

# **Laudatio for Prof. Dr. Gerard de Zeeuw on the Occasion of his Mandatory Retirement**

**Richard Jung <sup>1</sup>**

Center for Systems Research

*Systems Research and Behavioral Science,*  
**19**, 177-179 (2002).<sup>2</sup>

Slightly expanded text of  
'Laudatio for Prof. Dr. Gerard de Zeeuw on the occasion of his mandatory retirement.'  
Magna Aula, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam NL, 19. April 2001.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kouřimská 24, CZ - 284 01 Kutná Hora, Czech Republic; *Tel / Fax:* +420 327 512 197;  
*E-mail:* [Richard.Jung@post.harvard.edu](mailto:Richard.Jung@post.harvard.edu) , *URL:* <http://www.RichardJung.cz/> .

<sup>2</sup> Copyright © John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

 177<sup>3</sup>

*Systems Research and Behavioral Science*  
*Syst. Res*, **19**, 177/179 (2002).

**DOI:** 10:1002/sres.454.

*Revised 6 August 2001. Accepted 6 August 2001.*

Copyright © 2001 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

## • *Laudatio*

# Laudatio for Prof. Dr. Gerard de Zeeuw on the Occasion of his Mandatory Retirement <sup>4</sup>

**Richard Jung** <sup>5</sup>

*Center for Systems Research, Kutna Hora, Czech Republic*

I did not stand up to say fare-thee-well to Gerard de Zeeuw. I stood up to praise him. And since he would not have me praise him for too long, I shall instead tell a story about an age long quest in which he, to my mind, participates. Gerard is for me many things: a steadfast friend, respectful, tolerant and helpful. Although he acts as if he did not know it, he is quite a lovable man. And, perhaps because he was born in what was then Dutch East Indies, he seems to me to be a quintessential Dutchman. In the Dutch way in a crowded and threatened land, he attempts to resolve the universal and perennial conflict between the will to power and the necessity to get along with others.

Wittgenstein, who does not here need any introduction, declared that we make ourselves pictures of the world. Bláha, a Brno sociologist of the between the wars generation, said that it was the role of the intellectual, to make pictures of the world for others. De Zeeuw, present here, being both modest and generous, wants to write a recipe for people how to make not only pictures of the world and but indeed worlds for themselves.

From conventional beginnings in mathematical psychology, statistics, decision theory he embraced an esoteric Dutch invention called andragology. True to its program, he was pre-occupied with the problem of human action, in its theoretical, instrumental and ethical aspects. In the last few years, while continuing to communicate in the sober and restricted

---

<sup>3</sup> Original page number in:  
*Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, 19, 177-179 (2002).

<sup>4</sup> Slightly expanded text of 'Laudatio for Prof. Dr. Gerard de Zeeuw on the occasion of his mandatory retirement'. Magna Aula, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam NL, 19. April 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Correspondence to: Richard Jung, Centre for Systems Research  
Kourimska 24, CZ - 284 01 Kutna Hora, Czech Republic.  
E-mail: [Richard.Jung@post.Harvard.edu](mailto:Richard.Jung@post.Harvard.edu) .

language of his disciplines, his efforts unfolded to attempt to solve a trinity of problems, which we inherited from the Gnostics, the Hindus and the Buddhists. One is how we can grasp the nature of things without altering them, the other how we can act as we ought to without violating our own selves, and the third how we can help others without enslaving them.

The attitude of the Gnostic, that knowledge is inherent within us, and that it ultimately creates the world – in the beginning was logos – is partly expressed in the admonishment ‘*Thou say Jesus said this and Jesus said that, but what does thou say?*’ by John Fox, a founder of the Quakers, to a Friend in a Meeting to pay attention to the ‘Light Within’. It is reflected as well in what Professor de Zeeuw told a couple of days ago at the beginning of the Conference on Individual Emergence<sup>6</sup> about a Dutch expression when shrugging of an unusual accomplishment: ‘*I did not know I had it in myself.*’

📖 178

Kant has revived the issue for modernity. Many grappled with this problem, some of them originating in my land, as Brentano, Freud, Husserl and Patocka. I shall not presume to choose names from among the many outstanding Dutch philosophers and especially Dutch phenomenologists. As formulated by Husserl after 1910, phenomenology is the study of the structures of consciousness that enable consciousness to refer to objects outside itself. This starts the Quest for the Holy Grail of Phenomenology (sought by Alfred Shutz in his theory of typification and followed by the various social constructivists and conversation theorists): how is not only individual, but also common or shared experience possible?

Yet it was a German, whom we may personally dislike, Heidegger, who gave the problem of observation and action its current definition. For Heidegger, being thrown into the world among things in the act of realizing projects is a more fundamental kind of intentionality than that revealed in merely staring at or thinking about objects, and it is this more fundamental intentionality that makes possible the directedness analyzed by Husserl. Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty are all existential phenomenologists, in that they deny the possibility of bracketing existence.

So was, without acknowledging it to either himself or to others, Ernst Cassirer. Like a scarlet thread through his *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, which kept appearing in parts from 1923 till posthumously, he struggles with problems of intentionality and the possibility of shared or common experience. In his 1944 *An Essay on Man. An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, he puts it most clearly: ‘Not mere observation, but rather action constitutes the center, wherein for man originates the mental organization of reality. Only here the spheres of the subjective and the objective begin to be distinguished, the world of the I becomes distinct from the world of things.’ The attitude is echoed again recently by Pierre Bourdieu, for example in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* or in his *Sociology of Symbolic Forms*.<sup>7</sup>

The basic problem of action is detachment. To act efficiently, one has to detach oneself from one’s feelings. To maintain the resolve to act, one has to detach one’s self from the consequences of one’s actions. Of the three questions that in the *Bhagavad-Gita* are given to Prince Arjuna by Lord Krishna, the incarnation of the god Vishnu, two concern action. One lesson is that it is hard to discern the inaction that is hidden in action, and the action that it is hidden in inaction; the other that one should follow the yoke of the essential nature, role, or status peculiar to oneself, Sva-Dharma, regardless one’s feelings or conse-

---

<sup>6</sup> Amsterdam, April 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

quences. Much later Max Weber, in describing the proper conduct of a person called or appointed to an office as impassionate, '*sine ira et studio*', said essentially the same. Yet when Eichman used this defense, he did not receive much sympathy. A central theme of Professor de Zeeuw is that observation is action, and that detachment of the observation from the observer is the key problem.

There are several lessons we have learned from and about science in the century that has just past: In science objectivity means covariance under the transformation of subjective observers; for observers there is the iron law of the impossibility of non-participation. On certain levels, emergence of phenomena is due to participation and in some generalizable instances observation literally creates elements of the world; and science is a social institution. As a social institution, science is not only embodied in people, but its norms are invented, and to some extent agreed upon, enforced and followed by people. What we call its epistemology is just a set of rules for the acceptance of statements. (I have the impression that Professor de Zeeuw would like to use the model of science to add an axiological dimension: criteria for the acceptance of actions.) Scientific discourse, when fully developed, is formally closed. And socially, in terms of membership, there is, at least in the well-defined and academic disciplines, a considerable approximation of closure. (These are other two features of science that Professor de Zeeuw would like to generalize to action.)

☞ 179

Buddha offered four radical solutions to these problems: there is no unitary self (Anatta), there is no shared knowledge (Golden Silence), and the way to bypass salvation in Nirvana (*i.e.*, suicide) is on the one hand in mindfulness to being in the present in one's thoughts, feelings and actions and on the other hand, ultimately in service to others. I have no indication that Professor de Zeeuw is a Buddhist, but he may be in sympathy with some of these assertions.

It is in these contexts that I have tried to understand Professor de Zeeuw's work, especially his recent 'The world constructed by actors' and the yet unpublished 'Constructivism: a 'next' area in scientific development?' Some of the concepts he introduces, such as 'complete collectives', 'detaching observations from observers', and 'high quality experience' I understand, although he does not refer to them in the general context that I have tried to briefly outline. Perhaps the most complete statement of his approach to knowledge and action appears in his 'Three phases of science...' <sup>8</sup>. There he introduces the notion of "self-constructed objects" in a way reminiscent of Thomas' famous formulation in *The Polish Peasant* <sup>9</sup> at the beginning of the 20th century: 'A definition of the situation is real in its consequences'. De Zeeuw states in a Maturana manner that 'By constructing the process of construction, one may realise '*self-constructed* objects'. As the efforts invested in this should be sufficient to maintain the object, its further use should be 'free'.' <sup>10</sup> To my mind, this expresses succinctly in a general epistemological language a process of social and cultural change depicted usually in sociological language: a socially controlled individual innovation may lead through gradual adjustment of mutual expectations to institutionalization and later to internalization of new forms of experience and action, and thus results in the emergence of new social facts.

---

<sup>8</sup> de Zeeuw, Gerard (2001). "Three phases of science: a methodological exploration." In *Problems of participation and connection*. *Systemica* special issue, nrs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, vol. 13. Lincoln Research Center, Lincoln. Pp. 433 – 460.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas, Wm. I. and Znaniecki, F. (1918-1920). *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press. 5 volumes.

<sup>10</sup> de Zeeuw, Gerard (2001). P. 450.

In his endeavors, I have come to bid Gerard '*Bon voyage!*' His persistent and almost life long quest will go on after this occasion at which we have gathered to honor him, and I for one will look forward to further reports from his audacious intellectual journey.