



DANMARKS PÆDAGOGISKE
UNIVERSITETSSKOLE
AARHUS UNIVERSITET

Explorations into Anthropology of Policy

Gritt B. Nielsen
assistant professor
DPU/Aarhus Universitet



Matriculation – a welcome to what?



The handshake – a ritual passing to what?



2005 Elected rector

”By giving each of you a personal handshake I confirm that you are now a part of 'Universitas' – the community from the Middle Ages which has survived for 526 years”

Welcome to :

'universitas' – community of researchers and students

Education as:

a voyage of discovery – not charter or business

Ideal of Learning

curiosity, involvement in the educational institution and larger society.
Participation as moral obligation.

→ **Student as independent explorer; co-owner; co-citizen**



2006 Appointed rector

”In a moment I start the race – your studies. Not with a pistol but with a handshake ...
Ready, Steady, Go!”

Welcome to:

a global race for knowledge and education

Education as:

race and competition

Copenhagen uni offers 'good coaches' and 'good training facilities'

Ideal of learning (implicit):

creativity, entrepreneurship, individualism –
efficient and at high speed

→ **Student as private investor; customer/consumer; knowledge soldier;**



Two-fold ambition of the study

- To explore how 'the student' – as a contested figure in a period of reform - is negotiated and enacted in diverse pedagogical, institutional and political settings.
- To develop a theoretical and methodological framework for working with issues of reform, policy and processes of change as objects of anthropological enquiry.



Diachronic and synchronic approaches

Historically

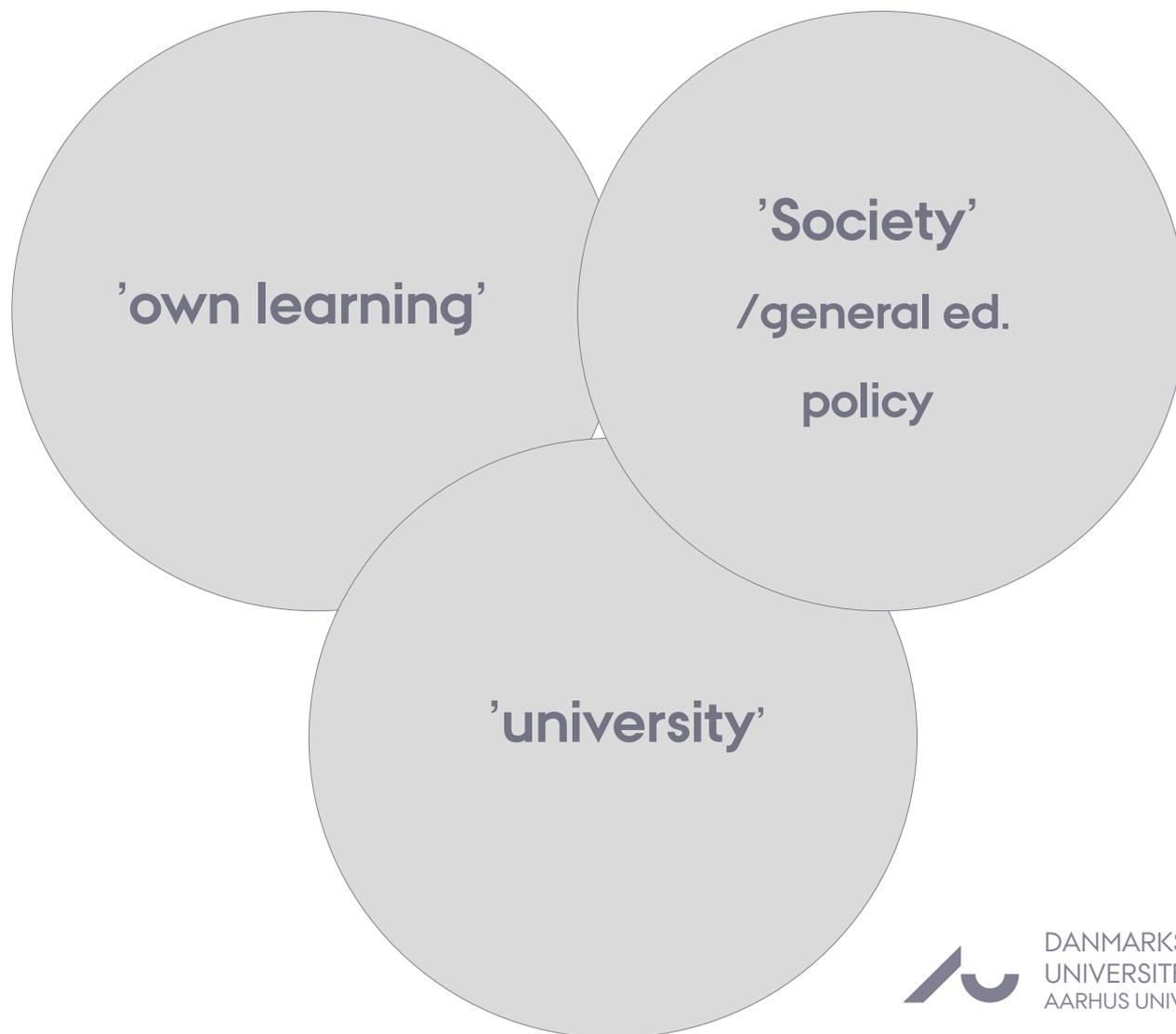
- › Policy documents, media debates and historical accounts from 19th century until the present

Ethnographically

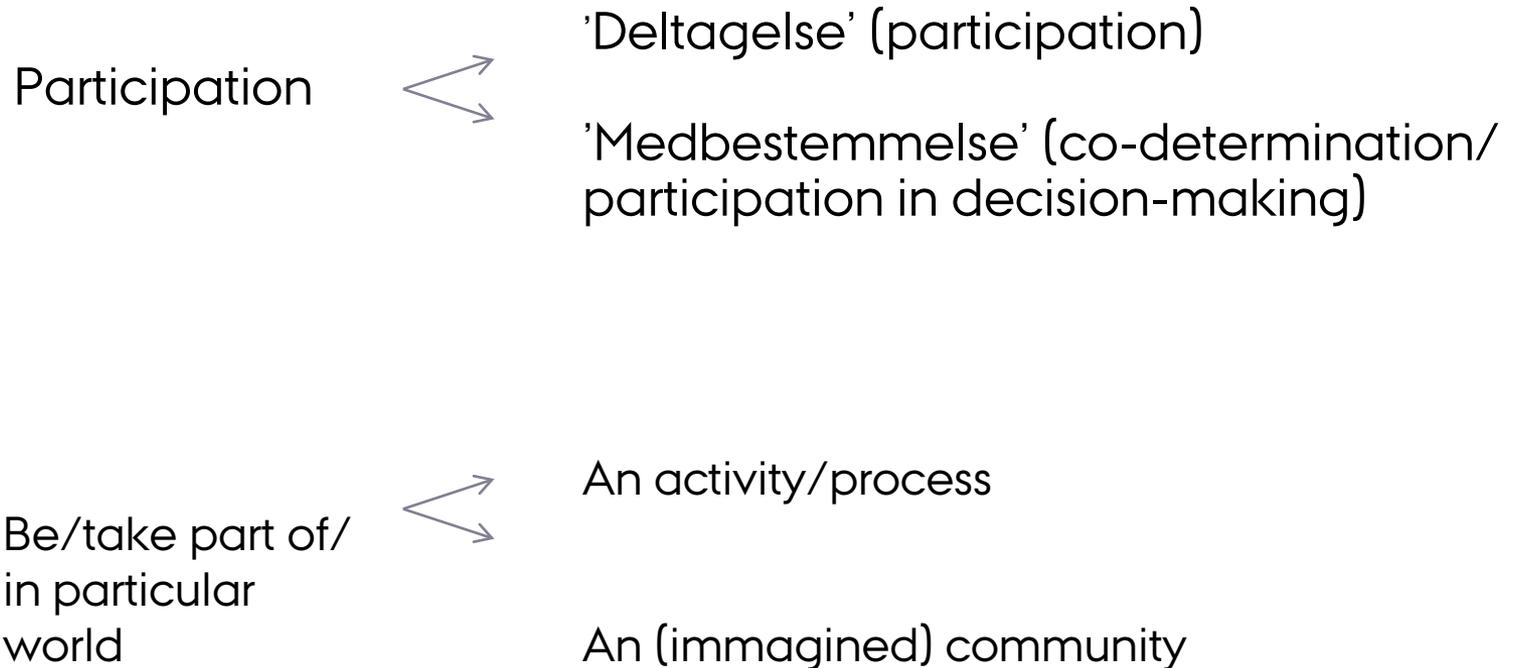
- › Activities of politically active students
- › Three natural science courses at 3 different Danish universities
- › Interviews with students, tutors and university leaders
- › Meetings, social events, immatriculation, policy documents, media debates etc.



University reform and student participation in:



Participation – a relational concept



Approaches to policy/the study of reform

1. Focus on larger and general tendencies

Discourses, political rationalities (Rose, Dean, Foucault)
social imaginaries (Rizvi), policy scapes (Ball)

The Governmentality-triade: rationality-technology-subjectivity

Pitfalls:

Change/reform as inevitable outcome of abstract, non-locatable imperatives: e.g. global processes of 'neo-liberalism' or 'New Public Management'



Anthropology of Policy

.2 Focus on 'local' practices:

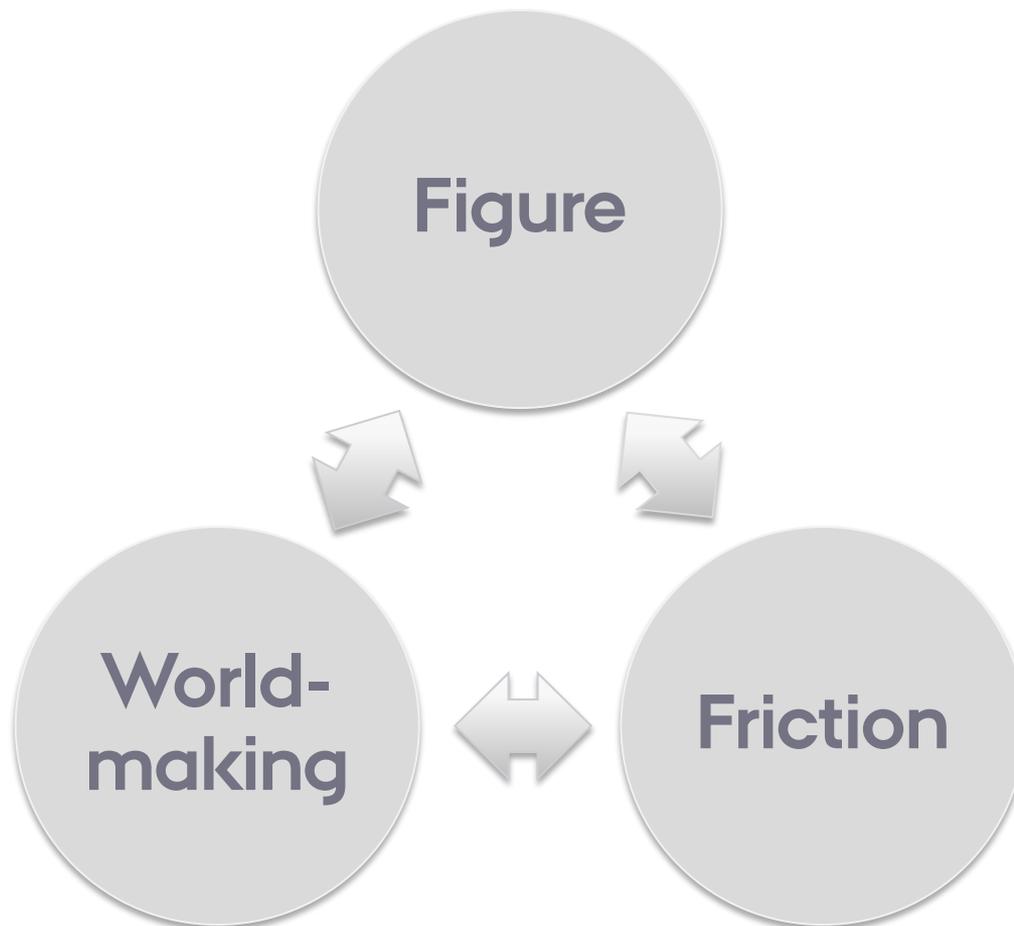
Processes of policy 'appropriation' (Sutton & Levinson)
Ascribes agency to people

Pitfalls:

produces 'policy' as a pre-given thing people *re-act* to
'policy' assigned a too dominant role in people's lives
restricts focus to explicit policy negotiations and the 'policy-makers'



My approach: 'Figuration Work'





Figuration Work

- › Not fieldwork on the 'inside' of a (pre-)given world; rather focus on constant production /negotiation of different figures.
- › Intersection of people's figure production and my analyses
- › Ontological politics (A. Mol)

Frictional events

- › **A process of *differentiation* through which figures take form as part of particular 'wholes' / 'worlds'**
- › "the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" (Tsing)
- › Events of disputes, conflicts, ambivalence etc (Moore, Gluckman, Kapferer, Foucault)
- › Larger processes *integral* to the frictional event – event always points beyond itself





Figure /figuration and world-making

- Figure – both noun/entity and verb /process
- Appears as absolute entity – but relative to its assembled components and to other figures → figuration
- The power of figures: do not just *contain* but *shape* ‘worlds’ or ‘wholes’ of/in which the student is/takes part.
- Figuration - a way of ‘scaling’ the student





The status and choice of frictional events

1. Student protests against 2006 welfare reform proposal

- Students' participation in the shaping of national education politics and Danish society

2. Chinese students' complaint to Minister (2005)

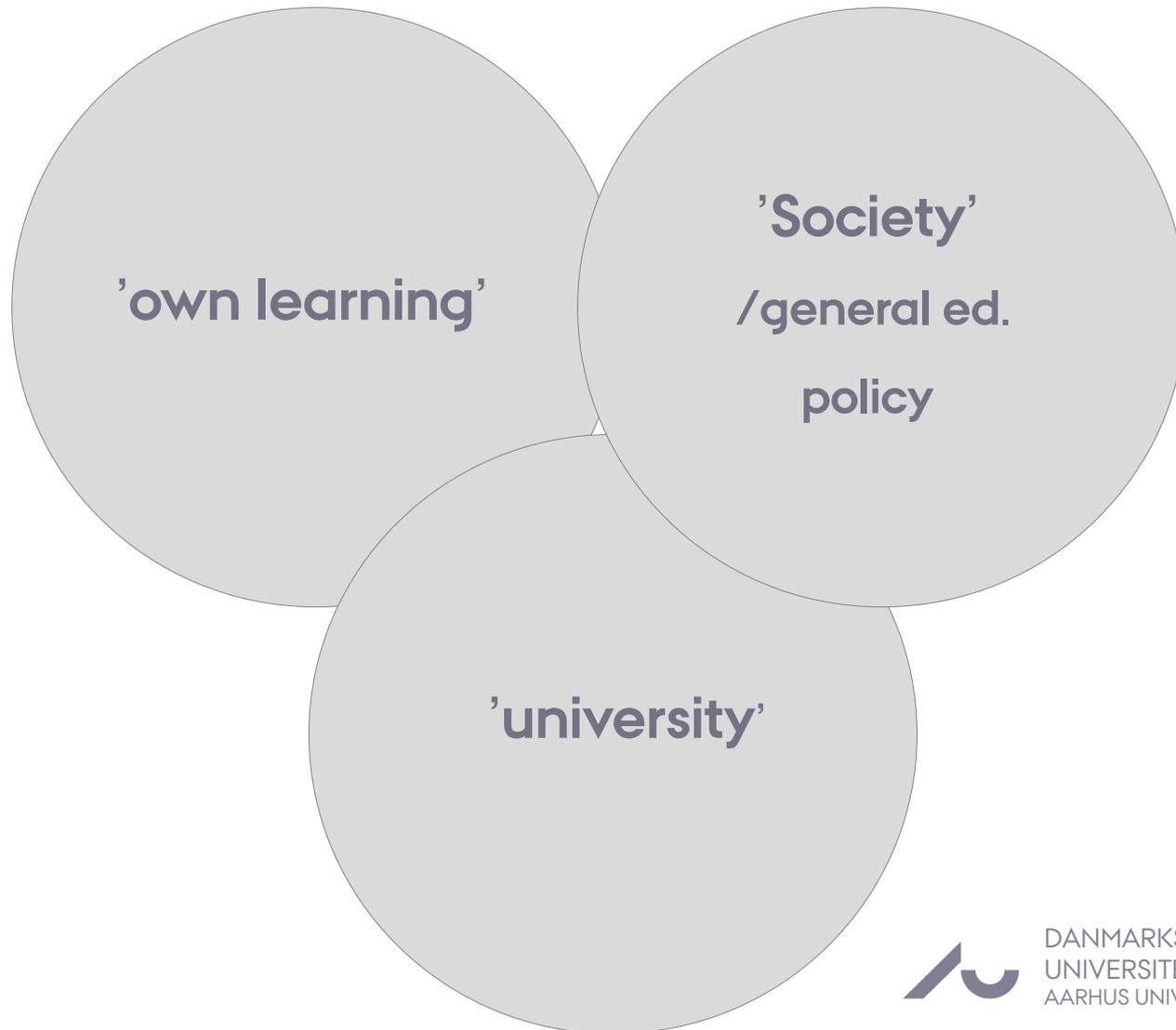
- Students' participation in the shaping of their university

3. Friction between the student, Kathrine and the teacher, Niels

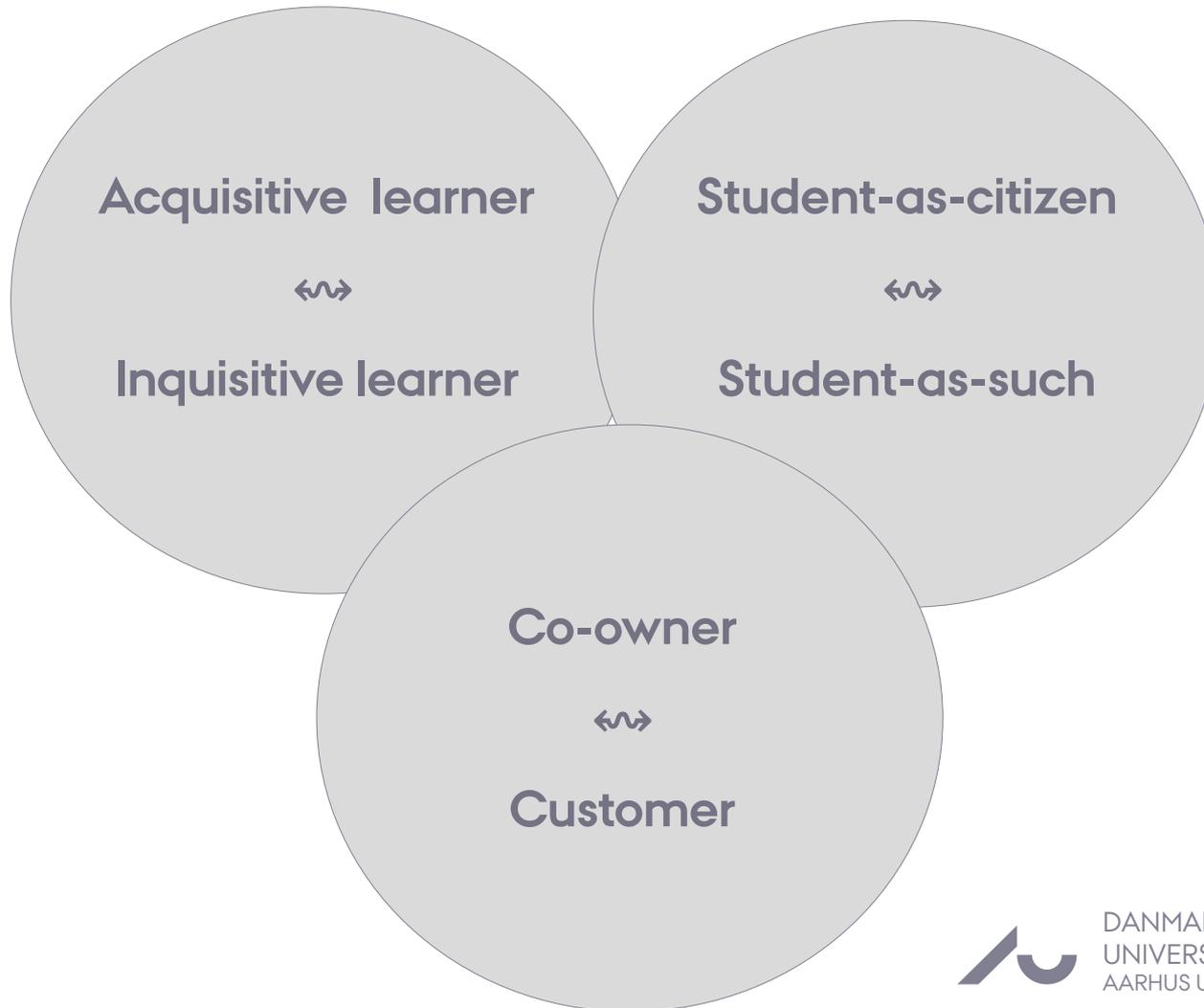
- Students' participation in the shaping of their education and learning



University reform and student participation in:



Student figures in friction



The student as part of/participant in

Integrative wholes

- › The person embodies the whole
- › Ownership as 'part-whole' relation
- › Sense of belonging, common identity
- › The person unseparable from the whole

→ 'Impartible participation'

Aggregative wholes/ Unity of units

- › the person is autonomous and *set apart from others*
- › ownership as 'subject- object' relation
- › rights, illegal/legal conduct, and a person or groups mastering of a thing
- › the person is separable from the thing owned

→ 'Autonomous/partible Participation'





From deconstruction to affirmation of the positivity of difference ?

“Figuration is about resetting the stage for possible pasts and futures. Figuration is the mode of theory when the more ‘normal’ rhetorics of systematic critical analysis seem only to repeat and sustain our entrapment in the stories of the established disorders”” (Haraway)

→ Figuration work:
create (policy)space for multiple figures and constant process of transformation?



- > Ball, Stephen J. 1997. Policy Sociology and Critical social Research: a personal review of recent education policy and policy research. *British Educational Research Journal* 23 (3):257-274.
- > ———. 2006. *Education Policy and Social Class: The selected works of Stephen J. Ball*. New York: Routledge.
- > Braidotti, Rosi. 1994. *Nomadic subjects: embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- > Castañeda, Claudia. 2002. *Figurations. Child, Bodies, Worlds*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- > Dean, Mitchell. 2006 [1999]. *Governmentality. Magt og styring i det moderne samfund*. Frederiksberg: Forlaget Sociologi.
- > Gluckman, Max. 1958. *Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- > Haraway, Donna J. 1991. A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.
- > ———. 1992. Ecce Homo, Ain't (Ar'n't) I a Woman, and Inappropriate/d Others: The Human in a Post-Humanist Landscape. In *Feminist Theorize the Political*, edited by J. Butler and J. W. Scott. London And New York: Routledge.
- > Kapferer, Bruce. 2005. Situations, Crisis, and the anthropology of the Concrete. *Social Analysis* 49 (3):85-122.



- › Mol, Annemarie. 1999. Ontological Politics. A word and some questions. In *Actor Network Theory and After*, edited by J. Law and J. Hassard. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- › Moore, Sally Falk. 1987. Explaining the Present: Theoretical dilemmas in processual ethnography. *American Ethnologist* 14 (4):727-736.
- › ———. 1994. The Ethnography of the Present and the Analysis of Process. In *Assessing Cultural Anthropology*, edited by R. Borofsky. New York: McGraw Hill, Inc.
- › Rose, N. 1999. *Powers of Freedom. Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- › Rose, N., and P. Miller. 1992. Political power beyond the State: problematics of government. *The British Journal of Sociology* 43 (2):173-205.
- › Sutton, Margaret, and Bradley Levinson. 2001. Introduction: Policy as/in Practice - A Sociocultural Approach to the Study of Educational Policy. In *Policy as Practice - Toward a Comparative Sociocultural Analysis of Educational Policy*, edited by M. Sutton and B. Levinson. Westport, Connecticut, London: Ablex Publishing.
- › Tsing, Anna. 2005. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global connection*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

