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Introduction: Social Theory After Strathern

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Introduction

“I don’t wear gloves, I like seeing things grow. I weed rather than dig, it satisfies my liking to have things orderly. That is, a lot of my gardening, I’m afraid, is imposing order...I don’t plant from seed, and I very rarely buy in plants. What I am in fact doing is weeding, cutting, trimming, pulling out weeds so that plants can grow, delighting in plants... Oh, and pruning them... Gardening is attention and organisation and ordering, yet what one is ordering...what one is doing, one isn’t changing beyond repair. On the contrary, the stuff beams back at one, grows back at one. And I can’t think of any other realm in which that occurs ...”
(MS in conversation with JC, this issue)

Insofar as Marilyn Strathern has come to stand for a certain kind of anthropology the question of social theory after Strathern is by necessity also a question about anthropology's relation to social theory. Contemporary anthropologists bemoan its apparent lack of influence on adjacent disciplines. Anthropologists, it is lamented, borrow their concepts largely from European philosophy “and no one outside anthropology really cares what we have to say about them.” (da Col & Graeber, 2011: x) In the aftermath of the crisis of representation that dominated the discipline in the 1980s and the internal debates about and theorisations of reflexivity that followed, anthropologists, it is suggested, have found themselves in the embarrassing position of pillaging theoretical concepts from other disciplines to analyse their ethnographic data, as opposed to generating new theoretical offerings out of their materials for others to digest (Henare et al. 2006: 8). How might a special issue like this one, with contributions from History of Science, Philosophy, Legal Studies and Geography, as well as anthropology proper, move us on from such internal dialogues to enact a theoretically relevant anthropology after Strathern?

Some anthropologists might consider such a project ill-conceived from the beginning. If Strathern’s influence beyond anthropology is growing (as evidenced by the editors of this journal commissioning a special issue in her name), her status within the discipline remains controversial. Various claims have been made for a ‘Strathernian anthropology’ in recent years. Yet the frustrations that accompany the reading of Strathern’s work are widely remarked upon, including accounts of the necessary relationship between her style of exposition and her comparative agenda (e.g. Gell 1999; Holbraad & Pedersen 2009; Reed 2003). Despite the frequency with which Strathern’s work is today cited in academic publications, her texts are rarely put on a first or second year undergraduate reading list. Secretly, senior scholars of her own generation admit to never having read some of her most well-known books or to finding them incomprehensible. There is concern that those who expound on the benefits of reading her work are becoming increasingly dominant in the discipline and yet continue to speak only to a small sub-sect of it, largely those who studied at or who have connections to the University of Cambridge. Given that this special issue represents an attempt to extend the productivity of Strathern’s disruptive presence in the social sciences, it contains contributions from scholars extending far beyond Strathern’s own

students, colleagues and chosen interlocutors. The purpose of this volume is neither to emulate nor simply endorse a 'Strathernian' approach, but to explore what value a critical engagement with her work might have for the social sciences by setting such an engagement in motion.

But what *is* a Strathernian approach? Although Strathern is widely recognised as a hugely significant anthropologist of her generation, it is far from apparent what her lasting legacy on the discipline will be. How should we gauge her influence? On the one hand, Strathern has extended anthropological knowledge in numerous fields of enquiry. Her comparisons of Melanesian and Euro-American concepts of gender, kinship, personhood and property have helped to redefine anthropological inquiry in both parts of the world (Strathern 1988; see Hirsch, this issue). Her early discussion of the implications of reproductive technologies forged new ground that helped revitalise the study of kinship and inspire a generation of social scientists working on biotechnologies (Strathern 1992a; see Franklin, this issue). By bringing social anxieties about technology together with an examination of the law as the site in which such concerns are resolved and reproduced, her recent work has developed new post-Durkheimian trajectories for theorising the law (Strathern 2005; see Pottage, Greenhouse, this issue). Her interest in the growing hegemony of transparency as a paradigm for managing knowledge has led social scientists to focus their attention onto the institutions in which they work and the creeping managerialism within academia (Strathern 2000a; see Lebner & Deiringer, 2008). On the other hand, what those who query the significance of Strathern's legacy want to know is how her *way of doing* anthropology might be different and how this might justify the complexity of the writing. Can a clear theoretical agenda be traced through her diverse writings and how might this be transformative of knowledge practices both in anthropology and the social sciences?

Strathern would probably ask us why it is felt that a relationship between social theory and anthropology needs to be made visible at all, and what kind of taken for granted analytical assumptions might generate such a problem in the first place. What is theoretical knowledge and how do we imagine it can travel? On the one hand, when we imagine disciplines as borrowing theoretical frameworks from one another this conjures up an image of social theory as a whole (akin to society) to which the disciplines stand as analogous parts. On the other hand, each discipline's own theoretical apparatus is imagined to provide a 'whole' new perspective on concrete social phenomena. Shifting theoretical context generates new knowledge. In this guise theories are thus imagined spatially as frames; organising concepts that can travel between disciplines in so far as they can be applied to new situations. Theories might be compared to one another (one set of data seen from different theoretical perspectives) or might be used to bring disparate things together (e.g. a Foucauldian conception of biopower used to illuminate medical practices in both Britain and Papua New Guinea). When we imagine the interdisciplinary trading of these perspectives they can also themselves start to take on thing-like qualities; theories become perspectives 'owned' and disposed of by each discipline.

Is there a way of exploring the futures of anthropological thinking that both keeps the distinction between 'anthropology' and 'social theory' productively in play while at the same time seeking out models of/for the traffic between them which extends beyond familiar part-whole thinking? In other words, can we etch out more precisely (more critically?) our assumptions about what exactly (anthropological) theory might be and how and where it might be made to travel? In particular, we suggest in this introduction that Strathern's work offers an array of critical techniques, taken up by the contributors to this volume, for the

generation of new conceptual topologies, by which we mean those spatially or arithmetically imagined analytic relations through which we organise knowledge, whether these take the form of relations between parts and wholes (Strathern 1994), the visible and invisible (Willerslev and Corsin Jimenez 2007), presence and absence (Law 2002) or the one and the multiple (Mol 2002). Reflecting on the spatiality of our concepts and how we make our familiar categories of analysis known to ourselves through such topologies are key Strathernian devices for taking anthropological reflexivity forwards. If we refocus attention onto the foundations of our own epistemological work might this also lead to the development of new ways of theorising theory for the future? We suggest that Strathern's approach to gardening, described in the epigraph to this introduction, points towards a variety of analytic strategies for generating new topologies of subject and object, the particular and the general, and the concrete and the abstract. This introduction does not therefore provide a primer for "Strathernian theory". Instead we review some of the original techniques that Strathern has used to 'garden' her theory: it can be used, if you like, as a conceptual toolkit.

Differentiation

It is conventional to think about theoretical work as the business of forming connections; creating new epistemic wholes out of what is already divided (whether disciplines, things, or persons). Social theory generates meaning by joining up a world otherwise divided into essentially distinct things (see also Wagner 1979). As representations these theoretical frames are detachable from the world they describe (Mitchell 1994; Latour 1993). Of course, the (post)modern experience is that one theoretical perspective, or explanation, is never enough to account for such 'things'. Perspectives are multiplied by conceptual shifts, by the impression that no one vantage point can account for an object, event, or interaction in total. The things described resist our exegesis, generate excess and refuse disposal (see Strathern 1990a; 1999: Chapter 4). Entities might be related in one regard (e.g. when considered through the theoretical frame of a Marxist theory of labour) but fractures and differences subsequently appear when we consider them from another (e.g. through the frame of governmentality). There is always a remainder, which provokes us to further shift our perspective or refine our theory: hence the impulse to borrow theoretical frames from other disciplines. Strathern has called this way of making knowledge by considering things as always part of something else the merographic connection (1992b: 73). We find it useful to think about merographic connections topologically, as a part-whole spatial form to which new knowledge must conform in order to be recognisable as such.ⁱ

Anthropologists contribute to our apprehension of merographic complexity by revealing the cultural diversity of responses to historical processes. Western concepts of modernity, individuality, or commodification, for example, are incorporated into other cultural lifeworlds in locally meaningful ways that in turn transform them.ⁱⁱ In response to the 'seemingly boundless unfolding of complexity' (Schlecker and Hirsch, 2001: 70) that characterises merographic thinking, dialectical models of social change that pluralise abstract sociological constructs have come to dominate the subject area (Englund & Leach, 2001). A theory of 'multiple modernities', for example (ibid.), allows for variation in the way modernity is enacted in everyday lives – and often involves a focus on dialectical relationships between 'local' and 'global' forces - but maintains a continuity across those contexts in so far as they can all be considered a form of modernity. Such dialectical models of relationships between the particular and general, or the local and global, control the disciplinary impulse to multiply perspectives and therefore to relativise knowledge by positing meta-contexts that act as abstract containers for ethnographic complexity. Considered topologically, however, the

endless multiplication of perspectives and the containment of fragmented parts in meta-theories do not look so different: they both entail the endless configuration of parts and wholes.

Strathern firmly situates herself within a Euro-American epistemic culture that relies on merographic connections for the production of new knowledge. Rather than experiencing the limitations of representational knowledge as a problem that requires resolution through dialectical synthesis of abstract universals and cultural specificity, however, she responds by celebrating our capacity for conceptual division and the epistemic conditions of possibility it sets up. Rather than resolving difference she focuses on the moment of differentiation, or of bifurcation, as she puts it, itself. A commitment to the self-generating potential of bifurcation requires us to avoid the temptation to slot pre-existing materials into familiar categories (“this is traditional and this is modern”), or to think we are escaping such dualisms by exploring dialectical relations between them (“this is a synthesis of traditional and modern; local culture and global modernity”). Bifurcation instead involves dwelling in the gap between the “relationship of the language of description or analysis [and] the object of study” (2011:88). We are stuck within the epistemological confines of our language, with its history of associations, its conceptual clusters and discursive bundles, but when our ethnographic encounters make it hard to “hold certain terms steady” (ibid.) we can also seek out new concepts.

We should be wary, Strathern suggests, of attributing to apparent resemblances concepts that might in fact originate from quite different ‘ideational routes’ (2011: 97). Her scepticism about theoretical models was born in part out of her experience in Papua New Guinea in the 1960s and 1970s, when anthropologists’ attempts to superimpose models of African lineage systems on Papua New Guinean kinship were faltering in the face of strong cognatic ties, transitory settlements and fluid relationalities (Lawrence, 1984; Wagner, 1977; Strathern, 1994). But the limitations of representation, the reductionism inherent to any reification, and the immobility of our concepts are also opportunities. The hiatus of anthropological knowledge in Melanesia resulted in the insight that ‘groups’ or ‘society’ are anthropological constructions rather than pre-given entities (see also Latour, 2005;27-43). Instead, Strathern searched the anthropological lexicon for terms such as ‘relationality’ or ‘dividuality’ that might better (if still inadequately) specify the ways in which people in Melanesia imagine themselves as being connected and disconnected from one another, and in turn disrupt understandings of Euro-American sociality. The disposal of pre-existent ‘wholes’ opened up new conditions of possibility for conceptual relationships.

Strathernian anthropology is slow anthropology. Her writings explicitly strive for better description through the repetitive differentiation and specification of terms. This strategy involves a constant narrowing down of language; a reduction (rather than expansion) of the number of the things our concepts can adequately describe. Rather than either multiplying contexts or generating new all-encompassing meta-theories she ‘prunes’ her contexts of intuitive explanations to see what concepts ‘beam back’, to continue the gardening metaphor. Indeed one might say that she revels in her awareness of the mischief such acts of discrimination can unleash; in the revelation of complexity at every scale (2004a). It is this awareness, we would argue, that matters. For this is what distinguishes the modes of reification that underpin acts of bifurcation from those that underpin simplistic dualisms (Pedersen, 2011) and what marks out Strathern’s subtle shift in conceptual topology.

The point is not only to develop better descriptions but to do so by making visible the conceptual manoeuvres by which we make the world knowable to ourselves. Consider Strathern's edited work *Dealing with Inequality* (1987b: 2), a volume that she introduced as being 'non-adjudicatory in character, non-exclusive in method. Rather than foreshadowing a conclusion about the prevalence of sexual inequality..., it draws attention to problems in anthropological practice. *To regard ourselves as dealing in inequality is to make an explicit stand in relation to the analytical activity which here defines us: how we make known to ourselves that inequalities exist*' (our emphasis). Following from this, we suggest that if any technique is definitively Strathernian it would be an unremitting focus on how we make our familiar categories of analysis known to ourselves and that this might be productively made to form a general property of social theory after Strathern. In seeking to clarify the key distinction here between disciplinary approaches, Viveiros de Castro and Goldman (2009: 36) take Latour as a representative of sociology because in his work on fetishism (1996) the invocation of premodern fetish practices – brilliant as it is – is a means of clarifying how scientists likewise 'also make an object to afterwards affirm that it had always existed' (ibid: 37). That is to say, 'The African fetishists serve only as a point of support, as supplementary material that helps us respond to a question that wasn't asked by them'. The Strathernian technique, however, would be quite different:

Taking some notions put forth by Latour – network and hybrid, for example – the problem of Strathern is how to simulate what happens when these concepts cross Melanesian material or are crossed by them. All of this is a problem of direction and application: either we simply apply the concept of network to the Melanesians – this is the traditional procedure in anthropology – or we do what Strathern does, which is exactly the opposite: apply the Melanesians to the notion of the network, that is, we redescribe the concept of network with the help of Melanesian realities. Everything happens as (if she were to say) the following: 'If Melanesians had the will and the patience to read Latour, what would they be able to say about it?' (ibid: 37-8)

Applying the technique of reflecting back on our own concepts is to perform (Reed, 2011: 166) the point of view of those who are ostensibly the subjects of our description but who thereby end up describing us, whether those 'subjects' are long dead Italian physicists (Biagioli, this issue) or *tricholoma* fungal spores (Tsing, this issue). Borrowing from Strathern, then, is to borrow from (or exchange perspective with) the subjects of our analyses, deploying the lack of fit between our concepts and 'their' social practices as a means to freshen and 'expand the anthropological concepts, not to restrict them' (Viveiros de Castro and Goldman, 2009: 37). This is the case not in the romantic sense of 'what we can learn from the natives', but rather a kind of rigorous testing of the analyst's existing conceptual tools. The technique presumes difference and a kind of gap, but these are not the preserve of anthropology so neither should be the technique. By way of example we take up the issue of power addressed by both Cross and ourselves in our respective contributions to this special issue.

The other side of power

A common criticism of Strathern's work is that she does not acknowledge relationships of power and inequality, particularly with regard to gender (Josephides 1991; Jolly 1992) and historical relationships between Melanesia and the West (Thomas 1991; Knauff 1999). However, we suggest that within her description of Melanesian relationality can in fact be found an indigenous theory of power which both contrasts with and complements the focus

on representation and control that have come to dominate anthropological (and other) theories of power over the past thirty years. Indeed, *The Gender of the Gift* (1988) might be read as an account of what power relationships between men and women in Melanesian societies look like if we do not presume that power is always about ways of controlling or governing the self or others.

Strathern's reading of Melanesian sociality suggests that power might be better conceptualised indigenously as a capacity to 'elicit' or 'extract' actions from others. Concomitantly, knowledge should be considered not as a tool of governance but an *effect* of social action. By assuming the correct 'aesthetic' form, for example by presenting the appropriate gift, others are compelled to respond and in doing so provide evidence (knowledge) of one's own capacities:

For a body or mind to be in a position of eliciting an effect from another, to evince power or capability, it must manifest itself in a particular or concrete way. This then becomes the elicitory trigger. (Strathern, 1988: 181)

Thus, in Melanesia the exercise of such power rests upon the capacity to make oneself visible in the correct form - often objectified in an exchange object.ⁱⁱⁱ When people in Mount Hagen put objects on display, for example, those objects are judged in terms of their aesthetic qualities: are they shiny, fat, the right colour? Which is to say, rather than power obtaining from enactment of the authoritative gaze, this is a means of arranging aesthetic criteria in order to make others see and respond to them. Indeed, 'the gift consists precisely in obliging the partner to the exchange, in producing an *effect*... Melanesian knowledge practices consist in producing effects on other people; they thus constitute a theory of social action. Something different is produced by the theory of Western knowledge: it is less linked to the idea of effects than to the idea of representation' (Viveiros de Castro and Goldman 2009: 31; see also Mol, this issue). We return in a moment to the question of (non)representation.

The gift, indeed, is synonymous with appearing in the right (aesthetically compelling) form. Cross (this issue) notes that one radical implication of reading Strathern's exchange theory as a theory of power is that power might not be exercised in a vertical direction from those who govern (global corporations) to those who are governed (factory labourers), but might entail a reverse action upwards whereby factory labourers present themselves in a form that compels managers to recognise them as equivalent persons; a relationship that is objectified in the corporate gift. Corporate giving may very well reinforce relationships of inequality by ideologically shaping or delimiting the forms that agency can take, but these are relationships that workers, nonetheless, experience themselves as actively eliciting. This is a perspective that is occluded when we presume that power consists only of domination. Might factory labourers actively seek to *provoke* their managers' disciplinary tactics for the production of working subjectivities because those tactics also generate recognition of them as persons?

We argue in our own contribution to this special issue, also on South Asia, that 'the insistence in Strathern's work on the persuasiveness of form allows us to discern more fully the underside of disciplinary power: its capacity to empower the subjects it produces at the same time as it delimits the forms of action that are possible.' Making explicit some of the connections between Thrift's (2007) important work on non-representational theory and the Strathernian image-that-intervenes, our aim is to draw out the affective qualities of relational forms. The power of south Indian portraits of politicians painted in blood, we argue, does not reside in their accurate representation of the subject. Instead, we draw from Strathern's

meditation on Melanesian portraiture, which simultaneously presents and activates the relationships that have gone into the construction of the person-image. Such images, we argue, are interventionist rather than representational. Indian blood portraits are in important ways nothing like Melanesian performances or exchanges; they conform to very different conventions for the recognition of personhood and agency. But Strathern's focus on the extractive power of the image brings into view the foundational role of relationality in their construction and efficacy. The blood portrait both presents an image (portrait) of a relationship between the person from whom blood has been drawn and the recipient and *inflicts* that relationship on the recipient. By materialising established tropes of asceticism, emotion and political commitment in blood portrait form a seemingly inescapable relationship between the artist and political leader is imaged (inflicted) in a manner that persuades the leader to do the artist's bidding. Of course, tapping power by making oneself seen by others (in the right way) is in no simplistic way the obverse of Foucauldian power-knowledge. We would suggest, rather, that the insight is more a complementary caution to the still pervasive assumption that *to view* (to enact the authoritative gaze) is to enact control; it reminds us of the other side of power.

Such an emphasis on the effects of affect implicates the schemas of representation/non-representation that we discussed earlier. Thrift, who has put issues of affect at the centre of questions of space, governance and power in recent years, describes affect as a kind of non-representational, semi-conscious knowledge of our world that 'primes us for action' (2007: 221). Conceived as an emergent property of relationships and encounters (between persons and between persons and things), affect is an apt term for describing the non-representational ways in which events might implicitly shape a person's emotions, attitudes and motivations and compel them to act in particular ways. What the two papers discussed here do is bring Thrift into conversation with Strathern in order to suggest that this kind of power, or anti-power, is frequently mobilised as a 'weapon of the weak'. In contemporary South India, at least, it is a method available for those with few other options - an imaginative response to marginal social positions that calls forth the resources of affective (and experimentally relational) persuasion. In this guise, visibility does not entail building up knowledge of an internal self or external other but enacting a relationship and eliciting a response that will hopefully reveal one's own social efficacy

That such a seemingly simple insight may be of wider import is intimated by Strathern's own extension of it into her subsequent work on audit cultures in United Kingdom universities, for practices of audit likewise determine the limited practices that will serve as evidence that accountability has taken place (2000: 3). A commitment to care in respect of what one makes visible thus both serves as the basis for Strathern's literary technique (discussed further below) and has provided the foundation for her critique of the accountability protocols that have become increasingly dominant within the academy. The primary value underpinning audit practices is transparency, something which the conflation of visibility and knowledge in modern Euro-American thinking makes it very difficult to argue with. What Strathern takes from Melanesian knowledge practices, however, is a realisation that total exposure is not necessarily the key to exercising or resisting power. Very often it is the concealment of objects, persons or knowledge which enables their subsequent revelation to have effects on others.

The essays by Copeman & Street and Cross thus draw upon readings of Strathern in order to question built in assumptions about knowledge, representation and control in dominant conceptions of power-knowledge in the social sciences. The authors' ethnographic materials

compel them to pause at the precise moment when conventional analytic schemas for theorising power in South India might come into play and explore alternative conceptual vocabularies. How should social theory respond? Do we pluralise concepts of power by engaging an analytic of ‘aesthetic coercion’ or ‘non-representational imagistic power’, just as anthropologists have talked about ‘multiple modernities’? Or do we maintain the surprise of differentiation by adopting ‘elicitation’ and ‘extraction’ as a distinct conceptual vocabulary? Might we even want to go further and differentiate Melanesian processes of elicitation and South Indian processes of affective persuasion; or distinguish between the modes of power unleashed in South Indian political art and labour relations respectively? New conceptual vocabularies are demanded at every point of bifurcation. Indeed Strathern’s decision not to explicitly engage with theoretical debates about power in recent years may be because the term is simply too burdened by its Euro-American discursive associations. Nevertheless, what we have sought to provide here are some notes for what a social theory of ‘power’ might look like after Strathern. What we have presented here is *not* a critique of Foucauldian power-knowledge, which remains a vital and compelling means of understanding contemporary apparatuses of authority and control, but rather a modest proposal to attend to the ‘other side’ of the equation so brilliantly presented in Foucault’s work. Whether we extend existing terms or invent new ones, the effect of ‘capture’ by Strathern’s writings on Melanesian exchange is the compulsion to think beyond the concepts we have to hand.

Comparison

Acts of bifurcation are not motivated by a desire for complete or more extensive knowledge. Instead they establish unintuitive juxtapositions between newly differentiated things. These ‘things’ are neither objects nor theories because theories in this mode of knowledge production remain firmly attached to their objects (see also Henare et al. 2006). A concept of elicitation, for example, emerges out of and remains embedded in acts of exchange in Melanesia. It cannot simply be lifted out of those acts, objects, relationships and applied to others, although its juxtaposition with sanguinary politics in India might reveal the latter’s affective qualities, just as the juxtaposition with exchange relations in Indian factories might provoke us to reflect again on the ways in which Melanesian processes of elicitation might be considered a kind of power. But if we cannot separate theory and data what are we left with? What is theory if it cannot be abstracted and moved? We suspect that Strathern would argue that we are left with comparison itself.

Strathern’s comparisons are enacted by shifts sideways rather than laid out to view from an external (theoretical) viewpoint. As Holbraad and Pedersen have described, this makes the author herself somewhat elusive (2009). She appears to move with her materials. As we have described, rather than generating a general theory that encompasses two or more things in a relation of similarity, Strathern “cuts away what we think is shared” (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2009: 390) to create “disjunctive” (Lazar, 2012), “inappropriate” (Tsing, this issue) or “asymmetrical” (Pottage, 2001) comparisons between concepts that remain attached to their things.

Sideways movements do not necessarily take place on a single plane. Disjunctive comparisons can leap across what look like scalar differences. As Tsing points out (this issue) twentieth-century anthropology progressed by way of a growing critique of comparison between similar units, with its echoes of a colonial gaze: “by making things comparable all the interesting questions had already been squashed. This was one of our defenses of ethnography: good ethnography, we thought, refused comparison”. For Strathern, however,

comparison does not depend upon similarity – neither the object analysed nor the theoretical frame used to analyse it need to remain stable. Instead she works to ‘recombine knowledge originating elsewhere’ (Edwards & Petrovic-Steger, 2011:3) by drawing on Melanesian funeral statues to illuminate intellectual property law (2005) or ceremonial exchange to explore the implications of biotechnology (1999). Correspondingly, the objectification of the concept of elicitation in Melanesian ceremonial exchange gives rise to our understanding of blood portraits as objectifications of affective power. But this does not mean to say they are the same. Here the reifications generated from bifurcation become the basis for ‘usefully shocking analogies’ (Tsing, this issue). The intended effect of these juxtapositions is surprise: a momentary apprehension of the grounds of our own and other's world making. Very often, this surprise also tells us something about the limitations of our own knowledge producing tools. As Tsing writes in respect of her comparison of kinship relations amongst persons and fungal spores, “Often it is the very incompatibility of the units being compared that illuminates the relationship between tools and research objects.”

As Hirsch describes in his contribution to this special issue, analogic comparison largely takes two forms in Strathern's work: analogies she establishes between Melanesian societies and those she draws between Melanesian and Euro-American modes of symbolic action. Her comparisons between Melanesia and Euro-America, he argues, emphasise the limitations of the analogy; they are ‘negative strategies’ (Strathern 1990b). As we point out in our own essay, however, ‘negative analogy is only able to have persuasive force (extend) because of the retained (conserved) positive analogy.’ Analogic limits, Hirsch suggests, have been especially important for Strathern in thinking about how western technologies and institutions such as Intellectual Property Law travel to places, such as Papua New Guinea, where the cultural conventions that underpin them do not hold. It is those comparative limits that challenge us to produce new concepts.

In drawing on Strathern's account of gift giving in Papua New Guinea to illuminate his own description of corporate gifts in South India, Cross, like Strathern, emphasises “the very many points on which we might draw parallels in order to heighten those where we cannot” (Strathern, 2005:109). Strathern's work in Papua New Guinea makes visible certain preconceptions that have driven previous social analysis of corporate giving. In this case, it seems, conceptions that were prefigured by the self-descriptions of the corporations themselves. Like Melanesians, workers in the South Indian diamond company where Cross carried out research see gift exchange as a moment of extraction and as a moment of revelation of knowledge about themselves and their relationships. But this is not to say the concepts of personhood and relatedness being operationalised are the same. The limit of the analogy is precisely where the element of surprise, and thus the possibility of new knowledge (bifurcation), emerges. As Tsing puts it (this issue): “The point of a Strathernian comparison is thus to show the limits—and possibilities—of forms of knowledge making, even as it sheds light on the situations and objects forced awkwardly into comparison.”

If Cross, Copeman and Street and Hirsch explore the limits of analogies Tsing (this issue) takes kinship to the limit. Tsing extends Strathern's awkward comparisons into the world of tricholoma fungi that merge with trees, mate with their parents and become their own offspring. The fungi, like Strathern's Melanesian, Tsing argues, can offer a critically reflexive view on our tools for knowing action and agency. They are neither individuals nor groups but ‘continuous, indeterminately growing interactive trajectories, adapting to changing conditions’. And yet, Tsing suggests, the fungi might not be as different from humans as we assume when we presume such inter-species comparisons to be impossible. ‘Indeed

reimagining ourselves as interactive trajectories goes a long way to getting us started thinking about how we act together with other species to make the world'. In the words of another ethnographer of 'companion species', Haraway;

Strathern... taught us why conceiving of "nature" and "culture" as either polar opposites or universal categories is foolish. An ethnographer of relational categories she showed how to think in other topologies. Instead of opposites, we get the whole sketchpad of the modern geometrician's fevered brain with which to draw relationality (Haraway 2003:8).

In the world of fungi, even comparison between species as pre-given categories falls apart. Matsutake mushrooms, according to the scientists who study them, are so dynamically amorphous that it is difficult to decipher where one species begins and another ends. As in Strathern's writings on Melanesia, parts, wholes, and therefore comparable units, dissolve. As Tsing demonstrates, analogies might be traced here across the relational practices of humans and fungi, or across the knowledge practices of anthropologists and scientists. Just as anthropologists in Melanesia who tried to make social relations fit into African segmentary kinship models were forced to think beyond the established understandings of society, so do the scientists trying to fit fungi into classes and categories need to remain open to surprise.

Analogy/invention

If Strathern's comparisons between Melanesia and Euro-America emphasise the partial character of analogy, Hirsch (this issue) points out that her comparisons within Melanesia emphasise the extension of analogies. This is a less remarked on feature of Strathern's comparative method but we suggest it is critical to the potential contribution of her work to wider social theory. Hirsch notes the similarity to Lévi-Strauss's technique in his *Mythologiques* (1964-1971). If in his classic multi-volume study Lévi-Strauss 'shows how all of the myths he analyses from the contiguous North and South America – over 800 – are all versions or transformations of one another', Strathern similarly argues that Melanesian societies can be understood as versions of one other; 'they share a common aesthetic' (1988: 340).^{iv} The way in which persons and actions are made known and apprehended are the same. Cultural conventions cannot be compared across these societies (e.g. different cultural conceptions of gender) because one reified set of conventions is re-iterated in events and interactions distributed across the region. Melanesians, she argues, take for granted the aesthetic form (gender) in which they must appear in order to be recognised, but they must realise themselves in this form – for example through participation in processes of initiation, reproduction or gardening - in order to have social effects. If, in Melanesia, Strathern emphasises the extensive quality of analogy (the reproduction of conventions in concrete form) this is because this is where Melanesians themselves focus their efforts.

Delineating cultural conventions and shared conceptualisations is the traditional preserve of anthropologists. Robbins has argued that this orientation towards convention has given rise to continuity thinking in anthropology (Robbins, 2007). While Papua New Guineans might convert to Christianity, for example, we like to emphasise the continuity of traditional cultural concepts and traditions in this new religious domain (ibid.). Continuity thinking thus dominates dialectical approaches to social change: we acknowledge the ways in which cultural conventions are altered in relation to new influences but we tend to emphasise the continuity side of the analogy; the way in which those influences are themselves incorporated into established cultural repertoires. The insight Strathern draws from her observations in

Melanesia is that scholars are not the only ones ‘making’ analogies. Twentieth-century anthropological analogic work involved producing representations that showed the connections between different domains of society. By contrast anthropologists of Melanesia have noted people’s attempts to ‘knock the conventional off balance’ by intentionally innovating upon it (Wagner, 1975). When young male Fuyuge speakers in the Papuan Highlands innovate on established conventions for their ceremonial dance form, *Gab*, through the modern repertoire of disco the anticipated power of the display comes from the appropriate revelation of convention in a new visceral form (Hirsch, 2001). We might consider such performances as analogic interventions; they extend and innovate on conventions for interpersonal effect rather than construct them through conceptual connection. Similarly, in our contribution to this volume, we discuss the ways in which an Indian social activist’s blood portraits of political leaders enact an analogy between the blood shed in and of a subjugated nation (Tibet) and the artist’s blood shed ‘for peace’. It is the enactment of this analogy in concrete form that makes it aesthetically persuasive. Thus, neither are scholars the only ones constructing conceptual topologies. The part conserved (the formal nature of blood being shed in each case) throws into relief the part that is extended (blood shed for purposes of peace, not subjugation). Such juxtapositions thus take the form of an analogic intervention, since their purpose and effect is to stimulate action/response. Analogy, skilfully rendered, mobilises its internal topology to produce effects in the world.^v

If anthropologists have tended to emphasise continuity by producing conceptual analogies, Strathern draws attention to the ways in which analogies might be enacted in practice. This is where anthropology’s duplex tool of the conceptual-interpersonal relation is important. Strathern identifies the anthropologist’s duplex technique of keeping both the interpersonal and conceptual in view at the same time as central to its processes of knowledge production (2005). When we talk about kinship we talk about both the ways in which people interact with one another and the ways in which particular concepts of relatedness are immanent in those interactions. Enacting relationships in practice analogically extends the conventions implicit in those practices. Conversely, as Edwards and Petrovic-Steger (2011) point out, conceptual work also extends and works upon our personal relationships.

Greenhouse’s essay in this issue considers international law in the light of Strathern’s concept of the duplex. The result is a ‘conundrum’: ‘the fact of plural legalities invites a conceptual rendering of culture, while the fact of cultural pluralism invites an instrumental rendering of law’ (Greenhouse, this issue). The result is another duplex: law/culture. For Greenhouse the law/culture duplex is ‘a dialectic missing its third element’, or ‘something else to think with’: this missing something is anthropology. If anthropology activates interpersonal relations in order to generate epistemological reflections about culture, the law engages such relationships as categories. For that reason anthropology tends to apprehend the law as a purely instrumental institution, whereas, as we have mentioned, Greenhouse follows Strathern in suggesting that we ought to treat law as at least as epistemic as anthropology. With culture covertly present, then, ‘human rights prosecutions seem to give back to anthropology a nightmare version of its own concepts’ (this issue). Yet all the while anthropology is kept separate, and treats human rights (being law) as pragmatic. So far as the relation between law and anthropology is concerned, it seems that each conceals those aspects of the other that they nevertheless contain. But other ‘lines of flight’ are possible: law and culture might be ‘released’ from one another to take ‘flight across unexpected properties’. The result would be surprises consequent on productive bifurcation.

Alongside analogic limitations or extensions, Franklin, in her essay in this issue, is interested in the way in which “analogies return”. That is, the way in which a context that is borrowed from in order to extend meaning in another context might itself become transformed by that symbolic act. If Darwin borrowed metaphors of kinship to make evolutionary models of nature palatable in the nineteenth-century, today our ideas of kinship are being transformed by developments in the new genetics. The significance of analogic return becomes particularly apparent in the context of reproductive technologies, where scientific practices both seek to imitate nature and “travel back” to make nature “like technology”. As Biagioli points out following Strathern (this issue), “Metaphors can migrate, mix, and both open and eclipse the possibility of certain associations in different scenarios, but they can also be read in different directions. Going from son to father has different effects than going from father to son, though the relation is still between the same two entities.”

Biagioli’s essay in this issue offers a tantalizing counterpart to Franklin’s paper by comparing the way printing press technologies complicated relations between author and work in eighteenth-century property law, when it gave rise to the modern notion of copyright, with IVF technology’s complication of legal relations between parents and children in the 1990s. Just as, before the printing press, evidence for authorship lay in the delivery of a piece of work, rather than its content or form, so, prior to IVF, did legal notions of motherhood rest on her delivery of the child: “Mothers and authors were defined by the fact that they materially delivered children and works from themselves.” Delivery was sufficient evidence of authorship/parentage in and of itself. While the printing press rendered production inconclusive as evidence of conception so IVF “rendered delivery inconclusive to the definition of mother.” Both technologies push the origins of creativity back in time from the point of delivery to the point of conception or “intention”. Here, we also have an analogy that returns:

Metaphors of fathers generating works helped the articulation of modern notions of intellectual creativity, which were then fed back, a few centuries later, into the conceptualization of new forms of reproductive creativity...

People often talk about technologies as catalysts for change. One of Strathern’s contributions to these discussions has been the insight that while technology frequently upsets basic dualisms between nature and culture, it can also be a driver for their reproduction in new forms (1992a). In other words, through the notion of the duplex, technology is neither simplistically considered to materialise either convention or invention. Instead, we could say, technologies are analogy machines; they “invent” conventions in new forms.

Surprise

In her essay in this special issue, Mol traces the uses of the Dutch word *lekker* through different practices in Dutch care homes, internet forums, and academic papers. The article is in part a response to Strathern’s comments on an earlier piece by Mol about the possibility of comparing not only conceptual schemes but *practices* of ‘cutting’ across time and space. There Strathern asked how Mol could decide all those practices were ‘about’ cutting at all. In other words, was Mol not still conceptually pre-determining her material? Mol’s response is ‘to trace socio-material practices and semiotic specificities together’ (this issue). Crucially, the word *lekker* does not only describe states of bodily pleasure or appreciation; its utterance may itself be constitutive of those states. Revisiting the classic nature/culture divide that preoccupied (especially feminist) anthropologists in the 1970s and 80s, Mol suggests that it

remains the case that when such a division is being made ‘bodies get situated on the nature side and language belongs to culture’. But the bodies present in scenes of lekker, principally in Dutch care homes, ‘are not pre-linguistic vestiges that elude verbal disciplining’. Rather, ‘flesh and talk jointly participate in a practice... [A]sking *is het lekker?*... is not sensible, but sensual. It is a verbal variant of caressing’; that is to say, the word does ‘not just frame pleasure, [but] generate[s] it’. Moreover, inspired by the merographic relation as elaborated by Strathern, Mol follows ‘trails’ of lekker in its complicated multifacetedness as a means of circumventing part-whole topographies of social description. Proceeding from this, Mol, in ‘activist mode’, not only follows lekker as it moves but *makes it move* by inserting it into the English language and into contexts where it might contain the capacity to surprise, thereby creating the possibility of a new concept, something that incorporates and goes beyond all the notions of niceness, naughtiness, tastiness that any single translation would give us: ‘I try to shift lekker around. From nursing home wards to managerial meetings and Ministries. From mundane practices in the Netherlands to academic texts written in English. How far can you go?’

Mol’s analysis has no explanatory endpoint as such. Lekker is never contained by theory. There are only endless shifts sideways; comparisons without comparative frameworks. How else, then, might we dispose of excess meaning (the language is Strathern’s) if not by exhausting interpretation through hyper-contextualisation; by laying out in clear view all the possible meanings we might attach to the image, event or artefact? This, of course, is precisely what Strathern resists. The image or event will always yield up more meanings for disposal (Strathern, 1999: 60). Why do we desire to “finish” explanation at all? Instead, in juxtaposing Euro-American and Melanesian knowledge practices, Strathern borrows something of the Hagen’s techniques for generating effects. Rather than comparing Euro-American and Melanesian practices from an external position that renders them equivalently ‘cultural’, she moves through a series of unfolding images in analogic sequence (e.g. New Ireland Malanggan followed by British patents; Minj compensation payments by European Intellectual Property Rights). The technique is one of selective revelation. Strathern thus gives us images to unravel images. Of course the intention, in contrast to that which lies behind figurative writing, is a kind of explanation. But, crucially, in order for that explanation to register as surprise in the mind of the reader not everything need be made visible at once.

This technique appears to rely on the eclipsing of the author herself. A recent survey of scholarly reviews of *The Gender of the Gift* showed how they highlighted the theme of authorial disguise (Crook, 2007). They refer to ways in which ‘the method’s ornamentation “camouflages her position.” For [Mary] Douglas too, Strathern “manages not to have authored any criticisms herself”... [Margaret] Jolly suggested that “[w]hat emerges is not realist fiction but a compelling series of picaresque stories that seem in search of an author. Just as the individual is expunged in the analysis of Melanesian personhood, so the author eludes us”’ (ibid.). Her comparisons are enacted by shifts sideways, and this is precisely a means of avoiding an externalist ‘bird’s eye view’; indeed, it would seem that authorial elusiveness is ‘a constitutive feature of what comparison amounts to in her work’ (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2009: 372). As Crook (2007) points out, the effect produced is one where ‘the author appears to have disguised herself in order to let the methods first be seen for themselves’. Just like, perhaps, the modest gardener who recedes from view once their flowerbeds begin to bloom.

Surprise, Strathern argues, is generated by the ethnographic moment - when the time of observation meets the time of analysis. Anthropology’s distinctiveness does not therefore lie

in ethnographic fieldwork methods but in the relationship between fieldwork and writing. This, she suggests, is where its contribution to social theory might lie. Strathern's paradigmatic image of the ethnographer glimpsing two men rushing a pole strung with pearl shells over the brow of a hill in Highlands Papua New Guinea is nicely complemented by Cross's own image in this volume of corporate managers presenting gold coins to labourers in a hotel marriage hall in South India. These are moments that the analysts cannot shake from their mind, and that continue to generate surprise as they are revisited in the light of new materials. They are images that refuse exhaustion.

What might the ethnographic moment mean outside anthropology? How can the element of surprise that is central to Strathern's account of the ethnographic moment be recreated through different disciplinary knowledge practices? The materials that the contributors consider in the papers that follow are not necessarily ethnographic in the conventional sense (exemplified here by the contributions of Cross and Copeman and Street). They might comprise legal papers (Pottage), historical sources (Biagioli), anthropology's own archive (Greenhouse) or even the anthropologist's imagination (Tsing). Nonetheless, the notion of immersement does not seem misplaced, insofar as immersement can be taken to mean a kind of dwelling; a momentary suspension (and simultaneous anticipation) of analysis so that anything can be observed, a 'deep hesitation' (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2009: 387). In other words, the ethnographic moment moves us away from the comparison of tangible objects and intangible analytic constructs in order to compare instead the moments or movements that make up the knowledge production endeavour. The contributors each dwell in their materials; they seek out further complications, problems, and distinctions that destabilise the unexamined conventions of Euro-American thinking of Euro-American thinking. With a little bit of gardening, we can still be surprised by what such writings throw up.

Echoes

We have argued that central to Strathern's focus on analogy is the idea that through the repetition and reproduction of concepts in everyday interactions we both conserve and extend their meaning. This makes Strathern acutely aware of the historicity of ideas:

I would draw an analogy. In the same way as one might wish to comprehend capitalist organisation as it developed historically in Europe, so one needs to inject a real history into our comprehension of Melanesian gift economies. The history itself may be unrecoverable, but we surely know enough about historical process to recognize a series of connected events. (1988: 34)

Strathern's recent work examining the metaphoric extension of post-enlightenment kinship thinking as it has historically shifted between domains in Euro-American culture (2005) might thus be read as a counterpart to her pan-Melanesian ethnography. Perhaps one of the reasons that Strathern has nonetheless been accused of cultural essentialism and a-historicism is that she does not herself attend to the mechanisms of repetition.^{vi} Instead, as the above quotation reveals, her identification of 'analogies that extend' presumes that those historical relations exist without making them explicit. When Strathern follows concepts of personhood through Melanesian or Euro-American institutions and practices, then, she is presuming that real historical relations underpin those continuities. Rather than comparing whole cultures or societies she compares historically emergent concepts as they are crystallised in particular social practices and interactions. The connections between these interactions do not add up to bounded wholes.

One of Strathern's major contributions to anthropology has thus been to demonstrate the ways in which 'echoes' of biological thinking – 'a primal distinction between biological process on one hand and social constructs on the other' (Strathern, this issue) – can be traced across all levels of social and cultural life. This way of mobilising the work of analogy has implications for the role of anthropology in the social sciences. When asked by Janet Carsten (this issue) how anthropologists can contribute to public debates about new reproductive technologies, Strathern answered with a critique of cultural diversity. The problem with assuming that the anthropologist's role is to make cultural variation visible is that this position is also a political one; it feeds into contemporary ideologies about individual choice. By contrast, "the other contribution that anthropologists can make," she argues, "is to point out the ramifications and consequences of what seem to be individual decisions, but that in fact do have repercussions." When we act we reproduce ideas and convey them to others: "People's actions have consequences not only on those.... with whom they are in immediate contact, but they have what one might say are, so to speak, counter-consequences, that is, they raise possibilities and those ideas then become part of the repertoire with which everyone thinks". (It is such counter consequences Mol is seeking to actively create, perhaps, when she inserts 'lekker' into the English language).

Echo, we suggest, is an important feature of Strathernian analogy. A reverberating echo does not entail the presence of a single abstractable principle held constant across different contexts but a trail of enactments and utterances that repeat^{vii} and transform one other. When Hirsch compares analogies that extend to analogies with limits, he is not returning, therefore, to a distinction between similarity (within cultures) and difference (between cultures). Concepts are conserved through repetition, but it would be a mistake to presume that those concepts lie 'behind' or prior to the interactions. Instead Hirsch points to the ease with which shared conceptualisations traverse social domains in some places and bifurcate in others. Whether and how concepts travel through institutions, persons and technologies is always an empirical question. Here, then, is another version of how ideas or concepts travel. Not as overarching frameworks that momentarily and partially encompass their materials, but as ideas that are already embedded in practices, and which are subsequently borrowed, echoed, and translated as they are taken up by others. Might we have another model of knowledge exchange for the social sciences here? What ideational routes might anthropology share with other social sciences, or be actively created for the future through critical engagement with Strathern's work?

Legal theorist Pottage's essay in this special issue – an exemplary exchange of perspectives between anthropology and law – models one such route. Discerning echoes between Strathern's treatment of law as a knowledge practice and early Roman law's conception of law as object as described by the historian Yan Thomas, Pottage suggests that these shared conceptualisations provide the basis for a theorisation of the law within legal studies that would depart from established understandings of the law as an instrument of society. What he argues is that legal technique can be understood as a process by which things and persons are connected in ways that are recognisable within the confines of law itself - that are able to act as effective legal objects within the courtroom. In Roman law, for example, the implicit conventions governing the recognition of legal knowledge, what Strathern might refer to as the "aesthetics" of law, do not require the appearance of intentional criminal actors but the appearance of typified actions to which persons might be attached. In Roman law there was no separate, abstract, domain of society that gave actions their meaning or purpose. Actions were things: "objects and endpoints are not found in nature, ready to be discerned and acted

upon by law through the exercise of cognitive and practical reason, but are instead immanent in the legal operations and transactions that act upon them.” Pottage's point is that while modern law might describe itself and its objects in very different ways, it might nonetheless still be understood as a series of aesthetic operations by which lawyers attempt to create recognisable legal objects. From this perspective society may not be an external context or force that law enacts in practice but an object “immanent within law, and that is constituted by legal technique.” There is, then, a double engagement here with Strathern: in addition to drawing on Strathern’s specific insights concerning legal form, what Pottage enacts and extends so skilfully is a Strathernian technique of analogical enquiry. Invoking Thomas’ conceptualisation of the ‘formularity’ of Roman law as something that ‘was not a vehicle for anything other than itself’, Pottage is able to draw a contrast with anthropological understandings of law, as a means of excavating and re-examining the postulates of anthropological categories of analysis, but also as a means to enact a conversation (between anthropology and law) by way of the analogy. This is where the technique comes into its own: through both drawing the analogy between the different disciplinary understandings *and* locating specific usages of analogy within them, the article provides a prototype of the kind of ‘post-plural comparison’ (Holbraad and Pedersen 2009) that might characterize theory after Strathern.

Discarding familiar theoretical containers may take the form of rediscovering the earlier echos of concepts that still resound today – retooled, so to speak, via their reimagining in a relational way, as potential transacting partners for the illumination of the present (Riles, 2011: 32). This is what we find in Greenhouse’s contribution to this special issue, which represents the conceptual beginnings of what became the anthropology of law as a means of shedding new light on contemporary issues - the relation between culture and law, between human rights and anthropology. In particular Durkheim’s *The Division of Labour in Society* and Malinowski’s *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* are treated as resources for regaining a critical perspective on the way law is able to both foresee and contain the social, the cultural and anthropology. The question addressed by Malinowski was whether the Trobriand Islanders, who had nothing empirically definable as law (i.e. no jural or legislative institutions as such, nor even a definite category *law*), could nonetheless be said to have it. Durkheim, on the other hand, wondered whether law, as something that is otherwise hidden, might be considered the force that ‘makes solidarity visible by symbolizing the collective conscience’ (Greenhouse, this issue). Greenhouse questions the main reception traditions of these works, finding overlooked subtleties in each of their arguments that would require recognition of a ‘secret sympathy’ between their respective contributions. Malinowski’s very use of the term ‘law’ registered the influence of Durkheim, while, if for Durkheim criminal sanctions ‘make the “collective conscience” visible’, for Malinowski, law amounted to ‘the visibility of social structure’ (ibid). Critically, following Durkheim, Malinowski reframes ‘law through social science as an interpretive and critical project that bears directly on the moral self-legitimation of contemporary states’. And, if both seek to ‘somehow take into account local cultures’ (ibid), as in settings and accounts of legal pluralism and disputes over human rights, there is also an instrumentalism common to each. Through their complementary re-reading of anthropology and Roman Law, Greenhouse and Pottage both make law visible as a simultaneously instrumental *and* epistemological project. Thought together with Strathern, their projects might provide a model for considering the ‘culturality of law’, and for complicating the prevalent anthropological characterisation of law as reducible to pragmatism. Greenhouse’s recourse to progenitors of the anthropology of law is poetic, for as she notes elsewhere (2009: 113), ‘figuration[s] from classic social

anthropology' constitute 'a repertoire always nearby in Strathern's narratives of her own reasoning'.

In this special issue, then, we can follow the translations and mediations of Strathern's ideas as they are reproduced in concrete form (academic papers). But the collection does not amount to a new 'social theory' on a different order from the relationship between text and reader that it facilitates. We can talk about Strathernian theory or Foucauldian theory, but we only ever really have those theoretical formulations as they are being enacted, in the texts that we write. The contributors therefore seek to take social theory forward through the genre of 'response' (Riles, 2006) rather than epistemic encompassment. That is, to explore the analogic connections or disruptions that people discover between her ethnographic expositions and the enduring, niggling questions that have framed and motivated their own academic careers.

Conclusion

'My maternal grandmother had a wicked sense of humour and I like to think she has passed it on to me'.

(MS in conversation with Alan Macfarlane, 2009)

Strathern has articulated some of the dangers of thinking that we can move knowledge across disciplines. The risk is that, when interdisciplinarity is invoked as a sign for creativity or accountability it becomes its own yardstick, without attention to the specificity of the knowledge practices in play (2004b: 39). In particular, when disciplines come to stand in for a distinct perspective (e.g. for the cultural as opposed to the economic, or the social as opposed to the scientific), each viewpoint is presented as complete in itself. Knowledge is already in place (ibid.: 5). It is available for management but not for critical engagement (2006). Management involves casting (always) unfinished disciplinary debates aside in order to facilitate the trade and mixture of useful knowledge. Strathern contrasts the interdisciplinary attempt to subordinate differences to unified outcomes to the disciplinary work of creating disagreement and divisions 'as points of growth' (2006: 199). Here, what Strathern calls criticism is crucial: 'the aim of criticism in research is to re-multiply, re-divide, the outcomes of any one particular argument.... Criticism bifurcates; it makes a single account multiple again' (ibid.). If we look for intellectual value in the interdisciplinary encounter, she suggests, neither the image of benign tolerance of parallel perspectives, nor that of trade^{viii} may offer suitable guides.

And yet Strathern might herself be considered an exemplary practitioner of interdisciplinarity. Her interests in bioethics and audit cultures, for example, have led her to engage with the work of social scientists working across the humanities and social sciences. Rather than despair of the new fashion for interdisciplinarity Strathern provides us with a 'research model' for what it might look like (2006). She finds hope in the idea that criticism may not depend on pre-specified undivided or divided origins. Instead we can look to the moments in which differences become an active concern. Differences opened up in the course of interaction, that are established by the contrasting problems people have, might provide the potential for critical engagement and argument rather than anodyne agreement. As Kelly puts it (2011: 72), 'Strathern's use of "analogic reasoning" (1991, 2005a, 2007) reveals how one might build connections between different empirical accounts of the world while preserving their distinct epistemic integrities'. Akin to the anthropologist's immersement in the

relationships and concerns of those they study, this engagement takes the form of a willingness to 'be captured by someone else's work... Critics find themselves drawn – precisely by their own interest – into other people's agendas... To argue with an idea is to be captured by it' (2006: 203, punctuation removed). The uncertainty of the encounter, the lack of pre-specified interests and goals, generates the on-going potential for newly articulated distinctions and arguments. Capture, she suggests, simultaneously involves the marking out of new positions. This explicit commitment to surprise as an affective property of analytic differentiation, we argue, is a distinguishing feature of Strathern's methodological toolkit.

As we have sought to illustrate in this introduction, bifurcated concepts are not suspended at a remove from the material they are 'cut' out of (Strathern 2011; cf. Holbraad & Pedersen 2009). They are not frames. They can only move through, in, and as the materials they bring into relation. The important point for us is that such alternative conceptual topologies set up the possibility for different kinds of exchanges between the social sciences. Acts of bifurcation are not peculiar to anthropology, although the distinctions between self and other, interaction and analysis that are opened up in the ethnographic encounter (the anthropologist's use of concrete relationships to access abstract relationships [Strathern, 2005]) might make anthropologists peculiarly sensitive to them. It is this goal of creating new concepts by discarding our familiar theoretical containers that the contributors to this special issue have sought to borrow from Strathern.

We have suggested that such strategies find a parallel in Strathern's approach to gardening. As Strathern notes (interview with Carsten, this issue), gardening both involves generating order and being open to surprise. Gardeners never know until it has bloomed exactly how their garden will turn out. Rather than buying in new plants, Strathern returns again and again to old ethnographic images from her past fieldwork, or texts that have already been made available by other authors. The point of 'replanting' such texts in her own writings is that they generate new ethnographic moments. By pruning them back, taking cuttings and creating new juxtapositions, revealing hidden analogies between them, these 'old' moments are able to grow again in new, unpredictable directions. Given the 'traditional' role of the anthropologist as provider of context and upholder of 'the social', her 'abstensive' cutting away of the "'thingy" mass' of context as the condition of a mode of comparison that reveals 'uncommon denominators' (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2009: 382) and her suggestion that the concept of society is theoretically obsolete (see Strathern, 1996b) betrays the confidence of a gardener well practiced with her secateurs. In this sense Strathern's texts, like the perennial garden, do not have summed up end points but generate new conceptual shoots and connections.

Gardens, like Strathern's writings, tend not to directly or obviously reflect their authors – the gardener herself tends to be a rather hidden presence. The good English garden is one that demonstrates the capacity of the gardener to tame the natural world at the same time as giving nature enough leeway to 'beam back' so that the garden does not appear simply as a reproduction of a template and has some unique, particular, and enchanting quality.^{ix} The surprising qualities of the garden are experienced as the effect of an external force; the forest that creeps back and resists our efforts at control. We order gardens, prune plants, arrange flowers, water lawns but gardens *grow* themselves.

Gardening, in the English sense, involves the control and transformation of nature in line with aesthetic cultural conventions (flower beds and borders, lawns, flowers and foliage). If Strathern's writings might be considered as gardens, then Strathern appears to revel in the deployment of exactly these kinds of conventions. The analytic techniques she draws on are

well established: analogies, images, comparisons, echos. But she is possibly disingenuous in her claim to be entirely Euro-American (merographic) in her approach to gardening/knowledge production. Unlike the quintessential English gardener, whose efforts are focused on control of their materials and who experiences nature as a surprise that grows back at one, Strathern's precise choreographed control of her materials seems *intentionally oriented* to the generation of surprise. This can be seen, for example, in the almost excessive 'pruning' of her ethnographic images in order to excise familiar similarities and to reveal unintuitive analogies. In other words, her control of her materials appears to go so far as to actively seek unpredictable effects. In this, we suggest, her approach to knowledge production borrows techniques from the Melanesian gardeners she so often invokes.

Daribi gardeners from Papua New Guinea do not simply seek to control their gardens through a domestic division of gardening labour (Wagner, 1975). Such gardens would be considered mundane and unimpressive; they would turn out how everyone might expect. Instead the Daribi gardener must use magic spells that enable the gardener to borrow and channel power from other domains, such as the raking and nesting capacities of the bushfowl, in order to 'make his work more effective' (ibid.: 63), and to create a garden that is uniquely generative (in terms of the food it produces and relations with kin that it furthers). Garia gardeners from another region of Papua New Guinea (Lawrence, 1984), meanwhile, whisper the secret names of spirits into their seedlings in a bid to 'tap' those spirits' powers and make them grow. In other words, Melanesian gardeners actively seek to elicit, through their relationships with one another, spirits and animal worlds, the unique, surprising effects that English gardeners attribute to the external forces of nature.

Strathern's texts appear to borrow from these more 'magical' gardening techniques. Just as Daribi gardeners 'borrow' from bushfowl, so Strathern explicitly borrows from old ethnographic material, other persons' texts and pre-existing resources, to re-enchant contexts (such as kinship) that had come to appear analytically moribund. If she lacks complete control over her plants (other people's ethnographic descriptions, her own ethnographic memories, newspaper reports) it is because they have come from elsewhere. Her texts unfurl and bloom. They do not symbolise or represent social relations (as for example English gardens have been taken to reflect the social class structure), but impress them on the reader through the revelatory staging of analogies, just as a Daribi gardener might hope their harvested garden generates knowledge (of their capacities) in those who eat from it.

Strathern has often claimed to make jokes in her work (2009; 2010b; personal communication) but for those struggling to follow the logic of exposition they might have been hard to spot. We suggest that the joke here takes a quintessentially 'implicit' English form. It might be found not in the content of her work but in its form; in her earnest commitment to Euro-American scholarly convention at the same time as she reveals the grounds of such convention as artifice. The result is the obviation of figure and ground. Her techniques simultaneously order and elicit conceptual growth. In the spirit of her own enquiries, then, this special issue – in anticipation of future analytical relationships - seeks to make incomplete an entity already there.^x

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ⁱ On part-whole relations as a knowledge form see Strathern (1994; 2004a).

ⁱⁱ See, for example, the work of Jean and John Comaroff (1992) on dialectical approaches to anthropology and history.

ⁱⁱⁱ Munro (2005) has similarly noticed the implicit theorisation of coercion in aspects of Strathern's enquiries.

^{iv} Several scholars have pointed out interesting correspondences between the oeuvres of Lévi-Strauss and Strathern (see, for instance, Gell 1999; Viveiros de Castro & Goldman 2009).

^v Copeman (2009) therefore employs the term 'catalytic analogies'.

^{vi} See especially the work of Thomas (1991) and more recently the overview by Scott (2007).

^{viii} In this respect Strathern offers a critique of Galison's 'trading zones' between scientists, which might, she suggests, be a useful model for interdisciplinary problem solving but is not a catch-all for knowledge production.

^{ix} As Gell has pointed out, 'enchantment' is a by-product of our apprehension of artworks or technologies as appearing beyond human capacity and as containing external, magical qualities (Gell, 1992).

^x The reference here is to Strathern's 1993 essay 'Making incomplete' (in particular, p. 48).