



The Body in the  
Social Sciences

## NEWSLETTER, June, 2025

Editor: Somdatta Mukherjee

[mukherjee.somdatta4@gmail.com](mailto:mukherjee.somdatta4@gmail.com)

# Board Committee

Dulce Filgueira de Almeida	President, ISA RC54
Mônica Mesquita	Vice-President, ISA RC54
Somdatta Mukherjee	Secretary, ISA RC54
Letícia R. T. Silva	Treasurer, ISA RC54
Craig Cook	Board Member, ISA RC54
Anabela Pereira	Board Member, ISA RC54
Victoria D'hers	Board Member, ISA RC54
Dietmar Wetzel	Board Member, ISA RC54

# Words from the Vice President

---

How wonderful to be with you all!

The current global movement calls for collaboration, solidarity and resilience, and it is in this spirit that this newsletter comes to us.

We begin by sharing the art for our next meeting - the Bahamut SUMMIT - From the Moon to the Fish. This international open day event, which will take place in the first week of July in Lisbon, will be an opportunity to share, learn, and, most importantly, come together around the relational theme of body, emotion, and ecology. We are waiting for you there!

In the sequence, we announce the composition of RC54 at the 5th ISA FORUM in RABAT through direct link for you. We will have 16 sessions, consisting of 11 RC54 sessions and 5 joint sessions, totalling 99 oral presentations. Hooray! The hard work of the RC54 Board, combined with your participation, has made it possible to reach this number. As Vice-President of our RC, and on behalf of our President, Dulce Filgueira, and the Editor of our newsletter and Secretary – Somdatta Mukherjee, I do express our gratitude to each and every one of you.

Following the great success of our first two newsletters last year, which featured writing from renowned authors, we now also share more challenging and interdisciplinary insights from equally renowned authors like Sal Restivo.

Step by step we are expanding our RC externally, but mainly in our internal space, co-building an RC54 community.

Mônica Mesquita

Vice-president

# Stalwarts Speak

---



## Loneliness in Self and Society: On Social Brains and Social Bodies\*

Sal Restivo<sup>1</sup>

10th June, 2025

Loneliness has been a concern for many observers of the human condition, especially in America, for some time now. The late John Cacioppo, one of the founders of social neuroscience, pioneered research on the effects of loneliness. Social isolation or rejection disrupts our thinking, our will power, and our immune systems. It is for this reason that solitary confinement should be considered “cruel and unusual punishment.” Loneliness – lack of connections - may be the key to violent behaviors ranging from bullying to street violence and school shootings. It’s not too much of a leap to suggest that it might play a role in terrorism and warfare. Not only should we not underestimate the relevance of the loss of community in explaining violence, we should also pay more attention to the relevance of touching in a radically social species. Fear of and barriers to touching (and sex which is a more complicated extrapolation of touching) are implicated along with loneliness in many if not most of the problems of the human condition (Montagu, 1971; 3<sup>rd</sup>. ed. 1986). I hypothesize an Erotic force that bathes us from birth to death just as we are bathed in gravity. It is the fundamental reason sensuality, sexuality, and the social are so important for humane living.

Loneliness is not just an individual phenomenon. The separation of groups and cultures may cause collective loneliness. Ecumenical thinkers like Karen Armstrong (Charter for Compassion) and the Dalai Lama have argued that world peace could be based on the compassion that is at the center of all religious traditions. The problem is that compassion is a centripetal force and reinforces the boundaries that separate groups and cultures. This force tends to overwhelm any centrifugal forces that might help to link us across our cultural differences. There are certainly cases in which the centrifugal forces of compassion can be mobilized to support communication and exchange across national borders, and across barriers

---

<sup>1</sup>Professor at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, retired 2012; Senior Fellow, University of Ghent, 2012; Adjunct Professor, NYU, retired 2017; Honorary Lecture Professor, Northeastern University, Shenyang, China, 2007.

of language, sex, gender, race, class, and ethnicity. But the differences represented in all these categories of our lives are intensified by the centripetal forces of compassion. And this breeds physical and emotional violence across these categories.

In *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam (2000) documented the ways in which we have become increasingly disconnected from each other. Putnam may indeed have deftly diagnosed the damage that loneliness has done to our individual and collective health but this kind of analysis is not new. It became visible as part of the collateral social damage of the industrial revolution. It is iconically represented in the distinction between *gemeinschaft* (communal society) and *gesellschaft* (associational society) societies. That dichotomy was voiced in such English pairings as rural-urban, country-city, informal-formal, primary-secondary, status-contract, and community-society. There was a sense of loss – the loss of community, the loss of connection – in these dichotomies, not a sense of progress. It is time we gave serious attention to the evolutionary sociology lesson that humans arrive on the evolutionary stage already, everywhere, and always social. We do not arrive as individuals who become social; we arrive as the most radically social of the social animals and culture individuates us. We are radically social compared to our primate relatives, and differently social than the ants and the bees. This leads to new ways of thinking about body, self, brain, mind, and consciousness. And it gives us a new way to understand creative thinking and genius. There are no “lone wolves.” Even when alone or in isolation the person is a social being. The social in this sense is complicated; it can manifest itself in the competitiveness and aggression of chimpanzees and some humans on the one hand and in the more cooperative lives of bonobos and some humans.

Let's go back to the nature of the body in this ultra-social context. When human persons come into contact with other human persons a field is generated that engages a process of rhythmic entrainment. This field carries emotional communication and is the fuel of consciousness. Human bodies are rhythmic systems, essentially vibrating entities. Our postural vibrations are constantly adjusting to what comes under our gaze, whether an object like a painting or plants, animals, or other humans. When two such human vibrating entities come close together they are enveloped in a field that conducts emotions and consciousness. Dance is the gross expression of the fine-grained rhythmicity that is innate to all levels of life from cells to bodies; and even social systems have their rhythms, even societies and groups dance. When we sociologists and anthropologists argue, contrary to the physicists and biologists, that consciousness originates in

the social world (Whitehead, 2008), we are pointing to the innate rhythmicity of humans and their capacity for dance as the in-between conduits that generate consciousness.

If you do not have access to this social model and you are restricted to brain-centric thinking, you might solve the hard problem of consciousness by proposing a transducer theory. This is exactly what Robert Epstein (2021). Epstein is aware of certain mysteries that require explanation.

Epstein's mysteries include spirits, dreams, and the immaterial realms transcending the reality we know. We have had a sociological theory that explains these phenomena since the 1800s in the works of Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and others. Once we understand rituals, emotions, and collective effervescence we have the basic ingredients for explaining the origin of religious experience and the gods. These form the foundation for a rejection of transcendence and the explanation of Epstein's other mysteries then fall readily into place. Epstein's transducer theory is a mechanical solution – and an admittedly brilliant one – but it assumes a brain that doesn't exist, an isolated biological brain that operates independently of its cultural environment. The social brain paradigm (Restivo, 2023) stays within the framework of sociocultural phenomenon and doesn't require an electro-mechanical solution. Nonetheless, perhaps what we have are two sides of the same coin. We have a phenomenon which lends itself to two different theories depending on whether the approach is brain centered or social centered. The brain is manifesting what is going on socially.

Socialness is a fuel and our social being must be constantly re-fueled. The amount of fuel in our “self-tank” is measured in units of cultural capital. Adapting a concept introduced by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977/1990; and see Bourdieu, 1985), I use the term “cultural capital” to refer specifically to the forms of cultural capital that can be embodied. That is, what kinds and parts of accumulated cultural knowledge can be held in a memory cache (self-tank) with sufficient stability and sustainability to fuel one's conscious awareness of and access to the cache. Language is a primary example of this form of cultural capital. The size of the tank and the amount of cultural capital it holds at any given time establishes the limits of sanity when alone or in isolation.

## REFERENCES

Bourdieu, P. (1985), “The Forms of Capital,” pp. 241-58 in J.G. Richardson, ed. *Handbook for Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (Westport, CT: Greenwood).

Bourdieu, P. and J-C. Passeron (1977/1990). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: Sage).

Cacioppo, J. and W. Patrick (2008), *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: W.W. Norton).

Montagu, A. (1971), *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin* (New York: Harper and Row).

Putnam, R. (2000), *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

Restivo, S. (2023), *The Social Brain: Sociological Foundations* (New York: Bloomsbury/Lexington).

Whitehead, C., ed. (2008), *The Origin of Consciousness in the Social World*, Exeter UK, Imprint Academic),

---

\*Excerpt from *The Body Reimagined as a Node in a Nested Network of Social Ecologies: Body/Brain/Culture in the World Round Table 3 (Dialogues)*. *Knowledge in Praxis: The Social Construction of the Body*, Post Porto Alegre, Brazil, International Sociological Association Forum, RC 54: *The Body in the Social Sciences: Bodies in the Pandemic Context*, 9/4/21.

# Thoughts from our members

---

## Dulce Filgueira de Almeida

For the Humanization of Bodies, with Broad Smiles and Hope on Our Faces:  
A Reflection on Tomorrow with Ingold, Le Breton, and Freire  
Dulce Filgueira de Almeida<sup>2</sup>

It is with great pleasure that I accept Professor Adrian Scribano's invitation to participate in the event "*Thinking about Tomorrow: Challenges and Hope for Latin America*", organized by the International Network of Sociology of Sensibilities. As a sociologist of the body, discussing sensibilities and emotions—especially in the current global context—seems to me not only relevant but essential. Sharing this space with colleagues such as Adrian Scribano, Juan Antonio Roche, and Geoffrey Pleyers is a great honor.

As a researcher, I recently asked myself: how can someone who has devoted much of her academic life to ethnographic studies with fishers and traditional communities (such as quilombolas)—analyzing their embodied practices and lived experiences—and who now researches the origins of the sociology of the body in Brazil through the work of American sociologist Donald Pierson of the Chicago School, speak about the future? More specifically, *what* future are we speaking of?

Our present moment is profoundly shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic—or its aftermath—which has ushered in what some refer to as the “new normal.” At the same time, we face the looming specter of the far right, which has deeply affected Latin America. In Brazil, this influence will last, at least formally, until December 31, 2022, following the upcoming presidential elections in October—a moment when hopes may be renewed.

It is evident that the pandemic has not impacted all nations equally, nor has it led to public health policies grounded in equality or equity. In some Latin American countries, for instance, the

---

<sup>2</sup> University of Brasília  
President of RC54 – The Body in the Social Sciences



pandemic has unfolded without the implementation of basic health measures. This likely results in underreporting both the number of infections and deaths.

The lasting impacts of the pandemic—along with the rise of the far-right—have laid bare the profound sociocultural rifts that underlie care for human life in our societies. These rifts are symptoms of a deeply unequal world, underpinned by capitalism, colonial legacies, and stark economic and social distances between nations and bodies.

Some data from Brazil illustrate these inequalities. First, there are clearly “outsider bodies”—those of Indigenous peoples, quilombolas, women, children, environmental defenders (such as Bruno Pereira and Dom Phillips), and those living in extreme poverty. Many of these individuals lack access to clean water, sanitation, and waste collection. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, PNAD Continuous, 2020), only 44.8% of Brazilian households are connected to a public sewer system—this in a country that was once among the world’s largest economies, yet remains plagued by extreme inequality.

A second indicator of concern is access to in-home bathrooms. According to the same report, 5.4 million Brazilians (2.6% of the population) live in households without a private bathroom. This figure rises to 8.1% among those living on less than \$5.50 a day (PPP) as of 2019. In such contexts, even the simple act of handwashing becomes a public health challenge. The absence of running water or treated water, coupled with household overcrowding, creates dire conditions. This overcrowding is most prevalent among families with children, particularly single mothers. And the situation is even more critical in other regions of the Global South, such as Guinea-Bissau, where even in the capital, many residents live without running water or electricity, let alone sanitation infrastructure.

In light of these circumstances, we must reflect on the notion of “outsider bodies.” I draw here on Howard Becker’s concept, which, as he notes, is inherently ambiguous and ambivalent. An outsider may be someone who violates social rules knowingly—or even someone seeking to impose new ones. Thus, who is labeled an outsider depends on social interactions and the perspective from which they are viewed (Becker, 2008).

Given all this, how can we imagine tomorrow? And what might it look like? (To quote a beloved Brazilian song, beautifully interpreted by Simone.)

We must remember that “the past shapes the future,” as a character in a television series once wisely said. Learning from past mistakes is essential if we are to construct a different future—one based on new foundations for imagining and acting.

As Tim Ingold reminds us, the relationship between experimentation and imagination is based on the premise that we are alive *in* this world, and the world is alive *for* us (Ingold, 2019). At the same time, the world is provisional. Its structure is not fixed, which means that human resistance remains possible—even in the face of catastrophic events like the pandemic or the global rise of the far right. Ingold, Le Breton, and Paulo Freire offer valuable insights here.

First, we must embrace our shared humanity. Perhaps our societies could place the humanization of bodies at the center of cultural and social dynamics. The key question, according to Ingold, is how to live. In *Anthropology: Why It Matters*, he writes that anthropology—not philosophy—is best suited to tackle this question, because it is “philosophy with people in it” (Ingold, 2019, p. 8). Never has such a philosophy been more necessary. We are more numerous than ever before, and we live longer than ever. Anthropology, Ingold argues, must help restore balance—mediating between scientific forms of knowledge and the wisdom of human experience and imagination. We must, he insists, “take the other seriously.”

But even as we take the Other seriously, we must also smile. What does that mean? In David Le Breton’s work, we rediscover the smile. It emerges in specific relational contexts and reminds us—despite its contradictions—that democracy can still inspire us to pursue social justice and human rights. Just as the smile is polysemic and enigmatic, so too is democracy. The smile expresses embarrassment, discretion, mystery, naivety, irony... “Sometimes, even when I am sad, I smile,” Le Breton writes (2022, p. 17). The smile humanizes our daily relationships. It softens social interactions and allows us to see the Other differently. It is a subtle, full-body gesture—mouth, eyes, nose, teeth—that brings lightness to life.

In Brazil today, our smile is intertwined with the hope for democracy. We look to the recent experiences of our neighbors—Argentina, Chile, Colombia—and hope to follow their example toward greater justice and broader human rights, especially for those outsider bodies: Indigenous peoples, quilombolas, women, children, and environmental protectors.

Finally, as living human beings (Ingold, 2019) who smile (Le Breton, 2022) and learn from the past, we must embrace *hope*—as Scribano urges. For this, we turn to Paulo Freire, one of Brazil’s greatest educators. His *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, *Pedagogy of Autonomy*, and *Pedagogy of Hope* have become global references. Hope, for Freire, is not passive. It is not about waiting. It is about *hoping as doing*: standing up, going after, building, resisting—and never giving up (Freire, 1992).

Long live democracy! Long live the unity of Latin America! For the human rights of forest peoples, and for the dignity of all lives: let us hope—actively, courageously, and collectively.

## Activities



# BAHAMUT SUMMIT OPEN DAY



## FROM THE MOON TO THE FISH (Un)Tangle Ecology-Body-Emotion Relation

- 09h30 – Somatic Practice & Reconnection with Earth with [Daniela Velho](#) | Visão Pura  
10h15 – Grape Reception  
10h45 – Open Session - [Graça Martinho](#) & [Mónica Mesquita](#) | MARE NOVA  
11h00 – Plenary Session - **AT HOME ON THE WAVES? SOME REFLECTIONS ON OCEANIC LIFE**  
[Tim Ingold](#) | University of Aberdeen - Keynote Speaker (online)  
[Daniel Oliveira](#) | MARE NOVA - Moderator Q&A  
12h45 – Lunch at Espriguiçódromo  
13h45 – Sea-ing the Ecology, Body & Emotion Relation - Roda de Conversa with  
[Anabela Pereira](#) | Tribo Cura | Portugal  
[Emanuel Ramos](#) | Tiniguena | Guinea-Bissau  
[Claudia Lorenzoni](#) | Ifes | Brazil  
[Paulo Borges](#) | Sanctuary Dewachen | Portugal  
15h30 – Felling the Ecology, Body & Emotion Relation - Sacred Dance with [Yara Couto](#) | UFSCar  
16h00 – Papers Presentation  
18h00 – Close Session | [Dulce Figueira](#) | UnB | Brazil & [Vitoria D'heres](#) | UBA | Argentina  
18h30 – Fringe Meeting at Campus

**NOVA University Lisbon**

**4th July 2025 - CAMPUS CAPARICA**

mandatory registration until 15<sup>th</sup> June - link

contact - [bahamut@fct.unl.pt](mailto:bahamut@fct.unl.pt)



- RC54, ISA in collaboration with WG08, ISA and OLO MARE NOVA SST is going to organise an event – BAHAMUT SUMMIT, a Pre-Forum ISA event in Lisbon. This international event is open for the general public, with the possibility to participate through oral communication. All necessary details and information about this open day is in the google forms: <https://forms.gle/vnZb86hbPa5PgDUz8> . The communication was made by OLO MARE NOVA SST (<https://www.fct.unl.pt/noticias/agenda/2025/05/cimeira-bahamut-da-lua-ao-peixe-desenredar-relacao-ecologia-corpo-emocao>).
- RC54 is organising several sessions in the V ISA Forum, Sociology, to be held at Rabat, Morocco, from 6th to 11th July, 2025. Please visit the ISA website for more details on the sessions. For any queries please do not hesitate to contact our programme coordinators:  
Dulce FILGUEIRA DE ALMEIDA – [dulce.filgueira@gmail.com](mailto:dulce.filgueira@gmail.com)  
Monica MESQUITA – [mmbm@fct.unl.pt](mailto:mmbm@fct.unl.pt)

## Follow us

---

WEBSITE	<a href="https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/research-networks/research-committees/rc54-the-body-in-the-social-sciences/">https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/research-networks/research-committees/rc54-the-body-in-the-social-sciences/</a>
LINKEDIN	<a href="https://www.linkedin.com/company/rc54-the-body-in-the-social-sciences-international-sociological-association-research-committee">https://www.linkedin.com/company/rc54-the-body-in-the-social-sciences-international-sociological-association-research-committee</a>
BLUESKY	<a href="https://bsky.app/profile/rc54-isa.bsky.social">https://bsky.app/profile/rc54-isa.bsky.social</a>
INSTAGRAM	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/isa.rc54">https://www.instagram.com/isa.rc54</a>
FACEBOOK	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/186596218868733/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/186596218868733/</a>

## Editor's note

---

Dear Readers,

Here I am once again, sharing my thoughts with you all. To promote and build an integrated peace in the present scenario of unrest and to reinvigorate our social system we have to do our part by stamping out exclusion, talking about equity and equality, addressing policy change and climate change, situating bodies in protecting geo-political space and intergenerational relations and by looking within. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Professor Sal Restivo for his in-depth writing. I also take this opportunity to thank our President, RC54, Dulce Filgueira de Almeida for her thought provoking write up.

We are together as a RC54, ISA community because of our common research interest – 'The Body in the Social Sciences' where we try to understand, think, explore, explain and describe different cultures from different perspectives of the umbrella theme of our RC54, ISA. Academic conferences, seminars and workshops are those platforms where we get the opportunity to share our thoughts, know what others are thinking on the same subject area and thus contribute to our knowledge flow. As you all know that we will be meeting soon for our next ISA Forum in Rabat, RC54 is organising sessions where we exchange and cultivate our thoughts. I take immense pleasure to let you know that ISA, RC54, in collaboration with WG08 and OLO MARE NOVA SST is organising a Pre-Forum ISA event – BAHAMUT SUMMIT – in Lisbon. I would like to thank Monica Mesquita, Vice President, RC54 for taking all the responsibilities in organising this event and request you to take part in the same.

While concluding I thank you all for your continuous support that made me understand what it takes to build a community and what it means to be in a community with one another. Your participation in RC54, ISA helps us to sustain each other throughout our academic journey.

I believe that it is always possible to do better next time. So, do not hesitate to reach out at [mukherjee.somdatta4@gmail.com](mailto:mukherjee.somdatta4@gmail.com) with your positive criticism.

Enjoy your read.

Somdatta Mukherjee

June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Kolkata, India