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14 Strangely Familiar

The Debate on Multiculturalism and Plessner's
Philosophical Anthropology

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The groundlessness of multicultural society

For the purpose of inviting a new perspective to the debate of multiculturalism, I would like to present an account of what it is like to live in a multicultural society. This account is not from a personal or political perspective, but rather a description of two concepts (indeterminacy and embodiment) that are found in Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology and political philosophy. These concepts highlight the aspects of subjectivity, intersubjectivity and culture, all of which are important when one wishes to investigate the tensions, problems and possibilities that arise in multicultural societies. They can help us understand why living in a multicultural society can be a liberating experience for some, while it can also cause anxiety to others, which then can lead people to change their attitude towards others from being open to becoming more defensive and exclusive. The key concepts in the following account are indeterminacy and embodiment. I took both concepts from Plessner's work, and in this paper I will first briefly put these concepts in the context of Plessner's own work and time, and subsequently make some suggestions as to how they will help us give an account of what it is like to live in our own time and society.

I will begin by giving a very short introduction to the debate on multiculturalism, after which I will leave this debate for what it is and try to give what I think is the best possible description of life in multicultural society. My account starts with Plessner's ideas on culture and identity, which I will use to formulate what I imagine Plessner's idea of cultural identity would look like; in Plessner's social and political philosophy, our sense of identity is a continuous process of familiarizing with the unfamiliar and vice versa. I will illustrate this understanding of cultural identity with a short description of Plessner's own experiences during his exile in the Netherlands. The aspect that is central to this experience, in a philosophical sense, is what Plessner – following Dilthey – calls the principle of *Unergründlichkeit*, a term that Plessner used in his political philosophy to emphasize the openness, unfathomability, and indeterminacy of human nature. This

principle of indeterminacy – as I will translate this term from now on for reasons I will explain in the next section – is found in Plessner's three laws of philosophical anthropology and also in Plessner's political philosophy. I believe it to be of importance for this paper because it opens the way to something unfamiliar and indeterminable that is part of our identity. The principle of indeterminacy also lies at the foundation of Plessner's concept of power in his political philosophy. According to Plessner, politics is a process relying on the ability to familiarize oneself with the unfamiliar, and the power behind this ability is grounded in our indeterminacy. Indeterminacy is the power of the possible; it endows us with freedom and potentiality.

There is another aspect, however, that features mainly in Plessner's philosophical anthropology, but which is also very important when it comes to an account of cultural identity, namely the aspect of embodiment. Indeterminacy is not just part of our existence, but it is part of our life in society. This life is always experienced, first and foremost, in an embodied way. The relation between indeterminacy and embodiment will be explained in a short description of Plessner's thoughts on laughing and crying. In the end, I hope to have demonstrated why Plessner's concepts of indeterminacy and embodiment are important when we want to think of the best possible account of life in multicultural societies.

Multiculturalism

Commenting on multiculturalism requires me to give an overview of the most prominent positions in the discussion so far, and explain where I myself side and why I do so. The discussion on multiculturalism emerged out of previous discussions on subjects such as the level of representation of African American literature or feministic literature in the curriculum of universities, the legal situation of minorities, such as the French speaking Canadians. In this discussion, multiculturalists such as Will Kymlicka (Kymlicka 2002) and Charles Taylor (Gutmann 1994) have made important contributions in arguing that cultural identity should be recognized as an essential aspect of citizenship and the rights regarding this cultural identity should be protected and put forward as (at least) equally as important as economic rights. Liberal philosopher John Rawls puts forward an unencumbered subject at the foundation and center of his *Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1971) and gives priority to redistributive justice rather than recognition. This stance put him and some similar kindred philosophers in opposition to communitarians who prioritize the importance of cultural recognition.

As it becomes clear from Amy Guttmann's book on multiculturalism (Guttmann 1994) and from the numerous other books and articles that dealt with the subject after that, the discussion on multiculturalism has far more than just two positions from which one can argue from. Furthermore, the focus and label of the discussion can range from "identity politics," "politics of recognition," to "politics of difference" and many more. The scope of the issue of multiculturalism – even just in the philosophical realm – has become too broad, too diverse, and too complex for me to attempt to touch on all of it in this article.

Fortunately, the most important aspect of the discussion with which this paper is concerned, does not require us to first get acquainted with all of the aspects, goals and players in multiculturalism. The recurring problem that I wish to highlight is the difference of opinion on what aspects of subjectivity and culture are of importance when it comes to political and social justice. While evaluating this discussion, I tried to answer two questions: 1. Is a (comprehensive) theory of the subject a necessary element in the discussion on multiculturalism, and if so, 2. What should such a theory look like in order to give the best possible account of the subject of life in multicultural society? For both these questions I have found Plessner's work to be of utmost importance.

Cultural identity

Our ideas about our identity are as contingent as the concepts within our horizon to which these ideas relate. They have no ground outside of the horizon within which they originate. At the same time, when confronted, I can come to realize that my horizon is the one I am put up with: it is an inevitable part of me that I did not choose, yet for which I am nonetheless held responsible and accountable. Whenever we don't take our horizon completely for granted, for example, when it is put into questionably someone else, it can also mean that our sense of identity and our self-image are put into question. That means that the contingent character of our cultural horizon can be felt as a threat to our sense of identity. In the normal flow of life, we may take our sense of identity for granted, as we are absorbed in the roles we have taken up, the roles and patterns that were obvious to us. That sense of identity also defines our sense of integrity; as long as we act according to the roles, with their corresponding values, they give us a sense of direction and a sense of structure.

The experience of losing that sense of structure and familiarity can be a disconcerting experience that truly shakes the ground under our feet. As an example, I shall use the experiences that Plessner described from the time he was forced to live as an immigrant in Groningen (Dietze 2006, 99-186). Before he moved to Groningen, he was a citizen of Germany, but this was probably not a role by which he primarily used to define himself. More likely, he defined himself as a scholar, a sociologist and philosopher. He came from a background of affluent German citizens. As a well-educated reflexive personality, he was capable of distancing himself from any rigid or absolute definitions of his cultural heritage or social class. Nevertheless, he described his time in Groningen and his attempt to fit in, as difficult, painful and sometimes confusing. One of the first obstacles was that Groningen did not live up to his stereotypical expectations of the Netherlands (Dietze 2006, 102). This impeded his integration efforts, since even stereotypes could have at least given him some clues to what he could expect and what would be expected of him in his new societal role. Instead, he found that he would have to reconsider what he thought he knew about the Dutch culture, what the rules, practices and customs were. This he could only learn through experience, by observing customs and regulations or bumping into taboos and sensitivities he did not know. He had to experience first hand that he could not simply grasp a situation, follow intuitions, but he had to develop a new sensitivity to the structure of situations. He lost the familiarity with which he used to address situations and persons. But he also described that in this process, he lost the familiar way in which he used to see himself, that for the first time, he started to see himself as a German. That must undoubtedly have led him to the question of what this German identity meant, what it encompassed, which was certainly not a simple task at a time when the entire German identity was being redefined in the National Socialist regime. It is important to note here that what he encountered was not something strange that determined him from outside, but something strange that had already been a part of him. He encountered the *Unergründlichkeit* in himself, which always included the strange as part of the 'own' (*das Eigene*).

Plessner's experience illustrates a concept, which he used in his philosophical anthropology as well as his philosophical sociology, namely the *Unergründlichkeit* of human being (GS V, 161). As with many German concepts, this one is difficult to translate. *Unergründlichkeit* speaks for the fact that we can never get at the center of our being, never fully grasp what we are, even though it is exactly this concept of *Unergründlichkeit* that points us in the direction of who we are. It means that we have no essence, although

Plessner is certainly not an existentialist. Since *Unergründlichkeit* also entails the fact that we are not determined by any essence of what we are, I prefer the translation of *indeterminacy* here. Though one must be careful not to confuse what I call indeterminacy with the idea of indeterminacy as something that has yet to be determined. This difference will become clearer in the following description of Plessner's laws of philosophical anthropology.

The principle of indeterminacy is sometimes called Plessner's fourth law of philosophical anthropology, though one could equally claim that the indeterminacy is a structure that is found in each of the three laws, the first of which is the law of natural artificiality (Plessner 1975, 309). As a life form that is naked, split and incomplete, man has an artificiality that is characteristic of his natural condition. Man, as a life form that is constitutively homeless, only has roots and a ground from which to exist as far as his natural artificiality creates it and carries it. Culture, the realm of normativity, is the outcome of human existence and the only way in which he can exist: the cultural norms and values we live by have to have their own weight. Their necessary adaptation to the objective world grounds their validity as independent from us. This may seem contradictory to the idea that those norms are constructed by us, therefore it is important to remember that they are constructed by us only insofar as they are an outcome of our ontological condition, rather than being constructed by us in the constructivist's sense. The content of culture and normativity is far from absolute, but normativity and culture as such are an absolute part of the human being. They have their objectivity, which presents itself in that which we have to find or discover, as opposed to what can be constructed. Every product of culture has this structure of being dependent for its creation on human being(s) and being independent at the same time. Man, says Plessner, can only construct as far as he can discover.

As we bring culture into existence, we establish our relation to the world. This brings us to the second constitutional law of philosophical anthropology, i.e. that of mediated immediacy (Plessner 1975, 321). In short, mediated immediacy encompasses the idea that, as man lives and at the same time leads his life, he does so in immediate relation to the world and experiences this relation in a mediated way. This means that we cannot speak of two parallel relations, a mediated and an immediate one between man and his world. It is first of all an immediate one, because man realizes the possibility that is already given in the life form of the animals. Yet, in light of his loss of innocence, this immediate contact has to be given to him in a mediated way. The loss of his equilibrating relation with nature, which animals still have,

is the key to understanding expressivity. Expressivity is the driving force behind the historical dynamic of human life. Our deeds and crafts, which are supposed to overcome the impossibility of an equilibrium, succeed in this task, but at the same time undermine this very relation they established, as they can only reach the natural world in an artificial way. We try over and over again to become rooted in nature, each time with apparent success, but in the end to no avail.

The rootlessness that man tries to overcome in his mediated artificial ways is grounded in a nothingness that constitutes our life form. The third constitutional law, the law of the utopian standpoint (*ibid.*, 341), tries to describe mankind's rootlessness in terms of the "nothing" that constitutes both man and his world. It claims that we always have to stand somewhere, be in and at a certain point in space and time, but at the same time, this position is not given to us immediately or unconditionally. We have to take a stand and be rooted somewhere and some time, but whichever standpoint we choose to take, it is always without a foundation in an absolute ground. There is no eternal or absolute point of view; there are always just positions we may occupy. These positions are necessarily groundless and so our position is always rootless. "As the eccentric positionality is precondition for the fact that man grasps reality in nature, soul and a world-along-with, so it simultaneously holds the necessity of recognizing its unsustainability and nothingness" (*ibid.*, 346).¹

In every one of these three laws, there is a tension between two aspects, aspects of being free and indeterminate and of being bound to the search of a natural equilibrium. This means that there is always an openness of the structure of the human being. This inevitably has consequences for the structure of our cultural identity, where the same principle of indeterminacy can be discerned.

The principle of the indeterminacy of the human being is important with respect to this paper, because it opens the way to including aspects of the unfamiliar within our sense of identity. If, according to Plessner, we always have to come to our familiarity through the unfamiliar, then our own self has carried within its boundaries aspects of the unknown or unfamiliar all along. The possibility of a subject that is completely familiar with every aspect of itself, thus completely transparent to itself, is excluded from this philosophy of human being: "The designation of eccentricity in terms of 'transferral to the Otherness in one's self' (GS V, 231) leaves room

1 The translations of citations in this text are all my own, except where no translation was needed, i.e. in the citations from *Laughing and Crying* (Plessner 1970).

for an interpretation in which the self is already occupied by the strange, so the strange does not have to force entry from outside. The wavering frontline dividing the familiar and the strange is laid transversely through the self” (Arlt 1996, 115). Plessner did not create his philosophical anthropology on the basis of the familiar characteristics of our species (rationality, language, meaning). Instead, he described structures that already include characteristics that we may not see as our ‘own.’ In this way he describes human being as constitutively homeless. Everything that is our home, that which we describe as familiar, natural, true to its nature and necessary, can only be attained if we abandon what we define as unfamiliar, unnatural and irrational. The friend-foe relation is one that transcends political and cultural relations between people and is always at work within every one of these relations. This is why this relation is central to what Plessner called his political anthropology (GS V, 139).

Political anthropology

Plessner starts with the observation that the question at the heart of political anthropology, i.e. the question about the relation between human being and politics, can only be adequately addressed within the domain of philosophy rather than within politics itself: “The foremost question in political anthropology: in how much does politics – the struggle for power in intersubjective relations between individuals, groups and the dealings of peoples and states – belong to the essence of man, seems to be only of philosophical relevance rather than political relevance” (GS V, 139).

Plessner deeply disagrees with such a division between politics and political theory on one side, and the issues of science, art, law and belief on the other. Practical politics needs to be pervaded with theory in order to lead to decisions, and forgetting this close relationship between theory and praxis can lead to bad politics as well as bad philosophy. “Here philosophy itself must interfere. It cannot do this by way of asking directly what the nature of the political is, pretending to comprehend it unprejudiced, instead philosophy must pay attention to the mode in which it asks the question, since philosophy itself will be put into question when asking about the nature of the political” (GS V, 141).

According to Plessner, the notion of power is what relates the fields of philosophical anthropology to the field of political theory (or what he simply calls the political). His notion of power differs from the power of a leader, the political power of a state, or physical power. Instead, power

refers to a particular structure of human being. This structure arises from the *indeterminacy*, which I mentioned earlier: “that is why the possibility of humanity, which entails that which makes mankind into mankind, that is every human potentiality, must work with the stipulations set by our indeterminacy” (GS V, 161). The principle of indeterminacy is at work, not just in the object of philosophical anthropology, but also in the underlying framework from which philosophical anthropology works, and in every theory that aspires to touch upon aspects of human being, including political theory.

A person – in the sense of Plessner’s anthropology – is never fully determined, neither by nature, nor by history. History itself is something that is always open to interpretation, something that can be taken up and changed according to who questions it. Thus mankind always begs a question that has no final answer. Man, never beyond question, is also power; since he is never fully determined by anything outside of himself, he will always have the power of possibilities. This shows striking parallels to Heidegger, where *Dasein* is determined as well as design (Heidegger 1927, 145). Only death may constitute the end of possibility (Heidegger 1927, 261). For Plessner, it is the process of ageing that signifies the loss of some possibilities, yet is accompanied by the fulfillment of other possibilities. At the same time, it is also death that signals the limit of possibility (Plessner 1975, 169). Man as power is the aperture between history and future, only a snapshot moment, passed as soon as we begin to think about it. Yet no other species except for us has this aperture, this power to affect the future and history, endowed by our mere existence. According to Plessner, this structure, which he calls power, should have its proper place and significance in political theory. The structure of power endows man with potential, freedom and responsibility, and takes man as a force of change (GS V, 190, 200).

A political theory that incorporates Plessner’s notion of power as well as its implied idea of human nature and history, is opposed to political theories that reduce history to a single principle or to a purposeful movement towards a specific state of affairs. Any kind of essentialism, be it regarding a group of people, a culture, a race, or even history itself, is excluded from the kind of political theory Plessner’s anthropology implies. This also means that certain political systems could be criticized from the viewpoint of a political theory in which this idea of power has a place. The strongest example is a dictatorial system, where civilians are a mere complement to the dictator and there is no room for individual freedom. The principle of indeterminacy does not just exclude essentialism, historicism and determinism with regards to our own Western culture, but it also affects the way we think about other

cultures and other eras “only in so far as we take ourselves as groundless, do we give up our position of supremacy over other cultures as is they were barbarians and only strangers, then we also give up on the purpose of a mission against the Other as were it an unabsolved and immature world and with that we disclose the horizon of our own history and present state unto a history that is open to heterogenic perspectives” (GS V, 161).

The principle of indeterminacy underlies power and our mental and practical skills. Our comprehensional skills are gained within the horizon of the familiar, which we strive to gain against the unfamiliar and the uncanny (*unheimliche*). This conflict between the familiar and the unfamiliar characterizes us as political beings, as everything we undertake is marked by the political struggle to gain the familiar at the cost of the alien (GS V, 191). The anxiety that accompanies our indeterminacy drives the political struggle. The anxiety that accompanies our indeterminacy has a structure that relies on our bodily existence. In order to give the best possible account of living in a multicultural society, we must therefore not forget to explain how this indeterminacy, which is such an important concept for Plessner’s political philosophy, is grounded in our embodied existence. The relation between our embodied existence and indeterminacy is best described in Plessner’s account of laughing and crying, which I will briefly elaborate on to highlight its relation and consequences for life in a multicultural society.

Our bodily existence in society

As I mentioned when explaining the three laws of philosophical anthropology, we normally find ourselves having a position in the world, while we simultaneously have to take a stand in that same world. The world I am speaking of is a meaningful whole, a structure of sense, signification and intentionality. This entails the whole of meaningful situations in which we find ourselves in our daily lives and in which we can respond adequately most of the time. Plessner’s account of human expressivity in laughing and crying is founded in his theory of our eccentric existence as the embodied being we are. It is important to keep in mind that Plessner’s theory of laughing and crying only holds true if we discard the metaphysical tradition of treating body and mind as completely separate substances. Furthermore, we must start from the idea of our fundamental situatedness in the biological world, and our mediated and indirect relation in that same situatedness. As Plessner puts it:

Animals behave according to the situation, follow its relationships (more or less), adapt to them or perish by them; man sees them [i.e. his relations, both in the world and between the world and himself. KP] and conducts himself in the consciousness of their organization – he articulates them: through language, through schematic projects for action and for shaping. He not only masters these relations, he also understands them *as* relations and can isolate the relation as such from the concrete situation. He must take them in some *sense* or other: concretely or paradigmatically, practically or contemplatively (Plessner 1970, 153).

But according to Plessner, we also find ourselves in situations in which we cannot adequately respond to the relations within and about it. It is in these situations that Plessner takes a special interest, because they mark the boundaries of our behavioral mastery. After the nature of our existence, it is a natural fact and at the same time our moral obligation to always respond to the situation we find ourselves in and take a stand in it.

Usually, in unequivocal situations which can be unequivocally answered and controlled, man responds *as* a person and makes use of his body for that purpose: as an instrument of speech, as a grasping, thrusting, supporting, and conveying organ, as a means of locomotion, as a means of signalling, as the sounding board of his emotions. He controls his body or learns to control it (*ibid.*, 34).

According to Plessner, man has no choice but to respond somehow. At the same time, it is impossible to find an answer within the power of our ordinary expressive tools (i.e. language, action, etc.). It is in light of the absolute necessity and plight of taking a stand in answering to our situation, that a category of expressive movements, i.e. laughing and crying, can be specified as a singular category.

Plessner distinguishes expressive movement from gesture, bearing and gesticulatory language. Expressive movement is found in animals as well as humans, e.g. a dog wagging his tail, a chimpanzee baring his teeth, or an embarrassed girl who bows her blushing face. Expressive movements find a universal prevalence among peoples and periods; they have a compulsive onset and discharge in certain situations; and finally they have a purely expressive and reactive character (*ibid.*, 50-51). Expressive movements are opaque and immediate: “[t]he furrowed brow, the flashing eye, the outthrust chin, and the clenched fist are components of an immediately expressive language whose transparency refers ‘on its own’ to an emotional

state and is not first produced by the interposition of the person (as in the case of gesture)" (ibid., 54). In short: "[i]rreplaceability, immediacy, and involuntariness give laughing and crying the character of true expressive movements" (ibid., 56).

Plessner deals with this category by illustrating how a situation can make it impossible for us to answer to it as the person we are, while at the same time demanding such an answer from us nonetheless. This can be the case because a situation is ambiguous to such an extent that it cannot be resolved by gestures or language alone. In such instances, we erupt into laughter, our body responds in a move that is neither a gesture nor a posture, but still a meaningful expression. The expression is impersonal and direct, which means that the person we are recedes into the background and our body acts as the floor for an expression that comes from our impersonal embodiment. Its answer does not mean anything besides the expression of the fact that we are unable to respond to the situation through other means. There is no other adequate response, because any response can only touch one of the multiple layers of meaning, in a situation in which they overlap each other without neutralizing each other. Jokes usually use the ambiguity which they can provoke to make us laugh. They play with meanings and set them within a context in which we cannot make normal sense of what is meant, and we laugh. For example, this is why we laugh at the cartoon character Homer Simpson when he tells his wife, during what was supposed to be a deep and meaningful discussion: "Oh, Marge, cartoons don't have any deep meaning. They're just stupid drawings that give you a cheap laugh" (Irwin 2001, 92). That is also why we laugh when someone we take seriously as a person, all of a sudden pulls a funny face. We still recognize him in the situation as a person we take seriously, but in the same situation he acts in a non-serious way. We cannot choose to either take him completely seriously, because he is pulling a funny face. We also cannot simply abandon the usual serious attitude we have because the person pulling the face is still recognized as being the same person he was. The crossing point of the layers of meaning is what we understand as the point of the joke. And so we erupt into laughter, we retain the ambiguity of the situation and we manage to respond to the situation in one and the same movement. From here, we have no trouble regaining mastery over ourselves and the situation we are in, since we never completely lost that mastery, part of it remained in tact in the laughter.

However, a situation can also be unambiguous but laden with a meaning that is too overwhelming to be grasped by our comprehensive skills. We do not feel the tension of multiple layers of meaning overlapping, but we

feel incapable of grasping the full weight of the situation and respond to it adequately. Here we cannot respond with laughter, for in laughter we answer a situation directly and impersonally. In a situation that can lead to crying, there simply is no other adequate response because no response can do justice to the full scope of what is happening to us. It is not the intensity of a certain personal feeling that leads to crying, but instead, just as in laughter, it is the relational nature of the situation. We want to acknowledge the absoluteness of what is happening, and so we refuse to put things 'into perspective,' since for us there is no perspective in that moment, and so we surrender ourselves to our tears.

If we want to give an account of laughing and crying that reckons with the complicated psychophysical structure of these expressive movements, we must abandon the traditional split between body and mind and our conventional tendency reducing phenomena to either one of these realms. Hence, Plessner's aim in describing laughing and crying is to explain and support his theory of eccentric positionality. In contrast to other bodily movements that we use meaningfully, e.g. speaking, shaping, acting, the body acts autonomously in laughing and crying. And only in a being that has an eccentric relation with his body, can the body act autonomously as the medium of meaning. Laughing and crying are exceptional because they make the unity of the body collapse, and they maintain it at the same time. The person retreats temporarily into the background as he let's his body answer for him. The function of elaborating on these exceptional cases is to show the bodily nature of our existence and to emphasize the role of the body in the way we find and express meaning in our existence. That means it is also important to account for the role of our body in our relation with culture and society.

The cultural and the political

In light of the discussions on multiculturalism, I had posed the following questions at the beginning of this paper: is a (comprehensive) theory of the subject a necessary element in the discussion on multiculturalism? And if so, what should such a theory look like in order to give the best possible account of the subject who lives in a multicultural society? If we look at what Plessner said about the relationship between philosophical anthropology and political theory, the answer to the first question is affirmative. The notion of power that is of central importance in political theory, is deeply connected to the way power features in the human being itself. The answer

to the second question is also derived from Plessner's philosophy and has embodiment and indeterminacy as its central concepts.

If we want to give the best possible account of what it is like to live as a subject in multicultural society, we must also include our embodiment, as it plays such an important part in finding and expressing meaning in our existence with each other. I think Plessner's work is very fruitful in this respect, since his philosophical anthropology puts great emphasis on embodiment and at the same time gives an account of our embodiment that is open and complex enough to function well as a foundation for his political philosophical account of society. The openness that we find in his three laws of philosophical anthropology, and which accounts for the dual role that our body plays in situations such as laughing and crying, is the same openness that we find in Plessner's account of power and indeterminacy when he writes about political philosophy. The fact that this openness is always correlated to our embodied nature closes the circle in which we tried to tie together his philosophical anthropology and political anthropology to give the best account of life in multicultural society.

If we agree with Plessner's view of the political, which he sees as the matrix of relations that entails the exertion of our primary power in order to familiarize the unfamiliar, then the political has been connected all along to the structures that we find in philosophical anthropology. Political theories that speak about society, always address the relations between groups and individuals, whether directly or indirectly. Any theory that wishes to do justice to those relations cannot avoid the principle of indeterminacy. The best possible account of what it is like to live in a multicultural society accepts that there is no singular relation between an individual and his or her cultural background, nor is there one between an individual and his or her body. Furthermore, it takes into account that the body plays an important role in the relation of a person towards his or her culture, not only in the sense that cultural expressions often involve the body, but also in that the relation towards the body is influenced by culture. None of the relations are straightforward or singular, all of them bear an ambiguity that we often wish to overlook in the hopes of simplifying the ethical discussions about cultural practices or group rights. A complex and ambiguous account of life in a multicultural society is not the easiest one to use in discussions on multiculturalism, but it might be able to build bridges in the discussions that more monistic accounts could not build.

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