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Didn't think I'd be spending my part of my hols defending myself against Christoph Cox's response incl. accusations orientalism and creationism in my work, but here we go. A (long) thread:

1) Nature/culture. By framing the debate in his own terms, which insists upon the division between nature/culture Cox has ignored my Harawayan call to shift debates around "the nature of sound" to the "natureculture of sound". (p283)

In my article I follow Haraway to depart from a dichotomy of naturalism vs social constructivism in an attempt to get to a political-philosophical "elsewhere". Instead Cox doggedly rehearses this very same dichotomy. (soz to dogs)

gy' and 'auditory cultural studies'.¹ While sonic ontologists claim to investigate the nature of sound itself, proponents of auditory culture explore sound in specific cultural and social contexts. Critics of sonic ontology (including Kane and, in 'Sounding/Thinking', Marie Thompson and Annie Goh) argue that there is no such thing as the nature of sound or that, if there is, it is inaccessible to human beings, who always inhabit particular subject positions and are situated within specific auditory cultures that shape and frame what sound is and does.² In an essay published in 2011, I chal-

Yet there are two different ways to construe this complementarity, only one of which I think is viable. One can take the real to be a social construct, thus folding nature into culture, ontology into epistemology; or one can take cultural history to be an outgrowth of natural history, thus folding culture into nature and conceiving human knowing as one natural process among others. The first position has been prevalent in the humanities and social sciences for decades, but it is deeply mistaken. Confounding chronology, it treats us latecomers in the history of the universe as the authors of that very universe. Only the latter position – that cultural history supplements a natural history that vastly preceded it – makes any sense. To clarify and explain why this is

Digging his heels into "material-realism" and straw-manning onto-epistemology as hopelessly "correlationist" is a crude move.

In Karen Barad's reply to Trevor Pinch (in a more nuanced and interesting debate than this) she reiterates why measurement is a material-conceptual practice inseparable from apparatuses of measurement (Barad 2011)

and epistemological matter, but Pinch's 'uncertainty principle' for science studies is purely a statement of epistemic limitations. Pinch also overlooks other key dimensions of complementarity: that mutual exclusivity has its root in understanding measurement as a material-conceptual practice; that material-conceptual practices are simultaneously conditions of possibility and performative actions that produce phenomena inseparable from the apparatuses of production; and that subjects and objects do not preexist but rather emerge from their *intra-action*.³

Hence why ontology and epistemology are irrevocably intertwined and subjects and objects do not simply pre-exist but emerge from intra-action betw. phenomena, matter and apparatus

However this is not the same thing as saying that matter did not exist prior to human existence! It merely foregrounds the entanglement of the material and the semiotic/discursive.

It is an argument about the processes of (scientific) knowledge production not a debate about the age of the universe! 😊

2) Creationism. Conflating onto-epistemologists, "correlationists" AND creationists as those people not being able to "make sense of natural science" i.e. in denial of the age of the universe is sloppy to the point of foul play.

To claim that perception and conception constitute their objects is to adopt the radically idealist and anthropo-narcissist position that human beings literally generate the world and its contents – a latter-day creationism that replaces God with human beings.¹⁷ Indeed, like creationists, correlationists and onto-epistemologists cannot make sense of the statements of natural science, for example, the recent discovery by an astrophysics team led by Jorge Zavala and Min Yun of a galaxy 12.8 billion years old – that is, a galaxy that emerged one billion years after the Big Bang and 12.6 billion years before the emergence of human beings (and thus human knowing,

perceiving, and conceiving).¹⁸ The onto-epistemologist can respond to such claims in one of three ways: (1) she can accept that they describe a world prior to human construction and thus abandon the doctrine of onto-epistemology; or she can adopt one of two creationist alternatives: (2) the outright rejection of these scientific claims, or (3) the assertion that human beings retroactively generate the prehuman past along with its events and objects. Only the first path has any intellectual credibility. Nonetheless, Thompson adopts (3), that is, the second creationist alternative, referring to 'ancestral' claims concerning the existence and nature of the universe prior to the emergence of human beings as 'an origin myth'.¹⁹ Ancestral claims, she

Using his personal connection to Haraway as his former professor to "school" [@DrMarieThompson](#) and me about Copernicanism and Darwinism is laughable (for obvious reasons) as well as Haraway's whole body of work being precisely NOT about putting (techno)Science on a pedestal

The work of Donna Haraway, my former professor, is a key resource for Thompson and Goh, who would do well consider Haraway's affirmation (against such creationism) of the four blows to human narcissism promulgated by modern

science: Copernicus's discovery that the earth is not the center of the cosmos; Darwin's discovery that humans are simply animals among other animals; Freud's decentering of conscious thought; and the informatics revolution, which erased the boundary between organisms and machines. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 11-12.

Rather, the question of nature is inherently political and contested and feminism/feminist STS must pay attention to human-nonhuman relations in how the humanities configure science AND how science itself is done by scientists

Cox's accusation of Marie and I being mired in cultural relativism was something Haraway was also critiqued for - and elaborated many times why this is not so (quote from Haraway 2004, 330)

Interviewer: And without reducing everything either to purely social constructions or purely natural things?

Donna Haraway: Absolutely. I am neither a naturalist, nor a social constructionist. Neither-nor. This is not social constructionism, and it is not technoscientific, or biological determinism. It is not nature. It is not culture. It is truly about a serious historical effort to get elsewhere.

This "elsewhere" outside of the binary or naturalism/realism/materialism vs social constructivism, neither-nor, appears to be inaccessible to Cox.

3) Orientalism. Additionally, and without wanting to dwell on my own ethnicity for too long, a white (presenting) male professor calling a woman scholar of East/SE Asian descent "orientalising" is problematic to say the least

Both Thompson and Goh consider such realism and universalism to be peculiarly European or white. This is a thesis that, in classic Orientalist fashion, combines ignorance about non-European intellectual traditions with the fantasy that the racial and cultural other harbors mysterious sources of

The charge of my/our positions as ignorant of non-European intellectual traditions and knowledges is not only ironic given my PhD on forms of knowledge which challenge Western masculinist scientific notions of knowledge...

But also as Cox appears to conflate *his* notions of reality and knowledge based on Western science with all others - he tries to draw parallels with "other" Asian/African philosophies as if these further serve his point about the "nature of reality"

cians.²² The onto-epistemologist might arrogantly reply that these intellectuals promulgate European colonial knowledge or merely describe their local cultural contexts rather than the world as it really is. In truth, throughout history and all over the world, particular human subjects have consistently taken themselves to describe the nature of reality, which is to say that realisms dominate every philosophical and scientific tradition. When, for example, Nāgārjuna claims that all phenomena are empty and interdependent, when Śaṅkara declares that the self (*ātman*) is identical with the absolute (*Brahman*), and when Akan philosophers defend an interactionist psychophysical dualism, they take these claims not to be culturally relative but to describe the way things really are. One may contest these claims; but they suffice to point out that the association of realism and universalism with European thought is absurd.

The point is - how could one be sure that the Nagarjuna, Samkara or Akan philosophies he mentions have the same or comparable notions of realism or universalism as his? Surely a robust philosophical inquiry would not presume this to be the case.

His accusation that "It's as though there exist no Chinese astrophysicists..." exemplifies his conflation of the superiority of "Western science"* and simplistic (and frankly essentialist) usage of ethnicity throughout his response...

knowledge. It's as though there exist no Chinese astrophysicists, no Sri Lankan analytical chemists, no Nigerian engineers, no Dominican mathematicians.²² The onto-epistemologist might arrogantly reply that these intellectuals promulgate European colonial knowledge or merely describe their local cultural contexts rather than the world as it really is. In truth,

"Western Science"* which is in fact ofc hugely complex global/multi ethnic/multi national thousands of years of entangled histories of intellectual traditions

I similarly find his mentioning of Oliveros', Delanda's & others' ethnicities or traditions tokenistic - these come closer to textbook orientalism which in his own words (correctly) concern the "fantasy that the racial and cultural other harbors mysterious sources of knowledge"

that the transdisciplinary return to ontology and the concomitant return to realism and materialism [...] tunes out key questions the social, economics, and history'.²⁴ My sonic supplement to DeLanda's account of the real as flux draws not only from white artists such as John Cage, Max Neuhaus, and Christina Kubisch but from queer Tejana composer and theorist Pauline Oliveros's conception of the sonosphere; percussionist polymath Milford Graves's account of cosmic vibration; and the long Indian philosophical tradition that considers the world to be fundamentally sonic.²⁵ As these and other theorists show, the concept of the sonic flux emerges out of specific cultural traditions but also communicates beyond them, describing sound's universal becoming.

in spite of the recent resurgence of sympathy for relativism, its inconsistency remains as glaring as ever'. Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, 27.

²³ Thompson, "Whiteness," 266.

²⁴ It's worth noting that, far from 'sidelining [...] indigenous cosmologies', as Thompson asserts of new realist and materialist philosophies, DeLanda's staunchly scientific realism was fostered through an apprenticeship with a female Mazatec sha-

man. See Davis, "DeLanda De-stratified" and Si-Qin, "Manuel DeLanda in Conversation."

²⁵ See Oliveros, "Auralizing the Sonosphere"; Cox, "Milford Graves"; Beck, *Sonic Theology*; Lee, *Spiral: The Sound Issue*; and Cox, *Sonic Flux*.

²⁶ DeLanda, *A Thousand Years*, 21, 215.

²⁷ I make a modest start on this project in the second chapter of *Sonic Flux*.

Overall, Cox's response - instead of challenging my argument on any reasonable grounds (which there certainly are) - ends up affirming my critique of his sonic ontology as "posthuman sonic naturalism."

My argument was simply to call for accountability in knowledge production in sound studies - the embodiedness of listening is not necessarily commensurate with situatedness as accountability&responsibility in producing knowledge

I join [@DrMarieThompson](#) in sending [#Parallax](#) Journal some serious side-eye that they sent us this two days before it went public when Cox's response lacks serious/respectful engagement with our ideas & accuses us of "not understanding science"/being creationists-orientalists

[@DrMarieThompson](#) To be clear- I'm not anti-debate nor unable to take criticisms of my work. There IS surely a meaningful debate to be had in sound studies about all of this. But that would demand good faith not bad faith critiques

[@DrMarieThompson](#) For those missing the texts, PDFs can be found here: Cox 2018 bit.ly/2HQwRC8 and Thompson 2017 & Goh 2017 bit.ly/2HMT9ER

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