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## **Experiments in Good Faith and Hopefulness: Toward a Postcritical Social Science**

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# EXPERIMENTS IN GOOD FAITH AND HOPEFULNESS

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Toward a Postcritical Social Science

*Casper Bruun Jensen*

Critique has run out of steam.

—*Bruno Latour*

What is the aim or *telos* of the social sciences? In one sense, this is a peculiar question to pose, since there must be multiple objectives. Yet we hear it asked by an increasing variety of actors. It is posed by politicians who wonder how best to spend their money, how best to educate students, and how best to support knowledge-making. The question is also asked, however, from within the disciplinary communities of the social sciences themselves. From within, such discussions are invariably related to questions of theory and method. Here, I engage some of them as they play out currently in the fields of anthropology and science and technology studies. Both anthropology and STS (science, technology, and

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society) have gone through a series of reappraisals, or even upheavals, over recent decades. In both fields, such changes are closely related to matters of political and practical aims and opportunities, and to ongoing debates about methods and analytical forms. These discussions, moreover, share important characteristics. Notably, in both anthropology and STS, the notion that social research centers on the adequate representation of empirical facts has been complicated, not least with reference to the reflexive problems inherent in efforts to describe reality and/or speak for “the other.” These discussions have led to the formulation of multiple positions and oppositions, including “basic” research versus “applied” or “political” research, realism versus social constructivism, and, most recently, epistemology versus ontology. These are unresolved issues; probably they are unresolvable. An attendant consequence is that both anthropologists and scholars in STS currently experience heightened levels of uncertainty about theories and methods, means and ends. Indeed, one question arising in discussions of disciplinary objectives is whether new forms of analysis themselves intensify or alleviate uncertainty. Nor is there certainty about whether intensifying or alleviating such uncertainty would be preferable.

In this context, the emergence of increasingly vigorous hybrid positions is noteworthy. In 2004, Bruno Latour argued that “critique has run out of steam” and called for efforts to develop modes of analysis and engagement not premised on “deconstruction” or “debunking.”<sup>1</sup> Earlier, Donna Haraway had called for attentiveness to “situated knowledges” as an alternative both to “views from nowhere” and to a relativism unable or unwilling to get its analytical hands dirty through engagement with concrete issues.<sup>2</sup> While importantly different, both responses were hybrid in eschewing traditional separations between facts and values, and between the conceptual and the empirical.<sup>3</sup> Instead they located researchers as part of the wider world, with the consequence that scholarly knowledge itself was seen as a performative element in its reshaping. Latour’s and Haraway’s responses may thus be taken as “prototypes” for articulating the potentials of the social sciences. Both aim to retain or enhance conceptual and methodological sophistication while also somehow finding ways of “speaking practically.” Finding a position, however, from which to live up to this doubled (or multiplied) obligation is not easy.

Consider, for example, the introduction to the eminent STS scholar Adele Clarke’s *Situational Analysis*, which argues for “methods that can support research

1. Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004): 225–48.

2. Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99.

3. Casper Bruun Jensen, “Continuous Variations: The Conceptual and the Empirical in STS,” *Science, Technology, and Human Values*, published online September 9, 2013, doi: 10.1177/0162243913502866.

on social suffering and anguish that also allow the hope that dwells at the bottom of Pandora's box to emerge, nourish, and be nourished." Although in favor of such methods, Clarke immediately recognizes that the hope they engender "cannot be naive."<sup>4</sup> A better-than-naïve stance toward those methods entails that "we cannot assume . . . that our research will lead directly or indirectly to the changes we may envisage."<sup>5</sup> Clarke's point is doubtless well taken. Yet, insofar as she explicitly suggests that our methods *should* nourish hope, questions arise. For example, what is the positive relation between our methods and hope, if the deployment of those methods does not facilitate change for the better, either directly or indirectly? At what levels or in what situations can such methods nourish hope? What precisely makes them hopeful? It is questions of this kind that, probably, underlie Clarke's insistence that whatever hope we have cannot be naive. At the same time, she evidently feels the need to insist on hopefulness.

Half a century ago, the conservative political theorist Michael Oakeshott noted that "the disappointment of the hope of achieving demonstrative political deliberation with the aid of an 'ideology' composed of explanatory 'laws' of social change or development is one of the great traumatic experiences of the early twentieth century."<sup>6</sup> Presently, we do not hear much about explanatory social laws. As early as 1962, however, Oakeshott was suggesting that the hope of identifying such laws, while it had not quite "evaporated," already manifested a "slackening of the impulse." Even so, he pointed out, "the larger hope of distinguishing political deliberation from mere opinion and conjecture has not evaporated: it has merely turned, in search of satisfaction, in other and somewhat less ambitious directions."<sup>7</sup> Oakeshott would probably still find his diagnosis to be valid today.

Clarke's ambiguous formulation can indeed be read as symptomatic of a gradual decline in the confidence of social scientists. After the reflexive debates in anthropology and STS,<sup>8</sup> for example, discussions about normative and practical relevance in both fields have become simultaneously more persistent and more undefined. At present, the analytical and methodological toolboxes of both disciplines are swelling with concepts and methods, but (as in the case of Clarke's hopeful yet nonnaïve methods) the most advanced approaches invariably come with self-reflexive warning signs. These uncertainties, I would suggest, cannot be resolved with reference to any general quality measurement, whether conceptual or political. Their resolution relates to researchers' theoretical and methodologi-

4. Adele Clarke, *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory after the Postmodern Turn* (London: Sage, 2005), xxvi.

5. Clarke, *Situational Analysis*, xxx.

6. Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1962), 92.

7. Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, 92.

8. See, for instance, James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Steve Woolgar, ed., *Knowledge and Reflexivity: New Frontiers in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Sage, 1988).

cal dispositions, their locations in particular contexts, and their engagements with specific discussions. The issues, in short, are always concrete.

Three specific, distinctive, novel, and contrasting experimental responses to the question of what comes after critique are found in the writings of the anthropologists Hirokazu Miyazaki and Richard Rottenburg and of the philosopher and STS ethnographer Helen Verran. For Miyazaki, what comes after critique is what he terms a method of hope.<sup>9</sup> This method responds to the ennui that set in after the appearance of *Writing Culture*—to his observation that, “since the mid 1980s, many anthropologists have been anxious about their discipline’s loss of relevance.”<sup>10</sup> In contrast, Rottenburg offers an experimental “parable of aid” that goes beyond well-worn critiques that emerged from postdevelopment anthropology. As for Verran, her intervention in postcolonial STS aims to define an analytical position of good faith, whose credibility demands the simultaneous articulation of analysts’ and informants’ “metaphysical commitments.” These are three quite different statements of purpose for a postcritical social science, though they share some basic features. Each makes sophisticated proposals for moving beyond stale oppositions, such as “neutral empirical description” versus “conceptual pyrotechnics,” or “political engagement” versus “ivory tower indifference.” Each is committed to the performativity of knowledge. Finally, the three in their different ways exhibit similar tensions, or even paradoxes, with respect to the postcritical relations they posit between empirical description, conceptual elucidation, and practical/political implication. To analyze these tensions and paradoxes is a key purpose of the present discussion.

### Hope’s Method

“Hope is nothing else than an inconstant pleasure, arisen from the image of a thing future or past, of whose event we are in doubt.” Such is the definition offered by Spinoza in his *Ethics*.<sup>11</sup> As an inconstant pleasure, hope, according to Spinoza, offers neither a firm basis for conduct nor for the acquisition of knowledge. In contrast, more than three centuries later, Hirokazu Miyazaki has defined hope as a general “method of knowledge formation.”<sup>12</sup> The striking difference between these definitions provides an entry point for engaging hope as a method. Miyazaki’s ambition is not to characterize hope in theoretical terms. He emphasizes that his own concern is not with “the ethical question of what the proper object of hope should be or the sociological question of what social condition increases or decreases actors’ capacity to hope” (2). Nor is it with hope “as an

9. Hirokazu Miyazaki, *The Method of Hope: Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

10. Miyazaki, *Method of Hope*, 131.

11. Benedictus de Spinoza, *Ethics* (1677; repr., London: J. M. Dent, 1959), 97, prop. XVIII, n. 2.

12. Miyazaki, *Method of Hope*, vii.

emotional state of a positive feeling” (5). Instead, his focus is on “hope as a methodological problem for knowledge” (2).

To specify the entailments of this perspective, Miyazaki offers a parallel reading, in which he places his ethnography of Fijian Suvavou people alongside positions on hope formulated by scholars as diverse as Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, and Richard Rorty. In their different ways, each of these figures points to the significance of hope as a generator of “prospective momentum” toward the future (3). In particular, Miyazaki invokes three emphases of Bloch’s philosophy of hope: indeterminacy as a condition of possibility, the “strategic abeyance of human agency,” and the “repetitive quality” of hopefulness (27, 105). Indeterminacy “dwells in the not-yet,” and so, for Bloch and Miyazaki, hope must be “unconditionally disappointable” (69). A “moment of hope” is said to emerge “at the moment of abeyance of human agency” (106). Finally and centrally, hope is self-regenerative: it is maintained and carried forward by new acts of hope. The greater part of *The Method of Hope* elaborates on these points by articulating the hopeful engagements of Miyazaki’s Suvavou informants and by explicating the relation between these engagements and his own ethnography.

Though *The Method of Hope* is not primarily a philosophical exposition, it is of course not without conceptual underpinnings. For example, one can find important similarities between his approach and certain arguments made in *Hope: New Philosophies for Change*, a volume of “philosophical interviews” with Isabelle Stengers, Brian Massumi, and Alphonso Lingis, among others.<sup>13</sup> Stengers, for instance, suggests that the “adventure of thinking is the adventure of hope, in spite of the many reasons we have to despair.”<sup>14</sup> For Stengers, “hope is the difference between probability and possibility.”<sup>15</sup> Even if no one has promised us anything, she writes, “no one has the right to say ‘I know how things are, they are hopeless’” (247). Miyazaki’s ethnography, less given to generalization than the work of philosophers, focuses on enduring disputes concerning the Suvavou peoples’ claims to land. Their land was “sold” to the state under dubious circumstances many years ago, and much energy has since been invested in trying to achieve clarity about what happened and to get the land back in Suvavou hands. Miyazaki documents the incessant writing of “petitions” in which Suvavou people address their claims to the government. These petitions have been met with “repeated rejection,” and yet, Miyazaki argues, these efforts continue to strike sparks of communal hope.<sup>16</sup> For the Suvavou, the very act of petitioning represents “an enduring hope to confirm their [Suvavou] self-knowledge, the

13. Mary Zournazi, ed., *Hope: New Philosophies for Change* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

14. Isabelle Stengers, “A ‘Cosmo-politics’: Risk, Hope, Change,” in Zournazi, *Hope*, 244–74, at 245.

15. Stengers, “‘Cosmo-politics,’” 245.

16. Miyazaki, *Method of Hope*, 3.

truth about who they really are” (3). Hope is both elicited and reproduced in such repeated acts, which generate its prospective momentum. The story we are told is one of a continuously foiled hope that is also continuously regenerated.

Ethnographically, this material is fascinating, but Miyazaki’s main focus is methodological. For him, the Suvavou embody a method of hope that is “operative in all knowledge formation” (9). This claim relies on maintaining a strict parallelism between Suvavou land claims and ethnographic knowledge making, and on the subsequent extension of that structure to knowledge in general. Thus, Miyazaki argues that the only adequate account of the hope expressed in Suvavou land claims is one “whose shape replicates . . . those moments” (7). An ethnography of the hope of others will also have to exhibit hope, and, consequently, the ethnographic effort is “to inherit and replicate the spark of hope on another terrain” (30). This claim would be ambitious even if it bore only on ethnographies that exhibit hope as a central feature, but Miyazaki extends it further, suggesting that hope is operative in knowledge formation generally. Moreover, because hope has been defined by its repetitive, self-generating quality, the claim “cannot be argued for or explained” (110); it can only be replicated: “Hope is the only method of recapturing hope,” and “the method of hope is the only method of representing hope” (128–29). The method thus becomes a *perpetuum mobile*: the hope of the Suvavou is never met, yet it is endlessly repeated; to represent this hope, one has to replicate it, which can only be done by a method of hope; such a method in turn generates hope for anthropology, which has to replicate it in turn.

If the method of hope is defined in terms of prospective momentum, knowledge ceases to be tied exclusively to questions of representation or critical potential. Miyazaki’s exposition highlights hope not because it “most adequately” depicts the Suvavou setting but because it defines an orientation that allows both the Suvavou people and the ethnographer to imagine future becomings. Since knowledge generated through the method of hope cannot be evaluated exclusively in terms of its adequate characterization of a state of affairs, it ceases to be wholly representational. Rather than formulating a critique of the status quo, the method, centering on the space for imagination and action opened up by hope, is radically oriented toward the future. The knowledge generated and replicated through the method of hope is therefore inherently performative, both for Miyazaki’s Fijian interlocutors and for the anthropologist.

Despite its self-proclaimed inexplicability, the method of hope does raise significant questions. Not least, we might query, as we did in relation to Adele Clarke’s insistence on hopefulness, the value of a hope that seems never to pay off. Clearly, that value is supposed to be found in its “prospective momentum.” This suggestion, however, leaves unspecified the relation between hope thus understood and hope as a general method for knowledge formation. We might therefore further ask what kind of method it is that hope for the future underwrites. The answer seems to be that hope shapes a formally empty procedure entailing

nothing except the encompassing claim that hope can and must be found in any and all settings. But, in that sense, what the method appears to replicate is sameness.<sup>17</sup> Though we may hope for different concrete things, we are all alike in hoping. Everyone is similar in that hope undergirds all of our knowledge-making projects, no matter how varied they may be. With Deleuze we might therefore ask how to take into account actors who do not try to “methodically apply a thought”—that of hope—“which pre-exists in principle and in nature” but instead try “to bring into being that which does not yet exist”?<sup>18</sup>

For example, encountering Fijians who cease petitioning their government, or anthropologists who do not share Miyazaki’s project, how would the methodologist of hope respond? However phrased, the response would necessarily entail that, irrespective of their own views on the matter, these actors simply have different hopes—for without this claim the method of hope would no longer be general.

Though Miyazaki claims to evacuate the *method* of hope of all emotional content, an important dimension of his informants’ activities does seem to be captured by Spinoza’s definition of hope as an “inconstant pleasure,” “arisen from the image of a thing future or past, of whose event we are in doubt.” But what would happen if Miyazaki’s Fijians ceased to act on the basis of this “inconstant pleasure,” if hope ceased to replicate what might take its place? *The Method of Hope* answers that there is no alternative: hope is inherent in all knowledge, and “only” a method of hope can replicate it. Thus, only hope regenerates hope, but “the flipside is that hope cannot be preserved otherwise.”<sup>19</sup> What happens, then, in situations where hope actually seems lost? Miyazaki’s recent work offers an illustration of just such a situation.

### A Not-So-Forward-Looking Kind of Excitement

The context of Miyazaki’s *Arbitraging Japan*<sup>20</sup> is altogether different from that of his *Method of Hope*.<sup>21</sup> The former ethnography deals with Japanese investors,

17. For an “inverse” view—focusing on the *impossibility* of disappointing hope in a Melanesian context—see Marilyn Strathern, “The Decomposition of an Event,” *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 2 (1992): 244–54. This latter mode of analysis offers a way of seeing hope as a future-generating device without positing it as a generalizable method: see Casper Bruun Jensen, *Ontologies for Developing Things: Making Health Care Futures through Technology* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2010), 31–51; Hans-Jörg Reinberger, “Experimental Systems: Historiality, Narration, and Deconstruction,” *Science in Context* 7, no. 1 (1994): 65–81, at 65.

18. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 142.

19. Miyazaki, *Method of Hope*, 120.

20. Hirokazu Miyazaki, *Arbitraging Japan: Dreams of Capitalism at the End of Finance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

21. Most of the material discussed below is from Miyazaki, *Arbitraging Japan*. Some specific formulations, however, are taken from Miyazaki’s keynote presentation, “The Gift in Finance” (Osaka University symposium “Translational Movements: Ethnographic Engagements with Technocultural Practices,” March 3, 2012).

their responses to changing market situations, and the relationship between their visions of arbitrage and their understandings of, and dreams for, their own lives and the world at large. While the question of hope also infuses this work, it has a completely different valence here than in *The Method of Hope*. For while Suvavou people have remained hopeful in the face of repeated letdowns, Japanese traders gradually have lost faith in arbitrage and financial markets. After global financial crises and Japanese national catastrophes (the tsunami and the Fukushima nuclear accident), the “arbitrage sensibility” of traders “was fading away.”<sup>22</sup> With the loss of that sensibility, hope diminished. Whereas arbitrage used to generate hope for the traders, it turned into a generator of despair. In turn, the loss of hope was manifested in a loss of “ambiguity” in traders’ personal and professional lives. It is significant that *Arbitraging Japan* connects the loss of hopefulness with the loss of ambiguity. Miyazaki argues that the hopes of traders were directly related to their commitment to, and belief in, an opportunistic and relativistic world—a world that could be “arbitraged.” But, as he bleakly notes, the possibility of maintaining that commitment “is quickly fading, for both my trader-interlocutors and myself.”<sup>23</sup> The loss of faith in arbitrage diminished traders’ hope because it disabled their capacity to perceive and deal with ambiguity. Loss of an arbitrage sensibility meant that traders would become increasingly deterministic.

Even in this gloomy context, however, Miyazaki is able to find glimpses of ingenuity and initiative. He points to Yamane, a trader who admitted to “having ‘fun’” with the Tokyo Electric Power Company bonds that were under heavy pressure after the Fukushima catastrophe.<sup>24</sup> Yamane’s sentiment was shockingly out of joint, Miyazaki says, with the national mood of “mourning, suffering and resignation.”<sup>25</sup> Still, Miyazaki reads Yamane’s response as “refreshing in the context of the suffocating emptiness of the pervasive collective determination to ‘ganbaro’ (‘let’s not give up’).”<sup>26</sup> Miyazaki insists that Yamane’s response exhibited some of the positive aspects of the flexible, open-ended relativism characterizing the rapidly fading “arbitrage sensibility.” It would seem that Miyazaki is defending Yamane’s “bad will” against moralizing critiques of reckless market behavior.<sup>27</sup>

22. Miyazaki, *Arbitraging Japan*, 129.

23. Miyazaki, *Arbitraging Japan*, 132.

24. Hirokazu Miyazaki, “Saving TEPCO: Debt, Credit, and the ‘End’ of Finance in Post-Fukushima Japan,” rev. version of “The Gift in Finance,” 11.

25. Miyazaki, “Saving TEPCO,” 11.

26. Miyazaki, “Saving TEPCO,” 11.

27. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 138–39: the classical image of thought, Deleuze argues, is based on “good will” whereby “thought is . . . filled with no more than an image of itself, one in which it recognizes itself the more it rec-

ognizes things” (138). Thus, the very idea of representation is based on “good will” and an “upright nature,” both of which are presupposed by the idea of a “generalized method” (139). Counterposed to “generalized method” is the figure of the thinker who exhibits “bad will.” *Mauvaise volonté* has little to do with the intention to hurt others or with any deliberate attempt to obstruct. Rather, the term designates the disposition of someone who fails to grasp what goes without saying for everyone else. Thus, “bad will” offers resistance to any general consensus or agreement about what we all, as thinkers, ought to “know very well.” Thanks to Isabelle Stengers for some of these formulations.

Indeed, it is not far fetched to read this critical commentary on public (and anthropological) common sense as exhibiting *Miyazaki's* bad will.

We might say that the Japanese tsunami and everything that followed were nothing if not a “sign from without,” the kind of “shock” that Deleuze suggests gives impulse to new thought.<sup>28</sup> As the arbitrage case also makes clear, however, hope offers no solution in contexts where there are decreasing opportunities for “replication.” And indeed, when Miyazaki briefly notes that Yamane’s commitment to the techniques of arbitrage temporarily sustained his source of hope, the interpretation seems stretched. His characterization of Yamane’s actions as “an effort to try to keep going in an impossibly uncertain situation” seems more to the point.<sup>29</sup>

Because of its radical discontinuity with what went before, the Japanese crisis can be seen to offer a challenge to the method of hope. At the same time, however, its shocking “novelty” may well have stimulated a pragmatic orientation toward the future, less adequately described in terms of a generalized insistence on hope than as a “completely situational” mode of response.<sup>30</sup> Playing with the “margin of maneuverability” in the volatile Japanese market, Yamane experimented with the resources that this situation presented. And any circumstance, no matter how dire, leaves available some resources for experimentation.<sup>31</sup>

The philosopher Alphonso Lingis writes of “hope against the evidence,” that is, of hope as an event that arises in a “break with the past.”<sup>32</sup> The break can be seen as “a discontinuity in which something new is born.”<sup>33</sup> The idea of hope as event is based on a Nietzschean sense of affirmation capable of accepting even “painful, destructive and absurd things.”<sup>34</sup> Miyazaki concludes that his anthropological description of the Japanese disaster parallels Yamane’s in that both are hopeful responses to an “unbearably uncertain situation.”<sup>35</sup> They are hopeful not because “any of our responses achieved anything good, but because [they] confounded both what looked oppressive and what looked liberating from the outside.”<sup>36</sup> Even so, it is not obvious that these responses entail any particular method.

28. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 132.

29. Miyazaki, “Saving TEPCO,” 13.

30. Brian Massumi, “Navigating Movements,” in Zournazi, *Hope*, 210–44, at 218; cf. Teun Zuiderent-Jerak and Casper Bruun Jensen, “Editorial Introduction: Unpacking ‘Intervention’ in Science and Technology Studies,” *Science as Culture* 16, no. 3 (2007): 227–35.

31. Massumi, “Navigating Movements,” 211.

32. Alphonso Lingis, “Murmurs of Life,” in Zournazi, *Hope*, 22–42, at 23.

33. Lingis, “Murmurs of Life,” 40.

34. Lingis, “Murmurs of Life,” 25.

35. Miyazaki, “Saving TEPCO,” 15.

36. Miyazaki, “Saving TEPCO,” 15.

### Far-Fetched Facts

With Richard Rottenburg's *Far-Fetched Facts*, we enter into a quite different analytical and methodological territory.<sup>37</sup> What Rottenburg's study shares with Miyazaki's *Method of Hope* is the ambition to find new ways of responding to postcritical uncertainties. In both, we find actors that experiment with whatever resources are at hand (and with equally mixed success). The ethnographic contexts, however, and the analytical solutions proffered are altogether different.

Rottenburg's story is a parable of aid, drawn from studies of development projects in sub-Saharan Africa. In general agreement with critical development studies, Rottenburg is "outraged" at the "universal acceptance" of the distinction between development and underdevelopment, even by many people in societies classified by this modernist formula as underdeveloped (xii). The question is why the formula and the hope for development that it generates continue to be replicated, though it is increasingly recognized that the distinction between development and underdevelopment has failed and, in many cases, has created "nightmares" (xiv). To analyze this issue, Rottenburg swerves from the standards of ethnographic exposition. Although *Far-Fetched Facts* engages with some very particular aspects of a single project, the account is fictionalized: located in "Ruritania" and financed by the "Normesian Development Bank." Fictionalization enables Rottenburg to maintain a focus on the "elementary questions that necessarily play a key role in all national variants of development cooperation" (xvi). This overarching interest is based in Rottenburg's own long experience with development projects in several African countries. "The pattern," he found, "was always the same: The projects had been impeded by problems that from the perspective of those responsible could be classified as neither technical nor economic. My task consisted in identifying the 'sociocultural reasons' why project objectives had not been achieved" (xvii). Because the problem is endemic, Rottenburg argues, it would be pointless to identify real actors. Doing so "would only encourage readers to latch onto questions of individual responsibility. . . . I wanted to direct attention away from strengths and weaknesses of specific real actors and toward the significance of general structural principles and the contingencies of the mundane practices of the development world" (xviii).

Rottenburg's interest in explicating general structural principles seems quite "classical." It also appears to tie in neatly with critical development studies. At the same time, *Far-Fetched Facts* is distinctive, especially in its carefully orchestrated experimental form. Inspired by fictional writing like that of Vladimir Nabokov, Rottenburg introduces a narrative with four voices. He speaks in his own voice in the introduction and the final chapter. In the middle chapters,

37. Richard Rottenburg, *Far-Fetched Facts: A Parable of Development Aid* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).

a fictional anthropologist, Edward B. Drotlevski, “guides the readers through the sites and the mental topographies of the locals in question,” in an “odyssey through the world of development cooperation” where he meets “locals” who either doubt or believe in development representations (xxxv). Doubt is primarily represented by Samuel A. Martonosi, another anthropologist, who works for the development consultant Julius Schilling. Figures of belief-in-development are diverse here but represented most outspokenly by Schilling, the consultant who has been given the contract to reform Ruritanian waterworks. The book thus offers a multiply layered and self-reflexive narrative that alternates in giving space to (a) the realism and universalism represented by Schilling and “the development model,” (b) the relativist deconstruction of “development critique” represented by Martonosi, (c) a “metacommentary” on both (offered by Drotlevski), and (d) a synthetic conclusion (presented by Rottenburg).

Within this complex setup, we find narrators describing multiple “empirical problems” and characterizing them in the terms of authors as diverse as Latour, Niklas Luhmann, Jean-François Lyotard, and the institutional theorists John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan. The overall mode of exposition, however, is particularly inspired by Luhmann’s systems-theoretical view that, whereas one can never attain to reality as such (since whatever is recognizable as reality is defined by the system as a part of which one operates), one can work reflexively to “shift the observer perspective” or to “reposition the paradox” (xxix). Thus, Rottenburg’s analytical attention is held by what he calls “code switches”—between a metacode that understands development as above all a “technical game” and various “cultural codes” ascribed to others when they fail to live up the demands of the game. Crucially, in *Far-Fetched Facts*, *no one* can truly live up to these demands, while *everyone* remains blind to just their own inability to do so. Accordingly, a kind of relativist irony is embedded within each narrative. And in striking contrast to Luhmann’s famously dry writing, Rottenburg uses the strategy of constantly “repositioning the paradox” to devastatingly funny effect.

As identified by Rottenburg, the key empirical issue and paradox of development takes the following form. Much financial development assistance flows into, and aims to support and enhance, the public infrastructures of developing countries, but the implementation and sustainability of such infrastructures require administrative and organizational systems and capacities. One important reason, however, that the infrastructures do not *already* work is the weakness of these systems and structures. Concretely, when a new reform is considered, a consultant is brought in to analyze the current situation by examining the existing documentation. Usually it is found that previous development efforts failed due to misidentification of the central problems—due, in other words, to badly planned interventions. Therefore, new consultants commence to prepare better plans. Just like previous consultants, however, the new ones are faced with the

challenge of identifying and acting on the “real” problems. This recurrent difficulty, Rottenburg says, “stems from the fact that the organization is unable to provide any reliable information, which was precisely the problem in the first place” (xxii). Problems therefore tend to replicate, and “the entire process is caught in a vicious circle” (xxi). In short, “needing an infrastructure in order to be able to establish an infrastructure” is a “typical ‘Catch-22’ situation” (xxii).

Rottenburg’s analysis incessantly exhibits the paradoxes and irrationalities of development, thus “tripping up” the “sublimity” of its self-serving modes of explanation and watching it “fall flat on its face.” In *The Man without Qualities*, Robert Musil uses the idea of tripping up sublimity to describe certain propensities of the “new men of science.” “Who does not know the malicious temptation—when contemplating a beautifully glazed vase,” the narrator asks, “that lies in the thought that one could smash it to smithereens with a single blow of one’s stick?”<sup>38</sup> Musil’s new men of science were people particularly prone to this temptation, people in whom “a propensity to Evil” thus “crackled like the fire under a cauldron.”<sup>39</sup> And Musil continued to characterize this crackle as “nothing less, nothing other, than the pleasure of tripping sublimity up and watching it fall flat on its face” (361).

Rottenburg’s analysis, as I have noted, exhibits as well a “crackle of evil” in its ironical exposition of development paradoxes. At the same time, however, Rottenburg’s postcritical aspirations oblige him to go beyond unsettling the sublimities of modern development. Otherwise, his analysis would remain at the same level of denunciation as standard critiques of development. How, then, does Rottenburg’s “evil crackle” transmute into a different analytic form?

### Tripping Up Sublimity?

Although the consultant Julius Schilling in *Far-Fetched Facts* is a “believer” in development, he is by no means naive. He is intermittently aware even that the success of his project is not premised on any rational or consensual process. He attributes most of the trouble that the project runs into to the coexistence of two mutually incompatible “scripts” for action—one official but practically unworkable, the other practically workable but formally illegitimate. It is among the risky tasks of the entrepreneur to somehow ensure the flow of action in spite of the incongruent demands of these models. Still, at one level, Schilling does believe in the fundamental feasibility of development (that is, in the modernist formula).

38. Isabelle Stengers, *Power and Invention: Situating Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 25, citing Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, vol.

2, *The Like of It Now Happens*, trans. Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser (London: Secker and Warburg, 1961), 361.

39. Musil, *Man without Qualities*, 359.

Matters become more complex, in Rottenburg's book, with the introduction of Martonosi, the fictional consultant-anthropologist who works for Schilling but also engages in his own critical analysis. Martonosi is knowledgeable about actor-network theory and recognizes that one of the central protective mechanisms of development organizations is to keep outsiders out of their "black boxes," thereby enforcing the rule that "nothing noteworthy or remarkable actually occurs inside" (60). Also educated in institutional theory, Martonosi is prepared to characterize such units as preeminent examples of "institutional organizations" whose success has less to do with actual results than with sustaining legitimizing narratives (68). Thus, for example, "Ms. Hoff of Urbania, who sees part of her income tax used to provide Ms. Kimambo with better water service in Jamala, should not learn too much about the myriad of precipices that lie between her bank account and Ms. Kimambo's water faucet" (81). Otherwise, her support for development aid might rapidly dwindle.

This game of facades is related to institutional mechanisms and power relations as well as to "the irresolvable contradiction between the universalist and the relativist sides of the narrative of progress" (88). Development projects are based on the modernist formula (universalism), which justifies constant intervention in the affairs of "developing countries," while this model must also invariably be made to fit into varied local circumstances (relativism). In Rottenburg's analysis, the most important consequence of this "constellation of factors" is the construction of development as a "technical game" founded on "objective numbers" that renders systematically invisible or irrelevant any cultural or political aspects. The title *Far-Fetched Facts* signals that development facts are *fetched from afar*—in multiple "local settings"—but also aggregated in development bureaucracies (*pace* Latour's centers of calculation) and that these "facts" (now in scare quotes) are "far-fetched," that is, far-out and unbelievable.

The third anthropologist in Rottenburg's book, the metacommentator Drotlevski, agrees with Martonosi that how facts are made and represented is crucially important. Whereas Martonosi concludes that development problems are caused by a Western hegemony of ideas, Drotlevski counters that "the technical game is not an instrument of hegemony, but rather the only code available for carrying out transcultural negotiations under postcolonial conditions and the norm of reciprocity" (142). One might wonder why Martonosi, who is clearly an expert in actor-network theory, would reach for Western hegemony as his final explanation. The immediate explanation is found in his eclecticism, which mixes Latour with institutional theory (among others). Yet, since this hybrid theoretical model is quite implausible, questions are raised about the role given to Martonosi as a foil for Drotlevski and, eventually, for Rottenburg himself.

In the final chapter, “Trying Again,” Rottenburg speaks, in his own voice, in an effort to sort out this tangle of positions and repositionings. As already noted, he organizes the discussion around the relation between the notion of a (universalist) metacode and a diversity of (relativist) cultural codes. The problem with the deconstructive position of Martonosi, as Rottenburg presents it, is that it presupposes that development could occur without any metacode. Against this view, Rottenburg notes that, first, most actors in the story, including, prominently, African engineers and bureaucrats, do not in the least feel oppressed by the technical game they are required to play. On the contrary, they support it most vigorously of all. At the same time, however, Rottenburg also emphasizes that development requires skillful code switching, for though everyone officially believes in the general validity of the technical game, each party also believes that other actors are “actually incapable of speaking in the metacode and just [pretend] to do so” (198). Still, the tenacity with which everyone holds on to the technical game “virtually eliminates any chance of correcting errors because it excludes the differences between frames of reference employed by the cooperating parties, even though these remain the most significant sources of error” (199). This gambit is demonstrated through the constant “repositioning of the paradox” by the story’s four narrators. So Rottenburg ends with a doubled argument that points to the indispensability of a metacode that claims absolute objectivity, while also recognizing that this code is the source of development’s perpetual breakdowns. Where are we then, postcritically speaking? It might appear as if this story is no less bleak than the critical development narrative that it aims to replace. Indeed, Rottenburg makes this argument himself.

Commenting on Martonosi’s hope to “spark an urgently needed debate” on the consequences of Western hegemony for development, Drotlevski (as more or less a proxy for Rottenburg) dryly notes that his own position “is ultimately even more pessimistic” (142). It is more pessimistic because it affirms the need for a metacode even as it acknowledges that the attempt to work with this code continuously wreaks havoc on development collaborations and aspirations. Although Rottenburg draws on a combination of Luhmann, Latour, and Lyotard in a surprisingly effective manner, his single critical comment on Latour speaks to the same pessimism: “I do not, however, share Latour’s optimism about the possibility of avoiding objectivism in ‘real life.’ My investigation concurs more with Luhmann, who presumes that we have to suspend doubt when confronted with the necessity of making decisions.”<sup>40</sup> Yet, as exemplified by the ways in which people routinely act on various, incongruent, and relative “cultural codes,” it is by no means certain that objectivism is generally required either to terminate doubt

40. Rottenburg, *Far-Fetched Facts*, 204n15.

or to facilitate action.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the metacode itself might be “repositioned” as a material-semiotic entity that has been strengthened and stabilized throughout history but that is nevertheless contingent and changeable.

This interpretation, however, is not Rottenburg’s. In his book’s final paragraphs, he tries to evade his own pessimistic conclusion by distinguishing between “the absolute conviction that the metacode is objectively correct” and the “relational conviction that the metacode is an inevitable presupposition for cooperation under conditions of heterogeneity.”<sup>42</sup> Only the latter, he argues, is a prerequisite for engaging in the reflective process through which actors can review “their own frames of reference” (even if perhaps “unwillingly and rather poorly”).<sup>43</sup> Hence, in the end, Rottenburg’s aim seems not very different from Martonosi’s hope that ethnographic and analytical clarity can “spark an urgently needed debate.” Insofar as the metacode remains ultimately indispensable, however, it remains unclear what the point of having the debate would be.

### Good Faith

Helen Verran’s undertaking in *Science and an African Logic* is quite distinct from those of Miyazaki and Rottenburg.<sup>44</sup> Verran’s aim is to generate a “good faith analyst”—an aim, she says, that is premised on analytical monism. In its basic form, monism affirms that there is only one kind of stuff in the world. This might seem an esoteric doctrine, but it has a considerable philosophical pedigree (Spinoza and Deleuze were monists, as is Latour in his symmetrical anthropology). Through the complicated structure of *Science and an African Logic*, the reader is treated sequentially to three forms of analysis of numbers: one premised on universalism, one on relativism, and, finally, one that sees numbers as agents—as “ontic” figures that participate in the enactments of politics. Rather than monism, this tripartite structure immediately suggests dialectics. Thus, universalism and relativism could be seen as antithetical, sublated and surpassed by ontic numbers. Seen in another way, however, the analysis does illustrate Verran’s monism: it affirms the existence of universal, relativist, and ontic numbers in the same analytical movement. The latter analytical form, Verran argues, enables a distinct form of generative critique.

41. Cf. Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, “Don’t Throw the Baby Out with the Bath School! A Reply to Collins and Yearley,” in *Science as Practice and Culture*, ed. Andrew Pickering (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 343–69; Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Belief and Resistance: Dynamics of Contemporary Intellectual Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), and “Cutting-Edge Equivocation: Conceptual Moves and Rhetorical Strategies in Contemporary Anti-

epistemology,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (2002): 187–212.

42. Rottenburg, *Far-Fetched Facts*, 200.

43. Rottenburg, *Far-Fetched Facts*, 200.

44. Helen Verran, *Science and an African Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

Paradoxically, therefore, Verran's argument appears simultaneously symmetrical and asymmetrical. Symmetrically, ontic analysis is not located at a "higher" level of explanation than those it supersedes. It does not offer a transcendental standpoint from which universalism and relativism can be rejected. In that sense, the analysis exemplifies a kind of relativism. At the same time, however, Verran is adamant that her analysis moves away from and, in some way, goes beyond the forms of epistemological relativism (exemplified by Rottenburg's figure of Martonosi) that are predominant in anthropology and STS. In this sense, the analysis is explicitly asymmetrical. Thus, even if Verran's analysis is *more* relativist than universalist, she insists that it is still *not really* relativist. This is obviously a complicated position to hold onto, and it is in order to resolve its complications that Verran brings to the table the notion of "good faith." Her good faith analyst is a textual figure created by scrupulous explication of the author's own metaphysical commitments.

Verran's recent article "Imagining Nature Politics in the Era of Australia's Emergent Markets in Environmental Services Interventions" exemplifies this mode of explicating "metaphysical commitments."<sup>45</sup> The point, she writes in this essay, is to configure the position of an analyst enabled "promiscuously" to proclaim her "commitment to incompatible analytical framings" (412). Specifically, the aim is to shape an analytical position that enables navigation in an environment where multiple incongruent views and imaginaries (universalist and relativist, for example) can and must all be taken seriously at the same time. Posing the question of how "to do social analysis in good faith," Verran acknowledges that there is no simple answer. She does, however, direct the reader's attention to Donna Haraway's cyborg figure as exemplary: it offers, Verran argues, a "whole image" though not an "image of a whole" (423). Because the "whole image" is itself partial and partisan, good faith analysis requires paying attention especially to those parts that tend to elude the field of vision of the social analyst. Accordingly, Verran's own discussion of tender bids for Australian environmental services pays considerable attention to the commitments and interests of different actors. After this, Verran offers an analysis "that would probably startle most of the other people at the hearing" (425). In particular, she suggests that the hearing and tender process "was itself a form of politics: a politics contesting means for constituting nature, offering options in the form of designs for the working units of that politics"(425). In conclusion, Verran insists that "to choose to make one analysis and not the other, or choosing to make both, is a form of politics"—a politics of the imagination. To "eschew bad faith," she says, academics need to be explicit about their commitments when engaging in their analyses.

45. Helen Verran, "Imagining Nature Politics in the Era of Australia's Emerging Markets in Environmental Services Interventions," *Sociological Review* 59, no. 3 (2011): 411–31, at 420.

The monist starting point of good faith analysis obviously aligns with the symmetrical obligations of actor-network theory. Yet Verran argues that the problem with actor-network theory is that, though it claims to be symmetrical, it effectively “consign[s] . . . ‘to the flames’” those versions of reality that do not subscribe to its own monism (423):

And to justify this trashing by claiming that we have never been modern is, in my view, a form of analytic bad faith. To tear up those very useful humanist attachments is bad politics, perhaps something that is more obvious to social scientists in Africa than in Europe. Social analysis should be generative for the people those analyses are about, opposed though their interests often are, and generative also in the academic collectives within which such analyses are currency. (423)

Though a critical indictment of actor-network theory, this argument is also a way of highlighting the positive qualities of good faith analysis itself. For the benefit of this mode of analysis is precisely that it can affirm all versions of reality, even ones that might be regarded as incompatible by analysts confined by more rigid metaphysical commitments.

A similar strategy unfolds in “Ethnographic Stories as Generalizations That Intervene,” written by Verran and Brit Ross Winthereik.<sup>46</sup> Their article begins with the argument that “stories have in them a capacity to re-present the world in ways that are *generative*” (37). Such stories should be generative, we are told again, not only for the people and practices they are about but also “for the authors and their academic collectives” (37). Once more, generativity is coupled with the obligation “to represent others and their diverse practices in good faith” (38). The contrast is yet again with those who “artfully claim that we have never been modern,” which is said to be a “deflating claim” that “does not afford possibilities for intervening” (47). Winthereik and Verran thus address “the possibility of writing generalizing ethnographic stories that intervene” (38), and they consider how ethnographers might “become better equipped” to make their stories “participate in building the common world.”<sup>47</sup> In this context, good faith entails recognizing that ethnographic stories intervene not despite but because of their partiality.

While these arguments are empirically interesting and conceptually engaging, it is worthwhile considering their “politics of concretization.”<sup>48</sup> Doing so entails paying attention to the ways in which the arguments demonstrate their viability and preferability in comparison with the alternatives that they implicitly

46. Brit Ross Winthereik and Helen Verran, “Ethnographic Stories as Generalizations That Intervene,” *Science Studies* 25, no. 1 (2012): 37–51.

47. Winthereik and Verran, “Ethnographic Stories,” 37; see also Brit Ross Winthereik, “Hopeful Comparisons

on the Brink of the Grave,” *Common Knowledge* 17, no. 1 (2011): 77–81.

48. Casper Bruun Jensen, “Established Sentiments, Alternative Agendas, and Politics of Concretization,” *Configurations* 14, no. 3 (2007): 217–45.

or explicitly claim to supersede. We might ask, then: What follows from doing good faith analysis? What politics does it enable? At this juncture, it is possible to take two different interpretive paths: one critical, another rather more appreciative. In what follows, I take both, offering two divergent interpretations that, in conjunction, point to unresolved tensions within good faith analysis. In turn, these tensions pose questions concerning the generative potentials embedded in this analytical form.

### (Without a) Critical Armature

“Imagining Nature Politics” argues normatively that analyses should aim to be generative for everyone affected (no matter how much they disagree with each other), as well as for academic colleagues. “Ethnographic Stories,” however, is much more relativistic, stating only that the situations in which one might want to intervene “are radically underdetermined. Many directions are possible and many things may follow.” Yet, while this seems inevitably true, it also makes impossible specification of the point where good faith makes a difference to intervention and generativity.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, it appears that the interventions that follow from writing “stories that intervene” could be *anything* or *nothing*. Yet, insofar as good faith analysis strives to be generative for all those “startled” actors that such analyses describe, what then can generativity *mean*? How, where, and why, moreover, do such analyses differ from the ways in which analyses that are (implicitly or explicitly) not “in good faith” operate? For example, in what *particular respects* do such analyses differ from other “monist” forms of analysis, such as actor-network theory, accused of “consigning to the flames” perspectives incongruent with its own worldview?

Winthereik and Verran note that, “in their partiality” and radical incompleteness, good faith analyses “take up a position in politics.” But is any other option available? That is, could one imagine ethnographic stories (or any other type of representation of others’ lives) *not* being partial and *not* taking a position in politics?<sup>50</sup> And if analyses do invariably take such positions, then in what sense does good faith generate “better” outcomes? Here, we might recall Stanley Fish’s rejection of the “theory hope” embedded in the assumption that an improved critical consciousness necessarily leads to improved practical consequences. Fish considers whether “anti-foundationalism as a model of epistemology provide[s] us with direction for achieving the epistemological state it describes.”<sup>51</sup> For example, if we recognize that “our convictions about truth and factuality have not been

49. Winthereik and Verran, “Ethnographic Stories,” 49.

50. Casper Bruun Jensen, “Sorting Attachments: Usefulness of STS in Health Care Policy and Practice,” *Science as Culture* 16, no. 3 (2007): 237–51.

51. Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 347.

imposed on us by the world, or imprinted in our brains, but are derived from the practices of ideologically motivated communities,” would the recognition enable us to set those convictions aside in favor of others?<sup>52</sup> Fish’s answer is “no.” The hope that theory will help us to shed ideology presupposes, he writes, that the “recognition of contingency” can be turned into a way of “avoiding contingency.”<sup>53</sup> Fish’s critique perfectly corresponds to that of Rottenburg’s fictional Martonosi, who hopes that unveiling the hegemony of Western discourses will somehow help to create a more level playing field. Significantly, however—given Verran and Winthereik’s critical appraisal of actor-network theory—a similar argument is implied by Latour’s well-known adage that the fate of any claim is in the hands of later users.<sup>54</sup> In other words, even if one is aware of what one is trying to do, and also aware of the difficulties of achieving this goal, such awareness, by itself, makes the accomplishment of the aim neither easier nor harder. This is not a problem that can be theoretically solved but, rather, a condition to be contingently handled.

In this light, it is telling that the generative implications of good faith analysis, direct or indirect, are never spelled out. Indeed, the question of whether generativity has been “accomplished” remains strictly undecidable; it is a claim, or a hope, rather than an exemplification or a demonstration. Undecidability regarding consequences (generative or otherwise) characterizes not only good faith analysis, of course, but also social research at large. But this is precisely the critical point, for it means that a commitment to generativity via good faith does not uniquely enable, let alone guarantee, a good faith, generative, or “otherwise positive” outcome. Although Winthereik and Verran do an excellent job in obviating the flawed distinction between “non-interventionist, and engaged research, which is often considered interventionist and therefore *good* in some general sense,” their argument thus seems to rest on an equally abstract claim.<sup>55</sup> When we read that “good faith analysis is about having faith in it being possible to write stories that are generative for *some of* the practices we study and for *some of* our own colleagues in social theory,” it might fairly be said that this embrace of specificity is itself none too concrete.<sup>56</sup>

Even as this line of criticism is, to my mind, both valid and consequential, it remains possible to read Verran’s argument more generously. In Nigeria, the Northern Territory, and elsewhere, Verran has shown keen attentiveness to multiple viewpoints and their conflicting interactions. In work with Aborigines and environmental scientists, for example, Verran took on a role as diplomat, engag-

52. Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally*, 323.

53. Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally*, 524.

54. Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

55. Winthereik and Verran, “Ethnographic Stories,” 38.

56. Winthereik and Verran, “Ethnographic Stories,” 38.

ing in a complex work of commensuration between their seemingly incompatible ontologies. In her accounts of these situations, she beautifully describes the negotiations through which fragile links might be created between such worlds.<sup>57</sup> Even so, good faith did not *enable* this experiment or generate its diplomatic outcomes (such as they may have been). It could not have done so, since good faith is a textual outcome of the analysis. Good faith simply extends an invitation to take on board whatever the world offers up to the analyst for perceiving, with due recognition of the analyst's own lack of innocence in producing new renderings of that world. Seen thus, Verran offers a set of richly textured accounts of the performativity of all knowledge, including that of the social analyst. Generativity is therefore obviously not—because it could not be—a matter of creating good outcomes. In Verran's concrete analyses, rather than in meta-arguments that make explicit their aspirations, generativity is elicited in efforts to interrupt the standard gestures of political or philosophical critique. These are experimental attempts to loosen up rigid social-scientific or commonsense categories, with the aim of facilitating analyses capable of dealing seriously with difference, even ontological difference.<sup>58</sup>

This interpretation relieves the notion of good faith of any earnest or high-minded normative connotations. It seems more in tune with Verran's postcolonial project of bringing seemingly "incommensurable knowledges" into potential relation. In several ways, it thus offers a more constructive entry point for engaging her oeuvre than the critical interpretation previously formulated. Nevertheless, it has one significant drawback from the perspective of the would-be good faith analyst. For if, in the first interpretation, the success of good faith could in a sense be "measured" in terms of the kinds of generativity, whether political or practical, to which the analysis would give rise, it is just this possibility that altogether disappears in the second one. There, the articulation of metaphysical commitments achieves nothing except, precisely, the construction of the good faith analyst. Accordingly, its drawback is that it deprives good faith of a good deal of its "political" or "normative" attractiveness. Of course, this drawback is problematic only for those who turn to good faith because it appears to promise novel, politically efficacious (generative) modes of social analysis or social philosophy. In other words, the loss will be felt, if not by Verran herself, then by anyone who turns to her analyses with any sort of politically motivated "theory hope."<sup>59</sup> It might, however, be ventured that good faith and generativity are rhetorical signposts that in particular appeal to, and attract, readers who harbor just such

57. Helen Verran, "A Postcolonial Moment in Science Studies: Alternative Firing Regimes of Environmental Scientists and Aboriginal Landowners," *Social Studies of Science* 32, no. 5/6 (2002): 729–62.

58. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Exchanging Perspectives: The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies," *Common Knowledge* 10, no. 3 (2004): 463–84.

59. Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally*, 347, 524.

hopes. Indeed, the very name “good faith analysis” prepares the way for readers keen on finding in Verran’s writings a critical theoretical *armature* comprising normative concepts and methods. Yet the real power of the method may be the inverse: that it yields a fragile analyst who does the job absolutely unprotected by any such armature.

### Postcritical Hopes and Tensions

The three proposals for postcritical engagement considered here center on particular topics and issues that are interesting in their own right, but they also aim to reorient disciplinary imaginaries more generally. Miyazaki’s self-regenerating method of hope simultaneously describes ethnographic reality in a manner that allows for replicating the effect of hope on the terrain of analysis. Rottenburg’s study of far-fetched facts and the incongruence between meta- and cultural codes aims to go beyond purely critical appraisals of development aid. Verran’s good faith analyst is constructed through a process of explicating metaphysical commitments meant to enable analyses that are generative for a disparate set of actors. In different ways, each proposal speaks to the importance of creating modes of knowledge production that are not based on representation and critique. Although the authors describe these efforts differently, all define future-oriented agendas focused on the performativity of knowledge. As I have suggested, each proposal also embodies certain tensions and paradoxes.

In Miyazaki’s case, we might identify the tension as that between the method *of* hope and the investment of hope *in* method. Strikingly, Miyazaki’s notion of hopeful replication is mimicked in Latour’s description of specifically religious narratives. “The only way to understand stories, such as that of the Annunciation,” Latour writes, “is to repeat them, that is, to utter again a Word that produces in the listener the same effect, namely one that impregnates with the gift of renewed presence.”<sup>60</sup> Transposed into the general territory of social action, however, “impregnation” of this type loses much of its force. In Miyazaki’s recent work, as we have seen, hope is not much of a factor, except insofar as it seems to have vanished. We also saw, however, that loss in no way diminished the creativity of Miyazaki’s anthropological response. The only loss seems to be that of the promise that hope might ground a postcritical method that would be generally applicable.

To an extent, Rottenburg’s *Far-Fetched Facts* seems to present an analogous case. On the one hand, Rottenburg’s ironical, metareflexive, and experimental narrative succeeds marvelously in what, following Musil, I called “tripping up

60. Bruno Latour, *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*, trans. Catherine Porter and Heather MacLean (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 107.

the sublimity” of development aid. Inspired by scholars like Latour and Andrew Pickering, Rottenburg clearly demonstrates the performative consequences of representational development “games.” He also shows that an important limitation of critical development studies is their inability to engage seriously with material agency. On the other hand, Rottenburg subsumes this part of his analysis under a systems-theoretical mantle, which characterizes development in general as shaped by the tension between a universal metacode and many cultural ones. One might query the compatibility between that reading and the emphasis on the translational capacities of material agency. The central dilemma, however, is that Rottenburg’s ultimate framing in terms of codes and metacode locates him too close for comfort to Martonosi, his fictional development critic. Eventually, both end up arguing for the creation of “spaces for reflection.”

I alluded earlier to the arguments of Stanley Fish against “theory hope,” against the belief, that is, that theory can help us not only to know the world better but also to change it for the better. “Theory hope” is often connected to “method hope,” since for theories to make any “real difference” they must somehow facilitate extrapolation of “a better set of methods for operating in the world . . . a better set of rationales and procedures for making judgments, and a better set of solutions to the problems that face us.”<sup>61</sup> It is in this sense that Miyazaki’s method of hope is also a hope *in method*. In Rottenburg’s case, we find no such hope. Nor are his hopes for the application of theory very pronounced. What Rottenburg does seem to retain, however, is a strong representationalist hope in the explanatory powers of theory. This representationalism runs parallel, though at times clashes directly, with the performative analytics that Rottenburg otherwise so successfully deploys.

The case of Verran’s good faith analyst is somewhat different but exhibits no less remarkable tensions. The specification of the good faith analyst appears to articulate a privileged position characterized by its claims to create especially generative outcomes for both informants and intellectual peers. Yet it is far from obvious what the benefits of generative analyses done in good faith are meant to be. Even so, the rhetorical power of “good faith” and “generativity” lies in the connotations of political normativity and practical efficacy to which these terms give rise. As with Miyazaki’s notion of hope, the vocabulary offers “tokens of sincerity” rather than substantive gains.<sup>62</sup> As an alternative, I extracted from Verran’s analyses a strictly nonmoral approach, the generativity of which would be entirely contingent. Rather than strongly normative, the claims made by *this* good faith analyst would be humble. Rather than issue guarantees, she would

61. Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally*, 346.

62. Paul Valéry, as cited in John Vignaux Smyth, *The Habit of Lying: Sacrificial Studies in Literature, Philosophy, and Fashion Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 88.

promise nothing at all. In this alternative, all hope in either method or theory would vanish. I would now add that, in many ways, this alternative interpretation aligns with my own view of what a postcritical response entails.

Conventional theories and methods can be understood as the armor and weaponry of social scientists, the tools with which we defend ourselves or carry out our attacks. They give comfort and safety. Conversely, insofar as the postcritical situation entails that there *is* no theory or method to hide behind, the analyst is left to operate in a fundamentally uncertain position. Rather than being “protected” by theory and method, social scientists are inherently vulnerable and susceptible to “manipulation—willing, conscious, or not.”<sup>63</sup> I would suggest, then, that acknowledging one’s uncertain, vulnerable, and, indeed, often rather helpless position is a manner of taking seriously both the risks and the possibilities of postcritical analysis.

The position that I have just sketched has among its precedents the conclusion of Leibniz that, as Isabelle Stengers summarizes it, “nobody can know the true reason why they act as they do.”<sup>64</sup> Any action, intellectual or otherwise, is shaped by dispositions and affects that go beyond what can be known of them, no matter what our theories, methods, or reflexive endeavors may be. The scope of engagement and analysis always exceeds the thinker’s grasp, and hence social research and scholarship, even when conducted with the best intentions and described with meticulous reflexive care, are inherently open to manipulation. This is why, Stengers argues, the analyst must attempt to be as “discriminating” as possible, an obligation that in particular entails that one abstain from hiding behind “the protection of any kind of general reason.”<sup>65</sup> Eschewing the use of theory as a critical armature, the analyst is then obliged to speak *concretely*. At this point in time, speaking concretely obviously cannot entail any form of empirical characterization that would claim to be *untainted* by conceptual or theoretical thinking. Indeed, the claim that facts are able to speak in an unmediated fashion, *through* the analyst, is perhaps the classic precritical strategem. It also offers a particularly apt illustration of what it means to hide behind a “general reason”—here, reason manifest as transparent representation. Speaking concretely, in contrast, obliges the analyst to situate his or her conceptual resources and aspirations alongside—but not above or beneath—the situations and contexts addressed.

63. Jefferson Humphries, *The Red and the Black: Mimetic Desire and the Myth of Celebrity* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), 77, cited in Smyth, *Habit of Lying*, 84.

64. Isabelle Stengers, “Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices,” *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2005): 183–96, at 189.

65. Stengers, “Introductory Notes,” 189.

### Insisting Properly

Hope, in one way or another, appears to be an important aspect of all of the post-critical projects we have encountered—thus far, Miyazaki seems to be right. Even if social scientists are critical of the status quo (in the manner of Rottenburg’s Martonosi), they try to offer vantage points, intellectual if nothing else, from which other (and better) worlds become imaginable. At the same time, however, the anthropological ennui to which Miyazaki refers relates to the purportedly meager outcomes of reflexive, relativist, postmodern turns and especially to their assumed quietism.<sup>66</sup> Hence, Miyazaki’s focal question: how can anthropology regain hope?

Part of the rhetorical force of *hope* (and, as I have suggested, of Verran’s *good faith*) is that it is a term that one cannot easily engage critically.<sup>67</sup> If one does not have faith in the transformational capacities of social analysis, one must be a conservative, a dystopian postmodernist, or an apathetic relativist. If one is not hopeful, one must be cynical—which is indeed one way to read Rottenburg’s entertaining but also devastating analysis (yet even Rottenburg finds some hope in the end). But are these the only available options for a postcritical project? To consider this question, I point to two quite different formulations.

Consider, first, quasi-anthropologist Carlos Castaneda’s shamanic mentor don Juan. Throughout his apprenticeship, Castaneda continuously asks don Juan “why” a sorcerer acts like he does. Repeatedly, he receives the reply that there is no reason. When Castaneda persists, don Juan answers that “it is possible to insist, to insist properly, although we know what we are doing is useless.”<sup>68</sup> This response can be juxtaposed with Michel Foucault’s famous reply to a question about the possibility of finding ethical precepts of present value in ancient Greece:

You see, what I want to do is not the history of solutions—and that’s the reason why I don’t accept the word *alternative*. . . . My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic—activism.<sup>69</sup>

66. On the relation of quietism and postmodernism, see the following articles from the *Common Knowledge* symposium “Apology for Quietism”: Jeffrey M. Perl, “Introduction: ‘More Trouble than They Are Worth,’” in 15, no. 1 (2009): 1–6; Hanne Andrea Kraugerud and Bjørn Torgrim Ramberg, “The New Loud: Richard Rorty, Quietist?,” in 16, no. 1 (2010): 48–65; and “Quietism Now? An Anonymous *Envoi*,” in 16, no. 2 (2010): 276–84.

67. For a somewhat parallel effort, dealing with “optimism,” see Lauren Berlant, “Cruel Optimism,” *difference* 17, no. 5 (2006): 20–36.

68. Carlos Castaneda, *A Separate Reality: Further Conversations with Don Juan* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1971), 77.

69. Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault*, vol. 1, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: New Press, 1997), 253–80, 256.

It would appear that neither don Juan nor Foucault was sanguine about the prospects of change for the better. Probably both were uncertain what such change might mean. Of the two, don Juan sounds the more resigned, since he claims that everything is in effect useless. Foucault simply notes that everything is dangerous. Both were, perhaps, postcritics ahead of their time.

Yet, even in the absence of an agreed purpose, shorn of the belief that what they do will come to matter, neither don Juan nor Foucault resigns himself to apathy. Don Juan's "ethics" is one of "insisting properly" in the face of expected futility. Foucault says he is a hyperactivist because of, not in spite of, his pessimism. His stance recalls Stengers's call to resist the dominant form in which questions about the usefulness of social science are posed by those in a position to demand answers: "What would you do if you were in our place?" Her ferocious response is that "I am not in your place! And it is not by chance. A society where I would occupy any kind of power position and still think and feel as I do would be a completely different society, with different problems and different ways to solve them."<sup>70</sup> While Stengers rejects the demand to justify her work in terms of the practical problems of managers or policy makers, her "pessimism" does not in any way lead her to a passive position. What is distinctly postcritical about this position is that it is fortified neither by a general theory nor by a methodology, a normative framework, or a political project. Instead, it is based on a pragmatic and experimental engagement with each new situation as it arises. This stance, I submit, is one fruitful way of giving meaning to don Juan's notion of "insisting properly" as a postcritical response.

### ***Flight to Arras***

Postcritical responses in social science cannot be premised on the specification of any kind of particularly generative method or form of analysis. Indeed, it is both the limit and the creative condition of possibility of our theories and methods that they cannot provide more than provisional, experimental, and inherently uncertain grounds for research engagements and interventions. Hence, the present discussion has disputed the notion that postcritical anthropologists have any need for general methods, abstract principles, or encompassing political projects to go by.

During World War II, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry was a French reconnaissance pilot assigned to take photos of German army positions—a mission that, he came to realize, was futile. What his supervisors demanded, he wrote in *Flight to Arras* (1942), was that pilots should "sketch the face of a war that has no face. The Staff appeal to us as if we were a tribes of fortune-tellers."<sup>71</sup> He continued,

70. Stengers, "Introductory Notes," 268.

71. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Flight to Arras*, trans. Lewis Galantieri (1942; repr., New York: Harcourt Brace, 1969), 7.

“We knew perfectly well that they would never be able to make use of our intelligence—luckily. It might be brought back by us; but it would never be transmitted to the Staff. The roads would be jammed. The telephone lines would be cut. The Staff would have moved in a hurry. The really important intelligence—the enemy’s position—would have been furnished by the enemy himself.”<sup>72</sup> Even so, Saint-Exupéry’s determination to carry out his task only intensified. *Flight to Arras* has been read, not without reason, as a noble defense of duty. It can also be interpreted, however, as speaking to the importance of “insisting properly” in contexts where the level of uncertainty leads one to expect that the outcome of action may well be “nothing.” In such contexts, there is little to fall back on except the knowledge that one has indeed not given up on acting. There is nothing particularly grandiose or heroic about that insistence. Considering the high-minded rationales given for sending pilots on suicidal missions, Saint-Exupéry concluded no more than that he would never again judge anyone based on the “phrases by which they justify their acts.”<sup>73</sup> As Stengers would come to do, Saint-Exupéry rejected all forms of “general reason.”

Returning to the less lethal and differently uncertain realm of social scientists, we too may reach the conclusion that it is possible to “insist properly” in thought and action—empirically and conceptually—even without entertaining the hope that doing so will ultimately matter a great deal. This approach is perhaps particularly incumbent on scholars in the social sciences, and the humanities too, when they are (as increasingly happens) addressed as fortune tellers, while, like Saint-Exupéry, they often have neither the means nor the urge to tell the kinds of fortunes expected.

If we invert the positive connotations of *hope*, the postcritical problem becomes perhaps a matter of preventing despair by continuing to “insist properly.” “We don’t know if we will succeed,” as Stengers writes, “but we know that if we fail now, we may never have the force or resources to begin again.”<sup>74</sup>

72. Saint-Exupéry, *Flight to Arras*, 7–8.

73. Saint-Exupéry, *Flight to Arras*, 130.

74. Stengers, “‘Cosmo-politics,’” 255.