

Situated knowledges
Donna Harraway

‘we don’t want a theory of innocent powers, where language and bodies fall into the bliss of organic symbiosis

This text, written about science in the broadest term of the word, is extremely dense in thought that is very essential to my project. I will attempt to extrapolate and reflect on quotes and ideas that stuck with me as saying something meaningful about what it is i’m undertaking.

Taking distance of a historical understanding marked by ‘innocent powers’ is one of the core goals of ‘a history (tribute)’. There are no ‘good guys’ or ‘bad guys’ in the narrative I’m trying to craft. It is the mechanisms of power themselves that perpetrate violence. The fracture of the relationship between language (and ability to be heard/ to speak) and body are on full display. In many cases the narrative (that which is told trough the hegemonic model of history or politics) is so different from de bodily experience of specific individuals subjected to it, that the visual-speech act of self immolation can break trough the cracks of ‘language’ employed by the structures that be. These ‘cracks’ provide us with a window of human experience that is hard to otherwise see.

Trusing especially the vantage points of the subjugated. This essay is an argument for situated and embodied knowledges and an argument againsts various forms of unlocatable, irresponsible knowldege claims.

In this sense, the strength of ‘a history (tribute)’ is that it is tied to specific people, in a specific place, performing a specific action in their specific vision. At the same time, I try to extrapolate some semblance of the nature of ‘reality’ (reality of politics engaging with human body and experience) from this collection of situations. Sooner or later, the project will certainly call for engagement with the specificity that is the nature of every case. This could be by zooming in on specific cases that are maybe particularly telling or symbolic. Or maybe by specific cases that happen as I am working on this project. A way of making particular contemporary cases very much part of history.

They are not “innocent” positions. In principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge. They know modes of denial trough repression, forgetting and disappearing acts. Ways of being nowhere but claiming to see comprehensively

Only partial perspective promises objective vision. All western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relaions of what we call mind and body, distance and responsiblilty.

What is interesting about the phenomenon of self-immolation as a center-point for a history is that I as an ‘author’ don’t control who does it for what reasons. It is an action that in its nature is undertaken to protest oppression/subjugation, there is always the ‘**experience of opression/subjugation**’, So when an ex - whermacht soldier does it to protest the way him and his fellow veterans were treated many years after the war, it becomes strikingly clear that no conception of history is innocent, that reality often resides in the ‘guilty’ parts. People going so far as to burn their body because of the ‘feeling of subjugation’ is a great strength of this project. It suggest the unequivical nature of resolve and feelings attached to this issue and so points at strange -and very real- parts of history. In that way maybe we can feel empathy, or **at least recognize the humanity** of the veterans in Germany who had to deal with the shame of a nation. Or the students in India who burned themselves to prevent people from lower castes acces to the same opportunities.

“subjugated” standpoints are preferred because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective and transforming accounts of the world. But how to see from below is a problem requiring skill with bodies and language.

One cannot relocate in any possible vantage point without being accountable for that movement.

responsiblilty for translations and solidarities linking the cacophonous visions and vidionary voices that characterixe the knowldegues of the subjugated.

Something I have to figure out from this essay in relation to my project is what knowledge exactly is contained in these actions. There is real knowledge about human experience and politics contained in the broader overview, but what is there in terms of individual knowledge. It could be many, many different things, but I really cant say for certain. I think I have to talk to people who survived it to know better. It will certainly differ immensely form case to case too. I suppose **the ‘knowledge’ contained in such an action is the awareness/ experience of reality around oneself**. And recognizing/deciding that the state of reality warants this kind of action. It is a knowledge most of us lack when talking about specific struggles in specific places.

“With whose blood are my eyes crafted?”

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“Knowledge from the point of view of the unmarked is truly fantastic, distorted and irrational.”

about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations and responsibility for difference

The image of nodes in fields is a very important one for me in relation to ‘a history’(tribute). Seeing all these bodies on fire as nodes in the field that is the world and its history is a very powerful image. One that can only be evoked once you get rid of a linear model of history where one thing happens after another. A model that does not make so much sense in relation to the specific act performed anyway. Since the power of it is such that it the body becomes a ‘timeless object’ in a way. I like to think of every body on fire as tapping into the same archetype that is as old as fire itself. That certain elements of history and humanity are working in circular ways. Not in a rational explaining-the-universe sense, but in a poetic explaining-the-universe sense.

The object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and an agent.

The action itself is an exclamation of agency, and beyond that there is an acute awareness of the performative aspect of the undertaking. In many cases people strongly play into that. It is very delicate -and maybe impossible to the fullest extent- on my end then, to recognize all the individual agencies when compiling this history. At the same time so much agency is already in the nature of the action that maybe my project influences it little, if any.

It is also interesting that what I do ‘normalizes’ the action of self immolation. Usually it is an act of utter extremety in a context where exceptionally few people go that far (there are exceptions, think Indian student protest & Buddhist monks). Inside of this history the context is such that *everybody* does it. One could consider this taking away from the expression of *agency* that is present in every individual case. I tend to think that the sneaking sense of mundanity adds to the the power of both the whole and the individual cases.

“bodies” as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic generative nodes, their boundaries materialize in social ineractions.

This can be a way of explaining the body-on-fire as such a unifying symbol. If, instead of a singular and hermetic act, you imagine it as a social interaction, you understand the forceful nature of the what is being communicated. This specific social interaction (body on fire) is a very concious materializa-tion of the boundaries of ‘body’, that is, a body of people.

The body itself functions as the means for the social interaction that materi-alizes the boundaries of a certain shared knowledge. (the knowledge about a shared grievance.)

There lies a serieous danger of romanticizing or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their position. This is neither easily learned nor unproblematic.

It is not really my intention to make people understand *why* specific persons did this. It is much more my intention to communicate to people ‘*this happened*’. In this sense I want to leave room for the friction that is present when a spectator looks at this from their own position, and is forced to reckon with this ‘vision form the subjugated’ by virtue of the fact that this extreme act materialized in the world. Time and time again.

acknowledging agency of the world is recognizing a sense of the worlds independent sense of humor.

Even tough I have a gut feeling I don’t entirely understand what is meant with the world independent sense of humor. Maybe it is that which is funny beyond our human capacity for understanding. But funny nonetheless. It sometimes seems like some of the individuals involved are agents in one of these jokes. There is a sense of it being funny, but within the picture of our own, human understanding it is a bit too painful too laugh.

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trough technological enhancement vision becomes unregulated gluttony. _____

This interests me deeply. Even tough she talks about instruments of obser-
vation, one could consider the internet, and acces to information an exten-
tion of ‘vision’. Trough this I could make certain implications about my own
project but I feel it is -at this point at least- a very ‘regulated’ undertaking.

science is a contestable field, the content is the form. _____

(Replace the word science with history)
The form of history being the body on fire is a crazy and potent image. In
my opinion also a very valid way of trying to understand history.

Science is rhetoric, a series of efforts to persuade relevant social actors
that ones manufactured knowledge is a route to a desired form of ‘objec-
tive’ power _____

Even tough I am concerned with history, I am not in the field of ‘science’
or articulating objectivities in a way that is vying for power within the struc-
tures of objectivity that are in place. I am not operating within academics
and do not adhere to the standards that are considered ‘objective’. I do not
‘translate’ according to those rules. Yet there is certainly an attempt to lend
a certain power of ‘objectification’ to the individuals involved in this history

reductionism : When one language must be enforced as the standard for all
translations (of reality)

Relativism is the perfect twin to totalization in ideologies of objectivity. Both
deny the stakes of location, embodiment and partial perspective. Both
make it impossible to see well. Both are ‘god tricks’--> vision form every-
where and nowhere. _____

The undertaking of articulating an alternative way of understanding history
is in itself an attempt to contribute to the awarness of the multitudes of un-
derstanding that exist. Building the framework that I am there is an attempt
at getting across an element of ‘legitimacy’ that might still be a regulated
attempt at playing a *god trick*, to rival the big god. Maybe it is something
else entirely. Im not so clear about this yet for myself.

An object of knowledge is finally itself only matter for the seminal power,
the act, of the knower. _____

For the self-immolator, the object of knowledge (the reality around them) is
matter for ‘the act’, which is a way of excercising power.

struggles over what will count as rational accounts of the world are strug-
gles over *how* to see _____

For me, working with these objects of knowledge the situations is very
different. I have to think deeply about what ‘the act’ entails in my case. It is
something I have clearly articulated, but feel I have not gotten to the bottom
of. Succinctly put; It might be the act of partaking in the struggle over *how*
to see

objectivity, that is, partial connection. _____

A very beautiful and true quote. To talk about all the situations involved I
need, at least, a partial connection. It is clear that I have a lot of work to do
diving into the specificity of some or many histories and personal stories
involved.