a theory or an instrument for finding answers but something to help us to reflect in a new way (on the same material or to find a new material).³⁶ Now I want to dwell on the relation between the change of language and what Burgiere says about “questions asked” because this is relevant to the analysis of Amselle and the interpretation I give of him. My point is that I find what Canguilhem sees in new concepts and Le Goff’s “desire to go further” to be a relevant description. To go

³⁵ This dynamic understanding of theory and practice could be found in the epistemological tradition going back to August Comte. According to Dominique Lecourt, Comte “does not explain the genesis of knowledge from sensual data (données des sens): what is primary is, according to him, the “speculation” on the the causes...In order to know one must of course observe; but in order to observe one must be put into motion by “some theory or another””(Lecourt: 93).

³⁶ For an excellent discussion of the relation between the theoretical and the empirical see Glynos and Howarth’s book *Logics of critical explanation in political and social theory* (2007).

further than what, one may ask. And it is here that the problem of the metaphor of the hybrid comes in. What about the problem with the metaphor *mestizo* or hybrid? This change of language is necessary for Amselle due to the insufficiency in the language of (cultural) hybridisation. As I see it, this could be read as a kind of obstacle that forces the thinking of cultural dynamics to repeat an origin.

My point is to show that there is a correspondence between the epistemological obstacles and the change of language in the writing of Amselle and the epistemological obstacle in the political discourse. My contribution to what Amselle is writing is thus both to analyse this change of language or metaphors in order to surpass a hindrance from an epistemological perspective and to show how this reflects the epistemological problem in the political discourse. This is due to Amselle's own intellectual style of intervening in internal problems of anthropology as well as using his reflections in the public debate. But it is also a result of my own approach where I want to reflect philosophically on the parallels between anthropology and politics.

I want, however, to emphasise one thing which marks an important distinction between the way Canguilhem reads the history of science and the change of language, and the way I read Amselle and the use of the metaphor *branchements*. Even though science may be involved in the use of metaphors the metaphors do not stay metaphors, but become, if they are successful, operational. This means that the new concepts are able to produce new empirically based knowledge and end further theoretical speculation. As I see it, *branchements* does not do this. The overcoming of obstacle means here something a bit different. Political-philosophically, it helps us to think in new ways, to develop our reflection on how we think culture in a plural society. Concerning the epistemology of social science it is close to what the historians of mentality described as the satisfaction "to go further" and to "ask new questions of the sources". But, as far as I am concerned, *branchements* does not end further theoretical speculation: it is not a solution and it does not correspond perfectly

with an empirical reality: It remains a metaphor. This takes us to the next question which is what a metaphor is.

6.5 *Branchements* as metaphor?

Branchements is, following Amselle's own words, a metaphor taken from the fields of electronics and informatics and applied to his anthropological fieldwork. But what is a metaphor, and what does a metaphor do? And even more precisely: what does it mean that *branchements* is a metaphor? For it does not seem entirely clear that *branchements* is a metaphor. That it is involved in something metaphorical is one thing, but since *branchements* is not derived from a discourse but from an image I am uncertain as to whether one could call it a metaphor. I find it pertinent to draw on Ricoeur's work on the metaphor, *La métaphore vive* (1975), which is one of the most extensive elaborations on the metaphor that exists and which strengthens the ricoeurian approach in the dissertation.

6.6 What is a metaphor?

Even though the metaphor as such is not our main theme- and one could have written a whole dissertation on the metaphor- we must pay at least some attention to it in order to understand what it means that *branchements* is a metaphor. Ricoeur's work on the metaphor, *La métaphore vive*, discusses some issues that are relevant for understanding metaphors in general and serves as a guide in our own discussion of *branchements*.

First of all, metaphor (lat. metaphora) comes from ancient Greek μεταφορά (metaphorà) and the verb μεταφέρω (metapherō, "transfer"), composed of μετά (metà, "beyond") and the verb φέρω (pherō, bring, bear, carry). In Latin "metaphora" is a rhetorical figure by which a word is transported from one meaning to another that has some analogies with it (Oxford English Dictionary, 2013). In the sentence "Achilles is a lion", "Achilles" is the unfamiliar, or that which we want to understand, whereas "a lion" is the familiar. So even though Achilles and a lion are very different, the metaphor draws our attention to their resemblance or that which

they have in common. Furthermore, whereas a simile compares that which we want to describe with something else (Achilles is like a lion), the metaphor is a matter of substituting that which we want to describe with something else (Kunnskapsforlaget, 1997: 154).

The most canonical thinker treating the metaphor is of course Aristotle who in his *Poetics* states that “Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else” (Aristotle in Ricoeur 2009: 13). Now, from this definition a long tradition (classical tropology) for understanding the metaphor was established and constituted a number of assumptions about it: 1) A differentiation between proper (ordinary language) and improper meaning (figurative language). 2) The lack of a proper word leads to the borrowing of an alien term where the borrowed term substitutes the proper meaning. 3) The real meaning of the borrowed term is abandoned in favour of the proper meaning. 4) Resemblance is what controls the substitution of the absent term with the borrowed term. From all this follows that the metaphor does not constitute any meaning of its own. Now this tradition, which focuses on the word, the substitutions of words, and the distinction between a proper and an improper meaning, has been named *substitutionalist*. And this again draws on a tradition of designative understanding of language where words stand for things in the world.

But does not the metaphor express new meanings and redescribe reality, Ricoeur asks. And if it does, it is incomprehensible from the point of view of the substitutionalist theory of the metaphor based on designation of words. So, Ricoeur relates himself to the second tradition of theory of metaphor called *interactionist*. By drawing on the works of I.A. Richards and Max Black, Ricoeur sees the metaphor as an interaction between the different components in a sentence. For interactionists a metaphor is first of all a syntagm composed of tenor/focus (which is the word expressed metaphorically) and vehicle/frame (which is the rest of the phrase). In the phrase “The chairmain plowed through the discussion” the word plowed is focus, whereas the rest of the phrase is meant literally and is the frame. And it is the

interaction between focus and frame that constitutes the metaphor. Secondly, a metaphor creates a meaning that implies a loss of meaning. And thirdly, the focus-word does not refer to its lexical meaning, but to the “system of associated commonplaces”. In the metaphor “Man is a wolf”, some details are suppressed and others emphasised- in short it “organizes our view of man” (Black in Jensen 1998: 24). But it seems like Black has still not got rid of the idea that there is an original meaning which genesis is not accounted for and which cannot comprehend literary creativity and redescriptions of reality. And even though Monroe Beardsley, according to Ricoeur, is closing in on it by claiming that a metaphor implicates a new meaning, it is still derived from a primary meaning. Ricoeur writes that:

Beardsley’s theory of metaphor takes us a step further in the investigation of the new metaphor. But it too in turn is caught short by the question that asks where the secondary meanings in metaphorical attribution come from. Perhaps the question itself (From where do we get...?) is wrong-headed (Ricoeur 2009: 113).

What Ricoeur is onto here is, as I see it, a problem of genesis. When can we say that something begins and is not just taken from somewhere else? How can we account for what is new, and how can we avoid an eternal regress where one meaning always refers to a prior meaning? To say that a new metaphor is not taken from anywhere is to recognise it for what it is, namely a creation of language, a semantic innovation, Ricoeur writes. And when he wants to articulate what constitutes this semantic innovation he turns to the reader or hearer, stating that “one must adopt the point of view of the hearer or reader.” The reading of a metaphor constitutes the metaphor as a semantic event which “takes place at the point where several semantic fields intersect” (Ibid: 114). I think this gives us a new approach to the interactionist view because the semantic fields (the interaction of focus and frame to put it in the words of Max Black) do not intersect without something or rather someone to unite them. Julio Hans C. Jensen writes that it is from the context the metaphor *is interpreted within*, that new meaning is created: “Context must be understood as the interpreter’s

cultural, historical, personal, and situational context” (Jensen 1998: 26). However, to me Jensen risks reducing the reader to his or her context, and ultimately to a given meaning. The reader and the context of the reader are not identical. And was not this the point: to avoid a regress to an original meaning? Semantic fields intersect all right, but the result of reading cannot be reduced to the sum of the two contexts or semantic fields. My point is that by introducing context as the background for the reader, the reader becomes reduced to his or her background. And then we lose the creative aspect once more. The reader and his or her context must also be understood as a dialectical relation.

Ricoeur separates living from dead metaphors. Contrary to dead metaphors, which have gone into the ordinary use of language, living metaphors capture the emerging and innovative aspects of language. However, the living metaphor is not just a pure language game but concerns reality and is a reference to the world: it redescribes reality. This makes it particularly suitable for our reflections on *branchements* and the operative dimension of both anthropology and critical thinking.

Ricoeur writes that:

Metaphor is the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality...From this conjunction of fiction and redescription I conclude that the “place” of metaphor, its most intimate and ultimate abode, is neither the name, nor the sentence, nor even discourse, but the copula of the verb to be. The metaphorical “is” at once signifies both “is not” and “is like” (Ricoeur 2009: 5).

This quote from the introduction underlines, as I see it, two points that are particularly interesting for the discussion of *branchements*. First of all, the question of whether the metaphor redescribes reality is vital to understanding *branchements* in the sense that it intervenes into the correlation between imagination (fiction) and reality. The view that cultures are abstract and closed entities is challenged with *branchements*. Secondly, branching in the domain of informatics and electronic on

the one hand and in the anthropological domain on the other is a tension that constitutes the creation of new meaning.

The metaphorical “is” that both signifies “is not” and “is like” takes us into the sixth study of *La métaphore vive* which discusses resemblance. As Abel and Poirée write in *Le vocabulaire de Ricoeur*, the metaphor is not so much about a semantic substitution as it is a “tension between heterogeneous semantic domains (aires)” (Abel and Porée: 81). And resemblance is precisely this dialectic between “is not” and “is like” which comes into being when two heterogeneous semantic domains intersect. In classical rhetoric and tropology the resembling aspect (being like) between the absent term and the borrowed word controlled the substitution. In fact metaphor is the trope of resemblance par excellence and draws on a reversion of the relation that Aristotle saw between metaphor and simile: “simile is no longer a sort of metaphor, but metaphor is a sort of simile, namely an abbreviated simile” (Ricoeur 2009: 205). For Ricoeur this is somewhat modified because resemblance is constituted by the reader or interpreter of a metaphor. And this constitution is composed of something verbal and something non-verbal. This non-verbal aspect Ricoeur calls, with Wittgenstein, “seeing as”, or as Jensen expresses it: “to “see as” is an act of consciousness which is released in the reception of the metaphor and is the imaginary’s process of realization”(Jensen 1998: 28).

6.7 Branchements as metaphor

Now, from what we have seen regarding the metaphor from the analysis of Paul Ricoeur we can now make some remarks on *branchements*. The metaphor contains the verb to be, according to Ricoeur, and comprises a tension between “is not” and “is like”. The metaphor draws a resemblance between some things and keeps them at the same time apart. In order to say that something is like something else and that a new aspect of something might be expressed, the literary sense of the word must be suspended and a new sense must be displayed. This involves interpretation:

If it is true that literal sense and metaphorical sense are distinguished and articulated within an interpretation, so too it is within an interpretation that a second-level reference, which is properly the metaphorical reference, is set free by means of the suspension of the first-level reference (Ricoeur 2009: 261).

If this holds true of *branchements* then the identification of *branchements* in informatics and electronics as a first-level reference should be suspended. The question is if *branchements* requires an interpretation and the first level reference could be suspended in favor of a second level reference. Does it suffer a loss of meaning and/or does it create new meanings when it leaves the field of electricity and informatics and encounters the domain of culture? I do not have the answer since I am not doing my own fieldwork and cannot really put *branchements* to the test. My role, at least within the frames of this dissertation, is to present some critical questions regarding the interventionist potential of *branchements* as a metaphor. However, I think it is possible to say something of the transition from first to second level reference.

First of all we have to ask the question of whether *branchements* is a metaphor. Amselle writes that relating his thinking to *branchements* is having recourse to a metaphor from electronics or informatics (Amselle 2001: 7). But *branchements* does not seem like an obvious metaphor since it is not an expression of language. At least it is important to look into what we mean when we say that something is a metaphor. Following the second part of Ricoeur's definition of the metaphor as the unleashing of "the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality", *branchements* might perhaps be called a metaphor. Importing a concept from informatics and electronics into the cultural domain unleashes the power that the "old fictions" of hybridity, identity, and difference have of thinking culture. We want to describe processes of cultural exchange, interpenetration, and openness without falling back into the "old fictions". Reality in this sense can be said to have been redescribed. Having said that, it is, from what Amselle writes himself, difficult to see it in accordance with the first part of Ricoeur's definition as a "rhetorical process"

which unleashes the power fictions have to redescribe reality. It is not, as far as I can see, the words and the definition of informatics and electronics that unleash something and it is certainly not a poetic language. So from this point of view *branchements* does not seem like a metaphor. As seen above, Fiquet- that calls for an elaboration on what the metaphorical here entails- calls *branchements* an image. And the metaphor is, as Ricoeur states, “half thought and half experience”. So to what degree is *branchements* reducible to an experience or a first level reference, or to what degree is it an activation of the imagination so that a new aspect of reality can be revealed?

Now, we must ask what this importation really means. What do we get from this comparison? Abel and Porée write that the metaphor is not so much about substitution but about “tension between heterogeneous semantic domains” (Abel and Porée 2009: 124). Is there a tension between the domain of culture and the domain of informatics? Does *branchements* contain a sufficient amount of ambiguity that makes it interesting? A problem with *branchements* is perhaps that it does not sufficiently allow for (a conflict of) interpretation, but that informatics steers the interpretation in a univocal direction. And this is perhaps due to the fact that *branchements* is not primarily elaborated through a discourse but through an image. On the other hand, I think that it is possible to say that the first-level reference of *branchements* (electronics and informatics) is suspended and a second level reference is deployed (N’ko culture and language), because N’ko, electricity, and informatics are not identical. *Branchements* as a metaphor thus helps us, through Amselle’s interpretation, to redescribe reality.

Is the question of whether or not *branchements* is a metaphor interesting or pivotal to the dissertation? Yes and no. It matters not whether or not *branchements* formally could be called a metaphor. But Ricoeur’s reflection on the distinction between the proper and metaphorical meaning might give us an indication as to what degree *branchements* can help us to develop new thinking. The question is what kind of thinking *branchements* can develop. For if *branchements* in its metaphorical use

only refers back to its proper meaning in electronics and informatics, the question is whether it gives us a sufficiently open perspective to allow us to shed light on new cases and help us to continue to ask questions.

6.8 Metaphor as problematisation

What I find extremely interesting with Ricoeur's philosophy of metaphor- and which is close to the French epistemological tradition through which I want to read *branchements*- is the emphasis he puts on tension and resistance. I read *branchements* as a way of problematising a certain way of understanding culture and do not see it as a theory through which I claim to know what reality is like. That does not mean that it is exempt from trying to intervene in reality. But it is this non-instrumental way of thinking tension between resemblance and resistance that I find to be pivotal also for problematisation. As we discussed with Canguilhem's distinction between theories/solutions and concepts/problems in the previous chapter, central to the task of epistemology is to reflect on how and why scientific problems are articulated, answered, and sometimes remain unsolved and open. When we enter the domain of the humanities it is even more difficult to answer and close the questions asked. So when we talk about the localisation of obstacle and the attempts at overcoming these obstacles through the use of metaphors, it is almost impossible to make these metaphors operational in an instrumental sense. The application of *branchements* can, as I see it, develop our thinking. We can for instance learn something about the resemblance between processes in informatics and processes of culture, but I also think there always will be a resistance in any material that deals with what is human. Since every context and case is new, the resemblance and thus the relevance of the metaphor will vary from case to case.

Anthropologist Philippe Chanson writes, in the introduction to his book *Variations métises Dix métaphores pour penser le métissage*, that the use of metaphors in the anthropological field of mestizo concerns the problem of the "intellectual equipment that permits us to think" (Chanson 2010: 32). In other words the

metaphors help us to think something that we cannot think without metaphors. But this does not implicate a solution in the sense of a transgression of the problem and the presentation of an exact description or definition. The metaphor cannot do without interpretation because the metaphor “gives us an indirect kind of knowledge” (Ibid: 33). It is precisely because it “reorganises reality...that [the metaphor] is a major epistemological tool for thinking the complex, moving... reality of the mestizo” (Ibid).

6.9 Summary

Before proceeding to the second step in the explication of *branchements* I recapitulate the main points so far. We first looked at the context of *branchements*. This consists, on the one hand, of the practice of anthropology and the study of identity in post-colonial Africa. Amselle’s case study N’ko and Soleyman Kanté present an alternative path to post-colonial thinking based on either primitive origin or the embracing of colonial thinking. On the other hand is the search for a suitable analytical language that is not trapped within origin. Here I have tried to indicate the problems linked to the metaphor hybridisation which can be characterised as a kind of epistemological obstacles to constructing non-essentialist anthropology. Furthermore, my point has been to see this change of language from hybrid to *branchements* as a kind of procedure of rationality similar to that of other sciences. In accordance with Georges Canguilhem, a change of language is necessary in order to overcome epistemological obstacles. The point is that the epistemological obstacle that Amselle is dealing with, and the reason why he abandons the hybrid as metaphor, is related to the one that we find in the political discourse. We will return to the question of language later. In the following paragraph I will go from discussing language and epistemology to elaborating on what I see as the dialectical aspects of *branchements*.

7. *Branchements* as dialectic

Introduction

The aim in this chapter is to explicate what I see as the dialectical aspect in *branchements* in particular and in Amselle's thinking in general. By doing so I want to say something about the way Amselle reasons as well as show how this kind of reasoning is fruitful as a critical approach to the way culture is discussed in the political discourse. The findings of *branchements* might ultimately lead to other kinds of reasoning concerning cultural belonging. Is it possible to develop a thinking that does not take cultural homogeneity as premise for both cohabitation and participation in a democratic society (Süssmuth 2006)? The concern is still the conditions for thinking culture and the relevance of *branchements* and Amselle's thinking, but here we explore more theoretically the philosophical aspects of this. As I have previously discussed, identity is what constitutes culture as something static and closed. But, as I have touched upon, this leads us into a critical discussion of identity. What Amselle does is criticise the way we understand culture and how it is linked to identity by examining other ways to conceptualise identity. And in doing this he draws on Paul Ricoeur's reflections in *Soi-même comme un autre*. A discussion of Ricoeur's thinking is thus pivotal in articulating Amselle's ideas.

A second objective, which nevertheless is linked to the discussion of Ricoeur, is how *branchements* intervenes into the identity-obstacle by being a dialectical thinking. Whereas origin and identity are concepts belonging to abstract reasoning (like comparison) where the result is that cultures are seen as closed worlds, *branchements* introduces the relation or mediation as the central aspect in identity-constitution. To show this I will draw on some elements in Hegel's thinking. In other words, the themes of *branchements*, identity, and dialectics are linked together. However, by including dialectics we are pulled into deep problems of how to understand dialectics. It is not entirely clear what kind of dialectics is at stake in Amselle's thinking. It seems to me that *branchements* shares dialectical aspects found

in Plato's writings (which Ricoeur draws on in *Soi-même comme un autre*), Hegel, and Spinoza.

7.1 Some dialectical aspects in Amselle's thinking: Mediation, third element, and relation

In the following I will attempt to give an interpretation of *branchements* by linking it to dialectics. In light of the overall problematics as well as internally in Amselle's thinking, dialectics is central. Three quotes from Amselle serve as an entry. First of all he states, as we have seen, that he wants to think cultural identity with "the idea of triangulation, that is, having recourse to a third element in order to constitute one's own identity" (Amselle 2001: 7). Secondly, he claims that "contrary to what those obsessed with the purity of origin think, the shortest path to "authenticity" is mediation" (Ibid: 14). A third excerpt is from *Mestizo logics* where he relates his work to that of Paul Ricoeur. Amselle writes that:

In this book I have attempted to conceptualize identity in terms of originary syncretism. I believe, in fact, that mixture is originary. One of the most recent books by Paul Ricoeur substantiates this notion. In *Soi-même comme un autre*, Ricoeur distinguishes between two aspects of identity, which are found at the level both of the individual and of the collectivities. He highlights the necessity of contrasting the identity of "sameness, to the identity of "selfhood"... "selfhood" is constructed in a permanent relation with alterity" (Amselle 1998: x).

With these three excerpts we have three key concepts that somehow articulate something dialectical but which nevertheless do not take us in quite the same direction: Mediation, triangulation (or third element), and relation. The two first take us in the direction of Hegel whereas the last leads us to Plato's writings and certainly to Paul Ricoeur. In the following I will look at the link to Hegel and then return to Ricoeur's thinking. The problem that guides my reflections is whether *branchements* is dialectical, and if so, what kind of dialectics?

When evoking a mediating principle in the constitution of cultural identity, Amselle draws upon Hegelian reflections. At the same time I do not think that

Hegelian philosophy can exhaustively account for Amselle's thinking because Hegel's dialectical thinking is idealistic and finished whereas the cultural *branchements* seems to me to be open and unfinished. Some aspects thus resemble more the kind of dialectics that could be found in the writings of Plato or Spinoza, whereas others seem to be Hegelian. So in order to understand how *branchements* is dialectical we must look into different ways of articulating it.

7.2 Hegelian dialectics

What does it mean to say that a culture or a cultural identity is constituted through mediation and a third? Even though the perspective on philosophy has changed since Hegel—from comprehending the whole world, the totality of reality, the absolute etc—there is still a lot to learn from his thinking. And as far as I can see, Amselle draws on Hegelian reasoning when questioning our understanding of culture. When using concepts such as mediation, third element or triangulation, and relation these are related to the Hegelian concept-constellation of abstract-concrete, reconstruction, and mediation. There are many ways of entering the work of Hegel and this is neither an attempt at understanding his thinking to a full extent nor to give a reading of Hegel which is chronologically consistent. Having said that, some background knowledge of the problems that Hegel was facing guides us in the understanding of our own. I mainly want to emphasise three points which are relevant to our reading of Amselle and the way he criticises the understanding of culture: a) abstract-concrete, b) reconstruction, c) mediation.

A) The discussion of culture and identity has led us into an examination of identity. And identity, difference, unity, and separation are at the center of Hegelian thinking. These concepts were early on a central problem for Hegel and a theme for his first published work *Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie*. The relation between parts and whole serves as an attempt at explicating the problem of identity. If we take a series of numbers (exemplifying parts) which we can sum up ($1+2+3=6$), the sum of the parts does not, according to Hegel, constitute

what we call the whole. The whole, which is something other than the sum, must be that which holds the parts together so that we can have a sum. In order to have mathematical equations we need an initial conscious act that holds the equation together. The sum too is just a part. The whole is something else than, on the one hand, the parts, and on the other hand the sum of the parts. We have, however, an inclination to abstract: When we separate the whole and its parts we also treat the whole like another part. So an additional problem emerges when the whole, which is not the sum itself, is taken as something autonomous or abstracted from the other parts. When the whole is separated from the parts, the whole itself becomes a part of the whole. This is, in Hegelian terms, an *abstract* notion of the whole.

Now the challenge is that we can also think the whole and its parts *concretely*. This requires, however, that the whole must be thought on different levels at the same time. On the one hand, the whole is concrete when it is not reduced (or abstracted) to a part. On the other, the whole is abstract when it is thought of as independent of the other parts. Examples of an abstract understanding of the whole might be the human soul or the German people when these are thought of as independent of the body or the multitude of Germans. The identity of a nation could thus be presented in an abstract and a concrete manner. An abstract part would on the other hand be like comprehending a limb of the body or an individual in isolation: they are nothing without without the whole that constitutes them. The concrete whole is the unity of the abstract whole (the soul, the German people understood independently) and the parts (the organs of the body, the singular beings of the people). As I understand it, this is close to what Hegel calls “die spekulative Grundfigur” which is “the highest form of knowing” (die höchste dem Menschen mögliche Erkenntnisweise) (Schnädelbach: 18). In his first critique, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kant tried to end the metaphysical speculation about how things are in themselves and to locate the limits for possible knowledge. The problem was, according to Hegel, that Kant’s analysis was undertaken abstracted from the concrete mediating processes through which all knowledge is related. For Hegel the highest kind of Erkenntnisweise, the

speculation, is “identity of the identity and notidentity” (Identität der Identität und Nichtidentität).

It is this speculative Grundfigur that I lean on when I explicate Amselle. It is a Hegelian way of thinking identity- as “the identity of the identical and the not-identical”- in which Amselle questions a notion of separation and non-communication between cultures. The idea is that the same way the German people is abstracted from the concrete periods and individuals through which it was forged, culture must be thought as concrete as well. N’ko shows that no cultural identity can be abstracted since this would be an empty identity. Furthermore, this has consequences for how we think cultural identity in a multicultural society.

B) If we return to our mathematical equation ($1+2+3=6$) as an example, it is not possible to account for the two numbers and their unity through the function + *until after* we have completed the equation. In other words, philosophical understanding is always reconstructions of reality as it already is. In other words, a temporal aspect is introduced into speculative thinking. Philosophy is thus not able to “go further” as it can only explicate the achieved reality. This point is vital for the further understanding of Hegelian dialectics. Because of this end point, the achieved reality of the Absolute becomes the point of departure for perceiving dialectics as a *process*. What does a dialectical process contain? Essential to any dialectical thinking is the etymological root itself. Dialectic is derived from the Greek *dialegein* composed of *legein* which means to speak and *dia* which means exchange (Macherey and Balibar: 359). An exchange of discourses means that there is more than one discourse. Paramount to Hegelian dialectic is that this exchange is laid out in time. The driving force in this development is the negative. In dialectics as exchange of discourses point of view A is understood when it is countered by a view negating A (not-A). And the exchange of discourses does not break down but continues this tension between A and not-A and leads to a view B. In this view B, both A and the negation of A is conserved (Aufhebung). But B leads to a new contradiction not-B which leads to a new point of view C etc.

On the one hand the exchange itself is what unites and separates the different discourses. From this perspective *the exchange* is not a part of the exchanges but that which makes the exchanges possible. On the other hand, without a plurality of discourses an exchange would not be possible. From this perspective the exchange is dependent on the participants or the different discourses. So neither the different discourses (the parts) nor the exchange (the whole) itself can be taken out or abstracted from the process of mediation. Consequently both the parts and the whole must be seen within the concrete whole. Now since dialectics is a perpetual movement from one place to another, this makes it in a way impossible to grasp from a first person perspective. When I am involved in a discussion I do not know the points of view of the others, nor do I fully understand my own, prior to the discussion. It is always a reconstruction. However, if we reconstruct this historically from the present we can account for all the prior movements that led to the point where we are today.

This end point, from which Hegel reconstructs the dialectical movements in history, or rather History's movement itself, is the perspective of what Hegel in *Phenomenologie des Geistes* calls the Absolute. This is vital for understanding Hegelian dialectics and for the reflection on dialectics in Amselle and Ricoeur. For, when the contradiction between two terms (A and non-A) is surpassed in a third term B, this implicates that the negative is the negative of the positive and not a "true" negative. Since dialectics is philosophically speaking a reconstruction from an end point in time, the direction and result of the dialectical movement become in a way inevitable. What is perceived as a contradiction (A vs. non-A) is thus constituted from the perspective of the term of surpassing (B). Or differently put, only the negation that leads to B (the third term) is a real contradiction from the perspective of Hegelian dialectics. As Macherey and Balibar states, this joins the beginning and the end of the process and thus closes the dialectical process.

I have now found two dialectical aspects in the thinking of Hegel that are relevant for understanding Amselle's thinking: abstract/concrete and reconstruction. The third is mediation which I now will go on to look at.

7.3 Mediation in *branchements*

Introducing Hegel's thinking on mediation as a theoretical key to question the notion of culture as closed does not entail thinking through Hegel's own system. We must think with Hegel beyond Hegel, which means mediations without an end, and do as Ricoeur put it: renounce the notion of "total mediation" (the Absolute). Hegel's critique of abstract thinking remains relevant to our thinking. As seen in the opening chapter, abstraction (in the sense of taking something out of its context and process of constitution) is a highly relevant operation. An example of this is cultural differentialism and cultural racism where cultures are seen as abstracted and in isolation. As I will discuss later, abstract thinking is what is questionable with regard to the metaphor hybridisation and mestizo.

Mediation or the mediate in Hegel's thinking follows from *die Spekulative Grundfigur* and is contrasted with the immediate. In Hegel's thinking this could be explicated through some problems in Cartesian philosophy. In the Cartesian tradition knowledge is understood through the subject who tries to acquire knowledge. This subject is opposed to the object of which it tries to gain knowledge. For Descartes the knowledge of the world of objects goes through the immediate intuition that the Reason has of itself. *Cogito ergo sum* is Reason's direct access to itself. For Hegel this leads into a dead end: the subject at hand is either an empty concept, a *tabula rasa*, or it is already constituted and the analysis is too late. The Hegelian consciousness is on the other hand linked to what it is conscious of (Schnädelbach 2007). The consciousness is connected with what is different from. According to Hegel, the difference between the so called reflective and speculative reason is that reflective reason separates what is one, whereas the speculative reason manages to express unity. Could this not also be applicable to cultures? The Mande cultural

domain, like the whole African continent, is different from the Christian and Muslim cultural domains, but not separated from them. An interesting hallmark of N'ko is its universal aspect. For instance, Aristotelian philosophy - from the perspective of N'ko representatives- is thought of as compatible with N'ko thinking and not perceived as a specific western kind of reasoning. For Kanté and his followers N'ko does not express a complete rupture with the western and Muslim world, neither is it the same. One way to read this is that N'ko is always already mediated through its contact with Muslim and western thinking. Like the Cartesian cogito, there is no *immediate* consciousness of N'ko-identity. Consciousness of N'ko was possible through the *mediation* of Mande traditions, the influence from the French colonial power, and the Muslim religion. The same way the Cartesian cogito is an empty consciousness, an isolated culture must be a culture without content or where no one is conscious of belonging to this culture. If we draw on the insights from the above critique of abstract thinking, a culture in its genesis does not have an “inside” but must use the resources from the “outside”, and continues to do so. The point is that the idea of an immediate access to a culture (for Norwegians to have immediate knowledge of themselves) is only possible when we abstract. And it is only possible to abstract in retrospect when the process of constitution is finished.

Branchements is in this manner close to designating mediation and that mediation is vital to the processes of identity and to consciousness of this identity. At least, if we follow a Hegelian line of thought, it is impossible to be self-conscious without mediation, without going through something else. *Branchements* draws, as far as I understand, on this. Mediation questions the notion of the non-mediated identity. N'ko holds together its different parts or influences and is thus separate from them, but can on the other hand not be grasped separately from its parts. We are thus led into what seems like an aporia: one the one hand N'ko is distinguished from other cultures and thus has an inside and an outside. On the other hand, when seen from the perspective of its parts, the outside and inside become blurred since the impulses are many. What I mean by this is that N'ko identity is the result of among other things

Kanté narrative. And from this perspective (of the whole), N'ko is distinguishable from Arab and western (French) colonisation. But when one looks at the different aspects that this narrative is composed of we see that it is influenced by the Arabs and western colonialism both. At certain points in the Mande history one had for instance three languages at the same time: a bureaucratic French language, a religious Arabic language, and trade done through Mande dialects. This is by Kanté attempted substituted by one, Mande, through the N'ko-alphabet. However, the influence from the French and the Arabs is still there.

So we can now to a certain degree relate the concept of mediation to *branchements*. When Amselle writes that the expression of an identity supposes the conversion of universal signs in order to manifest its identity, I read this as the description of a mediating process (Amselle 2001: 59). In order to articulate an identity this articulation itself is done through a medium that itself does not come from this identity. The medium supersedes, so to speak, identity. What we see here is similar to the Hegelian critique of the Cartesian cogito.

Emphasising mediation we have problematised the abstract view of culture. But what about the second notion, triangulation or third element, that reveals the dialectical thinking of Amselle?

7.4 The third

When Amselle says that *branchements* is to have recourse to a third element, this is perhaps the aspect of *branchements* where the Hegelian influence is the clearest. We have already touched upon it: if two persons who disagree are going to debate, this depends on something that makes it possible for the persons to both disagree and potentially agree. There is something that unites and separates the two at the same time. And when it comes to mediation, it has been said that a point of view in a discussion, the consciousness of being oneself, or belonging to a certain culture is inconceivable without a partner in discussion, another consciousness or other cultures. What holds the one and the other together and separate at the same time, is

the third. We discussed this earlier regarding the whole and the parts. The whole is something more than the sum of the parts and yet it does not exist without its parts. There are, for instance, rules that govern how the participants might use their language. In breaking these rules the discussion might collapse. When it comes to expression of (cultural) identity this is taken in a deeper sense since it does not only concern conscious acts. When I become a human being who belongs to this or that culture and I begin to express myself, this implicates that there is always already something that constitutes my expression. In order to be comprehended and in order to be comprehensible to myself, I use signs, symbols, language that is already there. My expression is mediated using, so to speak, a medium which is not mine, but which becomes mine. This is Amselle's point regarding N'ko also. N'ko is a mediated or connected cultural identity.

When Amselle describes *branchements* as triangulation or third element, this means, in Hegelian terms, that something holds all the different elements together and allows for mediating movements. As we saw in the previous chapter, *branchements* has a plural form meaning the plurality of connections. But if *branchements* is a third element this means, as far as I can see, that it is something more than the sum of connections: it is what allows for the different mediations to take place in the first place. Following a Hegelian reasoning it would be what unites and separates cultures at the same time. *Branchements* in the plural form thus resembles some kind of structure or system through which all expressions, in order to make sense, must be mediated.

To sum up the Hegelian dialectics, what was the motive for introducing a dialectical element into the understanding of culture? The aim here as elsewhere in the dissertation is to establish a reasoning that enables us to question a notion of cultures as abstract and original because this kind of reasoning is lurking behind the new racist and cultural differentialism. Hegel is, perhaps, the thinker par excellence who has tried to articulate a critique of this kind of reasoning. What his so-called speculative thinking wants to achieve is to see joined what previously has been

separated and seen apart. Even though Hegel's main concern—at least in order to break with Kant's theory of knowledge, my aim has been to take this reasoning and apply it to my own problem of culture and of interpreting *branchements*. *Branchements* reintroduces a mediating element in its articulation of cultures, which has led us to the question of what mediation is.

Three points which are vital to Hegel's philosophy and central to my elaborations have been abstract/concrete, mediate/immediate, and reconstruction. First, in order to understand the role of mediation in the constitution of (cultural) identity, a central conceptual pair in Hegelian thinking is abstract and concrete. Something is abstract when it is taken out of the whole to which it belongs. *Branchements* as a concept contains this as it emphasises that a cultural identity, in order to express its singularity, must convert universal (and external) signs into its own language. The problem here is to see whether this means that universal signs must be converted into the language of a particular culture and where the particular language somehow already exists, or if it is by converting universal signs that the particular language of a culture comes into being. Secondly, when something is seen as concrete it is grasped through mediation. Opposite to the concrete and mediation is abstraction and immediate. How is this latter pair problematic? I have here tried to see a parallel between the solipsism of the subject, which is under attack from Hegel, and a kind of "cultural solipsism", which Amselle is attacking with *branchements*. In the solipsistic reasoning of a subject the problem is how do I know that the things that I know correspond to an external reality. This problem is false since the fact that I already have knowledge of the world implicates that I am not separated from the external reality. In fact, the whole distinction of external and internal is questionable. It is premised on the abstraction and separation of the external and internal, subject and object. Likewise, the isolation of cultures is false since the fact that the identity or self-consciousness of a cultural group or persons belonging to a group can only be acquired indirectly.

We have so far looked at mediation and the third as aspects that reveal a Hegelian kind of dialectics. However, in *Mestizo logics* Amselle refers to how Paul Ricoeur in *Soi-même comme un autre* examines the relation of selfhood and otherness. This comes from another kind of dialectics or is a kind of mix of Hegelian dialectics and dialectics which one can find in Plato's writing. This dialectics takes us in a different direction than that of Hegel.

7.5 Dialectics from Plato's Sophist to Ricoeur

As we we have seen, Amselle draws up an argument in *Mestizo logics* where he proposes to "conceptualise identity in terms of originary syncretism". In addition to Anne-Marie Moulin's work in the history of medicine, Amselle gives credit to philosopher Paul Ricoeur for substantiating this notion of *originary syncretism*. Amselle writes concerning Ricoeur's book *Soi-même comme un autre* and the latter's distinction between the two Latin notions of identity (*idem* and *ipse*) that he

highlights the necessity of contrasting the identity of "sameness" to the identity of "selfhood." "Sameness" manifests itself in stability of character and behaviour, whereas "selfhood" is constructed in a permanent relation with otherness (*alterité*) (Amselle 1998: x).

I find this to be an interesting and, with some reservations, a pertinent (self-) interpretation which still stands even when Amselle abandons the metaphor *mestizo* for the benefit of *branchements*. At the core of our problematic lies this selfhood's "relation with otherness". The point is to theoretically render account of a relational conceptualisation of identity. And here Amselle draws an analogy: Like the identity of a person, the identity of a collective (culture) is related to what is other or different.

If we turn to Ricoeur's text *Soi-même comme un autre* we can read that it has three aims which all concerns dialectical aspects. It is an attempt at highlighting a reflective mediation immanent in the grammar of personal pronouns. Secondly, it seeks to elaborate two significations of identity (the identity of selfhood and sameness) and their dialectical relation, and thirdly it aims to scrutinise the dialectics

of self and other than self. As far as I am concerned, it is in particular this third aim which Amselle has in mind when he relates his anthropology to Ricoeur. Ricoeur explains the title of the book (*Oneself as another*) as that being oneself as another means that “one cannot be thought of without the other, that the self instead passes into the other” (Ricoeur 1990: 3). And it is this “one passes into the other” which we must explicate in order to understand Amselle. Mind you that to be a self is not to be *similar* to another. That would be to say that the two selves are analogically linked but do not affect each other. To say that the self *passes into* the other, and that to be oneself is *to be* another than oneself, implicates that there is some kind of continuity between the self and other than self. Furthermore, this relation between self and other than self (being oneself in as much as being other) is described by Ricoeur as a kind of dialectics. But what kind? Turning to Plato’s writings we find that

“The dialectics in which these two terms [between selfhood and otherness] oppose one another and are related to one another belongs to a second-order discourse, recalling that of Plato in the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist*, the *Philebus*, and the *Parmenides*; this discourse places on stage metacategories, the “great kinds” akin to the Platonic Same and Other, which transcend the first order discourse to which belong the categories or existentials such as persons and things...” (Ricoeur 1992: 298).

We do not have the time to examine Plato thoroughly here. Still it seems vital for comprehending the kind of dialectics that Ricoeur wants to articulate. So I have to say something about it. There are three kinds of dialectics in the writings of Plato, where the third kind is the one Ricoeur is referring to.³⁷ In the four late dialogues, the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist*, the *Philebus*, and the *Parmenides*, the concepts of being, identity, difference, and diversity are treated. If we here limit ourselves to the *Sophist*, Plato here outlines an understanding of dialectics, proposed by one of the

³⁷ The first is the hypothetical which deduces consequences of an hypothesis (*Phaidon*, *Parmenides*), the second shows the contradictions in the belief of opponents (*Elenchus*). And the third is about the dialectics of similarities/identity and the relation between forms (*Sophist*, *Statesman*). I am indebted to Erlend Breidal for helping me to understand the *Sophist* and for allowing me to read parts of his doctoral thesis on Plato on which I base parts of my account.

participants in the dialogue called the Stranger, that has led some to regard it as a “technique of relation” (Balibar and Macherey: 360). An overall theme in the dialogue is to determine who is philosopher and who is a sophist. Anyway, central for us is that the discussion eventually turns to the question of which of the five “great classes” or kinds (movement, rest, being, the same, and the other) can be combined and which cannot. Motion and rest are different kinds which cannot be combined, and yet they are both joined by *being*. Both motion and rest *are*, but *being* is neither in motion nor at rest. So the two kinds, motion and rest, are separated as beings on the one hand, and united through *being* on the other. Being, as that which unites motion and rest, is, however, neither motion nor rest. This goes for same and other as well. On the one hand none of the kinds are the same. On the the other, *other* permeates all the forms or kinds since each is other than the remaining ones. They are thus separated, by being different, but united, by the kind other. All the kinds are the same in the sense of being identical to themselves, but the sameness is shared with what is other. When Ricoeur distinguishes between a first order and a second order discourse it seems to me that he sees how something which is separated on one level can be related on another level. Self and other than self are separated on one level, but combined and related on another. Or differently put, a person is separable from another person when one counts them by having different numerical identity, but on the level where they interact their identity and difference are not necessarily clear.

In the Sophist (Plato 2007) dialectics is defined as the science of knowing and determining how and whether for each of the five “great kinds” something can and cannot be related to or combined with other things. And eventually we find the expression we are looking for. In 257b the Stranger, when discussing non-being, makes a distinction between *opposition* and *other than*. When speaking about non-being it is not something contrary to being but other than being (Plato 2007: 257b). Accordingly negation means other than and not the opposite. The distinction, and this is extremely interesting, is thus between opposition and other than. Transposed to our problem of selfhood and otherness, and the two levels of discourse, this means that

when identity (as selfhood) and difference are opposed they cannot be seen together, but when difference is comprehended as *other than* they can be thought relationally. Or differently put, a pure negation cannot have relation to anything else.

This is pivotal to our search for a relational understanding of identity and difference. The same and the other are different but not opposites and may be both related and separated depending on what perspective we are speaking from:

For we've not spoken in a similar way whenever we say it's the same and not the same; but whenever we say it's the same, we speak thus on account of its participation in the same in relation to itself, but whenever we say it's not the same, it's on account of its sharing, in turn, in the other, on account of which it gets to be apart from the same and has become not that but another, and hence once more it is said correctly that it's not the same (Ibid: 256b).

Having Amselle and Ricoeur in mind this harmonises with the identity of a person (or a collective) and explains why Ricoeur turns to this dialectic. In what Ricoeur calls the first order discourse the classes are separated but in the second order discourse they are related. What is central is how negation is not thought in a pure manner, but relationally. Identity or the same and the other can thus be united or are already united.

So we have gone from a Hegelian dialectics based upon separation and unity through something third, to a relational dialectics as it is found in Ricoeur/Plato. Consistent with the emphasis in the thesis in general on Ricoeur and the link between Amselle and Ricoeur I want to go deeper into Ricoeur's work on the dialectics of personal identity.

7.6 Ricoeur's dialectics from the long route to being to oneself as another

In order to get a grasp of Ricoeur's conception of dialectic we commence by turning to the introductory essay in *Conflict des interpretations* called "Hermeneutic et existence". Here he proposes a synthesis of hermeneutics and existentialist phenomenology, or rather: "the graft of the hermeneutic problem onto the

phenomenological method”(Ricoeur 2004b: 3). This grafting requires, however, that we take the “long” rather than the “short route”. The short route is after the manner of Heidegger which he calls an ontology of understanding, for “breaking with any discussion of method, it carries itself directly to the level of an ontology of finite being in order there to recover understanding, no longer as a mode of knowledge, but rather as a mode of being”(Ibid: 6). Instead of a hermeneutic à la Gadamer, which is close to Heidegger, where the question is a choice between truth or method, or between a traditional regional hermeneutic aiming for the comprehension of texts within specific areas (theology, philology, and law) or an existential hermeneutics, Ricoeur elaborates a third way which attempts to mediate the two. Neither being as self-interpretative nor the different kinds of hermeneutic methods can be abstracted or separated from each other.

This indirect, long route or mediating thinking makes Ricoeur interesting for those disciplines who want a dialogue with philosophy or for philosophers who want a dialogue with other disciplines. Having the long route in mind, interdisciplinary dialogue is more than a mere cliché; it refers to a fundamental aspect of his thinking. Besides Amselle’s explicit “use” of Ricoeur in *Mestizo Logics*, it is thus not difficult to see why Ricoeur’s thinking might be fruitful to him. This reflection on being through mediation presented in *Conflict des interpretations* is continued in *Soi-même comme un autre* but in the latter it takes a more ontological turn with the question of the Self as epicentre for the investigation. The same way as there was no direct way to being in *Conflict des interpretations* there is no direct way to oneself in *Soi-même comme un autre*. As far as I can see, this gives Ricoeur’s dialectical thinking a rather clear Hegelian stamp. The critique of the “short route to being“is similar to Hegel’s critique of the Cartesian cogito: the Cartesian Cogito is according to Hegel either an empty consciousness or it is completed and the analysis is “too late“. In the same way the being which we go directly to is an empty being, whereas the long way requires us to reconstruct an already achieved human existence. But what about Plato to whom we have ascribed the relational kind of dialectics that Ricoeur discusses and

Amselle refers to when describing the dialectics of selfhood and otherness? It is here that we touch upon a concept in Ricoeur's thinking that brings together Heidegger's distinction between what and whom, the Hegelian themes of mediation and reconstruction, and the relational dialectics of selfhood and otherness: narrative identity.

7.7 Narrative identity and the permanence of time

Before going into the reflection on idem and ipse elaborated in *Soi-même comme un autre*, we must go in via *Temps et récit III*. Though the problem of temporality is central to *Soi-même comme un autre*, it is even more so to *Temps et récit I-III*. In the latter Ricoeur elaborates on the complex relation between time and narrative. How does human time come about? Spurred by St. Augustine's contemplation on time, Ricoeur looks to how the experience of time is related to the transformation of time in history and fiction. As discussed earlier, it is essential to have his "long route to being" from le *Conflict des interpretations* in mind in order to understand the mediation of time and narrative. There is only an indirect way to being and there is only an indirect way to time: neither time nor being is given immediately.³⁸ Ricoeur suggests in *Temps et récit* that human time is constituted through the union of fiction and history, which are both aspects of narration. Why do we narrate? We narrate in order to shape time- in its chaotic and raw form- into an order which becomes the basis for human existence and identity. Man is a time-transforming or time-shaping being. But what does this have to do with identity?

Even though identity was part of the reflection from *Temps et récit*, Ricoeur did not occupy himself with this question until *Soi-même comme un autre*. This unthematized question of identity becomes the centre of his reflection in the latter work. Pivotal to this problematic is the already mentioned distinction between who

³⁸ This is something that joins Ricoeur to Canguilhem and Foucault in opposition to the likes of Heidegger and Deleuze (who is influenced by Bergson). Whereas the first group only admits that time and events can be given in retrospect through history, the second group tries to think time and events as such (Revel 2008:50-151).

and what. Through the different kinds of questioning Ricoeur is able to distinguish two different notions of identity, for persons and for things. But Ricoeur does not just include Heidegger's radical questioning. He also develops his argument in dialogue with Hanna Arendt's reflections on action and human identity. Paraphrasing Arendt, Ricoeur proposes that to identify an individual or a community is to answer the question of who has acted (Ricoeur 1985: 442). In other words, the analysis of narrative identity commences with an action or practice which leads to the question of identification: Who has done it? The way we ask the question is imbedded in language. The identification of the cause behind actions and practices is not questionable in the form of what. We cannot ask what acted if we are going to take what it means to act seriously. The question "who?" opens up a temporal dimension that is not ascribable to "what?" With actions comes responsibility, but this responsibility cannot be established without permanence in time. When I take responsibility for a past act, I acknowledge that it was me who acted regardless of whether or not I have continued to act in a similar way. This renders the responsibility and the acknowledgment constitutive for this permanence in time. In other words, the relation between acts and the reflection on these acts are circular. But it is this circular relation to myself that constitutes my identity.

So when we try to identify who did it, we do not identify a thing but a self. One of the central aspects that distinguishes the self from a thing is the peculiar kind of temporality. Whereas the temporal identity of a thing is the same throughout time (it is the permanence in time that makes it the same or identical to itself), the identity of a self is a constant tension between being the same and being oneself. Here the concept of narrative identity is reintroduced as the synthesising activity of the sameness and the selfhood of a person. On the one hand there is a relation (I reflect on who I am), and on the other there is sameness (I am the same as I was an hour ago).

Narrative identity is a question of continuity and unity of a life from the commencing act to question and answer. The answer might be both simple and

complex. It might be easy to say “it was him”, but this is possible only through a series of processes sedimenting the unity of a life.³⁹ These processes consist in the interconnectivity of history and fiction. Ricoeur writes that narrative identity is the outcome or the offspring (*rejeton*) of the union of history and fiction (Ricoeur 1985: 442). In other words, identity is an outcome of a process and not a point of departure. Fiction is not here the opposite of reality but the mimetical aspect of storytelling and synthesising. History is not possible without the configuration of facts and events within a fictional structure. And the fictional structure is an empty form without historical facts and events. This goes for both the personal micro-level and the macro-level of a society: the scientific approach to past events that we call writing history is linked to the existential dimension of narration. And central to narration is to unify all the events. This unifying of events does not come from the events themselves but depends on a logic that gives the events an order. This order is what makes it possible for these events to be imitated and rendered intelligible as historical facts.

A central point then becomes that the way there is no being without time, there is no being without narration. It is not possible to say who the agent of an act is if there is no synthesis of time through narration. Hence it is, as I understand it, the narrative itself that constitutes permanence in time. Or differently put; it is only through narratives that the problem of the possibility of identity in time can be solved. Without narration the problem of personal identity is locked in an antinomy without solution. In this antinomy one must either hold that the subject is identical to itself through its different states of mind or that the subject is a substantialist illusion and that only the diversity of cognitive and emotional states exists as Hume and Nietzsche claim. This dilemma, Ricoeur writes, disappears if one substitutes the idea of identity as the same (*idem*) with a view of identity as narrative (Ibid: 443).

³⁹ Is not this the issue when one in court discusses a person’s accountability for her acts? Can we from a third person perspective decide who can be made accountable for her acts and who does not? In order for a legal system to work the way we know it it depends on persons being able to acknowledge being the same person throughout time.

How does the distinction between idem and ipse come into the discussion of narrative identity? And how does this relate to the relation between selfhood and otherness and the dialectics of relation that we discussed earlier? Before I return to the relational dialectics of selfhood and otherness, I will pause for a moment and look into the other aspect of narrative identity.

7.8 Between permanence in time and de-substantialising identity

What Amselle has in mind when stressing the contrast between “sameness” and “selfhood” is Ricoeur’s somewhat phenomenologically informed distinction between the two Latin words for identity: *idem* and *ipse*. Whereas *identitas* in Latin is a noun, idem and ipse are pronouns. Idem refers to the same, and ipse to self. Idem is the identity of something that remains while the appearances or “accidents” change. The philosophical model has been, since ancient times, the substance. The ipse-identity on the other hand accounts for a non-substantial identity. In the Latin sentence “Aristoteles ipse dixit” ipse refers to Aristotle and means “Aristotle himself said it”. In “idem ille populus” idem refers to this people which is the same. As seen previously, Ricoeur’s point is to explore selfhood in line with Heidegger as another way of posing questions. The identity of a human, of a self, is the response to another question than that of a substance. As Abel and Porée write, it is more accurate to say that the identity of a person is to be him- or her-self rather than saying that he or she is the same (Abel and Porée 2009:60). The identity of a person, the Self, thus corresponds with the Latin ipse. But even though Ricoeur has learned a lot from Heidegger, Ricoeur introduces another element that takes him away from Heidegger. With the concept of *narrative identity* from the conclusion in *Temps et récit III* Ricoeur includes a dialectical dimension to his thinking of human identity.

In *Temps et récit* the permanence in time was central to Ricoeur. And the distinction between idem and ipse corresponded to the opposition between a formal and a narrative identity. As far as I can see, this changes slightly in *Soi-même comme un autre*. Here he is more concerned with a substantialist view of identity and with the problem of how to link selfhood to otherness. Whereas the dialectics of idem and ipse in *Temps et récit* is concerned with the problem of consistency in time, the dialectics of ipse or selfhood and otherness is what is at stake. Despite the fact that

there seems to be a consistency through time and that it is the narrative that secures the unity of the person, the unity itself consists of parts that have no immediate internal link. In other words, the moments in the ipse-identity are initially heterogeneous. Even though Ricoeur wants to avoid the *conclusion* given by, for instance, Hume and Nietzsche that there is only a diversity of cognitions and emotions, the *problem* posed by these thinkers remains highly appropriate. The notion of ipse is meant to make some important distinctions in relation to an idem-identity. My point is that whereas the conclusion in *Temps et récit* focuses on the synthesising activity of narration, the reflection on identity as ipse opens up to the question of heterogeneity present in identity. And this is paramount to our general reflection on culture and identity. The contribution of ipse compared to that of idem is in this sense that identity as sameness is conceived of as non-relational whereas the identity of a self is relational. Contrary to the synthesising aspect of narrative identity, ipse-identity accounts for the relation between identity and otherness. So in ipse-identity the emphasis is on what does not initially “belong together”. This is consistent but confusing. With narrative identity Ricoeur writes against temporal fragmentation, with ipse-identity he writes against substantialisation.

7.9 The relation between selfhood and otherness

Even though ipse-identity is graspable from the problematics of time, it seems to have a less developed but equally interesting value applied to the problem of cultural identity. This is of course related to our frame of reflections concerning the concept of culture. In the last chapter of the latter work Ricoeur commences a reflection on the ontology of selfhood where the relation between selfhood and otherness is laid out: “I suggest as a working hypothesis what could be called the triad of passivity and, hence, of otherness” (Ricoeur 1992: 318). The first aspect in this triad is one’s own body, the second is “the passivity implied by the relation of the self to the foreign, in the precise sense of the other (than) self, and so the otherness inherent in the relation of intersubjectivity” (Ibid). The third and the most deeply hidden

passivity is the relation the self has to itself. The last aspects are particularly relevant for our investigation. I want to underline that Ricoeur here primarily discusses the ontological aspects of the self of a person. Having said that, Ricoeur more than once indicates that his reflections on persons have parallels to collectives. An intermediate position is then to be preferred where both the fruitfulness and limitations of such a parallel can be explicated.

Now, this passivity fits with a phenomenological analysis taking experience as its point of departure. Furthermore, Ricoeur writes that “The term “otherness” is then reserved for speculative discourse, while passivity becomes the attestation of otherness” (Ibid). I take this to mean that the term otherness must stem from Ricoeur’s own ontological speculation. However, I find passivity also relevant for explicating what kind of dialectics Ricoeur has in mind, which eventually might shed some light on Amselle.

A step in trying to trace this passivity is for Ricoeur to reflect critically on the opposite results given by philosophers within the phenomenological tradition. Like any good dialectical thinker he tries to establish a new way through contradictions in opposite positions. On the one hand, Husserl attempts to lay out the otherness of the other through the phenomenological reduction. On the other hand, Lévinas develops a philosophy of otherness in a more ontological manner than Husserl. Husserl remains confined within the structures of the ego and its representation of otherness, the other remains represented through the comparative logic of the same; the other is *like* or the same as me. And Lévinas, in breaking with a Husserlian representation, singularises the other. For Ricoeur this is two sides of the same coin: “Because the Same signifies totalization and separation, the exteriority of the Other can no longer be expressed in the language of relation” (Ibid: 336). Having the above quote from Amselle and Ricoeur’s own ambition in mind it is precisely a relational understanding of the same and other that we are seeking.

Why are we led to a non-relational understanding of the same and the other, or, why does the emphasis on otherness repeat the mistake of identity as sameness?

The problem lies, according to Ricoeur in a hyperbole of separation which on the side of the same “appears to me to lead to the hyperbole of exteriority, on the side of the other, to an impasse” (Ibid: 339). It seems to me as if what we call dichotomous or oppositional thinking, dividing everything into opposites (for example man/woman, night/day, same/other, identity/difference etc.), has such a strong hold of how we think that to see the different poles as relational rather than oppositional is very difficult. The social exclusion that some might experience when wanting to be integrated into a society stems thus not only from an obvious xenophobic attitude but is also to be found deep in our theoretical thinking. In other words: do we have problems with understanding relations because we think in oppositional terms?

But what about the relational thinking we found in Plato’s dialogue the Sophist and which is described as a deficit in Husserl’s and Lévinas’ account of otherness? Ricoeur described the “relational dialectic“ in Plato’s metaphysical writings by distinguishing between a first-order and a second-order discourse. To me this distinction seems to correspond with *idem* and *ipse* on the one hand, and comparison and *branchements* on the other. According to Ricoeur, the five “great kinds“ on the level of the first order discourse “to which belong the categories or existentials such as persons and things“ (Ibid: 298), are not related to each other. As far as I can see, this is the level of classifications and categories. It is here that identity means *idem* (sameness). Both Amselle and Ricoeur have located the operation that secures this kind of identity thinking: comparison.

Regarding our reflection on social-anthropology and Amselle’s notion of *branchements* it is interesting to observe that in Ricoeur’s distinction between *idem* and *ipse* identity, which may be a way of articulating *branchements*, the *idem*-identity is designated as formal (Ricoeur 1985: 443). Applied to empirical investigations undertaken in social-anthropology and ethnology, formal has the meaning of out of context, or without content. Identity grasped through an assumption that there are stable entities like identities to be found, is an example of a formal identity. This operation may be characterised as abstraction and is expressed

in comparison. Comparison is an abstract operation which underlying logic is idem-identity. But what about the second-order discourse?

7.10 Second-order discourse: *branchements*?

Returning to Amselle's case, a vital feature for the N'ko movement is that it is always already involved in what is "external". To articulate the local mandingean language in a written language is to take something alien (Arabic, Latin and Egyptian Hieroglyphs) and familiarise it. This movement is a double reversal. On the one hand something alien (Arabic, Latin and Egyptian Hieroglyphs) becomes familiar (mandingean), but then what has become familiar has at the same time become modified from the initial point of view. Arabic, Latin, and Egyptian Hieroglyphs are recognisable and unrecognisable from both the original and the new (mandingean) perspective. What kind of alterity then are Arabic, Latin, and Egyptian Hieroglyphs to mandingean? Could this be described in more general terms? Ricoeur reflects on the role or character of alterity in the switch from idem to ipse in *Soi-même comme un autre* by stating that alterity can be constitutive for ipse-identity (Ricoeur 1990: 13). This implies that on the level of ipse-identity there is no clear cut boundary between alterity and identity. With the notion of ipse this leads us into a problem. For, taking the case of N'ko, on the one hand there is a continuum from being Mande to being Muslim and, on the other, there is a distinction between being Mande and being Arab. So Soleyman Kanté does not work without some comparison and distinction in mind. A certain degree of idem-identity is also present in the way he recognises something to be a Mande idem-identity with permanence in time. My point is that if ipse is to be scrutinised as a conceptualisation of *branchements*, in the sense that we want to see how identity and what is other (*altérité* in the above quote) are related, what is other may mean at least two things which are not entirely consistent with each other.

On the one hand, what is other can be taken as the opposite of identity. This is of course what I am trying to question with ipse or identity of self. Or differently put:

the oppositional logic that Amselle and Ricoeur try to get out of is reintroduced in the analysis of the N'ko. It seems impossible to identify and talk about something without assuming its difference from other things. How can what is other be constitutive in this sense? One way is via the negative: it is possible to define an identity through what it is not. Another way is through borrowing. If I borrow something foreign and turn it into my own in order to express myself, this assumes a distinction between me and that which is foreign at the same time as what is foreign becomes constitutive for me. But again this assumes the identity of me before the relation I have to others. This indicates, as I see it, how difficult it is to go into this sort of discussion about genesis. Where something ends and something new begins is not so easy to see.

On the other hand what is other is *not* taken as the opposite of identity but is in a kind of continuity or relation with identity. Consequently this risks dissolving the very idea of identity. This is why narrative identity, by its constitution of idem-identity, is seen as vital to account for the relative stability of identity. My question is that if otherness is not taken as an opposition- and distinction can be questioned- does not this mean that everything is one? The constitutive role of what is other is here something else as the boundaries between identity and otherness are questioned. Cultures are thus not to be understood as opposing worlds, but as variations of one. This needs two further comments.

First, it seems to me as if the elaboration of *branchements* and the relation between identity and what is other fluctuate between this first interpretation and the second. Even though the intention is to establish a thinking that is more in accordance with the second, it is difficult not to fall back into the first.

Secondly, if *branchements* and ipse can be used to account for cultures as being in a continuum and thus that the whole world is one, it nevertheless remains to be asked how it is one. What does that mean? Two alternatives seem possible. On the one hand that all things, all cultures, are united through a kind of universal spirit where the connectivity between cultures are governed by something transcendent

outside the web of cultural connections. On the other hand that everything is one but, so to speak, without being united by something outside of the web of connections. Or differently put: is *branchements* the point of departure in the sense of an always already existing structure, or is it a result of mediating processes? And what is the difference between these two?

A «solution» to this problem of trying to articulate relations rather than opposition and the constant fallback to classifications and oppositions could perhaps be that relational thinking must itself always be in motion. In other words, it is not possible to be in a relational mode where all identities (as sameness) and differences are suspended. It seems to me that there is something like this at stake in the passages that we looked at in the Sophist. The great kinds that as beings are separated (motion and rest), are united through *being*, but where *being* is neither motion nor rest. They are related at the same time as they are opposed and opposed at the same time as they are related. If Amselle tries to make this into a theoretical way of reflecting upon an empirical material, then this is a difficult exercise.

To sum up, in the reading of Amselle through Ricoeur, I have tried to explicate what Amselle means by linking his thinking in *Mestizo logics* to Ricoeur's discussion of identity in *Soi-même comme un autre*. What they have in common is a relational or dialectical understanding of identity. There is, however, more to the link between them than an explicit reference. First of all I have tried to show how this link extends further than *Mestizo logics* and is a relevant way to explicate the metaphor *branchements*. Secondly, in order to get out of the static opposition of identity and diversity, they both relate this to the operation of comparison. Comparison is what in philosophy and anthropology reproduces a static notion of culture and identity.

At the same time we have faced some problems with the link between them. First of all, whereas Ricoeur in *Soi-même comme un autre* at least partly draws on dialectics elaborated in Plato's Sophist, Amselle, when explicating *branchements*, draws on Hegel too. Expressing *branchements* as a third element risks taking with us the idealistic aspects of Hegel. Whereas the dialectics between identity as ipse and

otherness in *Soi-même comme un autre* are relational in the sense of a continuum where the distinction (between the external and the internal) is questioned, the introduction of a third reinstates distinction. Distinction is not a problem per se, but it is a problem as long as this is what reproduces the external relation between identity and otherness.

A second problem is the analogy between the identity of a person and the identity of a self. Does a culture have a self in the same way as a person does? If this is the case then it seems to me inevitable that a substantialist view of culture becomes reproduced. This problem exists, however, not only between Amselle and Ricoeur. Ricoeur makes a similar analogy when he in *Temps et récits* sees a parallel between the narrative identity of groups and persons.

7.11 Spinoza, Hegel, and dialectics

Before moving on to the next stage in my interpretation of *branchements*, which is *branchements* as an expressionist account of genesis, I find it pertinent to open up a reflection on Spinoza, Hegel, and dialectics. In addition to finding relevant thoughts on dialectics in Hegel's thinking and Plato's dialogues, *branchements* could be interpreted from a Spinozist perspective. A problem with using a Hegelian account of mediation as a reading of Amselle was that this might lead us into Hegel's idealism. My point is that mediation is part of Amselle's reasoning in passages such as those where Amselle states that the expression of an identity supposes the conversion of universal signs in its own language. The expression of identity is only possible in a mediation, that is, by going through something else. And in this case *branchements* is described as a web of meanings. But is *branchements*, or this web of meanings, which ensures a successful expression of identity, itself above the process of branching? For from the perspective of Hegel the process of mediation is completed. The risk is, as I see it, that the same problem emerges regarding *branchements*. To what degree does *branchements* allow for future connections and reconnections? To what degree is *branchements* open or closed, unfinished or completed? We have also

seen this in the light of Plato, Ricoeur, and a kind of relational dialectics. The way the great kinds in the first-order discourse are separated, cultures can be separated and compared. But the mixing of kinds is on the other hand inevitable and must be treated also in a second-order discourse. Another way of articulating this is Spinoza's thinking.

This is not the time or place to look thoroughly into Spinoza himself. Hence the point is not to make a scholarly remark on Spinoza or the difference between Hegel and Spinoza, but rather to see what this may entail regarding our understanding of *branchements*. So, for a scholarly account I rely on first and foremost on Pierre Macherey who is one of the leading French experts on the philosophy of Spinoza. And for Macherey, Hegel's own reading of Spinoza can teach us about dialectics. In his book *Hegel ou Spinoza* Macherey discusses many topics in the Hegel-Spinoza relation by taking Hegel's reading of Spinoza as the point of departure. Macherey claims that Spinoza has superseded Hegel by presenting dialectic without teleology. Even though Spinoza's philosophy remains an open question to Macherey it indicates another way of thinking contradiction and negation in dialectics. Macherey's point is that despite their different approaches and irreconcilable tension, Hegel and Spinoza have a common ground (Macherey 1980: 13). The epicentre of this common ground and tension is dialectics where Spinoza according to Macherey represents "the denial (la dénégation) of this [Hegelian] dialectics which briefly could be called a dialectics without teleology ..."(Ibid). Even though this is rather difficult to understand, and without discussing whether this is a correct interpretation of Spinoza, I will try to give a summary of what Macherey means by this.

In the last part of his book Macherey commences a long discussion of dialectics by looking at Hegel's interpretation of Spinoza's proposition "omnis determinatio est negatio" written in a letter to Jarigh Jelles in 1674. For Hegel the phrase was crucial to his own thinking; it does, however, also demonstrate Hegel's misunderstanding of Spinoza's thinking. According to Hegel the thinking of Spinoza

is not as fully developed as his own. Hence Spinoza has not appreciated the full meaning of the phrase.

The limitation in Spinoza's thinking is, according to Hegel, that he understands negativity in an abstract manner, detached from relations. Pivotal to Spinoza's philosophy is substance. In rejecting the dualism of Descartes, Spinoza introduces the idea that there are not two substances but one. Furthermore this substance is not given in itself, but only through its attributes. Since Hegel interprets Spinoza's conception of substance as deprived of positive determination, he [Hegel's Spinoza] sees the attributes and thus negativity as the only way to determination. The only way to learn about the substance is through what it is not, through its attributes or modes. But, and this is Hegel's criticism, this negativity does not get us in touch with what is positive. Spinoza remains stuck with the negative without seeing it in relation to what is positive. What Hegel does here, Macherey writes, is to separate the substance from its attributes. This means that the substance and the attributes are external to each other (Ibid: 145). And since the substance is given only through its attributes, this means that the substance has an external relation to itself. Hegel finds this abhorrent. Externality, as long as it is not related to what is internal, remains an abstract or detached understanding of externality, whereas for Hegel all externality must be related to internality. In other words, the failure of Spinoza is relative to Hegel's thinking but not, as we will see, an interpretation on Spinoza's own premises.

According to Macherey, Hegel for his part understands the phrase "omnis determinatio est negatio" consistently with his own thinking in the sense that in every negation there is determination. In other words, in negation there is something positive (a determination) which pushes forward. Forward, towards what? Towards the realisation of an absolute spirit. The negation is already contained in the positivity of this absolute, the end point of history, from which all processes are reconstructed. Something is a negative because we reconstruct it from an end point. The negative thus loses its negativity in the sense that it is resolved through the teleology of the absolute. Or rather, the negative in order to be a negative must be determined by the

positive. And this positive is given from the end point of history. The determination is the end point in history from where the philosopher reflects.

Now, if we, still with Macherey, see this from Spinoza's side of things, he illustrates the theme of determination with the problem of part and whole. Whether something is in opposition or adapted to other things depends on our perspective. Macherey writes that:

To perceive a figure is to conceive of a thing as it is limited by another which is opposed to it: it is therefore...to distinguish it from other things that do not belong to this configuration. But if one takes a different point of view, according to which it [the figure] on the contrary is adapted to another point of view ... it looks like a part in relation to a whole that proceeds from another determination (Macherey 1980: 159).

Spinoza thus tries to think determination and negation from another point of view than Hegel's end point in history. Something is finite or determined from a certain perspective taken by the intellect, but the number of potential determination is infinite. So what is perceived as contradiction and opposition is dependent upon the modulation of the intellect. We here touch upon a theme that has pervaded our discussion on dialectics, namely negation.

Macherey takes up an interesting topic, discussed by Spinoza, which is relevant to our own problematic. In a letter to Louis Meyer, Spinoza ridicules the Cartesian notion that the material substance is divided into different and distinctive parts. The division of the substance is due not to the substance itself but to our imagination. The reason that we think there are things of a different nature (like spirit and matter) is because the imagination is too limited in its understanding of infinity. Macherey comments:

The way the imagination proceeds is here evident: in order to apprehend extent the imagination determines or divides it, and then attempts to reconstitute and generate it from the achieved elements. But this «genesis» can only be fictive: it expresses nothing else than the impotence of the imagination to present infinity as divided (Ibid: 162).

Now, this is interesting as it reflects the still relevant limitations in our thinking. The problems located by Spinoza of determination, division, and imagination are, as far as I can see, operative in the epistemology of culture. Instead of an infinite continuum where people with different cultural backgrounds meet, interact, and make exchanges and where different cultural expressions all could be seen as a variety of humanity, these cultural expressions are seen as expressions of different “substances” called cultures. I am not saying that discussing metaphysics and cultural diversity is the same. However, Spinoza is on to a logic which is present in our thinking in general. The question is to what degree the imagination limits and determines what is to be a contradiction and what is to be divided and separated. The two latter quotes are interesting because they say something of the epistemological role of the imagination. As far as I can see, Amselle challenges the comparative imagination, which divides different cultures and societies, and the use of the hybrid as metaphor, which refers back to a notion of origin. Comparison and hybridity, from this perspective, entail not seeing the relational aspect in the constitution of identity. By using the metaphor *branchements* the division of people into cultures is suspended in favour of a relational account of human beings.

Macherey writes that Hegel’s misunderstanding of Spinoza, and hence ultimately his dialectics, consist in the separation of substance, attributes, and modes into different orders. But this is not Spinoza’s own point of view:

For Spinoza it is one and the same order, not the abstract order of the imagination but the concrete and physical reality of the substance which expresses itself simultaneously and identically as absolute and relative, and which is known by the understanding and imagination as contradictions (Ibid: 175).

As I understand it the problem is that the Spinozist substance is immanent whereas the Hegelian Spirit is transcendent, and Hegel attacks the former from the point of view of the latter. “Omnis determinatio est negatio” thus turns out quite differently and becomes the decisive source to Hegel’s misreading. Three interpretative levels

are then discernible in Macerhey's book: Hegel's misunderstanding of Spinoza, Hegel's own point of view, and Spinoza's point of view according to Macherey. 1) The negative is [to Hegel's Spinoza] the indirect way to an unknowable substance (similar to negative theology?). This is to Hegel's mind limited as Spinoza does not attain the positive. 2) To Hegel, on the other hand, negation is the negation of the positive due to the realisation of the Absolute Spirit. 3) From Spinoza's perspective, however, since the substance is immanent but expressed through its attributes and cannot be separated from them, every determination is dependent upon the negations the imagination represents to the intellect. Something is determined in opposition to something else, but this opposition is determined by the limitations in the intellect's ability to imagine. In other words, the nature of the contradiction can be questioned.

At the end of the book Macherey states that Spinoza rejects the Hegelian dialectics, but asks if this means that he rejects dialectics altogether. No, it is the non-dialectical elements that he rejects, i.e. the idealism of dialectics, that dialectics is governed by the teleology of the absolute. But a materialist dialectics à la Spinoza does not have any guarantees, orientations, or promises for a resolution of all contradictions. In the same spirit Macherey understands the dialectics of Marx. Together with Étienne Balibar, Macherey has also written an article on dialectics in *Encyclopedia Universalis*. Vital for Macherey and Balibar then becomes to break with a dialectics of continuity. This materialist dialectics "must think difference (and not identity) in its determination" (Macherey and Balibar: 362). However, from what we have seen in Ricoeur's reflection on idem and ipse, he has really deconstructed the concept of identity itself. So the problem might not lie in identity as such but in a certain conception of it as idem or sameness. But in the light of what we have seen in Macherey's book on Hegel and Spinoza, the Spinozist difference is not a substantial difference but a mode or variation on the same immanent plane. The contradictions in this dialectics, "une contradiction réelle", can be conjugated with other contradictions which are not contained within the concept of the same.

What do I mean by this? Central to any reflection on dialectics, including my own, are negation and contradiction. The question is whether the role of the former is guided by the latter. Balibar and Macherey write that dialectics is a complex process since it holds together identity and alterity, the same and the other, in the same movement, and because it understands the one by the other. This conflict can furthermore be presented in two opposing ways: 1) Identity and alterity could be understood as a *contradiction* from the point of view of an already given unity where the other is determined on the basis of the same. 2) Or identity and alterity could be understood as a *difference* which recognises the identity in the alterity itself. This question is thus paramount when scrutinising the dialectical aspects of *branchements*. Again the question of unity emerges as the fundamental problem in dialectics. As I read Balibar and Macherey there are two kinds of unity. If the unity is an essential unity already given (“*unité essentielle déjà donne*”) then the other is determined on the basis of the same. This means that the other is related to the same, but from the perspective of the same. This is an idealistic dialectics in which the other somewhat mirrors the same. Whereas if the unity is (“*l’unité substantielle ou réflexive de l’être*”) substantial, then the other is a real negative. This does not mean that they are not related, but that they are not joined by an already given unity. It may rather mean that contrary to a unity which is already given, the unity between identity and difference is a result of the reflexivity of being (*l’unité réflexive de l’être*).

How does all this fit the interpretation of *branchements*? For one it is a question of inside and outside. If we follow Macherey, the Spinozist dialectics questioned precisely the distinction between the internal (identity) and external (difference) posed by Hegelian thinking. But Hegel too would agree that the internal and the external are joined. The real difference, I think, is that whereas identity and difference are separated and joined from a finite point of view in Hegel’s thinking, identity and difference are seen from an infinite point of view in Spinoza’s thinking. The third element that unites and separates is thus absent. It seems to me that if *branchements* and the dialectical movements are to be thought in the form of an open

system, this must be perceived from the perspective of infinity and not finity. Macherey's discussion of the difference between Hegel and Spinoza has thus taught me a lot.

If Spinoza is right in that there is only one substance, how does this translate to the question of cultures and their dialectical relations? Even though I am not trying to reduce the substance, one could read it as an image of mankind, and as that there is only one humanity. Consequently cultures are not substances, but attributes or modes that express this substance. Or rather; they are products of the (culture-anthropological, comparative) imagination and the construction of identities and oppositions between them.

In the above discussion of determination the point was that, following Spinoza, what is seen as a contradiction and what is an adaptation is a matter of perspective. The same is true of *branchements* where elements that from one perspective do not seem to belong together and become a contradiction, from another perspective do not necessarily contradict each other. In this sense it is a question of our imagination. The Spinozist substance has an infinite number of modifications, the imagination sets the limits. The idea of an "imagined sameness" that I have discussed previously is interesting in relation to this because it says something about how the perception of something as the same and as different is not given once and for all. At least in the case of belonging to the same society this becomes clear. When sameness is seen within a binary logic, opposing sameness and difference, what counts as same and as different is determined in advance. When someone is perceived as different from me and another is perceived as the same as me, this is to a certain extent determined by the imagination. This becomes clear when we for instance take the nation as the frame for thinking society. The nation is a finite form where those who are thought to belong and those who are thought to be strangers are determined by how we imagine this opposition to be.

In the light of what we have seen in Macherey's book on Hegel and Spinoza, the Spinozist understanding of negation, and thus alterity and difference, is that it is

not a substance. Alterity and difference is a mode or variation on the same immanent plane. The contradictions in this dialectics, “une contradiction réelle”, can be conjugated with other contradictions which are not contained within the concept of the same.

7.12 Concluding remarks

Regarding dialectics I have tried to do an important philosophical task, and that is to discuss consequences and relations between premises and conclusion. Or differently put, by reflecting on three or four kinds of dialectics as possible interpretations of *branchements*, I have tried to give an outline of what kind of potential *branchements* has in questioning cultural purity. By taking Hegel, Plato, Ricoeur, and Spinoza as different ways of conceptualising dialectics, I have tried to indicate different ways to interpret *branchements*. This still concerns the epistemological question of what conditions, what language, we use to discuss culture. As far as I can see, Amselle himself uses Hegelian concepts (mediation, third element) in describing *branchements*. But when he discusses *syncretisme originaire* in *Mestizo logics* he turns to the *relational* understanding of self and otherness in Paul Ricoeur’s philosophy. Ricoeur for his part draws on Plato when articulating the relational dialectics. So I have tried to reflect on what kind of dialectical thinking Amselle actually bases his thinking.

But I have at the same time tried to be critical in the sense of asking what kind of dialectical thinking is preferable for interpreting *branchements*. Is *branchements* an open or closed system of connections? This depends on what kind of dialectics we take as our point of departure. Even though I think Hegel is highly relevant for questioning abstraction, there are some problems concerning the idealist aspect in Hegel. Hegel’s dialectics and the account of mediation are, after all, reconstructions. And reconstructions are made from a point where (or should I say when) the mediations have ended. The third element, which both separates and unites elements, is linked to this endpoint outside history. Plato and perhaps in particular Spinoza

represent alternatives to a dialectics based on a third element. The relational aspect that I find so interesting and so potent as a means for questioning identity, plays out differently when turning to Plato/Ricoeur and Spinoza. A thinking which is based on relation (Sophist) and the infinity of such relations (Spinoza) gives a more open understanding of dialectics, and ultimately *branchements*, than one where the relations are determined in advance as composed of identities and differences.

8. Genesis and hybridity

Introduction

In the two preceding chapters I have examined the epistemological aspects of *branchements* and scrutinised the concept's theoretical content through a variety of dialectics. I will now try to go beyond an exegetical approach and discuss the strengths and limitations of *branchements*. I have divided this chapter into two main parts. In the first I will discuss genesis, a problem which is present in dialectics but which can be thought in other ways. A limitation in the dialectical thinking of both Hegel and Ricoeur, when we try to understand the genesis of cultural identity, is that they think genesis as reconstruction. For Hegelian thinking the reconstruction is done from the perspective of a Spirit and the end of history. For Ricoeur there is a relative endpoint, the present, and from this all narratives are synthesised. What is at stake in *branchements* is that the various elements, such as norms, symbols, practices etc., which from one perspective are seen as originating from different cultures, from the perspective of *branchements* are seen without purity or origin. Furthermore, dialectics has been one way to account for *branchements* as a critique of origin and identity. But there is a problem of synthesis here. When we reconstruct how different elements are synthesised, it seems inevitable that we have already located the elements. But was it not the assumption of distinguishable identities that *branchements* was meant to problematise? Maybe reconstruction and synthesis are the only intelligible ways to think dialectics. But I think it is fruitful to contrast this with other kinds of thinking as well. Spinoza through Macherey and Plato through Ricoeur gave us at least a hint at another way of thinking dialectics. Here I want to continue the discussion of genesis by drawing on the works of Charles Taylor, Gilles Deleuze, and George Canguilhem.

In the second part of the chapter I will contrast *branchements* with the way the hybrid is thought both practically and theoretically. It seems to me that the essential deficit of hybridity, which makes it different from *branchements*, is dialectical

thinking. Having said that, I think that hybridity might be more suitable for analysing processes of becoming whereas *branchements* problematises origin.

8.1 Genesis between mediation and expressivism

We have seen that mediation questions (cultural) purity and pure origin. In order to think mediation in its most radical form, we had to detach it from identity as sameness and difference as the negation of this sameness. Identity and difference come about through mediation. Mediation is thus not a movement from identity and difference as already established entities, but mediation without identity. How can one render account of this? The problem is that once the mediation no longer mediates between some fixed things, we have no point of departure from where we can organise an analysis or reconstruction. Or differently put, it is because we have questioned the reconstruction as a point of departure that we have been able to question purity of origin. But once we have rid ourselves of the pure origin, we are still left with the problem of beginning. Is it possible to speak about beginning without being taken back into origin? This question is one of the motives for introducing the theme of expressivism. For, one way of accounting for the temporal aspect and the genealogy of culture is to see it as expressive in an immanentist sense of the word. The continuum behind the distinctions of identity and difference is immanent expression.

Now, as a point of departure we take the statement from Amselle previously used that the *expression* of an identity supposes the conversion of universal signs in its own language or the conversion of its own signs within the web of meanings (Amselle 2001: 59). The choice of words is interesting as identity becomes something to be expressed and this expression is relational. It thus marks a connection between dialectics of mediation and expression. To express an identity is to make it real so to speak. Or differently put: to realise an identity it must be expressed. And this expression is situated in a relation. But does that mean that the relation is fixed prior to the expression or that the expression constitutes the relation?

8.2 Herder and expressivism

The question of the beginning (of a culture) leads us to a reflection on expressivism. And central to the expressivist movement is Herder. According to Charles Taylor, Herder is in his *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache (Treatise on the Origin of Language)* the first to have grasped that the condition for, and constitution of, consciousness are both immanent in the articulation of that consciousness (Taylor 1995: 94). Taylor writes in the text *The importance of Herder* that “My (perhaps overdramatic) claim is that Herder is the hinge figure who originates a fundamentally different way of thinking about language and meaning” (Ibid: 79). This “way of thinking” is Herder’s expressivist theory of language which Herder as a critique of Condillac’s theory of the origin of language developed in *Essai sur l’origine des connaissances humaines*. In Taylor’s account of Herder’s critique, Condillac explains how language arose by telling a story of two children uttering cries and gestures. These he calls “natural” signs of feeling. Each child, seeing and hearing the other, “would come to see the cry as a sign of something (the cause of the distress). Then the child would be able to take the step of using the sign to refer to the cause of the distress. The first sign would have been instituted” (Ibid: 80). The rest of the language is thus built term by term. Taylor’s point is that this theory of origin presupposes what it tries to explain; i.e. the origin of language. “That words can stand for things is taken as something immediately comprehensible” (Ibid: 82). Vital to this so called designative theory of language (that words stand for things) is the understanding of ideas as predating language. In other words ideas and language are separated. With expressionism this view is challenged.

It is the reflexivity of language that Herder wants to understand and which is present in what Taylor calls “rightness” in the use of language. The point is that neither reflection nor rightness is possible without expression. In explaining expressivism Taylor goes back to Herder’s anthropology which must be seen as a reaction to the French Enlightenment and its view of human beings. Herder

rehabilitates some basic Aristotelian concepts of life as realisation of form, but in a modern sense with the subject as the point of departure: “each individual (and in Herder’s application, each people) has its own way of being human”. Taylor mentions two traits which distinguish Herder from Aristotle’s realisation of form: an inner form or inner power imposes itself on external reality as well as maintains its own shape and it is posterior to the realisation of the form that the form itself is determined (Taylor 2005: 15-16). And further: “Man comes to know himself by expressing and hence clarifying what he is and recognizing himself in this expression. The specific property of human life is to culminate in self-awareness through expression” (Ibid: 17). When it comes to language, in order to find out whether I am using a word right, I must express it in the context I believe to be appropriate:

Speech is the expression of thought. But it isn’t simply outer clothing for what could exist independently. It is constitutive of reflective (linguistic) thought, of thought which deals with its objects in the linguistic dimension. In its origin it is close to and interwoven with gesture” (Taylor 1995: 92).

This notion of “what could exist independently” is what expressionism questions. Is there a language (or a culture) before the attempt to articulate this language (or culture)? Even though to render language and culture equivalent is problematic, Taylor’s reflection sheds some light on our question of culture. Taking Amselle’s statement about the expression of cultural identity, I see the parallel to Taylor and Herder in the sense that all three call “the independent” into question. However, as far as *branchements* is concerned, this also becomes a challenge. Does Amselle, in his account of *branchements* as the “conversion of signs necessary to express any identity”, and the explication of this through N’ko, assume that prior to the expression and conversion there is something that “exists independently”: Mande culture and language? Or does he claim that it is *in the expression itself* that identity is constituted? From this latter perspective we could get an expressionist reading of *branchements*. On the other hand, is it possible to express oneself without some already existing language? And if so, does this reintroduce the boundary or

distinction we tried to question? To realise oneself is to realise oneself through an expression. But this expression is relational in the sense that it is directed at someone. From this perspective it is the relation which constitutes the expression. Or differently put, it is the “language game” of the relation which determines what is possible to express. In other words, the relation is both the condition for and the result of an exchange of expressions.⁴⁰ If thought is dependent on mediation and communication and communication itself is constituted through expression, this means that ultimately there are no clear ideas and thoughts prior to their articulation (Taylor 2005: 43-44). Or differently put, we are close to a view that regards thinking as immanence.

Even though I am impressed with Taylor, and keeping in mind that he discusses expressionism in connection with persons, there seems to be a limitation to his expressionism when it is applied on our problem of culture. I will not go into a discussion on Taylor here, but as we recall from chapter 2 on culture and identity in the political discourse, as well as from chapter 7 on dialectics, Taylor’s thinking is centred on identity and dialectics of recognition.⁴¹ And it is this focus on identity that I want to question. His thoughts on expression seem to be within this frame. The consequence is, I fear, that expressionism is seen from the point of view of a process that is finished. One thing is to reconstruct a process of expression as a process of self-understanding, but what about future expressions? If the request for recognition of one’s identity is what is at stake, then this means that the identity in question is already constituted.

The second problem, which perhaps is not so much Taylor’s problem, is how, when it comes to understanding culture, we can think unity and diversity without

⁴⁰ It is here appropriate to make the reader recall what Amselle wrote about the close relation between language and the concept of culture. Language is often seen as the essence of culture or its most important hallmark. Informed by linguists language shaped, as Amselle writes, the anthropologists’ understanding of culture. An example close at hand is the anthropology of Levi-Strauss informed by structural linguistics. Consequently the view of language shapes the view of culture. Taylor’s emphasis on expression is hence highly relevant and serves us well in the criticism of the abstract view of culture.

⁴¹ I cannot go into this here but the *recognition* of one’s cultural identity is what matters in *Politics of recognition* (1992a) and *The ethics of authenticity* (1992b).

either assuming a closed unity or a given (and then closed set of) diversity? One of the difficulties *branchements* is designed to articulate is the dialectics between humankind as one humankind and the variations within humankind. As previously discussed, I find the unification based on an abstract principle of Spirit to be an impasse because this leads us into a position outside of history. In other words, I am seeking a notion of the dialectics of *branchements* to give an account of unity and diversity of cultural expression that is not idealistic. Could it be more comprehensible through a concept similar to Spinoza's substance and its relation to expression? Expressionism as it is presented by Taylor does not, as far as I can see, to a full extent reflect on the relation between the different levels in expression. In order to gain an understanding of how deeply this goes into the genesis of cultural constitution, and in order to think this in a radical but rigorous manner, we turn again to Spinoza - this time in the interpretation of Gilles Deleuze and his book *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*.

8.3 Expression as triad

First of all, the point here is not to scrutinise Spinoza. It is rather an attempt at grasping the notion of expression in a way that can illuminate our problem. Deleuze takes the 6th definition in Spinoza's *Ethics* as a point of departure for his examination of the notion of expression: "By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence" (Spinoza in Deleuze 1992: 13). And somewhere else: "Whatever exists expresses the nature or essence of God in a certain and determinate way"(Ibid). From this Deleuze tries to give a reading of Spinoza stating that the idea of expression sums up all the difficulties concerning the unity of the substance and the diversity of attributes (Ibid). For our part, as we are also trying to elaborate on the difficulties of unity and diversity in relation to the question of culture, it seems to be a relevant approach.

One is immediately struck by the intuitive difficulties that arise as one tries to enter this thinking. A first problem that faces the reader of both Spinoza and Deleuze when wanting to address the problem of expression is the relation between thinking and what the thinking is thinking about. Deleuze tries to explicate this to us:

The range of the notion of expression is not merely ontological; its implications are also epistemological...knowledge becomes a sort of expression. The knowledge of things bears the same relation to the knowledge of God as the things themselves to God (Ibid: 14).

Knowledge is on the same plane as what the knowledge is about because nothing can be, nor being conceived, without God. All our ideas are nothing but a reproduction of nature, and thus express nothing which is not the expression of nature. Knowledge is not “some operation on an object that remained outside it, but a reflection, an expression, of an object in the mind” (Ibid: 15). This is, according to Deleuze, the historical pre-modern understanding of explanation. To explain something was to let the thing express itself. Thus it is the expression that constitutes the intellect and not vice versa. We are already at this point touching not only upon a historical difficulty, but also a difficulty in thinking alternatives to our own thinking. The introspection of the Cartesian tradition separates the thinking from what the thinking is about, so that the things are no longer explained by themselves, but are only accessible through the analysis of the intellect.

Deleuze goes on to distinguish between two levels of expression in Spinoza's philosophy. On the first level the substance expresses itself in the attributes. This level must, Deleuze writes, be understood as a *constitution*. On the second level the attributes express themselves. This second level must be understood as a *production* of things. The problem is how to think these two levels in the analysis without separating them. A constitution is often thought of as being prior to production. The constitution of a subject's identity comes first, and then the subject produces something. The same is true with the notion of God as a first principle. Even though

Deleuze/Spinoza write about a chronological difference between them, constitution and production are closely connected:

Expression is not of itself production, but becomes such on its second level, as attributes in their turn expresses themselves. Conversely, expression as production is grounded in a prior expression. God expresses himself in himself “before” expressing himself in his effects (Ibid: 14).

In order to understand the word express it is, however, important to look at the correlative concepts *envelope* and *explicate*. The same problem as one runs into with constitution and production appears here as well; the terms seem contradictory but are not. Deleuze writes:

Expression is on the one hand an explication, an unfolding of what expresses itself, the One manifesting itself in the Many (substance manifesting itself in its attributes, and these attributes manifesting themselves in their modes). Its multiple expressions, on the other hand, involve Unity. The One remains involved in what expresses it, imprinted in what unfolds it, immanent in whatever manifests it (Ibid: 16).

Intuitively it is reasonable to think that development and envelopment go in different directions. What is developed cannot at the same time be enveloped? Deleuze acknowledges the difficulties by referring to André Darbon’s Spinoza study. In Darbon’s attempt at explicating the expression he ends up in contradictions:

In the first place, *what is expressed* ought to be different from what expresses itself...» And Darbon concludes that «Each attribute expresses the eternal and infinite essence of God, again we cannot distinguish between *what is expressed* and *what it expresses* » (Ibid: 19).

What is interesting here is not that Darbon contradicts himself but the resistance in Spinoza’s thinking in general and in expression in particular. Having these difficulties in mind, Deleuze reveals his approach or his solution to these problems:

Expression presents us with a triad. In it we must distinguish substance, attributes, and essence. Substance expresses itself, attributes are expressions, and essence is expressed...The originality of the concept of expression shows itself here; essence, insofar as it has existence, has no existence outside the attribute in which it is expressed; and yet, as essence, it relates only to substance (Ibid: 21) .

It is doubtful whether Amselle as an anthropologist would approve of these metaphysical reflections. However, as far as thinking is concerned it is the approach I find fruitful. If we try to understand this as a manner of understanding *branchements*, the point is that *branchements* is not external to its expressions. An expression thus has no other origin than itself because the substance which expresses itself exists through its attributes. The argument is to draw the following parallel: The same way as every essence for Spinoza exists through the attribute that expresses this essence, cultures do not exist outside their expressions. And the same way the essence is related to nothing but the substance, a culture is related to the web or continuum of cultures which constitute humanity. The same way as Deleuze places the substance, the attributes, and essences on the same level, all joined analytically through expressivity, the continuum or interconnectivity of cultures, the cultural practices, and the cultures are also on the same level. Keeping this in mind, what does expressivism do to our perception of culture? If there is nothing prior to expression-or at least if this something has no clear form or content- then this also has serious consequences for how we approach a cultural identity. This does not entail that cultures are fictions, but does, on the other hand, neither lead to conclusions like those of Charles Taylor in *Politics of recognition* and the *Ethics of authenticity* where cultures can be recognised, or to politics where cultures can be compared. Briefly, what these latter representations of culture do would be similar to abstracting and detaching one level (the essence) of the triad of expression from the other levels. But then we lose the level that unites all the essences. The “diversity of cultures” should thus be understood as variations or the plural cultural expressions of the same level.

Spinoza’s thinking of expression thus helps us to reflect on two aspects that are central to *branchements*. The first is that the same way there is no origin as point

of departure, nor an end point to the substance, there is no origin or end point to *branchements*. Both the substance (as expression of substance) and *branchements* (as cultural expression of humankind) go towards infinity. The second aspect is that unity and diversity do not stand in opposition to each other. All variation (diversity) is an expression of the same unity (substance or humankind) because this unity only exists as the variety of expression.

8.4 *Branchements* as commencement

In the light of what we have discussed concerning expressionism, another thinker that may come to our aid in our attempt at understanding beginning without origin, is again Georges Canguilhem. Now, if mediation is prior to or simultaneous to both identity and difference, and a pure origin cannot be detected, there is nevertheless a commencement. Canguilhem, in his elaboration of scientific concepts in the history of science, distinguishes between *commencement* and *origin*. They are both concerned with a beginning but in completely different ways. Everything has a commencement, but an origin is the ideal reconstruction of the point of departure and turns out to be something other than the real commencement. In the book *De Canguilhem à Foucault, la force des norms* (2009), Pierre Macherey writes about an unpublished paper on the scientific origin of psychology by Canguilhem which draws on this distinction. *Origin* comes from the Latin *origo* or *orior*, which means to outgo from (*sortir de*), whereas *commencement* comes from *cum-initiare*, which means to enter into. “The concepts commencing and origin: *origo*, from *orior*, signifies exit from (*sortir de*), *cum-initiare*...means something altogether different: to enter into, to make a path” (Macherey 2009:53). This amounts to two different understandings. In origin the beginning is a point from which other things emanate. Commencement on the other hand is the act in which something begins.

Canguilhem himself uses this in a slightly different context. His point is that when working with the history of science, origin is mistaken for commencement and the real beginning of a science is misplaced. An example is the origin of psychology.

The science of psychology commences in the 19th century but find its origin in the writings of Locke and Leibniz (Ibid: 53). Here the real startingpoint is after Locke and Leibniz, whereas the origin (from where one imagines that psychology begins) is found in them. Another example is the concept of reflex which origin is ascribed to Descartes, but which originated from the vitalist Willis.

Now, the idea is to take commencement as a notion for understanding cultural genesis. When Amselle writes that when *branchements*, by showing that every culture is mixed by elements which themselves are mixed, rejects the idea of an originary purity, it nevertheless lacks an understanding of genesis alternative to origin. Amselle writes that in order to escape for good the notion of the pure we must perceive the mixing of cultures as consisting of already mixed cultures. With commencement the genesis has a point of departure. How can commencement as another understanding of beginning be proven? In the history of science it is possible to detect new concepts that have not been seen before. These concepts could be said to commence something, they create ideas or captures things in new ways. However, in the context of the dissertation we stand the risk of transforming commencement into metaphysics, and this is not the point. Again, the point is rather to problematise a notion of beginning as origin. Commencement gives another account of beginning which makes it possible to question why a pure origin is necessary.

Now what has been the point of introducing expression and origin? Having the overall problematic in mind the point is to see *branchements* as a way of accounting for genesis. With Hegel and Ricoeur we came a long way in explicating a range of different conceptualisations of dialectics. Common to them all is that everything stands in a relation to something else and cannot be taken out of this relation without losing it. This put the relation itself at the centre for the constitution of identity. Speaking more specifically of human beings, to realise oneself (to become real so to speak) is to express oneself in a relation to another. But this led us into the problem of whether this relation and these expressions are already determined by a third.

Mediation functions as a way of deconstructing abstraction or isolation: I cannot express myself in isolation.

8.5 *Branchements* or hybridity?

As already mentioned, Amselle substituted the notion of culture as *métissage*, mestizo, or hybridity with *branchements*. But what does the difference consist in? If we want to look at hybridity and mestizo, it is instructive to begin with how they are defined. According to *The Oxford dictionary of biology* (Oxford, 2004), a hybrid is: “the offspring of a mating in which the parents differ in at least one characteristic. The term is usually used of offspring of widely different parents, e.g. different varieties or species.” The link between racism and culture has been discussed throughout the dissertation as a genealogical connection. When it comes to the term hybrid the link to racial thinking is even tighter since the hybrid was a way to conceptualise the ideological problem of degenerated races.⁴²

However, throughout the history of racial thinking the hybrid has not been thought in an unambiguous way. Robert Young draws, in the book *Colonial desire* (1995), up a typology of different takes on the hybrid ranging from polygenism which denies that different races can mix at all, through more moderate positions where the ability to interbreed is possible for one generation or if two races are proximate to each other, to the amalgamation thesis where all humans can interbreed in an unlimited way and can create new races. In addition there is the normative evaluation of amalgamation in the sense that miscegenation produces a mongrel group that forms a “raceless chaos”. Arthur Gobineau, for instance, was of such an opinion (Young 1995: 18).

Now, the hybrid has been invoked as a metaphor for understanding culture in a more dynamic and open way. It has been transferred from this ideological pre-

⁴² As discussed in chapter 3 Gobineau saw the mixing, or hybridisation, of the German and Gallo-Roman races as the cause for the decay of the French nation (Skorgen 2002), and, as Amselle (1996) and Bruno Latour (2001) stress, the 18th century French society was obsessed with regeneration.

scientific genetics to cultural criticism. For instance, the post-colonial thinker Homi Bhabha sees the hybrid as a third space which destroys polarity between the oppressor and the oppressed (Bhabha 2008). Instead of engaging in a battle for recognition of one's oppressed identity which is negatively defined, Bhabha sees hybridity as a space of negotiation where "the discourse of colonial authority loses its univocal grip on meaning." Here hybridisation is invoked as part of agency; hybridisation is something which should, could and is being produced.

For Amselle the central problem with hybridity and/or mestizo is that it is too closely connoted to a quasi-biological notion of races which again is linked to the ideological theory of polygenism which is the assumption that humankind has an initial plurality of sources. This, however, draws once more on the idea of a plurality of races within human kind. What I want to examine is to what degree hybrid thinking is dialectical. Or differently put, dialectics is way of reflecting critically upon the metaphors mestizo and hybrid.

As mentioned earlier the level of intervention for the dissertation at large is the language through which we use to describe the human being. With regard to what kind of approach I attempt (Burke 2010) in the dissertation it concerns first and foremost hybridity and *branchements* as concepts and language. What language, concepts, and metaphors are suitable for grasping the unity and diversity of humankind, which ones risk taking us back into essentialism?

In *Globalization and culture* Jan Nederveen Pieterse establishes a typology of three theoretical frames or paradigms for understanding cultural difference (Pieterse 2009). In the first, cultural differences are regarded as immutable and as generators of conflict. This cultural differentialism exists in historical and modern forms. Samuel Huntington's book, *Clash of civilizations* (2003), is emblematic for the modern version of this paradigm. The second framework for understanding cultural difference is the eradication of differences in the light of globalisation as the world becomes more and more culturally homogeneous. A third way is that of cultural hybridisation where elements traditionally held separate become mixed.

Now, one aspect that Pieterse underlines is that both differentialism and homogenisation have undermined the experiences in between. “Hybridization reflects a postmodern sensibility of cut’n’mix, transgression, subversion...it foregrounds those effects and experiences which modern cosmologies, whether rationalist or romantic, would not tolerate” (Pieterse 2009: 55). I suppose Pieterse is right in distinguishing modern cosmologies and a postmodern sensibility for “cut’n’mix, transgression etc.” Having in mind, for instance, Gobineau’s fear of racial degeneration through hybridisation, it is at least a historically pertinent critique. However, what I oppose is the discourse that sensibility for these kinds of phenomena is postmodern if we by this understand practices and experiences incapable of being expressed rationally. In other words, the opposition between rationality and the sensibility for what is in between is questionable. I insist on the possibility of being both sensible to such phenomena and experiences and at the same be a rationalist. If we by this should read phenomena that are in between as an indirect critique of rationality- as impossible to be thought without introducing essentialistic categories- as opposed to postmodernism, then to me this represents an insufficient and static conception of rationality. I suppose this is consistent with Pieterse’s own view, given that he tries to convey the concept and idea of hybridity in an academic book. I understand Pieterse’s and Bhabha’s motivation for breaking with the classificatory reasoning inherited from colonial thinking. But where does the rejection of rationalism leave us? In wanting to break with rationalism we risk losing the critical potential in reason. As far as I can see, this is what Amselle tries to do with the metaphor *branchements* and the reason why I think an epistemological reading of it is pertinent. *Branchements* is, as far as I am concerned, not just another theory of culture, but a way of reflecting critically on other theories that are based on purist premises.

Now, is it possible even in *branchements* to avoid differentialism and convergence or homogenisation? The attempt to present hybridity as an alternative is not as easy as one might think. Hence Pieterse presents a yardstick of kinds of

hybridities: “on the one end, an assimilationist hybridity that leans over towards the centre, adopts the canon and mimics hegemony and, at the other end, a destabilizing hybridity that blurs the canon, reverses the current, subverts the centre” (Pieterse 2009: 79). So, the domain of *in between* is more nuanced than first assumed. Where is *branchements* situated on such a scale?

As pointed out earlier, *branchements* is an attempt at escaping the idea of purity still lurking in the concept of métissage. In order to mix something one needs something not mixed. Pieterse presents a similar challenge to the notion of hybrid: “the mixing of cultures and not their separateness is emphasized. At the same time, the underlying assumption about culture is that of culture/place. Cultural forms are called hybrid/syncretic/mixed/creolized because the elements in the mix derive from different cultural contexts” (Ibid: 86). In other words, when conceptualising hybridity it takes a form which force the thinking into a purist track that emphasise an initial distinction. The reason why it is difficult to discuss this is, according to Pieterse, that two concepts of culture are being used indiscriminately: A territorial notion presents culture as inward looking, whereas translocal culture is outward looking. The inward looking perspective is static and the outward looking perspective is fluid.

He seems to be on to something. However, I wonder if it is something more than once again locating the problem, that the language in which we want to articulate practices of boundary crossing is essentialist and pure, that our thinking is more concerned with how element A and B are different and/or similar, than with the *process and point* where A and B meet. My point is here that *branchements* helps us to enter the analysis at the right time. Or, more precisely, the point is *not only where A and B meet, but that they already have met. The way I see it, branchements introduces a temporal dimension in its way of questioning.* Whereas a synthesis, like the hybrid, supposes an origin of the elements brought together in the synthesis, a radical interpretation of *branchements* would be that there are no pure elements that a synthesis could be composed of.

If we take the notions discussed above of mediation, translation, expression, and commencement as interpretation of *branchements*, they are, as far as I can see, keys to articulating the processes which do not take pure poles of identity as points of departure. To cross a cultural boundary presupposes a distinction (between two identities, cultures etc.) prior to the crossing. For example, in order to communicate, we assume that the persons involved must be distinguishable from each other. They transgress the distinction through communication by persuading each other with arguments. But, before they communicate, how do they gain access to themselves? Does not communication of a content or point of view assume a prior communication from where we learn to articulate? Communication is not posterior to their distinctiveness and hence what saves them from solipsism. Communication is the proof that solipsism is impossible. It is on the constitutional level, and not merely on a post-constitutional level, that *branchements* functions. It might be true that we live in “an age of boundary-crossing” (Pieterse 2009: 88), but the lesson from *branchements* is that this is a human condition equally true of the past: “If every culture talks a foreign language it is because the language it talks is already foreign” (Amselle 2001: 13).

Pieterse takes on some of the most important objections to the notion of hybridity. I will here discuss some of the objections relevant to *branchements* as well. Interestingly enough, most of the arguments are related to anthropologist Jonathan Friedman and opposed by Pieterse. One claim, proposed by Friedman, is that hybridity is a political and not an empirical concept. “I discovered that a certain way of representing reality, as hybridity, was not a mere intellectual interpretation of the state of contemporary reality, but a politicized position” (Friedman 1999: 229). Whether or not this holds true for hybridity, the question for our part is whether it is appropriate for understanding *branchements*. As I see it, *branchements* is first and foremost an epistemological and not an ontological, normative, or political concept. True, the political and ethical motivation is linked with the epistemological level. But, if *branchements* does not succeed in destabilising the notion of culture as closed,

pure, or abstract on an empirical level, then it cannot sufficiently succeed on a political and ethical level either. Here I do not find Pieterse's answer to Friedman's critique sufficiently satisfactory. Against Friedman's claim that hybridity is a normative and political concept, Pieterse answers: "Indeed, but so of course is essentialism and boundary fetishism" (Pieterse 2009: 102). Even though this is true does this not entail that notions such as hybridity and *branchements* have to have an empirical ground in order to be able to problematise purity? From what point of view can purity be questioned? Is it only an ethical or political critique? Does not hybridity or *branchements* have an effect if they are capable of rendering account of phenomena in new ways?

A second main objection, also forwarded by Friedman, is that hybridity is a dependent notion. That is, in order to hybridise something two or more pure elements are presupposed. If not, then hybridisation as a notion is meaningless. Friedman concludes that "In the struggle against racism of purity, hybridism invokes the dependent, not converse, notion of the mongrel. Instead of combating essentialism, it merely hybridizes it" (Friedman 1999: 236). Pieterse responds that this is correct, but that this is a question of ethical revalorising of the hybrid instead of a devaluation of it in the name of purity. From a normative point of view this might seem just. As I see it, *branchements* goes in an epistemological direction, which renders it more potent as a criticism of origin. Instead of launching some normative or political defence of the hybrid, *branchements* questions the notion of origin. This is, as Friedman points out, not sufficiently done in hybridisation. And from this point of view hybridity is epistemologically weak since it cannot challenge the point of departure for discussing culture. Liberated from any biological thinking, *branchements* gives us an advantage. Does that mean that *branchements* is a non-dependent notion? As seen through mediation (Hegel and Ricoeur), *branchements* refutes the idea that there is something absolutely non-dependent. Everything depends on something else, meaning everything is related to something else. But these dependent elements can not be abstracted from the process that makes them dependent. In this perspective nothing

stands alone. Purity and hybridisation are abstractions in the sense that they assume that there is something that stands alone, whereas *branchement* is an explication of the concrete processes in which nothing stands alone. But *branchements* is not dependent in the sense that it depends on pure elements. These elements are themselves dependent. In the end *branchements* is the network of relations.

I just want to mention briefly that there are other terms, like syncretism and creolisation, which also are used to describe different kinds of processes of cultural exchange. I will not elaborate one these terms further. The literature on them is extensive, and I do not claim that hybridity, syncretism and creolisation are equivalent (Hylland Eriksen 2010: 195-224). However, the aim in this dissertation is to question origin. So, one reason for limiting the discussion to hybridity and *branchements* is that even though syncretism and creolisation might be suited to describe specific processes of cultural exchange, they are, as terms, not better suited to question origin. *Syncretism* is an “attempted union or reconciliation of diverse or opposite tenets or practices, esp. in philosophy or religion” and “the merging of two or more inflectional categories”. *Creolizations* is “the action or process of taking on any of various characteristics or aspects of Creole people, their culture, etc.; esp. the assimilation of aspects of another culture or cultures; hybridization of cultures” and “the fact or process of assimilating or converting a language, dialect, etc., into a creole, by contact with one or more other languages and the acquisition of native speakers” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2013). Even though there is a difference in how one thinks synthesis they are, like hybridization, marked by the idea of an initial difference. Another reason is that hybridity is the term which most clearly is involved with identity, origin and raciological thinking.

8.6 A Norwegian case of hybridity

Among the contributions to the research on cultural complexity in Norway (CULCOM) that ended in 2010, the fieldwork of the Norwegian social-anthropologist Viggo Vestel in a dormitory town in Oslo is particularly interesting

(Vestel 2003, 2007). Vestel undertakes to analyse the “elementary presuppositions for community in face to face relations within a multicultural context” by analysing a multicultural youth club in Oslo (Vestel 2007: 134). The dormitory town concerned, “Rudenga”, consists of 45 % with immigrant background distributed on 80 different nationalities. Rudenga has earlier been stigmatised and associated with crime, social problems, and conflict between generations. What is particularly interesting with Vestel’s case and his analysis is the challenge of analysing positive aspects. In media cultural minorities are often associated with something negative and the language of negative analysis is well established. One thing is articulating what does not work. Quite another is to say what actually does work and how and why it works. Vestels asks:

While studying social life in an area where the actors who associate themselves with several different cultural traditions are living in the same neighbourhood, and especially while studying youth in such contexts, one of the core questions is, of course: if and how do people in such areas build social relations to each other? (Vestel 2003: 52).

Vestel mentions seven characteristic of this club: a ritual of greetings, a hybrid use of language (kebab-norwegian), a practice of clothing, music preferences, friendship and loverelations, loyalty to the club, and the fact that there was a male domination. His analytical challenges consisted, according to him, in “how to interpret the handling of cultural boundaries” (Vestel 2007: 137); especially in the light of the fact that the members of the youth club develop a “mutual acceptance”. So the question of how social relations are established is linked to the handling of cultural boundaries.

Central to his research in the youth club is the relation between Omar (with Iraqi background) and Ola (with Norwegian background) and one particular incident involving them both. One evening Vestel observes the two boys exchanging music lines on a guitar. They both send musical statements in the form of phrases on their guitars “back and forth, partly repeating, partly recreating the phrase the other sends out, and partly creating new ones, as a kind of communication” (Ibid: 146). Omar then

gives Ola a line built on an Arab scale which he strives to repeat and finally succeeds in repeating. Ola even incorporates this line into the music of his rock band. This introduction of the Arab scale is interesting to Vestel because it shows openness from Ola and a willingness to take a chance from Omar. Vestel writes that:

When Ola hints at rock'n'roll, it is not the musical genres that are known to be the most open to non-western influences...So why this openness on Ola's part. And how come Omar is taking the chance of exposing such strangeness, presumably knowing very well that such tones are usually both considered and acted upon as matter out of place (Vestel 2003: 54-55).

Now, the question is how to interpret this. Marcel Mauss and the Gift, Pieterse and the hybrid, Unni Wikan's concept of resonance, and Charles S. Pierce's semiotics are all invoked in the attempt to scrutinise the case. Ola's acceptance of Omar's otherness could be related to Marcel Mauss' essay on the Gift. The line is a Gift which marks a difference and is accepted and returned. However, this is not sufficient and it brings up another question; how is it possible to accept and receive a (cultural) difference? Vestel opens in his article up a discussion of Sartre and Levinas, concluding that they both have too absolute an understanding of the other. Either the other must become like me (the same), or the other must remain in her singularity (difference). But in order to articulate the "cunning" aspect of the social practices, as Vestel puts it, he needs another theoretical elaboration.

In addition to the works of Pierce and Wikan, Vestel draws on Pieterse's reflections on the hybrid. Vestel tries to approach the question of how cultural boundaries and the crossing of them are handled (Pieterse 2009). Pieterse establishes, as we already have seen, three competitive paradigms for an understanding of cultural difference: Cultural differentialism promotes the view that cultures are immutable and generate conflict (the clash of civilizations). Cultural emergence implicates an increasing cultural assimilation (MacDonalization). A third alternative is cultural hybridisation which is a mix of cultures and cultural differences. Vestel writes that even though there are processes of differentialism and homogenisation in the youth

club, it is hybridisation that best can account for most of the examples. This is interesting as the language of hybridisation suffers (though to a lesser degree) from the same intellectual obstacles as differentialism. However, Vestels asks:

What is the hallmark of the processes where different cultural traits are experienced, generated, and practiced as if they belonged to each other in a “mix”? How are initially not-associated elements brought together as to eventually constitute a unity or a foundation for community? (Vestel 2007: 144)

The thesis of Vestel is that hybridisation, Wikan’s notion of resonance, and Pierce’s semiotics together articulate similarity: “Central for the experience of resonance is the ability to let similarities from the horizons of the interlocutors work as points (bridges) for contact” (Vestel 2003: 57). Wikan, on her part, states that: “Where cultures separate, resonance bridges” (Wikan in Vestel 2003: 57). And this is followed up by Vestel:

A central challenge which the processes of hybridisation in a culturally plural society (det flerkulturelle) confront us with is the exploration of what kind of role the experience and the generation of similarity (likhet) plays in the constitution of social relations between two or more cultural axes of orientation” (Ibid: 150).

In his doctoral thesis, *A community of differences* (2003), Vestel takes the theme of hybridisation further by discussing Jonathan Friedman’s critical approach to it. Vestel shows that the youth in Rundenga are most certainly giving a hybrid account of themselves. They do not, contrary to what Friedman states, homogenise, and do not seem to focus on origin at all. “The practices of the youngsters all question the assumption of the neat and the tidy boundaries of identity” (Vestel 2003: 539). If we look at the question in Vestel’s article, the one we already have looked at, of “how initially non-associated elements are brought together so as to eventually constitute a unity or a foundation for community”, it is on the basis of an assumed similarity that this is taking place. The everyday lives of the youth at Rudenga, Vestel writes, directs the attention “to something rarely mentioned in the literature on hybridity, namely the

role confirmation and generation of *similarity* plays in the construction of hybrid communities” (Vestel 2007: 145).

Vestel refers to Friedman’s critique of hybridity as: the presupposition of the existence of identifiable identities characterised by fixed boundaries. Hybridity is thus, according to Friedman, not suited to capture the flux and changes in the phenomenon of identity. Friedman writes in the article “The hybridization of roots and the abhorrence of the bush” that:

I have argued that hybridity harbours no critique of essentialism because it is a derivative of essentialism. Arguing that cultures are creole merely pushes the essence back in some mytho-historical time frame when things were pure. This is inherent in the concept itself (Friedman 1999: 254).

Friedman criticises the notion hybridity for being both not empirical but political, and for being trapped within the logic of essentialism. Vestel responds by subscribing to Pieterse’s view that “the importance of hybridity is that it problematizes boundaries” (Pieterse in Vestel 2003: 516). I am sympathetic to the notion of problematisation. However, I am tempted to agree with Friedman that hybridity as a concept does not capture the flux and change, and that the term is closed within purist logic. The question is whether it is sufficient to say, as Pieterse and Vestel do, that boundaries are problematised when they are crossed (hybridisation), or if what we really need is to problematise the thinking of boundaries (*branchements*).

If we try to bring together some of the elements in Vestel’s argument he tries to answer the questions of how “initially non-associated elements are brought together as to eventually constitute a unity or a foundation for community”, and why the two friends playing guitar are open to each other: “why this openness on Ola’s part”, Vestel asks. One answer lies, for him, in some kind of fundamental similarity: “similarities from the horizons of the interlocutors work as (bridges) for contact. But have we not seen this kind of reasoning before? It seems to me that we are back to a version of the problem of the third previously discussed in relation to Hegel’s philosophy. In the kind of dialectical thinking that hybridity is based upon, the

differences (between the two boys) are guided by similarity. It is what constitutes the unity or foundation for community. Similarity is, however, not part of the exchange itself, but a guiding principle for it. And is not the way we think boundaries and differences also the result of some principle that separates and unites at the same time? As I see it, *branchements* can open up another interpretation that also emphasises something Vestel mentions: openness. But to be open does not, as I see it, assume similarity or something third. There *might* be similarity, but being open is not reducible to it, nor is it a prerequisite for it: I can also be open to what is different. Or differently put, if we are all similar in the end, does not this render it superfluous to speak about openness? As far as I can see, *branchements* is onto such an openness. What *branchements* and openness have in common is that unity (as similarity or something third) and boundaries are not the point of departure. On the other hand, openness does not deny the fact that we as human beings have different backgrounds. Furthermore, if we take openness as a point of departure, and not similarity, this opens up for another interpretation of the *unity* Vestel is trying to figure out: if we are open to each other we could perhaps *create* or *produce* this unity together. And Vestel himself is onto it when he discusses the role “the generation of similarity plays in the constitution of social relations”.⁴³ The question is if similarity is assumed or generated.

8.7 Remarks on the analogy between persons and cultures: can a culture have a self?

A problem that I have encountered during the reflections on culture is the analogy that Amselle and Ricoeur draw between personal and collective, or cultural, identities. Ricoeur states that a subject or an individual does not have direct access to his or her identity but must articulate and interpret his or her being-in-the-world

⁴³ Similarity is here confusing since Vestel uses the Norwegian word *likhet* which means similarity, in the sense of resembling, and equality, which has a constitutional meaning. And it is perhaps in this latter sense that this should be interpreted.

through an externalisation of his or herself. Or differently put, to be in the world is always already to be externalised. If we follow this idea, a pure singularity is not imaginable, at least not as a creature in possession of language. In other words, to articulate an identity is to *connect* oneself to what already exists, such as other languages, ideas, practices. But then one is at the same time other than one self, hence the title *Oneself as another* (*Soi-même comme un autre*). Now this kind of reasoning is what is at stake in Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity. I receive my identity through the perpetual self-interpretation of my proper actions, and the external events through which my life is intervoven. This acquisition is done through narration which synthesises actions, events, symbols, norms etc. Without this synthesis actions and events have no coherence, but remain heterogenous. Now, Ricoeur states that this narrative identity goes for collectives as well as persons and he uses the psychological identity of a person and the identity of the Jewish people as parallel cases.

The connectivity to what is other than oneself in the thinking of Paul Ricoeur is explicit in *Mestizo logics*, and, to a certain degree, implicit in *branchements*. *Branchements* is another way of describing the connectivity between what Ricoeur calls the dialectics of ipse-identity and alterity, between oneself and another. And thus, in Amselle too, culture receives the status as analogous to an actor. This seems intuitively troublesome. Can a culture act, reflect, or, as Amselle writes: "express itself"? My point is not to say that Amselle and Ricoeur are not aware that this is problematic. On the contrary, the motive for introducing the metaphor *branchements* and the concept *narrative identity* seems to be precisely to find, not theories for identity but, new ways of questioning identity.

But going back to the problem of the analogy, as far as Ricoeur is concerned, one answer would be that the reflexive character of being self is a grammatical point relevant to all personal pronouns, plural and singular. I am myself and we are ourselves do not necessarily imply a difference. "We" can also act, express, and reflect and remain grammatically correct. But does this apply on other levels as well?

To say that it works like this grammatically is one thing. Another is to say that this holds on an epistemological level as well. Do not a person and a collective entity like a society, a nation, or a culture require different approaches? A vital difference between a person and a cultural group, a collective, is that the former has a body which a collective can only have in an indirect meaning of the word. We can speak of the state as a political body, or draw an analogy from the realm of physiology and the normal and pathological to social normality and pathology. But this is not a body which can feel and be constitutive for the self in the same way as for a person.⁴⁴

I therefore think that instead of describing *branchements* as the result of cultures acting and interacting, or as integrated wholes at all, *branchements* describes connections, reconnections, transfers which may or may not be intentional. Cultural *branchements* is not merely the result of individuals acting, and here Amselle and my own interpretation diverge somewhat, but also of descriptions of exchange processes with a long duration, a *longue durée*. Even though Kanté acts within the short time span of a human life, the Mande language and traditions as well as the interaction with the Arabs and French of which he is part, precedes him. On the other hand, Amselle seems to be correct in stressing the conscious and decisionistic aspect in *branchements*, with the experimental attitude in mind.

⁴⁴ Vincent Descombes discusses in his book *Les embarras de l'identité* (2013) the status of the analogy between a person and a people when it comes to the concept "identity". Can the identity of the people be treated in an analogous manner to that of a person? And should we interpret such an analogy in a literal or a metaphorical sense?

9. Epistemology of translation

Introduction

With the theme of translation I will follow the same path as I did with *branchements*. I commence with a chapter on epistemology before elaborating on the theoretical aspects and their relevance to the overall problematic. And, consistent with the overall structure of the dissertation, translation is also related to the epistemological problems with culture and the attempt to articulate another way of thinking.

In the preceding chapters we have seen how *branchements* in its different aspects questions a notion of culture as pure and abstract. I aim at further elaborating these problems here. However, whereas *branchements* intervenes in the discourse that links culture to identity, origin and raciology, translation is a way of reflecting on the link between culture and language. The first entry into the theme of translation is thus how the view of language, and its function as image for culture, becomes an obstacle for how we view culture. What is interesting with translation is that by breaking with an oppositional view of languages, it can articulate another way of thinking culture. The second point of departure is to see this in relation to the problem of the “imagined sameness” discussed earlier. This expression from Marianne Gullestad, and interpreted by me more specifically as an “imagined *cultural* sameness”, is based upon such an oppositional logic. A third motive for introducing translation is the role Amselle gives it in the articulation of *branchements*.

But even though Amselle touches upon translation, this theme is more widely elaborated by Paul Ricoeur in *Sur la traduction* (2004a). Ricoeur discusses here similar epistemological problems to those discussed by Amselle, but takes this one step further by also presenting translation as a paradigm. *Branchements* and translation are thus different in the sense that they treat different aspects of the same problem (the roles raciology, identity, oppositional logic and linguistic classification play in the constitution of culture). But they are also different in the sense that

whereas *branchements* is a metaphor, translation is a paradigm. I will discuss what that means at the end of the chapter.

What is interesting with Ricoeur's discussion of the epistemology of translation is the way he emphasises the *practice* of translation and not the *theory*. For it is on the level of practice that we can understand the real epistemology of translation, and where it breaks with oppositional thinking. In order to understand this further I want to dwell on a well known example from the philosophy and history of translation: Martin Luther's translation of the Bible. By presenting a complete translation of the Bible to German for the first time, Luther demonstrated in practice that it was possible to do something theoretically impossible: to read the Bible in the mother tongue of the people and thus break with the assumed opposition between an inferior oral German and the original Greek and Hebrew written texts.

9.1 Entry I: Oppositional logic in linguistic classification and translation

As we saw in chapter 3, Amselle writes that linguistic classification was vital for how colonial and early anthropology understood the human being. The way the diversity of humanity was thought corresponded to the way the diversity of languages was thought. And this diversity was in its turn thought within an oppositional logic or within "a system of oppositions" as Amselle writes. From the perspective of this language-culture connection this would entail that an intervention in the epistemology of language could cause changes in the epistemology of culture. And, as we will see, this is what Ricoeur does when he discusses translation: the epistemological obstacle for our understanding of translation is that languages are either insurmountably different, or that they have the same source either in the human brain or in a historical root. If the first is true, then translation is impossible. If translation is, on the other hand, possible, this must be because languages can in the end be reduced to the same. But, from the perspective of the practice of translation, this is not the problem in translation. If we, in accordance with Ricoeur, put this problem aside and see how translation is practiced, we see that the balance between

the reader's and the author's language is what is at stake. It is the openness of languages to one another that is revealed in translation.

We see thus that the themes of translation and culture come together by both being linked to language and the role language plays in our understanding of culture. Breaking with the oppositional thinking where languages are seen as insurmountably different, translation might question the way we see cultures too.

9.2 Entry II: Translation and cultural sameness

A motive for introducing the theme of translation, in the continuation from the epistemological concerns in linguistic classification, is to provide a way to critically reflect on an imagined cultural sameness which underpins the play of inclusion and exclusion. As we saw in chapter 2, Marianne Gullestad discusses how equality is linked to a certain notion of imagined sameness. It is not sufficient for a person to have a legal status equal to that of other citizens; she also has to feel that she is the same as those who recognise her. Now this sameness refers to cultural identity and cultural origin. For an immigrant, however, or rather, through the very label of being called an "immigrant", inclusion into a society becomes a difficult task. An immigrant is someone whose identity and origin are always different and this will never cease to adhere to this person. An invisible hierarchy of Norwegians may then be established and reproduced on the basis of an assumption that there is a cultural difference between the original and "ethnic Norwegians" and those entering the community.

A similar idea lurks behind the more general claim that in order to live together in a multicultural society, everyone must subscribe to a set of norms, rules, and principles applicable to all, and that those who come here "must adapt to our ways of living" and abandon their culture and customs. Furthermore, such adaptation is impossible - or so one claims - without abandoning particular cultures and customs. In other words, the homogeneity in question here is a *demand for adaptation* to "our" values. Imbedded in this demand lies a double assumption that "we" and the "others"

do not have any shared values, and that the others threaten our values. In Norway this discourse is particularly common in the rhetoric of the right-wing populist party (FrP), but it is also a general tendency. The very vague term “Norwegian values” is confused with what we take to be a more general foundation for western societies such as democracy, rule of law, and human rights. However, from what Gullestad writes, this confusion makes sense since equality, in terms of rights and duties of a citizen in a country, is linked to the cultural sameness that “Norwegian values” are a part of. The demand for adaptation which is constituted by the imagined sameness thus reproduces the image of an inside and an outside which again shapes our understanding of culture. The question then becomes how to get beyond this.

The question of whether or not we can live together in a culturally diverse society nurtures itself on this logic. Whether one is a universalist, claiming that all humans are the same, part of the same human nature or historical origin, or whether one is a cultural differentialist claiming that sameness is only ascribable to those within the same cultural community, the problem is sameness as premise. The phrasing of the question of whether we can live together in a culturally diverse society in the terms of a hypothetical *if*, disregards the practices in which this is already happening. It disregards the practices where cohabitation is already effective and where the distinction between sameness and otherness is transgressed.

My proposition is that translation helps us to question the assumption that there is an inside (of culture) to which the inhabitants normally considered to be original have privileged access. If this is so, then Norwegian culture and values are untranslatable to others and everybody on the “inside”, all the “original” Norwegians, would have an immediate and unproblematic access to it. This would further lead to the conclusion that this inside has remained unchanged. My claim is that translation questions both the notion of imagined cultural sameness and the notion that the inside and outside of a culture is a premise for the perception of a mutual framework, and that the real problem can be formulated in the following question: *Is cultural sameness a premise for cohabitation?* In other words, the concept of translation

problematizes the question to which cultural sameness is the answer. The problem is not the answer but, rather, the question. If the initial question asks whether we can live together, the real question would be how we already do live together. Here we have more to learn from translation. Taking the practice of translation into account gives us another take on how the opposition between unity and diversity (and the similarity between the unity and diversity of languages and cultures) can be overcome.

9.3 Entry III: Translation in *branchements*

The third point of entry is a continuation from the chapters on *branchements*. We saw there a way of articulating how identity is the outcome of dialectical movements or connections, and not a point of departure, and that in the connecting process itself there is no clear cut distinction between identity and not-identity. This deconstruction of identity and not-identity as oppositional is in its turn subversive to the outside and inside of culture. But how exactly are identity and not-identity internally linked?

Going back to Amselle's own problematic of post-colonial West- Africa there is no outside to the web of connections. Every identity that wants to articulate itself must relate itself to a constellation of meanings or universal signs. This does not, however, mean that everything becomes the same or that variation is wiped out. Connection is also a conversion or translation of these universal signs. And this is, as Amselle writes in connection with cultural expression: "Translation and conversion...are characterised as what is immediately given in cultural expression (*des données immédiates de l'expression culturelle*)" (Amselle 2001: 59).

With translation Amselle allows for both continuity and rupture between particular and universal meanings. Kanté gave Mande speakers access to the Koran without going through Arabic but rather through the Mande language. It became possible to be a Mande Muslim in the sense that there is continuity and rupture in both the meaning of being Mande and in the Muslim religion. Not all Muslims are literate in Arabic and hence not identical to each other. Muslims speak different

languages and this ruptures the strong link between Islam and Arabic. On the other hand there is continuity as the Mande speakers receive the meanings of the Islamic faith through reading the Koran. In the same way the Mande oral language is both conserved and transformed. It is conserved in that Kanté shows consideration towards the Mande oral language and it finds an expression it has never had before through alphabetisation.

Translation could be described as an aspect of *branchements*. In the African context the (re)discovery of writing is related to prophecy and the prophet is defined as both “the translator of the divine message in the language of his people and as the one who allows for the particular to access the universal” (Ibid: 61). Amselle’s point is that the opposition between the universal and the particular is fictive and that singularity and universality are complementary. The N’ko tradition articulates a certain understanding of the universal in a religious sense of Islam as translatable into local tradition. It expresses a “will to dissociate the Arab language from the Muslim religion in order to “mandinguiser” the latter” (Ibid: 136).

Translation is a conversion of signs. However, in order for the translations and conversions to be legitimate, they must remain faithful to some original meaning or reality. With regard to Kanté, I understand this reality to mean the reality of the Mande tradition. His enterprise and the creation of the N’ko alphabet are a kind of “Platonic project where the invention of an alphabet as well as the translation and editing of a whole series of works aim to assure a faithful reproduction of reality...” (Ibid: 157-158). In Kanté’s case this reality is the Mande tradition. When analysing Kanté’s fidelity to reality, Amselle draws on the Aristotelian notion of mimesis: “the problem of the invention or the reinvention of writing is inseparable from an approach that puts mimesis, understood as a copy or scan of reality, before everything” (Ibid). In other words, Amselle is using the old principle developed by Aristotle in the *Poetics*, of representation. This means that every translation, invention, or rediscovery is committed to something. There is a limit to how foreign the elements can be, to how creative one can be.

Translation, in the sense of articulating a balance between continuity and rupture of both particular and universal meaning, here draws, as far as I can see, on the double movement in *branchements* between connection and reconnection. For, even though the connection to the web is necessary, this does not mean that the connection may be bent in new and different directions.

9.4 What is translation?

Translation comes from Classical Latin *translatus*, past participle of *transfero*, from *trans-* “across” + *latus*, “borne”, “carried”, irregular perfect passive participle of the verb *fero, ferre* “to bear”. In English *traduce* (To malign a person), coming from the Latin *traducere* (or *transducere*: *trans.*, beyond, across + *duco, ducere*: to conduct) I lead, bring, transport, or conduct across or over something (Oxford English dictionary, 2013). Translation is, however, related to hermeneutics and expression through the Greek *hermeneuein*.

The French translation scholar Jean-René Ladmiral writes that “Translation passes a message from the language of departure or the source language to the language of arrival or the target language” (Ladmiral 1994: 11). The translation carries something over from one place to another. This may perhaps be illustrated as two banks of a river which are separated from each other. A transport of something from one side to the other is difficult until something, for instance a bridge, is constructed. The two banks are no longer separated. However, the river is still there and the bridge may be fragile.

An outline for a philosophy of translation may be found in the principle of analogy in Aristotle and later in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. Thomas sought to develop a rational discourse on God and God’s nature without God being an empirically accessible entity. Since we have to build our knowledge and language from sense-perception of creatures, how then can we understand something which is beyond sense-perception? By establishing a comparison between the human world and language and God, Thomas created a negative notion of God’s nature. God is *not*

an accident; he is *not* corporeal, *not* imperfect etc. The point is that the comparable creates knowledge from what we already know (from sense-perception of creatures) to what we do not know (God's nature). The Thomas scholar Frederick Copleston writes, in his thorough presentation of Thomas in *A history of philosophy*, that "We cannot form an adequate idea of the divine simplicity as it is in itself...we know however, that it is at the opposite pole, so to speak, from simplicity or comparative simplicity in creatures" (Copleston 1993: 349). The comparison is, however, ambiguous in that similar attributes of God and man in human language are not univocal nor purely equivocal:

When we say that a man is wise and that God is wise, the predicate "wise" is not to be understood in an univocal sense, that is, precisely the same sense...On the other hand, the names we apply to God are not purely equivocal, that is to say, they are not completely different in meaning from the meaning they bear when applied to creatures (Ibid: 352).

Now, according to Thomas, this tension between the univocal and the equivocal is balanced by the analogy. Thomas writes in *Summa contra Gentiles* that what is said of God is neither said in an equivocal nor univocal way, but in an analogical way (Thomas 2000: 227). Returning to translation as a kind of analogy, what the analogy does is to bridge a gap that theoretically cannot be bridged. It is on this historical and epistemological background that we can derive the philosophical elements of translation later achieved by its practices. As will be seen in the definition of translation given by Ricoeur, Martin Luther's translation of the Bible, as the creation of a comparable, bridges a gap regardless of whether it was theoretically possible or not. And is not the problem in translation as well as in negative theology that there is no certainty as to whether the translation or analogy corresponds to the original?

The historical importance of, and examples of, translation is not difficult to find. The contact between the West and the Arabic world led in the 12th century to vital developments for the West as it rediscovered its Greek source and foundation. For instance, Hippocrates, Galen, and Aristotle were all translated by Wilhem of

Moerbekes (Störig: xi). However, despite a widespread practice of translation, a theoretical study of translations was not undertaken until much later. Even though a scientific approach to translation emerged in the 15th century with the Italian humanist Leonardi Bruni's work, *De Interpretatione Recta* (1420), it is first and foremost from the 19th century onwards that a theoretical approach to translation is developed. Ricoeur refers in many places to the work of Antoine Berman and his book *L'épreuve de l'étranger*. In this book Berman discusses two German traditions of translation. On the one hand there are the likes of Novalis and Schlegel who subscribed to what Berman called a speculative theory of translation. This speculative theory of translation was furthermore linked to what Novalis and Schlegel conceived of as critique (Berman 1995: 167). To them translation was a way of improving the potential in the original. This led to the conclusion that for instance Shakespeare was better in German than in the original English (Ibid: 172). On the other hand, among others, Humboldt and Schleiermacher try to conceive of, for the first time, that which is alien or strange in a text. According to Berman, what is different in them compared to Novalis and Schlegel is that understanding is introduced as a problem. To understand a text is to understand "an expressive product of a subject" and a phenomenon of objective language defined by history and culture. And this history and culture are different from the readers, interpreters, or the translators (Ibid: 227). Thirdly, language is not just an instrument, but the place where man lives. Language defines who a human being is. Through these three points one becomes aware of the differences of languages and the importance of them.

What is interesting with Schleiermacher in particular is how closely he links understanding, interpretation, and translation. In fact, whereas interpretation concerns itself with ordinary expressions, translation handles science and art. But how should this relation between the author's and the reader's language be balanced by the translator? And it is here that Schleiermacher criticises the idea that one should translate as if the author wrote in the language of the reader (Ibid: 235). For what is very important to acknowledge for a translator, is the author's relation to his mother

tongue. Schleiermacher argues that in order to recognise one's own mother tongue and having one's own mother tongue recognised, it must be able to receive what is different. As far as I can understand, this means that what is strange and different has a constitutive role for the status of equality. By being able to express something from a different language in one's own language, the cultivated character of one's own language is demonstrated (Ibid: 236).

We thus see that translation has a role to play in the intersubjective constitution of languages. Translations can, by approaching the reader's language, demonstrate to the author the equal value of the author's language. What is the most interesting for us, is the role of the strange here. It is only by showing that the reader's mother tongue is as rich as the author's, that it can receive a status as equal.

9.5 Why translation?

Now, from what we have seen in these entries, what do they have in common to link them to translation? What joins them? Linguistic classification, the post-colonial problematic of N'ko, and the introduction of new languages into the world of written culture, and the problem of cultural sameness, all concern purity. Cultural sameness is based on an assumption that there is an outside and inside to cultures and that humans stem from either this or that pure cultural origin. Cultural identities thus stand in an oppositional relation to each other which makes a notion of inside and outside tenable. The opposition between universal and particular (cultural) meanings has a similar kind of dynamic. Universal is thought of as purified from any particular culture, whereas a particular cultural expression is thought of as non-communicative and auto-generative.

Translation can be seen both as an articulation of a problem and as a solution to this problem. Translation is the practice of overcoming obstacles of communication. On the other hand, translation as a practice shows how these obstacles are already overcome and that the theoretical obstacles through which one perceives translation are too abstract. As previously discussed, the perspective of the

dissertation is to see *branchements* and translation as ways of problematising the view of culture as pure. I will, to some extent, elaborate translation as a kind of solution, but I will mainly focus on problematisation.

What level exactly do I aim at when I want to include translation? As discussed by Peter Burke, cultural hybridity can be examined on different levels, one of them being the level of concepts and terminology. And here Burke mentions translation as accounting for processes of cultural hybridisation. As he stresses, translation is one of the least ambiguous notions and one that has already been used for a long time. Anthropologists such as Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard saw the analogy between language and culture which, to some, rendered anthropology “an art of translation” (Burke 2010: 56). The point is to see a certain parallel between the questions concerning purity of culture and the inside and outside of culture, and the questions concerning purity of language and the inside and outside of language. This is why translation has become a specific metaphor for describing processes of cultural hybridisation. In other words, I do not claim to be the first to use translation as an approach to culture, this has been done for quite some time.⁴⁵ However, I have neither seen anyone discuss translation as a paradigm the way Ricoeur does, nor have I seen translation analysed epistemologically the way I do it. My point is to see the idea of translation as a paradigm together with my epistemological reflections on culture. It is because culture is indirectly and directly linked to language in the first place that translation is interesting. As I see it, it is by offering another view of language that translation can have an effect on how we see culture.

However, as the Italian philosopher Domenico Jervolino (2007) states, there are four different levels through which translation can be studied. Translation is of course first and foremost a transition between languages. Secondly it reveals a cultural political question. As we will see, Luther’s translation of the Bible reflects

⁴⁵ In addition to being used in the cultural history and anthropology (Burke 2010), translation has become a huge field opening up perspectives in for instance post-colonialism and political theory (Bhabha 2008, Buden 2008).

indirectly what it is to be German. Kanté's creation of N'ko and the translation of the Koran are other examples. A third level is represented by the ethics imbedded in translation. In order to translate, one must be open to letting what is foreign in another language enter one's own language. This openness is vital to what Ricoeur calls the paradigm of translation. A fourth and last level-which is linked to the third-is translation as a way of reflecting on the anthropological dimension of being a Self, and this brings translation back to its original kinship with hermeneutics. This last aspect draws on the thinking from *Soi-même comme un autre* as discussed in the previous chapter. In the same way as what is other is present and constitutive for identity (the distinction between the two becomes blurred), translation articulates how the need for translation (le desire de traduire) reveals otherness at the centre of human existence. We do not only need to translate in order to make ourselves understood to others, but in order to understand ourselves. Translation is necessary because I do not immediately understand myself.

Richard Kearney writes about this that "We are at the same time dealing with an alterity that resides outside us and an alterity that resides within us" (Kearney 2008: 164). The way I see it, what translation does is to question the very opposition between the exterior and the interior, which in its turn is suitable to our problem of inside and outside of culture.

9.6 Translation from theory to practice

If we now turn more specifically to Paul Ricoeur's notion of translation, the basis for our reflections is a collection of three articles on translation published under the title *Sur la traduction* (Ricoeur 2004a). I shall not give a summary of the texts here other than the parts central to our problem.

Translation fluctuates between the language of the author and the language of the reader. Ricoeur refers to a long tradition in the theory of translation. Franz Rosenzweig presents translation as a paradox. It serves two masters: the author in her work and the reader's desire to understand. Schleiermacher for his part describes, as

we have seen, translation as taking the author to the reader and the reader to the author. According to him, a translator in the end has to choose between the language of the author and the language of the reader. And in the end the translator's ability to let the reader's language receive the author's language is the test of whether or not the reader's language is equal to the author's (Berman 1995: 226-250). Ladamiral, in his book *Traduire: théorèmes pour la traduction*, denominates this the antinomy in translation between a literal and literary translation ("traduction littérale ou traduction littéraire (dit libre)" (Ladamiral 1994: 89).

Now, the tension between these two poles has led to both a linguistic and a philological debate, as well as to speculation on whether or not translation is in fact possible. Two kinds, or types, of response can be discerned. On the one hand, given that there is a multiplicity or diversity of languages to be translated, translation is impossible. Ladamiral writes that the predominant tendency is to conclude that translation is theoretically impossible (Ibid: 85). In lack of a third text the transition between the two languages remains blocked. On the other hand, given that translations actually do take place, there must be some common ground shared by the different languages. This is an attempt to justify translations based either in a common origin prior to the separation of all languages, or in a prior structure common to all languages. However, both strands run into obstacles: The first cannot explain the fact that translations do take place; the second does not succeed in supplying us with this common ground. And we can here already see the point Amselle is making of connecting the epistemology of language and the epistemology of culture.

Ricoeur's contribution is not a solution to these problems. His point is rather that this problem, *whether or not* translation is possible, is a theoretical problem imposed from the outside. He tries to understand the problem that *the practice* of translation is a response to. According to Ricoeur, the real problem in the practice of translation is whether to be faithful to or to betray the language of the reader and whether to be faithful or to betray the language of the author. The outcome of this

tension is “the production of equivalence without identity” (Ricoeur 2006: 63). Since the tension between fidelity and treason is never dissolved, it accounts for how an equivalent is not identical. Even though Ricoeur, to a certain point, might be right, the question is whether this displacement from theory to practice is too easy. As Ladmiral points out, the question of whether translation is possible is posed exactly as a result of this problem, the problem of which language to be faithful to, in the practice. They are part of the same antinomy. So it seems like it is difficult to get rid of the question of whether translation is possible due to the fact that every translation is faced with the question of whether it is a good translation. But, on the other hand, the question is of quality and not of possibility. To say that a translation is not satisfactory is not to say that translation as such is impossible. And in a translation some parts might be deemed more successful than others. That does not mean that less successful translations prove the impossibility of translating, only that the demand for faithfulness to the two languages has been difficult to comply with.

This problem still endures after the translator’s work itself is finished. Even though there is not a third text from where one can judge a translation, this does not mean that the translation is exempt from criticism. And the best way to criticise a translation is to present a better one. Critique is perhaps too vague or general to constitute a principle in translations, but is, however, a necessary part of the translator’s labour.

Before elaborating further on the link between translation, hermeneutics, and anthropology, we will look at an example that may help us picture how Ricoeur argues about translation: Martin Luther’s translation of the Bible into German.

9.7 Between fidelity and treason: Luther’s creation of comparable

Translation is the construction of equivalence without identity or a comparable between two languages. This implies a continuity and rupture of meaning at the same time. Where continuity is ensured in the commitment or faithfulness to both the author and the reader, the ruptures reveal themselves in the betrayal of them. The fidelity is jeopardised in favour of a creative act which, at the same time, is, as

Ricoeur writes, a risk: “Grandeur of translation, risk of translation: creative betrayal of the original, equally creative appropriation by the reception language; construction of the comparable” (Ricoeur 2006:37).

What then is a comparable? An example that is close to Ricoeur’s heart is the Martin Luther’s translation of the Greek Bible into German in the 16th century. Translations of the Bible had been undertaken before both to German and other languages, but Luther gave the first complete translation of the Greek and Hebrew texts to German without going through Latin. Luther also found the earlier German translations of parts of the Bible too close to the Latin, and he aimed at a Germanisation of the Bible. We are not forgetting the Geneva Bible or the Czech translation by the Moravian church. However, these are not our focus here. Before Luther the translation of the Greek text had been done through Latin. The Catholic Church had thus had a monopoly on translation and interpretation of the Bible through the Latin language, which only the Church was the real possessor of. If we read Luther’s own thoughts on Bible translation in *Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen*, we can read his antiauthoritarian statement that:

We do not have to ask the literal Latin how we are to speak German... Rather we must ask the mother in the home, the children on the street, the common man in the marketplace. We must be guided by their language, by the way they speak, and do our translating accordingly. Then they will understand it and recognize that we are speaking German to them (Luther 2003).

What is striking when reading this is the central role the translation has in Luther’s reformation. As Luther’s credo was that the Bible is the only authority (*sola scriptura*), he opened the way for a thinking which did not have to go through the tradition of the Catholic Church. In order to realise the idea that the Bible is the only authority, everyone must be able to read it. *Sola scriptura* is no good if people cannot read the Bible. Luther’s solution is ingenious. Instead of everyone learning Latin, the only accepted translation language, which up until then had been reserved for the few, the meaning of the Hebrew and Greek texts became accessible in the language

of the people. In other words, Luther's translation is not merely the effect of the idea of the Reformation; it could be understood as its articulation and realisation. Or differently put, would *sola scriptura* be equally meaningful without the translation of the Bible? The translation thus expresses the Reformation on a concrete and symbolic level. The real effect was, however, not only a change in the religious perception but the destabilisation of power.

Luther wanted to germanise the Bible by translating it into good German, the German of the people. However, it was not clear what good German meant as the Germans spoke a number of dialects (*Mundarten*). Antoine Berman describes the difficult balance. Luther's double attempt was to balance the relation between German (*Hochdeutsch*) and the Hebrew and Greek text on the one hand, and between German *Hochdeutsch* and the other German dialects (*Mundarten*) on the other (Berman 1995: 46). So, in order for the German particularity to acquire universality in the sense of equality with Latin, it could not remain in the "pure" particularity of the dialects. However, without some continuity to the dialects (*Mundarten*), it would become too strong a homogenisation.

Even though Luther was convinced that the word of God could be received in the German language, he was not exempt from the paradoxical demand in all translation of serving two masters, the language of the original or the language of the reader. Even though the principle of taking the original to the reader's language is the most common for all translation, Luther finds it also necessary to practice the other principle of taking the reader to the original's language. As Franz Rosenzweig writes in his text "Die Schrift und Luther" (1974), Luther was conscious of the necessity to give room for the Hebrew language in order to fully appreciate the meaning of the text. It was thus sometimes necessary to go beyond the German normal language, as he explains in his foreword to the translation of the Psalms, and "get used to" such words (*solche Worte behalten, gewöhnen*). In order to conserve the Hebrew meaning, which is stronger, he substitutes *Gefangenden erlöset* (liberated the imprisoned) with *Gefängnis gefangen* (imprisoned the prison/imprisonment) as an expression of what

Christ has done. Now, what is interesting for our part is that Luther does not import a foreign word to express this, but twists the German language itself so that it can receive the proper meaning of the original. It is still German but Luther found (in *Gefängnis gefangen*) either a not yet actualised potential in the German language or constructed a new German phrase.

Antoine Berman writes, à propos the Lutherian Bible, that what this translation showed is that the development of one's own culture goes through the other (Berman 1995: 56). And as far as I can see, it is precisely this relation between self and other than self which is at stake in Ricoeur's distinction between the two conceptions of identity (*idem* and *ipse*), in his own understanding of translation of course, and in Amselle's conception of the branching of cultures. They are all based on the dialectical principle that there is no immediate access for a person or a collective to oneself.

The idea of the universal (as the word, reason, or right) in European history is accompanied by a notion of its linguistic form (Latin, French). Latin could thus be opposed by particular languages, or rather languages which were oral (*vulgate*) and without grammar on the one hand, and languages that had writing and grammar on the other. This notion of the universal as the opposite of the particular is, however, something that found its way into the thinking of the Enlightenment. But, as Richard Kearney points out, there were obstacles:

The ideal in the century of Enlightenment of a universal perfect language was confronted with the resistance from cultural differences that rested on linguistic disparity... most attempts at founding one absolute language was found to be, de facto, an imperialist and cunning manoeuvre... which aimed at giving privilege to one particular language...in relation to the languages of subordinate countries or regions (Kearney 2008: 163).

As we saw in the previous chapter, in a postcolonial context this holds true, and it is thus interesting to see Kanté's strategy for coping with this problem. But this could

also be found within the western cultural sphere. Luther's translation reflects this problem and its solution.

According to Annelise Senger, Luther viewed translation as reviving old German words rather than importing foreign elements. It is thus with some reservations, as we will see later, that one can claim that Luther did not homogenise the German language. As Luther states elsewhere in *Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen*, the most important element to be conserved from the original text is the meaning of the text.

For our part, the most interesting aspect of Luther's translation is how German becomes a language that the "original" text could be translated into. How can this balance, which Berman describes as "neither Latin, nor pure dialect, but a generalised popular speech (parler)", be articulated? German was up until then incomparable to Latin and thus inapt as translation-language. In other words, German was not an equivalent to Latin when it came to receiving the word of God. God did not speak German until Luther translated the Bible. Luther thus changed the perception of the German language. Ricoeur writes that:

Luther not only constructed a comparable in translating the Bible into German, in "germanizing" it, as he dared say, in the face of St. Jerome's Latin, but created the German language, as comparable to Latin, to the Greek of the Septuagint, and to the Hebrew of the Bible (Ricoeur 2006: 37).

Once again, the significance that Luther's translation had for the enlightenment philosophy a century later is striking. First of all, the Church was dethroned as authority. However, that does not imply a rejection of the universal as such. With some reservations one could perhaps localise Luther's enterprise as being somewhere between the French and the German Enlightenment. The first is focused on dethroning all authorities with reference to metaphysics, tradition etc., but nevertheless preserves a centralist and anti-traditional universalism. The second is represented by, for instance, Herder, who criticises the rationalism of the authors of the encyclopaedia. Louis Dumont writes in *Essais sur l'individualisme à propos*

Herder that he criticises the Enlightenment for its vulgar rationalism, its narrow understanding of progress, and, above all, for the hegemony of this universalist rationalism (Dumont 1983: 137). Despite of Luther's and Herder's diverging views on translation, Luther initiated a criticism of the universalism on which Herder continues. Having said that, Luther's enterprise is not a refutation of the universal in general, as Dumont proposes in the case of Herder. Rendering the word of God accessible for everyone in their own language, he rather introduces a destabilisation of the notion of the universal. In translation it is possible to grasp the universal in the particular.

Returning to the dilemma of treason and fidelity, what status does this *conversion of signs* have? Since there is no third text or criteria by which one can measure the correctness of a translation, one is left with the dilemma of treason and fidelity. And as Olivier Abel and Jerome Porée write, not even a true fidelity is an identical repetition. However, they write that "that does not mean that translation is treason... it is a creative fidelity"(Abel and Porée 2009: 125). They seem to indicate an opposition between treason and fidelity which creativity tries to surmount. This seems a bit odd, particularly in the light of Ricoeur's own description of the grandeur of translation as "creative betrayal of the original". I do agree that there is some sort of fidelity, but is it not necessary at some level to betray in order to be creative? Or is not creativity a kind of treason? To say that translation is not treason seems to be an attempt to escape the dilemma in favour of consistency of meaning. Having said that, what about fidelity and the limitation of creativity? After all, translation is not a total relativity. Creativity thus seems to be central to the articulation of the openness in translation that enables the transition between two languages.

We are now in a better position to understand the initial amplification of the comparable. Theoretically speaking, the construction of a comparable means three things: the comparable unites two entities that before were separated or heterogeneous. In this case the German written language unites the spoken German and the Hebrew and Greek original texts. Also, a language thought of as inferior is

lifted up as the equal to Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. And this equality is achieved without abandoning the German language tradition.

So going back to Ricoeur's displacement from theory to practice, the question is not whether it is possible to translate the Bible, but to what degree the translation betrays or remains faithful to the original language and the language of the reader. Luther created what we can call an equivalent without adequation or identity, or, in other words, an equivalent without homogeneity.

Before elaborating on the theoretical aspects of translation, I will pause for a moment and recapitulate the main points so far. The introduction of translation into our reflection draws on the overall problematic of purity and the fact that both Amselle and Ricoeur turn to this concept when they criticise purity. Translation is, however, somewhat ambiguous in the sense that it both articulates a problem- that of misunderstanding, lack of understanding, perpetuated communication etc.- and a solution- that these obstacles are overcome through the practice of translating. Even though a solution is provided when a translation is given, an uncertainty nevertheless adheres to it: is the translation a good one?

Through the case of Luther's translation of the Bible, we have a European equivalent to Soleyman Kanté, the case used by Amselle. Luther emphasises the connective aspects that Amselle speaks of, in the sense that German as a language can only become a language of its own after or through its connection to constellations of meanings or universals like the Bible. By finding equivalence between the Hebrew and Greek languages and the German dialects, German could be recognised as a particular language. But if this is possible, it opens up the question of how it is possible. Is there some common ground historically or in human nature which makes it possible? On the other hand, the failure to find the perfect translation might lead us to the opposite conclusion, that translation is impossible. In other words, we see here a parallel between the problems of translation and those of culture. As I see it, what we are struggling with, in both cases, is the epistemological

obstacle that hinders us in reflecting upon openness: openness is neither sameness nor difference.

Does translation need a common ground or does the absence of a common ground render translation impossible? Or does the fact that we already have translations show that this question is perhaps not the right one? The phenomenology or practice of translation seems to assume and destroy the inside and outside of language at the same time. It assumes unity and diversity of language. So, my point is, there are some paradoxes in translation too.

9.8 The parallel of language and culture

How is Luther's creation of a comparable relevant for the intercultural and the question of homogeneity? Luther's translation gives us an example of what kind of thinking we can develop. Luther serves us in developing a *thought image*, to borrow an expression from Deleuze, without which it is difficult to renew any thinking. And again, it is the practice which shows us a possibility that theory cannot find by itself. Or as Ricoeur writes, paraphrasing Donald Davidson, translation is "Theoretically Difficult, Hard and Practically Simple, Easy" (Ricoeur 2006: 15). Having said that, the practices never articulate themselves but must be explicated.

I find Ricoeur's take on this very interesting. The same way the creation of a comparable shows that the problem "*if* translation is possible" is a false or theoretical problem, the problem "*if* it is possible to live together in a culturally diverse society" is a false problem. The hypothetical *if* does not take into account the cases where the problem has already been overcome. And perhaps it is these latter cases that we should focus on understanding. But since this has been analysed by Ricoeur through Luther as a practical enterprise, he has found that the theoretical or hypothetical question is not the question that the translation responds to at all. The question is rather the degree of faithfulness or betrayal to one of the two languages. As far as I can see this is an insightful approach that is transferable to the question of culture. A

process of integration is perhaps rather a question of how faithful or how deceitful one could be.

Homogeneity in the sense of *demand for adaptation* is thus a response to a false problem. The demand for adaptation is a response to a problem which supposes that other cultures represent a threat to democracy and Norwegian society, French society etc. I am not making an invitation to relativism or a refutation of values, norms, and principles in our societies. Neither am I proposing a naïve attitude. There are of course groups and individuals who have no interest in democracy and rule of law, or who do not want to live together, and there are those who aim at founding society on alternative laws. But in this context as elsewhere, there are but potentialities, no guarantees.

My point is rather that this hypothetical *if* nurture itself on the oppositional logic of identity and difference which is common to both language and culture. The theory of translation asks if translation is possible or not and premises the outcome on either an identity of all languages in human nature or a common origin, or on the differences between the languages being insurmountable. This point is similar to that of Gullestad when she reflects on the imagined sameness which is a common cultural identity and origin. This sameness has as its opposite another and different cultural identity and origin. Following the egalitarian logic and its link to this imagined sameness, co-habitation is impossible because one has no original common ground. The hypothetical and the imagined have in common that they disregard practices that show something else than what theory allows for. What Gullestad does not take into account, is the practices or examples of successful intergration which could be subversive to the imagined sameness.

Luther's problem was not whether or not the translation was possible, but rather if he would succeed in stabilising the tension between faithfulness and treason. But again, the problem is not theoretical but practical. Likewise, we must investigate multicultural society taking the practices that are already there in order to articulate that which is already possible in practice. The idea of a cultural sameness and the

demand for adaptation to our values do not render us capable of understanding the intercultural practices which are already there and which transgress our imagination. In the way in which translation as a practice transgresses our imagination, we must look into transcultural and intercultural practices that also transgress our imagination.

Further, as a result of this preliminary “deconstruction” of the question, comes the more constructive solution. In Luther’s case, the creation of a comparable combines entities (German and Greek) that before were separate or heterogeneous. Thus, Luther’s practice of translation has not only showed us a false or badly worded question. It has also given us, more specifically, a practical example which can reflect on cultural diversity. Translation as a practical activity overcomes obstacles of understanding. The fact that people go from not understanding to understanding one another is only understandable from the practice and theory of translation. The risk is, of course, that the translation becomes focused on adaptation.

In addition, the equal status of German and Latin is achieved without abandoning the German language and tradition. If the point of Luther’s translation was the creation of an equivalent without identity, a comparable to Latin, it is important due to the fact that it was no longer an obligation to learn Latin to read and hear the word of God. German received the status of universal equality to Latin, but kept its German particularity. German, as Bible-language, was the construction of an equivalent to Latin without being identical to Latin. To say that German is equivalent or comparable to Latin is to say that German and Latin are of equal worth, that it is possible to say the same in both languages, and that a complete homogenisation is not a premise for this.

This gives us another interesting take on the comparison between language and culture. As I see it, there are some analogous points between the Latin-German opposition and the sameness-otherness opposition in a multicultural society. What Luther’s translation created, was an equality which is not based on sameness. Even though the German language is related to Latin, Greek, or Hebrew, it is not reducible to them. Instead a specific German branch of Christianity saw daylight and

augmented the spectrum of Christian religion. Equality thus meant creative contribution and recognition, but not on its own terms alone. Homogenisation, total adaptation, or cultural sameness is not a prerequisite for co-habitation and equality. What generates a feeling of equality is rather that one with one's own background (culturally or not) can contribute to this co-habitation and perhaps broaden the imagination of what it means to be Norwegian, French etc.

Now, this parallel between language and culture has historical roots where our understanding of culture is affected by the way we understand languages. From this perspective the analogy between translation, as an intervention in the discussion of language and culture is perhaps not innovative in itself: there was a link between culture and language from the outset. And any discussion of language might thus potentially have an effect on how we think culture. The openness that Ricoeur is on to, and which we will return to, in translation gives us another approach to language and might affect our understanding of culture.

9.9 Translation and identity

As discussed earlier, translation can be examined on many different levels. And even though concrete translations to some extent guide our reflections, it is the philosophical and more abstract points that I see as fruitful for shedding some light on our problem of culture. One of the levels that I want to focus on and which is related to culture, is identity. And again it is interesting to see the comparison of an individual micro-level and a collective macro-level.

There is a striking resemblance between Jean-Loup Amselle and Paul Ricoeur in their approach to the relation between identity and translation. Amselle writes that:

The identity implicates immediately a translation and a conversion of the fact that it is a being for others...The expression of any identity supposes the conversion of universal signs in its own language or, the other way around, the conversion of one's own signs into a planetary of signs in order to manifest its singularity (Amselle 2001: 59).

Something very similar is proposed by Richard Kearney in an article on Ricoeur's philosophy of translation. Kearney writes that:

translation indicates the ontological act of speaking in the way of not only translating one-self (from the inside to the outside, from private to public, from the unconscious to the conscious) but also, and more explicitly, to translate one-self for the others (Kearney 2008:160).

If we are going to follow Amselle's reasoning, that identity implicates the translation of one's own being for others, this means that the language through which one does this is not entirely one's own. And if the language of the other is necessary for me to be able to express myself, then this entails that I am originally not present to myself. Translation is thus implicated in this problem of identity and can, for Ricoeur's part, be seen in continuity from the dialectics of selfhood and otherness discussed in the previous chapter. Dominico Jervolino states, in his book *Paul Ricoeur. Une herméneutique de la condition humaine*, that "Actually, in translation we are confronted with the problems of identity and alterity" (Jervolino 2002: 42). In light of what Kearney and Jervolino write, the point is that in order to express myself to others I must use a language that is not my own or I must translate myself into the language of the other.

However, this points, as far as I can see, to a more fundamental aspect. For when I must represent myself to others this is not a voluntary act but part of becoming myself. That which is other is constitutive of identity. Or differently put, there is no clear distinction between identity and alterity. In this sense translation is not something that comes posterior to my identity but is at the center of my being. In order to express myself and what I am, I must translate myself through another language. But this reveals again that this Self, that I take to be me, is not really distinguishable from otherness.

It is of course here relevant to mention the importance of Jürgen Habermas in the discussion of communication and the role of dialogue in his discourse ethics (Habermas 2003). When I write that I, in order to express myself, must translate

myself, this resembles perhaps something that Habermas says. Both he and Ricoeur's philosophy of translation deal with the problem of communication and communication as constitutive for human beings and their rationality. However, what I find preferable with the way this is thought in Ricoeur is that translation questions homogenisation and includes a reflection on variation. What I think Luther's case thus reflects is a reversal of the homogenising perspective. All were not forced to learn Latin. And even though translation might not be a "solution" to the problem of power (it is still a question of who translates what), translation has built into it a sensitivity to openness that goes both ways. In a situation where people with different backgrounds meet it seems strange to presuppose that a set of rules is already binding the participants.

Furthermore, what is at stake on a theoretical level in translation is that it manages to balance both continuity and rupture when it comes to identity. With translation Amselle turns upside-down the problem of how to balance discontinuity and rupture, and of how it is possible to import foreign elements without alienating oneself completely from one's own identity. But again, there is no pure identity from the outset. Discontinuity, continuity, identity, and difference are fixations of fluid elements. It is in this dynamic that translation and conversion create the process from which all other elements receive their significance.

Only a purification of the poles in translation fixes the identities. This is important since it is from fixed identities that we elaborate the way we think about culture. However, translation, both as practice and as theory, does not have fixed identities as a premise. And this hermeneutical point is what separates translation from those who claim that adaptation to our values is a necessity, and those who claim that an individual's cultural belonging must be recognised. They both focus on the static relation between individuals and cultures. However, translation takes the dynamic and transformative aspect into account.

9.10 From comparison to the creation of a comparable

Comparativism accounts for both similarity and difference. In order to identify something, it must be seen in relation to other similar things and contrasted to different things. Thus two things belonging to different groups of things can be identified by their similarity and difference to other things. However, difference here is an identifiable difference and not an unidentifiable difference. Is this then a true difference? What about that which is really different and cannot be compared? My second question is whether this logic of opposition is fruitful when it comes to describing what is human.

Taking the last question first, when we discuss the term diversity in relation to cultures this assumes an initial contrast or opposition between cultures which is due to a comparative approach. As long as diversity is understood through comparison, the diversity is always already determined. Jean-Loup Amselle underlines this in his critique of the comparative method in anthropology:

It is thus not the notion of society that founds comparativism but the reverse: because I need to draw up classifications and typologies, I must have elements to classify, and if I can legitimately extract them from their context, it is because I have denied beforehand that these elements are political units situated in a sociocultural continuum (Amselle 1998: 10).

In other words, from the perspective of what we perhaps could call a traditional comparativism, diversity is an identifiable diversity. And in this diversity there is no continuum but a series of identities and differences which are mutually exclusive. Now, this is underlined by Ricoeur too. Concerning the adjective “*même*”, Ricoeur writes:

”Same“(*même*) is used in the context of comparison; its contraries are ”other”, ”contrary”, ”distinct”, ”diverse”, ”unequal”, ”inverse”. The weight of the comparative use of the term ”same” seems so great to me that I shall henceforth take sameness as synonymous with *idem*-identity“ (Ricoeur 1992 : 3).

As far as I can see, Ricoeur's claim is the same as Amselle's: that comparison reproduces a binary logic, and that this binary logic is an abstraction that takes something out of its context. My point is not to get rid of comparison or diversity as such, but to reflect critically on how specific procedures give specific results. Is it possible to liberate diversity from this binary thinking?

An interesting person in all this is Wilhem von Humboldt. Humboldt takes on comparison, translation, and diversity as concepts and is mentioned by both Amselle and Ricoeur. For Ricoeur, Humboldt's concept of diversity informs us of a radical heterogeneity which immediately seems to lead to the conclusion that translation is impossible. Amselle sees a potential in Humboldt for a new anthropology which puts continuity at the centre of the analysis of societies.

Comparativism or comparison is in this sense an abstract procedure which reproduces the diversity of culture, but it does not take that which is not comparable into account. What is interesting to notice is that Ricoeur stated in *Sur la traduction* that translation is the creation of a comparable or an equivalent without identity. This equivalent is not assumed but produced. So even though Ricoeur and Amselle both criticise comparison, the kind of comparison they criticise is not the only one. And I think Ricoeur, through the case of Luther, is on to another way of thinking comparison which does not base comparison on similarity or on the abandoning of comparison in the light of cultural diversity. What is comparable is not possible due to an assumed third element that guarantees the translation or the comparability between what is compared. We cannot start off from some empirical assumption that what we are comparing is unified on the basis of a third underlying element. Comparison between different elements is a construction with all its shortcomings and deficiencies.

Furthermore- with reference to the Hellenist Marcel Detienne and the philosopher of translation Antoine Berman- Ricoeur writes that comparison and translation are always facing what is alien, other, what cannot be compared. But should this lead us to abstain from comparisons? Or seen from the perspective of

translation; should the fact that something just is not translatable stop us from translating? Are translation and comparison limited to what is similar or the same? If we pause for a moment and look at some of the things that Marcel Detienne writes in *Comparer l'incomparable* (2009), he writes that comparison for him is experimental and constructivist. The comparison of two or more phenomena over time and space is not the result of an empirical fact, but something which appears through a human effort. From this perspective both the potential and the limitation of comparison are important. It is through comparison that the plurality and non-reducibility emerge as well as the continuity of phenomena through time and space. This can, as Detienne shows regarding the concept of "nation", also augment or pluralise our understanding of something we thought to be univocal. If we, however, do not attempt to compare the incomparable, then how should we acquire knowledge of that which we do not understand, and indirectly; how can we experience the limitations in our own knowledge and ultimately of ourselves? The constructivistic aspect can, as I see it, be interpreted in the same direction as Ricoeur interprets translation: as a way of continuing human action, communication, understanding etc. This leaves comparison in the humanities and to a certain extent the social sciences as part of human existence. It is not cultures, societies, religions, languages that want to be compared; it is the human beings, incarnated as anthropologist, historian, or translator and the community they belong to, that want to be compared.

As we saw previously, Ricoeur displaces his focus from theory to practice when he examines translation. The practice of translation shows a paradox. On the one hand there is no third text to guarantee that the translation corresponds with the original text. On the other hand, translations are given despite this absence. From a theoretical point of view this is difficult to comprehend as translations must either be possible due to some shared historical origin or brainstructure, or impossible due to the difference of all languages. However, from a practical point of view, this opposition is overcome all the time. How is it overcome?

Translation is the *creation of an equivalent without identity or the production of a comparable*, Ricoeur states. In this I think it is vital to underline creation and production because the respective equivalent or comparable does not exist independently of the intellectual operation of comparing. In a similar way, comparison does not depend on an assumed similarity, sameness, or historical origin to that which is compared. However, it does not give up due to incomparables.

How is this different from the comparativism of identities and differences? There are, as I see it, some vital hallmarks that separate them. First of all, the productions of comparables are productions in the sense that they do not exist prior to the comparing act itself. It does not depend on an assumption of empirical or natural entities. Secondly, it does not exclude that which cannot be compared from the comparison. Thirdly, it does not reduce that which cannot be compared to something that can be compared. These two last points capture the meaning of the expression *equivalent without identity*. This means that comparison does not assume an identity, similarity, or sameness between what is compared, nor does it assume the inside and outside between he or she who compares and that which is compared. He or she who compares similarities and differences on the other hand does not stand in a relation to that which they compare. From a relational perspective the non-comparable aspect is respected but not rendered absolute. From an oppositional perspective, on the other hand, the non-comparable aspect becomes absolute. However, the non-comparable aspect does not hinder the construction of a comparable as such.

As the reader might notice there is an oscillation here between an epistemological concern, as already indicated in the first part, with having culture as an object of knowledge on the one hand and culture as part of a more human and existential concern on the other. Or differently put, the oscillation is between an anthropological philosophy, an epistemology of culture, and cultural identity politics. Following Ricoeur's way of thinking as a mediation and the long route to being between the epistemological and existential, I do not think that these approaches stand in opposition to each other even though they are not identical problems. My

point is that one way comparison in anthropology could be “rescued” from Amselle’s critique- that comparison is a way of abstracting cultures and societies- and thus treats what is human as a thing- is to see it as part of a human existential need or desire. By relating comparison to the anthropologist, historian, translator, or whomever as a human being, and not as a scientist in the natural science kind of way, it makes sense that the opposition is between the anthropologist and the one he or she interacts with and tries to understand. But it goes deeper than this too, because comparison from a relational perspective could be seen as the anthropologist’s or the anthropological community’s own self-reflection.

9.11 Translation as paradigm and/or metaphor?

We must now reflect on how translation should be thought. As far as I see it, translation may be understood in at least two ways or on two levels: translation may be interpreted as a metaphor for culture or we may take the description that Ricoeur gives into account and call translation a paradigm.

Translation is related to metaphor on two levels: Translation and metaphor are etymologically linked through Latin. The Latin word for metaphor is translation and both mean to carry over. In Latin to translate is: *converto* (-is, *converti*, *conversum*, -*ĕre*), *transfĕro* (-rs, *transtŭll*, *translātum*, -*ferre*), *verto*, (-is, *verti*, *versum*, -*ĕre*). It is very interesting to see that the verb “to translate” as *transfĕro* is composed by *trans* (“beyond”, “across”) and the latin verb *fĕrō* (bear, carry) with the same etymological root as the ancient Greek *φέρω* (*pherō*) (Oxford English dictionary, 2013). Secondly, translation may be seen as a metaphor for culture in the sense that one speaks of cultural translations (Burke 2010, Chanson 2010). Cultural processes, where elements from different places are imported, exported, borrowed, and exchanged, could be described as cultural translations. It is thus not far-fetched to speak about cultural translations the way we speak about cultural *branchements*. This could, in other words, be read as a transfer of meaning from language to culture and translation is hence a metaphor. Having said that, translation seems to have an even larger

meaning as an articulation of a model for understanding the human existence. For in *Sur la traduction*, Ricoeur names one of the texts « Le paradigme de la traduction ». The question is if metaphor narrows the analytical and epistemological potential and whether we should rather see translation as Ricoeur does: as a paradigm.

9.12 What does “translation as a paradigm” mean?

Paradigm as a concept is inevitably linked to Thomas Kuhn and his *Structure of scientific revolutions*. However, its original meaning is from Ancient Greek: παράδειγμα (para-deigma, model, pattern, exemplar), coming from παραδείκνυμι (paradeiknumi, I demonstrate clearly) composed by παρά (para, "beside, near") + δείκνυμι (deiknumi, "I show" "I indicate" "I point out") (Oxford English dictionary, 2013).

Whereas a metaphor is a transfer of meaning from one domain to another, a paradigm seems to me to be something else than a metaphor as it does not take separate domains and put them together. When something is a paradigm it is a model for other things. And as far as I can see this means that what it is a model for must somehow be unified. The example or model is somehow unifying.

When Ricoeur enters this second text in *Sur la traduction* he marks two paths which give us access to the problem asked by the act of translation. The first is translation in the strictest sense of transferring a verbal message from one language to another. The second takes translation in a more general sense as a synonym for interpretation of everything meaningful within one linguistic community. The former is followed by Antoine Berman, the latter by George Steiner. As I understand it, Ricoeur's point is that they articulate two aspects of the paradigm of translation. Berman focuses on the problem of alterity, whereas Steiner focuses on translation as almost synonymous with interpretation: translation to Steiner is not just a process of transition between two languages; it is also articulating processes within one language. So vital to the paradigm of translation is alterity and that alterity is “inside

us". When Ricoeur in this text articulates what lies behind the notion of paradigm, he turns to ethics:

It is here that I return to my title: the paradigm of translation. Indeed, it seems to me that translation sets us not only intellectual work, theoretical or practical, but also an ethical problem. Bringing the reader to the author, bringing the author to the reader, at the risk of serving and betraying two masters: this is to practice what I like to call linguistic hospitality. It is this which serves as a model for other forms of hospitality that I think resemble it: confessions, religions, are they not like languages that are foreign to one another, with their lexicon, their grammar, their rhetoric, their stylistic which we must learn in order to make our way into them (Ricoeur 2006: 23-24)?

So, linguistic hospitality is a model or paradigm. Ricoeur asks if the confessions and the religions are not like languages, strangers to one another. But my question is why this is not a metaphor. And if it is not merely a metaphor but a paradigm, what does this mean? As far as I can see, it has to mean something deeper and broader, something that transgresses the separate domains. Even though translation comes from the practice of language exchange, language as such does not give us perspectives on translation. On the contrary, it is translation as a concept, as a model or paradigm, that gives perspectives on language. But language is one of several things that translation can give perspective on. It is not language but translation that is a paradigm. Paradigm thus means something that is a model for something else. Translation is a model for language, for ethics, for ontology, for hermeneutics, for culture.

Now, a paradigm following the definition given above is that which one shows by giving an example. But what is it with translation that makes it a model, example, or paradigm for all the other domains and joins them?

9.13 The paradigm of openness

Ricoeur writes that the paradigm of translation is linguistic hospitality. This linguistic hospitality is to understand that which is alien in order to penetrate it. But why is this a paradigm and not something metaphorical? After all, he describes confessions,

religions as (comme) languages. It could at least be regarded as a comparison or as a simile. What Ricoeur must mean by calling it a paradigm is that it goes deeper and wider than comparison.

In the secondary literature on Ricoeur's philosophy of translation, paradigm is mentioned many times. Richard Kearney writes in two (very similar) texts, *Le paradigme de la traduction* and *Vers une herméneutique de la traduction*, about translation as a linguistic, ontological, anthropological, and hermeneutic paradigm. Kearney writes that "Ricoeur is holding the view that good translations require a radical openness towards the other" (Kearney 2008: 161). And further: "the translation exposes us to what is other (l'étranger). We are at the same time involved with an alterity residing outside ourselves (en dehors du chez-soi) and an alterity residing inside" (Ibid: 164). This point of an alterity residing inside ourselves is a point underlined many times by Ricoeur and originally borrowed from Georg Steiner, who, in his book *After Babel*, writes about translation internal to a cultural and linguistic domain. Consistent with my thesis I do not want to go much into the ethical aspects of translation. But can I then get to the bottom of understanding translation as paradigm otherwise? It seems like the epistemology of translation and the question of whether it is a paradigm or a metaphor are confronted with a fundamentally ethical question of openness. If translation and the linguistic hospitality are about *openness*, then the epistemological and the ethical problem coincide. Ricoeur's philosophy of translation is a philosophy of hospitality which points to an openness. And even though this could easily be interpreted as an ethical statement, does it not equally hold as an epistemological statement about the practice of translation? This is not a relativist point of view. In order for a translation to be good, both languages must be open: otherwise it is not a translation. My point is that openness here is an epistemological category. Openness accounts for the silent rules which govern the practice of translation.

But if we return to the concept of paradigm and see this in relation to openness, it points further than merely an epistemological observation. When Ricoeur

calls translation a paradigm- comprised of ethical, linguistic, ontological, anthropological, and hermeneutic aspects of human existence- this points again to the overall theme and problem of the dissertation of a closing of culture. If translation is a paradigm not only limited to an epistemological perspective, it could mean that it is a way of articulating intercultural thinking theoretically.

10. Tradition, plurality, challenges, and potentials⁴⁶

Introduction

In this chapter I want to continue the reflections on translation commenced in the previous chapter. Language is, following Amselle, historically and epistemologically linked to culture through linguistic classification and a certain “system of oppositions”. And since translation concerns language translation is indirectly relevant to culture. As we saw with Ricoeur the displacement from theory to practice gave us a certain take on translation that made it possible to question the logic of opposition. And it is in this displacement that what he calls “linguistic hospitality” is revealed. Since the practice of translation is occupied with the question of treason and fidelity towards the readers and the author’s language at the same time, what is revealed is an openness between languages. So, when Ricoeur calls translation a paradigm it is this openness that he has in mind. Having said that, translation is also hallmarked by an obstacle: it is the obstacle in communication that spurs the translation in the first place. So in some way or another we are left with a kind of paradox of openness and hindrance in translation. This takes us into two further considerations regarding translations, tradition and plurality, and these will be the main focus in this chapter.

First, the theme of culture and its purity, closure, or openness is linked to other concepts such as tradition. As Galty and Leavit writes in *Dictionnaire de l’ethnologie et de l’anthropologie* a vital aspect in how we think culture is through transmission, normally illustrated with the use of words like tradition (PUF, 2004). On the other hand translation too is linked to tradition, etymologically as well as philosophically. Etymologically translation is linked to tradition in the sense that both articulate the

⁴⁶Parts of this chapter have been presented at the conference “La traduction / la transmissibilité et la communication transculturelle dans les sciences sociales” at *École des hautes études en sciences sociale* in 2010. I would also like to thank Ida-Johanne Gamborg Lillebø for comments on parts of this chapter.

transportation of something from one time or place to another. Philosophically translation and tradition are joined in the problem of hermeneutics and interpretation.

The second consideration is related to the first. The paradox of openness and hindrance in translation articulates how plurality and reflexivity are part of human existence and that this has consequences for how we think tradition and culture. From the perspective of translation tradition and culture are not containers that human beings are trapped within. Following George Steiner and Paul Ricoeur translation is not only mediating between different languages; they show that translation just as much articulates an aspect of language itself, internal to one language: translation is something we all do in order to make ourselves understood and in understanding others. Human beings must translate because we exist as plural. In other words, translation thus articulates an original plurality that comprise also those living within the same culture or tradition.

The chapter will be divided in three parts. In the first I will join with hermeneutics and look at the relation between translation and tradition. In the second part I will look at how translation articulates plurality and reflexivity. And in the last part I will take up some general considerations concerning translation.

10.1 The question of tradition

We will in the following paragraphs look at tradition. There are two reasons for this. The first is the strong link between hermeneutics, tradition, and translation. Translation is, as we have indicated with Schleiermacher and Ricoeur, related to interpretation, and interpretation is in its turn linked to tradition. From the outset the German theory of translation from Luther to Schleiermacher holds recognition of the German culture, language, and tradition as the most important aspect. Secondly, as the overall problem is the notion of culture, tradition is, if not synonymously with culture, at least an aspect or perspective on culture. We say for instance “cultural tradition”. There is a temporal aspect which is perhaps not so clearly present in

culture. Cultural customs come from transference of something in and through time. A tradition thus both conserves and generates something over time.

In *Dictionnaire de l'ethnologie et de l'anthropologie* the authors behind the article on culture, J. Galty and J. Leavitt, state that cultural anthropologists have directed their attention at a fundamental characteristic of culture, that of transmission : “ Transmission is normally explicated or illustrated with the use of words or expressions such as « tradition », « custom », « cultural tradition », « cultural héritage »”(PUF, 2004 :190) The transmission and tradition of culture further testify to the temporality of culture. Or rather, a cultural tradition is the transmission of something over time. The question is how to describe this process of transmission. Is it a ruptured or a continuous process? And does a tradition stand in a ruptured/continuous relation to itself, and likewise to traditions that can be considered as other?

By asking these questions we enter into a problematic of translation. However, before doing so we need to say something about alternative approaches to tradition. First, an almost naturalised conception of tradition, the perspective of “the native”. Secondly, those who challenge the view that traditions are natural by claiming traditions are constructions. A third conception is that of hermeneutics emanating from the German Romantic tradition. A fourth one could perhaps be that of the Enlightenment. But we will not focus so much on this. A common trait of these approaches is that they, consistent with the hypothesis of the dissertation, to a different degree have a non-dialectical understanding of tradition. On the one hand tradition is thought of as the truth or as natural. On the other, tradition is thought of as invented and ideological.⁴⁷ Translation rejects and embraces elements of both.

⁴⁷ There has been a lot of research in the last decades on the invention-aspect of both culture and tradition. Roy Wagner's *The invention of culture* and Hobsbawn's *Invention of tradition* are well known examples. But even though this is interesting, I will not discuss this topic further here.

10.1.1 The Enlightenment's view of tradition and prejudice

As touched upon earlier in this chapter the heritage from the Enlightenment in today's debates on multicultural society is that specific cultural traditions have no place on the public arena.⁴⁸ An example of the Enlightenment's view of tradition can be seen in Diderot's article in *l'Encyclopedie* on the concept "eclectic". The thinker who is eclectic and dares to think for himself is the one who tramples on (foulant aux pieds) prejudice, tradition and authority (Diderot 1986: 7). We recognise of course this ideal of independent thinking from Descartes to Kant. What interests us here, however, is that prejudice, tradition, *ancienneté*, and authority are used as synonyms for a backwards kind of thinking, something that we as enlightened beings should have overcome. It is this negative attitude towards tradition that Gadamer and Ricoeur criticise, though in different ways.

What interests Gadamer in the Enlightenment is the discrediting of prejudices and authority. However, the demand from the Enlightenment of transgressing all prejudice proves for Gadamer itself to be a prejudice (Gadamer 1998: 276). To Gadamer this proves two points: that the enlightened subject is an illusion and that the enlightened ideal contradicts itself. As Gadamer claims, there is no point from where one can make judgments without calling upon a tradition which has not itself been questioned. A judgment has always something prior, a pre- (judgment). It is the importance of the adherence to a cultural tradition which renders recognition an ethical obligation according to for instance Charles Taylor. From this perspective tradition is relevant in a multicultural society. Having said this, it is on the other hand just as important to question the assumptions of homogeneity and continuity of tradition.

What Gadamer is trying to do is rehabilitate prejudices by displacing the view that prejudices replace proper judgments and see prejudice as a source for

⁴⁸This does of course not correspond to reality. In Norway for instance arguments that new citizens must adapt to the specific Norwegian culture is mixed with more abstract and universal republican values such as democracy, rule of law, and freedom of expression.

truth.⁴⁹ The authority of a prejudgment is rather constituted in the recognition of the authority of others. And it is here that Gadamer localises a particular kind of authority: tradition. Tradition is an authority that has become nameless.

10.1.2 Hermeneutics and tradition between rupture and continuity

Now, contrary to the Enlightenment's critique of tradition and the romantic attempt to rehabilitate it, Gadamer sees his own project as a philosophical hermeneutics. As far as I understand Gadamer's way of reasoning, a common focus for both the Enlightenment and Romanticism- as mirroring the Enlightenment- is the focus on method. Whereas the Enlightenment focused on the way or path (method) to true knowledge free of prejudgment, the Romantics turned this into a history of different kinds of prejudgments and traditions and that these had to be understood on their own premises. Instead of a negative evaluation of tradition the Romantics had a more positive approach. The point is that this led again to the search for a method of understanding the different periods of time. In other words, the Romantics broke with the Enlightenment's negative view of other people and other historical periods. But they also continued the tradition for thinking method: the reading of authors who lived in another time and another context than the reader led also to the question of how we can understand a period and context different from our own. The Romantic hermeneutics is reflection on the method for understanding texts that are different.

This takes us back to what we saw with Schleiermacher. Following Berman, Schleiermacher is a kind of transitional figure in the development of a modern hermeneutics as he links translation and understanding for the first time.⁵⁰ By linking subjectivity, expressivity, and language, the understanding of human beings requires

⁴⁹Gadamer writes that "The Enlightenment's distinction between faith in authority and using one's own reason is, in itself, legitimate. If the prestige of authority displaces one's own judgement, then authority is in fact a source of prejudices. But this does not preclude its being a source of truth, and that is what the Enlightenment failed to see when it denigrated all authority" (Gadamer 1998: 279).

⁵⁰Berman writes that: "one must consider him the founder of this modern hermeneutics which aims at being a theory of understanding" (Berman 1995: 227).

the understanding of their particular language, which renders the question of translation pivotal. The author's cultural, historical, and linguistic difference or specificity becomes the object of study and places the topic of translation at the centre of hermeneutics. On the other hand, Schleiermacher's hermeneutics must be seen in relation to his dialectical thinking (Skorgen in Læg Reid and Skorgen 2006: 94). For the difference or specificity of the author cannot be understood in an absolute manner. The author does not have a privileged or direct access to or understanding of his own work, only an indirect or mediated (dialectical) access. And this mediated access is presented through interpretation.

What I find very interesting with this is that Schleiermacher's thinking seems akin to that of Ricoeur (and the role he gives to the act of reading) and that this way of thinking dialectically is relevant for our overall problematic of inside and outside. By thus questioning the author's access to his own work we have something to learn. The cultural and temporal distance that separates us is not absolute since the idea of a clear cut distinction between an inside or outside of ourselves is not tenable. In this sense Schleiermacher's thinking contains both a thinking of rupture and continuity. There is a (cultural and historical) rupture between the reader and the author which requires that we can handle the epistemological obstacles of understanding that which is foreign, and there is a continuity in the sense that this rupture is not total because the author is not present to him- or herself. As far as I can see this opens also to questioning tradition, which I aim to do in the following. For the time being I find it noteworthy to see that Schleiermacher's thinking helps us to do this.

Going back to the point of departure; so where should we place Schleiermacher? Is his hermeneutics a philosophy of truth or a method, to put it in gadamerian terms? On the one hand he recognises, as Berman underlines, the alterity of the other in translation, on the other hand there is a more general truth that all understanding is dialectical. Or, as Torgeir Skorgen points out, one finds both a focus on method and rules on the one hand and a recognition of more general philosophical insights on the other (Ibid 2006: 101).

10.1.3 The ontologisation of hermeneutics and tradition

If we now join with the question of tradition, that we discussed moments ago, in relation to Gadamer, we saw that whereas the hermeneutical tradition was originally driven by the epistemological problem of understanding and accounting for the obstacles that we encounter when reading, Gadamer turns understanding into an ontological question marked by Martin Heidegger.

We do not have the time or place to go thoroughly into Heidegger's thinking here, but pivotal to Gadamer's elaboration of hermeneutics in the continuation of Heidegger is the latter's reflections on *Wirkungsgeschichte*. The past concerns human existence (*Dasein*) in the sense that it shapes our relation to our future. Since one hallmark of existence is being interpretive and constantly attempting to seize future challenges, dangers, and possibilities, we draw on past experiences or rather the tradition we are part of and which has shaped us. In this sense we always already make pre-judgments and always already understand what lies ahead of us. A part of Heidegger's thinking is thus to make us aware of our own pre-judgments and then open up to the otherness of the other's speech or writing (Ibid 2006: 195).

Now this description of existence as hallmarked by a search for understanding is continued by Gadamer. Like Heidegger, Gadamer found the pre-judgments of experience to be both productive and limiting. Pre-judgments are productive in the sense that without them there is only chaos, on the other hand they are limiting to the degree that they hinder us from opening up to new experiences. But, following Gadamer, we cannot imagine ourselves without them because they say something about us as human beings trying to understand our own existence. And in order to understand our own existence we draw on the historical tradition we are part of. A vital part of the historical tradition that interests Gadamer is texts. The historical texts of the tradition are, however, not merely of the past but can say something about us as human beings here and now. And from this perspective history is more than a past long gone.

10.1.4 Gadamer and Ricoeur

What is, however, problematic with separating truth and method is that one loses sight of the epistemological dimension and ability to criticise and call into question. But how is this possible when these questions always already must use a language which itself is forged through a tradition? Ricoeur establishes an argument that does not assume a rationality outside tradition à la the Enlightenment thinkers, but which on the other hand does not eclipse reason with tradition.

Even though translation, as will be discussed later, is the possibility of saying the same thing in another way and shows that any use of language is not totally fixed and determined, which indicates that we are not determined to think according to one set of norms and regulations, this does not mean that this reflexivity is detached from a context or tradition. As seen with Luther, the creation of a comparable makes it possible to not break with the German language but find in the German vulgate a reservoir of its own which was just as capable as Latin of expressing the Hebrew and Greek language.

Daniel Frey calls tradition a *universel concret* and describes it as “the unit of cultural discourses and practices from where thinking chooses its objects...the phenomena of receptivity which renders thinking possible...in all cultures” (Frey 2009: 86). So, even though reflexion and thinking are not determined, that does not mean that there is no point of departure. Tradition as receptivity is this point of departure from and on which the reflection reflects. Translation thus has an impact on the imagination to such a degree that a complete liberation from tradition or a structuring of the world would not only be difficult, but would lead into chaos. Imagination opens up, but the imagination also binds and produces a relatively stable scheme.

However, there are different notions of tradition around, also within what we could call the hermeneutical tradition. In order to understand Ricoeur, it may be interesting to situate him in relation to other hermeneutics such as Hans-Georg Gadamer. By this I do not claim to fully do Gadamer justice, but only outline a

difference between him and Ricoeur in order to understand how Ricoeur thinks tradition. Frey underlines an important distinction between tradition as synonymous with truth and tradition as condition for the possibility of truthful understanding (“tenir-pour-vrai”). I think this is an interesting distinction. Whereas Gadamer is more on the side of the former, Ricoeur is more on the side of the latter. Frey writes that in Gadamer’s thinking there is an appeal “to recognize the authority of the tradition...the hermeneutic analysis of Gadamer culminates in the recognition of the already expressed meaning and the values already recognised in the tradition ” (Frey 2009: 87). But, even though one has an understanding of the world from a certain point of view, this does not render it legitimate to draw the conclusion that one has a privileged access to the truth or that the Tradition is the truth.⁵¹ This plural aspect is a limitation of the relativistic aspect and becomes, as we will, see paramount in the articulation of the intercultural. It is not possible to build a society together based on the idea of exclusive access to the Truth through one’s proper religious or cultural Tradition. But that does not render cultural traditions illegitimate as foundation for reasoning as such.

Now, it seems like Gadamer and Ricoeur supply us with different conceptions or states of tradition which again give us two different points of departure for developing criticism. Frey, in his book *L’interprétation et la lecture chez Ricoeur et Gadamer*, nevertheless underlines that the difference between these two does not lie in the use of different concepts but in different understandings of the same concepts. According to Frey this must be seen on the background of the hermeneutical traditions of Wilhelm Dilthey and Martin Heidegger. Whereas Dilthey is concerned with the epistemology of interpretation, Heidegger questions the nature of understanding. For the latter understanding is a characteristic (an existential) of

⁵¹This perspectivist thinking is criticised by Louis Dumont as part of a modern ideology. The problem with what he calls the modern ideology is that “the moderns” deny other people their own claim of being “the only people” with exclusive access to the truth. As one can imagine this denial of hierarchy produces problems in our understanding of others. Secondly, it paradoxically reintroduces a hierarchy between those with and without the ability to relativise their own perspectives. *Essais sur l’individualisme, Homo hierarchicus, Homo equalis*.

Dasein, or being-in-the-world, and precedes any question of knowledge (Frey 2008: 45). We always already (immer schon) understand the world in a pre-intellectual manner. The epistemological question of how do I have knowledge is thus a question which arrives posterior to understanding. Heidegger's hermeneutic asks the question of what is this being whose mode of being is to understand. In the tradition from Dilthey the matters are different because he seeks the specific method for the Geisteswissenschaften as contrary to the natural sciences. With Heidegger hermeneutics becomes part of a philosophy of existence and turns away from method altogether. The question of method arrives too late so to speak.

Driven by the Heideggerian ontology of the pre-intellectual understanding and the intertwining into the tradition, Gadamer defends tradition by attacking the approach to tradition from the Enlightenment thinkers. In *Warheit und Methode* he writes that "Reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms-i.e., it is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates" (Gadamer 1998: 276). And further on in a now famous phrase: "Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live" (Ibid). A multicultural situation, with people from different cultural, religious, and linguistic traditions and denominations living together, shows that we cannot take for granted such always already pre-understanding of ourselves (in selbstverständliche Weise). And we could radicalise it by saying that this cannot be taken for granted with respect to the human condition as such, regardless of the singular situation. My point is that we cannot assume the clear cut distinction of inside and outside of tradition, or that we understand ourselves completely on the inside. It is perhaps more evident in a situation where we speak different languages, but nevertheless, translations are necessary for the human condition as such. The point is not so much to criticise Gadamer, but rather to ask if the notion of translation articulates something in relation to traditions that is not thematised by Gadamer. I agree with Gadamer that the individual is a problematic assumption in Enlightenment

thinking, but, on the other hand, so is the self-evident understanding of ourselves which Gadamer subscribes to: “The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life” (Ibid). From this perspective every initiative, every repetition, must be reduced to the current of history. But what happens when the current breaks down and is disrupted, and when new elements are introduced? Prejudgement developed and transferred through tradition might be necessary for understanding, but that does not as far as I can see make understanding necessary.

I find this an interesting insight from translation the way Ricoeur explains it and this makes it a fruitful input to the idea of being outside or inside a tradition. It is neither nor. Translation and interpretation become necessary where the understanding breaks down, and this might happen to someone on the “inside” as well. Translation shows that understanding is not necessarily our point of departure or that this understanding does not become total.

From this it seems that while Gadamer seems to claim that our way of reasoning and understanding is always already woven into a tradition, Ricoeur seems to claim that we are never completely inside it. This is what renders critique possible and legitimate. Ricoeur does not claim that we are outside it, but as long as translations are needed (and here translation is not temporary but a part of the human condition) it demonstrates the alienated dimension of human existence as well as the open dimension of human existence. While understanding is assumed in Gadamer, misunderstanding stands as an important part in Ricoeur’s analysis.

We may not, as Gadamer underlines, ever find a position outside the tradition we belong to and from where we can unprejudiced perceive things “as they are”. Here Gadamer seems to have a point against the Enlightenment thinkers when they wanted to establish a method that could ensure a judgement without prejudices. For, is not the claim dear to the Enlightenment that “every authority should be questioned”, a claim that itself is above questioning? In other words, it must be

understood within a tradition of criticism which hence is a source of truth. And an important source for criticism resides within the tradition.

However, it is not the only one. Criticism is also possible because there is a rupture which source is not intellectual but which is linked to the human condition. Even though tradition is vital to our thinking, it does not follow from this that this tradition is homogenous, closed, static, or that being related to it is to avoid misunderstanding. Gadamer claims that the critical thinking of the Enlightenment must be understood as being within a tradition, but this rules out a questioning which arises from the absence of understanding or from the experience that the tradition one “belongs” to just does not make sense.

Ricoeur, on the other hand, seems to subscribe to the view that we are related to a tradition, but that this tradition is not closed. Otherwise, we would not need translations. It is because something is open and understanding is not immediately given that the space of interpretation and translation is open. So, since we need translations, we are never completely absorbed by the tradition or traditions to which we belong. Misunderstanding is not merely failure to comprehend what someone says because it is said in a different language; it is also the absence of understanding of one’s own language. As George Steiner discusses translation is not just a response to the barrier between two different languages but also within one language. From this crack in the horizon of understanding doubts and errors leak out. The reason and source of these cracks and leaks is the absence of a standard that can measure our level of understanding and the ability of our translations. The translation has no original to which it can correspond perfectly. This is the point from where we can ask questions.

10.1.5 Translation, hermeneutics, and tradition

How does the concept of translation fit with hermeneutics and the concepts of interpretation and tradition? First of all, translation is related to hermeneutics in the sense that interpretation and translation both have a common root in the Greek

concept *hermeneuein*. So from the outset there is a close kinship between translation and interpretation. Even the art of oral translation is called interpretation and not translation. In other words, to be able to translate one must be fit to interpret. The link between translation and hermeneutics is established by many scholars. Richard Kearney writes that “From the moment there is language there is interpretation, which means translation” (Kearney 2008: 163). Whereas Domenico Jervolino describes, in his book *Ricoeur. Herméneutique et traduction*, this relation as a sort of division of labour:

We would here just like to underline that translation is at least one of the interpretative practices which theoretical practice is represented by hermeneutics. Our problem consists in seeing to what point translation can shed some light on interpretation as such (Jervolino 2007: 72).

Is it a question of practice (of translation) and theory (interpretation)? It seems difficult to say that the one is possible without the other. Interpretation is to a certain point implicit in the operation of translation; we interpret in order to translate. But on the other hand, we translate in order to interpret. In both cases one attempts to bridge a gap or surmount a barrier, and in both cases openness becomes visible to us. I am open to letting something (a book, another person, or a language) affect me at the same time as this book, person, or language is open for me to enter into.

I think Ricoeur’s interest in translation fits very well with his more general view on hermeneutics which from the outset is fundamentally conflict- and problem-driven. By emphasising the reasons for translating and interpreting, Ricoeur introduces the cultural and temporal distance rather than the always already overcoming of this distance in understanding.

In one of the essays from *Du texte à l’action* Ricoeur takes up the opposition between “alienating distanciation and belonging” when discussing the debate between Gadamer and Habermas (Ricoeur 2008: 72). At stake here is the tension between a critique of ideologies and a hermeneutics of traditions. As Gadamer, through Heidegger, lays emphasis on prejudgment and understanding as hallmarks of

existence-human beings attempt to understand their own being- this activity sediments a tradition which acquires authority when it comes to truth. On this background Habermas sees it pertinent to oppose this hermeneutics of traditions with a critique of ideologies consistent with the criticism of the social sciences. How can we question the authority of the tradition, its truth, with a hermeneutics which has become ontological, particularly when this is driven by consensus? Is agreement written into our being? From Gadamer's point of view it is, however, relevant to ask from where a criticism could be articulated if not from within a certain tradition which structures this same criticism. Ricoeur summarises: « A gulf therefore divides the hermeneutical project, which puts assumed tradition above judgment, and the critical project, which puts reflection above institutionalized constraint» (Ricoeur 2008: 282). Now, Ricoeur abstains from trying to found these in a synthesis and acknowledges that they do speak of different things, but he asks if it possible that the one might recognise the legitimacy of the other's challenge. This goes as follows: How can a philosophical hermeneutics account for criticism of ideologies, and can a criticism of ideologies be detached from hermeneutical presuppositions?

Given that the epistemological and methodological question after Heidegger is deemed too late compared to the always already given structures of understanding: how is it possible to be critical in hermeneutics, Ricoeur asks. As Gadamer is concerned, Ricoeur sees the main obstacle for recognising the challenge from Habermas to be that his hermeneutics refutes the alienating distanciation. What kind of openness does an ontologisation of hermeneutics allow and what kind of openness does a critical hermeneutics with the dialectics between belonging alienating distanciation allow? And here we are at the core of our question of openness (of culture). For if we are guided by a thinking that does not allow distance, it becomes impossible to break out of our own horizon and modify our own perception. As a possible approach Ricoeur then introduces the notion of mediation and links it with tradition. As we saw in a previous chapter, it is by the long way through the works, texts, and documents of the tradition (and perhaps through the dialogue with others)

that we attempt to understand our own existence. And it is in this mediation that Ricoeur reintroduces critique. By opening up for mediation as a fundamental aspect of human existence, it becomes possible to come on the outside of one's own tradition. How is mediation possible, i.e. how is distance possible without the refutation of tradition altogether? Ricoeur thus makes the tension between alienation and understanding into the driving force itself of hermeneutics:

My own interrogation proceeds from this observation. Would it not be appropriate to shift the initial focus of the hermeneutical question, to reformulate the question in such a way that a certain dialectic between the experience of belonging and alienating distanciation becomes the main spring, the key to the inner life of hermeneutics (Ibid: 289) ?

Ricoeur goes on to “deconstruct” hermeneutics and criticism by showing that the one is contained in or presupposes the other. He builds among other things on an argument from Dilthey's distinction between understanding and explanation but without accepting Dilthey's division of labour between natural science and the humanities. It is not a question of truth *or* method as Gadamer claims, but of their dialectics. Ricoeur's claim is that the epistemological dimension of explanation is a presupposition for understanding. Another vital point is that understanding through reading is not the projection of one-self in the text, but letting one-self be exposed: Reading introduces me to an imaginative variation of my ego (Ricoeur 1986: 408). Reading deconstructs the imagination of the ego because the work contains a variety of potential interpretations at the same time. The work thus challenges me by its openness. However, this openness is only acquired dialectically through the fluctuation between an engagement and distancing alienation. As far as I can see, the open dimension in interpretation is parallel to the one in translation that is expressed by Ricoeur as a paradigm.

Now my point is that this dialectics between alienation and understanding- and hence, according to Ricoeur, the driving force of hermeneutics- is, as far as I can see, contained in translation. Translation is, as we have seen, necessary due to, among

other things, the absence of understanding (i.e. alienation). The need for translation is thus understood from the obstacles and problems that generate it in the first place. Translation articulates an initial alienated distance which hallmarks the human condition. In the following paragraph I will go further into the problematical aspect as the driving force in interpretation and translation.

10.1.6 Misunderstanding and conflict

Gadamer seems to assume that understanding is a point of departure. It seems pertinent to ask why we need to interpret if we always already understand. Udo Tietz writes in his introduction to Gadamer that “our and everyone’s prejudgement are more or less true and coherent. And Gadamer considers this fact as a necessary condition for all kinds of understanding which only can be questioned in particular cases.” (Tietz 2005: 42). But is the formulation of a critical question the only way to pose a problem? Is not understanding relatively often hindered by misunderstanding and lack of understanding?

Here it is tempting to open up a reflection upon the epistemological aspect of misunderstanding. Translation does not merely witness the overcoming of an obstacle in the understanding, but also refers to the obstacle itself. The levelling of tradition with Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein (Dasein or being-in-the-world always already understands) and the ontologisation of hermeneutics disregard the epistemological question such as how we can be certain of our knowledge, as emerging too late. Since we already have a comprehension of the world, the question of whether our comprehension is the right one is posterior to comprehension.

Previously we linked Amselle’s notion of *branchements* with a certain tradition in the philosophy of science called French epistemology and the thinking of Georges Canguilhem. Again it seems like Canguilhem’s thinking is relevant to our reflections on translation. Central to this tradition is the notion that experience is an obstacle to and not the foundation of science. It is because we do not have an understanding of the experience that we establish a scientific explanation or theory. It

is from here on that science commences. But this explanation or theory might be wrong and another hypothesis must be established. Now, in the Cartesian tradition, the error is seen as an error of the mind, caused by its hastiness or prejudices. Anyway, the error or the obstacle is not attributed any value, but is only something to be overcome by using the correct method etc. In the hermeneutical tradition, at least in Gadamer's sense, the tradition cannot be totally erroneous because it is within the language of the tradition that we also say that we are mistaken. The question of the error of tradition is itself possible only through a tradition. In other words, neither the Enlightenment nor the hermeneutical tradition ascribes any value to the potential of the error or the obstacle. The obstacle is hindrance and condition at the same time. For is it possible to understand without misunderstanding, without the absence of understanding? Must not every attempt at acquiring knowledge start with obstacles and errors?

Misunderstanding marks the transition to the second aspect of translation that I find highly relevant for our problematic and which stands in continuation from the discussion of tradition, and that is human variation and plurality. And how are we to account for this human variation?

10.2 Translation as problematisation of diversity

One way to express the plurality of humankind is as a cultural diversity. Cultural diversity was, historically speaking, a way of escaping an ethnocentric understanding of culture. For Claude Levi-Strauss it was an argument against a racism based on evolutionism and a distinction between the civilised and the savage. In place of a concept of culture that separated the civilised from the barbaric, culture was augmented to a diversity of cultures. For anthropology this is partly an epistemological and partly an ethical point. However, thereby new distinctions that substantialised cultures by giving them a heterogeneous origin were created. In order not to reserve culture for what is western, something that was not western and still equally recognisable as culture had to be located. And even though the intention was

good this contributed to an essentialist concept of culture. A differentialist logic which assumes an initial difference between us and them seems to be inevitable in anthropological reasoning. Part of the cultural racism (the fear of difference) and anti-racism (the defense of the right to be different) we see today draws on this logic (Taguieff 2010). If we, on the other hand, can demonstrate a continuum or continuation between human cultures, then such logic can be challenged.

The connotation and the link to biodiversity are problematical. As Ricoeur states in the text “*Quel éthos nouveau pour l’Europe?* “ (What new ethos for Europe?), communication and the biological metaphor are incompatible by the fact that there is no initial communication or continuity between the species. Between languages and cultures, on the other hand, this is possible:

The languages do not constitute closed systems excluding communication. If this was the case, there would be the same difference between the linguistic groups as the one existing on the biological level among living species. If there is only one human species, it is in particular because transfers of meanings are possible from one language into another, briefly because one can translate (Ricoeur 1992b: 108).

Translation thus offers us a perspective which makes it possible to draw some conclusions. First of all it allows for shedding some light on the terms and metaphors we use when we discuss culture. On the one hand it makes sense to speak of different languages and cultures. On the other hand, languages and cultures are not separated in the same way as species in nature are separated from each other. As long as the term diversity is linked to bio-diversity one risks reproducing a view of cultures as initially separated with heterogeneous origins. But the practice of translation shows that the idea that there are more than one human species or race is mistaken. Otherwise translations would be impossible.

Translation thus accounts for the cultural variations among men without turning these variations into heterogeneous origins. Translation articulates the continuity of humankind. Translation is possible because there is only one

humankind. But that does not exclude variation in humankind, a variation which is almost infinite.

With the theme and concept of translation we see the contours of a kind of universalism in the sense of a unity of humankind. Ricoeur writes that “In this sense I speak of a “universal principle of translatability” (Ibid: 108). The human world is one world, but this world is not homogenous. Variation in human expression might be so great that the distance between some of the parts might be overwhelming. On the other hand the practice of translation shows that what one initially thought to be impossible to translate due to insurmountable linguistic barriers was possible after all.

We have discussed how diversity and identity did not have to stand in opposition to one another but could be comprehended as relational. Ricoeur takes an approach to plurality which does not merely see plurality of languages as an obstacle to translation and communication but as a presupposition for it. Is there language without the plurality of languages, and we could add; is the culture without the plurality of cultures? Ricoeur’s answer is negative: «the language does not exist anywhere else than in *the languages*. It does only realise its universal potentialities in the differentiated systems» (Ibid). As we saw in a previous chapter, this is very similar to what Amselle claims to be the case for cultures. Translation does not entail turning everything into the same. For Ricoeur this also turns into a normative point and he states that he does not want all to speak the same language, be it Esperanto or English. The danger, as he sees it, is non-communication:

It is without a doubt neither the dream of giving a new chance to esperaton nor making one great cultural language triumphing as the unique instrument of communication that menace us the most ; it is rather the danger of non-communication(Ibid).

What Ricoeur calls non-communication (incommunicabilité) has, as I see it, two sides. On the one hand there is a danger of a linguistic and cultural homogenisation so that when cultures and languages lose their outside, or that which they communicate with, the «inside», so to speak, does not evolve further. One could

interpret Luther's translation of the Bible as a contributing to an evolution of the Christian world by turning it inside out and letting its message be communicated with the outside of the Latin world. On the other hand, the focus on cultural diversity is problematic as long as this diversity is not related to its opposite. Translation as an articulation of communication questions the idea of a pure inside and outside. But here again there is always the possibility of someone wanting to purify the inside and thus attempt to present an ideology of the pure inside.

This universalism also undermines the idea of an origin. For if translation and communication are at the centre of the human condition and a hallmark of what is human, there are no languages or cultures that are not involved in some previous translation or communication. In other words, translation articulates that which is *in between* two languages and cultures, and does not do this from the perspective of the one or the other pole. The term diversity with its derivation from biodiversity to cultural diversity does not however allow communication and translation to be at the centre. The biological concept of species or a plurality of species thus forges the idea of a human origin or plurality of origins and thus turns out as an epistemological obstacle for understanding what the human potential is. The human potential lies thus in the human ability to communicate, to open up to what is alien and break out of isolation. The opposite is of course also a potential for those who want to purify their origin and not externalise themselves by including others. But this ideological representation of purity is posterior to communication between human beings. Differentialism and cultural racism emphasise the non-communicable and non-translatable as a hallmark of culture. With translation, however, a contrary understanding may be articulated.

My point is that the negative answer to whether translation is possible or not, discussed by Ricoeur in *Sur la traduction*, is based upon a certain understanding of a linguistic diversity which in its turn depends on an oppositional logic between identity (as the same) and what is other. It is not possible to translate because languages are in their nature heterogeneous. This diversity is in its turn taken from

biodiversity and presupposes an initial separation of different species. What is more; languages and cultures cannot be understood as species because translation reflects an initial ability to communicate. The theoretical question of whether translation is possible or not comes after the practice of translation. The practice of translation thus demonstrates an initial communication between humans across assumed cultural boundaries.

This gives us, as already mentioned, an ambiguous concept, and diversity is on the one hand taken as an oppositional concept or as a way of describing a given diversity where what is diverse is mutually heterogeneous and potentially exclusive. From the model of a discontinuity of species (biodiversity), humanity remains separated. But this can turn into an ideological representation of humanity and a principle of non-communicability. On the other hand, diversity means a variation, which is a fact.

As I see it, translation as an articulation of what is human is linked to this second diversity. Whereas the first kind of diversity is on the level of language or culture, or the construction of a series of such entities, the second kind is what articulates the human. Because men are, as Arendt points out, distinct in the sense that each human being is distinguishable from any other. And from this original distinctness comes the drive to communicate. So the need for translation comes from the humans and not from the languages. It is a human need, predating the language itself. From this perspective the comparison of the diversity of languages and cultures, or the term diversity itself, does not touch this human condition the way translation does. As Ricoeur writes: “if there is only one human species it is because the transference of meaning is possible from one language into another, briefly because one can translate“(Ibid). Translation articulates a human universal: the need and desire for communication.

My point has been to question diversity and its constitution through comparison by contrasting diversity with translation as *the creation of an equivalent without identity* or as *the construction of a comparable*. This articulates a continuum

without reducing variations to either sameness or to difference. A translation of a text is, on the one hand, not the same as the original or, on the other, an absolute difference. A translation rather articulates a level where what is same and what is different does not stand in opposition to each other but meet. And this meeting is founded in the fact that humankind is one species and not a diversity of species. Translation is in this sense not merely an intellectual operation performed by translators of texts but an aspect of an initial intercultural communication. Translation as a concept thus articulates, or is based on, a universal human trait: the desire to communicate. It is also from the perspective of the desire to communicate and to translate that we should understand human diversity in its most fundamental form. This is not an abstracted diversity which takes the perspective of cultures and languages as its point of departure. Languages and cultures do not desire anything for themselves, cultures and languages do not translate and communicate; human beings do. And it is this human desire that constitutes the continuity across languages and cultures, and creates equivalents and comparables.

What is more, this way of thinking comparison might reflect comparison in anthropology in an interesting way. First of all it takes the constructive element into account and not what is immediately empirically given as similarities. The creation of a comparable is a creation or a production of a comparable meaning and does not work on the assumption of a pre-existing similarity between phenomena emanating from a common origin. Secondly, it takes that which cannot be translated or compared into account without assuming that this can be reduced to an identical equivalent. From what has been said one is tempted to draw the conclusion that anthropology and the diversity confronting it could be seen from the perspective of a human relation, rather than merely as a detached observer of an objective reality.

10.2.1 The desire to translate

I mentioned, by referring to Hanna Arendt, in the previous paragraph that translation articulates a desire for communication and that this desire is related to an initial

human plurality. Because, what is it that triggers a translation in the first place? Why do we translate? Like at so many other times Ricoeur refers, in his account of translation, to Hanna Arendt stating that translation is something that one does (*la chose à faire*) in order for human action to continue. This *la chose à faire* is neither constraint nor utility, but *a desire to translate*. To understand this we will look at some aspects of Arendt's thinking and more specifically her thinking on human action. Translation has not its root in theory, but has an existential and practical side as its point of departure. Ricoeur writes with reference to Arendt that "Translation is definitely a task, then, not in the sense of a restricting obligation, but in the sense of being the thing to be done so that human action can simply continue" (Ricoeur 2006: 19).

In other words, there is a connection between action and translation as the desire to translate makes the human action continue. In the *Human Condition* (1998) Arendt analyses the three categories of human activity: labour, work, and action. While labour is about sustaining human biological life and the needs of consumption and reproduction, and work is concerned with the building and maintaining of a human world, action is "to disclose the identity of the agent, to affirm the reality of the world, and to actualize our capacity for freedom" (d'Entreves 2006). Now, action is hallmarked by freedom and plurality. Freedom is the capacity to begin and start something new: "To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin...to set something in motion" (Arendt 1998:177).

If we take this as a possible interpretation of translation as well, as Ricoeur seems to do, this does not mean that a translation repeats or reiterates an original meaning, but also that something is begun and put in movement. At the same time translation cannot be driven by beginning something alone, it is also about continuing something. So action and translation must from this perspective be understood as something between imitation and initiation. Translation imitates the languages of both author and reader, but initiates at the same time a new relation between them. This relation is communication. In a context where cultural diversity represents a

conflict (either ideological or real) due to insurmountable cultural differences, it is partly due to a notion of action as finished or as a mere repetition of cultural codes, norms, or symbols. If this is so, then it is also impossible to initiate a new community, and the options for a multicultural society turn out to be either learning to adapt to or imitate *one* culture, or live separated in one's "original" community. But following Arendt's thoughts on action it is not a repetition but an initiative. Likewise translation initiates something which contains at the same time something new and something old. I translate because I want to make myself understood.

The same way life corresponds to labor, worldliness to work, and plurality to action, we must ask what translation corresponds to or what threatens to rupture it. The answer is in human distinction and plurality: "If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood" (Arendt 1998: 175). Translation is closely connected to language which again, according to Arendt, is connected to action. It is thus in the plurality Arendt writes about that we also must seek the meaning behind Ricoeur's interpretation of translation. *Plurality is both a condition for and a threat to translation in the sense that translations would not be needed if there were no distinction between humans.* Translation is the step out of isolation and is not limited to relations between cultures. Translation is also closely related to all linguistic understanding as "synonymous with the interpretation of any meaningful whole within the same speech community" (Ricoeur 2006: 11). In other words, the continuation of a meaning within the same linguistic community is also threatened. Ricoeur here refers indirectly to the observation of George Steiner who in *After Babel* (1998) writes about two kinds or levels of translation. There is the ordinary way of thinking translation as between different languages. But there is also a translation labour within one linguistic domain. On the first level the distance that makes translation necessary is a cultural and linguistic one. The barrier is the obvious fact that one language differs from the other. On the second level the distance is temporal and requires a philological elaboration of the transformation and meaning of

language in another time. “Here the barrier or distance between source language and receptor is time” (Steiner 1998: 29). Steiner thus renders translation into a more general feature of the human existence and almost synonymous to interpretation:

Translation”, properly understood, is a special case of the arc of communication which every successful speech-act closes within a given language. On the intra-lingual level, translation will pose concentrated, visibly intractable problems; but these same problems abound, at a more covert or conventionally neglected level, intra-linguistically (Ibid: 49).

Now, to speak of translation as something one does in order for human action to continue, takes us to communication. As Domenico Jervolino states: “The particularity and finitude of individual languages are thus not seen as an insurmountable obstacle but as the condition for communication between individuals” (Jervolino in Kearney 2008: 160). How is this connected to cultural diverse societies? If we take a look at the philosopher of science Gaston Bachelard, we can read in *La formation de l'esprit scientifique* something similar to Jervolino in Bachelard's attempt to understand scientific rationality (Bachelard 2004). Bachelard develops an understanding of scientific rationality by studying the processes, the corrections, and the obstacles that a science undergoes in order to become a science. *The obstacles that the scientific rationality is facing are obstacles that block the scientific progression, but they are at the same time also conditions for this progression.* Historically, in order to overcome these obstacles, a transformation in the scientific reasoning itself was necessary. It had to go through a paradigmatic shift, to put it bluntly. If the very process of overcoming these obstacles is successful, Bachelard claims that this sometimes establishes a new scientific rationality. Without claiming it to be equivalent, it is nevertheless a similar approach to rationality in translation and communication. Translation faces obstacles, produced by different languages, which test the rational activity it is to translate. It is only after the work with the translation that we know if it succeeded in overcoming the obstacles. The question with regard to translation is not whether or not translation and

communication between two languages are possible, but what kind of translation and communication we end up with. If we take communication to be part of the construction of rationality, this is a way of thinking which opens for a dynamic (but not relative) understanding of rationality.

I see an interesting combination of Arendt's "existentialist" anthropology and Bachelard's epistemological thinking. The distinctness of every human being that Arendt speaks of and the particularity of all languages become an obstacle, but at the same time a condition, for communication. Communication as a concept is in itself not sufficient to understand this process. Like life threatens to rupture labour, distinction threatens to rupture the human action and throw you into isolation.

This takes us back into the same discussion of Habermas that I mentioned in the previous chapter (Habermas 2003). What I find interesting with this dynamic and desire driven approach to communication is that it focuses on the obstacles- the lack of understanding, the misunderstanding- as the driving force of communication and not on communication as an already existing structure that forces our reasoning. Habermas writes about his communicative action theory that "I call interactions communicative when the participants coordinate their plans of action consensually, with the agreement reached at any point being evaluated in terms of the intersubjective recognition of validity claims"(Habermas 2003: 58). But what if and when this "intersubjective recognition of validity claims" cannot be reached? A reconstructive account for communication is not sufficient to handle the obstacles that we are facing when dealing with inter-cultural communication. This is not a cultural relativist critique of Habermas stating that the different world views are so different that communication is impossible. I am merely underlining that communication has been and continues to be hallmarked by obstacles and hindrances. Translation is a practical and temporary "solution" to some of these obstacles. But the "solution" of finding equivalences does not rest on an assumed shared language that constitutes a safe and rational transition between languages. A translation as equivalence without identity is produced and created.

10.2.2 Translation and plurality

We are now approaching two aspects of translation extremely pivotal to our examination of culture: one we have already mentioned: plurality. Another is reflexivity. I commence with the former. We have seen that translation could be thought of as a comparable without identity. Translation enables one to say the same thing in another way. The question is if this is possible due to a potential plurality within a language or in the world of languages as such.

Now, a vital trait of Ricoeur's concept of tradition is its plural character. This is pivotal to his philosophical anthropology. The story of Babel, where men were punished by God by being dispersed, is given a completely different interpretation by Ricoeur: "This is how we exist, scattered and confounded, and to what? Well...to translation" (Ricoeur 2006:19)! Frey writes à propos this plurality in Ricoeur's thinking that "Ricoeur renounces by the way to use the concept of tradition in singular form" (Frey 2008: 228). As seen previously about the notion of narrative identity there is not a homogenous tradition, but the interconnectivity of several (into one). Another trait just as important is that in addition to sedimentation, tradition is also innovation: "The concept of tradition is here presented according to Ricoeur as a dynamic concept" (Ibid). Sedimentation and innovation are two immanent and contradictory forces within tradition where the former resists change and the latter ensures change. Both the plural aspect and innovation are related to translation in the way that translation explains the processes of transition and the problem on which it is founded. Translation thus articulates both problem (misunderstanding) and answer (the practice of translation).

We saw earlier with Luther that the creation of a comparable, and reflexivity as will be discussed later, is to say the same thing in different ways. In Luther's case this is the word of God. But we could go on to ask what the word of God is without this plurality of expressions. Or in our context; what is a culture without the plurality of cultures. Translation problematises the relation between unity and plurality to such

a degree that the notions themselves must be questioned. Domenico Jervolino writes that “It is in the hiatus between language and the languages...that the practice of translation is inserting itself” (Jervolino 2007: 75). However, for Jervolino this hiatus is deduced from a more fundamental hiatus in our selves. The long way to a recognition and understanding of ourselves goes through the other (persons or cultures). He goes on to state that one translate every time one speaks: “One is tempted to say that there is a plurality of languages because we are originally plural” (Ibid : 79). As seen above, this plurality is underlined by Hanna Arendt when she gives account for human action and speech as generated through an initial distinction between human beings.

I think this initial plurality could be interpreted on more than one level. For concerning plurality in Frey’s and Jervolino’s accounts it is difficult to understand if the plurality of languages and cultures are plural in the sense of a diversity of languages on a global scale, if this means an internal plurality to each language, and further if this ultimately refers to persons. And are we not all plural in the sense of having an internal plurality of thoughts, denominations, needs, desires, duties etc. which we want to communicate? If we, as Jervolino states, translate every time we speak it seems like all these levels should be taken into account. Translation can in this sense not be thorough enough.

How does plurality reflect our overall problematic? The plurality as point of departure for translation questions once again the distinction between the inside (of a language or a culture) and outside. The desire to translate emanates, so to speak, from the need to transgress one’s isolation. On the other hand, do we not then risk reintroducing distinction? With Hanna Arendt I have openly done so. For her an initial separation is what triggers us to act and speak. This contradicts, however, the thesis that translation questions the very assumption of an original isolation. As seen with Amselle, translation is precisely the point of no return where one, in order to identify oneself, must do it through a language which is already foreign. Either they disagree or the plurality must be thought of at a pre-communicative level.

One difficulty with translation is that it both articulates a solution and a problem and that the one immediately refers to the other. As we saw with Ricoeur's account, translation does not take us out of the paradox because translations are practices (they can never be complete and yet we have translations). In the same way translations assume some point of departure (distinct languages) and that the distinction between them are already transgressed. There is no common ground which can mediate a perfect translation, and, on the other hand, this common ground is somehow provided in the course of the act of translation itself. In the same way an initial plurality is a point of departure, at the same time as the transgression of this plurality must already be assumed.

10.2.3 Translation, reflexivity, and the deconstruction of the pure and closed culture

Linked to this question of plurality is reflexivity. And again Gadamer's notion of tradition could be presented in contrast to translation. First of all, why is reflection important? Our main problem is the notion of culture as pure and abstract, this amounts to saying that there is no point outside the tradition from where one, as an adherer to a certain cultural tradition and community, can question the tradition. But translation articulates precisely that there is another place within one's own language which always opens up to take us outside our own language, our own thinking, and hence our own culture. Or differently put, it questions a clear cut distinction between them.

Even though a language structures the way we think and act, and the structures, the grammar of language, are relatively stable, there is also room for some liberty in the use of this language. A speaker is not forced to say what he or she wants to say in one single manner. Referring to Ricoeur, Daniel Frey states that a speaker has the means to *say the same thing in another way*, due to the «language's own reflexivity». It would be impossible to say something in one language without being able to say it in another (Frey 2008: 85). As far as I understand it Frey's point is that translation, meaning the ability to say the same thing in different ways, is a

precondition for understanding as such. So when he, following Ricoeur, uses expressions like it would be impossible to say something in one language without being able to say it in another, this “another language” means the ability to rephrase ourselves. Even though it sounds a bit odd to say that everyone in possession of language skills also possesses the ability to express himself in *another language*, the idea is as far as I can see that language is not closed but has an inherent openness. I understand *another language* not necessarily to mean a foreign language, but the plurality of expressions within one language. The reflexivity in language is this passage through another language really means it is within the same language. Every language possesses an internal plurality. This foreignness is, however, present in one’s own language every time one tries to reformulate an expression. It bears witness to the otherness in one’s own language. A translation needs a restructuring of the reader’s language in order for the translation to be possible. Jervolino seems to support this reading when he writes that “To talk, to think, means at the same time to translate, in a large meaning of the word, also when we speak with ourselves, when we discover the traces of...others in ourselves” (Jervolino 2002: 42). As discussed earlier this plurality and/or alterity are in the end derived from the question of identity and the play between self and other than self. There is another point of view we have access to which puts what I wanted to say into perspective. I draw on this “external” source when I rephrase or translate myself.

The need to say something in another way refers to a prior obstacle in the understanding. Why do we rephrase ourselves? Reflection is needed and possible due to the rupture in our understanding. This is a more fundamental understanding of translation than is commonly pictured. Ladmiral writes that: “Translation is a universal human activity, that has been necessary at all times and in all parts of the globe through the contacts between communities speaking different languages“ (Ladmiral 1994: 11). The question is, however, whether it is also necessary within communities that speak the same language and if translation thus renders account of an aspect of the human condition.

Now, one thing is to use translation and reflection to question the notion of a closed language, tradition, or culture. Another is to do the opposite, to detach reflection itself from tradition and make it into the hallmark of an abstract reason. In *Europa ohne Identität?* (Tibi 2000), Bassam Tibi writes contrary to Ricoeur and Gadamer, that reflection and rationality detached from cultural traditions. The hallmark of modernity is to principally question everything. This is a part of rationality, and does not amount to relativity. Modernity is self-reflexive but without questioning the Reason: “The confrontation between the culturally modern and the neo-absolutism of non-european civilisations reveals the trap that cultural relativism has fallen into” (Tibi 2000: 84). But in light of what we have discussed above it does not seem necessary to propose an abstract rationality as a presupposition for reflection. We have learnt from Ricoeur’s notion of translation that reflection is always already at play within a tradition. The problem in Tibi’s discourse is that reflexivity is comprehended within the logic of opposition between abstract reason and cultural Neo-absolutism. So both his concept of reason and his concept of culture become abstract notions, whereas the practice and what is inter-cultural escape.

Reflexivity thus becomes pivotal to the deconstruction of an inside and outside. Translation shows how reflexivity is inherent to the inside of language and that a kind of internal variation questions purity from the inside. Again, what is interesting is not so much the claim that culture is not closed but the ways this assumption is questioned. Any prejudice of others or any idea of the purity of one’s own heritage depends on a notion of purity and the distinction between inside and outside. What translation as reflection shows is that there are always some cracks in the inside, there is always an internal plurality or variation.

In addition to see translation as the creation of a comparable, which amounts to saying that to a certain degree a link between different cultural affiliations can be achieved – another vital aspect of translation is in our context that it questions a notion of pure origin conserved through tradition. If a cultural affiliation gives us a certain *Weltanschauung* from which it is difficult to escape, it is on the other hand

equally difficult to picture an immediate access to this tradition. We might never be outside a tradition, but that does not mean we are inside.

10.3 Some remarks

In the third and last part of this chapter I want to focus on some questions that I have posed when working with translation. In the following order I will reflection on: the question of the original and the idea of the perfect translation, the normative aspects in translation, the question of who it is that translates and the consequence this has for the potential of translation, the difference between translating between linguistic domains and translation within *one* linguistic domain, the idea that translation represents some kind of solution, lexical vs. holistic understanding of translation, the question if everything can be translated. And and last I will turn to the question of the third. I have found these questions interesting and relevant for understanding translation in relation to the overall problematic, however they have not be my main focus.

10.3.1 From the perfect translation to transgression of the original

We saw in the first part that translation was described as the creation of a comparable without identity. The debate on whether translation is possible or not rests on at least one presupposition: that there is an original with which a translation can be in perfect correspondence. Domenico Jervolino describes this obsession for the perfect translation, which again rests on the idea of an original: “The only remedy for an improper translation is a new translation, but the perfect equivalence is not possible” (Jervolino 2002: 42). Jervolino here describes the internal dialectics of translation. For translation can never find an identical equivalent criticism and the presentation of new and better translations are what drives the development of translation.

As discussed by Ricoeur, translation can be seen as the creation of a comparable without identity. The comparable is, in other words, the link between different languages, different texts. What kind of concept of an original is presupposed in the practice of translation? There is an original, but the question is

whether the actual representation of this original can account for the potential of the original. Here interpretation and translation demonstrates the same principle: that the original is not transparent and must be scrutinised in order to make sense. When a translation is criticised by the presentation of an alternative, this activates, as long as it might seem reasonable, another not yet actualised potential in the original. This version of translation goes, as Antoine Berman writes, back to what he calls the speculative theory of translation in the 19th century (Berman 1995). From the perspective of Schlegel and Novalis translation was thought of as a kind of critique where every translation transgressed the original by extracting the meaning in a purer and better way. This led to the idea, for instance, that Shakespeare was better in German than in English (Berman 1995: 172).

How does this translate to a question of culture? The point is that the plurality of cultures could be read as a continuum and a play of potentialities in humanity. Humanity as such has an actual and potential existence. What is challenged in translation is the grasp the actual notion of humanity (western democracy, rationality, language etc.) has on the real. What Kanté and Luther do is to explore the potentiality of the source or the original. Texts like the Koran and the Bible had in this sense a potential universality which transgressed the limits of the Arab and Catholic universality. Within this older universality a linguistic adaptation, in the sense that all have to learn Arab or Latin in order to receive the true meaning of holy texts, was a prerequisite. But the translations of the Bible and the Koran show a greater universality which can reach people in their own language. This makes the particular an actualisation of a potential universality.

Even though the perfect translation could be called into question and one can and must be creative when one translates, translation is nevertheless bound by a kind of normativity. In other words, it is not possible to translate something just the way you want. The potential is not without some limits. Anything does *not* go, so to speak.

10.3.2 Translation and normativity

Even though there might not be a pure original which the translation has access to, there is some sort of normativity which limits the scope of possible translations. Even though a language is never closed and a thing can usually also be said in another way-and thus the notion of an original language must be abandoned-, it is still meaningful to speak about a good translation. Frey focuses in his article on “the universal principle of translatability” and he is more interested in the search for the concrete universal. Paraphrasing Ricoeur, Frey writes that:

A good translation can only aim at an assumed equivalence; it cannot be founded on a positively given identity. An equivalence without identity [...] which can only be searched for, worked with, assumed. It exists, despite this limit, a « universal principle of translatability (Frey 2009: 85-86).

My point is here then, contrary to Frey, to question what *limitation* equivalence without identity implies. Yes, there is reflexivity in language and translations which Frey with Ricoeur articulates as “linguistic hospitality”. But at the same time Ricoeur articulates a limit to this transformation which has another significance. So, when Ricoeur says in *Sur la traduction* that translation does not only present us with an intellectual, theoretical or practical problem, but an ethical problem (Ricoeur 2004a: 42), this could also be interpreted as a statement on the limiting normativity in translation.

This normative limitation reveals a fundamental commitment in translation. For what do we commit ourselves to when we translate from one language to another? First of all, there is a commitment towards the language one wants to understand. Secondly there is a commitment towards one’s own language. This is the ethical problem according to Ricoeur: To practice linguistic hospitality is to take the reader to the author and take the author to the reader (Ricoeur 2004a 42). As I understand Ricoeur here, both the reader’s and the author’s language are hosts for what is foreign. In order for the reader’s language and the author’s language to be hosting each other’s’ languages, the translation must risk the fidelity of each. This

tension is overcome in the creation of an equivalent without identity. It is a commitment to the two languages, but it is also a betrayal. What does this betrayal entail? After all it does not destroy the possibility of the translation. And what happens in the transition from fidelity to treason and back? A translation is not a repetition of an original meaning. It is the emergence of something new, either as an import from the foreign language or as a restructuring of our own language.

10.3.3 Translation as enrichment and hospitality

Translation gives promise to enrichment for both sides of a translation. Translation is not merely an act of hospitality in hosting a foreign language in one's own. It also bears witness to enrichment in terms of discovery of an unused potentiality in one's own language. Translation can thus lead us in another direction than the way we normally think of globalisation. Translation can of course be part of a homogenising strategy where everything becomes translated into English for instance. But it does not have to be like this.

And here, perhaps, we approach another normative aspect of translation. Even though this is outside both the topic and perspective of the dissertation, translation reveals normativity in the sense that human plurality and the exchange of perspectives are made possible in translation. Other ways of perceiving the world inhabit our own language in translated texts.

This exchange of perspectives reveals yet another ethical hallmark of translation which is the hosting of another language in one's own. By translating a foreign language into one's own or by letting other languages host your own we both let ourselves be affected by that which is foreign and we loosen our own grip on our own language. Translation has this inherent openness which goes further than a mere recognition. When I recognise someone it is either as similar to me in the sense that we are equals or as different from me in the sense that I cannot reduce the other to the same as me. But in either case I and the other remain closed to one another. But in translation that which is other is not only recognised but invited in and may become

constitutive. It is a linguistic hospitality. And this linguistic hospitality could not have been possible without an initial openness of human beings.

10.3.4 Who translates?

Even though our main concern is the purification and abstraction of culture and translation is a way of deconstructing this representation of culture, we nevertheless touch upon another question which must be commented upon. For if translation, practically and theoretically, represents a questioning of the notion that culture is something static, closed, pure, and abstract, we are still left with the question of who translates what. Translation is not exempt from potential power relations between different cultural groups in a society or within one cultural group.

If we take Luther as a point of departure, we may observe that even though he wanted the Bible to speak the language of the people on the street and the common man on the marketplace, he still depended upon a homogenisation of the diversity of German dialects in order to arrive at a German translation. And who is Luther to speak in the name of all Germans? The same could be said about Kanté when he constructs the N'ko alphabet.

In order for a group of people to be heard it seems inevitable to coordinate all the individuals into one voice. Boris Buden writes à propos this that since there is no third element that can ensure a unity between two languages (that of the oppressors and the oppressed) the only possible solution lies in some kind of translation. For him this strategic essentialism is a kind of translation: “The only possibility for establishing understanding between them is a kind of translation. And thus, the concept of “strategic essentialism” should be understood as a kind of translation” (Buden 2008: 25). Here the point is that it is necessary to speak a foreign language, to translate one's own concern into a foreign language, in order to be heard. This will sometimes require some kind of essentialisation. And is this so far from what Amselle has shown with the example of N'ko, or with Luther and his translation of the Bible? The problem is that from this perspective translation homogenises that

which cannot necessarily be homogenised. In this sense there is always the risk that individuals speak on the behalf of, and then potentially do injustice to, others.

Another aspect of representation is the problem of majority and minority. If translation is thought of as a possibility in cultural encounters and dialogues, the question remains as to who shall translate. For instance, in a situation between a host culture and an immigrant group, translation might turn into a kind of homogenisation after all. It is all nice and well that translation is an enrichment of our perception of the world, but who is to decide what is to be translated? Integration into a society might easily mean that the immigrant group must learn to translate the host's culture and values and not the other way around.

10.3.5 Translation within a cultural domain and between cultural domains

Even though translation has many levels, my point is not to claim that translation works in the same way in all. I think for instance that translation between what we normally would take to be different cultural domains, or between different languages for that matter, is different than the existential or reflexive translation for those within the “same” cultural or linguistic domain.

I think it gives meaning to speak of my interpretations of what other people say, or my own rephrasing of what I say when communication breaks down, as a kind of translation. But in a multicultural society or in any exchange between people with different languages and cultures there might be challenges to translation that are far greater. My point is that translation works in different ways on different levels and from different perspectives.

10.3.6 Translation is not a “solution”, and yet it solves problems

Some thinkers, like Homi Bhabha, view translation as a field with a politically subversive potential (Bhabha 2008). However, this should signal to us to be cautious and use some prudence when it comes to its relation to politics. The reflection at hand is neither the project of political subversion, nor is it meant as the support for a

specific “politics of translation”. But this does not mean that one should be as naïve as to think that the theme of cultural translation is not part of the vocabulary of policy makers. Like the notion of intercultural, cultural translation also risk being used by politicians in a desperate need to describe new directions of integration.⁵² The task for philosophy is to remain in a reflective and problem oriented mode. Developing theoretical thinking is not the same as founding political governing.

So, one should remain sober. As I have underlined, there are only possibilities and potentialities, no absolute solutions. In order to understand the relevance of translation in a European democratic context, we must shift focus from languages or cultures to singularities. A translation is always the translation of a singular text- and not, as in the case of Luther, the point of departure for a larger reformation-with specific problems and solutions. Likewise, in a cultural context it is also always singular beings who will need translations in specific contexts with their specific problems and solutions. If we take translation to be part of a process where I try to make myself understood, or a certain group tries to make themselves understood, the translations are a continuously on-going work which must commence every time there are obstacles to understanding and communication. Translation is thus not the presentation of a ground which can mediate in an absolute and final sense. It is painful work which will not always lead to immediate solutions.

My point is that translation in this sense has a singular character. Translation might solve problems of understanding, but these problems are singular and must be faced again and again. And since the perfect translation is impossible, the “solutions” always risk being replaced by another and better translation.

⁵²The notion of the intercultural was the key concept in EU’s 2008-campaign European year of intercultural dialogue. However, judging from the documents it represents nothing new (EYID, 2008).

10.3.7 Lexical versus holistic understanding of language and translation

But from what level are we talking about translation here? From one perspective or level translation is work that must be done little by little and stay focused on singularities. Here I talk about translation as a way of thinking both linguistic and non-linguistic challenges. But in speaking about a linguistic translation, Ricoeur has a holistic approach that is interesting:

These considerations lead me to say that the work of the translator does not move from the word to the sentence, to the text, to the cultural group, but conversely: absorbing vast interpretations of the spirit of a culture, the translator comes down again from the text, to the sentence and to the word. The final act, if one can put it that way, the final decision is about making out a glossary at the level of words: the selection of the glossary is the final test where what should be impossible to translate is crystallized as it were in fine (Ricoeur 2006: 31).

Ricoeur's view of language, of reading, and of translation joins here with not only the hermeneutic tradition that sees that part in light of the whole, but with a French tradition of approaching texts. The point is that the choice of words and the ways they are composed within the same textual corpus effect how they can be interpreted.⁵³In other words, the ways the words are composed transgress the meaning of every word standing on its own. The plurality of meaning (polysemy) of a word is thus vital because it shows that the lexical work cannot be done prior to the context the words are linked to. That does not necessarily mean that the whole, the context, closes the possibility of interpretations: there is often more than one way of interpreting a text and more than one way of translating a text.

Now returning to the overall problem, the consequence this has for how we think translation as a paradigm and for how we approach culture is that we commence with a complex whole that cannot be reduced to its separate parts. Ricoeur

⁵³ I am indebted to Marianne Hustvedt for turning my attention to this.

here even talks of “the cultural group” (ensemble culturel) and “the spirit of a culture”. What is pivotal is that a purely lexical approach- even when it takes its plurality of meaning into account- closes the translation or interpretation. The openness that I try to articulate regarding translation is on the contrary linked to translation being a whole text or culture. The internal plurality which requires translations even within the same linguistic domain (Steiner 1998) is also linked to a whole. But this whole is not a closed totality.

10.3.8 Can everything be translated?

A question that must be asked is of course whether everything can be translated or not.⁵⁴ Or more precisely: can everything be translated in the sense of cultural translations? Will there not always be some untranslatable elements? Again it is impossible to answer this in a general manner. We have to admit that Luther, as an example, hides the fact that one stays within the limits of the Christian culture which after all has some kind of unity both linguistically and culturally before and after the Reformation. Thus it is possible to object that the cultural and linguistic obstacles that Luther was facing were not sufficiently difficult to make this a good example. One also has to admit that there might be cultural differences between people which are permanent and insurmountable. But on the other hand, is there a limit to how different we can be? Another difficulty is that despite of the real cultural differences which produce real difficulties, there are of course those who try to purify the identities in the name of different ideologies and for whom the translation presents a menace. For instance, according to some, the Koran should not be translated, or could not be translated without losing its message forged in the holy Arabic language.

Having said that, the essential point of bringing Luther as a case is that his translation has showed that something (theoretically) impossible became (practically) possible. The translation in a philosophical and historical sense draws our attention at

⁵⁴I thank Falk Bretschneider at EHESS for making me aware of this point.

the same time to the general idea of practices and more specifically to the cultural translations that we need. Translation might serve us anyway. On the one hand, if one admits that cultural differences present a problem in our democratic societies, then translation as it has been described is a solution to these problems. It compels us to translate! On the other hand (with reference to what I stated above about Arendt and translation as the overcoming of obstacles), if one claims that it is not a problem, then translation has nevertheless taught us something about how it is not a problem, so to speak. In other words, translation is always already at work.

10.3.9 The question of the third: from structure to production

I think the time has come to see translation in relation to *branchements*. For even though I think the two to some extent are compatible, there seems to be some differences which might reveal some fundamental problems. Briefly put, what we are dealing with is unity. The problematisation of outside and inside of culture is a question of whether there is a unity that can account for variation without substantialising or abstracting this variation into heterogeneous cultures.

As discussed in the previous chapter, it seems like *branchements* should be understood as a kind of a pre-existing structure which everything must relate itself to. This structure governs or is composed of what Amselle calls universal signs. And his account of translation as the conversion of universal signs into particular meanings goes in this direction. This harmonises with the fact that he calls *branchements* a third element which again draws on Hegelian dialectics. This can of course be questioned. Are there such universals? And does that render any thinking outside these historically established universal meaningless? Even though I find his reasoning clever and pertinent regarding those who want to represent their culture as originally pure, I find it difficult to answer an unequivocal yes to these questions. But this is not the issue here.

For with a closer look at how Ricoeur articulates what a translation is, I think we might have a slightly different take on unity, one which might be equally fruitful

regarding the problem of cultural sameness and cultural difference. Ricoeur proposes to see translation as the *creation of a comparable* and that this comparable is an *equivalent without identity*. The comparable (the translation) is this place where two languages meet. But can this place be assumed? Is it something that exists prior to the translation? No. As Ricoeur states, there is no third text which can assure the transition and guarantee the faithfulness to both writer's and reader's language. If this was the case, this would assume that "we would have to be able to compare the source and target texts with a third text which would bear the identical meaning that is supposed to be passed from the first to the second" (Ricoeur 2006: 22). And since we cannot do this we must think this in another way. We cannot assume the equivalent or the comparable; it must be produced."The cultural kinship hides the true nature of equivalence, which is produced by translation rather than presupposed by it" (Ibid: 63).

Here translation opens another interesting and relevant aspect: construction. In a multicultural society where people have different languages and different cultural backgrounds understanding and communication cannot be assumed but must be constructed and produced. As far as I see it this takes us back into the question of how translation is a paradigm. The openness that translation reflects in what Ricoeur calls the linguistic hospitality is what opens for the productive and constructive aspect. What is more, we cannot assume some underlying rationality or common ground in for instance interreligious dialogues. Dialogues could, from the perspective of translation as a paradigm, be seen as the construction and production of a common ground.

The constructive aspect avoids the problem with the third element and the structure of universal signs that we faced with *branchements*. But for our purpose of deconstructing outside and inside of culture the productive aspect seems to reintroduce distinction. The production of a translation is after all meant to bridge a gap, a gap which takes us back into an initial distinction.

10.3.10 Distinction or no distinction?

A problem which I think is linked to the problem in the previous paragraph is a seeming paradox. On the one hand it is possible to say that translation questions the outside and inside of a language. Since translation can be seen as fundamental to human existence and translation is the conversion of alien signs in order to express oneself, there is no clear distinction between me and others. And on a cultural level: all cultures are constituted through the conversion of signs coming from somewhere else. On the other hand, if we take reflexivity or internal linguistic plurality as a hallmark of translation, then this assumes that there is an inside. So translation seems to assume distinction between an inside and an outside and question this distinction at the same time.

Even though translation does this, at the same time it seems like translation goes more in the direction of assuming an inside and outside than *branchements*. Translation is, according to Ricoeur, a production or construction that makes the transition from one language to another possible. But in order for this production to be meaningful, must we not assume an initial separation between the two that we try to bring together? Amselle tries to incorporate translation into *branchements*, which rather entails deconstructing an assumption of an initial distinction. Having said that, Ricoeur's reflection on translation assumes somehow an initial unifying ground. This unifying ground lies in human beings ability and desire to communicate and to translate. Humans are plural in ways of expressing themselves, but they are united in the desire for communication. There is something that makes translations possible and which transcends the linguistic diversity. From this perspective translation does question separation and does not assume it.

From this it might seem like there is something that indicates that translation and *branchements* go in different directions. If this is so, I do not think it is unambiguous. But one possible answer is the level at which we enter the analysis. If we focus on the practice or the process of translating, this already assumes something

initially separated. On the other hand, when a translation is provided, it shows somehow that the transition between the two was always already possible.

10.3.11 Concluding remarks on translation

I have in the two last chapters attempted to use the insights from translation in general, and Ricoeur's reflections on translation in particular, as an approach to the problem of cultural sameness. This cultural sameness is a conversion of Marianne Gullestad's term imagined sameness which is an invisible fence that governs the play of inclusion and exclusion. This imagined sameness is constituted by the idea that culture has an inside and an outside and that a successful cohabitation depends on everyone in a society being culturally the same and on the inside of culture. My point has been to intervene into this idea by drawing on the translation of texts as a metaphor. At the same time the theme of translation has given me the opportunity to follow up a hallmark of *branchements* from the previous chapter where Amselle includes translation as one aspect of *branchements*. The main focus on *branchements* was, as we recall, the deconstruction of this inside and outside too. But as far as I can see there are aspects of translation that do not necessary go in the same direction as *branchements*.

What aspects of translation have we examined? Following Ricoeur, translation first of all leads the focus from theory to practice. Thus translation acquires two meanings. On the one hand there is the practice of translation and on the other the theoretical elaboration of the practice of translation. On a more specific level, it has been my intention to show that both are interesting for the reflection on culture. Translation may be both a way of explicating practices which are always already there and/or a solution to obstacles caused by cultural differences. The lesson learned from Ricoeur's displacement from theory to practice is that it is applicable to the question of whether cohabitation is dependent on cultural sameness. I see here a parallel between translation and culture in the way we pose questions. Is cohabitation possible or is it not? If it is, this is due to cultural sameness, and if it is not, this is due

to cultural differences. These are theoretical questions. But from a more practical side, these obstacles are overcome regardless of whether they are theoretically possible or not. The practice of translation transgresses the opposition between the same and not-same. My question is whether this could be used as a way of articulating similar transgressions of cohabitation.

The historical case of Martin Luther's translation of the Bible has served our reflection on more than one level. It shows how a practice of translation overcomes obstacles which were theoretically impossible. It also forges an image of thought on how to reflect on solutions to translation problems. Last but not least, it sheds some light on the problematic of homogenisation. The idea that people from other cultures have other values or represent a threat to "our" values, is partly founded on the view that cultures are too different for us to live together. It has been my point to explicate that translation as a practice questions this view. This gives us a historical, yet European, example of what Amselle finds in Soleyman Kanté and N'ko. It gives us the opportunity to reflect on the theory of cultural continuity developed in *Branchements*. Even though the context of Kanté is even more complex, Luther's German Bible marks both a rupture and a continuity within the Christian world.

Now, translation can be used to demonstrate this idea of a cultural continuity by turning to a more general understanding of identity. Despite the weaknesses related to seeing the identity of persons and cultures as analogous to each other, the point has been to show how translation as a concept can account for some deep constitutive levels. Amselle, Ricoeur, Jervolino, and Kearney all point to translation as intimately linked to expression of identity. In order to express myself I must do it within a structure that is already known to others. I thereby translate myself. But I must also translate what others are saying into my own language in order to understand them. Translation thus distorts the notion of an inside and outside. And from this perspective it fits very well with *branchements*.

In this chapter I have looked at translation in relation to tradition and plurality. As far as I can see, by introducing translation into his reflections Ricoeur has been

able to give his own signature to hermeneutics and tradition. Or differently put, translation fits well with Ricoeur's way of thinking hermeneutics. For the point of departure for translation is the obstacle, and this obstacle is never really overcome. There is always a possibility that a better translation might be presented. After all, there is no correspondence between languages. The equivalences between languages must be created and produced and are thus the outcome of some sort of human effort.

Now there are more elements that indicate the distortion of inside and outside. The idea of a homogenous inside is questioned by translation in the sense that to translate is to say the same thing in different ways. In other words, we possess a reflexivity based on an internal plurality in language. And if this is possible, then this leads to the question of what an inside really is. Are we really on the inside in the sense of all being culturally the same? Through translation I think sameness as such has been questioned, because sameness- as one would immediately imagine it- does not allow variation. But with translation the same can be varied.

I will however claim to have located a paradox when it comes to translation. On the one hand translation distorts the inside and outside of a language, or, metaphorically speaking, the inside and outside of culture. On the other hand translation works on the assumption that there is a distinction between them. Furthermore, the outcome of this paradox is also decisive for the question of whether translation is complementary to *branchements*. Without pretending to solve this paradox, I find this consistent with the more general aim of the dissertation which is an epistemological or problem oriented approach to culture. My intention of introducing translation is to give us some perspectives; however, that does not entail that these perspectives do not have limitations. And it certainly does not entail that the problems they articulate can be removed once and for all.

11. Conclusion

The initial problem or point of departure for this dissertation was to examine the question of what “culture” means when we discuss multicultural society and what it could mean. Culture still seems to be perceived as closed, pure, and static although few will explicitly hold such a view. What is more, culture is a notion that could have a potentially dangerous outcome as it is invoked by those who want to underline distinctions between human beings, focus on our differences, and turn these distinctions and differences into an re-essentialist understanding of human beings. The difference between “us” and “them” becomes a question of culture and partly controls the play of inclusion and exclusion. But that does not mean that this is inevitable. Even though my intention is ethical and in the end concerns the question of how we are going to live together in a culturally pluralised society, I propose an epistemological take on this problem by presenting *branchements* and translation as two notions that articulate openness of culture. *Branchements* articulate openness regarding identity and translation shows an openness of languages. And thus, by intervening into the concepts that constitute culture, the consequence might be that we can manage to think differently about culture.

In the first part of the dissertation I mainly tried to describe the problem whereas I, in the second part, indicated a “way out” or an alternative thinking. In the first chapter I indicated that a static view of culture is localised and reproduced in a political discourse or rhetoric and that the reason for this reproduction is the specific unity of culture, identity, and the nation. It is difficult, if not impossible, to think about culture without thinking identity politics. The link between culture and identity seems almost natural, but it is not clear why culture should be a question of identity. The thought has its historical reasons, but there is not necessarily an obvious logical link. This led us into a critique of identity since it seems that it is from how we think identity that we understand culture.

From the backdrop of this political discourse and consistent with the epistemological approach, I tried to trace the genealogy of culture first and foremost

within a constellation with identity. The link to identity seems to me to constitute the epistemological obstacle that both society and any academic attempt at developing new kinds of thinking must overcome.

In addition to analysing translation and *branchements* from an epistemological angle, and articulating their respective theoretical content, the epistemological approach in the dissertation goes beyond this and has been presented as a structure for the dissertation at large. In other words, I have not only elaborated the internal points in Amselle's and Ricoeur's thinking from an epistemological angle, but also tried to see how translation and *branchements* could be read as ways of overcoming the epistemological obstacle that reproduce culture as something static. The epistemological take thus consists of two levels that are linked: I have analysed *branchements* and translation epistemologically in the sense of examining what these terms contain by looking at what "internal" obstacles or problems they are dealing with. But I have also examined epistemologically how these terms could be used for a political purpose- which is to take *branchements* and translation to another level- and deal with "external" obstacles. The point is that the problems that *branchements* and translation deals with, and their relevance for culture in the history of anthropology, is partly transferred to the political level. The epistemological effect of *branchements* and translation on how we see identity, language and culture might consequently have an effect on how culture is discussed on the political level. Even though both Ricoeur and Amselle have written much about the broader implications of their thinking, I think that the epistemological approach might have brought in some fruitful perspectives that these thinkers have not reflected upon. However, this renders the discussion in the dissertation rather complex: we have the reflections of Ricoeur and Amselle, we have my own elaborations of these reflections from an epistemological angle, and we have my own epistemological reflections on the consequences of the previous two levels on the discussion of culture in multicultural society.

The extent of my description of the problem or obstacle is justified considering the epistemological perspective I have chosen. For within the French epistemological tradition the understanding of the obstacle is pivotal for overcoming it. And secondly, different from natural sciences, the epistemological obstacles in the human and social sciences cannot be overcome that easily. In other words, the obstacle is something that continues to be a problem and cannot be superseded like scientific problems can be superseded in biology or physics. For the reader this could be read as a defeat and a negative conclusion to the dissertation as such. However, as I see it, this is part of the human condition. In the end when it comes to questions of how we are going to live together all we are left with is discussion and critical reflection. And I do not think that finding alternatives to essentialist and purist thinking can put an end to these latter understandings because in the end it depends on what we decide and how we choose to act. The epistemological reflections might be vital in shedding some critical light on the premises upon which we base our conclusions and ultimately our decisions. But it depends also on an evaluation of what kinds of norms we want to have in a society.

Concerning this latter point I am not sure whether *branchements* and translation “just” give us tools for criticising essentialism and purism or if they really can point us in another direction. And if pointing us in another direction is possible, does that mean that we are done with these questions? As far as thinking is concerned I do not think that it is sufficient to develop a “new” language. There is perhaps a practical or empirical deficit in the dissertation. And I think that in order to strengthen the theoretical points made in the dissertation they should be followed by a study of practices. For when it comes to successful integration I think it depends on what kind of experiences people have. In this way translation and *branchements* could be strengthened as analytical terms when it comes to articulating positive practices and experiences.

I have primarily based my reflections on two thinkers: the French anthropologist Jean-Loup Amselle and philosopher Paul Ricoeur. This link is both

explicit and implicit throughout the work. However, this has led to a rather strong emphasis on the philosophy of Ricoeur. Even though this is not an exegetical dissertation, it has been necessary to discuss parts of his thinking at length. Since Amselle refers to Ricoeur in *Mestizo logics*, I decided to follow this up and found that their thinking coincides to a large part. On the other hand this link between Ricoeur and Amselle has perhaps also been an obstacle since I have been searching for consistency between them. This might have led to me seeing *branchements* and translation as too closely related. But I leave this for the reader to decide.

The fluctuations between the epistemological obstacle of culture for politics and the epistemological obstacle of culture in the humanities and social sciences has represented a challenge and might have led to an apparent confusion regarding what level the dissertation is operating on. I think the reason for this is that I have tried to cover and reflect on Ricoeur's and Amselle's thoughts and problems at the same time as I have had my own thoughts and problems as point of departure. This interlacing of levels demonstrates a challenging but very interesting aspect of the dissertation. On the one hand a part of the problem in the dissertation comes from or is articulated in Amselle's (the comparative method, the use of metaphors in anthropology and the problem of origin and identity) and Ricoeur's (the problem of linguistic diversity or universality) theoretical practice. *Branchements* and translation articulates and address these problems. On the other hand, another part of the problem in the dissertation comes from the link between identity and culture in "my own" context; the political discourse. So it is by reading the theoretical works of Amselle and Ricoeur that I have been able to articulate what I see as the epistemological problem of the link between culture and identity. In order to do this I have scrutinized *branchements* and translation from an epistemological perspective. But when "using" these theoretical tools to analyse contexts and cases that Amselle and Ricoeur do not directly work with this produces a dynamic in how we think theory.

Having said that, I think that another reason for this interlacing of levels is that Ricoeur and Amselle are intellectuals as well as academics and that in the reading of

their work one is drawn in both the epistemological and theoretical direction as well as to their intervention into public affairs. Amselle takes on the parallel between the problems of an anthropology informed by postcolonial thinking and multicultural politics, whereas Ricoeur discusses the role of narration in human existence, in historiography, and in the memory of society. Thus, a theoretical reflection in philosophy (narrative identity) or anthropology (*branchements*) can thus immediately become an intervention into public life. And a “practical problem” such as the selective memory of the states’ atrocities, i.e. its forgetting, the hierarchisation of citizens, the culturalisation of social problems, draws on and expresses ideas that must be challenged academically. As I write within another context I have learned to understand this, but I still have some difficulties communicating it. This becomes particularly clear when it comes to the theme in this dissertation. Does this double role compromise the rigor of their writing? And does this mean that the aim is not scientific but practical? I do not think so, this rather gives the reflections a point of departure and an aim. The discussion and topic of culture are part of two themes in French history that are almost unparalleled: the revolution and the colonial history. As a Norwegian I say this with a touch of envy- not for the colonial past nor for the social problems caused by it I must admit- but for the tradition for seeing how practical and historical problems have theoretical and contemporary implications. The theoretical and the practical seem to be interwoven so to speak. It would be, however, incorrect to say that these questions are of mere theoretical interest (and not of practical interest) in Norway. It is rather a question of awareness. For the terms culture and identity are not Norwegian terms but draws on meanings shaped within the traditions (the German and French) from where we have imported our thinking. The consciousness of these historical aspects is important in the Norwegian context. In fact a naïve non-conscious use of language could be even more dangerous since it does not take its implications into account.

Even though it has been vital to understand the human- and social-scientific aspects in order to shed some light on the political problems, I have mainly focused

on the political implications in the dissertation. An aspect that I would like to explore in the future would be the epistemological potential for the social sciences and the humanities by examining historical and contemporary phenomena that could be said to be branched or translated. How can old empirical examples be read again? How can new materials be found? And how can *branchements* and translation be developed theoretically when facing new empirical material? These are questions that I find interesting and that I would like to work with. A very exciting question which the development of new theory opens for is its relation to its material and the negotiating activity that lies in the articulation of humanist and social scientific hypotheses. In other words I would like to do some kind of fieldwork myself. There is an example in Norwegian history that resembles the work of Kanté and Luther: the work of the Norwegian linguist Ivar Aasen who constructed the “new Norwegian” language and grammar. I have briefly mentioned his work in the third chapter but would like to include his work in a comparative research with Luther and Kanté with the emphasis on the role translation plays in the articulation of cultural identity.

At the more political or social side of things a new term that has been launched for some time now as an alternative to multiculturalism, and the concept of culture imbedded in this discourse, is interculturalism, interculturality, or the intercultural. However, this concept does not seem to have a clear theoretical profile. For the time being the intercultural seems to be a practice which either needs to be analysed for what it is: a practice, or needs further theoretical development. Perhaps translation and *branchements* could be suggestions for a theoretical elaboration of the intercultural. How so? A notion that I have touched upon, and that both Ricoeur and Amselle use, but not really analysed, is openness. Translation and *branchements* coincide in at least one point: they both thematise openness. This is interesting, for if we can say that cultures are open and not closed this is not the same as rejecting culture altogether. When something is open there are still two different sides that the opening communicates. Even though translation enables people with different languages to communicate and thus demonstrate openness between the languages, the

languages remain themselves. If we think this analogically to openness between cultures the point is that even though one might be open to that which is other, one is still within one's own culture. If the term intercultural is going to both break with the idea of culture in multiculturalism and conserve the term culture at the same time, it seems like openness could be a key term. Having said that, I think that in order for a theoretical elaboration of the intercultural to be powerful, it should be guided by a case study that takes practices into account. If the point is to change the language, which is a so central question in the dissertation, for how we think culture, for this change to be effective it must be guided by some kind of experience. Or differently put, I do not think a theoretical reflection alone can change our view of others and of how we understand culture.

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