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The discussion

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explain thereby (in words and concepts that can never do justice to the lived experience), the historically specific form of relations among collectively distinctive kinds of persons.

Notes

1. During the live debate Sola began playing his congas here.
2. During the live debate a three-minute improvisation took place between Sola and Madeleine. To listen to the sound recording please visit: <http://coa.sagepub.com>. Also see <http://www.cresc.ac.uk/people/dr-gillian-evans>

The discussion

Peter Wade, Manchester: Gillian, I enjoyed your talk and the musical performance was daring and good but could you relate what you did to the theme of the actual motion and what James was saying. Can you try and make some links there because I didn't get them?

Gillian Evans: What I wanted to do was invent a relation in order to show that that is not what anthropologists are doing. In order to understand the historical forms that relations take among collectively distinctive kinds of people, we have to enter into relations of co-creation with those people in order to be able to then explain those relations. But that's not the same as bringing relations into being anew, for the first time. The relations anthropologists study exist historically and are continuously emerging.

Karen Sykes, Manchester: Gillian, could you reflect upon your relationship, *as an anthropologist*, to the performance that you provided here for us today?

Gillian Evans: Yes. To invent a relation and have so much fun with it in the way that the two musicians and I did today and to feel instrumental – as mediator – to the creation of that relation, allowed me to reflect on why it is so difficult to be an anthropologist. The flesh and bloodness of it is *incredible* – words and the concepts do no justice whatsoever to the experience of what it is like to enter into relations with people. And the bringing into relation of myself, as an anthropologist, to the historically specific form of the amazing relations that other people are already making, to enter in as a co-creator of that process is *so* difficult. And to not only enter into the field as a co-creator, but then to try to do the whole process any justice in words and concepts that matter to anybody or explain anything adequately: I learned how hard anthropology is by doing this.

Becky Bloom, UCL: I notice that relations and connections were used in all four talks almost interchangeably. My question to all four speakers is why is this so?

Casper Bruun Jensen: I think I probably was guilty of conflating connections and relations. I think Morten didn't and, if I understand correctly, the problem is that connections tend to sound too literal. It makes you think of the most instrumental version of actor-network theory, where you literally trace how one actor is

connected to another: 'I am connected to my computer in a certain way ... and I am connected to other people in very literal, instrumental ways.' But relation is far broader and potentially crosses, as far as I am concerned, the material and the conceptual. So I think the notion of the relation opens up more things that it is possible to engage with anthropologically than do connections. This is something I have learned from relational anthropology of the sort presented by Marilyn Strathern, and that has helped me to think further on, on top of the kinds of anthropology or ethnography of the science and technology that you get out of reading a lot of Bruno Latour.

Morten Axel Pedersen: One of the points I tried to address in the beginning of my defence was exactly that: it's dangerous to conflate the concept of the connection with the concept of the relation. Because the real merit of the notion of the relation is that it enables you *not* to ask the question: 'if this is connected to that, is it then not connected to this other thing?' The concept of the relation *unlike* the concept of the connection allows for every thing to be related. The question is: 'In what particular way is it related? What kind of relationship is it?' You could say that connection is only one kind of relation. Then it is our task to start theorizing and identifying and naming what all the other kinds of relations are, if you like.

James Leach: If what I said didn't establish a disconnection between 'relation' and 'connection' then I failed to get across what I meant. The way that I was talking about relation and why it is so important to understand its role in the creative practice of anthropology is absolutely because it is more than just connecting things together. The relation gives us ways of understanding how concepts and persons inter-fill each other's positions, are interchangeable, borrow from each other, contain parts of each other. And in doing so, the anthropologist acts creatively by engaging in relations with others. It is engaging in parts of their relations, by picking up certain parts of what their relations do, by running with those, by presenting them back, by putting them into relation with concepts that we use ourselves all the time, thereby refracting and making relative the meaning and use of those concepts. That isn't connection. That is a much more active and technical understanding that just connecting things together.

Gillian Evans: The interesting thing for me about a relation compared to a connection is that the relation is a moment not a thing. It's what emerges when the connection transcends the mechanics of its production. The relation is 'the happening' where the state of being of one entity changes in proportion to the change in the state of being in the other. Entities become mutually specified through the relation. Before that they are just connection. The relation is the moment which transcends the mechanics.

Becky Bloom: And where do you place yourself in between what is related and what is not related. Where does the anthropologist place him or herself in this tension?

Morten Axel Pedersen: If we pursue the technical definition of the relation that I would like to advocate and maybe reinvent, then that question simply does not

make sense. Because everything is related, the question is how and not just how much, but in what way and what kind of relation.

Casper Bruun Jensen: If I could just latch onto that, isn't that part of the inventive moment that's going on there? Because everything is ... shall we say ... virtually related but it isn't in fact related and so sustained efforts are put into bodying forth the particular relation. But doing that is an additive kind of thing. It is then no longer just finding out what was there and making obvious or making explicit. It is in fact performing the relation, a specific relation in a distinct new way. I think that's where one of the inventive moments is in anthropology and I can't see how it could fail to be an inventive moment – doing precisely that.

Gillian Evans: As for where one is personally implicated as an anthropologist in making relations, I want to emphasize the point I made about self-alteration: that to be in a relation is to take the risk of self-alteration; that to enter into the co-creation of the historically specific forms of other people's relations is by definition to take the chance that you will not recognize yourself at the end of the process. Therefore, to be an anthropologist is to take a risk of change.

Laura Watts, IT University of Copenhagen: James, my understanding of your distinction between the two terms was that creativity allows for co-construction between participants and invention does not or at least produces much more of an asymmetry. I was wondering if you could say why the invention of the relations does not involve the co-construction.

My second question draws from Donna Haraway about situatedness. If you were talking about the difference between invention and creativity as the ways in which participants are potentially changed, then surely there has also to be taken into account the knowing about that relation. The relation can be different for the two people who are involved. What I'm trying to say is that there is a situatedness that is different between the two participants in the relation. And it seems to me there's something inventive about that on both sides, but it might be different. So there is an invention there, but it might be different on both sides. Maybe you could comment on that and how that plays to your discussion on invention and creativity.

James Leach: 'Invention' is a term that is deeply tainted, in our language. Have we not read Latour?! Have we not got a sense that invention is the way that one masks the actual creative processes in collectivities and among collectivities, whereby things come into being, to the end of creating a particular claim over something which has been created – and usually to the detriment of other people. I was trying to reclaim creativity. And I say reclaim, because if you push me I'm going to have trouble in telling you that creativity is an all-singing-dancing happy term either. But I'm trying to reclaim it for anthropology for exactly that reason. Because the taint of invention is a taint which puts it much closer to the kinds of critique of imposition, of claiming against others and so forth which is completely against the ethos of the anthropology that I want to promote.

In terms of your second question. There can be no creativity, there can be nothing coming into being without difference, without the friction that is caused by difference in relation. I don't think that's invention. Of course, in certain times,

in certain places, where invention is the mode in which things have to appear, then it becomes inventive – inventiveness. But I don't think that I invent my interlocutors when I'm talking to them. I don't think I invent the concepts that we share and gain. I think there may be co-creation, there may be friction, there may be misunderstanding, there may be mutual incomprehension. Relations don't always have to be creative. But the motion was 'The task of anthropology is to invent relations' and I'm trying to suggest that to take this positively, one would have to say that the task of anthropology might be to create relations and see creativity located in them.

Gillian Evans: I think the point about the situation if we were to think about it relationally is to ask the question, 'What does it mean to enter into meaningful relations of exchange here?' And the task of anthropology, in a way, is to address that difficulty through participant observation, so that the anthropologist is accommodating to the specific form of exchange relations. And that accommodating *to* inevitably means that there is an imbalance in terms of the competence of what's required. The 'accommodating to' is always a learning process in other words. And that learning process is about making sense of the situation as a historical case. It's not about inventing it and bringing into being for the first time.

Matei Candea, Durham: This is following up on what's just been said about invention. It's a question to Casper and to James. It involves, in Casper's sense, inventing a relation between this debate and Gabriel Tarde. Tarde can be described as a great theorist of invention which he thought of as opposition between different lines of imitation. Imitation, opposition and invention were the important things for him. So two opposite lines of imitation would meet in a person and that would create an invention. So I guess my first question is, if we read invention like *that*, which is clearly not about the valiant individual inventor, would that mean that you, James, agree with Casper? Because beyond the sort of terminological distinction it sounded to me like you're both actually proposing the kind of anthropology that wasn't miles apart. So that was my first question: If you accept the Tardean version of invention are you actually saying similar things?

My second question, which is related to this is that I think Bruno Karsenti pointed out that, in Tarde, every imitation is already an invention. Every time someone imitates something, that's already inventive in the sense that no imitation is perfect. And I was wondering whether to come back to the kind of objectivism that everyone's rejected. Might one say that the grain of truth in the objectivists' version of discovering a relation is in that order to invent stuff you actually have to try to imitate? So anthropologists try and be like people that they admire and produce something completely different, or they try and give a really, really good description of something, or they try and implement a concept that is an ethnographic concept theoretically – and, of course, they produce something completely different. So I just wondered what all four of you think about the following – in order to invent relations you actually have to try and describe them or copy or imitate them and then fail?

James Leach: I'm interested by the idea that imitation is how one learns and how one practices and how one actually comes to know. You said every imitation is

invention, but how can it be an invention in the way that I try to render the concept? It doesn't make sense to do so. The point is that every imitation is not an invention for us. Every imitation is exactly not that, it is a repetition and a repetition which can in fact be blocked and stopped by the kinds of words and kinds of understandings of ownership, creativity and invention that we live among. So it's all very well for us to try and regenerate the term 'invention' and say 'In an ideal world it's the same as creativity that James has described', but we don't live in that ideal world. We live in a world where these things have consequences. So Tarde yes, fine. He's got an interesting understanding of invention and I'm happy to think about it and work with it, but I'm not going to say that Tarde has put his finger on what invention is in the contemporary world that we live in.

Casper Bruun Jensen: I'm more inclined to the Tardean invention and imitation than James is. But I could imagine that sometimes attempting to be 'other than' also could lead to invention, so I don't know about the generic 'imitative' scheme. But in general I think it's congenial and it ties very nicely up with the Deleuzian inspiration that runs through a lot of the things that Morten and I have been saying. One thing that comes to mind is Deleuze's *magnum opus* *Difference and Repetition*. The Deleuzian argument is that repetition invariably contains its own vectors of change, seeds of transformation and so on. It is then the job of the philosopher, and I've extrapolated and said 'for the anthropologist', with other means, to tease out what are those vectors of change and seeds of change. That is the invented part of it. And I'd also not quite let James off the hook with his suggestion that there is a deep difference between creativity and invention because first, it was established that everybody agrees that nobody discovers anything. We are all in line with that. But I think then we've cleared the ground completely for James being on our side here. Because the only way you can then differentiate creativity, or creation, from invention, is by operating with this extraordinarily circumscribed and literalized version of invention taking it out of contemporary patent rights and so forth. And it's of course fair enough that James doesn't want to accept the Tardean version of invention, but surely you must accept that 'invention' might have many other valences than contemporary, modern legal systems give to the term. I think potentially you could probably discuss the taintedness of 'creation' and many other terms as well. In fact, invariably so, because each time you want to work with or suggest a new concept, that is also a reinvention of particular relations that are built into that, which is part of what my presentation was about. So I think that in the grand scheme of things we are very much in line, and to the extent that we aren't, it's because of this particular circumscription. And I think James would probably be happy if he went back and studied how interesting invention can be made in the hands of such people as Deleuze!

James Leach: So one would need to have a sort of second-order anthropology. One which first clears concepts of their historical and situated specificity in order that they can then be reapplied to specific historical circumstances to have any effect?

Morten Axel Pedersen: Yes, James, I think so – because that's exactly what happens to the 'relation'. Surely the way you use 'relation', which seems to be a term that you *would* like to defend, that has also been seriously re-described if we go back to the way you use it in your talk. You're not using it exactly as you made clear before, relation synonymously with connection, but that's ... indeed ... how many people use it. So you have re-described, you have invented, the concept of 'the relation' in the same way as we are (and I think we should have made that more clear from the beginning) *defining* a particular sense of the term 'invention'. The sense we're defining has no other. Invention has no other. Invention is what there is. Exactly as Casper was describing now, this is the Deleuzian point that the only thing that repeats itself is difference. There is no 'Other' to invention. Invention is simply what is happening. And that is the general conceptual basis of the argument we are making. Of course, we are not thinking that we are sitting here imposing schemes on a world which is passive and with our active anthropology inventing the world anew. The world constantly reinvents itself and we are part of that.

Gillian Evans: Deleuze said that transformation is only evident when it is affective. In other words, that affect is the moment of change. What I tried to show in my example is that the relation emerges in the moment of the affective transformation. So, I think what you're saying about imitation just doesn't really capture what happens when people search, through the experiment of exchange, for commensurability. The notion of imitation suggests a seeking for sameness and similarity, but actually what people are seeking for in co-creating with people is *change*. And the creation and the transformation is given by the affective moment of differentiation.

Martin Holbraad, UCL: James, the underlying point of dispute is this moral dimension to your argument. I think this turns on an analogy in Marilyn Strathern's work, which Casper cited, which is the analogy between the relations between people and the relations between concepts. And I think your kind of argument and your moral stand relies on that analogy – on a kind of flat juxtaposition between those two levels of description.

So basically, your dig at invention is roughly to say that it unflattens that analogy. The breakdown of the analogy is in its hierarchy, whereby the relation between concepts is valorized higher than the relations between people. Hence the analyst and the anthropologist has a kind of smarter-than-thou relationship to his or her informants, who are the people relating and being observed and so on. So it seems to me that your Strathernian adherence to the interchangeability between those two forms of relations is the motivation to your anti-hierarchical bid, as it were.

Morten's paper, ethnographically speaking, his point about this converted Christian actually seems to have a direct bearing on the breakdown of that Strathernian analogy. It is an argument for the conservation of relations. So relations that are distributed between people get 'intributed', or whatever it is, into different constituencies of the individual mind. Now that immediately is an argument about the breakdown in the analogy between the relations between people

(the pre-converted Mongol) and relations between ideas or part of the mind so to speak (the Christian Mongol). Morten's argument is so interesting because it precisely makes a distinction between those two levels.

So I'm wondering whether, Morten, your argument as well as being an argument about Christianity and conversion, is also an argument about intelligence? I mean intelligence in the 'elitist' sense in which 'intelligence' is gauged in universities, where we work, and according to which we judge, precisely, the kind of relations Strathern must have in mind when she talks about 'relations between concepts' as distinct, I would add, to her 'relations between people'. I know that's a huge taboo to say that, but nevertheless, while we are very happy to grade A, B, C to let people into university or not let them in on grounds of how smart they are, we don't talk about how smart our informants are. To talk about anthropology as 'co-creation', as if our relations to and between informants (viz. 'people') were equivalent and hierarchically on a level with the relations between concepts that our analyses establish is just to observe the taboo, as if the best compliment we could pay our informants were to say that they too are anthropologists just like we are (a geeky compliment to say the least, and pretty deranged as an empirical observation!). So, anyway, it seems to me that your political position is actually quite anthropologically interestingly questionable, if we take Morten's argument on board and try to start thinking about the relationship between ideas analytically as being dis-analogous to the relationships between people that we study ethnographically.

Morten Axel Pedersen: The way I understand what you're saying, Martin, is that the way I would like to take this Christian convert seriously is to say that a lot of stuff somehow seemed to appear *inside her* after she converted. It's true I'm working with this notion that the amount of complexity or relationality must remain constant from a given sort of vantage point. So from the vantage point of her, she has simply become more relational inside, in some sort of sense there is actually more of her – and that's not necessarily a good thing. Politically, ethically, in some senses it's actually quite problematic because this kind of involution, each on herself of her relational space between her and God, has tainted her possibility in some sort of sense, of having as many deep, if you like, relations or even connections with people around her. I don't want to say that this is something that Christianity always does but it's something that I see happening here. But since I'm not here to judge whether this is a good or bad thing politically, but to theorize this in relational terms, I think a relational argument can be made about mental processes. About what's happening when you think. So in terms of Martin's question, I think what I am trying to propose is a relational theory of thinking, a relational theory of what's happening inside people's heads – and to think, that is something we do more as academics than others. When I sit in a tent in Mongolia and it's -40 degrees outside, a lot of people tend to know each other pretty well and they're sitting inside their tents, they're not really talking all the time, they're thinking. They're doing that kind of relational stuff inside their heads. That's my argument.

James Leach: Martin, I think you're making some category errors. Creativity is not the issue that we're here to debate, it's invention. That's what's in the motion, that's what you have to make your minds up as audience about – whether the task of anthropology is to invent relations? Whether or not creativity is tainted is beside the point to some extent. I did say that I wanted to reclaim creativity and I gave some very good reasons for doing so. I think I made an argument for why creativity is a part of what anthropology should be doing. And that is because it is much more based in the idea of things coming into being, and things coming into being in processes which are perhaps indeed mystical for some, but isn't it part of anthropology's role to try and uncover some of that mysticism and see how it's actually happening?

Second, universities are places that *do* make judgements about people, based on their ability to think and articulate things. Anthropologists in fieldwork are not there to do that. Whether their task is to invent relations or not, they're certainly not there to make those kinds of judgements. So I think that's another category error in that you said we don't think about whether people are intelligent, we don't talk about whether they're intelligent in the field but we do all the time in the universities. Taboos are often there for good reasons. Perhaps reasons isn't the right word, because that again takes us back to an intellectualization. But taboos do have effects that are important to keep up.

Gillian Evans: I think the only point of the object that emerges for academics, which is the analytical object, is that it explains anything. Otherwise it is nothing more than mental gymnastics – and I think the contributions of our opposition prove that quite well. The point is whether or not we are only preoccupied with explaining anything to ourselves about the historical form that relations take among others. Or whether we actually think that we might be able to explain anything to those people about themselves and whether they'd be interested. And if we think that our task is simply to prove conceptual capital to ourselves, then we're not quite as clever as we thought; and if we can't explain anything to the people that we propose to co-create relations with, then we're not doing very well at explaining anything and, in that case, what's the point in having a theory in the first place? So I object to the notion that our informants are not smart. What it is to be smart is to know what counts as a meaningful relation of exchange and to know this would, by definition, therefore be generative of a relation and creative of transformation. That is what it is to be smart.

Casper Bruun Jensen: What I hear is a kind of imputation whereby Morten and I are suddenly turned into the wild meta-theorists whereas the more ethnographically attentive people that also actually want to talk to people outside the ivory tower are identified as Gillian and James. It was one of my central points that that particular imputation is one of the dubious analytical and practical moves that is inhibited if one begins to think about inventions in the sense that I proposed. Inventions at the so-called conceptual and empirical level take place simultaneously. So you might say that the empirical field is extended. It's both out in the field and it's also in the library. We were upfront in talking about

Latour and Deleuze, but there is a sleight of hand in Gillian and James referring more vaguely to things that sound slightly commonsensical about 'lived realities', 'co-construction of meaning' and all these kind of things, as if they were not analytical terms. I think they are *very* analytical terms, but they are covered over because they sound more 'natural'. It makes me want to pick up Nietzsche's hammer and tap a little bit on those kinds of analytical terms to see if they're hollow or what is in fact living inside! And I think what you will find inside is that they're not so innocuous themselves. They are in fact inventive terms, but they've been so naturalized or glossed over or black-boxed in the Nietzschean or Latourian kind of sense, that we've forgotten. I think one of the nice things about the inventiveness gesture is not that it allows you to go wild with theory, but that it requires you to be utterly attentive to what it is that you are doing with theory in relation to the entire world. That's what's at stake, so it adds responsibility for making extremely explicit and upfront how it is you're attempting to build your relations. It seems from listening to Gillian that Husserl didn't live in vain. But we don't hear a lot about the work she is drawing on, instead it sounds just like a normal natural way of understanding what's going on out there in the 'real world'. And I would of course say that I feel quite capable of having sensible conversations with numerous informants and friends, and I wouldn't always talk difference and repetition with them, but there are also many other ways they are also inventive. So, I would open that up a little bit.

Madeleine Reeves, Manchester: I've been struck as I think other questioners have, with the points of intersection and potential similarity between James's position and those of the proposing team. In the interests of trying to separate out that difference, I wondered if James, you could say more about how your idea of a forward-looking anthropology is different from Morten's post-relational anthropology and vice versa. I think that may help separate out some of the differences. And in terms of separating and gathering the differences between Gillian and James, my sense, Gillian, is that your disagreement is not just with the term 'task' and not just with the distinction between 'invention' and 'creation', which has been the focus of disagreement and unpacking here, but actually something more substantive about how you understand relation and how you understand differences between subject and object in the production of those relations. What would your position would be in relation to Morten's contention that everything is always already in relation to everything else?

James Leach: I actually don't actually think that everything is already always in relation to everything else. I think there are potentials in relations for people to act creatively and to make connections, to make other relations, to make things appear. That is active work. That sometimes might be a task, it might sometimes happen just apparently through intuition, or things come into being in other ways. It's not always ideas coming into being, but persons or objects coming into being through these kinds of processes. So I don't think that everything is always already in relation. And just on that, I just want to point out that if my opponent's sense is

that everything is always invention anyway, then how can it be anthropology's *task* to be inventive? Surely that's just what it is to be human? Are we just saying that all humans are anthropologists? But there was a previous part to your question as well and I missed it.

Madeleine Reeves: Well, I lost your narrative at the point where you were talking about a future orientated anthropology and how this is different from post-relational anthropology.

James Leach: Because social life is relational then things are coming into being all the time. There is creativity involved in social life. And anthropology is part of, not writ large, but part of and in a specific place within social worlds. The thought that I had, following Miyazake's point, is that anthropology is conceived of as dealing with things that have already happened in the past and reporting on them - observations on things that have already been and gone. And he suggests that anthropologists should try and reorient their analyses towards what people are intending, what people hope to come into being. And that analysis and ethnographic engagement should therefore go alongside and work with people in those projects of bringing things into being, rather than standing outside, observing what's happened and analysing it as something that's gone in the past.

Now of course that doesn't cover everything that we should do, or could do, but there's a future orientation there which involves anthropologists in working with people in the endeavours that they're undertaking, thinking with them about what those endeavours entail and what an anthropological perspective might bring or contribute to those kinds of processes.

I think that is quite different from the future that Morten was proposing, which is to impose a different theoretical agenda because a previous paradigm has come to its end. I don't agree. I don't see that the paradigm has come to an end. I don't know what creative energy one would be looking towards, replacing the notion of the relation as a scalar, complex term which helps us to understand how things come into being. I'm not sure what one would be replacing that with in this future theory which is proposed.

Gillian Evans: The point I was trying to make about the subject and object is that there is something symmetrical going on in the sense that the subject substantiates the objects of which it is the transforming product. And at the same time the object substantiates the relations of which it is the transforming product. But that symmetry doesn't mean that there is a flat equivalence going on. What I was hoping to demonstrate, or what I hoped I did demonstrate, today is that the embodied being of the subject creates as it were a liveliness which helps us to understand something about what it is to be embodied that forces us to have to critique this kind of discussion about thinking that has been going on here today. That actually, the conceptual moment is a moment in which you make what you're doing the object of reflection. And the kind of thinking that Morten was doing in his previous work, which was all about distributed cognition is suddenly reversed here, where instead of cognition being distributed it is suddenly all condensed

inside the subject – as if the multiplicity within is now a problem. Whereas I would argue that there is always a multiplicity within because, necessarily, we are inter-subjective and given through object relations, and what's interesting then, is to understand how the experience of being a person is transformed in the case of social change – not that there's suddenly an inside, or an interior to things that's invented in this moment of Christian transformation. For me the interesting thing is about working out what it is for a person to substantiate the relation between subject and object and that the liveliness of the subject contradicts the Latourian notion of symmetry between entities. I'm hoping to keep the liveliness of the subject on the table.

Morten Axel Pedersen: Just under 'everything is always relations', I sympathise a lot with what James is saying, and I think for me the statement that everything is always relations is simply the myth, if you like, of ethnography. It's a bit like what Casper said earlier – it's a necessary premise that I just set out. So what I do when I do ethnographical analysis or descriptions is that I stipulate that people are always already somehow, I'm not saying connected, but related. The *task* that I need to do when I describe is to find out what particular work they do to make particular forms of relations, such as for example connections. So it's not that I discredit the importance of going out and specifying what's happening. It's actually, for me, in order to specify in as many ways as possible that I operate with this premise.

On the future thing ... the way that I understand the idea of the post-relational is an act of love to the relational! Being post-relational is to be even more relational. So when I say we need to be post-relational, it doesn't mean that the 'relation' should be left behind for the reason that it's not good, it should be left behind exactly because it's so good. Because then I can only ask how can you be even more relational? And I actually think that what you said James now towards the end somehow reveals something. You said, 'how can we think about a world where we can't use the word relational?', but that's what creativity is! You've got to take the chance and say 'I'm doing away with that concept now. I need to reinvent something that is not the relation but that is doing the job of the relation and plus some and in a more intensive way!'

Jonathan Mair, Cambridge: I just wanted to note that all of the talks addressed relations in the field, relations between informants, relations between informants and God, relations between musicians – that kind of thing. And none of them addressed, and perhaps this is an example of the inventiveness of anthropologists in itself, none of them addressed the obvious interpretation, the naïve interpretation of the motion, which is: what are the relationships that anthropologists *themselves* might be responsible for inventing? So that's really an ethnographic question about the activity of anthropologists. So that the naïve, answer to that question, would be that they are responsible for inventing the relationship between the cases that they look at, their own particular ethnography and other ethnographies – that's the comparative function of the ethnographer – and they are responsible for inventing relationships between the specific cases that they do research on and general observations in the form of theory.

Now, if you took that naïve interpretation of the motion, then one question would be is that really an act of invention or is it an act of discovery? And the other question is, is the anthropologist responsible for that? So then we come back to the question of invention, creativity and distribution of responsibility. And I think that if you give some ethnographic attention to what the anthropologist is actually *doing*. Although the practice of ethnography, the practice of seminars, intellectual life is all very much about exchange, I think ethnographers are almost paradigmatically solely responsible for what they do because they are at the nexus of their ethnographic worlds and the theoretical worlds with which they engage. So I just wanted to raise that possibility and to point out that assuming responsibility and ownership over something is not necessarily always an act of misappropriation. And I was reminded in particular when listening to James' talk, about the traditional conclusion for statements of acknowledgments in ethnographies. That after thanking the people in the field, and thanking the supervisors, teachers and people in seminars, it finishes by saying 'but of course with all of this help, I'm solely responsible for the errors in this work'. And so there are reasons for cutting the network apart from taking credit for things. So it seems in terms of the things that anthropologists might invent, the kinds of relationships that we do invent, it seems a bit much to lay them at the feet of our informants and say 'Look, you're in on this as well'. I wonder what the speakers have to say.

Gillian Evans: I think that's really important, it comes back to the question of what difference it makes for the anthropologist. And, of course as an anthropologist you're always really ethnographically attentive to the kind of relations you constitute as an anthropologist in the university. But for me, for those relations not to fail, they have to (for me personally), achieve a transformation and that transformation has to be an understanding. There's only one point in all of this for me and that is that does it ... does any of this allow me to explain anything better than we already understood it before? And if not, then my state of being hasn't changed, your state of being hasn't changed. The capacity to change the state of being of anybody through words, concepts and explanations is very difficult, it's actually a very difficult craft. And we have limited tools in which to affect those transformations of understanding and people – but that's the responsibility I feel we have.

Jonathan Mair, Cambridge: Aren't you talking about the secondary relations. To follow up the example you gave of the music (that was a wonderful way to present your argument by the way), I saw what you were saying as being that your role in that was in getting the musicians together. That's one kind of an invention of a relationship. Now they played music and that had an effect on everybody and that's a different effect. But when you put two cases together in making an ethnographic comparison, that's one kind of relation that you invent. The effect that it has on other people is a secondary thing which may be more collective.

Gillian Evans: The transformation and state of being of the audience that musicians rely on depends on the relation they forge through their tools. The tools that I have are words and explanations. My capacity to transform the state of being of the audience in an anthropological sense *completely* relies on whether or not I have

explained anything at all, or whether what I'm doing is a conceptual gymnastics in which I remind myself that invention is given through personal, individual genius. Which it isn't. It's given through an explanation which has the capacity to form a relation, which by definition means changing the state of being of others for the better. That's my responsibility as an anthropologist.

Karen Sykes, Manchester: I want to talk about what happens when one finishes writing. And we've all acted as if somehow or another we have no control over how it has an affect. But when you finish writing a paper what do you do with it? We can discuss the process of the different relationships that are realised in the editorial process. And this is part of the story, I think, that might be interesting to revisit in the work that we are discussing right now. Because we've been bearing down enormously on the fieldwork process as if somehow or another that that was the end of anthropology and then magically it appears in our hands to be read. And we can then speak about its impact, but we're missing part of the story – and I just wanted Morten to speak about the business of the realisation of social relationships that is continuous rather than divisive between field and writing.

Morten Axel Pedersen: Well, I think it comes back to the discussion we had earlier on ... I don't know whether my opponents do ... but I certainly don't subscribe to the notion that out there in the field, there's the 'everyday', the 'everydayness' and all these kinds of things. Very theoretical, very abstract concepts! Watch out when people use something like 'everyday'! And then we come back to our offices and there's no more 'everyday' any more and then we abstract and we invent, you know, impose, I don't think that's the case. I think that there's no everyday actually anywhere. I think the field and the writing process are just as descriptive, just as ethnographical, just as theoretical. Of course they can be distinguished, but those are not the terms by which I would distinguish these processes from one another. Which, to come back to the motion we are proposing, is why invention is not just about something about someone sitting in an ivory tower imposing concepts on a 'lived everyday'. The world is not like that. People *do* concepts all the time and the world is in invention and our role as anthropologists is to lapse into that in very particular ways.

Chris Martin, LSE: I'd like to introduce a new word which nobody's mentioned yet – evidence – and this links to the question that was asked before about ownership of errors in ethnography. And whether evidence has a place in ethnography and if it does, how can we reconcile the idea of invention with evidence and if we can do this, do the opposition need an idea of evidence to oppose the motion?

Morten Axel Pedersen: I would ask you, maybe you want to phrase your question in the following way – 'What kind of particular invention is evidence?' Of course there is such a thing as evidence but it's not standing in opposition to invention, it's just a particular form of invention.

Marilyn Strathern, Cambridge: Well, this has all been absolutely fascinating. I wanted to pick up on one or two currents that have been running through the commentaries to do with the symmetry between the two sides. I wanted to go back to something that Roy Wagner said a long time ago. It was very crude, but what he

said was that there are many circumstances under which if you want to divide people you set them a common task, whereas if you want to achieve a common task you divide them! And that of course is what a debate does. And I think what is recreated or reinvented in the GDAT debates has been demonstrated here as an underlying similarity of purpose that we share as anthropologists. And I've really been quite impressed and have learned a tremendous amount through the division that you people have created. And all I wanted to then add was – what remains? And of course what remains is the debate itself and argument as a mode of understanding and I think it's through debate and through argument that we keep our agreements going. So really what we need to listen to is the quality of the arguments and I think what is going to follow is extremely important. We've had some brilliant improvisations and performances, which I think is something that anthropologists very importantly do. In a little while we are going to be asked to vote – in my own earlier experience in Manchester, I remember that nobody wanted to, everyone wanted to agree, but forcing us to perform division actually has to be the final act of this debate.

Soumya Venkatesan, Manchester: I'm going to give every speaker 5 minutes, if they want it, to make any last comments or summaries.

Casper Bruun Jensen: I'll go with Morten's comment about there not being an 'everyday' anywhere. I think it's an interesting premise to start with here. I think it points to a kind of ontological symmetry at stake in saying the task of anthropology is to invent relations. Because what it means is that, just to clarify, both anthropologists and informants, every body acts and every body thinks at the same time, that's the basic precondition for this. There's no authority position for either in this game, but it's not a zero sum game either, since the aim at least from the anthropologists' side is to establish continuity between the object and the description of the object. Which means that when you're doing anthropology, you're not of course just sitting in your ivory tower reading Deleuze, although you might do that a little bit of the time, you're taught what your object is like in the field of course, but the field itself is necessarily pluralised, so you're effectively taught in multiple fields, and some of the fields you are taught in are classrooms and libraries. So that's the symmetry here again. And it's because you're taught in multiple fields and you pass on the stuff that you find out, that you make up, that you invent in multiple other fields, that invention is a good generic description of the ongoing transformative process that is making and passing on anthropological knowledge. And method won't save you here I think. No matter how much you refer to your ethnographic in-depth encounters, it won't give you any epistemic high ground. But that's a fine thing because that allows you to expand the notion of what methods you might use. You can do many things if the aim, or task, of anthropology is to invent relations. Sometimes you even must do many things. Of course in-depth ethnography is indispensable, but many other combinations of doing a variety of things – reading, finding out, doing all kinds of things – may be what allow you to make the kinds of inventions that are required in your situation. And theory won't save you either, contrary to what our opponents have imputed to

our position. It's nice to know but it's no nicer or no less nice than knowing empirical stuff. So one is relieved from continuing to struggle to find the perfect analytical tool that will actually allow you to capture inter-subjective processes or discuss whether actor network theory is the final end of all social theory and so on. Instead one is opened up to the realisation, since we are in an inventive field, that multiple fields of enquiry and multiple tools provide assistance in the multiple tasks we're up to. They come from social anthropology of course, they could come from sociology, critical geography, literature, philosophy, history and so on. So multiple, open sets are connecting in these processes. And that leads to the final point as well, this is where I think I can also say something for 30 seconds about evidence. That is, everything goes, the empirical field can be almost anything, theoretical sets of resources can be almost anything, the invention of the relation... encourage almost anything to go in the first instance. But only in so far as each juxtaposition and relation is meticulously accounted for, both at the so called empirical level and at the so called conceptual level and in their combination simultaneously. Which I think is an extremely stringent demand. So you *know* whatever you want to know only in so far as you manage to meticulously and explicitly create that relation. There is nothing to hide behind because there's no methodical or theoretical guarantee. This gives you a very considerable freedom, but I think a much higher demand than actually what is usually or quite often going on in terms of theoretical or analytical arguments that purport to account for ethnographic encounters. So there's great freedom but high demand to be extremely specific and there's absolutely nothing to hide behind. There are no short cuts to take. That's it.

Morten Axel Pedersen: I want to congratulate our opponents for having made a very convincing argument, but nonetheless, I think that what you have to ask yourself is that, within the way in which Casper and I have defined invention and relation, does our argument convince you? Because that is not the same way in which for example, my honourable opponent James Leach defines invention. So you have to think within those kind of definitions, and then decide whether what we said was convincing or not. I think that it was sort of convincing what James said, but I think the way he set the premise for his opposition was flawed. I think the way we set out our premise is not perfect, but it allows a kind of anthropology that is both opening up towards new forms, but is also conscious of where we're coming from. And I think there is something to be said about the invention of relations as a pretty good working definition of what anthropology is.

Gillian Evans: What I've tried to do today is invent a relation in order to give you a feel of what a relation is like and that the feeling of what the relation is like allows you to understand that the relation is a transformational technique which arises out of the bonding together, the holding together of heterogeneous elements. And that the relation is the emerging effect of that connection and I think the rhetorical device – of the inventing of the relation – actually enabled us to come into relation with each other here today, through the moment of this demonstration. And it's exactly *that* that is the explanatory power of my argument in which I

have been able to show that by inventing a relation we understand exactly why that is not the task of anthropology. Because what is fascinating about anthropology beyond anything I've described today is that relations take historically specific forms among collectively distinct kinds of people. And that is the thing that anthropologists are tasked with explaining and that is not what I did today. And to the extent that I have not therefore done anthropology today, the vote is to go with the co-creation of relations as being anthropology's task – with the analytical purpose of understanding historical forms of relations as orchestrations of reality.

James Leach: The task of invention situated as those two terms are in our political and hierarchical and divided world, goes against the very practise and intention of anthropology which is to constitute knowledge in relations with others. In relational practice that is creative, vital and dialogic, that is *not* sentimental and to answer the question about morality, it is not about how we just are as moral beings (although I'm glad that it was recognised that that was what I was talking about), it's also about how we think, the way that we do our research, the way that we have to understand those things. There's a phrase used in contemporary dance practice, it speaks of a genre of dance making that is imposed upon the bodies of the dancers themselves. The choreographer is said to make a work *on* a company when she invents her material and causes the dancer's bodies to conform to that vision. The phrase 'a dance made on a company' contrasts with the emergent practices of the most successful choreographers working today where work is made *with* and *in* a company. The dancers create their own material and the choreographer organises it for particular performances and instances of its appearances to have a certain effect.

Are we going to accept that anthropological knowledge is made on the conceptual world of others, that it moulds and represents them in the image of the maestro maker, working alone and without consociates in the creation? I hope that you're going to vigorously oppose this motion and thereby that false and damaging vision of the discipline. We live with and through others, concepts and persons. Together we create meanings and regularities, things and institutions. But if we invented relations, we would have to deny this very constitutive reality and suggest that we start somehow from scratch, outside and not already part of and party to, created by, the relations between conceptual and social activities that give us human worlds in the first place. The concept of invention is irredeemably tainted by its association with the denial of co-creation and collectivities. As was proposed in this very forum 20 years ago, I quote 'Social relations are intrinsic to human existence and not extrinsic and as objects of *anthropological study*, one cannot therefore conceive of persons as individual entities'. Luckily for us anthropology is not tasked with inventing relations, but realising the intent of self and other in their communicative or procreative or whatever kinds of act through engaging with them. So I move that we throw out this motion, that falling as it does into the narcissistic fantasy of self creation and the subsequent fantasy that the world and other people are moulded to our image and desire. We do not invent relations because we do not and cannot impose them, we certainly oughtn't to be trying to.

The vote

The task of anthropology is to invent relations

For the motion (Casper Bruun Jensen and Morten Axel Pedersen): 12

Against (James Leach and Gillian Evans): 20

Active abstentions: 5

Non-voting, non-abstaining participants: 10

Soumhya Venkatesan is a lecturer in social anthropology at the University of Manchester and has organized the annual meetings of GDAT since 2008. She is the author of *Craft Matters: artisans, development and the Indian nation* (Orient Blackswan, 2009) and co-editor (with Thomas Yarrow) of *Differentiating Development: beyond an anthropology of critique* (Berghahn, 2012). Her current research focuses on the transformation of things into gods and vice versa in Hindu south India.

Matei Candea is a lecturer in social anthropology at the department of anthropology, Durham University. He is the author of *Corsican Fragments: Difference, Knowledge and Fieldwork* (2010, Indiana) and editor of *The Social after Gabriel Tarde: Debates and Assessments* (Routledge, 2010). His current research focuses on human–animal relations in scientific practice, specifically, meerkats.

Casper Bruun Jensen is associate professor at the Technologies in Practice group of the IT University of Copenhagen. He has published in *Configurations, Science, Technology and Human Values* and *Social Studies of Science*. He is the editor (with Kjetil Rødje) of *Deleuzian Intersections: Science, Technology and Anthropology* (Berghahn, 2009) and the author of *Ontologies for Developing Things: Making Health Care Futures through Technology* (Sense, 2010).

Morten Axel Pedersen is associate professor at the Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen. He is author of *Not Quite Shamans: Spirit Worlds and Political Lives in Northern Mongolia* (Cornell University Press, 2011) and co-editor of *Inner Asian Perspectivism* (2007, special issue of the journal *Inner Asia*), *Technologies of the Imagination* (2009, special issue of the journal *Ethnos*), *Comparative Relativism* (2011, special issue of the journal *Common Knowledge*), and *Times of Security: Ethnographies of Fear, Protest, and the Future* (forthcoming with Routledge).

James Leach is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen where he is a specialist on New Guinea. His research focuses on the transformative effects of technology on knowledge production, creativity, and concepts of ownership. His publications include *Reite Plants: An Ethno-botanical Study in Tok Pisin and English* (co authored with Porer Nombo; ANU Press, 2010); *Genealogy beyond Kinship: Sequence, Transmission and Essence in Social Theory and Beyond*

(co-edited with Sandra Bamford; Berghahn, 2009) and *Creative Land: Place and Procreation on the Rai Coast of Papua New Guinea* (Berghahn, 2003).

Gillian Evans is RCUK Research Fellow in the Centre for Research on Socio-cultural Change (CRESC) at the University of Manchester. She is interested in phenomenological anthropology and her current research focus is post-industrial change in London. Gillian is undertaking a long-term ethnographic study of the planning and delivery of the Olympic legacy in London, which will be published by Palgrave as a monograph entitled *London's Olympic Legacy* in 2012.