



Asymmetries, Academic Language and Political Power

EDITORIAL**JOHAN STRANG** **HUP** HELSINKI
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Featuring articles on political thought, conceptual history as well as feminist theory, this issue is not only perfectly representative of the scope of *Redescriptions*, but also an illustration of the *specific* profile of our journal in the tangled jungle of academic publishing.

Whereas the relation between political theory and the historical study of language has developed into an established scholarly field, feminist theory serves as an invitation to reflect on (hidden) power dynamics influencing the use of political as well as scholarly language. Indeed, in recent years, there has been a movement within the field of conceptual history to pay closer attention to the structural and political hierarchies between not only men and women, but also between different economic classes, centres, and peripheries and particularly between Europe and the West on the one hand, and the subaltern on the other. However, with the increased use of digital methods, there is a danger that this trend will reverse as conceptual history becomes absorbed in distant reading and quantitative arguments.

This particular issue is a reminder of the fruitfulness of focusing on power dynamics in order to bring forth the political element of the case at hand. Another common denominator of the six articles that make up the open issue lies in the inquiry into the relationship between academic scholarly language and political discourse. Some of the articles bring light to the inevitable ideological baggage carried by scholarly concepts; others reflect on how the meaning and function of concepts change when they travel between the academic and the political spheres. The final two articles in turn, explore how individual historical actors navigate and try to consolidate their political and scholarly ambitions – a struggle that sometimes can result in amplified tensions and even in the termination of personal relationships.

In the first article, Tuuli Tahko and Jani Marjanen probe into the history of the concept “vernacularization” as used in academic language, particularly in linguistic-historical analyses. They trace the history of the concept from how its early uses in order to denote the shift from Latin, the creation of local literary cultures and the rise of

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:**Johan Strang**University of Helsinki,
Finlandjohan.strang@helsinki.fi**TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:**

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national languages, to the more recent increased attention and appreciation for variation, which has prompted a politically motivated ideological preference for indigenous languages in a postcolonial setting. In this way, “vernacularization” has been used both in order to push for standardisation (of a national language) and de-standardisation (to assert the right to deviate from a norm). Crucially, however, Tahko and Marjanen emphasise that even in strict scholarly discourse, “vernacularization” proceeds from the normative idea of standing up against linguistic hierarchies and the perceived superiority or dominance of one particular language and its users over others.

The second article, written by Piotr Kuligowski and Stanislaw Knapowski, studies the concept of a *palais social/phalastère* in France. Originally associated with the utopian socialist Charles Fourier, the article focuses on mid-19th century attempts at adopting and redescribing the concept of a “social palace” in a context of urbanisation and industrialisation. Intended as a means of fighting social hierarchies by conceptualising Versailles-like royal palaces for the people, the concept slowly transformed and found its form as urban dwellings for factory workers. Of particular interest in the article are the tensions and interplay between concepts as expressed in language on the one hand, and in images and as concrete physical buildings on the other. As such, the article provokes reflection not only on the attempts to overcome social inequalities in an industrialising 19th century Europe, but also on the theoretical hierarchies between semiotics and materiality.

In the third article, Karin Jonsson examines the role of religious and nature metaphors in the reception of the Russian revolutions 1917 in Swedish socialist press. Jonsson is particularly interested in how the events, and indeed the very concept of a “revolution”, were interpreted through deterministic and sometimes cyclical conceptions of temporality. Whereas the more radical socialists used religious and nature metaphors in order to project a future world revolution, and as such, to anticipate and push for similar developments in Sweden, the social democrats were more sceptical using the Russian revolutions as an argument for democratic and social reform. The eventual victory of the labour movement, however, was portrayed in equally eschatological terms across the socialist press.

Martin Petterson in turn analyses the rise of the concept of “empathy” (*empatia* in Finnish and *empati* in Swedish) in the political rhetoric in Finland. The term was derived from scholarly discourse, where it denoted, among other things, the ability of the therapist to understand her patients. However, in political discourse, it was immediately used as a more abstract, general, or even scientific synonym to sympathy – as a call for compassion for those worse off. Thus, by way of paradox, even if the rise of the term “empathy” was part of the scientization of political rhetoric during the latter half of the twentieth century, it usually served the opposite purpose of criticizing cold rationality in political discourse. The adoption of scientific concepts in political rhetoric does not necessarily lead to more clarity, Petterson concludes, suggesting that the result is often more ambiguity.

The two final articles shift the focus from particular concepts to historical actors. In her article, María Luisa Jiménez-Rodrigo highlights the work of Charlotte Perkins, a pioneer of feminist sociology in the US at the turn of the 20th century. According to Jiménez-Rodrigo, Perkins was central in developing tools for analysing the gender as a structuring principle of social relations. In particular, Perkins was interested in the connection between economic structure and gender relations, which she analysed through the concept of an “androcentric culture”.

In the final article, Hubertus Buchstein discusses the deteriorating relations between Carl Schmitt and his student Otto Kirchheimer during the postwar decades. The backdrop for Buchstein's article is a recently discovered review of Kirchheimer's book *Political Justice* (1961), which was published semi-anonymously under the initials C.S.. Contributing to Schmitt's unusually negative review were both personal and scholarly disagreements. To be sure, Schmitt had already in the interwar era nursed a different view on "political justice" than Kirchheimer, but the disagreements grew in the postwar period. However, crucial was also the fact that Kirchheimer had flunked Schmitt's student George David Schwab's dissertation at Columbia University in 1962. According to Buchstein, this seems to have aggravated Schmitt to the extent that he wrote his derogative review.

As a whole, the issue invites us to reflect on political and cultural asymmetries, as well as on the relation between scholarly and political language.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Johan Strang  orcid.org/0000-0001-9142-210X
University of Helsinki, Finland

Strang
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