

## TOWARDS A COSMOPOLITAN ANTHROPOLOGY OF ANYONE:

A response to Brigitte Lewis

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### ABSTRACT

*In her article, 'Multiple Peripherals One Cosmopolitanism' (SITES 13(1), 2016), Brigitte Lewis offers a 'feminist analysis of cosmopolitanism' (1) and reveals the weaknesses of the latter as an 'emancipatory political practice' (11). She focuses criticism on my book, *Anyone, the Cosmopolitan Subject of Anthropology* (2012). The book, Lewis feels, is 'tied up in an androcentric worldview that does not 'make space for gender and the complexities of woman's place' (7); making 'masculinist versions of us all' in a false universalisation, it omits the subject as 'a lesbian woman' (2–6). I am grateful to Brigitte Lewis for the attention she has paid to my work. I am also grateful to the editor of SITES for this opportunity to reply to Lewis's critique and to elaborate on my position concerning the nature of cosmopolitanism. In what follows, I introduce some of the main propositions of *Anyone, the Cosmopolitan Subject of Anthropology*, first, and then address Lewis's specific criticisms.*

**Keywords:** cosmopolitanism; Anyone; individuality; human nature; human rights

### I

Immanuel Kant was the first modern thinker to use the term 'anthropology'. He used it in association with 'cosmopolitanism': anthropology as the science of the human was to be a cosmopolitan, an emancipatory, project. An essential commonality undergirded human differences – both natural differences and the sociocultural distinctions that human beings had invented for themselves. Anthropology would come to know a universal human nature and how it came to express itself in difference. This knowledge might emancipate human beings – globally – from the ignorances and the inequalities and violences of an

*ancien regime* that followed merely traditional paths in an unreasoning fashion. It was ignorant to see people as *essentially* in possession of different natures on account of their wealth or social status, their religious belief or unbelief, their age, their race, their gender, their nationality; and it was inegalitarian to ground social structures in these differences; and it led to violence when people based their identities on these social categories and divided the world into insiders and outsiders. Anthropology was that empirical discipline that brought humanity to a mature recognition of its universal capacities – of what human beings could and, by rights, should make of themselves as freely acting beings – giving onto a ‘cosmopolitan law’ that recognised all human beings as citizens of a universal state of humankind (Kant 1798).

*Anyone, the Cosmopolitan Subject of Anthropology* is written in a hopeful, Kantian vein. It looks forward, idealistically, to both a science and a society that is not in thrall to identity politics – to culturalism and multiculturalism – and eschews strategic essentialism. It regards these as contemporary counterparts of that *ancien regime* that would divide people from one another and from themselves on the basis of invented, inessential and rhetorical statuses and devices: that trap people in classes and categories. A cosmopolitan anthropology is a project to emancipate from category-thinking; at the least, to put culture in its place and to recognise the fundamental universalities and commonalities that exist beyond it: to know these latter and to have the opportunity to live them in a civil and civilized way (Rapport 2012a). Beneath the surface of cultural differences, as Michael Jackson writes, are ‘comparable imperatives, logics, and dispositions’ (2004, 153, 206); anthropology ‘annuls the language of cultural essence’, recognising cultures, genders, ethnicities, nations, to be merely the contingent contexts in which people live their humanity (2002, 118).

I conceive of anthropology as a three-part process comprising knowledge, aesthetics, and ethics. Anthropology would *know* the nature of human being; anthropology would also know how to know: *how to discern and how to represent* the nature of the human; finally, given what has been learnt and inscribed, anthropology would treat the *moral and political consequences* in train. A science of the human, an aesthetics of the human and an ethics of the human are the components of an ambitious, Kantian discipline. Human nature is there to be known by us – the essence of who we (all) are – and human nature is there to be represented, to be communicated by us, and human nature is there to be cherished, nourished, secured by us. Humankind is not the only kind of organic life, and the organic and inorganic are indissolvably connected in the universe, but knowing ourselves and disseminating this knowledge appropriately (aesthetically) and deploying this knowledge ethically so that that

nature and the precious organic (fleeting) life to which it gives rise might be recognised, respected and best accommodated socially and politically, is where our human positioning of ourselves in the universe might begin.

In using the term ‘cosmopolitanism’, rehabilitating it from ancient Greek philosophy, Kant recognised a duality inherent in the human condition. On the one side was *cosmos*, the human whole, the species to which all belonged equally and alike. On the other side was *polis*, the actual human life lived locally and individually, each one unique. The nature of human being spanned this apparently paradoxical arc between the universal and the unique, between species wholeness and individual embodiment. *Humanity represented itself in individuality*. Each individual embodiment was a paradigmatic, a ‘perfect’, representation of the human – no single body was more human or less human than another – and yet this individuality was a manifestation of a nature that all shared. The cosmopolitan project of anthropology was to traverse this arc, interrogate its tensions and unravel the apparent paradox whereby human commonality lived as individual difference.

*Anyone* is the name I would give to this individual, universal, human actor (Rapport 2010a). It is *Anyone’s* life that I would know, that I would aesthetically represent, and that I would ethically secure. It is by juxtaposing *Anyone’s* life against *Anyone* else’s – by zigzagging from one precious uniqueness to another (Rapport 1994, 30–36) – that I would hope to accede to a picture of what the unique lives share: how they emerge from a common human nature.

Two key distinctions may usefully be deployed in the analytical process of bringing together the human and the individual. The first is between *capacity* and *substance*. *To be human* can be said to be in possession of certain universal capacities, as birthright; *to live a human life* is to enact or substantiate, to fulfil, these capacities in an individual and unique way (Rapport 2010b). I am alone in how I imagine, in how I feel pain, in how I am pleased or displeased: in how I make sense of what my human senses inform me surrounds and infiltrates my body. But so is *Anyone*: it is the fate of every human being to imagine, to feel pain, to be pleased or displeased, to make sense – and so on – and to do so uniquely, and alone in their bodies. There are common human capacities – capabilities *and* liabilities – and there is unique substance to each and every manifestation of those capacities in an actual life. It is the anthropologist’s work to traverse this arc. From the individual life met in the field (or the archive), juxtaposed against other individual lives, what might I deduce concerning the universal capabilities and liabilities that infuse them? From the individual I learn of the human; and again, from earlier positings of human nature I may

anticipate the range within which a particular individual life might be lived. I move analytically across the arc from the individual to the human and from the human to the individual. (Human capacity includes liabilities as well as capabilities: I mean that to be human is to be prone to certain diseases and disabilities and limitations as well as potentialities and abilities; it is as human to suffer from cancer or cirrhosis of the liver – from a life that ends in death – as it is to be able to formulate the Theory of Relativity, to write *The Waves*, or to campaign for universal suffrage.)

A second key distinction in analytically bringing together the human and the individual is between *ontology* and *symbolology*. The ontological is a recognition of certain natural facts of our condition and of the universe: ontology describes the nature of being. The human species and the individual human being are ontological facts. Here is a truth that exists whether we recognise it – or value it or wish it – or not. There is an animal species that we designate as *homo sapiens*, and that species manifests itself in individual human bodies, reproduces itself by way of individual human bodies. Whether we designate that species as '*homo sapiens*' or as '*squiggly wiggly*', whether we designate that species as anything at all or fail to come to a knowledge of that species' existence, it will exist and it will have a determining effect on the lives we lead. Due to the ontology of our humanity we cannot fly, we die after a certain number of years; we are also able to consciously reflect on our capabilities and liabilities and endeavour to interfere with them. Part of our ontology as human beings is our facility with symbols: we construct languages and cultures and societies based on symbolic vehicles – words, musical notes, bodily gestures, material artefacts – that signal certain kinds of sense. We symbolically signal identity, belonging, value, hierarchy, worth, health, mood. In Clifford Geertz's well-known image, human beings weave webs of significance out of systems of symbols that enable them to live largely suspended in cultural spaces and social structures. Nevertheless, these symbolic worlds *are* constructions. They are fictions, things that human beings, individually and collaboratively, have made – and made up; they are not truths in the way that ontological facts are truths. Indeed, cultural webs of significance must attach themselves to natural reality; as Ernest Gellner phrased it (1995, 8), it is the natural construction of society that guarantees the cultural construction of reality. The distinction between ontology and symbolology is a fundamental one for an anthropological science of the human. It is a distinction between truths that stand for themselves, truths that abide whether or not they are humanly recognised, *truths that are independent*, and truths that depend on human construction and recognition, and that disappear as soon as their being believed in and invested in ceases. The natural modesty of women, the nature of men as sexual predators,

the domestic as a natural sphere for women, the civic as a natural sphere for men – these are fictions, symbolic truths that pertain to a particular culturo-religious construction. They do not exist if we have no knowledge of them or abjure them. But the fact that reproduction of the human species calls for ‘male’ and ‘female’ elements to come together in a specific way is an ontological truth that we cannot ignore or wish away if we wish for progeny. Equally, human individuality, the fact that we occupy distinct bodies with their own metabolisms, their own consciousnesses, their own lifetimes, is an ontological truth; it abides whether or not it is culturally recognised or valued, whether or not it forms the basis of social-structural incorporation. There is individuality and there is all manner of historico-cultural construction of the identity of social persons: individualism, dividualism; persona, personage, personne; and so on. One does not confuse or conflate the distinction as a cosmopolitan anthropologist – one does not confuse the difference between cultural fictions and ontological truths – and one interrogates the distances between them, the fit between them. Given the ontological nature of humanity and of individuality, is this culturo-symbolic construction appropriate? Is it a good fit? Is this the best way – a civilized way – in which our nature as individual human beings, as *Anyone*, might be culturally expressed and socially accommodated?

In short, there are matters of natural (ontological) fact, and there are matters of cultural (symbolical) construction. ‘Civilization’ might be the name one gives to a meeting between the symbolical and the ontological such that the former does not traduce the latter, through ignorance or vested interest or partiality (Rapport 2012b). In particular, the universal expression of human capacity that *is* the embodied individual, that is *Anyone*, must be emancipated from the arbitrary categorisations of sociocultural identification, from what John Stuart Mill called ‘the despotism of custom’ (1963, 194); so that the way *Anyone* conducts and projects its life – its gratifications, its aesthetic choices, its ‘cultural’ constructions – is as far as possible an expression of its own will, a fulfilment of its own substantiation of its human, capacious birthright.

## II

There are five main criticisms that Brigitte Lewis levels against *Anyone, the Cosmopolitan Subject of Anthropology*:

1. *Anyone* is conceptualized as ‘androgynous at best, excluding by omission’ (12); at worst, *Anyone* is ‘a white heterosexual man’ (14) who ‘contributes to the management, exploitation and domination of “others”, especially women’ (18). The book does not deal with ‘the various positions occupied by a sub-

ject in the world', such as those from which Lewis would see her awareness deriving: 'white, lesbian, middle class (sessional casual academic) Australian, gendered female, able-bodied' (2).

According to Brigitte Lewis, people in the real world ('particularly women') are 'always bound by categories of social difference and hierarchies of power that shove them into identities' (3); amid 'irremovable daily discrimination', 'women have no place to "become"' (13). I agree this is iniquitous. The issue is how to overcome such delimiting categorisation. For Lewis, to critique gender as a social category is to elaborate on the 'multi-positional varieties of womanhood that exist today' (4), perhaps as she does herself, above, in her self-description, and thus to achieve empowerment through self-identifying in categorical terms that are currently stigmatised or minoritarian. The category of woman 'is needed as a form of both potential oppression and a symbol of emancipation' (17): "Look, I exist and I am not alone" (4).

I disagree that to overcome invidious sociocultural categorisation is via strategic essentialism, to embrace the stigmatised category: 'woman', 'nigger', 'Jew'. I disagree, too, that how Brigitte Lewis produces knowledge of the world around her is by way of her being 'white', 'lesbian', 'middle class' ('sessional casual academic') 'Australian', 'gendered female', 'able-bodied'. These labels do not come close to describing or containing who she is in herself. They might be the convenient (limiting, homogenising) terms of others, terms that she might feel she has had to come to terms with in engaging with these others, but they do not describe or contain her personal awareness. No commonly shared terms ever could. This is the point: to emancipate the individual from symbolic collectivisation, homogenisation and essentialisation. The only collectives we truly belong to are ontological ones: our human species, and its higher zoological classes (*genus* (homo), *family* (hominid), *order* (primate), and so on). Moreover, as living exemplars of *homo sapiens* we are individually unique. A civilised society, I have contended, is one that endeavours to come to terms with this uniqueness. To isolate an aspect of that identity only, and to give it a public name – 'woman', 'lesbian', 'Jew', 'communist', 'anthropologist', 'footballer', 'ale drinker' – and to fight political battles in those (partial) terms – however significant that aspect of a self-identity might seem to be, is to fight in the wrong terms. Strategic essentialism cannot overcome essentialisation.

I would recall the prognosis of Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnerre, liberal member of the new French Assembly of 1789, endeavouring to codify Enlightenment principles of human universalism into a new Constitution: 'To the Jews as individuals one must grant everything; to the Jews as a "race" one must

grant nothing', he concluded. In emancipating the Jews (and Protestants and others) and granting them citizenship, post-Revolutionary France would also insist that there are no identities that must legally, politically and morally be recognised and guaranteed besides individuality and humanity. Clermont-Tonnerre's was a cosmopolitan vision of overcoming the fiction of cultural (religious, ethnic, sexual, professional) belonging as collective essence and identity. History starts afresh with each new individual life: previously ascribed symbolic identities are dangerous warping fictions that must be eschewed without strategic compromise. The only true categories are 'human' and 'individual'; the unique nature of our individual human being – the fact that each individual is a minority of one – is the project of a cosmopolitan anthropology and of a civilised society to accommodate. 'All the same – that is, human; each one different – that is, in themselves. Together men form a community of exceptions in the world' (Finkielkraut 2001, 80).

2. 'Cosmopolitan politesse' sounds like a rallying cry for respectability politics, for political quietude – 'playing nice' – and for not having the 'bad manners' to 'express opinions that challenge dominant hegemonies, oppression, patriarchy and male privilege' (5–6). Politesse is too 'utopian' an idea; we do not live in such a democratic world.

What form might an accommodation of individuality take in a civilised society that would avoid the distortions and delimitings born of extraneous categorisations, labels and stereotypification? The first is surely, as Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnerre proclaimed, a recognition in law of the individual as citizen. The individual is the unit of societal belonging: *Anyone* belongs to the society by virtue of his or her individuality, as an equal member. It is the individual who is the holder of rights and the focus of social services. And no other, symbolic (fictive) entity shares such rights or belonging or attention: communities, ethnicities, religions, genders. If individuals nevertheless pursue such sub-societal affiliations – as members of communities and so on – then this is part of their rights, provided that such affiliations are the voluntary 'achievements' of those individuals (whose rights to 'exit' and choose again are similarly safeguarded). It is crucial, however, that such collectives are not mistaken for things-in-themselves – with identities greater than the sum of the individuals who constitute their existence at any one time.

A second form of accommodation of individuality might be an interactional code by which, on a momentary and informal basis, *Anyone* might be recognised and included in society. The nature of the code is to presuppose the individuality of interacting citizens but not to presume an intimacy with them:

not to know their private selves or even to assume that private truths can be read off from public expressions. This is a balancing act: the code balances between a public respect for the individual and a public remoteness from what is individual. The public space does not aspire to be one privy to the intimacies of personal selfhood, but nor does it massify or stereotype the societal members such that they are overwritten by a collective label. 'Politesse' is the term I would employ to describe a kind of cosmopolitan 'good manners'. It comprises both a polite style of general, public exchange *and* an ethic of individual dignity and freedom. Deploying a cosmopolitan politesse one anticipates individual difference and respects that difference without compromising it according to a blunt, essentialising common denomination: the individual as 'woman', 'Jew', 'working class'.

Is this utopian? Certainly it is idealistic. But it is also realistic. The other with whom one is faced in social interaction is always first and foremost an individual other, however they might affiliate themselves (or not) and whatever the world-views and life-projects they construe for themselves. One should not expect to, and nor should one be expected to, know or even necessarily care about these world-views and life-projects tastes so long as they are freely acquired and not ascribed, and so long as they gratify and fulfil the other. The collective project that self and other share is the society, its laws and interactional codes, that assure *Anyone* an equal place: equal space for each to come into his or her own. If this is secured then there are no sub-societal collective projects – pertaining to class or gender, religion or ethnicity – that demand public recognition or special treatment. The interests, the identities, the tastes, the beliefs, the values of each individual societal member are unique, and to be recognised as such, with each having an equal right to their fulfilment. As a parent, a neighbour, a fellow society-member, I do not forget the individuality, the radical otherness, the precious singularity of the other with whom I interact. As a fellow professional, football-supporter, religious congregationalist, or team-member, I do not overwrite the fundamental separation and difference upon which any collective mutuality is based: fellow-members of cultural 'clubs' are able to come together and to imagine commonality – aspire to belonging, enjoy companionship – *because of* commonly embodied individual consciousnesses that ultimately keep them distinct. Given our individual natures, any proposition of collective symbolic sameness is a 'phantasy' of groupness (Laing 1968, 81).

3. It is 'the very definition of sexism' to write a book that fails to include 'even one feminist or woman-centred cosmopolitanism' (16).



There is only one cosmopolitanism, in my understanding. It concerns, as I have outlined, the knowing, the communicating and the securing of humankind and the individual human being. What is to be made, then, of the plethora of adjectival cosmopolitanisms – the ‘plural discrepant cosmopolitanisms’ (Clifford 1998) – that are now being proposed? We read of occupational cosmopolitanism (Hannerz 2007); urban Caribbean cosmopolitans (Wardle 2000); rural Togolese cosmopolitans (Piot 1999); upper-class cosmopolitan Cairene youth (Peterson 2011); middle-class cosmopolitan Indian families (Lamb 2009), working-class Pakistani cosmopolitan migrants (Werbner 1999); cosmopolitan dancers and choreographers (Wulff 2009); cosmopolitan patriots (Appiah 1998), and others. A less than controversial accommodation of these ‘types’ is to say that here are accounts of human beings in different societies and cultural milieux, occupying different positions in a social structure and different geographical locations, all of whom aspire to or practise a human life that overcomes the categorical bounds of a merely contingent, cultural world: all seek to escape from the arbitrariness and limitation of local customary practices. Does emancipation from different kinds of sociocultural, categorical limitation call for different kinds of cosmopolitan awareness? I suspect that this is Brigitte Lewis’s perception; precisely, she does not find the concept of *Anyone* sufficiently sympathetic to the specific needs of emancipation from patriarchy. Indeed, cosmopolitanism *tout court* is insufficient for imagining a ‘human rights based feminism’ (1).

No doubt there are different local, political and sociocultural battles to be fought. But I would say three things. First, an eschewing of category-thinking is, I believe, the foundation of *all* emancipations from culturo-symbolical constructions that are in ignorance of the ontological truths of our humanity and our individuality. We move towards a human civilization based on cosmopolitanism’s threefold promise: *true knowledge* of human capabilities and liabilities; *a history of examples* of how individual human beings have substantiated their human capacities and invented worlds and lives for themselves; *an ethical-cum-political project* whereby the best current knowledge concerning the human and the history of individual human lives translate into social arrangements that best offer individuals security and the space to come into their own: to fulfil their capacities for self-invention and self-gratification. Second, these latter social arrangements must accommodate those individuals who would share cultural tastes and choices with others: who would form cultural ‘clubs’ on the basis of religious belief or professional practice or recreational enjoyment. Third, these expressions of personal taste are, however, treated as *epiphenomenal* upon the foundational phenomenology of our being human and individual. In other words, a civilised society recognises its members as be-

ing first and foremost individual human beings, citizens alike, whatever may be their aesthetic choices of culture and community, their voluntary identification as ‘Jew’ or ‘anthropologist’ or ‘Melbournian’ or ‘woman’ or ‘lesbian’. An aesthetics of cultural identity is not confused with ontological human and individual identities, with essential capacities and rights to become *Anyone*.

4. To invoke an Enlightenment heritage is to canonise a Western, rational, objectifying, male subject, and to omit the whole person: to ‘shrivel our abilities to use our emotions and bodies as sites of knowing’ (6).

I do not believe this to be the case. I understand ‘the Enlightenment’ as a shorthand for that moment, and that socio-political and intellectual movement, whereby, in Max Weber’s terms, life lived on the basis of merely ‘traditional’ knowledge – religious, cultural, customary, ‘commonsensical’ – gave way to a ‘scientific’ appropriation of the world. The effects have been revolutionary. Ernest Gellner summarized:

‘Cognitive relativism is nonsense, moral relativism is tragic. [However,] the recognition of the inequality of cognitive claims in no way involves unequal treatment of people – quite the reverse. (...) Valid knowledge ignores and does not engender frontiers. One simply cannot understand our shared social condition unless one starts from the indisputable fact that genuine knowledge of nature is possible and has occurred, and has totally transformed the terms of reference in which human societies operate.’ (1995, 8)

Weber described this transformation as the triumph of rationality but to my mind that need not be narrowly interpreted as excluding the emotions or bodies. The Enlightenment insisted on the right and the propriety of human beings to know themselves and to arrange themselves according to their own, mortal, bodily capacities – without necessary supernatural or customary warrant. Moreover, as Karl Popper elaborated, no source of knowledge was rendered inadmissible in this Enlightenment project: imagination, intuition, reason, observation, even tradition; scientific discovery was akin to ‘story-telling, myth-making and the poetic imagination’. Simply put, all forms of knowing were subject to evidential processes of testing, critique and refutation; none had *a priori* authority as a guarantee or criterion of truth (Popper 1980, 378, 1997, 7).

5. *Anyone* is described in the book as ‘he or she’ or ‘s/he’, as ‘him or her’, thus forgetting the need to ‘move away from such exclusive and asymmetrical, dichotomised distinctions and non-binary personhood as decreed by the

## Transgender movement' (2).

Brigitte Lewis is right, in that 's/he', 'his or her', and so on, may not do justice to how an individual chooses to name their gender or their sexuality. There are two issues here. *Ontologically* we know there to be a genetic spectrum between what we term 'masculine' and 'feminine' traits in an individual human body (the middle portion of the spectrum being occupied by 'hermaphroditic' or 'androgynous' individuals). It is also a truth, however, that sex-dichotomous traits (masculine and feminine) must come together for the sake of human reproduction. One does not escape a version of 'he' and 'she' here. *Historico-culturally*, the English language has not to date overcome a dichotomous distinction between 'he' or 'she', 'male' or 'female', to any widespread extent. I wrote *Anyone, the Cosmopolitan Subject of Anthropology* in a way I felt to be gender-neutral: *Anyone* was any individual human being. I did not make it sufficiently clear, however, that that ontological body – in which normally a majoritarian genetic make-up as male or female occurs – gives onto individual lives in which are substantiated decisions on gender and sexuality that can exceed the historical and traditional resources of a language to accommodate them. *Anyone* is not sufficiently described as 'he or she', 'him or her'.

## III

I repeat my thanks to Brigitte Lewis for her scholarly engagement. Even where we disagree on the means, I believe we share an anthropological end. 'Recognising human beings as all connected by humanity yet distinctly individual, as cosmopolitanism does, is beautiful in theory, [a worthy aspiration, while] to achieve it we have a long, long way to go' (Lewis, 16).

## NOTES

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