

ELABORATING THE METHODOLOGY I

1. Empirical analysis

Empirical generalisation works at the lowest level of theoretical abstraction. At this level, the aim is to explore and map the different communities that form part of this project, sensitive to ways in which communities are projected and imagined. Following the non-prescriptive character of this approach, both qualitative and quantitative approaches will be used including statistical information, official discourses of community, unofficial discourses of community, and individual biographies and constructions of community. As will become clearer, the different empirical data sources themselves move from less to more abstract ways of taking hold of the meaning of 'community'. Codifying quantitative data, for example, gives rise to a more abstract construction of the concrete settings and situations within which individuals live out their daily lives than does collecting stories or asking someone to draw a picture of their place.

The quantitative data that will be used includes statistical data. We concentrate on the classical data sets: births, deaths and marriages; access to technology, particularly television, computers, radio, telephone and internet; rates of morbidity and mortality, that is, incidence of disease, depression, substance abuse, as well as their spatial distribution; rates of violence, including both domestic violence and public violence; religious affiliation; ethnic identity; level of education as determined by years of schooling and highest qualification attained; and population patterns, including the spatial distribution of populations and changes over time.

These data sources will be supplemented by archival histories, oral histories, and studies of the built environment, including map and policy documents. Drawing on these sources will help to develop a sense of how the research sites have changed over time. For example, using maps of the research sites will enable the research team to study how a place has been constituted over time and the variations that have taken place in terms of official accounts of a place. The following methods offer a means of historically contextualizing the quantitative data and provide a foundation from which it becomes possible to engage in more abstract forms of analysis.

There are infinite possibilities for using archival materials to build deep and textured histories of communities, so much so that writing a deep history in the initial stages of this research would be at best unwieldy, at worst, a serious distraction from the major work of the research. Recognizing this, we propose limiting the historical contextualization of the communities involved to a filtering of existing local histories (from civic sources), combined with whatever professional histories there may be available on each area. Taking into account that for many areas Indigenous history will have been suppressed, the Koorie Heritage Trust archives will be searched and accessed for any oral or life histories they have for the communities we are researching.

In the first instance, civic histories can be used to show how communities have formed and developed over time. At a second level, the existing histories can be set off against civic histories to give a more nuanced picture of community building. At the third level, people from each site will be recruited to be involved in the project; at least twenty people to be involved in the history part of the project and twenty people

from the arts side. They will be asked to contribute a 'life-history', which unlike a directed 'oral history' is more open, leaving room for more dynamically contextualized stories of community and wellbeing. These life-histories will be centred around themes of *change*, including shifting populations and social movements; *events* including major events that have joined or broken communities like wars, local celebrations, festivals, and catastrophes; *people*, including immigrants, refugees, children, the elderly and indigenous communities; and *places* incorporating social clusters and geographic boundaries; institutions and clubs organisations and civic forums. It should be noted that the examples given here are only intended as indicative, but are not exhaustive elements of life-histories. Such life-histories offer a deeply textured understanding of the mapping of community over time, through place, as well as enabling a dynamic history to be built without over-historicizing the project at the expense of the 'now'.

These historical resources will form the basis for what will become the 'community reports'. At regular stages during the project, a written draft of the archival history combined with the life-histories that 'talk back' to them be circulated amongst the community researchers, local service-providers and other interested parties. Their responses to the draft would form the basis of a 'community jury' feedback session. The outcomes of that session—hopefully aimed at concrete initiatives on ensuring community sustainability as formulated by community members—would then form the final chapter of a community report.

Another way of drawing community participants further into the project is to use photography as tool. The approach that will be used is known as reflexive photography. In this approach, community participant observers are given a disposable camera and invited to take photographs of their perceptions and understanding of community around the theme areas outlined above. Reflexive photography assumes that community members possess a great deal of 'inside knowledge' about the communities to which they belong. Community participant observers will also be invited to supplement their photos with meaningful photographs from their own collections as well as other personal artefacts that they believe expresses something about their community. They will also be given a mini-photo album and will be asked to arrange their photos and to think about the connections between them. The purpose of this is to encouraging the community researchers to begin to construct reflexively meaningful narratives about the places and events depicted in the photos.

Another complementary way of conducting the life history is to ask the community participant observers to take the 'outside' researcher on a walk through their community.

There are a number of potential advantages of using photography in this way. The first is that photos act as a prop to thinking about the themes and issues being investigated by the core research team. Hurworth (2003) notes that in some studies 'participants reported this technique promoted deeper levels of reflective thinking than interviews alone would have done'. Photos offer a tangible link that can be used to facilitate the development of ideas and thinking. Through the process of organizing the photos into an album, community researchers begin to construct their own meanings of community and how they relate to it.

A second benefit is that photography is itself a form of artistic expression. This approach thus sits neatly within the project's focus on community arts and wellbeing. In short, the research process becomes a community project in its own right. There are methodological advantages to blurring the boundaries in this way, the main one being that the research process itself becomes more transparent and familiar than might otherwise be the case. Since many, if not all, the community researchers are not professional researchers and may find research a rather novel and alien process, photography can help to make the process more familiar. This has particular relevance to the interview stage of the process. Rather than appearing as a formal interview, the interview process resembles an everyday dialogue.¹

The life histories will be complemented with social historical tools, including the creation of spatial histories of the research sites or 'social mapping'. We propose to undertake street-based research, which will involve selecting two intersecting streets in each research site, one that is primarily residential and another that has mostly commercial or community-oriented establishments. Exploring such streetscapes will provide a core referent point through which to ground the research. Telling the story of these intersecting streets is intended to become a way of telling the story of the community. While this story will necessarily be partial and will not reflect the entire community, it is intended to provide a spatial grounding for the research. Also, being aware that the entire story of a place cannot be told through two intersecting streets, a core consideration will be to supplement this account with others. The gaps or holes in the story of the community that are revealed by the limitations of the street mapping can therefore provide a spur to further ways of thinking about and mapping community.

2. Conjunctural analysis

Conjunctural analysis works at a higher level of theoretical abstraction than that of empirical analysis. It is intended to offer a means by which to lend some structure the various qualitative and quantitative data sources. It is conjunctural insofar as the analysis draws together the different data sources around various modes of social practice, and the ways in which they intersect with one another in the constitution of community. By such means, the empirical data can be organized and mapped across a number of different categories to build up a picture of the different ways in which communities are constituted. The modes of practice which will be focused on are the modes of production, modes of exchange, modes of communication, modes of organisation and modes of enquiry.

The notion of modes of practice draws on, expands and comprehensively re-works the Marxist idea of mode of production. In Marx's analysis, the mode of production refers to the combination of the productive forces (labour, machinery, raw materials and the like) and the relations of production (including relations of exchange, property, ownership rights, labour relations) which gives a society its particular character. For Marx, of course, the mode of production was central to understanding the nature of

¹ This point was reinforced during the preliminary stages of this project, when a member of research team attended an informal meeting between the Torch Theatre group and an elderly couple who had arrived from Greece just after World War Two and had lived all their lives in Australia in Mildura. Unprompted, the couple brought out their photo albums to help illustrate who they were and where they came from. Using photographs to talk about one's life and to explain one's connection to community is a everyday means by which people create meanings about the intertwining of their own lives with others.

society and social change in all historical epochs and in every society. In Marx's words, the mode of production 'conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general...' (From the Preface of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*). The mode of production therefore refers to the regime of social relations and material factors that structures other spheres of life beyond it.

The notion of 'mode of practice' shares with Marx's notion 'mode of production' the sense that these are transhistorical and are present in all societies, from tribal-traditional to modern-postmodern. At the same time it expands beyond simply process of production to incorporate the material factors and social relations of exchange, communication, inquiry and organisation more generally. Conceived thus, the different modes of practice identified here are intended to traverse both the phenomenological experience and structural dimensions, and the subjective and objective aspects of the ways in which communities are constituted. They do not refer simply to the objective structural character of societies but extend from the most concrete experience of being in the world to the structural dimensions of social life. Significantly, and departing from Marxist thought, no primacy is accorded to the mode of production in social explanation. Indeed, no single mode of practice outlined here is understood as being more analytically or theoretically foundational to the constitution of society than any other. Rather, societies are understood as constituted through the intersection and tensions between these different modes of practice.

Furthermore, the modes of practice identified here are conceived as orienting categories which can be used to delve deeper in to the mass of empirical data; to draw out the dimensions of the communities than empirical description might at first suggest. The reason for adopting these categories is that they provide a means of lending a measure of analytical coherence to the broad mass of empirical data, rather than as offering a definitive account of the ways in which communities are constituted. Nothing is absolute about the categories that have been outlined here; other ways of mapping and analysing the empirical data could be selected and used in place of others. As such, there may be modes of practice that are more relevant to the study of particular societies than the ones outlined here. In this respect, then other modes of practice might be identified. The only condition is that they describe and encapsulate a well-demarcated sphere of social relations and concrete conceptualized in a sufficiently general way as to work across different cultural and historical contexts.

A further point of clarification that can be made with respect to the different modes of practice is that not all of them need be applied to the analysis of every community. It may transpire that one or two modes of practice are of greater salience to the analysis of a particular research sites than others. Alternatively, the expertise and interests of a researcher may lie in the area of communications and organisation, rather than production or exchange. To reiterate the point made above, the modes of practice are intended as a means of structuring the analysis, not as a final and definitive statement on the ways in which communities are constituted. They offer a more or less comprehensive way of looking at community. Which ones are selected to analyse community will be guided by the dynamics of each particular community.

3. Integrational Analysis

Integrational analysis works at a still higher level of theoretical abstraction than the two approaches outlined in the preceding sections. The focus here is on the way that different modes of practice are structured and contribute to the constitution of society. In particular, four forms of social integration are identified: face-to-face integration, object-extended forms of integration, agency-extended integration and disembodied integration.

Before going further to describe these levels in more detail, two points of clarification might be made. The first is that these different forms of social integration are structured around different levels of socio-material abstraction. The notion of 'levels' here refers to ways of structuring basic ontological categories understood as basic or foundational categories, such as embodiment, time and space, within and through which social life is lived and enacted, and without which social life would be inconceivable. Following James, 'ontology' can be defined 'in the sense of the modes of being-in-the-world, the forms of culturally grounded conditions, historically constituted in the structures (recurrent practices) of human inter-relation' (James 1996, xii). This definition of ontology is distinct from its more common, metaphysical meaning specifying a type of philosophical inquiry that seeks to transcend the contingencies of history, society and culture to disclose universal structures of Being.

The second point to clarify is that each level can be thought of as constitutively more abstract than the one preceding it. In ordinary usage, to describe something as abstract is to distinguish it from more immediate or 'concrete' ways of approaching or apprehending the world. In this sense, 'abstract' refers to a conceptual or ideational process that stands in direct opposition to material practices and processes. In the present context, however, the notion of abstraction is understood in *socio-material* terms. This understanding of the term is not completely unknown within social theory. As Sharp points out, an analogous conception of the term can be found in Marx's analysis of the process of commodity abstraction. This refers to the process whereby the value of an object is detached from the particular characteristics that make it useful—its 'use-value'—and is reconstituted in the more general, universal form of 'exchange-value'. What is important to note about the process of commodity abstraction is that it is not simply a change in the way that an object is perceived or conceptualised. If this were all that was involved, then the process of commodity abstraction would hardly warrant further consideration. The significance of the commodity form for Marx, and its ubiquity, lies in part in the way in which it is constituted, and the consequences that this has for social relations more generally. In short, in the process of commodity abstraction, objects are re-constituted in socio-materially abstract terms. Sohn-Rethel makes this point out in his claim that the

essence of commodity abstraction ... is that it is not thought-induced; it does not originate in men's minds but in their actions. And yet this does not give 'abstraction' a merely metaphorical meaning. It is abstraction in its precise, literal sense. The economic concept of value resulting from it is purely by quantity and by applicability to every kind of commodity and service which can occur on the market ... It exists nowhere other than in the human mind but it does not spring from it. Rather it is purely social in character, arising in the spatio-temporal sphere of human interrelations (Sohn-Rethel 1978, 20).

Commodity abstraction thus realises a more abstract form of the object of exchange such that, unlike barter, or better still, gift exchange, the possibility of exchange is no longer dependent upon the subjective assessments of value by those who partake in the transaction.

Whereas Marx's analysis was confined to the immediate consequences of commodity abstraction to social relations of production and exchange, Sharp argues that commodity abstraction is a particular expression of a more general 'form of social life' in social relations and the social actors who participate in them are lifted out of particular contexts (Sharp 1985, 57). With commodity exchange, for example one no longer needs to maintain an ongoing bond with specific Others, to share their particular cultural assumptions or even to occupy the same spatial and temporal location as them, in order for exchange to successfully occur. Beyond relations of exchange, Sharp (1985) argues that the social relations of intellectuals offer another example of this abstract form of life. Through media such as writing, print, and more recently telecommunications, intellectual practice escapes the constraints of particular social settings, and is extended in space and time.

It is this socio-material account of abstraction, rather than an ideational account, that is relevant to the following elaboration of different levels of social integration. Each specifies a more constitutively abstract way of structuring social relationships. These are not intended as exhaustive accounts of the ways in which social integration takes place; there are any number of other ways of explaining and describing social integration. Nevertheless, they provide a working framework through which to understand the ways in which modes of practice are structured, interconnect and intersect with one another.

Face-to-face social integration

Depending on how the phrase is used, 'face-to-face social integration' could incorporate a very limited or a potentially enormous range of social relationships. In one sense, it could be interpreted literally as referring to encompass only those forms of social integration that are literally based on face-to-face relations. Alternatively, it might be defined more broadly, as a framing category through which social relations are structured and constituted. This would be to understand the face-to-face as a more expansive category, encompassing those forms of social integration which extend beyond the limits of face-to-face interaction but whose unity and coherence remains structured through categories such as embodiment, kin ties, blood relations and embeddedness within particular places. In Australian Aboriginal communities, for example, Uluru and the surrounding area and Oyster Cove (among others) are intimately tied to the formation of collective group identity and the personal subjectivity, as well as the physical and psychological well-being of the members of such communities. Even where such communities have been dispossessed of their country and fragmented by forces of colonialism, a connection to particular land and seascapes continues to be central to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait people's sense of being, and their bonds to community.

It is this more expansive notion of the face-to-face as a structuring category that is relevant to our concerns here. The notion of face-to-face social integration is thus intended to hold together forms of social integration that are enacted through social

relations of embodied presence, as well those that depend on categories of embodiment to maintain their internal coherence. What is central to this level of social integration, then, is that social life is structured within the limits of embodiment understood both literally as the corporeal body and in the more expansive sense outlined here.

Object-Extended and Agency Extended Social Integration

Object-extended social integration,² by contrast, is characterized by more temporally and spatially extended social relations than those grounded within face-to-face social bonds. This is not to suggest however that social relations of the face-to-face, such as those based on kin ties or attachment to place are withering away on their way to disappearing entirely, or are irrelevant at this level of integration. Rather, face-to-face relations are overlaid and reconstituted by more abstract forms of social extension. The defining feature of social integration at this level is that particular objects mediate social relations.

In the present context, the term ‘object’ has two senses. In one sense it refers to the ‘objectification’ of social relations, such that they take on ‘object-like’ properties. A reasonably straightforward example of this process is the changing nature of the monarchy. In the British political system, for example, the final assent of the monarch is still required to make a bill law. In a technical sense, then, the legitimacy of law derives from the will of a particular person whose position remains, through the practice of hereditary succession, grounded within social relations of kin and blood. The monarchy is thus substantially defined by embodiment and kin ties. Unlike the era of monarchical absolutism, however, such categories no longer structure or frame political authority. The monarch’s body and kin ties are no longer the primary or effective source of political authority. Rather, kin ties and blood relations are re-structured and re-configured within an overarching institutional setting (James 1996, 28-29). The dissolution of monarchical absolutism and its reconstruction in the form of constitutional monarchy, while by no means a straightforward historical or political process, is one illustration of the way in which social relations structured in terms of embodied categories, such as blood and kin, can be reconstituted within the terms of those structured via what might be thought of as ‘object-extended social relations’.

In codifying, formalizing and objectifying social relations, institutions like the monarchy, reframe social relations in a more general way. Neither the personal qualities of the individuals engaged in social interaction, or the particular settings within which they take place structure or order relations. The effect of this is that one no longer has to maintain an ongoing relationship to a specific Other or with a particular place for social relations to be consummated. Institutions, such as bureaucracies, civic organizations, political and social groups, function as intermediaries of forms of agency extension that expand the possibilities of binding individuals who are spatially and temporally dispersed (James 1996, 25-26).

Also included within this sense of objectification is the way in which institutions themselves reconstitute the world. An example of this which has relevance for the present project is comparing the notion of ‘territory’ which, for example, can be thought of as an objectification of place or land. Whereas place might be defined by

2 This is drawn from James’ notion of ‘object-mediated integration’. See Paul James, *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community*, 25.

the particular features that distinguish it from others, such as landforms and one's subjective relation to a particular locale, territory refers to the institutional mediation of place. To go back to the example of Indigenous people's connection to land, while many white Australians also have an attachment to places like Uluru and Arnhem Land most would not define themselves in terms of the particularity of the such places. Rather, non-Indigenous Australians are more likely to define themselves primarily in terms of their state or territory of residence and their status as an Australian citizen. While the attachment of non-Indigenous Australians to their country may be as deeply felt and significant as it is for Indigenous people, it is different insofar as it is institutionally mediated, resting as it does on the institutions of the state.³ This has practical implications insofar as the notion of territory enables different ways of talking about place. Since one's relationship to place is institutionally mediated, a more general connection to place is permitted. In some respects, then, territory allows one to think and talk about place in a way that can be presented and re-presented in a more abstract way, that is no longer tied to the immediacy of the surrounds within which one is situated.

Another example relevant to the study of community is the notion of 'population' which might, informed by the work of Foucault, be thought of as a similar objectification of 'the people'. As Foucault (1997, 73-79) points out, the emergence of population as a 'discursive object' is linked to a complex institutional framework (bureaucracies, hospitals, asylums) and practices with which they are associated (administration, economics, medicine, psychology, psychiatry). With the notion of population is that society is no longer understood as an undifferentiated multitude of individuals and groups, but can be viewed as a unified field of behaviour, with clearly demarcated boundaries and an internal coherence and order. It thus allows one, in a relative sense at least, to stand outside of the immediacy of social interaction and to re-frame one's relations to others in a more abstract way.

The notions of 'territory' and 'population' are not simply a different ways of conceiving, discussing or representing people and place. It is a different way of structuring and organising categories of embodiment, knowledge, time and space which have material consequences. The notion of 'population', as Foucault emphasizes, permits the possibility of intervening in the social in a more systematic way through the identification of specific patterns of behaviour and kinds of subjects. Population thus enables forms of social control that are not possible with the concept of 'the people'.

The second sense of the term 'object' is somewhat more straightforward. This refers to specific objects that carry social relations beyond the limits of embodied social integration. A good example of this is the process of commodity exchange discussed above. As we have seen, in the process of commodity exchange, and unlike barter or gift exchange, which are constituted primarily through relations of embodied-extension, commodity exchange is mediated by particular objects, namely money. The effect of this is that money enables exchange with an almost infinite number of Others scattered over larger expanses of space and time than is possible with gift or barter exchange. Money thus simultaneously breaks away from exchange relations set

3 This is not to say that the Indigenous person's relationship is not mediated at all. Ritual and myth, for example, may mediate the connection to land, however, both tend to be framed by embodied-extended forms of social integration.

within particular spatial and temporal contexts, between embodied persons, whilst re-integrating them at a higher level of social integration.

Disembodied-Extended Social Integration

Whereas object-extended forms social integration are distinctive insofar as they mediate social integration structured through face-to-face ties, the notion of 'disembodied-extended integration' is intended to capture those social relations whose underlying logic is to efface or radically bypass the kinds of boundaries that are integral to the more embodied levels of integration. This level of social integration is thus characterized by *detrterritorialized* and *disembodied* social relations. The means of disembodied-extension include those that are relatively established, such as print, as well as more recent means of extension such as telecommunications technologies. What is common to both print and telecommunications is that social relations break free from the corporeal limits of speech, enabling the possibility of social integration over larger spans of space and time.

A good example of this level of social integration which is relevant to the present research project is the emergence of national community. Benedict Anderson, for example, has highlighted the central role played by print, fused with capitalist exchange, in the emergence of the modern nation. The proliferation of mass-produced books and newspapers in the vernacular, he argues, was instrumental in breaking down the diversity of languages and dialects connected with particular geographical areas, thereby enabling the integration of large numbers of geographically separate people into a single national community (Anderson 1991, 44-47). An extreme expression of the same process can be seen in recent attempts by a number of European nation-states to reinvent themselves as brands. A pioneer of this phenomenon was New Labour's (ill-conceived and ill-fated) plan to 're-launch' Britain as 'Cool Britannia' as part of a more general process of 'modernization'. The aim of this was to create an image of Britain as a producer of high-tech consumer goods and services, and hub of entertainment and cultural production. Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, Peter van Ham (2001) notes that a number of other European countries have followed New Labour's lead. Acting on the advice of advertising consultants, van Ham reports that the Belgium Government

has decided to introduce a new logo and hip colors and will sport the cool Internet suffix '.be' as its international symbol. The overall aim of the campaign is to emulate Virgin, which, according to one Belgian advertising expert, 'isn't big, but you see it everywhere you look' (Van Ham 2001).

Similar branding strategies are under way in Estonia and Poland in an effort to create an image of these countries as an attractive destination for investment and tourists. While they may be clumsy and, as in the case of Cool Britannia, short-lived, the phenomenon of the 'brand-state', as van Ham refers to it, offers a neat illustration of disembodied-extended social integration. In the brand-state, social integration is no longer structured primarily through the institutional structures of the nation-state, nor in embodied social relations. This is not to say, though, that these are completely absent. In all of the examples listed above, institutions are the driving force behind such 're-branding' strategies. Moreover, brand states draw extensively on embodied categories, utilizing images of iconic geographical features and landmarks, ethnic traditions and histories as necessary components in creating the 'national brand'.

However, these features are re-constituted within the logic of abstract-extended forms of the social. Ethnicity, for example, is drawn upon as a surface motif, rather than as a deeply lived aspect of life that bears upon one's very engagement with the world, as in the case of face-to-face social integration. As van Ham (2001) observes, the use of ethnicity and history by brand states 'lacks the deep-rooted and often antagonistic sense of national identity and uniqueness that can accompany nationalism'.⁴ In the brand-state, the primary or dominant carriers of social integration are abstract—symbols, images, and icons of ethnicity, history and place—as opposed to stable and fixed attachments to place, body, ethnicity and common institutional bonds.

The phenomenon of the brand-state, structured through disembodied and deterritorialized relations is consistent with broader changes in relations of production of exchange. For example, many multinational companies have shifted away from the production of actual objects to the production and exchange of signs, ideas and images. The value of an object is thus increasingly derived from the signs, images and connotations that can be attached to the object. Nike CEO, Phil Knight, perfectly expresses this logic in claiming that: 'There is no value in making things any more. The value is added by careful research, by innovation and marketing' (quoted in Klein 2000, 197). Nike is now more a producer and co-ordinator of images, ideas and attitudes rather than a manufacturer of sports shoes and apparel; the actual tasks of making and selling sports wear having been contracted out to a globally integrated network of suppliers, producers, designers, none of whom are directly employed by Nike. A similar trend is evident in the dominance of finance market in exchange. As such, production and exchange are increasingly structured in terms of abstract-extended relations.

4. Categorical Analysis

Categorical analysis works at a still higher level of theoretical abstraction. At this level, the aim is to distinguish different ways of structuring the basic conditions of social life. Following on the previous point, it is assumed here that while there are different ways of structuring social relations—from face-to-face to disembodied-extended social integration—they still co-exist and intersect in a variety of different ways, do not stand in relations of equivalence to one another. Rather, there is a tendency for one level of social integration to stand in a position of relative dominance to the others such that it structures and re-constitutes them. In so doing, particular forms of social integration carry on, but are simultaneously reconfigured and restructured by the dominant one. Different ontological formations provide a means of analytically and descriptively taking hold of these distinctions.

4 In van Ham's argument: 'By marginalizing nationalist chauvinism, the brand state is contributing greatly to the further pacification of Europe.' This is somewhat mistaken. The brand state does not entail the end of nationalism, but rather a different form of nationalism; one which works at the abstract level of integration. James refers to this as the 'postmodern nation', arguing that whereas 'the modern nation-state was experienced as both publicly and intimately structuring one's life-world, then the postmodern nation is increasingly experienced as an unstructured, and at times even optional, background choice: for example the distinctions between race, ethnicity and nationality have become further stretched with nationality becoming less and less inscribed in one's body.' Thus, the nation is integrated through abstract-extension rather than the corporeal or institutional. See Peter van Ham, "The Rise of the Brand State: The Postmodern Politics of Image and Reputation," *Foreign Affairs* and Paul James, *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community*, 35.

At this level of analysis, then, the focus is the ways in which the most basic ontological categories are structured and constituted. Time and space, culture and nature, gender and embodiment, and knowledge, language and theory are examples of ontological categories. Such categories are foundational insofar as they are inescapable to one's being in the world. Social life is constituted within and, barring the visions of cyber-utopians, will continue to be lived within gendered bodies within space and time; shaped by culture and nature, informed by knowledge about the social world. Such categories are fundamental to the manner in which social life is constituted.

This is not to say that these categories are unchanging, or transcend the constraints of history and culture. On the contrary, while remaining foundational to social life, the manner in which such categories are constituted and lived in practice is shaped by historical and cultural change.

The body might serve as an example. For example, the body in Western culture has moved from a being regarded as an eternal and more or less taken for granted, to a 'site' which can be subjected to radical 'customization'. The body is thus constituted and reconstituted through the different structures within which social life is lived. In the first instance, the body is understood as an integrated whole, it is constituted through a more collective sense of nature. Modification is, in relative terms at least, constrained around the limits inherent to the body itself. In radical body-modification, by contrast, the body is re-constituted as fluid and open to enormous change. The body is reconstituted as a series of parts that are able to be manipulated at will through advance medical techniques and interventions. The body becomes infinitely malleable; bone, skin, cartilage, muscle, ligaments, right down to individual cells are understood as individual parts which can be taken out of the original relationships in which they are constituted and reconfigured in ways which, in an increasing number of instances, are wholly unprecedented. Such radical modification moves outside of the biological limits of the body, re-framing these via techno-sciences (see for example Caddick 1992).

The patterning of ways in which these are constituted and structured, the dominant level through which these basic ontological categories are constituted and structured can be described in terms of an overarching ontological formation. An ontological formation refers, then, to the dominant form of life through which these particular ontological categories are structured and constituted. For the purposes of clarification, four ontological formations can be distinguished: tribalism, traditionalism, modernism and postmodernism. As a general way of distinguishing these, it can be said that in social formations constituted in the dominance of tribalism, time and space, culture and nature, gender and embodiment, and knowledge, language and theory are structured through the primacy of face-to-face social relations, whereas postmodern ontological formations are structured through more abstract forms of social life.

Presented in this schematic way, the different ontological formations outlined here might be interpreted as referring to epochal distinctions, such that it might be thought that there is a linear movement from tribal to traditional to modern to a postmodern ontological formation. The implication of such a view is that, for example, traditional practices are absent from postmodern social formations. This is not the suggestion here. The claim here, rather, is that these different ontological formations are intended

to specify the overarching structuring form through which ontological categories are structured. A postmodern ontological formation does not therefore preclude the modern, the traditional or the tribal or vice versa. What it is intended to signify, rather, is that more abstract forms of social practice frame and constitute tribal, traditional and modern practice.

For example, tribal practices might continue within a formation dominated by postmodern practices and meanings. Indigenous people, for instance, may continue to recognize and maintain totemic relationships, while simultaneously linking this to the global tourism market and flows of goods. While the recognition of the totem in a day-to-day sense may remain relatively unchanged, and may be as deeply felt as their predecessors, the framing of that relationship may be entirely different. Where previously the framing ontological formation was set within an overarching cosmology which was the framing condition of that relationship, the global tourism market along with flows of goods and services now provides the framing of that relationship. Within the settings of that particular community, the cosmology may continue to frame such practices, while at the same time being overlaid by and drawn into a more overarching ontological frame. Recognizing the dominance of a particular ontological formation is not therefore to suggest that it is beset by the intersection and contradiction of different social structure, which may be in tension or outright contradiction that ontological formation.

In summary then our method works across four levels of analytical abstraction from the empirical to the categorical.

Chris Scanlon