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Author

Maurer, Bill

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Lateral Reasons for a Post-reflexive Anthropology

ON JULY 11, 1998, before I had imagined this book, at a time when the research that would comprise it was only beginning to take form, I found myself walking in on a screening of the Frank Capra film, *It's a Wonderful Life*.¹ Prodded by a colleague, I arrived, slightly late, at a conference about Islamic banking. I do not remember what I expected, but I certainly did not expect what I saw.

The founder of a southern California Islamic investment firm was standing next to a television in front of an audience of about three hundred in a large darkened conference room. On the screen, George Bailey, played by Jimmy Stewart, had just hung up the telephone on Henry F. Potter, the richest man in the county. Potter had gained control of the bus lines and the department stores, and had just taken over the local bank. His sights have been set on the Bailey Building and Loan Association for some time. After all, he explained earlier in the film, what is a Building and Loan good for when all it does is lend to people without collateral at low interest rates? "What does that get us? A discontented, lazy rabble instead of a thrifty working class." Sensing opportunity after bailing out the bank, he is eager to take over the Building and Loan, buy up the town's real estate, and sell it back to the good people of Bedford Falls at a profit. At Potter's instigation, the bank has called in the Building and Loan's debt. George's Uncle Billy, without thinking, has handed over all the cash, "every cent of it." And the people of Bedford Falls have rushed to the Building and Loan, passbooks in hand, desperate to get their money and worried that their savings have been wiped out.

George Bailey lingers before a photograph of his father, the founder of the Building and Loan, hung above a plaque with the motto, "All That You Can Take with You Is That Which You Have Given Away." He leaves his office and addresses the nervous people, who are pressed against the tellers' counter. "Now, just remember that this thing isn't as black as it appears." Sirens blare outside, and the people turn away from George for a moment to look out the window, then turn back to him. He explains that Potter has guaranteed the bank's deposits and that the bank will reopen in a week. "But George, I got my money *here*," one replies. "Did he guarantee *this* place?" another demands. George explains that, no, Potter is not guaranteeing the Building and Loan. One of the townspeople, Charlie, says he

wants to cash out his shares, and take his money now. George replies, "No, but you . . . you . . . you're thinking of this place all wrong. As if I had the money back in a safe. The money's not here, why, your money's in Joe's house, that's right next to yours, and in the Kennedy house, and Mrs. Macklin's house and in a hundred others. You're lending them the money to build and then they're gonna pay it back to you as best they can. Now what are you gonna do, foreclose on them?" Charlie insists on getting his money now. Reluctantly, George has him sign some papers and says he'll get it back in sixty days, per their agreement for the original share purchase. Just then, another man runs in and tells the crowd that Potter is offering fifty cents on the dollar, cash, for shares of the Building and Loan, redeemable immediately. "Better to get half than nothing!" someone shouts. A commotion ensues as people clamor for the exit.

George leaps over the counter and puts himself between the people and the door. "I beg of you not to do this thing. If Potter gets hold of this Building and Loan there'll never be another decent house built in this town. . . . Now, we can get through this thing all right. We've got to stick together, though. We've got to have faith in each other." The people respond, "I've got doctor's bills to pay"; "Can't feed my kids on faith!" Just then Mary, George's newlywed bride, shouts from behind the counter, "I've got two thousand dollars!" and holds up a wad of bills. It is the money for their honeymoon. George joins her behind the counter and says, "This'll tide us over until the bank reopens." He proceeds to disburse money, the payments based on people's stated needs ("Could I have seventeen-fifty?" one woman meekly asks) and guaranteed only by George's faith in them.

Six seconds to six o'clock and George has two dollars left. He, Mary, his Uncle Billy, and Cousins Tilly and Eustace count down the seconds and then lock the doors. They have managed to stay in business for one more day. They place the two remaining dollars in a tray, and George offers a toast: "To mama dollar and to papa dollar, and if you want this old Building and Loan to stay in business you better have a family real quick." "I wish they were rabbits," says Cousin Tilly. Holding the tray aloft, they skip and sing, back into the safe.

At this point in the film, the host of the Islamic banking conference paused the videotape player. He pointed to the screen, the images of Jimmy Stewart and company frozen in the middle of their conga-line dance through the office, and said, "This is the first *lariba* movie." There was a murmur in the crowd, a few giggles, some whispering. *Lariba*, Arabic for "no increase," is a term that has been popularized in Islamic banking to refer to the industry's attempts to avoid interest. "You've probably seen it at Christmas," he continued. People laughed at the irony of the statement, myself included. At the time, I did not notice another irony: the juxtaposi-

tion of Cousin Tilly's wish for rabbit-like fecundity of the inert bills in the tray, and the proclamation that the film exhibited a *lariba* sensibility. Much later in my study, however, I would be led to a provisional and contested understanding that the form of increase (*riba*) prohibited in Islamic banking is not always identical to animal-like fecundity, and that the moral discourse on *riba* is not simply the same as the Aristotelian objection to the reproduction of nonliving things recoded as a prohibition of "interest." At least, that was the case for some. As I would also find, the form of the argument about *riba* itself anticipated all the positions one could take on the question of such fecundity. The effect was to feel stranded, without unequivocal closure.

The host explained further that trust in others and faith in the community is the foundation of Islamic banking, and he echoed the words of George's father on the plaque in the Building and Loan office by repeating his own firm's slogan, "The Best of People Are the Most Useful to Others."² "This is what made America," he continued, the screenimage still frozen on the television monitor as he spoke, "and these are the values that have been lost in America, and we're trying to bring them back to America. Our children will be the foundation of Islamic banking in the United States."

The rest of the evening was devoted to formal talks and presentations. One in particular stuck with me. The notable Pakistani economist Khurshid Ahmed mentioned William Greider's (1997) book, *One World, Ready or Not*. He then outlined his own view of global financialization:

Now, instead of money being used for production of physical assets, we have created a monetary world where we are creating claims on claims on claims of assets; options; the financial world has no physical reality. It benefits the rich. In the last few years, how many billionaires have been created? The concentration of wealth and power is taking place. The twentieth century, while a century of growth, prosperity, affluence, is also a century in which the United States has emerged as a world power. In the twenty-first century, we will have to re-discover the role of money for the creation of physical assets—even Mr. Soros sees this now.³ Prosperity must go together with equity, toward a redistribution of wealth and income, and a rediscovery of the productive process. Islamic banking can make a singular contribution to this twenty-first century. (Khurshid Ahmed, American Finance House-Lariba, 5th Annual International Achievement Award Symposium in Islamic Banking, Pasadena, Calif., July 11, 1998)

The events of that evening captured my imagination, from Jimmy Stewart to Depression-era community savings organizations, the critique of the imaginary character of modern money and even the invocation of Greider. I began to form ideas for a research proposal that would explore contemporary alternatives to modern money and finance. This proposal imagined

comparisons between offshore finance, which I had previously studied in the Caribbean (e.g., Maurer 1995, 1997, 2000), Islamic banking, and the alternative currency movement. I was interested in efforts to remake money in the image of community. I knew of the Ithaca, New York, alternative currency experiment because my sister lived there and because an old high school friend now worked for a credit union in town that accepted deposits in Ithaca HOURS, the local currency. I was beginning to read about Islamic banking's efforts to create financial forms and institutions that avoided interest, efforts that sometimes included proposals to remake the money-form itself, since contemporary state-based currencies are bound up with government debt. And I had already been surprised in my Caribbean work by the way financial globalization there often fostered new understandings of identity and community. The research would eventually take me from California to London, Ithaca, St. Lucia in the Caribbean, and Makassar, formerly Ujung Panjang, on the island of Sulawesi, Indonesia. It would also result in my becoming credentialized in Islamic banking, and being invited to speak at an Islamic banking conference by the man who had first introduced me to Jimmy Stewart.

In my research proposal, I was concerned with "comparisons" among Islamic banking, alternative currencies, and offshore finance (bracketed, for the most part, for the purposes of this book). How did participants in alternative financial systems imagine the boundaries of community? How were these boundaries morally charged? What kinds of exclusions did they create? My work in the British Virgin Islands had shown how offshore finance depended upon and sustained deep divisions between citizens and the children of immigrants, divisions that got naturalized and racialized, even as it created new forms of community for British Virgin Islanders. While broadly sympathetic to the alternative financial communities I set out to study, I wanted to remain attentive to the way finance set some people apart as it brought others together. Still, the main thrust of the proposal was an emancipatory one (not least because I was applying for funding from agencies concerned with law and rights): attending to alternative forms of money might provide survival strategies for everyone in the era of financial globalization.

One might be tempted to say that a lot has happened in the domain of money since I began this research. Those happenings include: the Asian and Argentine financial crises; the collapse of Long Term Capital Management; the dissolution and reformation of the major international accountancy firms in the wake of scandal; the Euro; the Enron affair; the introduction of not one, but two new designs for U.S. dollars; the debacle of the U.S. presidential election of 2000; the bursting of the stock market bubble; unprecedented low interest rates and the ballooning of the real estate bubble; the events of September 11, 2001; the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq;

Total Information Awareness. Some of these events impacted the research and writing of this project, although not in ways I might have predicted had I known they were coming. I do not want to engage in any speculative retrospection, however, because these events are all part of the world I am writing within and not sidetracks away from some clearly defined path that I, and others, set out on beginning July 11, 1998.

Of greater concern to me than the effect of these events on this project is the implicit analytical framework that presumes guaranteed trajectories impacted by “external” events. That implicit framework reveals itself in the empirics of any research endeavor and the analyses built “after” them. The charter of field research and the empirical data warranting social analysis became an object of this study almost from the start, as the possibilities of empirical observation and the referencing of an external world through language were made problematic by the money-forms I was trying to study. They were not especially unique or peculiar in this regard. After all, modern money has been the archetype of the problem of the adequation of sign to referent, word to world, *intellectus et res*: how can a piece of paper truly stand for abstract value? Other moneys similarly staged the problem of the adequation of value and object, back as far as the minting of the first coins whose value was “politically authorized” rather than based on their weights or purities (Shell 1982:1). The problem of adequation and reference is also central to analytical abstraction, which generates intellectual interest, and the empirical project, which makes of “raw data” conceptual tender.

In the inductive method of social inquiry, for example, first comes data, then comes analysis. The data preexist and are not contingent on the analysis. Analysis provides the measure of data and the means of its circulation in a community of minds. While it should be second nature since Max Weber to recognize the implication of the questions asked in the facts found, the naively empirical impulse specifying much of what passes for social research remains troublingly central to contemporary inquiry, not least because any inquiry named “social” automatically invests in that moniker a reality, however circumscribed, that is supposedly external to the inquiry itself, despite all protestations to the contrary (slogans like, “What distinguishes the social from the natural sciences is that in the former the researcher is part of the reality researched”). No matter how implicated we are in the worlds we analyze, no matter what the objective limits of objectivism or the complicity between ourselves and our subjects, the empirical impulse absorbs the reflexive one by means of a perspectivalism that is additive to, not transformative of, the empirical project.⁴ We add new views to the subject, or listen to other voices; in this modality of reflection, reflexivity thus facilitates the discovery of more and more data. It does not fundamentally refigure the practices delineating the interior and exterior of inquiry—the observer and the observed, the sensorium and the sensed—

Cultural studies of finance hark back to the writings of George Simmel (1907), who postulated that money in capitalist society can provide both a bedrock for social relationships and an acid eroding all vestiges of community. As Turner summarizes, “[B]y making interpersonal relations more abstract, money . . . undermine[d] the traditional world in which power was manifest in terms of overt interpersonal dependency” (1986:99). Simmel’s vision was of a world that had undergone a shift from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*, from communities based on face-to-face relationships, mechanical solidarity, and interpersonal trust to a society based on organic solidarity, the division of labor, and the impersonal relationships of monetary transactions. In such a world, Simmel proposed, social cohesion would be possible only if money, the cornerstone of social relationships in capitalist society, were fixed, stable, rational, and objective. Simmel proposed a dialectical relationship between money and social stability: only in “stable” societies where interpersonal trust was valued and enforced by law would money acquire stability; money’s stability would then work like a cement to maintain social stability, and solidify the rule of law over the rule of “men.”

Building on Simmel, Susan Strange (1986) has taken the end of Bretton Woods and the rise of floating and uncertain exchange rates as causal for the end of social and economic stability, giving rise to what she terms, following Keynes, “casino capitalism” (Keynes 1935). Like Strange, other contemporary commentators on the end of Bretton Woods and the apparent disorganization of international finance have argued that along with these changes has come a breakdown of “trust,” a decline in interpersonal interaction in a financial sphere dominated by new information technologies and computer software that the *New York Times* calls, in its own gee-whizzy spin on Keynes’s metaphor, “Nintendo capitalism” (Hershey 1996; see Harvey 1989).

not even by “participation,” which also presumes a subsequent extraction of the researcher from the researched and a retreat to the study, and denies the contorted chronometric of memory and the mutual spatiotemporal intrusions of field and study (Strathern 1999).

The text above comes from the grant proposal that inaugurated my inquiry into alternative financial forms. The proposal centered on the possibilities afforded by alternative finance for a new “ground” to contemporary money, and was written in dialogue with the political economy of the post-Bretton Woods era (e.g., Helleiner 1994; Strange 1986). At the time, I viewed these alternatives as effects of or responses to the end of fixed exchange rates, and the apparently novel hyperreality of contemporary monetary instruments. There was an explicit temporal and developmental trajectory, too: from money made by fixed rates (*f1*) and a stable society (*s*) to money made by floating rates (*f2*) and a nervous condition, a nonsociety (*⌘*). The social stood for order. Casino capitalism eroded trust and brought disorder. The people I had decided to “study,” “my informants,” would be people who tried to settle that nervousness by regrounding money in an *x*:

faith, community, jurisdiction. My work proceeded from the causal assumptions that $f1$ generated s and $f2$ eroded it into $\$$, the temporal assumption that $f2$ followed $f1$, and that therefore $\$$ followed s . (Whether s could be located just before Simmel's time or during the Bretton Woods regime was left as ambiguous as it was in the work of international political economy scholars.) The first question the research would answer was whether alternative financial forms effected a reverse transformation, from $\$ \rightarrow s$, via a third form of money (call it $f3$) at least locally or in some circumscribed sense for the participants, if only in their fantasies. And the second was whether the x s people used to reground money ($f3$) in the social would create new inequalities or instabilities, or in fact would "work," and create a new social world (call it u , for utopia) that exceeded the first with its emancipatory potential. One or the other. The research endeavor would proceed, thus: First, solve for x ; then, see if x makes a u ; finally, measure the liberatory potential of u : does it make more or fewer people more or less "free?"

If, after all, anthropology is not a quest for an accurate description of a social reality, but a "scale model of all the mistakes to be made in figuring [it] out," and if those mistakes are already anticipated by the social reality "under" investigation (Wagner 2001:xiii), the temporal and causal assumptions in the grant proposal would be made to run backward from the answers they presuppose. Another way of putting this is to say that the proposal would be made to wait for some missing term to complete it in a contingent future.⁵ Anthropology would then be a practice of lateral reading and writing, neither descriptive nor explanatory but repetitive, multiplicative, and/or accelerative.⁶ Not only do the assumptions already run in both directions in Simmel, of course (nervous moneys make nervous societies and nervous societies make nervous moneys); this very operation was already perceived by people in the social worlds I chose to study (some of whom, it turns out, chose to study anthropology in advance of our encounter). The grant proposal started from Simmel's theories of money and community; Islamic bankers and local currency proponents started from some very Simmel-sounding theories of money and community, too. Study and field intruded into each other when, in interview situations, I was repeatedly presented with reading lists to work through "before" the "real" interview would take place. My assignments included Marcel Mauss, William Greider, Lewis Solomon, Margrit Kennedy, Janet Fitchen, and Simmel himself, among others. They are all to be found in the bibliography of this book. The bibliography could be said to be an expanded interview transcript, "raw data."

My anthropological training also became a resource for many of the people I talked to. I had expertise in "primitive" or "natural" economies; I knew about "gift exchange"; I understood "barter." In Indonesia, my

knowledge of Islamic banking in the United States was taken as knowledge of Islamic banking in the abstract, although Indonesia was often the presumed universal standard for everything else in these conversations (as one interlocutor asked me, “What’s the English word for *fleksibel*?” and another, “Do they have horses in America?”). My knowledge was useful, too, as it provided points of comparison with contemporary practices as well as, possibly, new techniques or new ideas to try out in other contexts. At the same time, however, people often imagined those contexts as in the past, a past to which they wanted to effect a return. This would be a return to a world before the modern separation of fact and value, economy and society. For some, living in the world of Islamic banking and alternative currency was *already* life in a world “before.” In proposing and living in a world before the modern settlement (Latour 1999) that has separated off domains like nature and culture, religion and economy, even as hybrids of these domains continually proliferate, they also objectified this prior world as such, denying its intercalation with the present world. They did so even as they made new hybrids that folded past and present together in the projects they were attempting to live now: the Islamic economy, and the natural barter economy. And they did so even as they waited for an uncertain future to provide whatever might be necessary to complete their project and make it truly universal.

For example, people I met thought they were living in a natural barter economy, and at the same time objectified it as an “economy,” if only when they contrasted it to a commodity economy. Yet actively living the barter economy—“before” it could even be conceptualized as “an economy” or as “barter”—should lie in the way of or prevent any idea or enactment of a commodity economy or, indeed, an economy as such. One could “invest in” or “believe in” barter, as one could in Islamic banking. “I believe pretty strongly in barter,” a woman in Ithaca told me, “because barter relationships historically have been direct.” Another Ithacan mused, “That connection between the economy and community, yeah, we were early [on] saying that, anthropologically, you cannot separate the two.” The sundering of economic value and human values is supposed to be overcome in direct, unmediated barter exchange; yet the negation of the separation between value and values underwrites the very separation it aims to unsettle, and the aim itself obviates the actual life within whatever commodity economies imagine true barter to be.

Now, one critical response might be simply to state that people who think they are living in a natural barter economy today are participating in an identity project, one legible in only capitalist imaginaries, and little else. Less charitably, one might dismiss them as naïve. Yet taken as a knowledge project, their intellectual move is reminiscent of the operations of an anthropology that tried to enframe other ways of being only after the fact of

having specified the division between worlds that can produce anthropologies of other worlds, and those other worlds, which by definition cannot produce anthropologies. The aim of producing a “total” description of another cultural world obviates actual life within whatever the world that spawned anthropology imagines those other worlds to be. The Ithaca HOUR, the local alternative currency in Ithaca, New York, is supposed to facilitate barter by providing a means of exchange tied to labor time. It “helps people with something to trade find each other,” I was told. Yet its very form—as paper money—interrupts that aim. A resident of Ithaca who had gradually stopped using HOURS explained that the currency experiment should have been like “disappearing task forces,” which “come together, are formulated and . . . then they just disband when they’ve served their purpose.” If you were really living in “barter,” your mode of being would be the end in itself, and would exist in relation only to itself rather than some external good.

There was a temporal incongruity, a present living in a past-contingent tense, a past that did not “happen” not least because it was, for some, “still” present but also ~~and at/in~~ the same time it was a potential not realized in “the” past. Islamic banking emanated from scriptural sources and medieval contractual forms that were not necessarily realized or revealed in the past in the manner in which they had been “recuperated” in the present. Alternative currencies engage Marcel Mauss or Paul Bohannan more than they do the Trobrianders or the Tiv, or, rather, the Trobrianders and the Tiv whose precontact ontologies are legible only after their anthropological textualization (that is, only after “contact” and its subsequent erasure). From some people, these past contingencies provoked charges of fakeness or insincerity against those who would attempt to live them: they represented an inauthentic Islam, they approached counterfeiting, they were self-serving not community-serving, or they produced false societies with an unclarity at their core. Indeed, in Indonesia, an expression used to describe Islamic banking was *tidak jelas*, not clear.

The grant proposal assumed that the financialized world economy and its alters were separate and separable entities; it presumed the same of the researcher and the social. Yet, as discussed in chapter 1, Islamic banking, alternative currencies, and “the economy” are densely intertwined. Which was the precondition for the others? The end of Bretton Woods and the oil price rises that flooded the world with petrodollars, for example, co-occurred with a new quest for purity on the part of wealthy Middle Eastern Muslims seeking a means to clear consciences, give alms, and spiritually renew themselves. Muslims suddenly with lots of spare cash. To the extent that petrodollars and Islamic finance sustained one another, the global financialization that has preoccupied political economists in many disciplines can be said to have been Islamic from the start. Meanwhile, floating exchange and floating

interest contain within themselves fixed exchange and no interest: the float can remain constant, and the rate can fall to zero. Indeed, in the course of my research, the latter occurred, at the point where the interest rate crossed the inflation rate and the United States's economy became interest-free, for some interbank lending, at least. Whether or not it was thus *lariba* became a matter of intense debate, a debate that hinged on whether *riba* is equivalent to "interest," and whether this kind of equivalence as an operation of abstraction is even permissible in Islamic banking. To the extent that Islamic finance is constituted by these kinds of debates, what has been called the financialization of the world economy after the end of Bretton Woods is thus always-already "Islamic banking and finance."

And Islamic banking and Ithaca HOURS were also always in advance the internal ground of comparison for each other, but not always and not without contention, remainder, or confusion. Midway through the research I became fascinated with small gold coins circulating in the city of Makassar on the island of Sulawesi in Indonesia. These coins occupy chapter 5. Tracing their origins, as a good anthropologist would, I found them to sit at the intersection of an ongoing conversation among a set of Islamic bankers interested in creating a global Islamic alternative currency, who had visited Ithaca, New York, to sit at the feet of the master architect of Ithaca HOURS in order to learn how to make a money. The World Gold Council, an international trade organization, got wind of their efforts and copied them, marketing gold coins to people in majority Muslim countries as a means of "interest-free" saving for the purposes of making the pilgrimage to Mecca. In Indonesia, the coins were distributed by the state-run national pawnshop. And, at the time of my research, counterfeits were beginning to circulate, as well.

Islamic banking and Ithaca HOURS became necessary to one another in my own efforts to restage what I saw them doing. They do not "represent" each other or "shed light" on each other so much as they draw on each other—but only sometimes, contingently and laterally. They metastasize into one another, but that metastasis is not essential to either of them, nor is it causal. For each overlaps and interconnects with other things, too. People in the worlds this book attempts to restage are sometimes racked with doubt about their endeavors in the domain of money and finance, but not always. The two "cases" do not automatically suggest each other, either. At every step my effort to "compare" got interrupted by the form of that which I was "comparing." For example, the obvious comparisons with which I started held that one of the cases was explicitly religious and Islamic, one secular or perhaps implicitly religious and Christian; one was global, one extremely local; one is very serious and important, the other is basically a joke. But as those gold coins made explicit, at every move my efforts to describe or to explain the worlds I was participating in felt false.

Where the comparison was concerned, which was serious and which the joke? Which religious and which secular? The comparative coordinate system folded back into itself. The descriptions unraveled as their words slipped away from any referents and instead revealed the tropes of Islamic banking, alternative currencies, and my inquiry as open and unsteady. This is a familiar enough experience in anthropology and has to do with the work of translation. But it was all the more troubling because the operations of Islamic banking, alternative currencies, and my analysis leaned heavily on even as they cut across the formula of *adequatio intellectus et res*, the bringing-into-relation of words and things and the problem of referentiality that has supposedly structured the money-form, the work of translation, and the analytical enterprise itself. If “the concepts we have settle for us the form of the experience we have of the world,” as Peter Winch (1958:15) famously wrote, here was a profoundly *unsettling* set of cases.

ISNAD: OR, ANALYTICAL MESHES

From Clifford Geertz’s reading of Wittgenstein, anthropology learned to look for publicly enacted meanings and their uses rather than remain bound to certain cognitivist fallacies concerning the nature of mind and symbol. As Geertz wrote, “culture consists of socially established structures of meaning in terms of which people do such things as signal conspiracies and join them or perceive insults and answer them” (1973:12–13). The task of anthropology is to help “find our feet” when the understanding of such structures of meaning fails, and to “formulate the basis on which one imagines . . . one has found them” (p.13). Fieldwork in this mode of inquiry “existed inside another form of life” and metaphors of boundary crossing or culture brokering dominated the disciplinary endeavor (Marcus 1999:97), as did the literary and epistemological device of “thick description,” which conjured a relation between anthropological inquiry and a “real” ground and texture of social life captured by anthropologists’ use of anecdotes, rendered “raw” data, “a note in a bottle” (Geertz 1973:9).

Criticisms of Geertz focused mainly on the question of totality or wholeness performed by those textual devices, yet often have been framed in terms of getting down to a more “real” ground of social life—to conflicts, for example, that put into question shared, public meanings (a move that is ironic given Geertz’s own emphasis on conflict)—or to something called “political economy.” After the disciplinary critiques of the 1980s, many anthropologists, tired of the demands of textual reflexivity for anthropological practice, have either absorbed the critique by proffering move “voices,” or negated the critique by getting “back to business,” collecting empirical facts and documenting daily realities, eschewing the “wholes” of

systems of meanings embodied in symbols perhaps but proffering ever more promissory bottle-bound notes. The reflexive turn tended to query the “I” but not the “there” in the old textual formulas establishing the ethnographer’s presence in the field. Even the critique of the spatial formations of anthropological knowledge left relatively untouched the empirical ground of the discipline, the kinds of data that would be brought to bear on its reformulated questions (Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

Lingering over the contorted temporalities of alternative money and finance, and the hybrid forms that instituted them, led me to question the empiricist impulses of my initial inquiry. For an anthropology only recently recovered from the self-criticisms of the 1980s, the impulse to get back to the empirical is strong indeed. Recognizing the practical difficulty of delineating “cultures” has not obviated the attempt to listen in on “other voices in other rooms” (Geertz 2000:247). Difference is still the stock in trade of the discipline, and difference is still locked into the local and the empirically accessible. The traditional view of difference—of “alternative” currencies, for example—posits a sort of numerical multiplicity in the objective world. For example: There are many “different” currencies. The anthropological record is full of money-forms (brass rods, shells, stones, letters of credit). Yet “alternative” in this sense is difference of one *kind*: infinite multiplicity of the same: many cultures, many moneys, but still “culture” and “money.” Many voices, many views, no closure implied by their anthropological entextualization—but still “voices,” and “views.” The perspective is quantitative and enumerative (bourgeois, even). Data exist in the world to be counted, classified and sorted, and every factum is a datum; yet they are still “facts” and “data.”⁷

Another view of difference—which unsettles even the difference between “views” specified in this manner, not to mention the very distinction between difference and sameness—places it not within the realm of the empirical but that of the potential. Here, difference has a temporal character; it “appears in pure duration” as an “internal multiplicity of succession, of fusion, or organization, of heterogeneity, of qualitative discrimination, or of *difference in kind*: it is a *virtual and continuous* multiplicity that cannot be reduced to numbers” (Deleuze 1988:38, original emphases). Gilles Deleuze borrowed Henri Bergson’s examples from the experience of consciousness, where “a complex multiplicity such as a feeling may contain a number of elements imperfectly perceived, but once these elements are distinctly perceived by consciousness, the feeling inevitably changes its nature as a result” (Patton 2000:36). Multiplicity or difference arises from “changes in nature at each moment of the division, without any one of these moments entering into the composition of the other” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:483). What Deleuze calls “virtual” realities are thus “actualized by being differentiated” (Deleuze 1988:97). Virtual reality is to be

distinguished from possible reality, the latter always taking the form of the real while the former's actualization puts into question that prefiguration as it continually multiplies. This would be alternative not in the sense of numerical multiplicity, then, but alternative in another sense of the word's Latin root, *alternāre*, oscillating in time, like alternating current in an electric wire.

Alternāre changes the charge of the anthropological form of difference as incommensurability or irreducibility; it stops its circulation as coin of the anthropological realm only to accelerate it, such that difference/sameness circulates all over, but not as one would predict in advance without those missing terms from the future that may arrive, or may not. This is not difference and repetition, then, but difference and substitution, where substitution trucks in homologies, samenesses whose difference the act of substitution re-stages. This book, then, is an effort to create a form that will elicit debates homologous to those that accelerate/alternate in the worlds it "de-scribes," it unwrites. It connects the electric wire to you, the reader. It runs those currencies through you, only to demonstrate that you were always-already laterally connected. This meanwhile opens up the circuit itself. Thus, the eclecticism of this text is not of a piece with 1990s experiments in ethnographic writing: the point is not just juxtaposition for the sake of unsettling the narrative flow, but that *as well as* an unsettling of the very familiarity of that device. My eclecticism in this text—from the pattern of citation to the use of inset text boxes and the like—parallels that of those whom I "studied" but also is intertwined with their use of similar textual devices and patterns of citing authority. The point here is the achievement of a homology of form, and, at the same time, a ramping up of the kinds of textual achievements of my interlocutors. It is not strictly parallel or homologous, then, but also densely laterally enmeshed and accelerated, speeded up, so that the enmeshments encountered in the field can be replicated and heightened in the space-time of a reading of this book.

Bergson's engagement with questions of the possible was directed toward placing intuition alongside (and probably above) speculative inquiry. "*Objects and facts* have been carved out of reality. Philosophy must get back to reality itself," he wrote (1911: 239, original emphasis). Yet philosophy had sought to reintegrate those objects and facts, arranging experience for the "facility of action and of language" (p. 240) rather than of true experience itself. That arrangement permitted philosophy to reserve for itself the privileged position of the arbitrator of means of accessing truth and at the same time the privileged position of recognizing its own fragility. "If metaphysic is only a construction, there are several systems of metaphysic equally plausible, which consequently refute each other, and the last word must remain with a *critical* philosophy, which holds all knowledge to be relative and the ultimate nature of things to be inaccessible to the mind"

(p. 24, original emphasis). Anthropology, of course, has held the position of just such a critical philosophy for some time, as critiques of anthropological relativism have made clear. I am interested in a double move: First, what would it mean for anthropology to become intuitive in Bergson's sense, or to truck in the differences of Deleuze's virtual realities?⁸ Then, what would it mean for anthropology to *question* the familiarity with and stabilizing effect of presently unfamiliar notions like becoming, intuition, and the virtual that might result from such trade?

This book proposes answers by means of its own performance. It has diverse affinities, each of which continually undercuts the others. One key affinity is with the seductions of Actor Network Theory and the work of figures like Bruno Latour and Michel Callon, who provide a freedom to trace networks that contingently concatenate subjects, objects, natures, cultures, words and worlds. The analytical difficulty of such entanglements, however, is that they can take on verbs, and once they do, they can become subjects. They can then be specified in grant proposals and identified in the world as empirical facts, possibilities that prefigure a real that is given in advance. Latour's realism is problematic for the same reason that it is so useful: refusing the separation of ontology from epistemology opens up the innumerable black boxes that warrant "reality," but it does so in terms of that refusal's own agnosticism. When entanglement, networks, and the like are employed to name a phenomenon in the world, they assume an externality to the nominator and reinstitute knowledge as empirical and instrumental, aiming at something—a more complete picture—for a community of knowers. This picture includes as agentive the natural, the non-human, and the material rather than taking them as that which "the work of social construction works upon" (Mitchell 2002:2); but by expanding the field of reference and action to infinite horizons it has the potential to augur the untangled human observer and the now infinitely vaster field of empirical data ready to be explored.⁹ In this respect, any inquiry that would employ Actor Network Theory as a theory would do well to heed Latour's own admonition that the data are not given, but rather achieved (Latour 1999:42). In other words, the point is not to identify entanglements and name them when you see them, but to obviate that very move as the analysis proceeds and to remain very much *within* that procession. Tentatively, then, I am supplementing Wittgenstein's aphorism, "not empiricism yet realism" (1983:325) thus: "not empiricism, not realism yet virtualism."

For Latour, reference is not a problem of the adequation of word and thing, because human and nonhuman practices link form and matter in an infinite series of transformations and recursions. The "gap" between language and the world is reconfigured by the circulations of momentarily stabilized words and things, mediations that generate other words and things, naming and becoming new, effective, realities. Thus, for Latour,

“There is truth and there is reality, but there is neither correspondence nor *adequatio*. To attest to and guarantee what we say, there is a much more reliable movement—indirect, crosswise, crablike—through successive layers of transformations” (Latour 1999:64), redistributing words and things along a reversible chain “transport[ing] truth:” “*The word ‘reference’ designates the quality of the chain in its entirety*, and no longer *adequatio rei et intellectus*. Truth-value *circulates* here like electricity through a wire, so long as this circuit is not interrupted” (Latour 1999:69, original emphasis).¹⁰

The chain of reference extends infinitely in either direction and presumably wraps around again (to eat its own tail?) in order for the circuit to be complete. Latour’s electric current metaphor is of course richly evocative, not least because ancient coins derived their value wholly from the *electrum* of which they were made, and not from any inscriptions the coins carried: *adequatio* was not the issue there, either, until the Lydians, according to Herodotus, simultaneously instituted coinage backed by political authority and the tyranny that accompanied it (Shell 1978:12).

It is, rather, the circuit that is the problem. The chain’s infinite expanses seem to close in on themselves, less “indirect, crosswise, crablike” than other spatiotemporal or faunal formations, like the radially of, say, starfish or sand dollars. The last are particularly important, for their pentamerous homological form is belied by their radical underdetermination: unlike their echinodermatic brethren, their five sections are not perfectly homologous but are often irregular¹¹—radiality without any center, pentamery without any universal cover of law (Cartwright 1999:6).¹² Crabs move crosswise, while echinoderms’ movements challenge even linearity’s others.

Circulating reference’s reference to circulation allows the abstraction and stabilization of circulation itself as a new social problematic. Latour’s goal is a realism that is perhaps too real for comfort, and can become of a piece with new social imaginaries of circulation that recapitulate old teleologies and dialectics. “Economics owes its present appeal,” we are told, “partly to the sense that it, as a discipline, has grasped that it is dynamics of circulation that are driving globalization” (Lee and LiPuma 2002:191). And social analysis had better catch up. “[C]irculation is a cultural process with its own forms of abstraction, evaluation, and constraint, which are created by the interactions between specific types of circulating forms and the interpretive communities built around them” (p. 192). This is a setup: the form of the argument leads to the quest for comparisons (with “non-capitalist circulations” for example, or the sorts of “alternatives” explored in this book) and the specification of those forms of abstraction, evaluation, and constraint. This is useful as far as it goes, but it reinstitutes narratives of transition (from production-centered to circulation-centered . . .) and leaves unquestioned the most tantalizing aspect of its unconscious desire: finding a representation *adequate* to a reality for *another* interpretive com-

munity—the intellectual or analytical one. If, as Nigel Thrift has argued, “there is no intellectual community which can be separated off from other communities, in which the intellectual community has the power to decode the world, whilst all the other communities just slope ignorantly about” (Thrift 1996:22), these interpretive communities must include the analysts and their objects, intercalated, networked together, who are circulating reference and circulated by it, each performing the others in a dance of multitudes where *adequatio* is not the only step in town.

This book attempts to take “the enmeshed condition as the starting point” (Sykes 2003:163). It takes seriously “the complexity of what we name in order to escape complexity” (Thrift 1996:16). In addition to Actor Network Theory, this book thus has affinities with Nigel Thrift’s “nonrepresentationalist style” of inquiry. By “style,” Thrift stresses he is not trying to build a new overarching theory that will provide the critical metalanguage adequate to the world. Rather, he is after “a means of *valuing* and *working with* everyday practical *activities* as they occur” (Thrift 2000:216, original emphasis). This is a style “after words,” in both senses: subsequent to the failed quest for that metalanguage, and at the point where language fails because its formula of adequation has no longer got the monopoly in the market for truth.

Webb Keane has asked, “Have we even now escaped the ontological division of the world into ‘spirit’ and ‘matter’?” (Keane 2003a:409)? The difficulty of escape has to do with the very imperative. Why escape at all? My strategy in this book is to follow the movements of Ithaca HOURS and Islamic banking, which sometimes attempt the escape into another realm of signification and value without a universal cover of law, yet other times are fundamentally bound up with the logic of value brought about by the operations of adequation and abstraction to and from a “material” reality. They alternate between one and the other, never settling on a stable resting point, never fully closing off the conversation, the circulation, or the analysis, and certainly never resolving into a new synthesis. For Islamic banking, this motion without endpoint itself can constitute virtue: the point is not to mirror the divine or try to come up with a practice adequate to it, but rather to continually engage in the work of doing and being and becoming, work that itself is virtuous practice. Judgment comes not from where you are in the end, but from what you’re doing along the way. Trying is good enough.¹³

The problem is the pull of modes of inquiry that rightly eschew but then take the form of description, which, under the sign of the operations of *adequatio*, already prefigures explanation and explanandum—the facts in the world and the description after it. I am after something else (I follow in time something else, too, as that which I am after has already preceded me in the field’s encounter with the study and the study’s encounter with the

field):¹⁴ neither description as such, nor explanation as such, but dense lateralizations with objects and subjects that are already densely lateralized with each other and with the thing I call me and my work. By taking the space of this text to enact these lateralizations in the time of your reading, I am not intending to claim that a new analytical category—the lateral—is adequate to a new or recently discovered lateralized reality. The point is rather an extension and acceleration of the lateralizations and their durative potentialities, enacted in the mutual yet limited engagement between the writing and the reading.¹⁵

So, for example, from time to time I lean on a series of anthropological and other interlocutors in order to build an argument. Figures like Bruno Latour, Roy Wagner, Marilyn Strathern, Gilles Deleuze, Marc Shell, John Locke, and C. S. Peirce constitute a series of chains of narration underlying the claims of my current venture, my *isnad* (pl. *asanid*), an Islamic banker might say: the chain of authority warranting my text back to some imagined ultimate source. At the same time, I am wary of the fact that the multiple and sometimes intertwining *asanid* are not always mutually reinforcing. They sometimes cavort promiscuously with one another; the results are sometimes barren, sometimes fertile, sometimes to one side of the logic of the relation warranting kinship, knowledge and chains of proof. The Arabic word *isnad* has other metaphorical possibilities: a mesh, a network; leaning, dependence; and trust. Never really secure in the knowledge that a story from the life of the Prophet is “authentic,” practitioners must rely on the science of judgment to weigh *asanid* while trusting the safety net subtending the activity itself.

LATERAL ASSEMBLAGES FOR A POST-REFLEXIVE ANTHROPOLOGY

This book is not after descriptive adequacy or a new “theory” of signs and their relation to or constitution of worlds. Rather, it restages others’ attempts to make words adequate to worlds as they also conduct other activities very much to one side of those efforts in the meantime. The effect is an oscillation (*alternāre*) between adequation and other modes of praxis. This book tries to replicate and accelerate that oscillation.¹⁶ It does not seek to “describe cultures” so much as to place the effort to so do in the same frame as that which takes for granted cultural difference and the knowledge apparatuses that it warrants.

Marilyn Strathern’s rereading of Maurice Leenhardt’s ethnography, *Do Kamo* (1979) is suggestive in this regard. Leenhardt addressed his reader directly:

To understand what I am writing here, it is necessary to visualize the Melanesian social landscape [Il faut, pour comprendre ce que j’écris ici, avoir sous les yeux

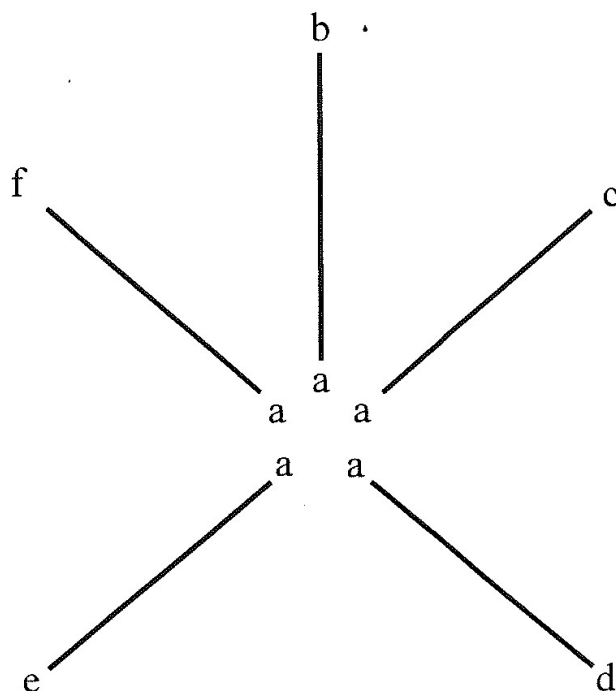


Figure 1. "The personage located by means of his relationships" (After Leenhardt 1979, fig. 12, p. 154)

le paysage social mélanésien; Leenhardt 1947:249]. A young man is never encountered alone but always in a united group of 'brothers' maintaining the same relationships as a unit with other groups. Even in their amorous adventures, they dread being alone. . . . In fact, all adopt the same personage in these groups; they *are* the same personage. If we look at nouns designating individuals in present-day languages, we find collective terms. *Pamara*, the uterine nephew, is in fact a plural. (Leenhardt 1979:154, emphasis added)

Leenhardt here introduced a diagram (figure 1).

He wrote, then, inserting his own perceptual apparatus into the text, that "it is apparent that we can put several *a*'s on our sketch and call them replicas of the body of one personage. . . . And I see that *a* does not correspond to a unique human body but to *all* the bodies of brothers and sisters in the same social positions. . . . Their social reality is not *in* their body but in this empty place where they have their names and which corresponds to a relationship" (p.154, emphasis added).

Taking Leenhardt seriously and truly attempting to see with him the "social landscape," one could multiply the *a*'s and the web of lines, except that doing so would suggest that each letter represents one individual human body, which is not what there is to be seen. Each *a* is a replica of the body of one personage, and at the same time a group of similar people. The *a* thus cannot be captured by the logic of empirical observability and

specification. It could never properly be “*sous les yeux*.” It is a virtual object, its duration and becoming are what generate interest, and what cannot be seen or represented on the page. It is interesting that Leenhardt introduces this discussion by addressing the reader in the same temporal frame as his writing, in the present continuous tense, stressing the act of his writing in a present time with the reader, and replicating the durative sense of Melanesian becomings in his very book. As Strathern writes, his only “mistake” (her word) had to do with that “empty place,” his only error “was to conceive of a center at all” (Strathern 1988:269). Refusing the structure of error, I would simply add that his language lies alongside others, where mistakes can be made and where the very idea of a mistake can be obviated by multiple and polyvalent emergences.

One could see these Melanesian worlds as analogous to the lateralizations I am proposing here: radiality without a center, and so forth. The analogic, however, sets up its own series of relations and divisions to worlds “out there” and presumes the ends it supposedly seeks to find. If “relations are not the object of a representation, but the means of an activity” (Deleuze 1991:120), the practical unfolding of the activity takes precedence over the specification and stabilization of relations. Not empiricism, not realism, yet virtualism. The effort of this book is not, however, to resist analytical moves that would draw analogies or identify homologies, but rather to allow such moves to lie alongside others without any synthetic or absorptive metatheoretical rubric to bring them under one sign of law. As with Deleuze, the effort is to displace the dialectic modality of reason or adequation, which is difficult because “breaking with” dialectics is at the same time a “central tenet” of the dialectic (Butler 1987:184). Difference and repetition in the Deleuzian sense replaces “hypotactic subsumptions” with “paratactic conjunctions” (Boundas 1991:8), or, the relation of opposition and dialectical tension and synthesis with the unspecified and open-ended “relation” of mere conjunction—the “and,” the principle of seriation that neither supposes nor denies relations of opposition, causality, analogy, homology, resemblance, or any other among its terms, “making possible convergence and compossibility as well as . . . divergence and resonance” (p. 184). For Deleuze, this *is* empiricism, of the sort Bergson sought through intuitionism, but I am not willing to stake a claim for it as any more or less accessible to the senses or more or less reflective of a real reality than other forms of empiricism. Revising Wittgenstein’s formula further, then: from “not empiricism yet realism,” to “not empiricism, not realism, yet virtualism,” I would add, “empiricism . . . realism . . . virtualism . . .,” the ellipses standing in for the paratactic conjunction of practical activity. The question is not of the rationalities subtending such an activity, but of lying alongside and proceeding in time with formations with which such activity is impossibly

linked. Hence the title of this book, *Mutual Life, Limited*. It is the mutual yet limited nature of living together, alongside, humans and sand dollars and things and words and living and nonliving objects and everything in between—like money—that this book sets out to perform.

“To understand what I am writing here . . .,” Leenhardt began. Perhaps his only problem, his generative nonerror, was his verb tense, present continuous and thus really in the world, not past contingent continuous and thus virtually there. Going through the motions, we just might discover what anthropology would have been becoming all along.

THE POINT IS TO EXCHANGE IT

Chapter 1 enacts the difficulties in attempting to specify the subjects of Islamic banking and alternative currencies, and documents my ethnographic voyages through various means of doing so.¹⁷ One strategy would be to argue that there are many “Islamic bankings” and “alternative currencies,” and that my work is concerned with only a particular slice or certain species. That move, however, denies the universal reach these phenomena sometimes claim for themselves, and it also freezes in time the unfolding of these experiments in a way that closes off their own analytical potential. Scholars of Islamic banking and alternative currencies who differentiate themselves from participants will no doubt be frustrated and annoyed with this chapter, as it continually undercuts explanations of the “origins” of these phenomena and wanders widely over their topographically complex terrain rather than cutting one path. Participants in Islamic banking and alternative currencies may be frustrated by my undisciplined lateralizations and the interrelationships I sketch. Yet they will probably be familiar with the picture that emerges, even if in their own work they continually attempt to purify or prune the branches of the bush that currently comprises their movements. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the possibility of alternative economies.

Chapter 2 turns to matters of law and belief, documenting the case law warranting Ithaca HOURS and describing, after a fashion, the jurisprudential practices of Islamic economics and Islamic banking. It does so in order to address the charge that alternative currencies and Islamic banking are “fake,” somehow not really real, a joke, an ideological smoke screen, or what-not. These charges pivot around the question of meaning: do Ithaca HOURS and Islamic banking really mean anything at all? Writing against utilitarian approaches to meaning, I argue that the continual emergence of such questions obviates the definition of truth as adequation of reference to reality and thereby sits in the way of conventional descriptive and analytical trajectories. This obviation allows other work to trundle along, in the meantime.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the temporalities of Ithaca HOURS and Islamic banking, and the promise of a perfect market that each offers. It looks at the logics of economic maximization proffered in some circles and queries the possibility of alternative values “under” capitalism. It also traces people’s use of figures like Mauss to imagine alternative exchange, and, by placing Melville’s short story, “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” alongside some Indonesian texts, queries the impossible temporalities of the gift: past contingents, and future conditionals on which current practices depend.

Chapter 4 places Islamic mutual fund purification techniques alongside farmers’ market transactions in Ithaca HOURS in order to open up the quantification procedures going on in each, and to point toward the relationship between abstraction, commodification, and number that these currencies restage. It attempts to suspend the logic of adequation and quantification by introducing that of substitution and another kind of numerology, one that rotates around substitutable units rather than the algebraic operation of setting sums to zero in order to “solve for x .” Accepting money to pose the problem of abstraction, the chapter argues, is a roadblock to inquiry that nonetheless is necessary for other work to take place—the work of exchange itself.

Chapter 5 and chapter 6 are more firmly located in Indonesia than the others, and I worry that they will be read as documenting “instantiations” or “examples” of what has been written in the earlier chapters. It should be borne in mind that the dense entanglements that occupy their pages could instead be viewed as the “theory” that demanded the “data” provided in the preceding chapters. Chapter 5 traces the small gold coins used as a means of saving for the pilgrimage to Mecca, and chapter 6 looks at the open-ended yet stable constructs of Islamic insurance and cooperative societies.

The conclusion returns to the work of adequation and abstraction, and restages it via some of C. S. Peirce’s and John Locke’s writings on precious metals, language, and ethics. It revisits the monetary information of thought that has occupied writers like Marc Shell (1978, 1982, 1995) and attempts another cut through that information by opening up its moral character. The conclusion remains open-ended, however, a series of unanswered questions whose form sometimes escapes the materiality of the page, not least because the monetary sign trumps the matter/spirit division itself.

THE WORK OF THIS BOOK is thus not to find a new Archimedean point for critical analysis, nor to present a new logic of the social, but rather to query the conditions under which the social becomes legible. This book is also not after a theory of value either, for the mutual entanglements of value and values obviate such a quest. Indeed, the very search for a theory of

value is a symptom of the supposed sundering of value and values. This sundering is exactly what, post-reflexively, Islamic banking and alternative currencies and this book challenge.¹⁸

Post-reflexively, because the work here is not toward a reflexive anthropology in the sense of letting others' voices tell their tales and being attentive to the authority of my own in structuring this book. In fact, I am perfectly content with my authorial power; I only wish I had more of it, as I watch my own analysis and my ownership of it disappearing into the text or undermined by my own reportage of events "from the field." What I am after is a mode of ethnography that undermines its empiric. I would be tempted to call this a nonempirical modality of ethnographic inquiry: for the stuff in the field presses on the study and often inhabits it, as when people "in the field" tell me to go to the library; and the stuff in the field challenges the sensorium's privilege by pointing up the networked complexity of fact and value, observation and analysis, and so forth. I resist the urge to name the modality of inquiry, however, because of some futures I can imagine were I to give it any name.

Indeed, I worry lest I be taken as too metatheoretical, as presenting no new data, nothing important, and having no politics, besides. I have already gestured toward some of the things that have happened since I began this project. I am writing in a world in which oil companies are awarded lucrative contracts after a war in Iraq over weapons that simply did not exist, and where these oil companies are domiciled in the same offshore financial centers as other entities labeled "terrorist," and have had—and may still have—dense yet opaque interconnections with those very entities. Yet that information seems not to generate interest, not least because it can never be "verified." When the empirics fail, other modes of reflection might become important. But there is no way of knowing in advance. As Elizabeth Grosz writes,

life and duration, and thus history and politics, are never either a matter of unfolding an already worked out blueprint, or the gradual accretion of qualities which progress stage by stage or piecemeal over time. Duration proceeds not through the accumulation of information and the growing acquisition of knowledge, but through division, bifurcation, dissociation—by difference, through sudden and unpredictable change, which overtakes us with its surprise. (Grosz 2000:230)

"You're lending them the money to build, and they're gonna pay it back to you as best they can. . . . We've got to have faith in each other," George Bailey said. Alternative currencies and Islamic banking always face the charge: will they "work," will they effect "change," or, even, are they really

real or just fake? Do they have a use? The demand for an instrumentalization of knowledge is levied against us all in terms of knowable futures and clear emplotments.¹⁹ This book rejects such a demand, in favor of allowing knowledges to lie alongside each other in their entanglements and durative becomings, as they continually divide, recombine, and exchange, in the meantime.²⁰ Mutual life, open-ended yet limited.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

LATERAL REASONS FOR A POST-REFLEXIVE ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Directed by Frank Capra; screenplay by Frances Goodrich, Albert Hackett, Frank Capra and Jo Swerling; Liberty Film, 1946. Quotations are taken directly from the film.

2. From a passage in the Qur'an, *Surah* 98 ("The Clear Evidence"), *ayah* 7: "(As for) those who believe and do good, surely they are the best of men."

3. In 1997–98, with the onset of the Asian financial crisis, the investment manager and philanthropist George Soros began to sound cautionary notes about unrestrained transnational financial activity, most notably in his 1998 book, *The Crisis of Global Capitalism*.

4. The objective limits of objectivism is Bourdieu's (1977) phrase; that of complicity, Marcus's (1999). On perspectivalism, see Strathern 1991.

5. Stefan Helmreich points out that the project would then be fashioned after abduction, not induction. As C. S. Peirce proposed, "An abduction is a method of forming a general prediction without any positive assurance that it will succeed either in the special case or usually, its justification being that it is the only possible hope of regulating our future conduct rationally, and that induction from past experience gives us strong encouragement to hope that it will be successful in the future" (Peirce, quoted in Doyle 2003:25). As Richard Doyle summarizes, "A missing term—one that may possibly arrive in the future—completes abduction's argument" (p. 25). Doyle uses among other things the contemporary cryonics industry as an example: the dead are frozen as they "wait" for some missing term to complete them and reanimate them in the future.

6. I hesitate to consider repetition, multiplication/replication, and acceleration as three separate analytical options, since, in the worlds this book describes, they were just as often alternative, that is, oscillating options following one another in time.

7. The situation is analogous to the one Strathern has described for models of choice available to late-twentieth-century Euro-Americans: "Individuality without diversity: the customer is pressured into the exercise of choice. . . . Diversity without individuality: the riot of consumer preference collapses all other possibilities, choice becomes consumer choice" (Strathern 1992a:193). Stefan Helmreich reminds me that it is also analogous to that faced by Lévi-Strauss in *Totemism* and Geertz and Geertz re: "kinship" (Lévi-Strauss 1963; Geertz and Geertz 1975).

8. It should be clear that the notion of virtuality deployed here is distinct from that of Miller 1998, which tends to hold steady a set of relations among the real, the virtual, and the abstract that the present endeavor attempts to reenergize, accelerate, and set in motion to other (open) ends.

9. Thus, the veritable torrent of information brought to bear in the analysis engulfs the reader in Timothy Mitchell's (2002) *Rule of Experts* and Donna Haraway's (2003) *Companion Species Manifesto*, the mosquitoes and dogs notwithstanding; these authors demonstrate the difficulties of creating a text in which the natural is simultaneously creative and emergent. I thank Hugh Raffles (and, with a sidelong glance, Webb Keane) for warning me of my own Cartesianism in such instants.

10. On Latour's shifting intellectual trajectories, see Lynch 1993. I am grateful to Hirokazu Miyazaki for directing me to this reference.

11. I have discussed sand dollars in Maurer 2004b, and reviewed some of the scientific literature on their nonhomology there.

12. Nigel Thrift (1996:14) briefly notes the possibility of radial truths.

13. See Mahmood 2001; Hirschkind 2001. I am grateful for conversations with Iris Jean-Klein on these points. I am also grateful to a reading of Alasdair MacIntyre

(1984) encouraged by Saba Mahmood on practices whose unfolding is itself an internal good.

14. The temporal prepositions are after Strathern 1992a.

15. “Articulation takes patience,” Thomas Keenan writes, following Marx, and reading “can be no more, and no less, than an effort and a chance” (Keenan 1993:155).

16. This represents one strategy for dealing with the so-called new ethnographic subjects like finance and accounting that resist because they anticipate conventional anthropological analyses. See Maurer 2004a for a review of the finance literature. See also Marcus 1999; Riles 2000, 2004; Miyazaki 2003, 2004; Strathern 1999; Fortun 2001; Fischer 2004. Strategies in those works involve developing parallel knowledges; making theory an ethnographic object; inverting means-ends relations; using hope as a method; and undoing perspectivalism as a knowledge-generating tool.

17 The heading for this section is after T. Keenan 1993.

18. On economic value and moral values, and their separation by traditional forms of social inquiry, see Stark 2002 and, obliquely, Graeber 2001.

19. And the times are indeed mean. Still, this book is offered against “the demand for work/theory/inquiry that will bear immediate fruit and be immediately recognizable as contributing to something already apparent and with a clear trajectory” (Lubiano 1999:14), and against the charge that “if the trajectory of the work . . . isn’t clear, then it has no possible progressive political use” (p. 15).

20. From Wiegman 2000:821, writing on the “elusive, unmanageable, and ultimately unable to be guaranteed or owned” future of feminism, and a call for a feminism “in the meantime.”

Mutual Life, Limited

ISLAMIC BANKING,
ALTERNATIVE CURRENCIES,
LATERAL REASON

Bill Maurer

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