

CULTURAL
EPIGENETICS AND
THE PHILOSOPHY
OF CHANGE

RICOCHET

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RICOCHET - CULTURAL EPIGENETICS AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHANGE

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COLLATED SYNOPSES

CH1: Introducing Thale Cress and The Bamboo Shark

Chapter one uses the examples of thale cress, a seasonally flowering weed and the bamboo shark, a quickly mutating non-lethal shark found around the archipelago of Indonesia, to demonstrate how biological processes of epigenetics and mutation occur. It then proposes why the relatively new field of epigenetics is interesting for the study of cultural evolution. I propose a modification to the work of artist and philosopher Manuel DeLanda on whom I drew in book one. How might the science of epigenetics reveal the ways in which cultures prescribe and reinforce certain patterns of replication within our lifetimes? Can biological models reveal the ways in which value systems are upheld through cultural epigenetics? I contend that the finds detailed in Ricochet offer another way, or, as Manuel DeLanda put it a modification to the field of material cultural history and philosophy.

CH2: Breathing and Time

In this chapter, I introduce the idea of biological patterns of activity such as breathing in animals or the seed cycle in plants, as allegorical ways to describe and think about deep historical time. While this chapter is concerned with natural philosophers such as Goethe (and the inherently patriarchal perspective of these canonical figures), it is focused on the use of these philosophies as a means to access spiritual states of meditation. Chapter two is a 'breather' which sets up the archaeological exploration of chapter three. It also takes issue with the concept of deviant knowledge established in book one.

CH3: Exploring the Germ Line of the Corinthian Order

Chapter three traces the mutation of cultural expressions around the garden of paradise from the earliest known archaeological records up to the contemporary world (from c 30,000 bce-2016). Along this journey narratives of prehistory, the first known cultural artefacts, anthropological discussion and official histories are taken to task and critiqued. In the absence of female perspectives, early mythological characters and interpretations are held as suspect. In addition, hypotheses around the establishment of the earliest known sacred trees - sacred palm trees - are discussed in relation to later architectural forms within classical and neoclassical architecture. While offering a running critique of how knowledge is created, modified and replicated, chapter three begins to establish a means of discussing cultural evolution in biological terms. The language of epigenetic silencing and activation, and mutational processes of evolution are

applied to patterns of cultural expression (focused on the garden of paradise), and a sacred tree of life. My enquiries reveal an enormous amount of replication with variation on the palm tree motif. I demonstrate the palm tree's recurrence at sites of spiritual, religious, financial and state power. The evidence for this ranges between the tenth millennia until the year 2016 and is drawn from well sourced and accredited scholars from multiple texts.

My hypothesis here is that some instances of this replicating cultural motif will be best described as mutations, while others will be more appropriately characterised as part of epigenetic activation and silencing. I then also connect the concept of epigenetic silencing with contemporary reflections on race-based cultural and historical erasure.

The study of causation between our environment and the genes we humans pass on to the next generation through epigenetic tags, is still very young. It is easier to map in plants while patterns found in the study of larger organisms are often inconclusive. Nonetheless abusive relationships during childhood have been shown to affect a person's cell behaviour with consequences in later life and it is epigenetic silencing or activation that carries that abuse into the body's cells. In this sense, chapter three uses the language of cultural epigenetics to make clear, specific mechanisms of cultural hegemony which have consequences for the manner in which the urban environment is re-imagined by future and current generations.

CH4: Lungs of History

Chapter four is both a deep dive, politically and philosophically into the implications of the findings of chapter three, i.e. the field of cultural epigenetics per se, and on the production of art in the historical context of the Baroque movements. It draws on the exhibition *The Potosi Principle, 'How Can We Sing the Song of the Lord in an Alien Land?'*, curated by Alice Creischer, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Andreas Siekmann, and Max Jorge Hinderer in 2010, as a vehicle with which to connect cultural epigenetics with cultural imperialism. Chapter four proposes that in order to understand the proliferation of sacred palm tree motifs across Western sites of power (such as banks, churches, universities, etc), it is necessary to explore both violence and the economy. It then suggests that decolonisation of the arts and of history, offers and is substantiated by a rejection of market solutions which are undermined by entropy. Chapter four suggests that decolonisation is vital both in light of the fact that colonialism and imperialism have created global warming and in the sense that, biologically speaking, life is entropy in reverse (Václav Havel).

CH5: The Viral Infection of Political Extremism

In this chapter, I take a close look at the relationships between slavery, racial prejudice and colonialism to the history of political extremism. The chapter draws particularly close reference to Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1951, while presenting my own timeline of events informed by contemporary historians such as Ibram Xolani Kendi and several others. The timeline

of totalitarianism draws parallels with specific events in the early twenty-first century such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal and the storming of the United States Capitol Building in January 2021, in the context of the Sars-Covid-19 pandemic. Chapter five continues to employ biological analogies and makes several arguments in favour of this method in the face of the unscientific nature of Nazi and Fascist programmes of racial hygiene. Biological metaphors have always been used to express ideas in their most vivid form, as for example when Trotsky described Stalin as the syphilis of the workers movement. If one were to cease thinking and working with biological systems the entire field of interdisciplinarity would effectively have conceded that 'race science' were capable of providing demonstrable evidence of naturally occurring racial hierarchies, which it cannot. Perhaps most importantly, the use of biological scientific arguments by Nazi extremists to justify the Holocaust and my own use of biological models to understand the decay of liberal democracies both demonstrate the dangers of investing political and ethical decisions with an apparently unchallengeable aura of scientific truth. Both represent a challenge to the scientific method. Only one side is attempting to absolve their conscious in so doing. However, the wider point here is that science itself cannot be placed in a gilded isolation chamber as the voice of truth in and of itself. Certainly not to the extent that the world has come to over rely on the interpretations of scientists which, in any case, and in the field of human medicine, do change over time. These arguments are taken up at several other junctures in the overall work.

CH6: A Nation in Contractions

Chapter six is a very short reflection on the nature of legal culture and the use of legal work by opposing groups in the ongoing conflict of Palestine-Israel. The chapter draws on the work of Palestinian-American legal scholar and human rights attorney Nora Erakat, and her 2019 book *Justice for Some, Law and the Question of Palestine*. It would sadly be remiss of me to ignore the history of the foundation of the modern state of Israel at the expense of the state of Palestine in a work that addresses the ways in which minority groups have been used as scapegoats to leverage power for Western dominance and strategic destabilisation during imperialism.

CH7: The Radio Mast and the Cultural Forager

In this chapter, I explore the idea of cultural mutation and cultural epigenetics in the context of radio and eradio. With radio or eradio transmission, like the transmission of genetic materials over time, each particle of information is the product of several stages of gathering and selection through curation. I argue that the behaviour and activity of a modern radio station can be meaningfully discussed in terms of organic mutation and vice versa. The chapter includes excerpts from a recent interview between Francis Sosta and Franco 'Bifo' Berardi that was broadcast on the sub_1xə1 radio platform in late 2020, in which Bifo concludes that the pandemic is teaching us a methodology. In this chapter, I am also interviewed concerning the process of founding sub_1xə1 radio and my work in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, by long standing collaborator and artist Gabriel Birch.

CH8: One More Time With Feeling

The concluding chapter to Ricochet addresses and critiques latent esoteric sympathies within the text, in particular the racial anxieties of Rudolf Steiner's Atlantis. The chapter departs from an esoteric reading of date palm trees and engages with the contemporary debt slavery of palm labourers (focusing particularly on workers and enslaved people in Indonesia and Malaysia). The problem of imagining better futures is brought into focus through a discussion of the event of heteronormative culture as discussed by Judith Butler (Gender Trouble, 1997). I focus on the problem of how to re-imagine a world that has been biologically damaged and intellectually silenced by the ongoing consequences of heteronormative culture, thought and law. The book concludes by reasserting the role of material philosophy during the ongoing environmental phase transition/collapse to which I bear witness. I highlight the value of decolonial approaches of knowledge production as they critique both the error of race thinking and the consequences of that thinking on the peoples and material environments of this, our lone planet.

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