

## **Vertiginous Worlds and Emetic Anthropologies**

*Casper Bruun Jensen*

Focusing on how worlds are created through interactions between actors that may share little in terms of either ideas or practices, the world multiple depicts a scene of radical heterogeneity. The study of practical ontologies (Gad, Jensen and Winthereik 2015) is concerned with how and by which actors this world is composed, how it is stabilized or destabilized, and what these patterns of similarity and difference, congruence and incongruence add, or fail to add up, to. This, of course, is easier to declare than to actually do. For one thing, the aspiration raises the question – central to debates about the ‘ontological turn’ -- of whether such practical ontologies are empirical objects – found, for example, in the mundane experiences of lived reality – or whether, instead, they are anthropological inventions generated through a labor of conceptualization – or, indeed, whether they are something else, which does not map on to the distinction between the empirical and the conceptual at all. What is in any case clear is that any attempt to give meaning to the world multiple must also deal with the question of where in the world the anthropologist sits, and what he or she does, or should be doing. Accordingly, in this contribution, I examine the role of the anthropologist in relation to the composition and transformation of this ‘multiple world.’

I begin with a consideration of the dichotomy of objectivity and subjectivity, parsed through a discussion of the now largely forgotten methodological controversy about etic (outsiders’) perspectives and emic (insiders’) perspectives. Both of these distinctions overlap, without quite coinciding, with that between scientific and indigenous knowledges.

Contrary to the conventional image, science and technology studies (STS) has shown that the sciences cannot, in fact, be distinguished from other practices on the basis of a singular objectivity. Instead of a scientific method there are archipelagos of practice and thought floating in different directions and only sometimes colliding; a fractal image of both knowledge and the worlds it aims to capture. Transposed to anthropology this image paves the way for what I call here emetic anthropologies.

### **The Emic and The Etic**

The ability to use science to objectify ‘the world’ is often seen as a trademark that distinguishes ‘the moderns’ from all other people. Isabelle Stengers describes the situation as follows:

To be sure, all peoples believe themselves to be very different from others, but our belief in ourselves permits us to define others both as interesting-it was we who invented ethnology-and as condemned in advance, in the name of the terrible differentiation, of which we are the vectors, between what is of the order of science and what is of the order of culture, between objectivity and subjective fictions (2000: 164)

While everybody view themselves as different from others, that is, only modern Westerners have systematized that difference *as* science, including the sciences of *culture*. While ‘they’ may have perspectives on ‘us,’ only ‘we’ are able to truly know ‘them.’ It is not incidental that Stengers’ ‘terrible differentiation’ hinges on the aspirations and capacities of ethnology.

In a different vocabulary, science is generally thought of as an *etic* endeavor. The linguist Kenneth Pike (1954) developed this term and its contrast, the *emic*, as a way of describing different approaches to the study of language. While the etic approach entailed a study of the “mechanisms and acoustics of speech production,” the emic approach centered on understanding “the categories of sounds through whose recognition native speakers identify and discriminate meaningful utterances” (Jardine 2004: 263). In other words, etic approaches study “behavior as from outside of a particular system,” while emic approaches begin “from the inside of a system.” (Jardine 2004: 264, citing Pike 1967: 37).

There is a clear resonance between Stengers’ objectifying order of science and studying systems from the outside, and a distinct order of culture dealing with that is happening on the inside. Yet, as Marvin Harris (1979: 32) wrote, the difference between objectivity and subjectivity does not neatly map onto the distinction between the etic and the emic, “since both the observer’s point of view and the participant’s point of view can be presented objectively or subjectively, depending on the adequacy of the empirical operations employed by the observer.”

Precisely exemplifying Stengers’ ‘terrible differentiation, Harris (1979: 34-35) subsequently defined objectivity as a trademark of those capable of adopting

“epistemological criteria” with which to distinguish science “from other ways of knowing.” Yet, even as Harris insisted that only a properly etic approach, specifically, in his view, cultural materialism, could claim the status of a real science of culture, critics ironically re-named his solution as an emics of the observer. What Harris thought defined the grounds for valid and objective explanation was thus re-described as nothing but an elevation of his own subjective perspective above that of everybody else.

No doubt to the chagrin of Harris, centering on distinctions that are “significant, meaningful, real, accurate or in some other fashion regarded as appropriate by the actors themselves” (Jardine 2004: 264, citing Harris 1968: 571) the premise of contemporary cultural anthropology is overwhelmingly emic. This orientation correlates with the method of participant observation, currently often re-described as “working with” people rather than studying them. As for the people with whom one “works,” they are usually also treated as having exclusively emic perspectives.

For Harris (1979: 45), the claim that all knowledge is emic amounted to nothing less than a “surrender of our intellects to the supreme mystifications of total relativism.” Today, social and cultural anthropologists typically do not view insiders’ perspectives as “supremely mystifying.” Quite to the contrary, many anthropologists are keen to protect such perspectives, practices, and forms of life against foreign forms of conceptualization, critiqued as latter days versions of colonialism (e.g. Todd 2016).

### **Entanglements**

Social and cultural anthropology has largely shed its previous etic mantle, donning instead an emic one. Yet, before too quickly celebrating the victory of the emic, we might want to pause. Is the replacement of the outside by the inside, or the objective with the empathic, actually as clear-cut as all that? Upon closer inspection, the etic and the emic, far from forming a stable opposition, the hierarchy of which has been turned upside down in recent decades, comes into view as a set of unsteady and shifting entanglements.

From one side, the emic emerges from within the supposedly etic. For one thing, even the accumulation of facts *meant to be etic* is bound up with linguistic and interpretive problems. Nigel Barley (1983: 44) offered an ironic description of this

situation:

Someone may have studied French at school for six years and with the help of language-learning devices, visits to France and exposure to the literature and yet find himself hardly able to stammer out a few words of French in an emergency. Once in the field, he transforms himself into a linguistic wonder-worker. He becomes fluent in a language much more difficult for a Westerner than French, without qualified teachers, without bilingual texts, and often without grammars and dictionaries. At least, this is the impression he manages to convey

His point is that if language competence is limited, as it often is, the status of any collected “fact” will be quite uncertain. Moreover, as Paul Stoller noted at this own expense, relative linguistic fluency doesn’t guarantee successful fact collection either. After having conducted 180 interviews among the Songhay of Niger, he found that every single informant had lied (Stoller and Olkes 1987: 9). When he confronted his informants, they simply shrugged and replied: “What difference does it make?” As Stoller and Olkes write, the reasons why people can’t be bothered to tell the truth are many: they don’t care, they don’t know you, or they don’t trust you. In effect, therefore, the firm line between emic and etic blurs even from *within the etic*.

Reversely, however, the etic also shows itself within the emic. Consider, for example, mundane experiences and lived worlds. In one sense, the study of such worlds and experiences depend on taking an empathetic insider’s perspective, thereby exemplifying and embodying the very meaning of the emic. Yet, how does the anthropologist know about the importance of lived worlds and experiences? After all, these categories do not come from the people whose lived worlds are studied. Instead, their importance has been inculcated as a central part of what it means to do good anthropology. Rather than based squarely on what is significant and meaningful for actors in the world, the conceptual categories undergirding such forms of analysis have been pre-figured on the basis of “distinctions judged appropriate by the community of scientific observers,” which is simply another name for those who teach the importance of attending, precisely, to mundane practice and lived experience. Conforming once again to the dictates of etics, these conceptual categories are not themselves falsifiable by actors’ notions of “what is significant,

real, meaningful or appropriate” (Jardine 2004: 264). Instead, the emic injunction has an etic basis in theories of phenomenology and hermeneutics.

So far, I have addressed some complications of the etic and the emic from the point of view of bounded ethnographies of single locales. Currently, of course, many ethnographies are not bounded in this sense. Instead, people are recognized to move in and out of places. Foreign (outside) ideas and technologies enter ‘indigenous’ (inside) settings and mingle with them. Foreign people, sometimes including scientists, also come and go. Moreover, some anthropologists presently study those scientists. A new set of complications thus arises, which is at once internal to each ‘world’ and elicited in movements between them.

‘Local people’ are usually seen to take an inherently emic – insider’s perspective – on their worlds, simply because they are not trying to objectify it. Yet people are always involved with ‘others,’ whose activities and motives they make sense of using their own emic categories. The development professionals that I am studying, for example, routinely offer observations and interpretations of the Cambodian villagers whose lives they take it as their job to try to improve. Reversely, rural people deploy their varied understandings to make sense of international development initiatives. Accordingly, the situation is characterized not simply by many emic viewpoints, but by the co-existence and entanglements of multiple viewpoints that are variably emic and etic depending on what or who is being addressed (Jensen forthcoming).

Anthropologists, however, are usually not *equally interested* in all of these perspectives. Instead, perspectival asymmetries are built into most or all ethnographies. The consequences of such asymmetries become particularly pertinent when anthropologists are dealing with the supposed interface between scientists and indigenous people. Since this interface is mostly studied from an ethnographic location amongst indigenous people rather than among scientists, and with a primary view to understanding the perspectives of the former rather than the latter, it can lead to depictions of scientists, their knowledges, and their practices as decontextualized, reductive and objectifying (e.g. Escobar 1998: 5; Sivaramakrishnan 2000: 68).

## **Fractals**

In some ways, the negative depiction of science as reductive and objectifying is at odds with popular images, textbook descriptions, and philosophical characterizations

that tend to present science in a positive light. In another sense, however, these are simply mirror images. Sharing the assumption that objectivism really captures the distinctiveness of science, these views differ only in how they appraise this trait. For those out to protect indigenous people against the onslaught of modernization, objectivity sounds bad. For those who aim to uphold the virtues of science against the supposed dangers of postmodern theory and the real ones of post-factual politics, it sounds good.

Of course, objectivity and its correlates, including neutrality and factuality, are also words often used to distinguish natural science from critical and interpretive scholarship in the humanities and social sciences. Yet, just like the *emic* and the *etic* cannot easily be used to distinguish forms of anthropology, since the two mix in practice, the distinction between objective facts and subjective interpretations is of little use for understanding the actual practices of either the sciences or the humanities, since they are similarly entangled.

For those who study science and technology historically, sociologically or anthropologically, it has long been clear that neither a clean distinction between the objective and the subjective, nor between the *etic* and the *emic* is anywhere in view. The idea of a general scientific method has long been viewed with skepticism. Rather than a homogeneous category, science has been shown to exhibit a disunity of styles, methods, types of knowledge and forms of theory (e.g. Galison and Stump 1996; Knorr-Cetina 1999).

For one thing, despite the fact that some scientists may describe science as objective, it is clear that they are also invariably interpretive. For another, not a few sciences comprise traditions, like Japanese primatology (e.g. de Waal 2003, Strum and Fedigan 2000) that actively *advocate* *emic* approaches. Along these lines, the philosopher Vinciane Despret (2010: 1) notes that certain ethologists are becoming aware that birds “tell very different stories according to the one who observes them.” Moreover, a broad range of phenomena, including such general and anthropologically pertinent ones as *language* and *culture* can be, and are, studied *both* *emically* and *etically* by different scientific sub-fields and practitioners (Smith 2005: 110).

As noted, Marvin Harris strenuously held on to the *etic-emic* distinction, locating his science of culture squarely within the former. Ward Goodenough (1970: 112), in contrast, saw the two as complementary since, he argued, the descriptions generated by *emic* insider approaches both depended on and provided resources for

the (etic) theory development adequate to anthropology. Yet, analogous to how science is either celebrated or criticized on the basis of dubious assumptions regarding its objectivity, both of these mutually antagonistic positions took for granted the etic-emic opposition itself. For both Harris and Goodenough, the underlying logic of the inside and the outside was left untouched. Indeed, Harris (1976: 338) asserted that its destabilization would be “epistemologically intolerable.”

Unfortunately for Harris, no matter where we turn, we find ourselves within a fractal ecology of knowledges and practices exhibiting just such intolerably unstable features (Jensen 2014, see Strathern 1991 for anthropology, Abbott 2001 for social science).

### **Emetic Anthropologies**

So there we are. Socio-cultural anthropology is often seen as an emic endeavor but it contains etic components. Moreover, the emic infuses the etic, as well as *vice versa*. Indigenous knowledge, again, is presumably emic, but since there is always more than one kind of knowledge, the emic must be constantly calibrated with respect to what, and whom, it is emic *for*. Meanwhile, scientific knowledge does not offer a single, or simple, alternative, or opposition, to either anthropological or indigenous knowledges. Instead, each of these domains is fractal, consisting of variably composed constellations of knowledge and practice operating at different scales. So where does this leave us in terms of the ambition to grasp the world multiple?

One answer is given by lateral anthropology, which, inspired by Marilyn Strathern (1988, 1991) and others, and affiliated with Bill Maurer (2005) and Stefan Helmreich (2011), draws analytical power from the study of mobile constellations of knowledge and practice that *move between* anthropological and other forms of Western knowledge, and ethnographic fields. Another reply is given by the ontological turn, which (also) draws inspiration from Strathern, as well as Roy Wagner (1975) and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998). In one controversial formulation, the ontological names an effort to mine indigenous thought for possibilities for setting conventional anthropological truths in motion (Holbraad 2012).

Usually, lateral and ontological approaches are seen as quite different, and their proponents are not always mutually supportive.<sup>1</sup> In my view, however there are close affinities between them. For one thing, both entail experimentation with the emic-etic relation. To describe what is shared among these approaches, it is therefore tempting to collapse these dichotomous terms, and speak of them as *emetic*.

In medicine, the term emetic describes substances that induce nausea and vomiting. In anthropology, moreover, the term was used half a century ago by Gerald Berreman (1966: 350), who drew a contrast between a purely etic approach, which would remain anemic (bloodless) in its “humorless scientism”, and a strictly emic approach, which would be emetic (nauseous) in its display of “empty ingenuity.” For Berreman (1966: 347), the relevant question would not be whether to be scientific (etic) or humanistic (emic) but rather “how to be *both*.” As noted, however, this ‘best of both worlds’ approach assumes a static relation between the two approaches that isn’t there.

In what follows, I use the emetic instead to characterize *approaches that suspend with the assumption of such a static relation*. At this point, the medical connotations once again come in handy, because emetic anthropological approaches, including lateral and ontological ones, often seem to nauseate critics.

Both lateral and ontological approaches are routinely met with hostile reactions. It is obvious that ethnographic empiricists can’t easily abide the forms of conceptual experimentation they entail. Neither, it appears, can those who have strong prior commitments to conventional critical frameworks or agendas (e.g. Bessire and Bond 2013; Graeber 2015). It would seem that emetic approaches actually make many readers *sick to their stomachs*.

Yet this is only one side of the coin, for in spite of its unpleasantness, nausea is not exclusively negative. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, for example, Friedrich Nietzsche (1966) depicted the great nausea as one step towards overcoming resentment. In this sense, emetics can be affiliated with what Foucault described as an “ethic of discomfort” (1994: 443-9) that paves the way to different kinds of insight.

---

<sup>1</sup> Whereas lateral experiments are often seen, positively or negatively, as the relativist inheritors of *Writing Culture*, ontological approaches, paradoxically, are derided *either* for returning anthropology to essentialism *or* for engaging in theoretical pyrotechnics that at once disregards ethnographic reality and political responsibility (see Gad, Jensen and Winthereik 2015).

Moreover, in quite a different register, as described by Davi Kopenawa (2013) and many others, shamans and others imbibe substances that *first* make them vomit, and then make them *see*. Nausea can thus also be used to describe the vertigo experienced as one is drawn towards what Marisol de la Cadena (this volume) calls ontological openings.

### **Co-Existence**

To begin articulating the relations between the emetic and the vertigo of ontological openings, I turn to Marisol de la Cadena's (2015) *Earthbeings: Ecologies of Practice Across Andean Worlds*. In this book, de la Cadena describes the historically changing relationship between the Runakuna living in the Andes, and Peruvian enterprise and state-making.

For decades, the Runakuna were forced to work on *haciendas* under brutal conditions. After a lengthy battle to get the land back on indigenous hands, the *haciendas* were closed by governmental decree and local co-operatives took over. However, corrupt politicians and administrators quickly took advantage of the situation, which did not significantly improve conditions for the Indians themselves. Continuing to live in poverty, some have found new positions within a neoliberal order, in which, among other things, their "indigenous" knowledges have been translated into foreign idioms such as environmental tourism and new age shamanism.

The story has a number of familiar aspects. For example, it can easily be interpreted in terms of co-optation and repression. Thus, in a conventional left-wing narrative, Indians figure as workers struggling to avoid exploitation and bonded labor. Further, from the point of view of indigeneity, it can be said that the Runakuna knowledges that sustain local communities have been pushed to the margins of history. What makes *Earthbeings* emetic, however, is de la Cadena's insistence that while *it is not wrong* to depict the situation in either of these ways, it is also not *quite right*.

While the Runakuna collaborated with critical social scientists, communists, activists and lawyers in Lima, all of whom viewed the Hacienda system as exploitative in a Marxist sense, the Runakuna continued to live in *ayllu*. Schematically, *ayllu* can be described as living with a group of people related by kinship and co-inhabiting also with various nonhuman others (de la Cadena 2015: 43). These others include what we could call animals, plants and mountains, or as the

Runakuna call them, Tirakuna. Translating Tirakuna as earth-beings, de la Cadena describe them as *enacted presences* (26). They are enacted, for example, by k'intu, the presentation of coca leaves, or by the sending off of *despachos*, packets of “food, seeds, flowers and kind words” (228).

We notice immediately that, contrary to labor exploitation, Tirakuna, k'intu, and despachos are emic Runakuna terms. Obviously, we are on the path of recognition of indigenous knowledges and practices, which continue to exist even if they remain secret from the point of view of modern knowledges. This is certainly also *not wrong* and de la Cadena spends much energy insisting on the point. However, this does not mean that she prioritizes a properly emic approach, for approaching the problem of description in terms of a choice between incommensurable knowledge forms is *also not quite right*.

For one thing, the indigenous knowledges and practices of the Runakuna are partially related to, and to some extent transformed by, outsiders. Certainly, one important dimension of such transformation is the long history of colonial violence. Yet, this is not the only vector of change, for some Runakuna have also seized the opportunity of making better lives *through* new relationships. Through involvement with the curators of the Quechuan exhibition at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C, for example, de la Cadena's friend and informant Nazario Turpo, gained a certain kind of indigenous ‘authority,’ which he could subsequently leverage in becoming an Andean ‘shaman’ and tour guide.

In telling the story, de la Cadena does not aim to sort out these mixed categories in order to get the really indigenous right. Instead, she explains why this is in a sense an impossible task. In part, as she insists, this is due to the fact that her ethnographic insight cannot simply be a transcription of Runakuna realities since it was generated through complex entanglements with these realities. Since ethnography is itself an outcome, or effect, of ambiguous, equivocal and partial relations, even seemingly emic concepts like *ayllu* or *Tirakuna* invariably gain new form in the act of re-description. Crucially, that form is *not quite emic without for that matter being etc.*

What, for example, is an earthbeing? Well, we cannot describe what it is for the Runakuna. We can say, as de la Cadena does, that *tirakuna* is neither a material nor a spiritual category, but rather an entity continuously made present (2015:25). That, of course, is not *really* how the Runakuna experience the matter, and certainly not how they speak of it. Reversely, if the Runakuna point to the Tirakuna,

Westerners are bound to perceive and experience natural objects like the Ausangate *mountain*. No matter the degree of earnest ethnographic immersion or intellectual effort, what Runakuna experience effortlessly as Tirakuna the anthropologist will perceive and experience as mountains.

The alluring choice between emic and etic strategies emerge at this juncture. Staying firmly on the etic side, one may argue, like Harris, that irrespective of what the Runakuna *believe* about entities like the Ausangate, at the end of the day it is *really* a mountain. Once again, this solution precisely exemplifies Stengers' 'terrible differentiation,' which defines objectivity as Western knowledge and relegates the indigenous to the status of fictions and beliefs. Contemporary sociocultural anthropologists, of course, will usually take a rather more emic route. Indeed, some will claim that proper ethnographic immersion may facilitate something like a conversion that would make it possible to experience *as* indigenous people do.

The emetic quality of de la Cadena's ethnography lies in its simultaneous rejection of both these options *and* the 'terrible differentiation' on which they are premised. Unable to experience the Tirakuna *as such*, and unable, too, to prevent the Tirakuna from being *transformed* in the very act of ethnographic description, de la Cadena (2015: 25) proposes that Tirakuna and mountains can nevertheless co-exist without either *detracting* from the existence of the other.

The emetic image of partly incommensurable yet co-existing worlds that do not detract from one another allows de la Cadena to characterize the Cuzco area as a "complexly integrated hybrid circuit" (2015: 20). It is a hybrid in which the "indigenous and nonindigenous infiltrate and emerge in each other" (2015: 5). While the area is composed of emic "wholes"—languages, understandings and practices -- these wholes intrude upon and permeate one another. Emetically, they become "inseparable fragments of each other," *without for that matter merging into unity*.

With a certain liberty, I would re-describe this as de la Cadena's wager on the possibility of enacting Cuzco area as "full of beings...with intention, will, perspectives, [and] meanings and who respond to each other" (Despret 2010: 4). At issue is a wager, rather than a description, because everything suggests that not all 'beings' in fact respond to each other in this capacious manner. The point is that de la Cadena's study creates a lure for feeling that makes it possible conceive of, and perhaps to some extent feel or experience, Cuzco worlds as *amenable* to co-existence without detraction. More than a 'mere' description, this is therefore an invitation to

search for, and enter, ontological openings.

The notion of a scene full of mutually responsive beings credited with will, perspectives and meanings comes via the philosopher Vinciane Despret. Despret, however, is not discussing anthropology. Instead she is trying to characterize certain ontological openings within ethology. In stark contrast with the assumption that science operates only in an etic register, Despret explains that some ethologists:

do not study what an animal is, [but] rather what an animal becomes in responding to the way he/she is questioned, in responding to what is expected from him/her. The situation is a co-inventive situation of knowledge, which creates opportunities for new behaviors. The animal's perspective upon the situation is, for these few scientists, at the center of the whole matter (2010: 4)

Far from embodying the cliché of distanced objectivism, these scientists *begin with* the emic question of the animal's perspective. Despret (2010: 3) argues that some ethologists in the tradition of Jacob Von Uexküll practice "a kind of 'alter-subjectivity'" with the animals they study. Based on recognition that "animals do not feel and think like us...do not share our point of view," they can only be engaged and understood via "a system of contrasts and differences."<sup>2</sup>

Despret's ethologists begin with an emic interest in the animal's world but they do not end with it. Rather, learning with and about animal 'alter-subjectivities' entails very specific set-ups that facilitate lateral movements between the scientists and animals. The point is to give birds, sheep or cats the double chance of being different from what the ethologists think they are *and also* different from themselves - as they respond to new situations.

There are, of course, numerous differences between this situation and that of the ethnographer, including the inability of the latter to control the settings in which s/he studies. At the level of description and conceptualization, however, there are resonances between the alter-subjective practices described by Despret and those

---

<sup>2</sup> By highlighting the resonance between de la Cadena's ontological openings and those generated by Despret's ethologists, I am not demoting Indians (once again) to the level of 'brute' animals. Quite differently, the point is that some ethologists are in certain ways more dedicated to giving their animals the chance to be different than many anthropologists, worried that difference will be read as hierarchical, derogatory or exotic, are with respect to the people they study.

engaged by de la Cadena. Both practices entail experimentation with the question of what it takes to allow one's interlocutors – who or whatever they are -- to be, and to become, different. In both cases the making of such ontological openings requires evacuation of the etic-emic dichotomy.

### **Materializations**

Practical ontologies are made of cosmologies, perspectives and viewpoints, no doubt. But they are also made of (other) *things*. Getting into view the material dimension of the emetic we are, as Bill Maurer (2015: 28) writes, “confronted with ... infrastructures.”

Here, I offer two brief examples of what this confrontation entails. The first is taken from Maurer's own work on the social implications of new forms of technologically mediated payment in Kenya. The second concerns a hundred-year long transformation of Thailand's Chao Phraya delta landscape. Despite their very different temporalities and settings, both provide insight into the emetics of materialization.

In 2007, the mobile phone payment system M-pesa was introduced in Kenya, where it attracted 17 million customers and revolutionized money transactions over a mere decade. Changing more than flows of money, text messages and mobile payments also began changing the capacities of young Kenyans for making social relations, providing “a route to financial stability and inclusion for people without access to or, more important, the means to afford a bank account” (Maurer 2015:11). Thus, it encoded alternatives for how to live differently, and for how to think differently about how one might live.

Of course, the new payment infrastructure relied on principles and ideas initially foreign to its users. Quickly, however, Kenyans started experimenting with its possibilities, tweaking M-pesa in creative ways to accomplish what they wanted. Thus, for example, people invented ways of acquiring goods from distant places by a mixture of texting and mobile money transfers between friends and extended kin. Thus, M-pesa and its users were mutually modified, both gaining new qualities through the interaction.

As Maurer argues, these reconfigurations provide materials for rethinking the ontological status of money. Rather than an abstract, rationalizing force, money is/are materialized relations that extend across time and space “linking us to our ancestors,

descendants, and fellow humans” *and* remaking those links (2015: 136), On close inspection, Maurer concludes, rather than an abstract flow, monetary relations resemble a delta with many “rivulets, side currents, eddies, and pools.” Reversely, as I continue to discuss, deltas, while certainly composed of flowing materials, are also made from ideas and abstractions. As much as money, they are emetic.

Historically, the Thai Chao Phraya delta was mainly been modified by local farmers. However in 1902, the Dutch engineer Homan van der Heide came up with a plan of unprecedented scope and ambition. His aim was to radically extend and transform the entire canal system, making it more suitable for agriculture (Brummelhuis 2007, Morita 2016, Morita and Jensen 2017). Though his plan was long dismissed by the Thai elite, the idea to modify the delta on a massive scale remained in circulation ever since.

Taking the basic stance that water is an element situated inconveniently on top of land, the Dutch engineer wanted more than anything to drain excess water to create space for agriculture. Yet, to the Thai who were used to river transportation and seasonal flooding, this idea was quite foreign, as it was far from obvious that water was an element to be removed. Indeed, they might have seen land as what, only sometimes, emerged out of water.

The difference between inside and outside perspectives extended into other domains, such as politics, where the ‘rational’ arguments pursued by the blunt Dutchman, were deflected by Thai political aesthetics, and where assumptions of European *real-politik* encountered the galactic politics discussed by Stanley Tambiah (1977; see also Morita forthcoming). Homan van der Heide himself clearly found the experience emetic -- vertiginous, confusing and infuriating. So did many of his Thai partners and interlocutors, though, of course, for different reasons.

Since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, when Homan van der Heide’s plan finally started to materialize, radical changes in the delta infrastructure began changing Thai lives and ways of thinking. Presently most people do not sail but drive. In all likelihood, the liquid perceptions (Thaitakoo and McGrath 2010) of previous generations have begun shifting. Perhaps it is indeed the case that Thai people now *do* think that water is an element sitting on top of land.

Akin to previous discussions, then, the inside and the outside refuse to stay put. Dutch ideas slowly began infecting Thai ones, leading to changes in the delta infrastructure that in turn transformed how the Thai were able to think of the delta

itself. At the same time, infrastructural transformations has created something akin to a materialized figure-ground reversal at the level of the delta's practical ontology: While land used to sit on water, water now flows on top of land.

Paradoxically, this transformation is now recognized to have reduced the flood resilience of the delta landscape and particularly of Bangkok. In consequence, after 75 years of modern interventions inspired by foreign expertise, experts are now looking to Thai solutions of the kinds that originally began to be squeezed out by those same interventions. Presently, "indigenous" forms, like houses on stilts and floating car parks, are beginning to re-enter the ways in which future delta infrastructures are imagined.

As previously discussed, the emetic results in part from a movement between internal and external *perspectives*. Here we encounter another sense of vertigo set in motion by a process of *materialization*. As infrastructures materialize new worlds, they modify peoples' sense of who they are and what they can do. Rather, than subtracting from indigenous knowledges and lived experiences, material transformations *add to* and *mutate* such knowledges and practices (see also Gow 2001, Jensen 2015). In turn, people tweak and twist infrastructures in unpredictable ways.

While Maurer noted that abstractions start to look *like deltas* when considered from the point of view of their material forms, deltas are thus *also* materially shaped and reshaped by the imaginaries of people. Ideas are like deltas, but deltas themselves are made in part by ideas, which are like deltas, which... We are, indeed, located in vertiginous worlds.

### **Vertiginous Worlds**

Ignoring the constraints of ethnographic reality, lateral and ontological anthropologists feel authorized to create concepts and theories that have no proper ground. Furthermore, they provide no leverage in the ongoing battle against Western colonialism and hegemony. Or so their anthropological critics would have it. It is possible to draw out two dimensions of these types of critique. On the one hand, they rely on the opposition between truth and fiction that Stengers characterized as the unique trait of the moderns. On the other hand, they define their own critical position "reference to a past [they] would like to regret" (Stengers 2000:149).

Offering an alternative to the vision of critique as atonement, Nietzsche

advocated a process of ‘active forgetting.’ While perpetual remembrance of past wrongs hold people hostage to their violent and unjust history, he argued, active forgetting operates as a “plastic, regenerative and curative force” (cited in Deleuze 1983: 113), a selective principle for making new thought and action possible. Emetic approaches, it could be said, rely on such a plastic force. They experiment with the invention of *anti-dotes* to the invention of the firm distinction between fact and fiction, objective and subjective, out of which Stengers’ ‘terrible differentiation’ between the moderns and everyone else was produced in the first place.

Once these dichotomies, and the hierarchy they embed begin to unravel, “scientific” and “indigenous” knowledge both come into view as relational effects elicited through contrasts and differences. At issue is not a claim to any spurious *equality* between forms of knowledge and practice. Instead, by attending to perspectival and material patterns of similarity and difference, emetic approaches replace the vast chasm assumed to separate the indigenous from the modern with a multiplicity of smaller and larger gaps that crisscross the terrain in many directions, generating smaller or larger domains (Jensen forthcoming), and eventually the ‘world multiple’ in its entirety.

In this situation, it is no longer only the ‘others’ who are different. Rather, as Stengers emphasizes, we moderns, too, are “already very different from what we believe ourselves to be” (2000: 165). Rather than inhabiting a dual landscape that pitches the objectivist reductions of scientific knowledge against empathetic engagements with the indigenous, uniquely made possible by anthropology, the anthropologist is located in a fractal ecology of knowledges and practices. Rather than a curator, interpreter or activist on behalf of the worlds of others, he or she assumes, not as a matter of choice but as a condition, the position of an ontological co-inventor of such entanglements (Jensen 2012, 2015). The world multiple comes into view as an effect of these entanglements, with all the vertigo this entails.

## **Bibliography**

Abbott, Andrew. 2001. *Chaos of Disciplines*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Barley, Nigel. 1983. *The Innocent Anthropologist: Notes from a Mud Hut*. Long Grove:

Waveland Press.

Berreman, Gerald D. 1966. "Anemic and Emetic Analyses in Social Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 68(2): 346-354.

Bessire, Lucas and David Bond. 2013. "Ontological Anthropology and the Deferral of Critique," *American Ethnologist* 41(3): 440-456.

Brummelhuis, Han ten. 2007. *King of the Waters: Homan Van Der Heide and the Origin of Modern Irrigation in Siam*. Chiang Mai & Singapore: Silkworm Books.

de la Cadena, Marisol. 2015. *Earthbeings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds*. Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press, 2015.

de Waal, B. M. 2003. "Silent Invasion: Imanishi's Primatology and Cultural Bias in Science," *Animal Cognition* 6: 293-299.

Deleuze, Gilles. 1983. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. London: Athlone.

Despret, Vinciane. 2010. "Ethology Between Empathy, Standpoint and Perspectivism: the Case of the Arabian Babblers." Available at: <http://www.vincianedespret.be/2010/04/ethology-between-empathy-standpoint-and-perspectivism-the-case-of-the-arabian-babblers/> (Accessed 4/3-2016).

Escobar, Arturo. 1998. "Whose Knowledge, Whose Nature? Biodiversity, Conservation and the Political Ecology of Social Movements," *Journal of Political Ecology* 5: 53-82.

Foucault, Michel. 2000. "For an Ethic of Discomfort." In *Power: Essential works of Foucault 1954-1984*. Edited by James Faubion, 443-49. New York: The New Press.

Gad, Christopher, Casper Bruun Jensen and Brit Ross Winthereik. 2015. "Practical Ontology: Worlds in STS and Anthropology," *NatureCulture* 3: 67-86.

Galison, Peter, and David J. Stump (eds). 1996. *The Disunity of Science: Boundaries, Contexts, and Power*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

- Goodenough, Ward H. 1970. *Description and Comparison in Cultural Anthropology*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing.
- Gow, Peter. 2001. *An Amazonian Myth and Its History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Graeber, David. 2015. "Radical Alterity is Just Another Way of Saying 'Reality'": A Reply to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro," *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5(2): 1-41.
- Harris, Marvin. 1968. *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture*. New York: Crowell.
- Harris, Marvin. 1976. "History and Significance of the Emic/Etic Distinction," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 5: 329-50.
- Harris, Marvin. 1979. *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture*. New York: Random House.
- Helmreich, Stefan. 2011. "Nature/Culture/Seawater," *American Anthropologist* 113(1): 132-144.
- Holbraad, Martin. 2012. *Truth in Motion: The Recursive Anthropology of Cuban Divination*. Chicago, IL & London: University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Jardine, Nicholas. 2004. "Etics and Emics (Not to Mention Anemics and Emetics) in the History of the Sciences," *History of Science* xlii: 261-78.
- Jensen, Casper Bruun. 2012. "Proposing the Motion: The Task of Anthropology is to Invent Relations," *Critique of Anthropology* 32(1): 47-53.
- Jensen, Casper Bruun. 2014. "Continuous Variations: The Conceptual and the Empirical in STS," *Science, Technology and Human Values* 39(2): 192-213.
- Jensen, Casper Bruun. 2015. "Experimenting with Political Materials: Environmental Infrastructures and Ontological Transformations," *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* 16(1): 17-30.
- Jensen, Casper Bruun. Forthcoming. "Mekong Scales: Domains, Test-Sites and the Micro-Uncommons," *Anthropologica*.

- Knorr Cetina, Karin. 1999. *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge*. Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press.
- Kopenawa, Davi. 2013. *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanonami Shaman*. Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Maurer, Bill. 2005. *Mutual Life, Limited Islamic Banking, Alternative Currencies, Lateral Reason*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Maurer, Bill. 2015. *How Would You Like to Pay? How Technology Is Changing the Future of Money*. Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press.
- Morita, Atsuro. 2016. "Infrastructuring Amphibious Space: The Interplay of Aquatic and Terrestrial Infrastructures in the Chao Phraya Delta in Thailand," *Science as Culture* 25(1): 117-140.
- Morita, Atsuro. Forthcoming. "Uncommon Worlds and Interstitial Spaces: In between the Cosmos and 'Thousand-cubed Great Thousands Worlds,'" *Anthropologica*.
- Morita, Atsuro and Casper Bruun Jensen. 2017. "Delta Ontologies: Infrastructural Transformations in Southeast Asia," *Social Analysis*.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1966. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for None and All*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Pike, Kenneth L. 1954. *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behaviour*. Glendale, CA: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- Pike, Kenneth L. 1967. *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behaviour*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. The Hague: Mouton & Co.
- Sivaramakrishnan, K. 2000. "State Sciences and Development Histories: Encoding Local Forestry Histories in Bengal," *Development and Change* 31: 61-89.

- Smith, Barbara Herrnstein. 2005. *Scandalous Knowledge: Science, Truth and the Human*.  
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Stengers, Isabelle. 2000. *The Invention of Modern Science*. Minneapolis, MN & London:  
University of Minnesota Press.
- Stoller, Paul and Cheryl Olkes. 1987. *In Sorcery's Shadow: A Memoir of Apprenticeship  
among the Songhay of Niger*. Chicago, IL & London: University of Chicago Press,.
- Strathern, Marilyn. 1988. *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with  
Society in Melanesia*. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California  
Press.
- Strathern, Marilyn. 1991. *Partial Connections*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Strum, Shirley C. and Linda M. Fedigan (eds). 2000. *Primate Encounters: Models of Science,  
Gender, and Society*. Chicago, IL & London: University of Chicago Press.
- Tambiah, Stanley J. 1977. "The Galactic Polity: The Structure of Traditional Kingdoms in  
Southeast Asia," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 293: 69-97.
- Thaitakoo, Danai and Brian McGrath. 2010. "Bangkok Liquid Perception: Waterscape  
Urbanism in the Chao Phraya River Delta and Implications to Climate Change  
Adaptation," in *Water Communities*, Rajib Shaw & Danai Thaitakoo (eds.), Emerald,  
pp. 35-50.
- Todd, Zoe. 2016. "An Indigenous Feminist's Take on the Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' Is Just  
Another Word for Colonialism," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29(1): 4-22.
- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. 1998. "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism,"  
*Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4(3): 469-88.
- Wagner, Roy. 1975. *The Invention of Culture*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

