

## What We Do Not Know in the Undertakings of Knowledge

*In all societies certain groups of people make knowledge their way of life, dedicating themselves to research and the acquisition and use of knowledge. Thus sorcerers and priests, shamans and scientists, make up special—albeit minority—groups to whom society acknowledges an extremely important role.*

*In order to understand the relationship between these groups and the rest of society, it would be wrong to assume that ignorance and knowledge are diametrically opposed realities, each one homogenous, coherent, and stable in its own right. In fact these groups are not fixed and stable. Everything depends on one's point of view. Each one of us is ignorant in relation to someone or something, an expert in relation to another. Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent, in her inquiry into the vulgarization of knowledge, shows how scientific thought needs this less dense but by no means empty audience that is the public at large. A strange public: while declaring the public prey to vague opinions and the passions of prejudice, science also considers it desirous of knowledge, capable of understanding and willing to learn.*

*There is also ignorance inside science itself. Or rather there exists an infinity of ignorance in the scientific realm, composed of unformed and unformulatable questions; areas of enormous confusion and difficulty at the heart of the most up-to-date and successful research. How do scientists direct their research? We know that many of them complain, in our time, of not being able to keep up with what is going on around them, with what other researchers are doing. As Yves Beauvois and Cécile Blondel-Lucas show, even in what one knows best, even inside one's own area of professional research, obstacles, limitations, and traps take up much of the field. Contemporary history seems to be more accessible than many other areas of research; yet everything about the way it produces its knowledge is problematic.*

*Perhaps, with Jacques Schlanger, we need to reconsider the very desire to know, this libido sciendi that has been the object of a long-standing and well-articulated theological distrust. The fact that intellectual curiosity is viewed favorably in our times may be the result of it being poorly understood thanks to our dulled sensibilities. There is nothing indeterminate in the desire to know, nor is the knowable without limits or knowledge without constraints. In knowledge dream and desire outstrip the possible, although this disproportion is also applicable to the situation of reason.*

*Is our inquiry, in the final analysis, an epistemological one? According to Isabelle Stengers, what we don't know about knowledge and its concerns reflects, on a deeper level, an ethical dimension. By reifying its object and disqualifying all other modes of knowing, science bases itself on power relations. Can it abandon its Western arrogance? Can we invent a way of knowing that is non-aggressively rational, capable of discovering the "I" of any inquiry into knowledge, in all its depth and sweep?*

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