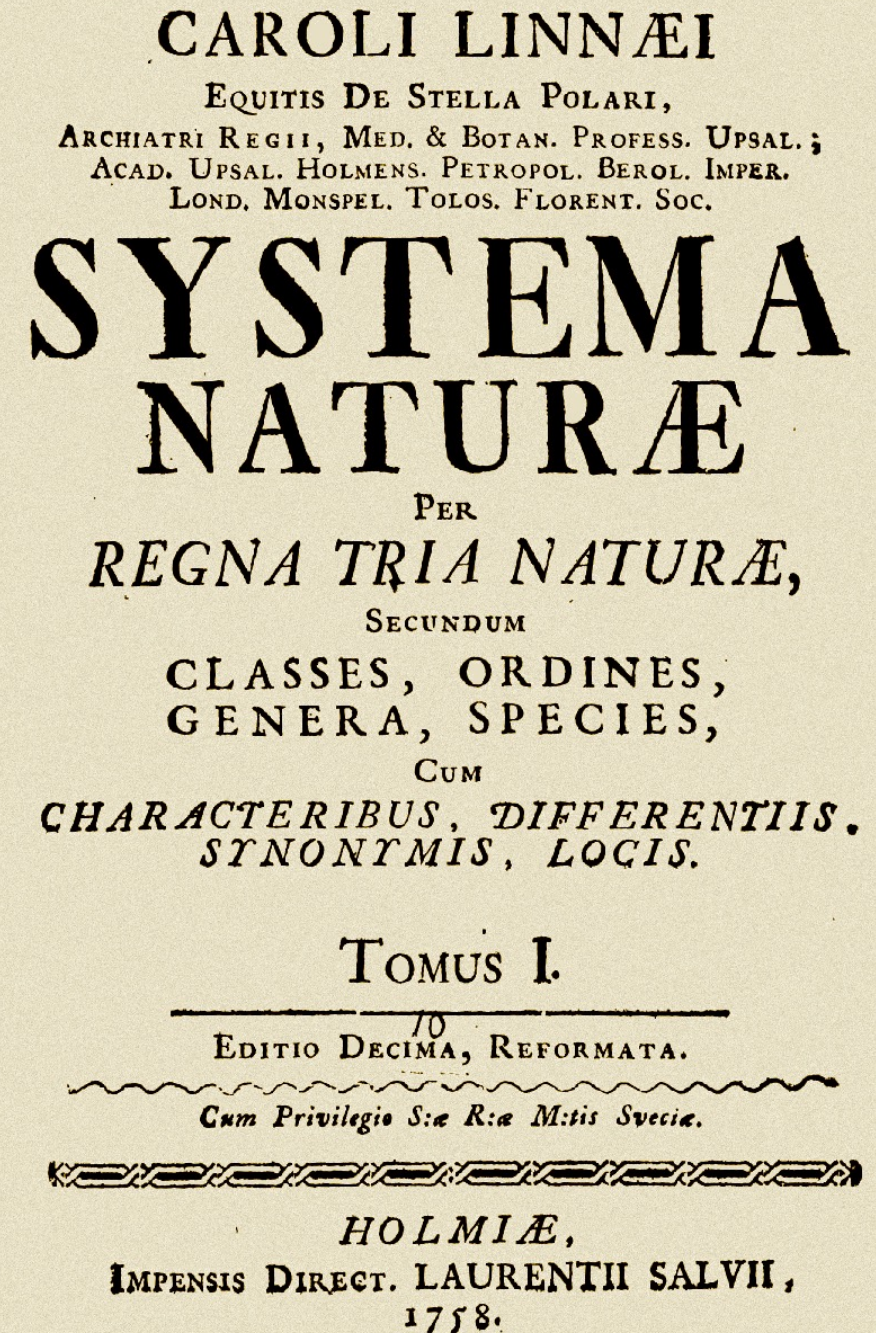


Natural Kinds, Human Kinds, and Classification

Tuomas Vesterinen, 7.3.2023



Overview

1. Recap on Kuhan & Relativism
2. Classification, Realism and Natural Kinds
3. Human/Social Kinds and the Looping Effect

Recap: Kuhn

- E.g. Copernican revolution
- E.g. “Melancholia” and “depression” are not co-extensive, which makes direct comparisons between their respective conceptions and explanations difficult.
- In art: modern vs. postmodern art (Brian McHale); institutional view of art (G. Dickien)
- Technological revolutions: overhaul of what is appreciated and ability to provide better solutions (not to solve puzzles) (Niiniluoto: Tekniikan filosofia)

- Strong program of science, postmodern approaches & Science war
- Alan Sokal case 1996
- Bruno Latour: Truth is socially constructed?

KUHN, INSTRUMENTALISM, REALISM

- Incommensurability seemed to lead to relativism: truth plays no role in scientific progress
- (Most) Logical positivists were instrumentalists: they believed that theories had meaning only as descriptions of observable things
- Theory is only an instrument for organizing our observations, postulated unobservables are not real (e.g. atom, electron, subconsciousness)
- Part of the problem was that they relied on a holistic view of meaning (theory as a whole determines the reference of its terms)
- In contrast, realists argue that, for example, the aim of astronomy is truth about the movements of astronomical objects
- Realists argue that unobservable objects of research and classification are real → natural kinds

Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge (Found by T. Kuhn)

- Animals are divided into
- *(a) belonging to the emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) quaking as though mad, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camel-hair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.*
- *(Cf. "Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind", George Lakoff)*

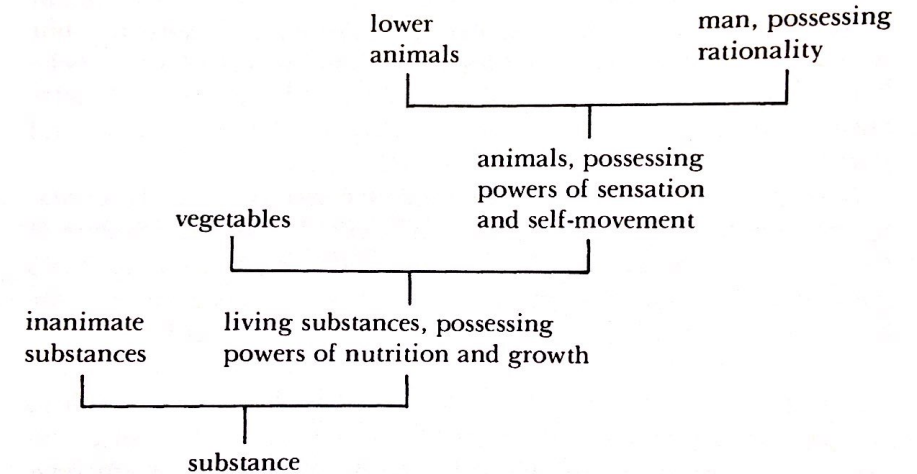
Scientific Realism and Natural Kind

- Scientific terms or concepts ideally refer to natural groupings or kinds that reflect the natural world
- Plato: “carving the nature at its joints”
- Classificatory concepts enable cognitive capacities: we can gather knowledge of the world
- Natural kinds vs. arbitrary groupings (things on my left side) or social constructs (Money? Race? Gender?)

Aristotle

- "Scientific definition of a *species* is by *genus* and *difference*, and so the *definition of the essence* of man is 'rational animal'. Rationality, the difference, is "the principle thing in a man's nature," and the properties flow from the difference "as a natural emanation". Accidents are attributes that are not thus connected with the essence: the substance can in principle be without them even when it never is in fact, as crows are never without blackness." (Ayers 1981)

Porphyrian tree



³ I quote from T. Spencer: *The Art of Logic* (London, 1628; Scolar Press facsimile, Menston, 1970), ch. XI, pp. 59f.

John Locke

- Mechanistic philosophy: “all differences are differences of degree, and everything is in principle indefinitely mutable.. Differences in spatial quantity and ordering and motion of the parts of things.. How we rank them is a matter to be more or less pragmatically determined.”
- Nominal essence: the boundary is precise because we draw it, nature does not supply it. We have no access to the real essence.

Birth of the “natural kind”

- William Whewell (1794-1866): *Kinds* are the groups that we refer to with our general terms.
- John Stuart Mill: *finite kinds* and *real kinds*
 - *Finite kinds*: Have only one thing in common. E.g. all green things, all the things on my left side.
 - *Real kinds*: Enable inductive inferences due to shared similarities. E.g. Tigers, chemical elements, planets.
- Charles Peirce: Laws of nature hold natural kinds together

Natural kind semantics

- Logical empiricism & descriptivism (Frege and Russell)
 - Each term is associated with a description (or a bundle of descriptions) that determine its reference
- Kuhn & Feyerabend: When descriptions in different theories are contradictory they are not talking about the same thing -> incommensurable
 - Therefore, there is no growth of knowledge about the thing
- Scientific realism & causal theory of reference (Kripke and Putnam)
 - Theoretical terms refer to unobservable real kinds
 - Descriptions do not determine reference
 - Reference is fixed by ostension or description whence its use is passed along in a causal-historical chain.
 - Scientists can have contradictory beliefs about the same thing

Essentialism and Naturalism about natural kinds

- *Essentialist* approach defines kinds as natural based on shared necessary and sufficient conditions that are determined by, for instance, microstructure, nature or intrinsic properties
- Essentialist usually argue that natural kinds are upheld by laws of nature (e.g. Peirce, Kripke 1980, Putnam 1975, Ellis 2001).
- *Naturalists* defend natural kinds from an epistemic point of view. They stress how natural kinds ground inductive inferences, explanations, and predictions (Mill 1843, Boyd 1989, Millikan 1999, Dupré 1993).

Questions

- What role does classification play in your field?
- Are there kinds in your discipline? Are they natural?

Classifying Humans and Human Kinds

- Are classifications in the human sciences different? Are their targets different, humans and social objects?
- Naturalism: supports inductive inferences
- Are they mind dependent? Three types of social kinds (Khalidi).
 - Recession
 - Money, cocktail parties, wars (When does a brawl turn into a war? E.g. the football war of Honduras vs. El Salvador)
 - Permanent resident

Dynamic Nominalism (Ian Hacking)

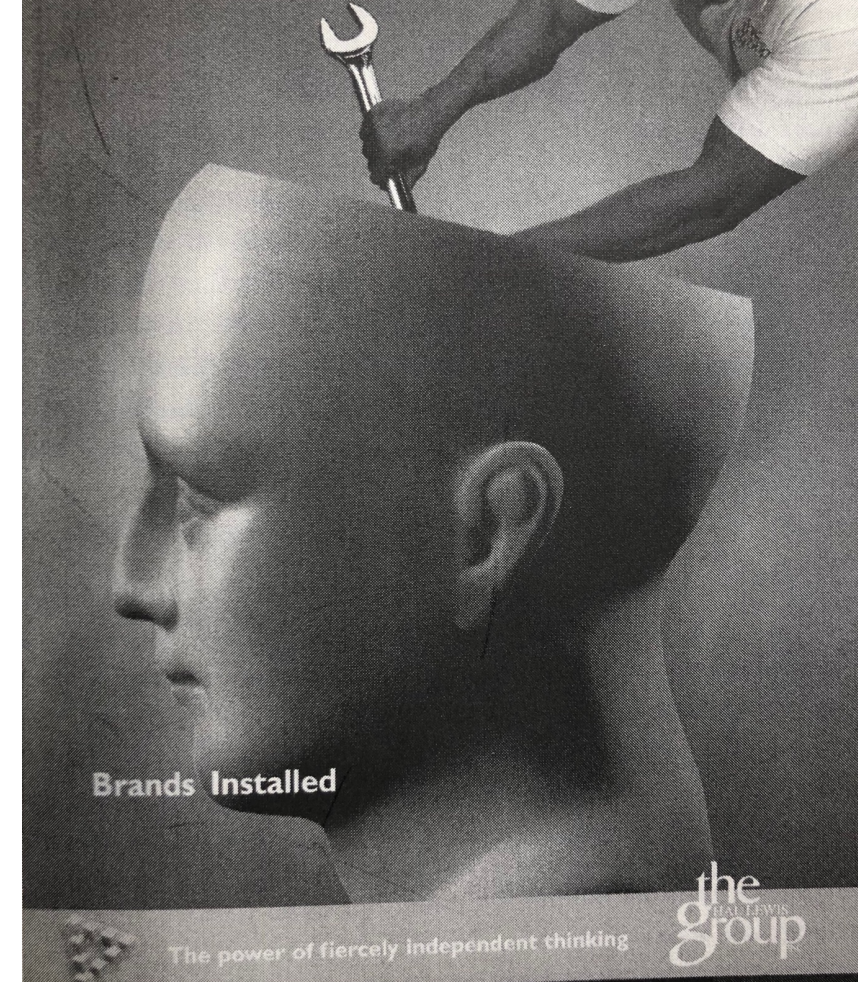
- Classification as a process of co-fitting our concepts and the world
- But the social world does not offer natural restrictions for different ways of classifying and intervening
- Whereas quarks are stable objects of study, "kinds of people" have a historical ontology contingent on their classifications
- "Perhaps the fundamental difference between the natural and social sciences is that the natural sciences investigate indifferent kinds, while the social sciences are on the whole concerned with interactive kinds." (Hacking 1997)
- Source of Instability: classification changes the very attributes used in the classification (Hacking 1993: 304)

Interactive kinds and indifferent kinds

- Human kinds are “kinds of people” defined by their behaviour, actions and tendencies (1995) (Later interactive kinds to incorporate agency 1997)
 - Fugue, multiple personality disorder, schizophrenia
 - Teen-age pregnancy, child abuse, and homosexuality
- Value-laden groups of humans that motivate reactions
- Hacking concentrates on the “abnormal” but also valued classifications, e.g. “genius” for romantics (Hacking 1997).

The looping effect

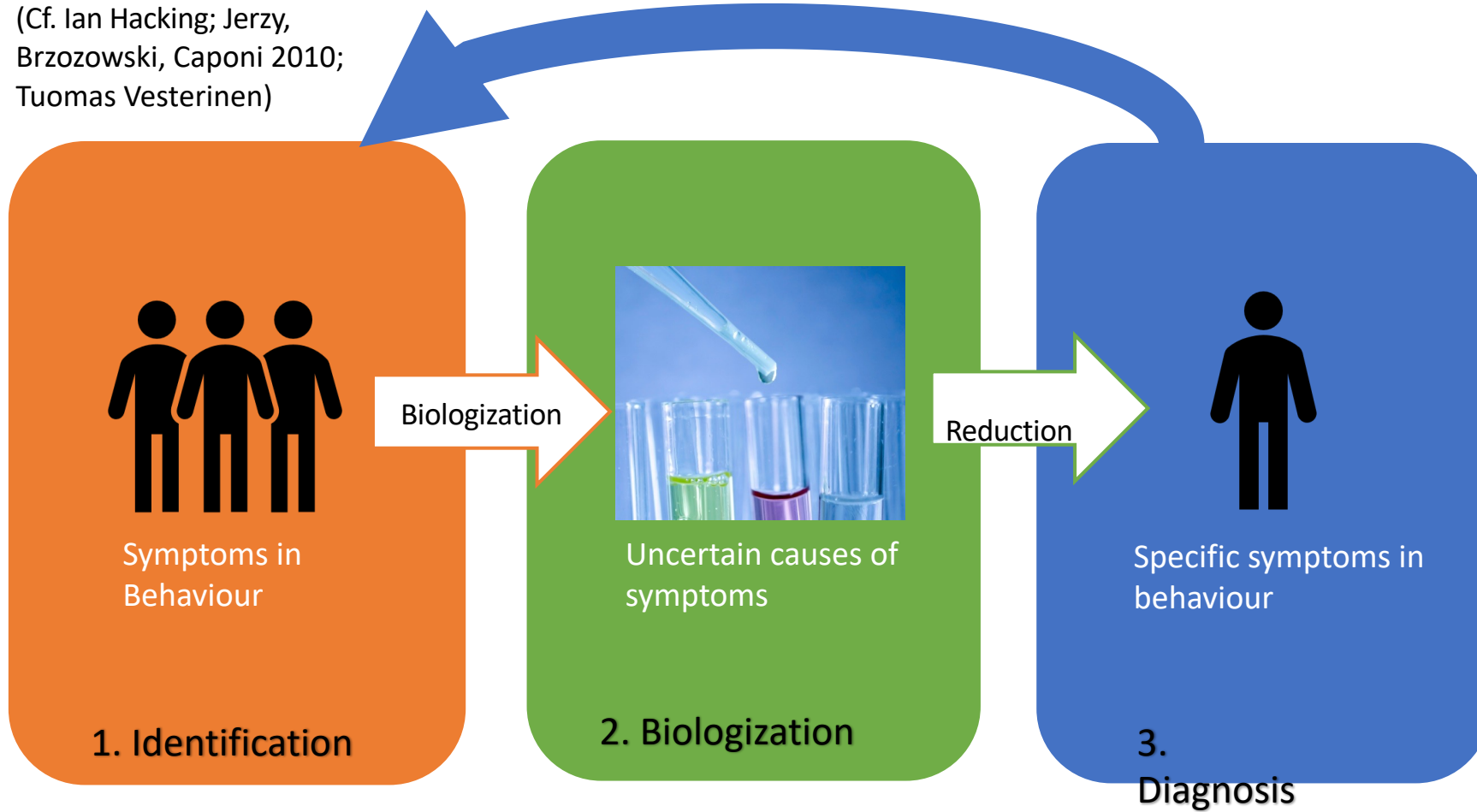
- **Classification** "changes the space of possibilities for personhood"
- **The Loop:** Classifications and the people being classified interact with one another
- First stage: Classification, associated beliefs, and the generated actions influence the people being classified (and others around them)
- Second stage: Classification may have to be amended to match the changes
- **The Effect:** Destabilizes the kind by rendering it a "moving target"



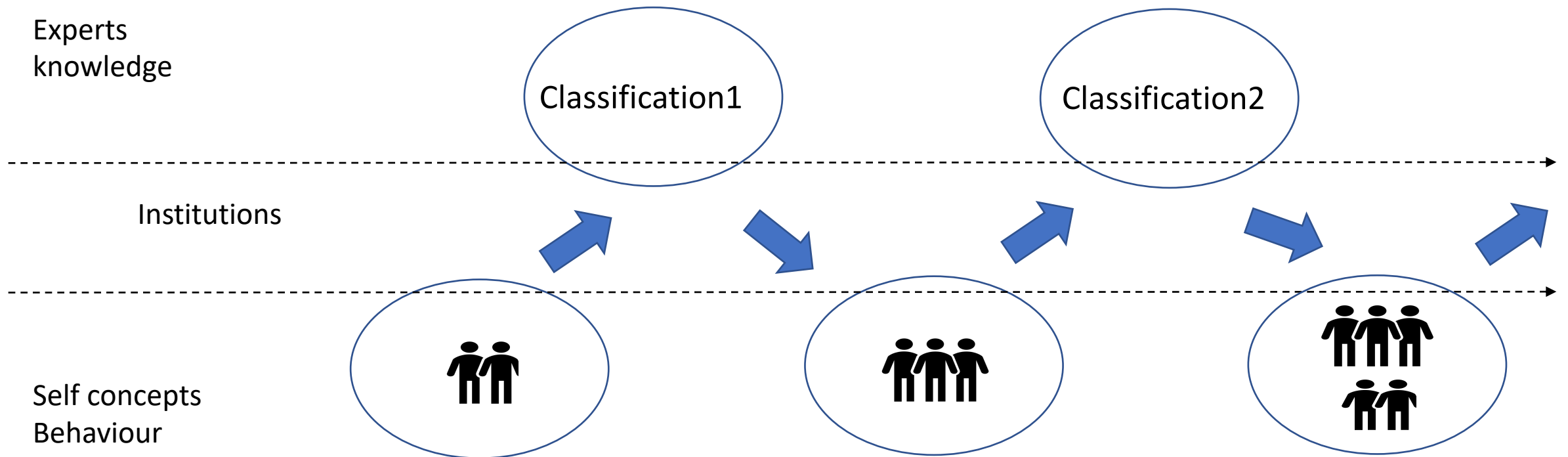
Looping Effect

(Cf. Ian Hacking; Jerzy Brzozowski, Caponi 2010; Tuomas Vesterinen)

Labeling

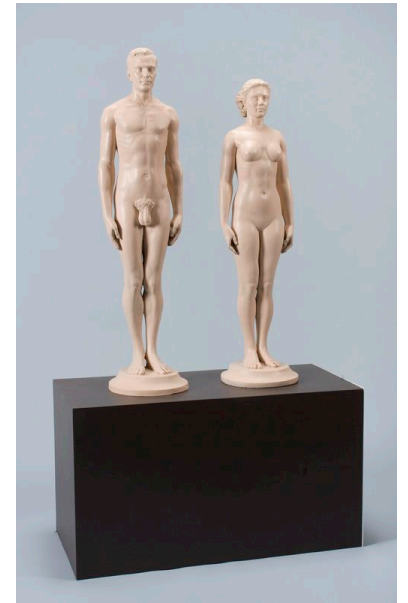


Human Kinds as moving targets



Psychiatric kinds as examples

- When symptoms appear somewhere they may need to be considered as symptoms of a disorders to cluster
- May lack the required “conceptual space” for a suffering person: the conception of the normal way to be abnormal
- Individual has to recognize and interpret her feelings and behaviour as kind-typical and learn the proper reaction
- Interactive kind is not just a bundle of symptoms, but a kind of person
- For example, when Asperger’s was included in 1994, it was thought to be really rare -> turned out to be common



Norm and Norma 1945

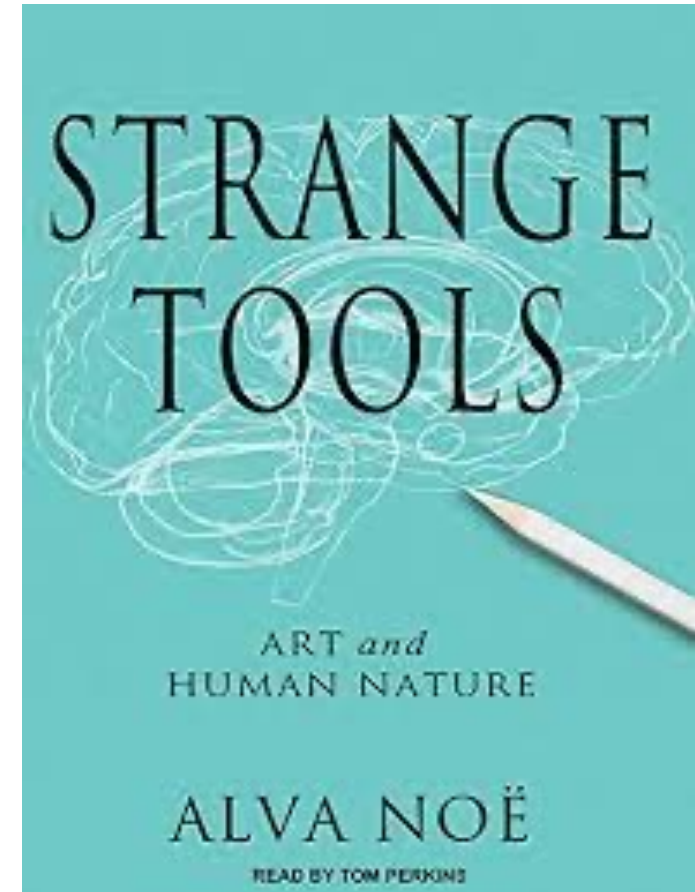
Culture influences mental problems

- E.g. Voice hallucination in the USA, Ghana and India; Depression in Japan
- Latah in South-East Asia
- Taijin Kyofusho: social phobia, ashamed for their bodily functions and appearance.
- Hikikomori: withdrawal from all social contacts
- Mild depression in Japan

うつ病でお悩みの方、
治験にご協力ください。

Strange Tools (Alva Noë, 2015)

- Hacking (1999: 34) “Looping effects are everywhere. Think what the category of genius did to those Romantics who saw themselves as geniuses, and what their behavior in turn did to the category of genius itself. Think about the transformations effected by the notions of fat, overweight, anorexic.”
- Art and technology do not only model, and describe yourself, feelings etc, but they change the ways we are organized, provide novel resources for thinking and doing things differently. They alter the way we see ourselves and reorganize our practices.
- Artifact kinds are subject to looping?
- E.g. the development of music instruments interacted with people, concepts, culture, craft-techniques and materials.



Are there looping effects in your discipline?

- Can you think of a looping effect in science, design, technology, architecture?
- For instance, “When I do my practice-led research in a field of craft, should I clarify to myself how my ontological thinking is linked to the idea of natural kinds? Glass-blowing process (social kind) and the material kind.”