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Jean-Luc Chappey, *La Société des Observateurs de l'homme: Des anthropologues au temps de Bonaparte (1799-1804)*. Paris: Société des études robespierristes, 2002. 573 pp. Tables, notes, appendices, bibliography, and index. 46.00 € (pb). ISBN 2-908327-45-7.

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This is a remarkable book that radically alters our understanding of an institution and a scientific project that, as Claude Blanckaert says in his preface, "semblait connue, inventoriée, réhabilitée pour de bonnes raisons" (p. 8). For many specialists in anthropology and its history, the short-lived Société des Observateurs de l'homme, whose projects included the "wild child" of Aveyron and the Baudin expedition to Australia, had become a privileged precursor of the modern discipline and even a pioneer of participant observation.^[1] Moreover, from François Picavet to Sergio Moravia and Michel Foucault, virtually everyone who has written about this seemingly familiar group has closely associated it with the Ideologues and the late Enlightenment.^[2] One of Jean-Luc Chappey's accomplishments is to show that generations of scholars have constructed and passed along a canonical history that rested on slender bases indeed. More broadly, in the course of thoroughly reconstructing the society, Chappey offers an ambitious and compelling social history of scientific and literary culture from Thermidor to the Empire.

Based on a doctoral thesis of 1999, Chappey's book is heavily influenced by Pierre Bourdieu and relentlessly tracks the Observateurs' social positions in scientific fields and their pursuit of intellectual legitimacy. This is a book that leads us not towards the colonies, but into the spaces of publishing, scholarly sociability, and political and cultural opposition. Chappey's approach is especially well-suited to this subject given the poverty of direct sources. The Société des Observateurs never published a scholarly journal or even a list of members. Using a wide range of archival and printed sources, Chappey establishes the social networks (*réseaux*) of the society's members and situates their projects within complex scientific, political and social contexts with striking specificity. The result is a model of analytical and methodological rigor and deep research. At 475 pages of text and notes, including dense prosopography, this is a challenging and very rewarding book.

Chappey's central finding is that the core of the Société des Observateurs de l'homme consisted of Catholic publicists and scholars hostile to the Ideologues and increasingly marginalized in both political and scientific culture. The creation of the society by the abbé Sicard, director of the Institut national des sourds-muets de Paris, and his protégé and client Louis-François Jauffret, reflected "une volonté de reconquête de l'espace public par des groupes qui en avaient été écartés et qui trouvent là un moyen de recomposer des solidarités mises en sommeil" (p. 31). Sicard, Jauffret, and several other Observateurs had been active participants in the catholic opposition to the republic during Thermidor and the Directory, an opposition that was forced to retreat after Fructidor (1797) but that began to resurface, albeit tentatively, when Napoleon came to power.

In chapter one, Chappey reconstructs a fluid *nébuleuse d'oppositions* of publicists, pedagogues and clerics and its many links to Sicard. The battles they waged were largely cultural, and the Ideology of Cabanis, Volney, and Destutt de Tracy became a primary target. Catholic publicists denounced materialism, promoted "healthy literature," and privileged the priest against the growing epistemological and political pretensions of the Savant. They were joined by men of letters and erudites whose intellectual terrain was being recast and downgraded by the rising authority of medicine and the Ideologues. The new Institut national, modeled on Cabanis' *Encyclopédie vivante*, entailed a reclassification of knowledge production with the sciences predominant and medicine at the apex. By creating the Société des Observateurs in early 1800, says Chappey, Sicard and his friends were taking up "stratégies de réappropriation d'un cadre d'intervention publique et de consolidation de positions sociales...." (p. 85).

From January to April 1800, the society remained shadowy and unofficial. Chapter two traces its tentative interventions and the constitution of the group's *noyau dur*. Jauffret, who became the society's secretary, was the ideal spokesman because of his amiable and neutral image, fostered by his reputation as a pedagogue. Chappey interprets the unconventional way in which the society went public (through the press, not the authorities), as well as its choice of meeting place (the hôtel de La Rochefoucauld), as clear challenges to the prevailing geography of scholarly space in Paris, which was dominated by the Ideologues and enshrined in the Institut national. However, the society was not an organ for the catholic reconquest. Chappey says, "les intérêts politiques, religieux et intellectuels qui avaient permis la construction de ces solidarités sous le Directoire sont désormais mis en retrait afin de défendre le statut savant du groupe des Observateurs et de rendre possible la reconnaissance officielle de leur projet de recherches" (p. 156). A scientific group with the object of "observing" the physical, moral, and intellectual dimensions of man had undeniable appeal for a wide range of scholars in 1800. For scholars such as Degérando, scientific societies provided opportunities to expand their *surface sociale* and find patrons or clients who could help consolidate their scientific legitimacy. Especially for younger scholars, societies offered "nouveaux lieux d'apprentissage et d'expérimentation..." (p. 185). For savants like Pinel, who were already ensconced in powerful positions, intellectual motives explain their entry into the society. Chappey's sharp biographical and disciplinary sketches help illuminate the different logic driving various figures to take part in the project.

In the summer of 1800 the society attained a new level of success and public visibility with its official participation in the preparations for the Baudin expedition and with the entry of a number of academic "strong men"—including Jussieu, Hallé, Cuvier, Fourcroy, Millin de Grandmaison—into its ranks. (In time, sixteen of the society's forty-five resident members belonged to the Institut national.) In chapter three, Chappey details the arrival of the "professors" (clustered into two groups, the naturalists and medical doctors on the one hand and the antiquarians and language specialists on the other) and the tensions that resulted from their presence. While they brought the society prestige and legitimacy, they also threatened the initial "equilibrium" established around the abbé Sicard. The society was "désormais traversée de multiples logiques d'intérêts et de relations qui, parfois, s'opposent et fragilisent la cohérence du groupe" (p. 161). Given its disciplinary and social diversity, what would the society's science of anthropology look like? Significantly, all the memoirs presented at its first public meeting were written by members of the *noyau dur*, and most were geared to a more popular audience. This was the anthropology of the voyagers, the famous deaf-mute Jean Massieu, and the "wild child."^[3] Questions about the society's scientific status were also raised by its rapprochement with commercial ventures such as the Société d'Afrique intérieure of Marseilles and by the efforts of a few to use the society as a platform for their catholic offensive.

In chapter four, Chappey locates in this context of risks to cognitive and social coherence the Observateurs' implementation of "norms and rules" relating to the functioning of the group and to the procedures of its science. By placing "obligations" and "constraints" on the members, the society's *règlement* was an attempt to resolve "les tensions au sein du groupe" (p. 225). The famous memoirs for the Baudin expedition, written by Cuvier, Degérando, and Moreau de la Sarthe, were also attempts at

cognitive and institutional normalization. Building on the work of scholars such as Marie-Noëlle Bourguet, Chappey offers an interesting thesis about the "sédentarisation des savoirs" (p. 250) since the mid-eighteenth century. As critics called for more objective and unadorned reporting and fewer adventure tales, voyagers had increasingly to follow the norms of observation and the collecting mandates established by "sedentary" scholars in Paris. With his focus on anatomy and the collection of skulls, and his disdain for untrained reflection, Cuvier clearly cast the voyager in a subordinate role.

What makes this account especially fascinating is that several of the Observateurs were voyagers in the older mold who were struggling to maintain their scientific relevance and their visibility before the public. Sonnini de Manoncourt, for example, vigorously contested Cuvier's anatomical approach and the "processus de confiscation du savoir par un savant sédentaire..." (p. 260). However, Chappey is not entirely convincing when he interprets Degérando's memoir, which dealt with the observation of "savage" customs, languages and institutions, within this framework. Degérando's injunction to learn local languages and "devenir en quelque sorte comme l'un d'entre eux" (p. 269) would hardly seem to privilege sedentary interests. Further, how would Chappey's schema explain perhaps the greatest scientific voyager of all time, Alexander von Humboldt, whose travels in Spanish America took place during the same years that the Observateurs were active? Scientific voyaging could and often did transform ambitious explorers into savants in their own right.

One of the book's many merits is that it links the Observateurs' anthropology to multiple scientific practices and discourses. For example, Chappey, again building on a fairly large body of work, nicely contextualizes Degérando's memoir within the varied and wide-ranging efforts of later eighteenth-century scholars and administrators to inventory French territory and its inhabitants. "Ce mouvement d'ensemble à partir duquel une science des peuples se met progressivement en place" (p. 266) became part of the "'bagage culturel' des élites sociales et intellectuelles de la fin du XVIIIe siècle" (p. 265). Degérando, who held a post in the ministry of the interior, was clearly engaged in the overlapping discourses of medical topography, descriptive geography, and statistics in France as he outlined the study of savage peoples.

It is in chapter five that Chappey fleshes out the contours and substance of the Observateurs' "hybrid anthropology," which was quite different from the science of man of Cabanis and the Ideologues and which was most cogently articulated by Jauffret in 1801. (It should be noted that Chappey concludes that Cabanis, Destutt de Tracy, Volney, and Garat, among others from the "canonical" list of Observateurs, never belonged.) Both Jauffret's and the Ideologues' projects were premised upon "un idéal encyclopédique d'unité des savoirs..." (p. 304). But, Chappey insists, their knowledge models were distinct in an important way. In line with the *Encyclopédie vivante*, anthropology for Cabanis "doit permettre la construction d'une véritable unité--une fusion pourrions-nous dire--des savoirs" (p. 305). Physiology provided the basis for this essentially hierarchical construct. For Jauffret, in contrast, "chaque savoir doit garder sa spécificité. C'est en effet dans leur juxtaposition--et non dans leur fusion--que cette unité des savoirs doit permettre la construction de l'anthropologie" (p. 306).^[4] Jauffret's inclusionary science fit well, of course, with the antimaterialism of many of the Observateurs. Jauffret called on them to combat those who would "rabaissent l'homme au niveau de la brute..." (p. 310).

By 1802, even Degérando had broken with Cabanis over the question of physical-moral unity, arguing that sentiments and ideas could be autonomous. The eighteenth-century naturalist Buffon was an important figure in these debates over human nature. Buffon's notion of natural history was generalist and descriptive, and his view of man was dualist: in "homo duplex," the mind was not reducible to the body. (Even Buffon's narrative style stood in sharp contrast to Linnaeus' "severe" style of writing increasingly favored by the professionals.) Besides providing scientific ammunition for critics of materialism, "homo duplex" was a position that could keep this very diverse group of scholars together in equilibrium. Disciplinary equality offered a secure space for the *seconds couteaux* (those without professional legitimacy), the theorists of universal languages, the pedagogues, the voyagers, the

popularizers. Increasingly marginalized in academic culture, these Observateurs were promised an important place in the construction of the new discipline, alongside the powerful naturalists and professors.

An area in which the *seconds couteaux* were especially visible was the society's civilizing mission to ameliorate the conditions of marginalized peoples. According to Chappey, "les Observateurs placent leur projet scientifique sous les auspices d'une obligation morale: celle d'amitié ou d'amour de l'Autre considéré comme semblable" (p. 281). Their philanthropy was sometimes tinged with antirevolutionary and antimaterialist moralism. But the Observateurs' attitudes were also in line with universalist and optimistic Enlightenment discourse, and they were firmly opposed to the doctrine of polygenism. The civilizing mission was also meant to be practical, and Chappey suggestively refers to it as their *anthropologie de terrain*. Perhaps the most curious example of this fieldwork was Jauffret's very popular series of promenades in the woods outside of Paris, which were conceived as a sort of moral therapy of socialization and pedagogy.

Why did the Société des Observateurs dissolve? We now know that we can no longer explain its disappearance by reference to Napoleon's contemporaneous attack on the Ideologues and the suppression of the Institut's Classe des sciences morales et politiques in 1803. In chapter six, Chappey leads the reader through a wide-ranging discussion of the shifting boundaries of scholarly and social space at the end of the Consulate and the early years of the Empire and offers a compelling synthesis of what he calls "un tournant majeur dans l'histoire sociale du monde intellectuel" (p. 426). The society was the victim of several interrelated trends including the rise of new social cadres and "experts" (and a corresponding contraction of the savant's functions); a *distanciation des savoirs*, reflected by the rejection of the *Encyclopédie vivante* and the restructuring of the Institut along the lines of the old (and heterogeneous) academic order, and growing disciplinary specialization. A resurgent church and the creation of the lycées played a role in the narrowing of the civic space in which to do science and the arts. From 1802, "un phénomène de spécialisation et de polarisation des lieux de savoir s'accélère au bénéfice des grandes institutions pédagogiques..." (p. 405). New norms and constraints affecting publishing houses further marginalized the voyagers and vulgarizers. It was not a propitious moment for learned societies, and many either disappeared or became appendages of the major schools.

In this new landscape, there was no place for the Observateurs' encyclopedic anthropology. While a generalist, encyclopedic approach to populations was taken up by the Académie celtique in 1805, its project "se trouve en effet en porte à faux avec l'organisation sociale des savoirs mise en place sous l'Empire" (p. 454). Chappey makes an important contribution here to long-standing questions concerning the difficulties encountered by the institutionalization of anthropology in France and the relatively late emergence of professional fieldwork; however, it is not entirely clear how far beyond the Napoleonic era we should project this compression of scientific culture and the consequent struggles of a certain type of science. How are we to view the wide variety of geographical, antiquarian, historical, and anthropological projects that emerged during the Restoration and July Monarchy?

Chappey concludes on a rare colonial note. François Péron, one of the survivors of the ill-fated Baudin expedition, successfully parlayed his voyage into academic recognition among the "sedentary scholars" by aligning himself "sur les nouvelles attentes du régime politique et sur les nouveaux principes d'intelligibilité de la connaissance de l'homme..." (p. 466). He not only fulfilled Cuvier's instructions to collect and measure, he also rejected his own preconceptions of noble savagery for a decidedly degraded portrait of primitive man. "Péron légitime ici le discours colonial mis en place par le régime politique à partir de 1802" (p. 466). The colonial connection here is apt, and I was surprised that it did not make more of an appearance. (We hear nothing, for example, about debates over slavery and human rights.)

Nevertheless, Chappey's resolutely metropolitan focus thoroughly anchors the Observateurs in their time and place. Instead of vague formulations about the non-European world in the French imagination,

we are presented with concrete connections and contexts (among them German scholars and publishing houses, the erudites and the horizons opened up by "the time of history," and of course the catholic opposition) that have long been neglected by historians of anthropology. For many years now, historians have moved beyond an older socially and politically disembodied history of ideas to more institutional approaches and to often subtle inquiries into the epistemology and politics of anthropology.[5] With its tight interweaving of the cognitive and the social, its depth of research, and its innovative conceptualization, Chappéy's book stands as a major contribution to the history of science and the revolutionary period. While discussion of ideas and their contexts is sometimes dispersed and overly compact (the sketches of the erudites and linguists are thinner than for other scholars), the book's organization around *réseaux* and a chronological *respiration d'un groupe* allows for a nuanced and complex airing of a fascinating scientific project. The Observateurs' fragile and contradictory anthropology should make us reconsider other episodes of French scientific culture.

NOTES

[1] See especially Jean Copans and Jean Jamin, *Aux origines de l'Anthropologie française: les mémoires de la Société des Observateurs de l'homme* (Paris: Sycomore, 1978). As Chappéy shows in his introduction, French anthropologists of the nineteenth century read the Observateurs quite differently, as precocious physical anthropologists. It should be pointed out that, apart from accepting the Ideologue link, George W. Stocking, Jr., "French Anthropology in 1800," *Isis* 55 (1964): 134-150, and Elizabeth A. Williams, "The Science of Man: Anthropological Thought and Institutions in Nineteenth-Century France" (PhD Diss., Indiana University, 1983) offered quite nuanced presentations and that many of their conclusions still hold.

[2] Chappéy says that the tight association between the Observateurs and the Ideologues was first asserted by François Picavet, *Les idéologues* (1891) and has been reasserted ever since. See esp. Georges Gusdorf, *Introduction aux Sciences humaines* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1960), Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les Choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), and Sergio Moravia, *La Scienza dell'uomo nel settecento* (Bari: Laterza, 1970).

[3] For an interesting examination of the Observateurs' theories on universal languages, see Sophia Rosenfeld, *A Revolution in Language: The Problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), conclusion.

[4] Chappéy notes the resemblance to the philosophes' vision of knowledge in the *Encyclopédie*, as interpreted by Robert Darnton.

[5] Over the last two decades, Claude Blanckaert has largely renewed the field. For a sampling of recent work, see Blanckaert, ed., *Les politiques de l'anthropologie: discours et pratiques en France, 1860-1940* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001). Williams (1983) remains the essential institutional overview; see also Nélia Dias, *Le musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro (1878-1908): anthropologie et muséologie en France* (Paris: CNRS, 1991).

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