

Words of Paul Wouters as tribute to Loet Leydesdorff

Thanks for the honour to thank Loet Leydesdorff by saying a few words on this beautiful occasion.

My first meeting with Loet thirty years ago was not by reading his work, but in person when I interviewed staff of Science Dynamics about the work of Bruno Latour for the journal "Natuur en Techniek", a kind of Dutch Scientific American, and for the biggest weekly in the Netherlands, "Elsevier". I got intrigued and attended as a science journalist a number of the famous seminars at Science Dynamics. This kind of work and group appealed to me, so I decided to apply for an open PhD position, prodded by Loet's colleague Rob Hagendijk. It was an application for a PhD position on the role of scientific instruments scientometrically measured. I did not get the job. I think Loet correctly saw that I simply did not have enough knowledge yet of the methods that would have to be developed. Nevertheless, some spark had exchanged between us.

Later, after I got a PhD student job in another project, Loet Leydesdorff joked with his authentic giggle: "You are either a genius or you have gone completely mad", after I handed in a paper on reflexivity, inspired by Malcolm Ashmore's Reflexive Thesis book in my second year of writing my PhD thesis to the Annual Conference of the Dept of Science Dynamics. In my case, the answer was obvious (so I shelved the paper for later rethinking). Interestingly, Loet sometimes also provokes this question in some of his readers, especially if his writing goes a bit over their head. Again, the answer is relatively obvious but different. Loet clearly has quite a number of characteristics that are indicative of what I would call a genius.

Loet's contribution today about quantitative and qualitative STS and the problem of historicism shows this again. Loet problematizes at a level which really challenges us to think and rethink. It is not just a matter of combining quantitative and qualitative methods, as if these can easily live together - because there are deep contradictions in the underlying assumptions. Loet, at least as how I have experienced him, challenges assumptions that many of us tend to take for granted; or worse are *taught* to take for granted at the university because they have become built into dominant paradigms and in dominant social configurations.

Loet has co-authored with an astounding number of people, from different backgrounds in an astonishing number of problem fields. So he is clearly a very generous collaborator. I have also experienced this myself, how much Loet gives you when you work with him. Yet, I think it would be a misunderstanding to see Loet as a peacemaker who simply wants to bring together quant and qual STS in the style of creating harmony. I would rather argue that Loet is a completely different kind of bridge builder. I see Loet's unique contributions (which are far too many to be able to acknowledge) as those of an irritant provocateur who challenges key assumptions in BOTH the quantitative and the qualitative camps, not only in STS but in social science as a whole.

I cannot do justice to Loet's rich tapestry of thinking. But let me highlight two key productive and consequential irritations that Loet puts to each side. If we look at the history of scientometrics, we can argue that many factors were pushing in the direction of

scientometrics as a descriptive social technology to govern and manage the increasingly complex house of academia and science. It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that Loet almost singlehandedly prevented that scientometrics degenerated in a theory poor governance instrument. Both within the NL and at the international level. I think this was the key issue in the debates and clashes that Loet had with his colleagues at CWTS at the time. Without Loet, our field would have really been a lot poorer.

It is not just that Loet was telling the quants that they needed theory, it was more than that: it was his argument for a particular type of theory work (deeper than Luhmann, in my perception at least). If you read (and re-read because a normal person like me needs that) Loet's books, it jumps out at you that he is one of the very few who has proven to be able to combine constructivist sensibilities with systems theory and a thermodynamical kind of mathematics. And to develop and maintain an intellectually subtle and complex approach to theory.

This subtlety is for example vividly clear in Loet's paper with Olga Amsterdamska from 1989 in which they analyzed the dimensions of citation analysis. Actually, it was this work by Loet and his colleagues of Science Dynamics, and the subsequent discussions Loet and I had, that inspired me to start a PhD thesis on the creation of the SCI (under the guidance of Rob). Those papers about citation theory and practice were a challenge both to quants and quals. The quantitative camp was challenged to develop more subtle theories of citation than were common (the current debate about citations sometimes still suffers from too much simplicity). And the sociologists were challenged because the paper did not simply assume that social structure was influential but tried to map this empirically, in relation to the influence of intellectual structure and the mutation of ideas.

The qualitative side of STS and social science is in their turn especially challenged by Loet's plea, which he repeated again today, to "invert the time arrow". From the very beginning, I was intrigued and inspired by this plea, although I had to re-appraise my love for historical writing. His critique from the perspective of systems theory on historicism invites us to rethink the present and history from the future, instead of the other way around. I find this in the context of the current Corona crisis especially interesting. For example, I am currently reading Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam Trilogy, which is a form of (dystopian) speculative fiction which also, like Loet, emphasizes the imagination of possibilities and potentials.

Let me conclude.

Loet, you are a unique piece of work. I have learned more from you than I currently realize myself. I thank you for your inspiring, funny and insightful irritations to my system. Without you the second part of my life would have been very different and I am sure far less interesting and challenging!

For those who are familiar with American comics: you are Lucky Loet: the man who writes faster than his readers can read. Loet, you are lucky that you have this capacity and motivation. All of us are lucky that you are member of our communities. Thank you very very much!

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