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The Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory (GDAT), The University of Manchester: The 2011 annual debate – Non-dualism is philosophy not ethnography

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Abstract

Does the concept of non-dualism have ethnographic purchase or is it mainly of philosophical interest? This article comprises the edited presentation and discussions of the 2011 GDAT debate on the motion 'Non-dualism is Philosophy not Ethnography'. The debaters proposing the motion were Michael Scott and Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov. They were opposed by Christopher Pinney and Joanna Cook. Marilyn Strathern acted as jester – playfully and rigorously engaging with all four speakers. The presentations and the discussions that followed were wide ranging, lively and stimulating.

Keywords

Non-dualism, ethnography, philosophy, debate, GDAT

Introduction: Keir Martin, University of Manchester

In their 2008 hit single, Madonna and Justin Timberlake inform their listeners that they have only got '4 minutes' to save the world. Chris Pinney, appearing as Timberlake to Joanna Cook's Madonna at this year's GDAT, was a little more optimistic, telling the audience that we only had five years to avoid Armageddon through the repentance of our dualistic philosophies. Nonetheless Pinney's performance shared with Timberlake's the desire to engage their respective audiences through the thrill of imminent catastrophe. Pop music seemed to be a central trope of this year's debate with 1990s girl bands and 1960s proto-punk pioneers attracting almost as much attention as the greats of Western Enlightenment philosophy and mythical figures from indigenous cosmologies. After comparing Michael Scott to Lady Gaga, Chris Pinney found himself cast as one of the Spice Girls (presumably 'Scary Spice' given his taste for the apocalyptic). Pinney himself approvingly quoted the revolutionary proclamation with which the MC5 introduced their classic 1968 live album *Kick Out the Jams*. I knew that I was not the only person in the room who was left a little bemused by his invocation of that particular testimonial as a rallying cry for anti-dualism. 'Brothers and sisters, the time has come for each and everyone of you to decide whether you are going to be the problem or whether you are going to be the solution... It takes 5 seconds, 5 seconds of decision. 5 seconds to realize your purpose here on the planet'. Not only had the time scale within which we had to act now been reduced from five years to 5 seconds (even the insistently urgent Timberlake had been willing to grant us a little more leeway than that), but the very division of the world's population into problems or solutions that the MC5 proposed seemed nothing if not starkly dualistic. No collapsing of borders or space for tricksters to play at the boundaries here. Just two opposed categories that we had 5 seconds to choose between.

As far as the two sides of the debate went, for Michael Scott and Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, relationalism is an ontology. Here the question of dualism/non-dualism arises in a different way than for Chris Pinney and Joanna Cook who critiqued the

more common split between matter/mind or material/immaterial. It was the mobilisation of these two ways of thinking about the question that gave the debate its particular flavour. Michael Scott warned against the desire to dissolve essentialisms wherever they were to be found by (sometimes automatically and unreflexively) identifying relations as prior to entities. This, for him, carries as much of a danger as the opposite desire to find groups where they did not exist that earlier generations of Melanesian anthropologists such as Roy Wagner had cautioned against. For Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, non-dualism was particularly associated with Actor Network Theory and its critique of the mind/matter duality. Latour's work with scientists illustrated the problem with this position, according to Ssorin-Chaikov, in that it relied on Latour over-riding the connections made by his informants, in a very hierarchical and ultimately dualistic manner. For the opposition, Chris Pinney's take on the motion was informed by the separation of the world as object from the viewing subject as critically examined by Heidegger; the world-view that was ultimately responsible for the impending apocalypse that he warned us against. Joanna Cook, drawing on her work with Buddhists, argued that the opposite of dualism (or the positing of two radically different kinds of entity) is monism, wherein the same single substance makes up all phenomena. This, she argued, was fundamentally different to non-dualism that holds that different phenomena are inseparable but without claiming that they are the same kind of thing. She thus suggested that ethnographically one can encounter modes of being that differ both from the kind of non-dualism that Pinney spoke about and from the idea of relationalism as an ontology that informed both Scott's and Ssorin-Chaikov's positions. Further, ethnography as a practice was inherently not dualistic as it relied upon 'living there bodily', leaving the ethnographer free to engage with dualistic, monistic, or relational ideas and practices that were encountered in the field.

All the speakers took advantage of the multivalent nature of the term 'dualism' in order to address the issues that concerned them the most; suspicion of the tendency to read indigenous cosmologies as an expression of contemporary European non-dualist philosophy, a desire to explore the hidden hierarchies behind the production of flat ontologies, or impending global apocalypse. And our debate's uses of the term 'dualism' far from exhaust its potential meanings in philosophy, where it can be used in discussions of moral oppositions, such as good versus evil, or indeed its ethnographic uses, in phenomena such as shamanic 'soul dualism'. Particular dualisms such as human/animal may well be good to think with, but the multiplicity of overlapping meanings that the very term 'dualism' carries can also be productive of fresh insight and inspiration as this year's debate illustrates.

Yet, multivalency carries its hazards as well. Perhaps inevitably, there was some talking at cross-purposes. For example, during the discussion, one questioner cautioned us not to mistake dualism for binary opposition and while this point was addressed by some of the speakers, on occasion, the distinction between the two seemed hard to maintain as the reader might see.

Anthropologists often trace the shifting accents and implications of a word as it travels from one social context to another – for instance, from philosophy to anthropology. So, in Papua New Guinea the term ‘kastom’ can mean an elite nation-building concept, a rhetorical opposition to the culture of white people, a moral evaluation of one’s adherence to an ethic of reciprocity or a reference to how things were done in the past, to name but four. All of these are overlapping and Papua New Guineans shift emphasis in the course of conversation, mostly without reflection. So regional ethnographic debates such as ‘is kastom the invention of tradition’, although often illuminating, also carry the danger of becoming conversations in which we talk at cross-purpose as different anthropologists focus on the aspect of the word’s meanings that addresses their concerns.

As Michael Scott reminded us, it is important to note that ‘Dualism’ means different things in different philosophical conversations. There is nothing intrinsically wrong in taking an aspect of a philosophical debate and using it for our own purposes. This year’s debate illustrated the ways in which by placing terms in new conversational contexts we give them new life and meaning. But it also reminded us that, in our desire to engage with such philosophical terms, anthropologists would do well to remember the ways in which these terms also carry their different evaluative accents and histories with them.

Proposing the motion: Michael W. Scott, LSE

Steps to a methodological non-dualism

By virtue of a kind of magical thinking that is both fruitful and perilous, some anthropologists are making powerful and efficacious connections between ethnography and various continental philosophies said to instantiate non-dualism. These intellectual connections, I affirm, both find and create real relations. Surprisingly, however – and this is the key point I wish to highlight – there is now a need to remind ourselves that these are indeed relations, not equivalencies. In ways that are arguably more monistic than non-dual, we are at risk of mistaking the relations of similarity we see between certain philosophies and the orientations of the people we meet in the field (and in ethnography) for indices of identity. Lost in wonder at the inventive discovery of these mystical correspondences – which we can manipulate to work amazing transformations on our own and other people’s ethnography – we have begun to liberate all kinds of actual cosmologies, epistemologies and ontologies from their ephemeral historical bodies and are restoring their inner plenitudes to the shimmering flux of universal becoming.

In my view, this engagement with metaphysics is among the most productive and challenging trajectories in anthropology today. For purposes of this debate, I follow the lead of its founder, Ingold (2011: 229–243), and define the anthropological craft of ethnography as philosophy, with people – even, with philosophers. Accordingly, I am not advocating a utopian purification of speculation from field

research, or of philosophy per se from ethnography. Rather, I simply raise a flag beside what I see as the opposite but currently more proximate utopian pitfall: the temptation to translate differences away, to misrecognize affinities between non-dualist readings of philosophies and diverse indigenous ontologies as unities and – on the basis of that small misstep – fall into an ethnographic habit of making all lived ontologies collectively and inevitably point – like perspectival bodies – to an immanent-transcendent multiplicity posited as shifting absolute truth. (And I am not saying that it is not, only that maybe not everyone univocally agrees.)

My concern is that our magically induced non-dualism is aesthetically persuasive but potentially eschatological. When it exhibits its monistic side – which some philosophers might argue is intrinsic to it – it abolishes history, transposing every lived ontology into conformity with its own eternally returning terms (compare Eliade, 1974 [1954]). The ethnographic analyses it informs can tend towards self-iteration, calling into question the need for field-based engagement in the very relations of which non-dualism is said to be an infinite inflation. At the same time, a monologic of fractal relationship can come to function as a general interdiction on essentialisms at any scale – whether monistic or pluralistic – either among anthropologists or the people with whom we work. But I think it would be regrettable – and unnecessary – if the innovative and insight-generating anthropology of ontology were to exhaust itself this way. A solution, I will argue, is for anthropologists to be even more engaged with all sides of philosophical debate about ontology and even more thoroughly non-dual in our comparative methods. First, however, let me clarify what I mean by non-dualism and elaborate my observation that some anthropologists may be quasi-monistically equating philosophical non-dualisms with the ontological assumptions of their fieldwork interlocutors.

I use the term non-dualism as shorthand for a mode of being – or ontology – that, in anthropology, is sometimes also referred to as relationalism or – with increasing genericism – simply as animism. As anthropological theory, this ontology is most closely associated with the paradigms of Melanesian sociality, actor network theory, material semiotics and perspectival multinaturalism. But it goes by other names as well, such as posthumanism and postpluralism. Contributors to anthropological theorisations of non-dualism are, of course, not all saying the same thing; their models reflect their dialogues with different people in different field contexts and with different philosophers. Yet, two points of broad consensus are legible across this steadily inter-conversant literature.

First, the many labels for what I am calling non-dualism may be said to describe an ontology that puts relations before entities. Theories of non-dualism assert that terms are nothing but relations. It is relations all the way down and all the way up, in and out and through and through. Nothing but relations; relations cubed. Hence, there are no core essences, no elementary categories antecedent to relations. Things do not enter into relations; they are made up of and inhere in relations.

A second point of consensus, therefore, is that non-dualism is the inverse of a modern Euro-American ontology often labelled Cartesian or Kantian dualism. Within this modern mode of being, people inhabit a world made up of two

radically distinct categories: the immaterial and the material. Hence, the familiar set of oppositions – subject/object, mind/body, idea/thing, culture/nature, etc. One common way of formulating this contrast between non-dualism and Cartesian–Kantian dualism has been to claim that non-dualists do not distinguish between the abstract and the concrete – especially in the register of the culture versus nature dichotomy. In ways that invite further scrutiny, such formulations can make non-dualists sound more like either material or noumenal monists. For this reason, it may be clearer to emphasize the primacy of always already ongoing relations – including relations between the terms of these and other classic oppositions – as both ingredient to and sustaining all things.

It is a striking feature of the anthropological literature on non-dualism that it is rich in references to the ideas and vocabularies of, among other continental philosophers, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and Deleuze and Guattari. Thus, a Heideggerian ‘ontology of dwelling’ in which the world appears in its ‘available-ness’ to an immersed ‘being-in-the-world’ is imputed to hunter-gatherers (e.g. Ingold, 2000: 42). The thoughts of Merleau-Ponty on vision, movement and the body are quoted as convergent with the epistemology of Aboriginal Australians (e.g. Tamisari, 1998). Amazonian cosmogonic myths are translated into the Deleuzian tropes of molar entities actualising out of a molecular pre-cosmological condition of virtual multiplicity (e.g. Viveiros de Castro, 2007).

Now, I would not want to be mistaken as saying that comparisons between Euro-American and other modes of written or practical metaphysics are somehow illegitimate or misleading. On the contrary, I find such comparisons not only valid and enormously instructive but exciting and virtually impossible not to make. In preparing for this debate, I happened across a wonderful passage from *Totemism*, quoted in an essay by Morten Pedersen (2007), in which Lévi-Strauss vividly describes the mystic moment of ‘rhizomatic’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 3–28) association. Lévi-Strauss writes:

For the anthropologist, Bergson’s philosophy recalls irresistibly that of the Sioux, and he himself could have remarked the similarity since he had read and pondered *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*. Durkheim reproduces in this book a reflection by a Dakota wise man which formulates, in a language close to that of *L’Évolution créatrice*, a metaphysical philosophy, common to all the Sioux... according to which things and beings are nothing but materialised forms of creative continuity... (1964: 97–98, quoted in Pedersen, 2007: 314)

We have all made these Frazerian leaps (cf. Willerslev, 2011). Such connections are precisely the free and vital growth of what we know, mapping all the pathways that link the places where our thoughts have wandered. I’m enamoured of the Surrealists, myself, so I might call this ‘objective chance’ (Breton, 1987: 87). But precisely because such comparisons can be so cognitively powerful, it seems especially important to keep it in plain view that they are only comparisons – not exact matches. Euro-American philosophical traditions – no matter how counter to

mainstream dualism – are not context-free universal decoders. It is easy to forget, however, that by deploying the models and vocabularies of these and other alternative Western ontologies, we do not avoid representing our ethnographic interlocutors. In dialogue with continental philosophies – and also, I would especially note, forms of post-dualist science such as biosemiotics – many anthropologists are striving to reorient ourselves towards non-dualist thinking. But our non-dualisms are not isomorphic with those of our informants – if, in fact, our informants are non-dualists. For most of us, there is probably still a significant gap between, say – recognising that eventually the elements that compose our bodies will flow into other forms – and fears or hopes of immediate metamorphosis into another species (see also Holbraad, 2010: 435–436).

If, however, we inadvertently conflate rather than compare our magical synthetic non-dualism with apparently indigenous non-dualisms, we can begin – in rather neo-dualistic ways – to seem to purify the world into two ontological types: a mainstream Cartesian–Kantian ‘West’ and its outposts versus an almost pre-lapsarian non-dualist ‘Rest’, situated in the places where we have tended to do fieldwork. As Terence Evens (2008: 13) puts it, for example, ‘[t]he peoples of classic ethnography... epitomize a non-dualistic mode of human existence’.

But what if Cartesian–Kantian dualists are not the only essentialists in the world? What if there are non-Cartesian–Kantian dualists, or non-Cartesian–Kantian pluralists? Despite Latour’s (1993) brilliant irreduction of modern dualism, anthropologists continue to take this particular dualism seriously as a description of how some people think, feel and act. We would probably hesitate to describe such people as non-dualists on the strength that Latour has identified contradictions in their dualism that point to a universal default non-dualism. Regardless of how we may evaluate it, we tend to respect the actuality of modern dualism as an ontology that makes a difference in the world. We aspire to be faithful auto-ethnographers, in other words.

Curiously, however, in my experience, ethnographic attempts to theorize other essentialist ontologies can meet with sceptical resistance. As some of you may know, I have analysed the cosmology of the Arosi of the island of Makira in Solomon Islands as what I term a poly-ontology – that is to say, a non-Cartesian–Kantian form of pluralism (Scott, 2007a, 2007b). Arosi, I have argued, experience their socio-cosmic order as formed of external relations among a plurality of independently arising and matrilineally reproduced autochthonous categories of being. Now, I realize that – as a revealing intellectual exercise – I could re-analyse Arosi cosmology in terms of a non-dualist paradigm. For example, taking perspectival animism as a kind of flexible universal constant, I could stretch it to fit Arosi variables (compare Holbraad and Willerslev, 2007: 330). This might involve likening the Arosi matrilineal categories to molar bodies that have emerged from the island as from a molecular background of virtual multiplicity – a virtual virtual. This, I might conclude, implies that – despite counter-indicative discursive and non-discursive Arosi practices – their matrilineages always already contain one another as an intensive insular multiplicity.

Continuing in this vein, I might work outwards from the island, finding ever more extensive levels of intensive multiplicity in infinite regress. I might even posit that the obscure serpent deity Agunua, reported by the early twentieth-century missionary ethnographer, Charles E. Fox, indexes Arosi speculation about this non-dual regress (compare Willerslev, 2011: 517–522). Alternatively, I could irreduce apparent Arosi essentialism to a regime of purifications – the poly-ontological constitution – undermined by unacknowledged works of translation. I could withdraw my monograph and reissue it as *They Have Never Been Poly-ontological*. But I would hesitate, nonetheless, to call Arosi cosmology non-dualist. To do so, I feel, would be to fail to take Arosi essentialism seriously as making a difference in the world. To adlect them to the ranks of indigenous non-dualists would be, for me, unfaithful ethnographic philosophising with Arosi.

But the issue is much bigger than just Arosi. We might also ask: Have Zoroastrians ever been dualists? Have Vedantists ever been monists? Was Lucretius ever really a pluralist? Or have all these seeming essentialists always been – in ways betrayed by their own surreptitious works of translation – implicitly non-dualists? Or, more likely still, have they always been misrepresented by Cartesian–Kantian dualist scholars, deluded by their own works of purification into seeing nothing but essentialisms when, in reality, everything has always been about fractal relationality? There are indications that some anthropologists have their eyes on Plotinus (Viveiros de Castro, 2007: 164). This suggests that the ontological implications of every neo-Platonism are now up for reconsideration. Platonism itself may be next. Indeed, the whole world looks set for conversion to non-dualism by reanalysis.

All of this signals a way forward. When we make magical connections with philosophy, we should aim to connect with multivocal debates, not just individual philosophers. In our enthusiasm for philosophers with non-dualist leanings, we may be too quick to excise their ideas from their original dialogic contexts. We tend to appropriate a preferred reading of their work and leave competing readings aside. It could easily escape us, for example, if reading anthropology alone, that a major question in philosophy is whether Deleuzian ontology should be understood as non-dualist or monistic (e.g. Bryant, 2011: 59–72). If Deleuze cannot be definitively pinned down on this issue, what are the consequences for our invocations of his concepts to translate indigenous cosmologies as non-dualist? Consider also the reality that ancient literatures are filled with detailed and prolonged controversies over the metaphysical import of myths and other traditions. It stands to reason, then, that the discursive and non-discursive practices of the people we meet in the field are equally multi-vocal and amenable to diverse interpretations. Are Rangi and Papa, the Sky Father and Earth Mother of Maori cosmogonic myths, one or two (Schrempf, 1992)? Does sharing a name with a deceased ancestor reveal a relationship of unity or non-duality (Willerslev, 2007: 50–72)? What is the nature of the relationship between an island and the beings said to be autochthonous to it (Scott, 2007a: 261–300)?

In effect, we need to be even more non-dual in our magical thinking. First, we need to be less quasi-monistic, remembering to compare rather than conflate

when we creatively make connections between philosophical and indigenous ontologies. Second, we need to be less quasi-pluralistic, remembering that the philosophers we take up are relations. They are intensive dialogues and extensive debates. And it is those debates that are most likely to resonate with the full range of purifications and translations in which our ethnographic partners themselves creatively engage. True, this implies a methodological non-dualism, but one that seeks, not to impose itself globally, but to grant actual non-dualisms and essentialisms equal possibility – one that seeks to elicit difference and multiplicity from others.

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Opposing the motion: Christopher Pinney, University College, London

Five years left and five seconds to decide: Anthropology and the apocalypse

For me, as I assume for most – if not all – of you in the audience, Michael's impressive salvo just had its premiere: I have not heard it before, and despite my attempt to intuit what he might say I have not (as Frederick Jameson might have put it) even half-heard-it-in-advance like some insidious pop song that infiltrates itself, through fragmentary iterations, into one's consciousness. In this respect, and doubtless others, Michael is quite unlike Lady Gaga. So, although I had noted, in advance, Michael's anxiety about a gathering of sinister paradigms that he has named as 'neo-animism, perspectivism, human–nonhuman continua,' etc., it is of course a gamble on my part to presuppose in advance that this debate will itself constitute some duel, a combat based on a duality, on the very binarism which we will seek paradoxically to argue against. So we recognize the possibility of (and would welcome) what Heidegger (2001: 66) termed 'the intimacy with which opponents belong to each other'.

A discontent with dualism is our agreed starting point, but Jo and I will map two symmetrical trajectories which head in opposed (but we hope complementary) directions. My critique of dualism will involve a movement from the two to the one, 'sneaking up on the one backwards' as Taussig (critically) puts it, an 'undoing' of the Cartesian legacy which I will argue demands a political response to avert looming catastrophe (Taussig, 2004: 61). Jo will map a move from that same dualistic origin in the opposite direction, where two becomes many – subverted by a complex hybrid practice of ethnography. If my trajectory is reductive, seeking a 'deep ecological' not-quite monism (what Naess (1973) terms a 'total-field image' in which all entities are knots in the biospherical net (echoes here of Roy Wagner's discussion of Indra's net) – what I would rather call the 'corpography'), Jo moves towards abstraction, stressing a holographic relationality whose pragmatic enactment underscores the inadequacy of dualism.

I would like first of all to question the opposition presupposed in the motion, and second develop an argument about the urgency and necessity of this questioning. The motion suggests a choice: philosophy or ethnography and invites you at the end of our deliberations to file into the imaginary lobbies of either 'ideas' or 'practices'. As you start to line up for one side or the other, you will probably glimpse many familiar ghosts urging you to stay in line. There will be British empiricist ethnographers who tell you that what matters is what people actually do; a single poker-waving philosopher is simply that – a sample of one and a sample as small as that can never be an ethnos. (And then of course there is the question of precept versus practice.) One of the more beguiling ghosts accosting you as you form into your lines might be a wise Aberdonian who will whisper that philosophy is a wonderful thing but it lacks a vital ingredient. Luis Buñuel once advised that anyone lost in the desert need simply utter their own formulation for a dry martini and a thousand disputing drinkers would immediately arrive to tell you

how wrong you were (and hence save you from your predicament). Our Aberdonian ghost might mutter that philosophy's martini tended to the dry side because it lacked 'people'. One person in a desert is philosophy, it is 'people' that can turn the desert into a site for ethnography. But how many people and what kind of people are required for this redemptive transformation?

One of the negative incarnations of dualism lies in the Cartesian creation of agentive subjects and passive objects. This of course used to be part of the habitus of anthropology and while clearly it is not part of Michael and Nicolai's paradigm, I wonder whether it lurks beneath the conception of a 'hot' philosophy and a 'cold' ethnography which reports (and privileges) statistically representative 'informants' as purveyors of 'social facts'. How different does the apparently commonsensical distinction between 'philosophy' and 'ethnography' reappear in the light of Taussig's observation that 'We do not have "informants". We live with storytellers, whom too often we have betrayed for the sake of an illusory science' (2004: 314). The illusory science was made possible by Descartes (and super-charged by Herder), and to deny the continuity between philosophy and ethnography, I believe, is to continue to sustain that illusion.

I suggested that Jo and I would be making arguments that are in some formal sense mirror images of each other. Hers is an expansionary forward engagement with the limitations of dualism, and mine is what Latour would call (let us not beat about the bush) 'reactionary' although it is reactionary (I would like to think) in an ultra-leftist way. I am, frankly, a romantic neo-Primitivist and proud of it. Much as I am seduced by the Benjaminian proposition (summarized by Taussig) that the 'supernatural is secularized but nevertheless retains its auratic charge as profane illumination' and am fully subscribed to the Latourian proposal that we have always remained in some sense pre-Socratic, pre-Cartesian, etc. I am completely unable to embrace the full Latourian programme which demands the recognition that the gods are present not only in Heraclitus' oven but also in hydroelectric plants, in Adidas shoes as much as patinated wooden clogs, in agribusiness as much as time-worn landscapes, in 'shopkeeper's calculations as well as in Holderlin's heartrending verse' (Latour, 1993: 66). This is the point at which I discover that I am more of a Heideggerean than a Latourian and that the urgent philosophical-anthropological-political agenda facing us now is (to quote Michael Zimmerman) a shift from 'an anthropocentric, dualistic, and utilitarian understanding of nature to an understanding which ... disclose[s] things other than merely as raw material for human ends' (1993: 196). Heidegger's greatest work, 'The Age of the World Picture', traces the historical emergence of a destructive dualistic view of the world as an object separate from the viewing subject and as something represented and substitutable. These are the preconditions for viewing the world as a standing reserve, as a resource available for exploitation. These are the preconditions for our current predicament.

So in this reactionary backwards mode, let me jettison you into an imaginary future (about 50 years hence) one ravaged by centuries of dualism, of world-conquering subjects, of human existence (to recall Zimmerman) as the master of entities, rather than 'in the service of the self-manifesting of entities'. It is a future in

which our illusory science will be of little use and where we will depend on non-dualist storytellers for our species survival, a future in which all Viveiros de Castro's 'theoretical' demands become existentially unavoidable. You may also, I recognize, take it as proof that, as my esteemed colleague Martin Holbraad has told me, I am a millenarian and proof of, as Michael Scott has written, the fascination that a certain kind of anthropology has with aestheticisation of destruction as the 'necessary foundation for political and moral renovation' (Scott, 2005: 191) But this, nevertheless, is the future that may well be coming for all of us.

Europe never escaped the recession that began with the collapse of the Euro in early 2012. Throughout the 2030s, most former vertebral states began their rapid decay. The loss of most of Manhattan and Los Angeles severely impacted the US state. Flood events in London, Amsterdam, Mumbai, Cairo and Dhaka, the effect of the gulf-stream shutdown on northern Europe, and the abandonment of desertified cities in southern Europe intensified the cellular propensities which were already making themselves visible. The Indian political elite was terminally weakened after the Vedanta scandal and President Jiang Xia's suicide exacerbated Chinese political decentralisation. Massive population movements and growing civil insurgencies weakened vertebral state structures which rapidly crumbled into what Appadurai (2006: 28) termed autonomous cellular practices.

'Technicist' predictions about the anthropology of the future (stressing an increasingly digital and networked existence) proved to be in many fundamental ways wrong (failing to locate its reliance on fossil fuel, coltan and vulnerability to cyber-annulment) although they were correct in assuming the reconfiguration of the Entity Formerly Known as Human (EFKH). By this I refer to that Enlightenment fantasy of the 'rational, self-certain, self-grounding human subject' (Zimmerman, 1993: 201). The mistake was to assume that EFKH would be dissolved into the techno-utopia of the cyborg, rather than reverse-engineered into a backward state courtesy of Oil Depletion, the Coltan wars and Cyber War 3. As it turned out, EFKH had to increasingly abandon the prostheses on which that utopia of distributed personhood was grounded. Its iPads, digital immersive units, teledildonics and all the other consumer durables that now clog the scrapping units on the Chesapeake and Mersey were inevitably vulnerable to power shortage and virus contagion.

Shorn of its digital prostheses, and wobbling uncertainly, EFKH discovered that it never had been truly modern after all and was thankful for that fact. Fifty years ago when I took part in a debate (about which, I must confess, I can remember surprisingly few details) in Manchester, anthropology was still embarrassed about its secret infatuation with the 'primitive' and had persuaded itself that it needed to study contemporary North Atlantic institutional structures and technics – futures markets, ultrasound scans and the like (all those things that a now forgotten theorist Bruno Latour argued were filled with gods). Of course these things no longer exist and they are only of interest to the neo-historicists in some of the Learning from the past programmes. The anthropology of what it used to call 'the contemporary world' – the anthropology which defined itself in crucial ways through its opposition to an earlier 'primitivism' – proved to be a failure. Its modernity went up in flames, and with it the

science of that modernity. The new anthropology has returned to the future, focusing on knowledge and techniques that emerge from its collaborations with non-dualistic small-scale societies and philosophical-cultural story-telling practices.

During that earlier Age of Oil, an instrumental dualist technical rationality held sway and found only a patronising, 'bracketed', place for the local knowledge of the kind which classical anthropology (the 'illusory science') had documented. Technical rationality defined what was efficient and real. Local indigenous – Red knowledges as they have since become known – were curiosities – subjugated and inferior forms of knowledge of interest chiefly as social facts (under the rubric of 'ethnography').

One of the key modalities of Red Knowledge has been what became known as Slowmediation. Mazzarella (2006) had named the vertebral fantasy of a frictionless politics which modeled itself after the liquidity of the digital as 'immediation' but with the widespread dismantling of digital networks, the information highway became more of a discontinuous and rutted pathway. 'Noise' disrupted 'signal', as Larkin (2008) had prophesized.

Political-economic crises and the rise of cellularisation precipitated the implosion of immediation as a goal and spawned numerous Slowmediation movements ranging from Deep Ecology to pragmatic options such as JustInTimeLiving. Both these, of course, are heavily indebted to Buddhism, Melanesian philosophical traditions and Heidegger's 'backward' looking philosophical legacy, all of them seeking a profound undoing of world-conquering subjects, and the repudiation of 'standing reserves' in favour of improvisational strategies. Both discovered that nonEuroAmerican storytellers (from a host of South Asian communities, and the Kaluli, Foi and Umeda among many others) were vital sources of species survival knowledge. Anthropology and ethnography became a conduit whereby, as Viveiros de Castro (n.d.: 18) puts it 'alterity revealed its power of alteration'.

A great Heideggerean insight deserves underlining: 'culture' itself, the very stuff of a certain practice of anthropology, the foundational illusion of the illusionary science, is itself an epiphenomenon of the Cartesian (dualist) intensification of the world as picture. The proposition, akin to Latourian purification, is this:

... the more extensively and the more effectually the world stands at man's disposal as conquered,, and the more objectively the object appears, all the more subjectively... does the [subject] rise up [and] observations of a teaching about the world change into a doctrine of man, into anthropology... The name "anthropology" as used here... designates that philosophical interpretation of man which explains and evaluates whatever is, in its entirety, from the standpoint of man and in relation to man (Heidegger, 1977: 133).

From this historical moment to Herder and the variability of the *ethnos* as the proper site for the upgrading of an insufficient 'philosophy' is but a small step. Surely this describes the historical arc that informs the motion proposed today and points to its tautological nature. An anthropology born of dualism inevitably finds itself wanting to drop 'non-dualism' in the trash can of philosophy.

In conclusion, let me quote some profound words. I had thought of trying to figure out what the ‘amazing thing’ that Smokey (Roy Wagner’s cat) had showed him (he mentions this in the Preface to *An Anthropology of the Subject*) but that turned out to be a dead end (Wagner, 2001), and a frustrating one at that. Instead, let me cite those leading philosophers, psycho-geographers and ethnographers of 1960s revolutionary Detroit, founders of the White Panther Party, and exemplary role models for our own insurrectional times, the MC5. At the start of what is surely their finest work, *Kick Out the Jams*, one of them asks the audience – in a manner that still makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up – whether they are ready to testify (Ok, I admit it, I’m an old hippy). And lest you accuse me of invoking agentive (revolutionary) Cartesian subjects here, let me underline that I take this as paradigmatic of what Merleau-Ponty terms ‘motility’ (rather than intentionality) and of how the multitude is (to invoke Latour) ‘capable of showing’:

Brothers and sisters... I want everybody to kick up some noise. I want to hear some revolution out there. I want to hear a little revolution. Brothers and sisters, the time has come for each and everyone of you to decide whether you are going to be the problem or whether you are going to be the solution. You must choose brothers. You must choose. It takes 5 seconds, 5 seconds of decision. 5 seconds to realize your purpose here on the planet. It takes 5 seconds to realize that it is time to move. It’s time to get down with it. Brothers it’s time to testify and I want to know are you ready to testify. Are you ready?

It takes 5 seconds, but as we know from the International Energy Agency (whose apocalyptic announcement on Wednesday of this week [‘World headed for irreversible climate change in five years, IEA warns’, *The Guardian* 9 November, 2012] was eclipsed by the impending collapse of the Eurozone) we have five years, or so they claim, to escape the potentially terminal consequences of our love affair with dualism. Five years until we reach the tipping point, five years until all possibility of reversing climate change is ‘lost forever’, and five years until the marginal communities among whom many anthropologists still engage in philosophical enquires will have to get up and move. Five years until *Homo sapiens* (the alibi, after all, for our illusory science) goes down the plug hole. Brothers and sisters, it is time to choose. It is time to ‘show’ that you are capable of ‘showing’. Are you ready?

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Proposing the motion: Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, University of Cambridge

Anamorphic ethnography

Imagine a world, which is flat, ontologically flat. It is like Ptolemy's Earth (Figure 1), and yet not quite – and it is certainly not the Ptolemy's Earth of Christian cosmology. The stars and the sun may be circling above and around it. But it is no God's or Angelic eye that encompasses it within his transcendental gaze (Figure 2); there is no mind of God that has conceived it in the transcendental act of construction. The ontologically flat world includes scientists and philosophers who think about this world and its shape. But the position of these thinkers bears no resemblance to that of God. They do not stand above and apart from this flat plane, but are instead situated on its extensive and infinite surface. They, and their thoughts about this world, are on a par with the matter about which they think. This is not to say that there is no reality and representation, but the latter is not ontologically above the former. Representations do not constitute a purely ideational plane, like concepts of mind that float above or underpin this world as its structure. Indeed, just as there is no nebulous realm of representation, there is no invisible underneath of things. Nothing underlies, underpins, or underscores the surface. There is no ontological depth, no layers or levels of appearance, and fundamental, 'true' reality.

By developing this vision, Actor-Network Theory (ANT) claims to have created a non-dualistic alternative to the intrinsically dualistic modern science. Dualism here is not merely a basis of binary classifications, which enable typologies and taxonomies across 'hard' and social sciences – of which anthropological



Figure 1. Claudius Ptolemy, *The World*, engraving by Johannes Schnitzer (1482). Public domain (http://www.labirintoermetico.com/07Geomanzia/corografia_tolemaica/Tolemeo_ecumene.jpg).

conceptualisations of ‘dual organisations’, ‘gifts and commodities’, ‘tradition and modernity’, ‘sovereignty and governmentality’ are examples. Rather, dualism as a subject of critique by ANT is a tradition of thought that distinguishes mind and matter – specifically, human action and material causality – in a hierarchical and axial manner that is linked with Descartes via Kant and Hobbes. Modern science still contains, from the ANT point of view, this dualistic distinction ‘as a proof of scientific, moral and theological virtue’ (Latour, 2005: 85).

Contrary to this, the proponents of ANT submit that scientific and philosophical representations, as human actions, do not ideationally capture material causality and thus create a ‘scientific’ overall map of the world but merely add connections to its surface. They are not above it; they do not reveal what is underneath the apparent; and they merely extend what is apparent horizontally. They are next, and on a par to, what they describe. And what they describe is not truth or not truth of representations but links and nodes of connections. Some of these connections interlink more often than others; some of these nodes become so frequent a crossing point for the reality to flow through that we call them ‘obligatory passage points’. This frequency is the only thing we note.

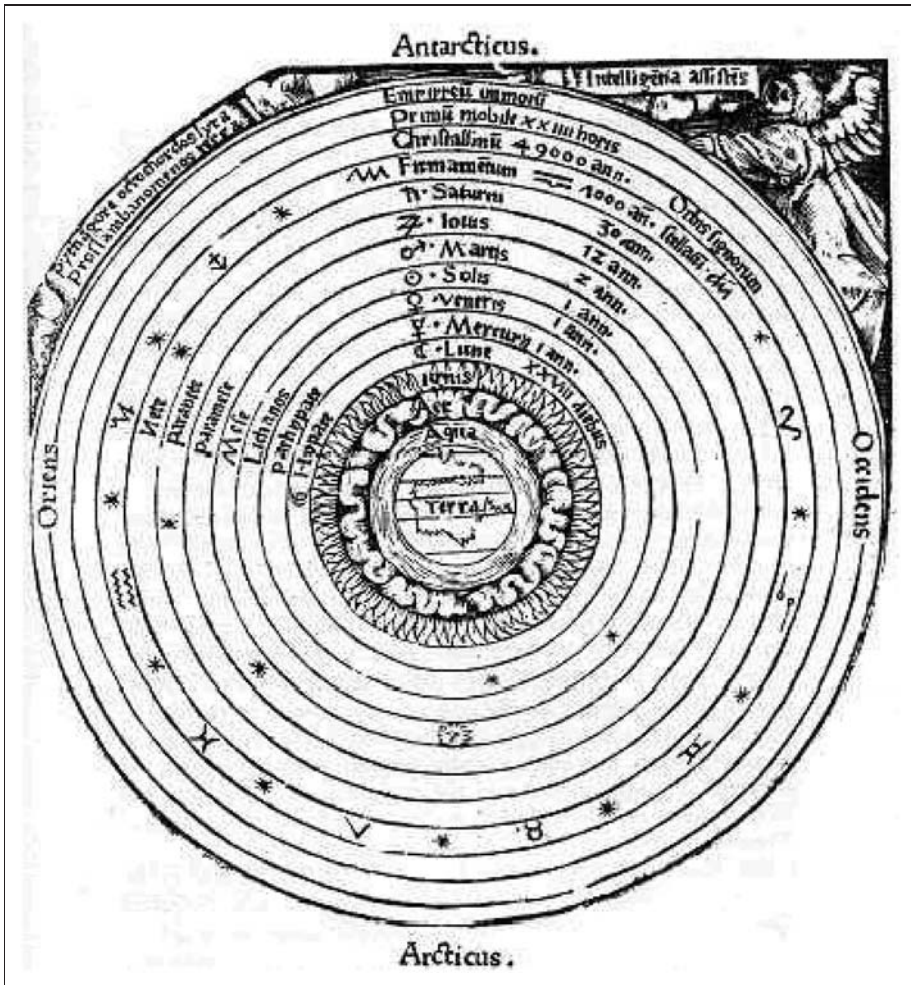


Figure 2. The Ptolemaic Spheres. Aristotelis Stagyrtae, Libri de Coelo (1519). Duke University Library.

The motion that we are offered to debate, ‘non-dualism is philosophy, not ethnography’, contains two dualisms. First, it is that of dualism and non-dualism (and I wonder how non-dualist is the very notion implied by the term ‘non-dualism’). Second, it is that of philosophy and ethnography. I am skeptical about non-dualistic ethnography, and will elaborate on this below using ANT as an example. But I would like to stress that what ANT successfully does is to work beyond the dualism of philosophy and ethnography. Philosophically, ANT critiques Descartes. Latour (2002) flags, via Tarde, Leibniz’ monism as its explicit alternative. But this

is also an empirical perspective on how science works in which philosophical assumptions and empirical hypotheses and findings are not on different 'levels' of knowledge but are on the same ontological plane. Ethnography is, from this perspective, philosophy and, the other way around, philosophy is ethnography.

It is in this spirit of unity of philosophy and ethnography that I would like to pose the following question: Exactly where does one have to stand to see and describe this flat ontology? Where is this point of view? How can we see that this plane is indeed a two-dimensional infinite surface? If our representations are just like those of philosophers and scientists that we describe, if we merely add dots and lines that are on a par with the world we are describing – in other words, if our position is a dot on this flat surface – this surface cannot appear to us as a surface at all but only as a line. It is a straight line if our point of view is on the margin of this surface – as if we are viewing it from a side. If we are in the midst of it, then the surface appears to us as a circle, with us in the middle. In either case we can only argue that this is a flat surface by assuming depth. We have to assume that this line or circle is a side projection of a two-dimensional flat space that lies perpendicular to our gaze and that we do not actually see. In this case, it is this assumption, a concept, a Cartesian possibility of multitudes in shape that we do not and can not actually see but which is necessary to maintain the flatness of this perspective.¹

The other option for us as a viewer is to oversee this surface from above. In this case, however, we do posit a point of view, which is not part of this picture but stands apart and above it. The overall picture then is not two-dimensional. It is three-dimensional – if this perspective indeed includes the ANT scholar's point of view.

It appears that such a non-dualistic perspective operates through a state of exception of a kind. It allows itself what it does not wish to allow subjects of its study. I suggest calling this 'intellectual sovereignty', using an analogy with Carl Schmitt's famous definition of sovereign as the one who decides on exception.

For instance, in *Pandora's Hope* (1999), Latour invites us to look at the photograph of biologist Rene Boulet (Figure 3). We see Boulet overlooking his materials on desk in the field. Latour describes this archetypal pose as that of the master of the phenomenon that he studies. Just a few days earlier, this material tucked away in the soil; it was invisible and dispersed; it constituted 'an undifferentiated continuum'. Science proceeds by differentiating and purifying this matter, which starts by simply arranging samples a desk. And then Latour adds: 'I have never followed a scientist, rich or poor, hard or soft, hot or cold, whose moment of truth was not found was not found on a one- or two-meter-square flat surface that a researcher with pen in hand could carefully inspect' (Latour, 1999: 53). Yet, in *Reassembling the Social*, we find Latour himself in the same posture exactly where he explains his own method. Scientific facts that he studies arrive as if these facts were maps crumpled into a bundle and as if we are to retrieve them from the wastebasket. He suggests then to 'flatten them out on a table' in order to measure connections between people and things precisely:

Through a series of careful restorations, we have to flatten them out on a table with the back of our hand until they become legible and usable again. Although this

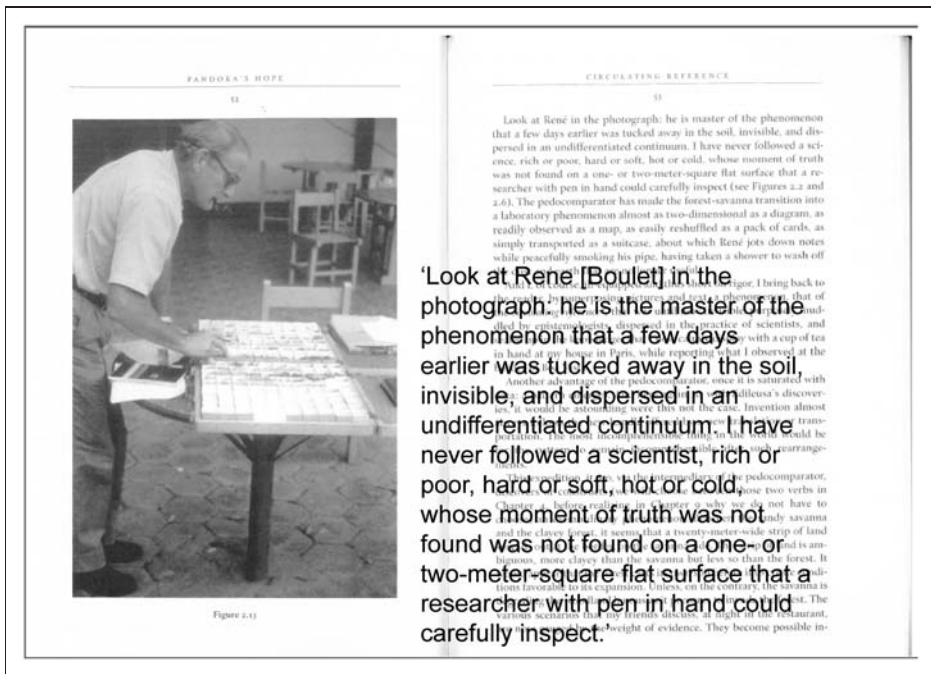


Figure 3. Rene Boulet in Latour's *Pandora's Hope*, 1999.

ironing out may seem counterintuitive, it is the only way to measure the real distance every social connection has to overcome to generate some sort of tracing. What was hopelessly crinkled must now be fully deployed (Latour, 2005: 172).

We see Latour standing back and overlooking these crinkled maps on the table, flattening them with the back of his hand, and measuring 'the real distance' (Latour, 2005: 172) of every connection. As he does this, his own figure is clearly not one of these crumpled maps that are to be flattened. Latour invites us to think of analogy with the Flatland, the 1884 satirical novella, which imagines three-dimensional animals living inside a two-dimensional world that is made up of lines (Latour, 2005: 172). But the position of Latour is not quite like that. When Latour flattens the world on the table with the back of his hand and overlooks its map from above, he is introducing back a third dimension to the overall picture. 'We' may 'have to become the Flat-Earthers of social theory' (Latour, 2005: 172), but at the same time 'we' remain standing back and overlooking this flat surface from a distance that is not unlike the distance of Rene Boulet vis-à-vis his research table.

Furthermore, Latour explicitly draws on the notion of the Cartesian grid when he explains his concept of the network. Latour compares the work of the ANT scholar to the cartographer who charts a newly discovered coast with the help of

what seems to be a ‘totally abstract Cartesian grid’ (2005: 24). This offers a method of description of every reported point by longitude and latitude. But, of course, this does not mean that the geographical data fits ‘a preordained geometrical shape’. He goes on to say that the grid does not correlate to the physical shapes of the objects that are being charted. The grid is a mere means of description ‘and not the content of what is being described’ (2005: 24).²

Latour argues that the relationship between the grid frame and what is being mapped with its help is the same as the relationship between the perspectival grid and a single point perspective in painting. Drawn first, the lines of the grid allow the painter to project a three-dimensional object onto a flat surface of the painting. But these lines ‘are not what is to be painted, only what has allowed the painter to give the impression of depth before they are erased’ (Latour, 2005: 131). Descartes-era artists also frequently used a special grid frame to achieve this, as is well illustrated by Greenaway’s film, the *Draughtsman’s Contract* (Figure 4). The grid is here a visual device that helps to order what is within the view.

Then Latour says that, in the same way, a network that he draws is not what is represented, but what merely ‘readies the text to take the relay of actors as mediators’ (2005: 131). A symphony, or a piece of legislation, a rock from the moon, an engraving – none of this has the shape of the network, but the network ‘readies’ the actor-network description (‘text’) of these topics.³

This is the reasoning behind Latour’s famous formulation that ‘network is a concept, not a thing out there’ and that it is ‘a tool to help describe something, not what is being described’ (2005: 131).



Figure 4. Mr Neville (Anthony Higgins) looks through the grid frame at the estate he is drawing. *The Draughtsman's Contract* by Peter Greenaway (1982).

It is interesting to see Latour making an analogy between such a perspectival grid and his own notion of network. This is quite different from being dismissive of 'Cartesian' distinctions between mind and matter, as proponents of non-dualistic anthropology so often are in passing. But let us think through the implications of this analogy. Does not this mean that Latour's networks are also to be 'erased' like the lines of the Cartesian perspective grid? What does it mean that they are not 'what is being described' but serve merely as a tool of description? That they are excluded from description? Are then these networks privileged in this perspective in comparison with connections between science and its contexts that ANT explores? And what is then the description of a symphony, or a piece of legislation, a rock from the moon, or an engraving as 'the relay of actors as mediators'? What exactly is the meaning of 'relay' here? The term is intentionally ambiguous as it signifies both communicating or representing and passing of something to someone. To relay is both extends networks of connections and describes them. The whole point of *Pandora's Hope* is that this extension and this description should not be in contradiction with one another.

At any event, however, 'relay' does not have a connotation of 'making'. Relating is about what is already there to be described or dispatched. What Latour relays is the practice of reduction of context that scientists do when they 'discover' facts. This process of reduction is the fact that Latour describes – with network analysis as his own method cut out of the picture as 'a tool to help describe something, not what is being described' (2005: 131). In doing so, I argue, Latour executes a similar 'reduction' that is grounded in the hierarchical and dualistic separation of tools and subject of description, namely, the networks and 'the relay of actors as mediators'.

Latour argues that science's discoveries are processes of 'reduction' in which context is subtracted and facts acquire compatibility with other facts. Latour routinely produces 'flat' visions of this process in the form of schemes (e.g. Figure 5). This flat description includes the state of embeddedness and the processes of reduction that 'dis-embed' facts from the context of research. But this overall vision is of course the one that Latour draws, rather than 'his' scientists who may and often do disagree with it (e.g. Latour, 1999: 3–19; 2005: 92–3). The connections that Latour makes overwrite and ultimately trump in a dualistic manner the connections that his informants make.

My question is if in doing so ANT itself isn't reductionist. Indeed, the ANT schemes do not include ANT scholar figures as a part of these schemes – just as scientific perspectives normally do not include these perspectives as a causal factor in the production of research results. Doesn't ANT execute a similar reduction when it gives us a depiction of facts about scientific reduction? Don't such schemes acquire property of facts that are being discovered?

But what happens if this reduction does not take place? What are connections that these discovered fact are embedded in? These are of course connections between Latour's method and the depicted scheme of scientific reduction (Figure 6). But this is not all. If I want to avoid this reduction systematically, and really 'flatten' this process, I have to add that this is not merely Latour who

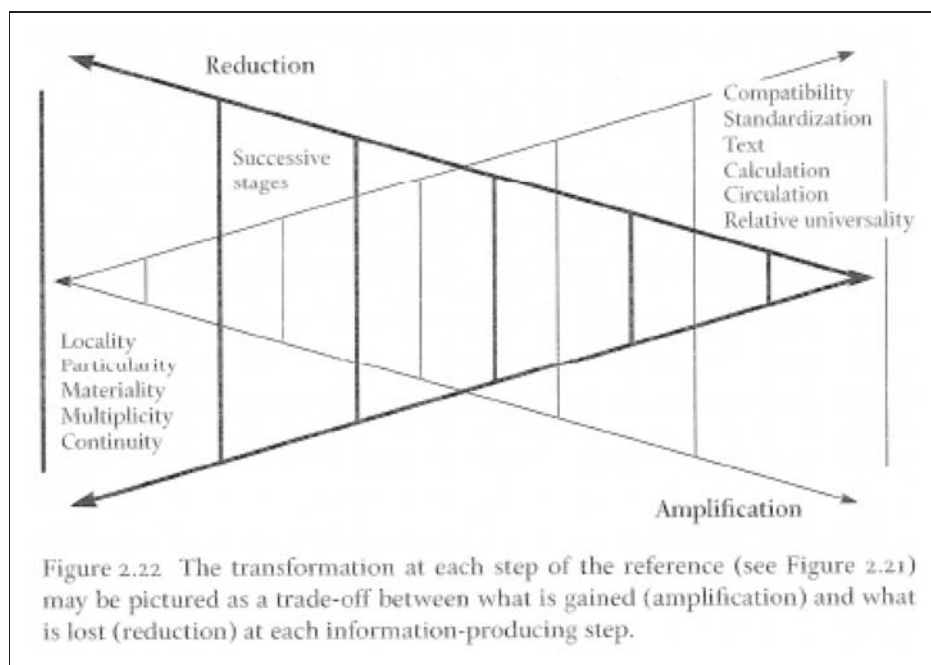


Figure 5. Production of facts in science. From Latour's *Pandora's Hope*, 1999.

is making these connections. It is I who draws them out explicitly. I have to account not merely for Latour's own practice but also for myself as mediating these connections between Latour and his description of the process of reduction (Figures 7 and 8). My practice is now embedded in the context of the Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory (GDAT) debate. GDAT thus becomes 'the obligatory passage point' in this overall picture of connections. In other words, if we want to be systematically non-dualistic and ontologically flat in this description, we have to recognize that the description of research undergoes endless overflowing by a description of research of descriptions of research that extends horizontally in what mathematicians describe as a bad infinity.

'Bad infinity' also means that I can bring certainty into the picture that I want to draw – that is, the picture of the process of scientific reduction – only by deleting these networks between GDAT, myself, Latour on the one hand and scientific reduction on the other. This takes me back to the pure and simple scheme on Figure 5. This is exactly the kind of Cartesian operation of deleting lines of the linear grid that Latour takes as analogy of the actor-network method.

What I have argued so far is that in executing such a deletion ANT remains Cartesian. I would like to turn now to the question what exactly is Cartesian in this vision. 'Cartesian' is the 'totally abstract grid' in Latour (2005: 24). It is linear visual perspective. This is a frequently made association that dates back to Erwin

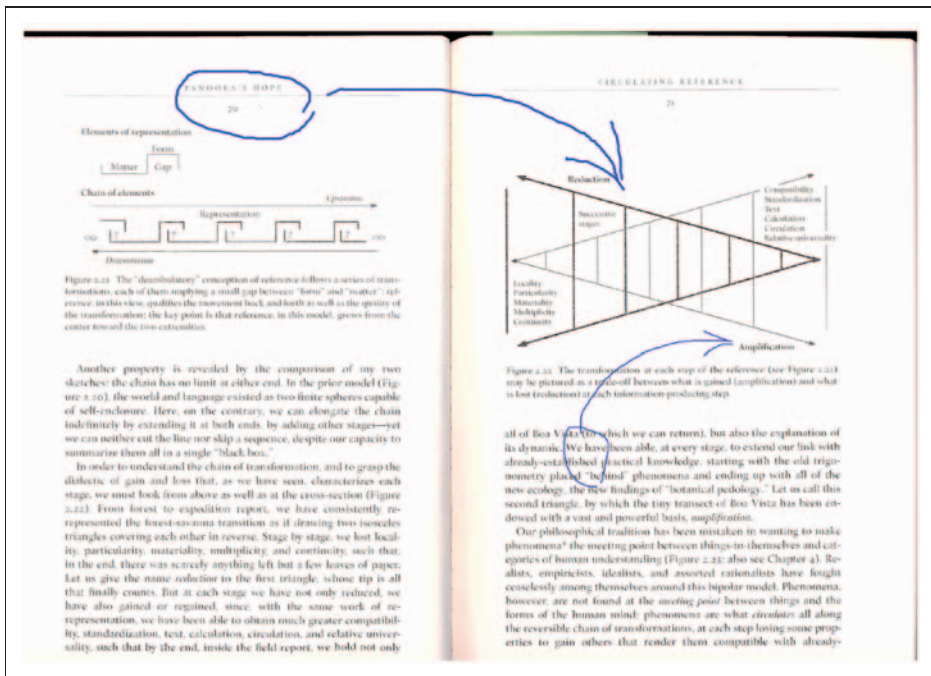


Figure 6. Adding connections to Latour's depiction of production of facts in science. From Latour's *Pandora's Hope*, 1999.

Panofsky's 1927 study of linear perspective that clearly and powerfully linked it with Descartes' philosophy (Panofsky, 1991). However, from the 1970s onwards, it has been equally clearly argued that this link is incomplete, if not misleading (de Certeau, 1987; Harries, 1973; Hoskin, 1995; Judovitz, 1993; Massey, 1997; Récanati, 2007). The main point of this criticism is that this equation overlooks the fact that vision is a sense, and Descartes' method is actually a systematic critique of the sensual apprehension of the world. Lyle Massay put this very strongly: 'whenever the association is made between the perspectival viewpoint and the Cartesian subject, it is not made on the basis of a close reading of Descartes' work' (Massay, 1997: 1159).

Indeed, from Descartes' point of view, the world 'gives' us signs that stimulate our mind – stimulate to draw a 'Cartesian grid' or Latour's network – but these signs 'in no way [do they] resemble the things they signify' (Descartes, 1985: 1: 165). Otherwise, there would be no distinction between the object and its image. In order to arrive at an understanding of the world, one has to exercise doubt in appearances, and a doubt in sensual experience with which we grasp these appearances. There is a complex question about what is the ontology of the world if we comprehend it through 'cutting off' our senses and appear to have 'no body' (no eyesight, no sense of smell, taste, touch, etc.). But it is Cartesian doubt that prompts

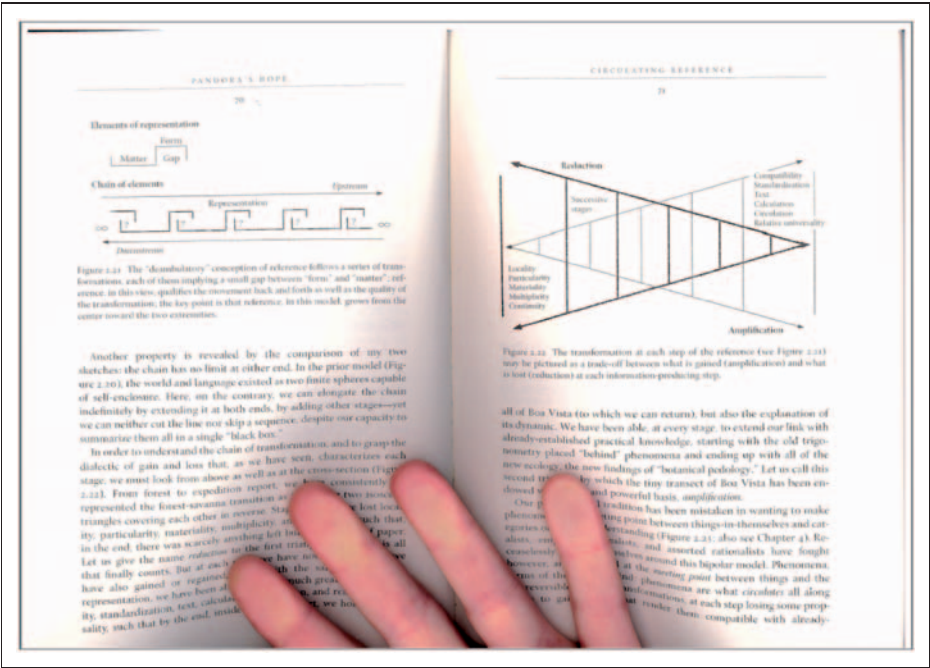


Figure 7. Adding connections: scanned page from Latour's *Pandora's Hope* to make the point on Figures 5, 6 and 8.

this ‘cutting’ as well as the whole of Descartes’ thought experiment about pure logical or mathematical ways of knowing. Interestingly, such doubt does not seem to have a place in a flat ontology which is made of lateral map of connections, which are made with precision and certainty, and with no doubt.

Doubt is fundamental to anthropology. We doubt the universality of our own cultural categories; we doubt our own understanding of societies that we study; and we doubt if we are successful in conveying often intuitive understanding that we gain in the field in the academic language that we use. However, for Descartes, doubt is also tied to possibility: ‘In order to doubt we must be able to conceive of the possibility that something may be different from the way it presents itself to us. Essential to doubt is the contrast between what is and what appears to be’ (Harries, 1973: 30). Thus grasping, with the effort of ‘the mind alone’, the seemingly infinite possible changes of which, for instance, the wax is capable (to use one of Descartes’ famous examples), he arrives at a picture that is quite different from what is or can be observable (Descartes, 1985: 20–21).

Latour does something similar when he invites us to grasp a political possibility of ‘the parliament of things’ or even simply grasping what actually empirically is – for example, such an elusive and difficult phenomenon as the ‘public’ (Latour and Weibel, 2005; Schaffer, 2005). More generally, this imagination of possibilities as

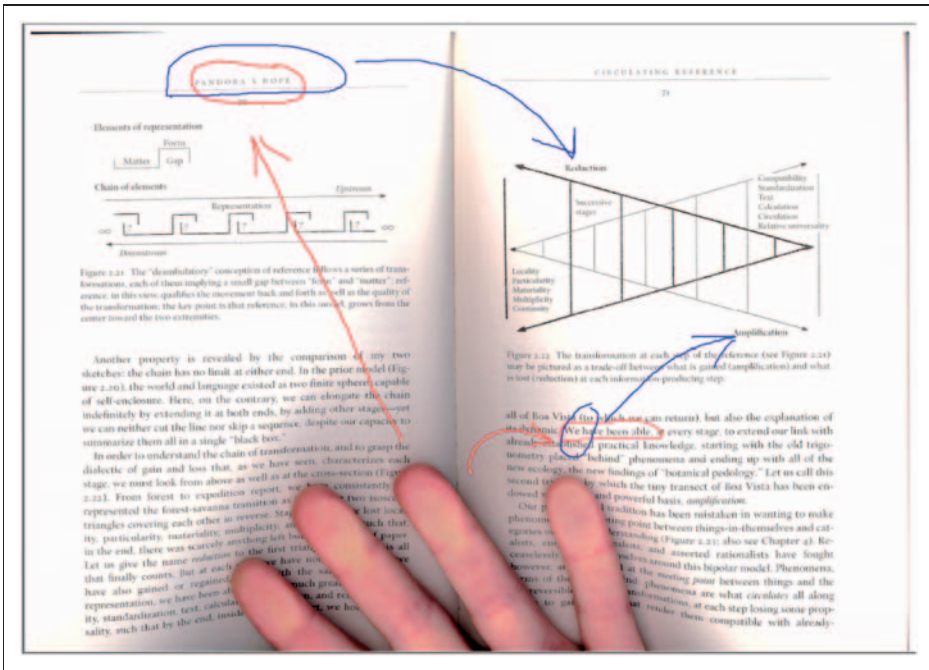


Figure 8. Adding connections: scanned page from Latour's *Pandora's Hope* and draw links to make my point.

both a political and heuristic device is closely linked with critical theory, to which anthropology has contributed so significantly through all its doubts. Critique imagines the potential of things and relations, which they afford but which are not out there yet.

This is again where I see links between Cartesian and ANT perspectives. Similarly to occasions when Latour deploys the notion of 'totally abstract Cartesian grid', we see him being Cartesian in a complex way that does not allow me to reduce Latour to a hard-and-fast anti-Cartesianism just as I cannot reduce Descartes' perspective itself to the linear visual perspective. Two questions follow from this.

The first question is then why Latour does so often appear to be a hard-and-fast anti-Cartesian? And why do the links between the linear perspective and Cartesian subject continue to be made despite the abundant and substantial critique of these links? This is exactly what Latour calls an analytical shortcut (albeit he does it with reference to other matters). But the point is not merely that such shortcuts are what he and other non-dualists nonetheless constantly do, but that such shortcuts actually do or perform something. This analytical shortcut seems to keep a strawman of Descartes to stand for whatever bad is associated with the dualist perspective. By 'associated' I mean being in 'association',

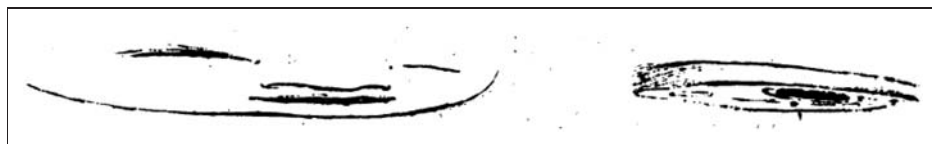


Figure 9. Leonardo da Vinci, anamorphosis of a child's face and an eye (C1510), Codex Atlanticus, Fol. 35v-a. Milan, Ambrosian Library.

that is, being in a Latourian connection. I submit that this association preserves Descartes as an obligatory passage point for non-dualistic approaches. Ironically, but hardly surprisingly, it is in this move of preserving this very abridged and simplistic version of Descartes that makes such a non-dualism itself most dualistic. It is clear that the 'Descartes' of this binary non-dualism is 'made' (constructed) in the Latourian sense. But Latour's own argument in *Pandora's Hope* that facts in science are both 'made' and 'true' here does not hold. This strawman version of Descartes corresponds neither to what Descartes actually argued nor to the current state of scholarship about his work.

The second question is if the analogy between the Cartesian and linear perspectives is problematic, is there a better way to grasp the Cartesian perspective visually or schematically (with all reservations about the limits of vision as a sense for Descartes)? And if the Cartesian perspective in its complexity is closer to Latour than it seems at the first glance, then what is Latour's own gaze? In particular, what do the schemes that are abundant in all ANT texts add up to as a visual perspective?

As far as Descartes is concerned, Massey (1997), drawing on Jurgis Baltrušaitis (1984; see also Baltrušaitis, 1977), argues that a more interesting analogy for Cartesian perspective is not a linear grid but anamorphism. Dating to Leonardo da Vinci's drawings (Figure 9), the anamorphic perspective deliberately distorts linear proportions of what is painted in order to keep this proportion when this painting is viewed from an angle that is oblique to the painted surface. This was particularly important for painting on curved surfaces of church ceilings. But this was also an attempt to avoid a dependency on a fixed-point perspective. If the painting consistently follows a linear grid perspective, it is only from this fixed- or central-point that the proportions of what was depicted appear 'right'. This single and immovable point of view is symmetrical with the 'vanishing point' of the painting itself. In order to avoid this and to allow painting to be viewed from different angles, one had to enlarge the parts of the painting that are in its foreground. From the linear grid point of view, this was a deformation of the image, or anamorphosis. In this perspective, the proportions of what is depicted appear 'normal' from oblique angles, but it is from the central point of view that these proportions appear distorted or disproportionately enlarged (Figure 10).

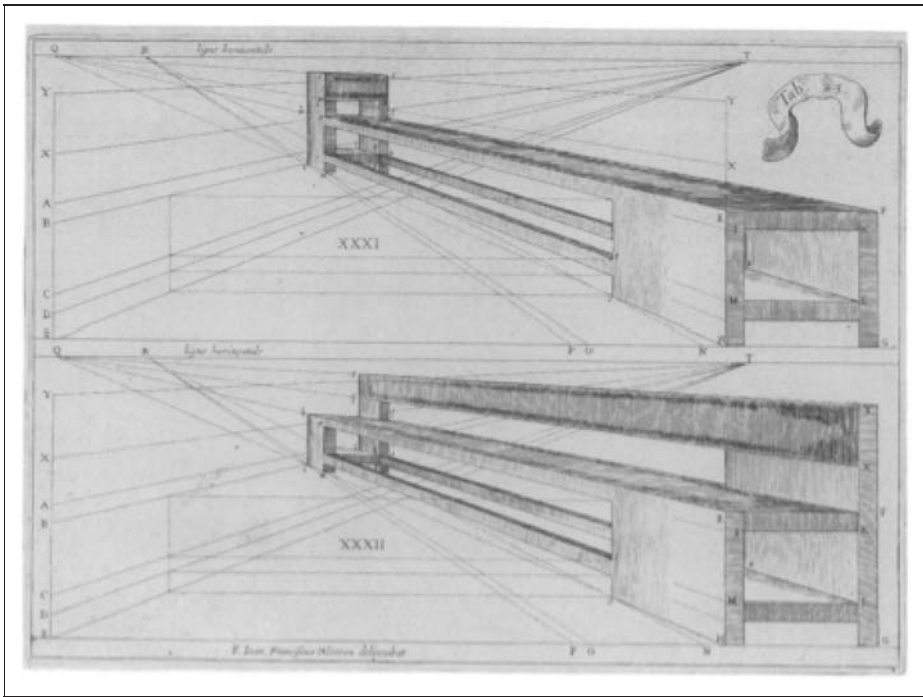


Figure 10. Jean-François Niceron, anamorphosis of chair and bench. Getty Research Institute, Resource Collection.

Let me go back to Latour's schematic representation of the process of reduction in science (e.g. Figure 5). What I have done in my commentary so far is to reintroduce the notion of depth, which, I have argued, is nonetheless contained within this method of flattening. Let me then, as a thought experiment, treat this scheme as a drawing that depicts depth. This drawing is a depiction of movement, and not of a static thing. Nonetheless, what we see is something that has quite an enlarged foreground ('locality', 'particularity', 'materiality', etc.). This 'something' moves away from us and develops properties such as 'compatibility', 'standardisation' and 'relative universality' at a larger distance. Latour's scheme is of course more complex. There is no single direction in which the process of making facts in science unfolds – although the vector of scientific 'gain' of reduction versus contextual 'loss' of amplification is an important conceptual axis on this particular depiction.

For Latour, these 'reduced' or 'generalised' phenomena are not representations of truth but simplifications. They are not ontologically 'large' and do not constitute the whole to which 'localities', 'particularities', 'materialities', etc. are parts. In fact, drawing on Leibniz' Monadology and its rendition by Gabriel Tarde for sociology, Latour (2010) argues for the reversal of background and foreground, and 'wholes'

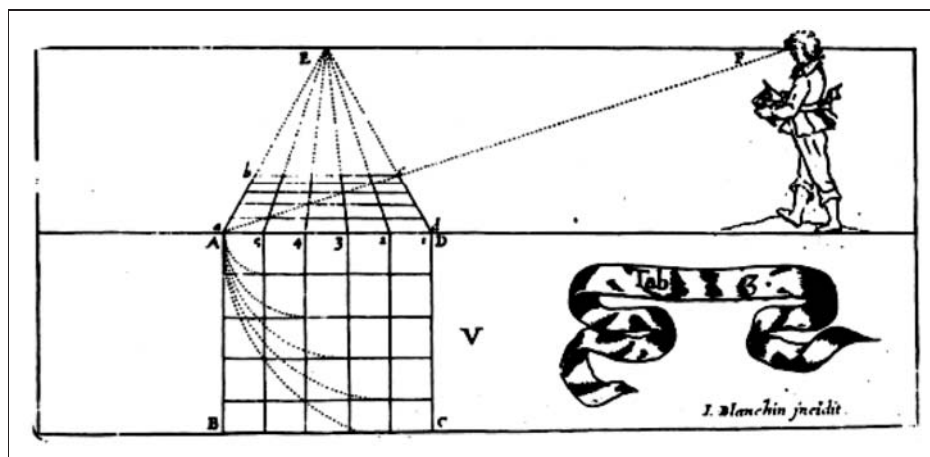


Figure 11. Jean-Francois Niceron, diagram of distance point construction with *perpetto*. *Le perspectiva curieuse ou magie artificielle des effets merveilleux*. Paris 1651. Getty Research Institute, Research Collections.

and 'parts', in terms of their complexity. The foreground – an individual event or a smallest component – is 'larger' in its complexity than a 'reduced' fact or simplified whole. By analogy with this, the 'locality', 'particularity', 'materiality', etc. in this perspective shows precisely how complex facts in science are. This vision is a matter of a detailed look at the 'foreground' events of the gathering of these facts. I propose to view this perspective that includes this amplified foreground and reduced background as an anamorphic perspective.

This perspective enables an ethnographic enlargement of the foreground of the processes under study. But equally importantly, if we think about this once again as an anamorphism in painting, in this perspective one can see the difference between the central and oblique angles of vision (Figure 11). What this anamorphic perspective achieves then is not merely a detailed view of the foreground but also the visibility of multiple gazes – and the possibility of gazes not merely at the depicted objects but also at gazes themselves. What appears within this vision is the geometry of difference between the central and oblique points, and the possibility to contemplate the central point perspective from the oblique one, and the other way around, to see (that is, to calculate) the position of the oblique gaze from the shape of distorted properties of the foreground as they appear from the central point of view.

If the linear perspective takes itself out of the picture – for instance, when the grid is deleted by the painter but also as the central point of view mirrors the vanishing point – the anamorphic perspective makes this central point of view visible by almost turning it into the object of gaze. I repeat that the anamorphic perspective is a gaze at the gaze as much as it is a gaze at what is depicted.⁴ It is, among other things, not a linear grid perspective, but a depiction of a linear grid perspective.

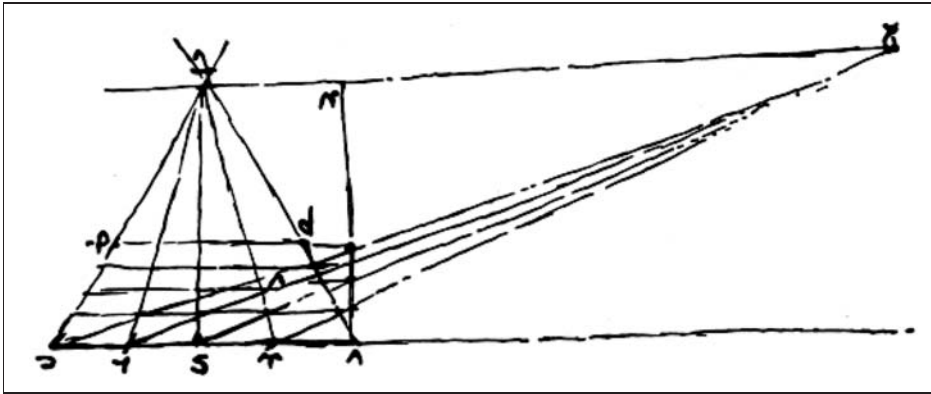


Figure 12. Leonardo da Vinci, distance point construction (1490–91), MS A, 42a, Paris, Institute de France.

I argue that an ethnographic perspective on science or on anything that includes ‘observing the observer’ is anamorphic exactly in this sense. It applies not merely to Latour’s gaze at science, but also, for instance, to Foucault’s gaze at the Panopticon and Dziga Vertov’s second-camera gaze at ‘The Man with a Movie Camera’. It remains dualistic in a sense that it does not abandon the three-dimensional or axial distinction between the observer and the observed. From a central point of view, it amplifies the foreground of research, such as techniques of fieldwork – and sometimes it does so to the point of exaggeration. But when it does so, it also creates, from an oblique angle, another flat surface that is perpendicular to the flat surface of the painting. This perpendicular flat surface connects the vanishing point of the picture, its surface and the central viewer’s point of view. Massey (1997) argues that this shifting of perspective, which invites reflection on perspective itself, is an equivalent of Cartesian doubt. I would add that it is the central point where the distortion is visible that becomes the locus of this doubt in appearances. It is doubt in appearances that includes doubt in the ethnographically amplified foreground. It keeps us, anthropologists, from believing too much in what we are so good at – in telling local stories and detailed depictions of individual cases. Anamorphic shifting of frames of vision and multiplication of flat surfaces along the lines of foreshortening or side-glances is, in my view, a valuable ethnographic device. But I am yet to be convinced that this perspective is non-dualistic.

Notes

1. Similarly, if ANT does not just describe but also adds connections to this surface, what appears from the vantage point of the dot on these added lines is that there are lines of connections behind ones that are added by ANT. But of this side surface is flat, these connections disappear from view once the new ones are added.

2. '[The Cartesian grid] does not correlate to geometrical properties of the objects that are being charted; it is a mere means to reflect the actual – complex and irregular – shapes of coast, or lines of connections. In other words, this is within the grid frame which is a means of description and not the content of what is being described' (Latour, 2005: 24).
3. 'In the same way, a network is not what is represented in the text, but what readies the text to take the relay of actors as mediators. The consequence is that you can provide an actor-network account of topics which have in no way the shape of a network – a symphony, a piece of legislation, a rock from the moon, an engraving' (Latour, 2005: 131).
4. Alberto Corsín Jiménez (2010; n.d.) also calls for 'anamorphic anthropology'. His argument is similar as so far as he uses the notion of proportion and size in his anamorphic perspective. But it is different as, first, his analysis draws on readings of Hobbes, and not Descartes (e.g. Malcolm, 2002), and, second, that he describes not a 'perspectival' vision of the classic age but a reversal of the gaze from the viewer to the picture. In anamorphism, he argues, it is not the viewer who looks at the picture but the picture that looks at the viewer. He links this exchange with the perspectivism in anthropology (Jiménez n.d: 133 citing Vivieros de Castro, 2010: 17) and with the baroque aesthetics in art (e.g. Buci-Glucksmann, 1994; Grootenboer, 2005).

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Opposing the motion: Joanna Cook, Goldsmiths College⁵

Ethnographic enterprise and the quality of non-dualism

The set-up. Our esteemed opponents are to be congratulated on their skilful attempt to defend the indefensible. Chris and I are here today to oppose the motion 'non-dualism is philosophy not ethnography'. There are multiple ways that this might be approached. Chris has robustly and coherently/apocalyptically dismissed the pitfalls of the opposition between ethnography and philosophy while also pointing to some of the ways in which Michael is not like Lady Gaga. In so doing, Chris himself comes close to the Spice Girls by proposing that 'two become one'.

I intend to demonstrate that despite the recurrence of dualist categories in ethnography, ethnography itself is an ongoing enterprise in non-dualism. I consider what dualism might be doing in ethnography and I argue that the only sensible conclusion of today's discussion is that ethnography is constitutively non-dualist, not because of a dualist contrast between dualism and non-dualism but precisely because the practice of ethnography permanently forestalls resolution to dualistic tension. It is productively non-dualist because in the doing of ethnography, the tension between dualism and monism remains unresolved; even in those instances where dualist and monist categories are salient ethnographic facts.

We are being asked to consider whether or not non-dualism is ethnography; conversely, whether ethnography is non-dualist. I am wary of the heffalump trap of opposing the double negative. But, of course, non-dualism is not the logical dualist opposite of dualism. Dualism in a simple rendering is the idea that there are two separate and distinct substances that make up a human being: most commonly mind and body.⁶ In each case, mind/soul/self is used to describe a conscious

substance (an internal essence in contrast to external materiality) that is distinct from the physical body. The antithesis of dualism is monism, which holds, in a hard line rendering, that all phenomena are the same substance.

Non-dualism, in contrast, holds that different phenomena are inseparable, but it does not hold that they are all the same. An example of a non-dualist philosophy is the principle of co-dependent origination, *Pañicca-samuppāda*, in Theravada Buddhism. Sometimes translated as 'dependent origination' or 'causal interdependence', it is the Buddhist principle that everything is interconnected and that everything affects everything else. Thus no phenomena are independent or self-originating. This principle extends through all things and all aspects of existence are thought to be connected and interrelated, from physical conditions, to events in a person's life and happiness or suffering in the mind. A recent development in reformist Buddhist thinking has been to interpret co-dependent origination as an argument for environmental activism (cf. Payutto, 1995). Thus, how the world is experienced and lived is, in part, how it is created.

Importantly, in this debate the logical dualism is not that of dualism/non-dualism but rather it is dualism/monism. If dualism/monism can be understood as either/or, non-dualism can be understood as both/and. To identify a dualist opposition between dualism/non-dualism does not give us a logical negation of a 'thesis', to use Hegel's dialectic. To hold non-dualism up as the antithesis of dualism will reveal contradictions but they will be rhetorical, not logical and any synthesis will be susceptible to criticism from multiple other possible antitheses.

What is dualism doing?

Following Lambek (1998), I take debates about monism and dualism to be constitutive of our philosophical tradition rather than assuming that one position must be correct and the other wrong: 'The point of cross-cultural comparison is not to seek solutions to a reified 'mind/body problem', but to contextualise a component of Western thought and hence to clarify its very constitution as a problem' (Lambek, 1998: 106–107).

In his work on spirit possession in Mayotte, an island in the Mozambique Channel, Lambek (1993) congratulated himself that he had demonstrated how taboos (identified in explicit rules and embodied practices) and visceral reactions to their violations transcended any opposition that might be identified between mind and body. Dualism had been successfully vanquished. In a later account (Lambek, 1998), however, he conceded that his analysis had triumphed over dualism only by discussing similar dual oppositions that were locally salient.

While 'mind/body' may not be universal, it is telling that dualistic categories are a common form of apprehending human experience. But what is it telling of? The multiplying of ethnographic evidence of dualisms does not logically lead to the relativist or cognitivist conclusion that the different labels point to the same thing,

or that what is understood as mind and what is understood as body will be the same everywhere. Nor might we conclude that other peoples' dualisms may be used to answer a question posed in another cultural context.

I might argue against dualism in analytic approach – and certainly this has been successfully done. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the body may be enacted in a variety of practices and has argued against a strict analytic division between the material and the social. In a beautiful piece of work on hypoglycemia, Mol and Law (2004) demonstrate that we may interpret the diabetic body as both the object of medical knowledge and the subject 'of the fleshy situatedness of our modes of living' (2004: 2). But for Mol and Law (2004), this dichotomy is still not sufficient: it skips over the work that is done to 'keep the body together'. The body is acting and enacted simultaneously. Keeping oneself together 'is not given but must be achieved, both beneath the skin and beyond, in practice' (Mol and Law, 2004: 15).

Thus, it may be ethnographically accurate that, in some contexts, the skin is conceived of as 'the border zone between the bounded self and the social world' (Benson, 2000: 235) while also being analytically acute to point to the work by which bodily activity incorporates the materiality of the outside and the centre of some bodily activities is external to the skin (Mol and Law, 2004); how the body is done rather than had.

Of course, the rewards of such analytic enterprises may not be reaped in an exercise such as today's debate. Were I to argue only that there are multiple ways of dissolving analytical dualisms, it could be countered that I was implicitly arguing against dualism and thus being dualist in spite of myself. This is not to suggest that dualisms are not ethnographically relevant but to ask where we locate ethnography and where we locate analysis. The focus of our ethnographic lens must be ethnography itself rather than the content of specific ethnographic moments. Rather than taking pot shots at each nested dualism and in so doing shooting ourselves in the foot and succumbing to a dualist enterprise, I suggest we try to explode the arena.

In identifying dualism, monism or non-dualism in ethnography as simultaneously its constitution and its content we are in danger of committing a 'category mistake' (Ryle, 1949). Rather than seeking to locate a non-dual domain in ethnography, we can develop our understanding of the non-dual quality of the full range of ethnographic practice. Insofar as non-duality is a quality of ethnography (texts and practices), it becomes a false problem to distinguish the non-dual (and by extension the dual) as a particular category or type of ethnography.

Ethnographic enterprise

In order to ask what ethnography is, we must back off from the 'problem' of dualism and observe it, to see how it is created, enacted and done. Such a position is not possible from within dualism. A clear illustration of this is ethnographic practice which, I suggest, is committedly non-dualist. If we are not actively implicated in ethnography by living there bodily, it is not considered proper

ethnography; put simply, if we were not fundamentally non-dualist, we would not need to go there.

Ethnographic fieldwork is a structured learning process. It requires that the researcher commit herself to practices and processes often entirely new to her domain of experience. In the field the ethnographer is learning, among other things, to understand the world around her through a new interpretive framework. It is reflection on precisely such processes that enables the researcher to gain further in-depth understanding of the field. It is in part the prolonged encounter of fieldwork that enables ethnographic understanding of the subtlety of interpersonal awareness. It is through the process of 'gradual familiarisation' (Hastrup and Hervik, 1994: 7) that the anthropologist is able to reflect on a multiplicity of bodily practices in order to examine cultural processes. This emphasises a mode of fieldwork that 'locates what has been called "the mind"...in the body' (Fernandez and Herzfeld, 1998: 110).

Rather than presenting the researcher as detached from the process of fieldwork through intellectual strategies of systemising and objectification, the ongoing negotiation of the fieldworker in the field and the incomplete nature of many field experiences are themselves positive and fruitful aspects of the fieldwork process; experiences which, if subjected to sustained anthropological reflection, may reveal dimensions of the studied community that would have otherwise remained concealed.

By extension, the production of ethnographic text is implicated here. The ethnographer supposes that an ethnographic text will result from ethnographic fieldwork. The danger of the dualist interpretation of ethnography and the role that ethnographic text plays in it is that all concepts, practices and forms come to be seen as 'culture bound' as dependent on 'context' or 'perspective'. In such instances, there is a danger of relegating them to either structural equivalents of other things happening in other places (a relativist reductionism) or implying that they are, in spite of themselves, not really real. Culture is fixed as bounded, whole, unitary and graspable. The ethnographer's task is then to account for a total field of data (Strathern, 1987: 258); she is in the unique position of being able to translate between cultures, explicating the conceptual gaps between their meanings and our concepts, to render the strange familiar.

But ethnographic writing is not created by finding a resolution to a punch and Judy, either/or, debate – rather the pleasure of the debate, the delicious tension between forms, local epistemology, internal analysis, practice and discourse is what is productive of, nay, is ethnography. Ethnographic texts are mediating forms, they are productive because the connections between things are always partial (Strathern, 1991) – new associations arise, something always remains aloof, unobtainable, there is always something more to say. Just as ethnographic practice is revealed as a process grounded in concrete social experience, ethnographic texts themselves arise through unfolding and constructing space. By taking ethnography as the focus of ethnographic enquiry, we reveal it to be both inside and outside events – it does not produce objective perspective but the 'excess of vision'

(Stewart, 1996: 74). The dualisms identified in ethnography are caught up in the process of narrativising – they are not fixed points of meaning so much as serving to illuminate the field of signification (Sperber, 1975; Stewart, 1996: 75).

Thus, ethnography, taken as the object of ethnographic enquiry (which is what is demanded of us by today's motion) robs dualism of its insistence on hierarchy and solution. Mind/body, culture/nature, engagement/detachment; one might resolve the tension by arguing that ethnography is both (dualism), or that what looks like two is in fact one (monism). But to take ethnography as the unit of our analysis is to ask how it is enacted and done and that is through such contestations and frictions. Foreclosing a solution to the problem of dualism is essential to such an enterprise.

Debate

Of course, an elegant illustration of this is found in today's debate. In some ways, the very form of this discussion has done my work for me. The debate is set up as a classic duelling stance or thrust, parry and riposte. We can only be for or against the motion. It was Marilyn Strathern who pointed out at the end of last year's debate that what the debate itself recreates or reinvents is the underlying similarity of purpose that anthropologists share – through the division created by the debate we develop a mode of understanding. It is, to quote her, 'through debate and through argument that we keep our agreements going' (in Venkatesan and Candea, 2012: 82). The motion, argument and voting that are the form of the debate serve to further a similarity of purpose; this is achieved through neither dualism, nor monism, but through non-dual enactment.

After our deliberations, we will hand over to our jester. I scarcely need to point out that the figure of the jester, the trickster, illustrates the familiar theme of ethnographic moments, events and figures that challenge dualisms; broker dualism and embody dualism. Theory, the spectacle, so often separated from practice, is united in ethnography. Here we have that unity embodied. What does that unity mean? It means fecundity.

I am reminded of Sanders' (1998) work on the Ihanzu of Tanzania for whom the categories of male and female are central to the symbolic scheme informing cultural practice. The combining of the categories 'male' and 'female' is the potent means of transforming and regenerating the world. Nowhere is this transformative enactment more visible than in the figure of the jester – whose power lies in her ability to cross boundaries (male/female, living/dead), while remaining 'perched precariously on the margins of society' (Sanders, 1998: 245). The jester moves within and between categories. She is not transmuting into the other gender, nor becoming a member of a third gender category, but holding place as a 'hybrid being' through combining dualism in a single body.

The structural position of the jester in this debate points to the fundamentally non-dualist nature of our fecund enterprise. I do not expect Marilyn to hurl obscenities or snatch prime cuts of meat as an Ihanzu jester might. The role of

the jester here is to push the boundaries of the arguments for and against today's motion. In so doing, she transcends the dualism of debate and stands as enactment of and allegory for the non-duality of the ongoing ethnographic enterprise in which we are all implicated.

Finally (and in jest), whatever she says, she is on my side. I claim the figure of the jester for non-duality and for ethnography.

Notes

5. At the time of the debate, Cook was at Goldsmiths. She has since (2012) moved to UCL.
6. Sometimes the mind is understood as soul – so for example, Plato and Aristotle used the term 'nous' to describe the part of a person that survives after death.

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The debate

Jeanette Edwards, Manchester:

I have to clear this up right from the very beginning by asking Chris in his role as neo-primitivist and proud of it – were you really arguing that the increased or burgeoning attention to the anthropology of science, technology, financialisation, banks, etc. is a waste of time?

Chris Pinney:

Well, that all depends on what happens in the next five years! All that ethnography, may be useful for salvage purposes and as I say, the neo-historicists will mobilise it in their 'learning from the past' programmes. It will undoubtedly be of interest and value, but those practices will no longer exist. That is my apocalyptic suggestion.

Jeanette Edwards:

So we are wasting our time. This is what you're arguing?

Chris Pinney:

It depends on what we're going to do in the next five years. That's the choice that currently faces us. So, it depends whether we want to mobilise the resources of 'red knowledge' against the 'age of oil' and mitigate the potentially calamitous consequences of 'age of oil' knowledge. So, those things may survive and then those ethnographies will form part of an ongoing tradition of the ethnographic study of those practices, or they will reach a point of termination in which they will simply serve as a window onto the past.

Karen Sykes, Manchester:

I'm not certain you want to hold up a 'history will be the judge' position with a neo-primitivist position.

Chris Pinney:

Ah, well, events that have not yet been predicted will determine the outcome. I'm not invoking anything as abstract as history. We are all motile bodies capable of showing in an unfolding future and depending on how that future unfolds, we will then write one account or another account. It's not a question of history judging this – it's a question of events.

Simone Abram, Sheffield:

I'm sure I'm not the only person who is slightly confused by the very wide array of registers of dualism we've been presented with so far – some more clearly than others, or some more clearly identified than others. But I can't let go of this point about the new dualism that you're raising here, Chris. It seems to me that you're arguing that the kind of ethnography that we do and its relevance is dependent on the subject. Are you saying that the ethnography of technology is somehow less indicative of human material relations than the ethnography of jungle dwelling perhaps? Are you saying that's a dualism that we should respect?

Chris Pinney:

No, I'm not. Thank you for pointing out an ambivalence and potential contradiction in my position. I think that one's assessment of that does depend on the nature of unfolding events. I would entirely agree with you and this is also the point that Jeanette was making that there may well be valuable conclusions to be drawn from ethnographies of carbon trading, or, you know, all kinds of aspects of the very dualist practices which are leading us towards calamity. So, I wouldn't in any way deny the potential political utility of those investigations. Because the bulk of what I had to say jumped ahead 50 years, it was then predicated on a subjectively known future, for the purposes of generating an argument, in which we had reached a stage in which the age of 'oil knowledges' had all imploded and in which we would then be forced to rely on 'red knowledges', on 'jungle knowledge'. But those are in two different temporal moments. So you should not extrapolate from my fantasy about where we may be in 50 years time to, make, or draw a conclusion about the worth or lack of worth, or political utility or lack of utility, of ethnographies of practices of our current dualist life world. It depends what we do with them. What we learn from them.

I sense your anxiety is that I'm critiquing a certain range of ethnographic subject matter. I'm not. What I'm saying is if we imagine ourselves 50 years hence, we would then have to recognise that those were essentially historical studies of practices that have ceased to be. And that the object of ethnographic inquiry, of ethnographic philosophical engagement would be different. It would be down to species survival. And that would be the point at which all those questions which – as we now read Eduardo Viverios de Castro – we receive as theoretical issues and potentialities, will become urgent, pressing, practical, survival questions. That's my point. But that is from the position of 50 years hence. In 2011, we still have five years left to figure out what's going to happen. So, keep doing your incredibly useful ethnographies of ultrasound and all the rest of it.

Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov:

If you're arguing... that 'red ethnography' isn't dualist, could you tell me a little bit more about what exactly is 'red ethnography'.

Chris Pinney:

Well, I think 'red knowledges' will be all those forms of potentially pragmatically useful slow mediational forms that will help us survive in the future. Knowledges which we presently bracket as social facts. They will be philosophical traditions and practices which encourage us to engage the world in very different ways... that teach us how not to exploit the world as standing reserve. That is, all those practices that would help sustain, for want of a better word, what one could think of as a new kind of deep ecological practice. It is difficult to forecast what those things will be in 50 years, but my suggestion is that events are unfolding with such rapidity that anthropology needs to be open to the coming transformation, which is going to turn all those bracketed knowledges, or things we make careers out of, into potential techniques of survival.

James Leach, Aberdeen:

If I were to try and caricature what I've heard, then I might say something like: Jo is saying non-dualism is real; Chris is saying non-dualism is politically and practically important; Nikolai is saying that, in fact, philosophy, even Cartesian philosophy is non-dualist; and Michael is saying that there are dualisms of different kinds out there and that we need to attend to them in ethnography. Now if I were to be convinced by Michael's position, that there is both dualist and non-dualist thinking observable in the world out there, how would the others of you recommend that I vote?

Joanna Cook:

One of the things that strikes me is that we're not here today to argue against dualisms that might be found, and we can do ethnography that incorporates dualism as ethnographic fact. But the question to my mind is: where do we put our analysis and where do we put our ethnography? And I think that to the extent to which we are engaged in an analytic inquiry, then to that extent, the presence or absence of dualisms in the world is not detracting from the non-dualist nature of ethnography itself.

Chris Pinney:

I think there's a welcome degree of consensus among various of our positions and in fact, we probably differ as much between ourselves on each side of the team as to the two ostensible opposing sides. So, to take Michael's critical observation about the desire to find what he calls the 'monologic fractal relations' everywhere, I completely agree that that's very disabling. That's a kind of pointless activity. And it's not going to help my kind of survivalist programme, because what we want to find is things that work, not the things we've dreamt up lying in the bath after reading Roy

Wagner. I was reading Viveiros de Castro noting that there is nothing more tedious and hollow sounding than those reconstructions that confront us with certain ethical ideals impersonated by non-western actors. Ethnography shouldn't be about getting others to impersonate our philosophical predilections. To that extent, I found myself agreeing with almost everything that Michael said. The point of ethnography is to produce trustworthy and useable, mobilisable forms of knowledge. So, in that sense I think that we have a lot in common and I think we should flip a coin, frankly!

Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov:

The main problem is, of course, that dualism is not a single category itself. There are so many different dualisms. So as Jo says, if we want to reflect about them ethnographically, then of course we ethnographically affirm their existence. The question then becomes even more difficult because, of course, does it imply that ethnography itself is a reflection, ethnographic perspective on these become dualistic? Jo argues that it doesn't. But I still think that in many cases it does, therefore I propose to vote for the motion.

Michael Scott:

I suppose, just to animate the discussion a little bit, I'd like to respond to Jo's response to James. She said that she was interested in the way in which ethnography incorporates dualism as an ethnographic fact. So, I wondered how she would deal with dualism as an ethnographic fact; what status does that have in her work? And then in Chris's presentation, I hear echoes of the eschatological issues I was trying to identify in the work of anthropologists who hold strongly to non-dualist positions. They think they have to explode essentialist categories – essentially to 'bomb' (cf. Latour, 2009) those categories – and so I'm a little bit worried by Chris's position. He seems to want to use some imagined historical future almost as a kind of threat to make you vote... and he wants to explode our case!

Chris Pinney:

This is the imagined future – read it! It's coming! [Flapping newspaper] Unfortunately.

Sarah Green, Manchester

Many years ago, when I was in northwestern Greece, someone said, 'life for people here, is a matter of one, two, many or a lot'. And it was a suggestion of the inability to count beyond 'two', an inability to look at the world in a complex way. And this debate appears to repeat that assertion that there are: two, one, or a lot. And that beyond that is not possible for ethnography. The 'a lot' seems to be beyond the capacity to understand or to comprehend or to see. It's sort of a, 'one' is clear, 'two'

is clear – ‘a lot’ is ambiguous and difficult and flexible. Is that your position . . . the position of any or of all of you?

Joanna Cook:

May I say, ‘no!’ I think that is something I would be keen to argue against. What I am pointing towards is a process of mutual constitution. And in response to Michael’s question, of course, ethnography is always based in concrete social worlds. So, in order to account for multiplicity, we are not supposing that these are total social facts that are separate from the process of ethnography. But in order to make ethnographic complexity evident, we need to make sure we don’t foreclose on those decisions before we begin.

Michael Scott:

I’m advocating for a methodological non-dualism. So, I think that this notion of ‘a lot’, which is ambiguous – ‘difficult’ or ‘flexible’, as you [Sarah Green] put it – suggests that there are discrete entities that can be counted, that there are ‘a lot of things’. But the starting point of a methodological non-dualist would be that there are simply relations, and so those cannot be added together to collect ‘a lot’. It’s not summative in that way.

Joanna Cook:

[To Michael Scott] Can I ask, in advocating a methodological non-dualism, have you done our work for us?!

Michael Scott:

No, I’m trying to create a position whereby anthropology, or sorry, ethnography can explore the multiplicity of different positions, different ontological positions throughout the world. So, what I’m saying is that it’s a mistake to distinguish between philosophy and anthropology; philosophy is ingredient or integral to ethnography. But when we use philosophy in our ethnography, we need to attend to philosophy in its non-dual state. What I’m trying to argue for is that ethnographers should engage in an even more non-dual condition, whereby they situate philosophers in their non-dual states, in their relations, in their dialogues.

Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov:

What is this ‘a lot’, what is ‘multiplicity’ – this is a really important question. It’s somewhat different from the question we’re discussing today, which is ‘what is dualism?’ and ‘what could be non-dualism?’ What I often find is that multiplicity

comes as a kind of answer rather than as a question. So, we then have to ask – actually how is multiplicity constituted?

Chris Pinney:

I think it's a great question as well. But I also think that it's a function of the way that the debate has been set up. My guess would be that in what we do most of the rest of the time, and I mean stuff we write and think about otherwise, we are getting beyond that and I think one of the main agents through which that happens is when you start considering historical contingency and transformation. That immediately generates, not necessarily the multitude, but it generates and demands a complexity that exceeds 'two'.

Joanna Cook:

I had a question following up on what Michael said. In his call for achieving an even more non-dual ethnography than the one we already have through engagement with philosophy as grounded in a philosophical tradition and its own context, is there ever a point at which a difference between Kantian and Descartes' dualisms might not be fruitfully explored?

Michael Scott:

Absolutely! I think that's one of the problems with the non-dualist position that takes non-dualism as truth, as opposed to methodological non-dualism. It tends to lump Cartesian, Kantian dualism together – and then tends to deduce from that conflated dualism oppositions such as nature–culture, abstract–concrete. Then all of those oppositions tend to just collapse into one large opposition, I think. So, I would agree that methodological non-dualism would seek to locate the development of those oppositions historically and dialogically.

Matei Candea, Durham:

I've got two questions. It strikes me that Jo and Michael actually agreed on quite a lot. Both agree on ethnography being methodologically non-dualist; and it seems to me that, Michael, you're further arguing for the motion in the sense that there's a particular body of what could be called non-dualist anthropological theory, which you would characterise as philosophy or anthropology. I was wondering if you and Jo disagreed about that.

For my second question, I'd like to come back to this distinction between philosophy and ethnography. And I guess may be only the people who have argued for the motion are accountable for it, because you must in some sense think that there is a distinction there to talk about, and I'd be interested in how you would characterise that distinction. The thing I've got in the back of my head is something Eduardo

Viverios De Castro said after a talk, in an offhand way, along the lines of ‘Well, anthropology is the philosophy of the other and so anthropology at home or in Euro-America is just philosophy’. And I remember being very dissatisfied with that and I was just wondering (a) what you think about that and (b) what the distinction is between anthropology and philosophy or ethnography and philosophy?

Michael Scott:

The distinction I wanted to draw was between the philosophers that the ‘non-dualism as truth’ anthropologists are drawing on – such as Heidegger, Deleuze and Guattari, Merleau-Ponty and so on – and the lived ontologies of our ethnographic interlocutors. What I’m suggesting is intended to be more consonant with the position that Tim Ingold developed, where he says ethnography is with people and it’s a fundamentally philosophical craft of working with people. Everyone is a philosopher from that point of view, it seems to me. Everyone is engaged in philosophical activity about the nature of the world and their role and position in it.

Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov:

I would add that also often there is a difference between the ethnography that we would like to carry out and what we actually do. So, the project and the actual practice of doing it. From that point of view, you can say that ethnography can be seen as always a bit of a failure of philosophy.

Michael Scott:

I would probably disagree with what Nikolai just said! I think that anthropologists can do ethnography with philosophers. The position that I’m trying to articulate here is that the anthropologist shouldn’t take any philosopher’s work as truth, as objective truth or reality. The anthropologist philosophising is no more subject to error [Ssorin-Chaikov – absolutely] than the philosopher.

Chris Pinney:

Michael, you asked at one point if Vedantists had ever been monist and I sense that the question there was also, how many would have to be monist for philosophy to have to become ethnography. So, aren’t you juggling there a sense that there’s a world of ideas that need to be concretised and the question is what are the criteria, what is the precise point at which philosophy becomes ethnography? The one cranky monk sitting in a cave who is disparaged by all the people around him, what does he have to do in order to turn what he says/does from philosophy into ethnography? I am suggesting that there is an almost statistical model of a generalisation of practice that you seem also to be invoking.

Michael Scott:

No, I'm simply suggesting that within a tradition like Vedantism there are debates about the nature of reality, whether it's 'one' or a 'multiplicity' or 'many' – and that anthropologists should attend to that. And so, the subject of anthropology could be this one cranky person in a cave. Why not? That person's thought might be equally important as the 10,000 other Vedantists somewhere else.

Chris Pinney:

But doesn't that act as a form of bracketing, a kind of anxious insulation from the possibility that the one cranky philosopher might have something to tell us? Because actually, we're then saying that this is only going to be valid as ethnography if it can be generalised, if we can present it descriptively as a generalised account. So what troubles me in that model is that we're cutting ourselves off to knowledge. Because unless that knowledge is then generalised, unless we can say it's a certain number of people, where there's more than a sample of one, we're not able to deal with it under the rubric of ethnography – and we impoverish our world as a result.

Joanna Cook:

I wonder with this question what we're doing with qualities and what we're doing with categories. And I think that we might be giving philosophy and ethnography short shrift here. It's not clear to me that the continental philosophers weren't themselves seeking social context and social contextualization – and it's for that reason that they've been so disparaged within philosophy itself. And it strikes me that in our own examination of non-duality here, if we're going to explore qualities of being, in specific instances which is one of the things that's sought by continental philosophies, rather than understanding this as categories of behavior, we come much closer to being able to defend ourselves for being socially sticky – which is one of the challenges that has been posed to continental philosophy over the last few years. An example of that is the anthropology of ethics of course, which is a burgeoning field which doesn't just accept philosophical categories and put them onto other places, but is rather looking at the ways in which people shape themselves in the light of ideals and how they think they ought to live. And that then – coming back to Sarah's point – is always going to be more complicated than 'one', 'two', or 'many'.

Magnus Course, Edinburgh:

I have an old fashioned piece of ethnographic pedantry for Joanna; you've presented the trickster as a kind of hero of the non-dualist cause: a figure which breaks down dualisms. But my understanding of trickster is, at least from the ethnography

of the Americas in particular, that tricksters invert categories – they don't blur them, they don't actually break them down or move across them. In other words, the creativity of the trickster is entirely premised on dualism, okay, not non-dualism. And I wonder if this point, this creativity emerging from dualism couldn't be expanded more generally. There's a sense in which people have presented dualism as somehow kind of static and conservative and a little bit dull. What I think the trickster exemplifies perfectly is just how kind of infinitely generative of creativity dualisms of different kinds can be.

Joanna Cook:

To go back to Todd Sanders' work, in another piece (to the one I discussed) what he's arguing against is theories of rituals of inversion. He says that we may see these as a way of understanding responses to social inequality, but in fact for the Ihanzu, it's the joining of the genders that is fecund, that is transformative. He argues very strongly against the idea of the inversion. And the reason that he does that is in each of the instances that he's looking at, he says that we can only accept the inversion premise in so long as we maintain gender hierarchy to be unitary and uncomplicated. And so it's precisely because the dualism is not static, it's because it maintains that ongoing friction and is never resolved – as it would be in inversion even if only temporarily – that transformation and generation happens. It's for that reason that, as he puts it, 'it is pregnant with meaning'.

Tim Ingold, Aberdeen

I'm the being whom Chris, I think, invoked as the ghost from Aberdeen, wafted down to Manchester courtesy of Flybe! A long time ago, I did say that anthropology is philosophy with the people in. I didn't say that ethnography is philosophy with the people in, I said anthropology is philosophy with the people in.

I might want to say that non-dualism is anthropology, but not ethnography. I might even want to say that ethnography, is in some sense inherently dualistic but at least I would say that masquerading anthropology as ethnography is to take away its power to delineate alternative potentials and possibilities of being of the kind that we really do need, as Chris said, in order to find a way forward in the world. So, I thought that a lot of the muddles in the discussion arise actually from confusing these two things. From treating what is actually an anthropological-cum-philosophical debate as a sort of ethnographic inquiry and interpreting the ethnographic facts.

I think it's this masquerade of anthropology as ethnography that does sometimes lead us sometimes to posit ethnographic actors as unwitting mouthpieces for our own philosophical predilections and I don't agree with that – and I agree with the criticisms that have been made of it. But I do agree that in thinking about the potentials and possibilities that human life in the world, presently and in the future,

we need all the help we can get. And we need to talk to people we meet in the field, we need to talk to students, we need to talk to other scholars, we can talk to anybody, and talking to all those people and doing philosophy through those conversations that we're having: that is anthropology. But it's not ethnography. And I think that if we clarify that distinction, a lot of the problems that we've been having can be resolved.

Chris Pinney:

Well, that's very helpful. I'm delighted to find myself in agreement and offer my sincere apologies for the minor misinterpretation!

I'd be interested to hear more about the elasticity of the relationship between anthropology and ethnography. So could I ask a question back to you to? The notion of a philosophical anthropology is very attractive in many ways, but without wishing to fully embrace Michael's anxieties, it does seem to potentially reinvent the problem he was arguing against.

Tim Ingold, Aberdeen

The one thing I want to get away from is treating ethnography as a method or a means to an end of then doing anthropological theory or philosophy. As far as I see it, ethnography is a task, it's something we need to do and that thing is to render truthful descriptions of people's lives.

As far as anthropology is concerned, that seems to me to be a philosophical speculation about the possibilities and potentialities of human being in the world. And clearly, these relate to one another and depend upon one another – they're not hermetically sealed in any kind of way – and we can do both. But I think we get into a lot of confusion... just to give one quick example, as a cellist I might have dreamt of going to study with Rostropovich and spending a lot of time at his feet and through that hopefully learning and coming back and discovering new things about the music that I didn't know before – that would be equivalent to doing anthropology. Or, I could go and study about Rostropovich, look at his background and say that actually I'm doing this as part of an ethnographic study of Russian cellists and talk to some others, and I could come back and write a book about the social and cultural context of Russian cellists. That would be a bit unfair, but that's a bit closer to doing ethnography and it's not that one is right or wrong, it's just that the goals are entirely different. That in the first case it's because I wanted to be a better musician, not because I want to find out about cellists and why and how they live and do what they do. So it's a difference of objective I think.

Melissa Demian, Kent:

I wanted to come back to Jo's assertion of ethnography as inherently non-dualist. I'm concerned that when anywhere we assert non-dualism in one arena of our

experience, another dualism will pop up somewhere else. And you can demonstrate it ethnographically – my favourite example currently being New Agers who are doing a sort of Buddhism, who are very interested in collapsing distinctions between mind and body, very interested in collapsing distinctions between I and thou, but boy do they love nature and culture? So as soon as you try to say this dualism doesn't exist, you are almost causing it to not exist by holding in reserve this one over here. And I also want to suggest that this is demonstrated by another famous or infamous figure of ethnography, which is the outsider or marginal informant, right?

So this is the person that many, if not all, anthropologists have to deal with at some point in the process of doing ethnography. Where they are initially met or embraced in some way by somebody in their host community with whom they seem to have an instant rapport and they begin to mutually constitute that world that we call ethnography. And then they find out that this person is not accepted by their own group for one reason or another and that the world you were mutually constituting is not in error, but it is not a world that would be embraced or shared by the majority of the people that you think that you are constituting a world with. And so the non-dualism you are creating with this marginal outsider or informant is actually predicated on a dualism between them and everyone else in their society.

So, while I could probably go along with Michael's methodological non-dualism for the sake of argument, I'm still extremely uncomfortable with the claim for some kind of inherent non-dualism to the ethnographic endeavor.

Joanna Cook:

I rather think that was what I was arguing! In arguing that ethnography is non-dual, what I was not doing was suggesting that there were not dualisms to be found.... So, the illustration with Lambeck and the trajectory of his work is precisely that in this claim to throw out dualism, to have vanquished dualism, he'd actually had recourse to other dualist categories.

So, whether or not ethnography is non-dualist doesn't stand or fall on whether we do or do not find dualism. And it doesn't stand or fall on whether they are multiple... or some are accepted and others are not. But rather, what I'm trying to point towards is the non-dual nature of the ethnographic enterprise. That is constituted through the ongoing interactions which we have and so is both with the people with whom we work but it's also with continental philosophers, it's also about being able to share an experience like this. Kathleen Stewart put it by saying ethnographic text, ethnography is never filling an empty space – it's already always an ongoing emplacement. And as Chris said in his introduction, we live with storytellers, rather than picking information.

Michael Scott:

Well, just to differentiate methodological non-dualism from what Jo has said. It seems to me that what Jo has said is that the anthropologist is always in a non-dual

condition with the people he or she works with. But, that seems to me to foreclose any possibility of essentialists in other worlds. The anthropologist might actually be working with people who are radically other, who don't presume a non-dual relationship. It seems to me that to take non-dualism as truth forecloses the anthropological exercise. It decides for us the type of relationship one can have in the field. By contrast, methodological non-dualism is a starting premise that enables you to elicit difference. It allows ethnographic interlocutors to be essentialists as well as non-dualists. It doesn't presuppose that the ethnographic subject approaches the ethnographer with non-dualist assumptions.

Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov:

Imagine again the very same scientist that Latour was talking about. He is there in the jungle for rather a long period of time, he's engaged in the world which he studies constantly and what he arrives at, one may argue, is an immersion in the world he studies by achieving what he thinks is the truth of that world. Now, that process could be described as sort of non-dualistic, but on the other hand it hinges upon all dualistic distinction between the world and its true representation. So, on these grounds, I am not convinced that this non-dualist engagement doesn't have this other fairly dualist side to it.

Chris Pinney:

In response to Michael's comments: our non-dualisms are not isomorphic with those of our informants – or not necessarily. I mean, I just wonder to what extent that was a kind of general anxiety about the difficulty of translation. There seems to be a much bigger question being raised of which dualism is just a very small part. I took it as a kind of Geertzian problem of how you then mediate these different worlds and dualism as playing a walk-on role in a much bigger set of problems.

Joanna Cook:

I'm not sure that the implication of what I'm arguing is that there's a duality to that relationship between the anthropologist or the ethnographer and the people with whom she works. I suggest that it is long-term participant observation that allows us to think about multiplicity of practices and interactions. I think there is a danger with the sort of epiphanic emergence stories that are typified by the cockfight. I see the kind of anxiety and the uncertainty and the incompleteness of many fieldwork experiences as being endemic to the process itself. And as such, this ongoing involvement of the anthropologist doesn't mean resorting to assumptions about mental actions, but it does mean developing some awareness of the psychological landscape in which assertions are made. So, to give you an example, my own earlier research was looking at how becoming a monastic changes one's relationship to

mental, physical and emotional processes; but importantly, how it also changes interpretation of subjective experiences. Now, the monastics with whom I worked are in a meditation monastery and meditation, of course, we might think of as the most unsocial of activities. One sits there with one's eyes shut on one's own. But of course, importantly it has strong social dimensions and that heavily influences the ways in which people understand the practice, themselves through the practice and the effects that they think the practice has and that they intend it to have. And in order to do that kind of research, it's absolutely essential that this is not understood as a dual relationship, or a relationship characterised by duality.

Michael Scott:

My point was simply that I heard you as generalising non-dualism to all fieldwork contexts – to your relationship with your ethnographic subjects. I was simply pointing out that, in fact, that's imposing a particular ontological condition on all subjects that you might work with. But, it seems to me that in many ethnographic contexts, the people or person that you're working with may have fundamentally different assumptions about ontology than you do and, if so, your presumption of non-dualism would be failing to take their ontological assumptions seriously.

Joanna Cook:

And I would respond that my approach is to explore the quality of non-duality in ethnographic research, rather than identify non-duality as a category of knowledge. Whether that's a category held by the ethnographer or by the people with whom she works!

Michael Scott:

I'm describing it as a state of being, not a category of knowledge!

Nayanika Mookherjee, Durham:

My question picks up from Matei Candea's but I also want to say something else. I sense anthropology has a kind of predominant aversion to the use of, say, continental philosophy in ethnographic analysis. So may be one set of one question I have is that, How is the use of continental philosophy in ethnographic writing different from the kind of ethnographic interpretation that is done within anthropological writing that we do? Further, I'm quite struck with conflating the word philosophy in the motion today with continental philosophy. That's quite narrow and quite stark and as most of you kind of have referenced philosophy as continental philosophy on the panel today, I'd like to hear more about that.

Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov:

I talk about Descartes and the networks that kind of surround him. And I would support this call for being as specific as possible to deconstruct categories such as philosophy. We just group together within Cartesian dualism anything from Descartes to Hobbes to indeed Kant and others. But I think it's actually interesting that it also strikes a distinction between ethnographic connections that we seek, for example the Descartes plus other philosophers in the Palais Royal in Paris that were developing the anamorphic perspective. The connection between them and the artists of the Renaissance who developed this technique of painting – it's logical more than ethnographic. So it actually breaks down even further. That is, the category of philosophy and the people who are related to it is actually ever more fragmented – it falls into individual scholars and individual things that they write in a period of time, their biography. So, from that point of view, this analysis could even be taken further.

Michael Scott:

My use of continental philosophy as a target in the debate was simply because most of the anthropologists in the discipline who are invoking non-dualism today are drawing on continental philosophers. So, I was simply observing that those anthropologists are using continental philosophers in dualist ways – that they are using them monistically or quasi-monistically by actually focusing on a particular philosopher and taking that philosopher out of his dialogic and complex relations in philosophy.

Chris Pinney:

I think you've raised the very important question of what gets recognised and what doesn't. I mean, what is made visible and vilified under the terms of the discussion and it strikes me that we could imagine a parallel discussion where we'd be thinking about the unhelpful influence of Evans-Pritchard or Alfred Gell, and then what we'd be talking about monological or segmentary logics that get imposed on ethnographic complexity. Or would we be talking about monological enchantment and stickiness that gets imposed on ethnographic complexity? But those kinds of parallel questions that I think are strictly symmetrical, they don't occur to us and I think you've drawn attention to the need to make those as visible as the current question.

Joanna Cook:

The philosopher that I chose for this was Hegel – for thinking about his idea of sublation of the negative of the negative and how something might become self-referential. But I think that perhaps this emphasis on moral philosophy is in part because of the previous dominance of Kantian deontology and utilitarianism. There's increasingly a body of research that is providing ethnographic analyses

of culturally diverse projects for the cultivation of ethical selves and that's particularly interesting at the moment.

Nayanika Mookherjee:

So, do we refer to the people we work with as only people we work with or could they also be philosophers? It's who the figure of the philosopher that's being evoked today when talking about philosophy... because it wasn't specific what philosophy meant in this motion.

Joanna Cook:

I think that's a really good point, and something that's underscored much of the discussion is that when we're talking about philosophy what we're assuming we're talking about is a western philosophical tradition and it's not clear why we're doing that.

Chris Pinney:

Can I just say, I think that's where Heidegger becomes especially interesting in terms of the multiple influences on his work. So that the western tradition becomes interestingly complicated.

Giovanni da Col, Cambridge:

It seems to me that not many ethnographic cases of non-dualism have been presented, and I would like to point your attention to these cases where non-dualism is not anymore a question of categories or perception or viewing things from a spatial point, but dualism, non-dualism are events, are moments like mystical experiences. Thinking about tricksters, moments where the trickster is precisely the joke, the event, where all the cause and effect are reversed and, suddenly, you can have an experience of non-dualism. Or the moment in my ethnographic cases where pilgrims to sacred mountains in Tibet suddenly see that the mountain is also God. And it appears instantly, this vision, so the figure and the ground appear at the same time. And, so, in this case, I think, what happens is not a question of whether non-dualism is philosophy or ethnography, but as a form of reverse ethnography. My informants would reflect on those moments and ask what happened? What happens? What did I see? And I think... in this case non-dualism can be an ethnography. I'm specifically pointing this out to Chris and to Jo.

Joanna Cook:

Working with people for whom a non-dualist philosophy is central, I can't agree more. So, in the context in which I work, non-self – that there is no core to the self

that what is experienced as the ongoing self is a compound – is co-dependent; that there is nothing that in the end can be identified as self. And what's so very interesting for me as an anthropologist is to explore the ways in which that is sought and experienced by the people with whom I work.

Chris Pinney:

I take your question to be pointing to the important fact that non-dualism may be an aspect of experience, completely detached from the ethnos, so we shouldn't necessarily expect to find that within the space of a named group, I was thinking of, say, Chris Tilley's work on the phenomenology of walking in the landscape, as the kind of event – practice moment that you're drawing attention to, which might be a fleeting experience in a set of experiences that are otherwise dualistically structured. So it's not then a question of... is it the Kaluli or not the Kaluli, it's a kind of potentiality that is present in all kinds of experience.

Theodoros Kyriakides, Manchester

This one is to Michael. I'm going back to the proposition you made that in trying to appropriate a certain philosophical tradition for the purpose of ethnography you have to consider it in its entirety – and I was just wondering why? So, for example, you made a claim beforehand, and I agree with it, that to reduce an object to its relations is to evaporate that object; it is not to consider it in itself. But I was just wondering if you're placing a certain philosophical tradition in dialogue with the other traditions, isn't that not to consider it in itself? Would it not be more productive to select certain key parts of a certain conceptual apparatus and use that for the purpose of ethnography?

Michael Scott:

What I'm objecting to is the use of those parts of that philosophy as some form of objective truth, or as absolutely equivalent to an ethnographic context.

Jonathan Mair, Manchester:

The question I was going to ask was anticipated a bit by James Leach's question and also by Magnus Course's question, which was about the productivity of dualism in a way. Because all of you started out from the position that non-dualism is somehow 'right' as an anthropological position, I was going to ask you what you could say to induce a dualist, a recalcitrant dualist, to vote for your side. But seeing as that's been sort of dealt with, what I wanted to ask about is a related question that arises in Buddhism.

Jo talked about the Theravada tradition. I've been reading recently about ideas of dualism and non-dualism in the Mahayana tradition. A scholar of Buddhism

called David McMahon talks about two kinds of non-dualism having been apparent in Mahayana Buddhism. One of them is a contemporary concern which comes from an interpretation of co-dependent origination. And that stresses the importance of the interconnection, relatedness and the idea that all beings are intimately connected to each other through chains of causation. And he says that is actually quite different from the traditional Mahayana approach, which aims at the end of all distinction and as he points out, if you end all distinctions then relation is as meaningless as the things that are related. He then points out that religion that's based on interconnectedness is very appealing right now in a time where we're focused on globalisation, internationalism and the internet, but he questions its coherence. So, my question to you, for all of you, as you started from a premise of non-dualism, which kind of non-dualist are you?

Martin Holbraad, UCL:

Would it be helpful in this discussion to make a distinction between 'dualism' and 'binary opposition' because it seems to me to be quite a consistent elision between the two? And one way that I'd venture to make that distinction would be to say that dualism involves a kind of irreducible incommensurability of the two terms that are being compared, whereas binarism places them on an axis. So, for example the whole debate about trickster deities seems to me, possibly, a red herring in this context, raising issues about binary oppositions rather than dualism as such.

My second question is, what is the answer to which this motion is the question? And it seems to me that, and this is my own partial answer to that answer as it were, Michael Scott got closest to it and in fact we are in a predicament right now in anthropological theory, which is that things that we might heuristically brand, for want of a better word as 'non-dualistic', are very fashionable. So, to talk about 'process' over 'essence' – that latter is a dirty word – 'process' is a wonderful word. 'Relation' is a wonderful word, 'network' is a wonderful word and so on. And, of course, there is an insidious side to that fashion and I'm very much prone to it myself... so it's as much a reflective question as anything else. I find this very troubling isomorphism (which I think Michael actually mentioned in his own talk, but I just wanted to emphasise it), between this kind of internal self-referential critique that western academia has kind of outsourced to a certain extent... or at least anthropologists claim is outsourcing to itself, the critique of what Deleuze calls the kind of royal road to philosophy, so the Descartes and Kants of this world, right, so there's this self-referential critique going on, you know, conversation amongst ourselves philosophically and so on, with a kind of allocentric vantage point that ethnography can offer, right? So this conflation between these two things is a problem, right? And I think many people, certainly myself included are guilty of it, and I think it can be read for example with this almost miraculous looking conversation going on between Amazonia and Melanesia. So why is it that, you know, Viverios de Castro's been invoked repeatedly, why is it that multinaturalism and perspectivism look so much like Roy Wagner and Marilyn Strathern. It's troubling, right? It's a

troubling question if we're into the multiplicity (to invoke Sarah Green's comment) that ethnography can give rise to, why do we seem to end up with rather blinkered, perhaps, fashions of this kind. And I'm wondering if the tail of the Royal Road of philosophy is wagging the dog of ethnography in this context. And in this way, I vote for Michael Scott who is trying to formulate some methodological non-dualism, which will release us from that predicament.

Chris Pinney:

Well, I think you've put your finger on something very important. The question of binarism needs to be separated, I think, from much of what we were talking about. So I have no problem with binarisms and my critique is very specifically targeted. So, I found much to agree with your brilliant observations, Martin.

Joanna Cook:

In response to Jon [Mair], I would say that I'd be the first kind of non-dualist. So, importantly here, the idea being that phenomena are inseparable – but they are not the same thing. The kind of telos of transcendence into everything being dissolved is not... is never in this instance achieved, in fact. And to that end, I would also respond to Martin that in fact, the holding of the tension in the example of the trickster, the holding is not one of a binary but is actually the friction created without foreclosure – and it's that which... as allegory for us, but also for the jester, is productive, is creative.

Michael Scott:

To respond to Jon's question of what kind of non-dualist I might be... I'm the kind of non-dualist that would be able to travel between these different positions, because I think the methodological non-dualism I'm advocating is one that isn't stuck in any one position and is able to morph. So, rather than the figure of the trickster as perhaps modelling a non-dual position, I would suggest maybe the image of the cuttlefish. In ancient Greece, the cuttlefish, with its shimmering and shifting colors, was a figure of resourceful mutability (cf. Detienne and Vernant, 1991). It was a figure of elusive amorphousness that could respond quickly to different situations. I think that the methodological non-dualist might take on something of the cuttlefish in his or her approach to anthropology, adopting and responding to different positions.

Andrew Lawrence, Manchester

It strikes me that this is an issue of methodology and presentation at the same time and anthropologists when they're ethnographers in the moment are engaging and observing non-dual action – an action that is just an action that's happening. The

theorising that comes after is dualistic and it is situated within a body of knowledge. Would you all agree that anthropology should explore other avenues such as visual anthropology, sensory media, other things that draw on a different body of knowledge, to both explore and present the world? It strikes me that visual anthropology is often accused of shifting the dualistic conundrum or debate onto the audience, but it's done by presenting ethnographic data within an emotional context.

Maya Mayblin Edinburgh

Following up on Martin, talking about fashions is actually quite productive here. I think rather than getting away from this idea of ethical positions, if we see dualism–non-dualism as aesthetics, what we really have are two kinds of different aesthetic ways of doing anthropology. I really think it's time that the Enlightenment came back into fashion. And it's not accidental that reading the old fashioned, unabashed dualistic anthropologists like Gell and Evans-Pritchard is often so much more pleasurable and more easy to understand than reading some of our contemporary kind of high flying non-dualistic anthropologists out there. And I think the reason is because the old, unabashed dualists weren't afraid of using dualistic methodology in a sense. They weren't afraid of breaking things down into their component parts in order to communicate to their audience who weren't their informants, they were other anthropologists.

(Speakers take the last questions together and address them in their closing remarks)

Joanna Cook, closing remarks:

We've had tricksters and we've had cuttlefish and now I'd like to bring in one of the visual images I've had while writing this – which is the idea of the snow globe. And it strikes me that there is so much bad weather and it's through stepping outside of the snow globe that one appreciates just how central bad weather is to the concept of a snow globe in the first place. What I'm looking at is an attempt to identify culturally specific modes of knowing, but in so doing thinking about where we locate ethnography and where we locate analysis. So, to consider ethnography as the focus of our ethnographic inquiry, we concede that these are moments of occupying an already and always occupied space – including this one. So the idea being that for all the dualism, we're still doing it – this is still Jon Mair's first kind of non-dualism. And I think there's no better illustration of that actually than the proposals by Nikolai and by Michael. So, in Nikolai's idea of the gaze, we wonder about where to place Latour. And there is an ongoing fractal... and I would argue non-dual nature to that and by extension Michael has argued for a more non-dual focus in ethnography and he's suggested that what we need is more engagement with philosophy, more context. And I would suggest that when we do it well, that's what we do. So, the non-dual cuttlefish moving through is a very good way of understanding that non-dualism is ethnography.

Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, closing remarks:

I'm very interested more generally and partly as a result of this conversation in exactly how the distinctions are made: not everybody would agree that the distinction... the difference between, for example, binary and dualism is drawn the same way. You can see how a distinction between analysis and ethnography works within ethnography. That's another distinction which is drawn differently and actually you can... by observing Latour's work, see how he's less dualistic in analysis and more dualistic ethnographically.

Bringing the Enlightenment back, I like that very much. But then we have to also see that the Enlightenment has to be differentiated, distinguished from the Enlightenment project that we are so familiar with, it's almost like a cliché. So, that the Enlightenment almost has to be approached differently, we have now to almost update our understanding of exactly what the Enlightenment is. That very process of clarification simultaneously goes beyond some dualisms that were associated with the Enlightenment project, as it were, but in and of itself, it posits other kind of dualisms, for example, the earlier understanding of the Enlightenment and the more current one, the less correct or more correct understanding of Enlightenment. These are also dualisms and also/or binaries that we have to think about. From that point of view, I would support the Latourian perspective that actually these connections and distinctions have to be constantly made and readdressed.

Chris Pinney, closing remarks:

The question about the visual, I'm very sympathetic to that, but I wouldn't want to reduce it to a question of media. It strikes me that it's a question of mode of expression. So, I think the visual is capable of engaging dimensions of sensory experience with great success, but I also think, you know words can do that. Taussig would be a perfect example of that and 'My Cocaine Museum' I think is exemplary in that respect. So, in that sense I think, you know, the Lyotardian distinction between discourse and figure is way more useful than a text versus visual, or a media duality. I think we're all capable of writing figurally effervescent words and we're all probably equally capable of making discursively dull films. So for me, the crucial question is that.

Aesthetics and ethics. Well surely, aesthetics is intrinsically about ethics, and I'm frankly kind of disconcerted by the idea that we should go back to a world in which we only wrote for other anthropologists. I mean surely the reason anthropology is getting interesting is that we're also writing for informants, our fellow storytellers. So, I find it difficult to agree with that nostalgia.

What I've really been trying to consider are: What are the conditions under which we would allow alterity to produce an alteration – the Viverios de Castro problem. In terms of converting ethnography into philosophy that's the key dimension I think.

Second point, how do we turn ethnographic social facts in the face of political necessity back into a useable philosophy. Ethnography, I think, needs to provide political options. I think it's very fitting or maybe it's ironic – I'm not sure, that this is funded by 'Critique of Anthropology' wasn't that part of its original programme? I think we need to get back to that. The global crisis, especially for the marginal poor is more extreme than it's ever been. It demands involvement, engagement and action.

Third and final point, related to this, I think we need to rediscover a different way to a more radical practice of anthropology. Part of it would involve what Roy Wagner terms 'unpredicting the world', but I also think of Foucault's observations at the end of *Order of Things*... where he talks about psychoanalysis and anthropology being potential counter sciences. I think we need to think about the potential of anthropology not simply as a kind of professional thing, you know, besieged by the current administration, but think radically about its political philosophical potential as a counter science. And so in that context, I think we need to engage in critical ethnography, a critical anthropology of the current state of emergency.

Michael Scott, closing remarks:

Well, my case for the motion really goes like this: When you inadvertently conflate continental philosophies with indigenous ontologies, I think ethnography becomes strangely gnostic. Every prophet sent from the virtual has the same message. They say, 'relations thou art and unto relations shalt thou return!' Our analyses of indigenous ontologies tend towards de-actualisation, restoring everything to the form of the *pleroma*. So, suddenly all the diversity we said we're interested in has been, sort of, turned into an immanent-transcendent blur in which history, processes of change, and the profusion of competing purifications look increasingly irrelevant. But I don't think this should be so – or it need not be so.

Without losing the creativity to be gained through dialogue with philosophy, I think we can elicit difference and keep history alive. And to this end, I offer a few brief recommendations which would stake out my position:

- Philosophise ethnographically.
- Make magical connections.
- Compare but don't conflate.
- Let essentialisms be – and even become!
- Take works of purification seriously.
- Remember that philosophers are relations, so attend to the debates.
- Shape-shift between essentialism and non-duality as on a Möbius strip.

The Jester: Marilyn Strathern

These are stage directions! 'Enter jester. Hat on table'. [Places jester hat on table. Jingling.] 'Jester perches on table, swinging legs'. But I'm only an actor so I've got a

swinging chair instead. [Indicates swivel chair.] ‘Jester announces, “it’s not persons who get your vote, it’s the argument”’. Okay. It’s not persons who get your votes, it’s the arguments. ‘Jester then coaxes the assembly to vote’. And in very small print, ‘the Jester reads from her script’.

This Jester is a poor fool indeed! I’m still puzzled. If there are two sides to an argument, do the two create an argument or does the argument drive them further apart? Or do both? Or is there no question? But there’s an existential way out of this, which is: how to vote?

Coaxing by importance! There is something more weighty going on here than simply identifying our constant combination and separation of social and cognitive phenomena. Otherwise, look at utterance itself: the combination and separation of subject and predicate. We’re talking about how to deal with phenomena. A discipline familiar with the need to dissolve the conventional categories of thought and its approach to other ways of thinking needs to know the categorical basis upon which it’s built. How, for example, concepts can be manoeuvred, reluctantly or not, into various binary and non-binary positions, antithesis, opposition, part-whole relations, juxtapositions, dualisms and non-dualism. These operations carry significance. And on this, there seems to me concordance between the two sides: it’s what the constructs do that matter.

No? Okay.

Coaxing by conviction! I’m obviously in favour of the motion. It’s absolutely essential to anthropological practice that we recognise the world for its unevenness. Whether over the distribution of resources or gender relations, social life puts people into incommensurable positions. We need all the intellectual tools we can muster to deal with incommensurability. Those familiar dualisms, mind–body or subject–object, remind us that we are, and social life is, composed of elements that combine, but can’t be merged. Unless we’re alert to the irreconcilability of facets of our being at the deepest level, we’re not going to do a proper ethnographic job. Projections of non-dualism that recent philosophers play with must not jeopardize the critical ethnographic instinct to differentiate the conditions of existence under which people labour.

Now, clearly, I’m against the motion. The anthropological enterprise will simply become impossible if we ignore the lessons of our time – as much about the world in its powerless state as about intellectual positions. Ethnography itself could not proceed if it were not willing to consider whatever point of view particular circumstances created and a discipline prepared for any view has no view other than this. The dissolvability of old dualisms is a superb starting point in marking out present terrain. For the traps to avoid are the hierarchies, boundaries and rankings that people throw-up, whether to conceal inequalities or to manufacture them – and what goes for persons and discipline must also go for the world to know that we’ve also been indivisibly part of it.

No? You want the arguments one more time?! Okay!

Right! For the motion. First argument. Get the continental philosophers out of the way. Non-dualist metaphysics is a species of magical thinking as though all the

becomings in the world were part of a universal condition. Worse happens when ethnographers find an equation between this shimmering world and the imaginings of their subjects. Don't be deceived when the speaker says how exciting this is. The greater the imaginative effort, the greater the misrecognition and mistaken identity. Indeed, the speaker goes so far as to whisper of totalitarianism. He makes explicit the sources of non-dualist thinking that have infected anthropological analysis. Then a rabbit out the hat: non-dualism must erode all essentialist thought. That means eroding the cosmological suppositions of many peoples and times. So, the criticism of mystical correspondence between non-dualism and diverse ethnographic imaginaries is turned on its head. Those imaginaries also throw up essentialisms . . . and non-dualism can be criticised for lack of correspondence too. Now this is less a defence of dualism, exchanging one hegemony for another than a rejection of hegemonic non-dualism from the magic garden of ethnography.

Second argument draws in the impetus of ANT to the debate, evoking visually and most stunningly an ontologically flat world, representation lying neither over nor under it. Yet having given this plausible depiction, the speaker then claims it is a non-dualist rendering of what is intrinsically dualist. Because if you ask how flatness is maintained, you have to imagine a specific point of view. Whatever is known to exist in a perceptible dimension must entail the means of perception. The speaker demonstrates in his visuals, the embeddedness of the observer in their object of study. But at the same time, the anthropologist in particular occupies a stance of exceptionalism. That is, a viewpoint is inevitable. And elsewhere, in fact, he made a strong argument for the unavoidability of dualism of ethnographer and ethnographic reality. Dualism and Cartesian philosophy in his hands turns out to be, of course, a far more interesting phenomenon than is ordinarily glimpsed – and the question is what we do with it.

Well, I turn now to the opposers. The first argument makes clear the discontent with dualism. The motion posits a false divide between philosophy and ethnography, denying their continuity as illusory. But equally seductive is the illusion that non-dualism can erase the power of all distinction. So, this speaker shows his hand. Arguing against the motion allows him to argue for a deep ecological, not quite monism, and he proceeds to seduce us by other means. A vision of the world, 50 years from now, after the collapse of the dualist world conquering powers. Dualist thinking is linked with a technocracy that inevitably fails and the story is of course like a philosopher's thought experiment. This leads to a strong indictment of the savagery entailed in a point of view. To imagine the world separate from the viewing subject is to imagine it as standing resource for exploitation – to paraphrase a philosopher. We're left with an apocalypse: our love affair with oil is our love affair with dualism.

The second argument contrasts dualism among ethnographies' subjects with the ethnographic enterprise – the doing of ethnography forestalls any resolution of a tension between dualism and monism. And you will have seen the nifty side step to post monism as the antithesis of dualism. Non-dualism is then appropriated for the tenet that, and structural functionalists as well as ANTers would agree, phenomena

are inseparable. Dualism/monism requires an either/advocacy, whereas non-dualism with no logical partner encompasses both, as hybrids do, although it seems there is some equivocation as to whether the issue is boundary crossing or boundary dissolution. There's a clever conclusion that she is not arguing against dualism – that would be dualistic – but pointing out how ethnography is done. Immersion in field-work sets up continuities that underscore the mutual co-implication of phenomena.

More coaxing? All right. Here's an appeal. And that comes from the way the jester was upstaged. Come to my aid, please! The last speaker notes the fecundity of debate, all the fertile discussion – but, at this juncture, you have to step outside it. By coming here, you've voted with your feet to hear the argument. Now you have to vote with your heads, which of the two arguments wins...

A final attempt then at coaxing. Look how I've paired this lot: pairing, now does that have anything to do with non-dualism? Have I given too positive a picture of the debaters? If truth be told, hasn't their performance been rather disgraceful? Each as bad as the other?! One side's been cunning, the other side's been sly, that lot devious, that lot slippery? 'No!' I hear you say, 'each has been as good as the other. We've had perceptive observations and acute comments, shining rhetoric and brilliant oratory'. So be it. I ask you to give a round of applause to the debaters, they've all been great actors – and then vote for the best arguments you've heard.

The vote

For the motion: 32

Against the motion: 41

Abstentions: 18

The motion 'Non-dualism is Philosophy not Ethnography' is declared defeated.

Reference

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Author Biographies

Soumhya Venkatesan is a lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester. She is the author of *Craft Matters: Artisans, Development and the Indian Nation* (Orient Blackswan, 2009) and co-editor (with T. Yarrow) of *Differentiating Development: Beyond an Anthropology of Critique* (Berghahn, 2012). Her current research focuses on sculptors and potters in south India, who make statues that become Hindu gods, to explore relationships between persons and things, the material and the immaterial and objects and subjects. Soumhya has organised the annual meetings of the Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory since 2008.

Keir Martin is a lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester and is the author of a number of academic and media publications on Papua New Guinea and the global economy. He was formerly a Research Fellow at the University of Aarhus and is a recipient of the Royal Anthropological Institute's Sutasoma Award for work likely to make an outstanding contribution to social anthropology.

Michael W Scott is a senior lecturer in anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His publications include 'The matter of Makira: colonialism, competition, and the production of gendered peoples in contemporary Solomon islands and medieval Britain' (*History and Anthropology*, 2012) and the monograph *The Severed Snake: Matrilineages, Making Place, and a Melanesian Christianity in Southeast Solomon Islands* (2007). He is currently wondering about wonder as an index and mode of ontological transformation in Solomon Islands and as a marker of religiosity in anthropology.

Christopher Pinney is Professor of Anthropology and Visual Culture at University College London. His PhD research in Madhya Pradesh in 1982–1983 was concerned with the lives of industrial workers and he has continued to conduct field-work intermittently in the same area on visual practices. His books include *Camera Indica* (1997), *Photos of the Gods* (2004), *The Coming of Photography in India* (2008) and *Photography and Anthropology* (2011). He was awarded the Padma Shri by the Government of India in 2013.

Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov lectures in Social Anthropology at Cambridge after obtaining his BA at Moscow University and PhD at Stanford; he worked in Siberia and Russia on the anthropology of the state, exchange theory, history of anthropology and aesthetics; his publications include *The Social Life of the State in Sub-Arctic Siberia* (Stanford University Press 2003) and edited exhibition catalogue *Gifts To Soviet Leaders* (Moscow: Pinakothèque 2006).

Joanna Cook is a lecturer in Medical Anthropology at University College London. She is the coordinator of The Laboratory for the Ethnography of the UK (LabUK) – a research platform for the study of contemporary British society and culture through an anthropological lens. Her monograph, *Meditation in Modern Buddhism: Renunciation and Change in Thai Monastic Life*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2010. Her current research examines the introduction of meditation techniques into therapeutic practice in the UK focusing on questions of ethics, well-being and the dialogue between religion and therapy.

Marilyn Strathern retired as William Wyse Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. She is the author of numerous books and articles.