

BOOK SYMPOSIUM

On the Emic Gesture: Difference and Ethnography in Roy Wagner,
by Iracema Dulley. New York: Routledge, 2019.

Introduction

Martin Holbraad, Editor at Social Analysis

We are excited in this issue to resume our Book Symposium feature, the aim of which is to give a platform to scholars who are not already widely known and established, and to acquaint our readers with ideas and analytical approaches that are fresh. In its first iteration, in 2019, the feature was tagged as “First Book Symposium,” but on this occasion this would be inaccurate, since the book to which the present feature is devoted, *On the Emic Gesture: Difference and Ethnography in Roy Wagner*, is not Iracema Dulley’s first. Prior to its publication in 2019, Dulley published in Brazil a historical ethnography of Catholic missions in colonial Angola (Dulley 2010), as well as a precursor to the work under discussion (Dulley 2015). Nevertheless, *The Emic Gesture* is Dulley’s first major exposure to an English-speaking readership, so devoting a Symposium to it is in keeping with the feature’s aims.

The Emic Gesture is a relentlessly theoretical study, engaging systematically with salient facets of the work of the late Roy Wagner. The book’s chapters roam freely across the rich terrain of Wagner’s oeuvre—from his theorizations of cultural invention, the power of image, and the relationship between fractality and totality, to his work on myth, money, naming, personhood, and much more. However, these varied thematic engagements are held together by a tightly conceived and precisely executed agenda of critical intervention, which Dulley summarizes as follows:

The question I ask throughout my engagement with Wagner’s main essays is how to account for difference within difference without falling into the closure of totalization. It seems that Wagner’s work contains this potentiality but is hindered by its very foundation, which it shares with much ethnographic writing: The emic gesture, in which difference is circumscribed



through the names of ‘others.’ For if named alterity makes it possible to question generalizations, it does so at the expense of instituting another sort of totalization. (2019: 4)

Dulley unpacks Wagner’s reliance on alterity—his ‘emic gesture’—as the territorializing grounding (my term) of his acts of anthropological meaning-making in “names such as ‘Daribi,’ ‘Barok,’ ‘Melanesian,’ ‘tribal,’ ‘peasant,’ ‘Western’” (ibid.: 1), which come to operate dialectically as poles that are “ultimately reducible to ‘us’ and ‘them’” (ibid.: 4). In its simplest form, then, Dulley’s question is whether and how it might be possible to engage with difference without subsuming it to the master trope of ‘us’ and ‘them,’ so freighted metaphysically, historically, and politically.

The Emic Gesture will be of major interest to readers, in at least three ways. Conceptually, it takes the abiding anthropological concern with similarity and difference to new places, unmooring it from its coupling with ipseity and alterity, and thus opening up the horizon for an anthropology able to engage with ‘difference within difference’ in its own terms. Since these questions have most recently been addressed in the literature on the so-called ontological turn, Dulley’s contribution takes that debate forward too. As Dulley (2019: 9) also makes clear, it is no accident that the main figure in the anthropological literature on ontology, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2015), is her compatriot.

Historically, Dulley is able to excavate the contributions as well as the limitations of Wagner, whose work in her treatment emerges as a startlingly original proposition for an ethnographically driven unsettling of all metaphysical foundationalism (see also Robbins and Murray 2002). Dulley’s exegesis is helped on its way by her critical juxtaposition of Wagner’s anthropology with Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive philosophy. Affording Dulley with the analytical leeway to deconstruct the totalizing implications of Wagner’s (and broader anthropology’s) moorings in the us versus them polarity, a further effect of the juxtaposition is to put Wagner’s anthropological models of meaning-making on a par with Derrida’s in many ways parallel lines of thinking in philosophy. The upshot is a remarkable argument about the complementarity of the two pursuits, which Dulley is able expertly to bring to light.

Finally, Dulley’s intervention speaks to urgent contemporary debates about the politics of representation, in anthropology and beyond. To combat anthropology’s reliance on arguments from alterity, as Dulley does, is to fight for forms of thinking that refuse to take the us/West/Whiteness complex as their baseline (cf. Mudimbe 1988; Trouillot 2003; Sinha 2021). More than just “provincializing Europe” (Chakrabarty 2007), Dulley’s orientation toward difference within difference cuts against the colonial dynamics of anthropology by unfettering it altogether from its geopolitical coordinates. In doing so, Dulley opens up a new way for anthropology to build on its own deconstruction.

We are privileged to have been able to assemble, for this Book Symposium, a set of commentators whose expertise spans the conceptual, historical, and political dimensions of Dulley's study. We are grateful to David Murray, Euanthia Patsiaoura, Suely Kofes, and Rosalind Morris for their attentive engagement, as well as to Dulley herself for her response.

Gesturing toward Power

David A. B. Murray, Department of Anthropology, York University

Just over 20 years ago, Joel Robbins and I edited a special issue of *Social Analysis* (Robbins and Murray 2002) reflecting on the impact of Roy Wagner's *The Invention of Culture (IOC)*, first published in 1975 (revised and second editions were published in 1981 and 2016). In the introduction to the special issue, Robbins and I noted that more than 25 years after its publication, *IOC* remained highly relevant to contemporary debates on the meanings and definitions of culture in anthropological circles and, indeed, to debates on the meanings and definitions of anthropology itself. We invited a group of anthropologists who were deeply engaged with Wagner's work to reflect on some of *IOC*'s key critiques and propositions. We asked: Does anthropology continue to present culture as a kind of 'relative objectivity' or has it successfully 'reinvented' culture in the ways *IOC* advocated? To what extent did Wagner anticipate some of the key critiques of anthropology that emerged in the 'reflexive' 1980s and 'cultural studies' 1990s? Alternatively, how might *IOC* have been pointing in different directions and thus provide us with a perspective from which to reexamine a new set of home truths that dominate the discipline today? What was the impact of *IOC* on the subsequent practice of anthropology? Did it alter, challenge, clarify, or obfuscate thinking about the anthropological work of translating difference, and if so, how?

Now, more than 20 years after the publication of that special issue, it is thrilling and gratifying to read Iracema Dulley's *On the Emic Gesture: Difference and Ethnography in Roy Wagner*, which goes well beyond addressing the questions we posed, demonstrating the ongoing relevance of Wagner's groundbreaking discussions of culture, difference, meaning, and ethnography, but challenging and extending his discussions in provocative new ways. In a masterful review of Wagner's entire oeuvre, Dulley distills key foundational questions that Wagner sought to address throughout his career, and critically engages with key concepts and theories that Wagner developed (and changed) over time. Given the brevity of this commentary, I am not able to engage with many of Dulley's original and provocative insights, so I will just summarize a couple of her key arguments with a particular focus on discussions of Wagner's (dis)engagement with power. As I noted in my essay on *IOC* 20 years ago, while Wagner was

revolutionary in redefining culture as a symbolic object of Western invention, and ethnography as a practice focusing on process, creativity, and relation (instead of stasis, convention, and objectification), he remained mostly silent on issues of inequality and power within societies studied by anthropologists and between the anthropologist and their interlocutors. As I elaborate below, while Dulley identifies this silence, further engagement with power is needed in order to keep Wagnerian concepts relevant to twenty-first-century anthropology and the complicated world(s) it engages with.

One of the major insights of *On the Emic Gesture* concerns the way that Wagner explicitly resorts to the emic in his attempt to overcome the ‘Western’ perspective but does not radically question the methodological and epistemological foundations of alterity: culture is both deconstructed as a unit and reconstructed as a mode of symbolization (a tension or paradox that is not analytically unproductive, in my opinion, and worthy of ongoing reflection at all stages of anthropological research and writing). Dulley (2019: 11) argues that despite Wagner’s critique of anthropology and ‘American’ convention, the emic gesture prevents him from opening the chain of dissemination that is contained in the attempt to control both unit and relation through dialectic, fractality, holography, and obviation.

In various passages throughout the book, Dulley acknowledges how Wagner’s emic gesture and ethnographic descriptions also elide questions of power and authority or take them up in very specific ways. She notes that Wagner’s (explicit) political neutrality “seems to compete with his ethical appeal for anthropologists to pay attention to the creativity of the peoples they study . . . An interest in transformation, manifest in the importance he assigns to improvisation, creativity and invention, seems to coexist with the negation of change at a deeper level that his stances on ‘contact’ and ‘history’ reveal,” which leads her to ask “What are the conditions of possibility for anthropology to aspire to symmetry?” (2019: 35). I wanted to see more attention given to issues of contact and history, which cannot be discussed without referencing multiple realms and dynamics of power. This attention would, I think, lead to a revision and expansion of Dulley’s question to ask, instead: What are the conditions of *asymmetry* that render anthropological aspirations of symmetry possible? How do conditions of asymmetry determine relationality within the anthropological enterprise?

In her chapter focusing on *IOC*, Dulley argues that Wagner’s conception of power can best be understood through a consideration of his opposition to the Marxist concept of ideology based on the idea that ideologies, like images, are cultural. She provides a key quote from Wagner: “For the symbol, or word or integer, the unity of consensual representation is the ultimate guarantor of the logics that become, in the process, organizational or economic power” (1983: 2). Thus, for Wagner, it is consensual symbolization as cultural image that ultimately guarantees “organizational or economic power.” Dulley responds,

This is probably the reason why any explicit theorization of inequality as related to power relations is absent from his theory of the social . . . if power is governed exclusively by cultural images as symbols, power relations among ‘others’ cannot be determined by ‘our’ criteria of what power is, for such criteria are understood to be determined by ‘our’ symbols, whose collectivizing mode of operation is very different from differentiating conceptualization . . . Wagner’s take on power intends to challenge the ‘Western’ discourse on power as related to the inequality of forces or possibilities based on the idea that this seeming inequality is, in ‘holistic’ modes of symbolization, complementary . . . Relativism, a consequence of the emic gesture, leads to a holistic conception of power as image in its Wagnerian instantiation. (2019: 70–71)

These are crucial insights into both Wagner’s conceptualization of power and the limits of that conceptualization, particularly in terms of how the ‘emic gesture’ can lead to a relativistic position on power that elides the ethically murky, but fundamentally important relational dynamics of power in anthropological research and writing. I would have liked to see Dulley apply her critique of the emic gesture more thoroughly to these brief discussions of power in Wagner’s oeuvre in order to further interrogate power’s embeddedness within and relations to other key terms such as invention, creativity, relation, and transformation. Such an interrogation would require further reflection on the effects of displacing power by locating its definition in the symbolic worlds of ‘others’ (an emic gesture I find to be both insightful and problematic). Should the anthropologist really commit to a notion of power that seeks to do without the violence of translation (Dulley 2019: 114)—indeed, can translation ever exist without violence?

Dulley’s overall aim is “to destabilize the (metaphysical) foundations on which the emic gesture rests in order to engage with difference within difference in the form of a language to come” (2019: 3) via the application of Derrida’s *différance*, that is, looking for latent or inherent meaning in Wagner’s writing that will help rupture the closure of the emic. I would have liked to see this Derridean reading applied more systematically to Wagner’s discussions of power: How might *différance* challenge a Wagnerian definition of power and lead us toward new ways of thinking about the relationship between power, invention, convention, relation, and inequality in the anthropological work of translation, and more broadly within the discipline of anthropology itself?

Dulley’s application of *différance* to pull us out of the paradox of Wagner’s deconstruction of culture undergirded by the emic gesture is a bold and exciting move and leaves me looking forward to further discussions on his work: As she notes in the conclusion to *On the Emic Gesture*, for Wagner, convention is to the rules of the game what invention is to its moves—the preeminence of convention is highlighted despite the variations foreseen by its structure.

However, “différance does not presuppose the totality of convention. For différence is not a game: it is play” (Dulley 2019: 146). I look forward to seeing examples of this play in ethnographic work: what does *différance* look like in an ethnographic text, or should we be looking beyond the text in order to better understand play? Finally (I ask, one more time!), can we ever analyze play without thinking about rules of the game and how they define and position the players?

Deconstructing Totalization: An Infinite Burden of Anthropology

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On the Emic Gesture is positioned between anthropology and philosophy to speak to the heart of everlasting challenges in the ethnographic production of difference. While concentrating on a deconstructive reading of Roy Wagner through the Derridean legacy, the book concerns much broader audiences than those to whom its title may appeal. For the closure of totalization, which Dulley opens through a deconstruction of the Wagnerian text, dwells not only in the language of academia but also in what is often perceived as the world outside it. Reading Dulley invites one to disrupt one’s blind subjection to language. Such disruption potentiates a celebration of uncertainty from which anthropology can benefit if deconstructive gestures, like the one Dulley performs, are displaced toward broader sites of anthropological and ethnographic praxis.

Dulley attends to conceptual orientations shaping Wagner’s key publications, while investing in the *emic gesture*, situated at the core of Wagner’s contribution and of the closure of totalization that Dulley masterfully opens. The deconstructive gesture that Dulley performs potentiates a metamorphosis of the Wagnerian text, a shaking of those pillars of the ethnographic quest that have manifested as fundamental to anthropology: ‘self’ and ‘other,’ particularly when totalized as ‘ipseity’ and ‘alterity’ respectively.

Dulley takes on Spivak’s position to acknowledge the pitfalls of deconstruction: one’s subjection to, and endless positionings through, language. In admitting an infinite movement of deconstructive possibilities, Dulley’s deconstructive reading of Wagner becomes subject to further deconstructive readings. In this respect, my commentary mainly asks whether deconstruction can serve as an epistemological and ethical gesture to which anthropology attends systematically for the benefit of the discipline, its diverse subjects and audiences. By ‘systematically’ I do not imply a fixed mode of implementing deconstructive practice, as this would defeat the point of deconstruction altogether. Rather, I point to the intensification of deconstruction in a *performative* mode, perhaps in the Butlerian sense of capacitating a series of effects, which, in turn,

might destabilize the subtle processes of totalization surviving in mainstream anthropology. The remaining comments concentrate on a couple of points to highlight possible avenues of further enquiry.

Through Dulley's critique of Wagner's deductive procedure—seen in some thrilling questions about ethnography's capacity to describe the world (2019: 40)—one might wonder whether it is possible indeed for anthropology to do without deduction for as long as it depends on language. Encountering the 'field,' even without an a priori theoretical orientation, one makes sense of one's observations, interactions, and data collection through language: through words that connote concepts, which, in turn, connote schools of thought, arguments, debates. Subsequently, one synthesizes 'field data' in certain ways to meet publishable standards. So, where exactly can one trace the line between the a priori and the empirical? Being subject to language, anthropology is, by default, subject to deduction and its connection to generalization and totalization.

By subjecting both deduction and induction to deconstruction, the following questions may emerge. First: can deduction be without induction, and vice versa, as long as the anthropologist depends on language to make sense of and write about the world they encounter through fieldwork? Second: is it possible that both deduction and induction are as problematic as any other gesture of totalization, particularly due to their directionalities being totalized as opposed to each another? With the phrase 'gesture of totalization,' I extend Dulley's focus on the 'emic gesture' as a constitutor of alterity to refer to practices that constitute totalities more broadly. Third: what might a deconstruction of 'deduction' and 'induction' generate with respect to understanding how and why authors like Wagner deconstruct certain totalities over others, as evoked, excellently, by Dulley's (2019: 53) analysis of Wagner's substitution of the totality of kinship with the totality of conceptualization? The reasons for considering the questioning of 'deduction' and 'induction' crucial for the popularization of deconstruction in mainstream anthropology are not much different from the reasons for placing 'alterity' and 'ipseity' under continuous displacement, as follows.

The ways in which, gestures with which, and extents to which 'selves' and 'others' are constituted through language more broadly, and ethnographic designation and naming in particular, have not been foregrounded enough by anthropology, despite postmodern responses having established a 'correction' of the discipline's founding authoritative discourse. If "difference within difference can only be accounted for through an erasure of alterity" (Dulley 2019: 4), performing such an erasure seems to be entangled with an erasure of its counterpart: an erasure of ipseity. Or, if "difference within the same is so infinite that one can no longer speak of sameness and otherness, for difference is everywhere" (ibid.: 110), then ipseity too is at risk of rejection. How

far has anthropology traveled toward such a rejection? Is it possible that it becomes less painful to erase alterity than ipseity, for it is 'others' that anthropologists are trained to study (and constitute, through language) rather than 'selves'? And if so, what kind of dangers does nondeconstructed 'anthropological ipseity' potentiate to 'others'?

To what extent is the institutionalization of alterity inseparable from that of ipseity, and how is one to understand the totalization of difference if not by attending to that of sameness? Alterity dominates Dulley's discussion for obvious reasons, and, indeed, anthropology has historically centered on understanding 'others' over 'selves,' totalized or not. But this does not mean that Dulley's gesture prevents one from considering why ipseity does not deserve as much of a deconstructive take as alterity. In the book's final remarks, Dulley (2019: 148) notes that "accessing ipseity can be a problem"; what if this problem poses a greater one to anthropology? If alterity is constituted through the totalization of difference and ipseity through the totalization of sameness, does deconstructing alterity not require deconstructing ipseity in each possible iteration? With this question, I call attention to the writing of anthropology, which may result from processes of research that invite the listening to an 'other' speaking about a 'self' and the displacement of this listening in writing, performed by the 'self' itself or in collaboration with the 'other.'

As Dulley suggests, what is problematic is the equivalence between the name and that which is being named. Is it, then, that the language of anthropology should afford an erasure not of names but of naming as a gesture of totalization? If totalization is a gesture of alterity, as well as ipseity, then to what extent are the ethics of anthropology liable to deconstruction? Another way to pose this question is: should deconstruction, as a gesture that is not closed but rather open to infinite iterations, be what differentiates anthropological commitment from other disciplines?

Intentionality notwithstanding, claims about what is and what is not, performed through naming and other modes of language, bring about political effects. Even though anthropology has, supposedly, moved beyond identity as an essentialized category of positionality and power, it is striking how much the language of identity, surviving historically through designation and branded today in the context of humanitarian impact, overlaps between academic and everyday discourse. Whereas my own training in anthropological environments was influenced a great deal by the ontological turn, reading *On the Emic Gesture* for the first time in 2020 proved liberating in that it allowed me to articulate an erasure of totalization that my use of language imposed upon the subject(s) of my research—a totalization reductive of the possibilities of 'self,' 'other,' and, most importantly, the questioning of the boundaries between them. Reading Dulley in that difference and alterity can

be nonequivalent led me, eventually, to undo designations that used to place my field as or in 'a Nigerian Pentecostal diaspora.' But even though I have urged in favor of introducing alternative ways and terms to think through, I have yet to erase ~~the name that totalizes~~. I wonder whether Dullely's reasons for not erasing Wagner's ~~names that other~~ have been similar.

On the Emic Gesture

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On the Emic Gesture by Iracema Dullely is a tour de force and its translation into English is a gift to Anglo-American anthropology. With an inimitable writing style and imaginative conceptualization, this book proposes an inflection point to the discussions related to classic dilemmas in the realms of ethnography and anthropology, such as the dilemmas of classification, description, and analysis. In it, difference is treated as alterity by means of a conceptual character, which Dullely calls *the emic gesture*. Through the emic gesture, already mentioned by the author in the very title of the book, an inventive dialogical counterposition between Roy Wagner and Jacques Derrida is woven. Wagner's Melanesians and Melanesianists, the Daribi and the Barok, are thus counterposed to Derrida's writing, *écriture*, and *différance*. With this book, Dullely makes an enormous contribution to anthropology as well as to other modes of knowledge as she makes visible the conjunctions and disjunctions on which such a counterposition is based. In this way, alterity (as difference) is revealed as an act of cunning, a transformative cause whose effects are shown to be reversible. Through reversibility, Euro-Americans and Melanesians, anthropology and philosophy can be seen as transformative relations.

After all, does not the emic gesture also contain an ethical gesture?

Invited to the scene as a figurant, Claude Lévi-Strauss nonetheless comes to the fore and disrupts the dialogue between Dullely, Derrida, and Wagner. This is because the supposed figurant makes a relevant appearance in the book, perhaps much more so than the author would wish. This is the case concerning writing (Derrida and Lévi-Strauss) as well as homology and analogy (Wagner and Lévi-Strauss). According to Wagner, Lévi-Strauss's emphasis on homology is to be distinguished from his own emphasis on analogy. Yet Lévi-Straussian analysis is not only based on homology, for it supposes oppositional and complementary disjunctions. In Lévi-Strauss, homology (in metaphorical operation) is doubled with metonymy, which, I dare say, pulls homology into the relational entanglement of contiguities. There is no doubt that homology is what allows Lévi-Strauss to operate ethnographic transformations while simultaneously detaching himself from ethnographic totalities in his own way. He does not, however, detach himself from the ethnographic, from ethnographic

theory, and from the primacy of difference. Thus, it is thought-provoking, for instance, to approximate two propositions: Lévi-Strauss's peremptory *le totemisme n'existe pas* (totemism does not exist)¹ and Wagner's inquiring "are there social groups in the New Guinea Highlands?"

Totemism does not exist because there is no identity between a name (totemism) and the multiplicity of empirical phenomena that one might attempt to unify under this name. In Wagner's analysis of Daribi kinship, he says that *para* is a name, not a group.² It does not represent a group; rather, it creates contrasts, which is what totems do, after all. *Para* is a name, not a group. But a name—what is it to say a name in Lévi-Strauss? What is it in Lévi-Strauss, as opposed to in Wagner and Derrida? There is a complex discussion on names in relation to classification in *The Savage Mind* (1962b), where Lévi-Strauss, in vertiginous displacement from one ethnographic area to the next, operates with both continuity and discontinuity. He does not reduce the name to language; neither does he remove it from classification or reduce it to sociocentrism. Rather, he affirms that the act of naming is situated within a continuum in which the passage from the act of signifying to the act of pointing is carried out insensibly. The name describes and classifies; it is located within the system and subject to ethnographic variations (are names contextual? one should ask). But this is a subject for another book, whose title might well be *The Reverse Arrow Against the Systemic Arch*—an endeavor at the height of Dulley.

On the Emic Gesture contains a precious discussion on the *pharmakon*, which is associated with Phaedrus, mentioned by Dulley (2019: 28) at the beginning of this discussion in order to engage with what Derrida says about it and also to characterize Wagner's anthropology, which the latter wished would be only remedy and not poison. From the *pharmakon*'s point of view, this is an impossibility. Here, could one risk an approximation, only to quickly push it away, between the status of *différance* as "an infinite chain of substitutions" (for instance, 'instituted by the *pharmakon*') and difference as the infinite chain of transformations in the structural analysis of myths?

Finally, on page 33, we encounter "Derrida, Lévi-Strauss, Wagner" in contiguity in the subtitle of a section that describes an encounter in which the Nambikwara chief, Júlio, actually gives Lévi-Strauss a lesson in writing. The latter might not have perceived it, and Derrida might well have taken interest in it. For, as I would like to suggest here, the Nambikwara did not so much incorporate the symbol of writing over its reality; rather, they elicited the drawing that is contained in writing.

In the posthumous edition of Wagner's book *The Logic of Invention*, there is an editor's note that ends with the sentence "Godspeed, analogic man." Is dialectics that crucial to understanding Wagner's work? If it is, Wagnerian dialectics is certainly very far from that of Sartre, against which Lévi-Strauss wrote. Could one then also say to Lévi-Strauss, *Adieu, homme analogique*?

A Difference of Reading

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Perhaps the most enigmatic gesture of Iracema Dulley's brilliant book, *On the Emic Gesture*, is the elevation of Roy Wagner to the status of ancestor worthy of monographic criticism. Few anthropologists have elicited this kind of treatment (different from the affectionate *Festschrift*). As Tim Ingold remarks, Wagner left no school of thought (2016: xv), and Wagner himself claimed that no one really read his most 'well-known' book, *The Invention of Culture* (2016: xvii). But Dulley is a scrupulous deconstructionist, and so she takes the margin as the locus for a project that aims to undo from within the system of thought of which that margin is not only an exemplary instance, but a constitutive part of the boundary maintenance that is necessary for the system to operate as such.

Bringing to bear the kind of critical reading practice that Derrida directed at Lévi-Strauss, Dulley finds in Wagner a different effort to break free of ethnocentrism, one that increasingly reverts to the fundamental oppositions between the 'West' and the 'Rest,' with the former being defined by a capacity for inventiveness (within limits, as she shows) and the latter by a tendency toward collectivization and totalization that resists transformation. Dulley's singular contribution locates this regressive tendency in what she terms the emic gesture, that effort to think from elsewhere—from the 'perspective,' 'point of view,' 'worldview' of others—that has been anthropology's most cherished claim to epistemic justice and the corollary of its methodological foundation in immersive fieldwork. While distinguishing the emic from Derrida's 'metaphysical' gesture, Dulley insists that there is no interiority without a bordering, a delineation of the limit and an exclusion. What Wagner does, however, is fix that limit such that difference functions between the named units, rather than within them. For Dulley, it is this loss of difference within difference that inhibits the promise of Wagner's earliest stated aims: namely to testify to inventiveness rather than the self-conserving traditionalism that has typically been attributed to 'nonstate' and ostensibly precolonial 'cultures.'

In reading Wagner, Dulley attends not merely to margins but to affective intensities, because, in the absence of a fully transparent and intending author who can control the destiny of their inscriptions, "the author's affects emerge in the text precisely at the points where there is desire to make it coherent" (2019: 26). This principle of critical reading leads Dulley to note that in Wagner's work, the emic gesture is adduced whenever coherence is threatened. The price of the coherence is, however, complicity with totalizing thought and the metaphysics of presence, which occurs every time people are nominated with an ethnonym—as the 'Daribi,' the 'Barok,' or even 'Melanesian'—and indeed any kind of group name, including the 'American middle class.' But insofar as the primary mode of naming is, as Charles Sanders Peirce argued, the pronoun,

the emic gesture operates even in the use of the adjectives ‘their’ and ‘our.’ Dulley does not advocate the abandonment of such terms, but reminds us that the act of naming does not merely designate what is, or enable the fantasy that naming can temporarily stabilize a flux of phenomena in the realm of representation; it expels difference from within. What, then, is the limit within which difference can be thought or inhabited from within any identity position? And what is the implication of this question for contemporary social analysis?

In the end, Dulley’s most dazzling contributions may not be to the analysis of Roy Wagner’s thought but to the two dominant problems of contemporary social analysis: namely, identity and ontology. The argument that words in ‘Daribi’ and ‘Barok,’ for example, appear to be perfect names or synonyms for the theorist’s model of reality cannot constitute an ethnographic proof. Again and again, Dulley shows us that ontology is reached only at the expense of language, through which it nonetheless appears. She questions whether one should seek difference within difference in ontological terms, and asks what it means for the new ontologists to rely so heavily on foundational works that rendered “difference as the alterity of named others” (Dulley 2019: 5).

In Wagner’s work, the ontological aspiration is ultimately reduced to the procedure of reversal. And it is therefore important to recognize the intimacy between the different variants of reverse anthropology and the desire to link image and power (the key principle of differentiating symbolization) in a way that escapes the distancing neutrality of referential and representational systems conceived on the basis of a split between world and signifier. There is a long history of such gestures (from Canetti and Lips to Taussig), which would find in the non-West the capacity to become other. The desire for that capacity is expressed in the discipline’s methodological principle of self-estrangement. But what problems are to be solved via these practices of self-estrangement, and via the access to transformability (emergence?) that they aim to access?

Tellingly, Wagner explains that what ails modern Western culture (no quotation marks) is a tendency to produce internal divisions that become reified and that require their subsumption in higher level collectivizing abstractions, while resisting that same subsumption at the same time. Civilizations afflicted by this tendency are said to require dialectical thought as both practice and value. Yet, according to Wagner, the modern West has not yet achieved this, at least not compared to the so-called balanced societies of the great religions (Brahmanic, Judaic, Chinese, Hindu—note the incommensurability of terms). Wagner writes:

Society is challenged by its creations . . . By attempting to ‘integrate’ and satisfy minorities, we create them; by trying to ‘explain and universalize’ facts and events we fragment our theorists and categories; by applying universal theories naively to the study of cultures we invent those cultures

as stubborn and inviolable individualities. Each failure motivates a greater collectivizing effort. (2016: 131)

Just as the ‘Daribi’ could absorb change only to a certain point if they were to reproduce their social world, so ‘modern Western culture’ needs dialectics if it is to “have a stable structure, one that does not work against itself” (2016: 132). Is this working “against itself” the recognition of minorities, the reification of the alterity within? Is it the objectification of scientific fact, or reification of the alterity without? If I understand his argument for fractality, as elucidated by Dulley (with remarkable lucidity), Wagner’s answer would be yes. Continuity and replicability of the same at scale is the ontological principle that can serve as a solution to ‘our’ impasse.

Identity politics and not merely sociological essentialism are implicit here. And one can imagine that the contemporary proliferation of terms for sexual identity positions via naming and pronaming could be subject to the kinds of critique that *both* Wagner and Dulley propose, so it is important to mark the difference between their analytic approaches. It is the difference of contingency, of event, and of that which cannot be predicted. Here is the most profound gesture of Dulley’s own text.

“It is my contention,” she writes, “that for trace to be thought beyond the emic gesture and (its) closure, *eventfulness* needs to be understood beyond the opposition of convention and invention, the literal and the metaphorical” (2019: 139, emphasis added). The statement is made after she has asked why Wagner always “looks for transformative metaphor in kinship, ritual and myth, in which form tends to repetition” (*ibid.*). Dulley has already noted his tendency to limit the change that can be accommodated in differentiating traditions, in a manner that paradoxically leaves the differentiating traditions in a state of self-reproduction (*ibid.*: 92–93). What then is this eventfulness?

The event, the contingent happening, immune to probabilistic and actuarial calculations, will not be inserted into either the accumulative or the repetitive process, which comprised the poles of culture for Lévi-Strauss (a concept that Wagner inherited). It happens. It is the happening. The event is absolutely singular in space and time. It has no substance or Being—it lies beyond every ontology. When Wagner says that only those changes proposed by missionaries that can be assimilated will be assimilated by the ‘Barok,’ he evades the whole question of the event as Dulley describes it and that is interior to neither the ostensibly differentiating nor the collectivizing traditions of the ‘Barok’ and the missionaries. And if this eventfulness or contingency cannot be explained *or* confined within the movement between the two polarities, or appropriated, assimilated, or converted as a result, one will need a different way to think about both the event and the provisionally coalescing formations within which difference is avowed or suppressed. That these formations will be named and

name themselves seems inevitable; but if one must constantly interrogate the process of subordinating difference in order to maintain the interiority of every named thing, then perhaps one can become capable of opening oneself to that which is neither predicted by nor predicated on one's own nominal position. This will, of course, not do away with the problem of how that interiority—its alterity and its form of appearance—is accessed (2019: 33).

How then does one access or liberate the difference that we are, if not via the detour through an alterity dependent on totalization? In the tour de force that concludes *On the Emic Gesture*, Dulley revisits Wagner's own answer to deconstructionism in "Dif/fERENCE and its Disguises," wherein the figure of an anthropological checkmate is derived from a reading of Hindu cosmology via the idea of the game. Dulley intrudes upon the text that she has cited, with a sharp *éclat* that brings her beautiful little book to its climax: "*différance* does not presuppose the totality of convention. For *différance* is not a game; it is play" (2019: 146). Wagner had only been able to think *Hamlet* as a play of binarily opposed possibilities where the playing of madness becomes, indeed, madness, when seen from without. But play, aleatory and unnamed, is not subject to this stricture. It is thus the scene of contingency, the practice of generating that which has not yet been imagined and which thus escapes every name of every culture and every identity. For this explanation, we owe the one named Iracema Dulley our enormous gratitude.

On 'Selves' and 'Others' as Subjects: Language and Power

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Any work that aspires to deconstruction must embrace the fact that it is liable to further deconstruction. In this sense, the responses to my book *On the Emic Gesture: Difference and Ethnography in Roy Wagner* have met my unspoken expectation of being posed questions that impel my work beyond the tedious repetition of its own conclusions. I am therefore thrilled and deeply thankful to engage with such thought-provoking comments.

I would like to start with the question of the political raised by David Murray. We seem to agree on our reading of power and the political in Wagner: his work addresses neither the power imbalances between the anthropologist and his interlocutors nor, as Murray puts it, "the conditions of *asymmetry* that render anthropological aspirations of symmetry possible." I must clarify that my question about the conditions of possibility for anthropology to aspire to symmetry was a rhetorical one. For aspiring to symmetry—something that Wagner's work certainly does—does not entail the possibility of achieving it. That would be wishful thinking. Rather than advocating that 'we' reach symmetry, I would argue for an engagement with difference that not only deconstructs the

ways in which totalized others are produced in scholarly and political practice but also reflects on the entanglements between language and power. To this extent, erasing the emic is a political move whose effects are not restricted to language.

It is true that language and power cannot be equated, for there is a dimension of power that language does not capture and there is more to language than the concept of power, in its theoretical and commonsensical instantiations, can express. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to completely disentangle them. If anthropology has certainly interrogated the relations of power that structure the discipline, it has not paid enough attention to the role that language plays in both establishing and challenging asymmetries. The emic gesture is the epitomic example of how the misrecognition of the entanglement between language and power allows for the discipline's frequent claims to symmetry to remain unchallenged. To put it in Wagnerian terms, through the emic gesture, invention functions as if it were convention while convention makes it possible to iterate this othering gesture ad infinitum. This is a work of transformation, as Suely Kofes rightly points out. Yet whenever difference is taken for alterity through the magic performed by naming, ethnography recreates in language the very political asymmetry on which it rests: the anthropologist names whereas 'others' are named, circumscribed, and subsequently described. This act of naming is an act of language. Yet it is pervaded by relational violence to the extent that it carries the risk of (fractally?) replicating in anthropological discourse the sociopolitical positionalities inhabited by anthropologists and the ones they name.

I therefore agree with Murray that it is necessary to "think about the rules of the game and how they define and position the players" as one thinks of *différance* not as game but as play. Yet play does not necessarily misrecognize the existence of game (let us not say 'the' game, for this would entail a stifling totalization from which escape could become impossible). Rather, it can playfully penetrate what sometimes appear to be immovable structures as it tries to undo them, displace them, or rip them apart. As play embraces uncertainty, openness, and pleasure, it can defy the violence of convention, structure, and continuity. It can, though it clearly does not always. When I advocate that one should invest in play, I do not mean to disregard the fact that there is game. But if a game is to be played, let joy perform resistance to oppression for as long as it can. At this point of the year, it seems inevitable to think of how this can happen in the experience of Brazilian Carnival—despite all attempts to reduce this wonderful invention to convention and constrain it to liminality.

This brings me to the issues of deduction, totalization, and ipseity raised by Evanthia Patsiaoura. Her question, "where exactly can one trace the line between the a priori and the empirical?", which is to say, between deduction and induction, points to anthropology's dependence on language and to the

fact that language cannot be restricted to disciplinary boundaries. As Rosalind Morris rightly points out, the questions I grapple with in my book are questions of boundaries. The emic is about establishing boundaries between the emic and the etic, the particular and the general, the empirical and the theoretical, those who are totalized and those who totalize. Alterity and ipseity depend on the language in which they are expressed as well as on the relational positioning of those who other and identify and those who are othered and identified. And yet, as Patsiaoura reminds us, the borders of ipseity ('us') are no more clear-cut than the borders of alterity ('them'). This has a beautiful implication: the deconstruction of otherness, through which one relinquishes the totalization of difference, has as its counterpart the undoing of the borders of sameness, identity, and the self. In this process, 'I' becomes, as Émile Benveniste would have it, the position from which discourse can be uttered.

This is not to say that there are no power imbalances between those who are called 'us' and those who are called 'them.' Political difference exists both in language and beyond it. Yet the borders between the ego and the alter, the so-called West and its so-called others, cannot be easily defined. One might, as do Wagner and Marilyn Strathern, resort to methodological strategies of exaggeration to make differences more poignant and therefore more graspable. However, this move depends on an effort of totalization that can by no means find its equivalent in the realm of that which 'we' have conventionally called the empirical. If the borders between 'us' and 'them' are not to be found in the so-called real, they must be the effect of language, power, and their entanglements. This is why erasing named alterity and the emic gesture that produces it is a political move. So is the erasure of ipseity, which can be understood as the totalization of sameness in the form of identity. It is true that my book does not dwell much on what this would entail, and I certainly agree with Patsiaoura that the counterpart of the erasure of alterity would be an erasure of ipseity through which the borders of identity and the self are blurred. This has traditionally been the terrain not of anthropology but of psychoanalysis and is currently the object of much interest on my part.

It is not a chance occurrence that deconstruction has been deeply influenced by psychoanalysis. The centrality of writing and the trace in Jacques Derrida, for instance, is very much indebted to Sigmund Freud's *Wunderblock* (its translation into English as 'mystic writing-pad' erases the element of wonder evoked by the German word). In writing, self and other can be undone. One cannot say that they merge, for this would depend on their having been originally separated. When Kofes proposes that "the Nambikwara" actually "elicited the drawing that is contained in writing" at the very moment that one of them mimicked Lévi-Strauss's writing act, she brings to the fore the centrality of language in the constitution of the emic. Writing is certainly a kind of drawing. And drawing is a kind of writing. Here, the name 'Nambikwara' allows us to

imagine a realm that is completely distinct from the (also imaginary) realm in which writing and drawing are separated. Yet how can one make such a claim? There is no possible method to inductively prove this kind of deduction that appears to correspond to the world because it is based on anthropology's rhetorical conventions. These conventions are not without their political effects.

The invitation to erase the emic gesture is an invitation to abandon the position of the supposed subject of knowledge (Jacques Lacan's fortunate expression to designate the one who believes that they know) and embrace uncertainty as to what one can claim to know. For instance: Where do the borders of the so-called self and so-called others begin and end? What are the political effects of tracing such distinctions? In what iterative history are names and the positionalities they index inscribed?³ It seems that anthropology has much to learn from psychoanalysis in dealing with its politics of naming and othering. For selves and others are a matter not of fact, as we are sometimes led to imagine, but of identification.

Engaging with ipseity brings me to Morris's questions: "What, then, is the limit within which difference can be thought or inhabited from within any identity position? And what is the implication of this question for contemporary social analysis?" In Wagner's work, the self is often juxtaposed with the culture within which this self, its identifications, and the very imagination of a self emerge. Thus, for him, the borders of the self are almost indistinguishable from the context in which they are constituted. Anthropology's investment in personhood has also frequently pointed in this direction. The psychoanalytical concept of the subject embodies this fusion and adds to it the political dimension of language, for a subject is indistinguishable from the context in which it is formed. It can only speak to the extent that it is spoken by language. And yet, in speaking, the subject does not merely reproduce language, just as in acting one does not merely embody convention. As Wagner reminds us, acting and speaking depend as much on convention as they depend on invention. Eventfulness resides in the unpredictability of what will be repeated and what will be transformed whenever the subject acts or speaks. Not even the worshipping of ancestors can do without this imponderability.

I was trained as an anthropologist at the University of São Paulo and the State University of Campinas after obtaining a bachelor's degree in philosophy from the former in the mid-2000s. São Paulo is a strange place where one can sometimes both inhabit the margins and have the illusion that one partakes in the center. Back then, 'we,' 'Brazilian anthropologists,' understood 'our' (note the devouring pronoun) most famous representative, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, to indisputably belong to the contemporary canon of world anthropology. We read him as much as we read those who we assumed to be his (foreign) ancestors: Claude Lévi-Strauss, Marilyn Strathern, Gilles Deleuze, Bruno Latour, and, last but not least, Roy Wagner. In that context, these authors were understood

to stand in opposition to both Pierre Bourdieu and the Writing Culture movement. Derrida was not particularly relevant then and there, but I encountered his work through my interest in translation and was deeply impressed by the way in which he read and wrote (which, in turn, deconstructed the structuralist philosophical reading in which I had been trained). This is the context in which Wagner could appear as an ancestor. The monographic treatment my book gives to his work (something that surprised Wagner himself as much as it surprised Morris) is probably the result of my training as a philosopher and of the fact that his writing does not fall short of the systematicity one learns to expect from a philosophical text. I soon realized that he was not a worshipped ancestor elsewhere as I traveled. Yet misunderstandings can be generative.

In engaging with how borders are drawn in the act of naming, I have hoped to make visible how alterity and ipseity are co-constitutive. Indeed, it is impossible to do without names and naming. But it seems worthwhile to “become capable of opening oneself to that which is neither predicted by nor predicated on one’s own nominal position,” as proposed by Morris. This does not mean that one should ignore the fact that one is positioned in the world, in language, and in the imbrications between them. (I wish there were a language in which one did not have to constantly deconstruct the opposition between language and the world.) Rather, it means accepting being displaced from one’s position through the unnamed alterity to which events expose us—something that can happen in spaces ‘we’ believe to be inhabited by ‘others’ or in the uncanny space of that which one imagines to be familiar or pervaded by the strangeness of identity.

I wish to end this brief response to the comments I have been generously offered with the invitation for the unnamed ‘us’ to embrace the political, so often associated with game, together with the pleasure one finds in play. For, if it is true that there can be no game without constraint, the constraints of game are not unrelated to the names one assigns to games, plays, and players.

Notes

1. “Il en est du totémisme comme de l’hystérie. Quand on s’est avisé de douter qu’on pût arbitrairement isoler certains phénomènes et les grouper entre eux, pour en faire les signes diagnostiques d’une maladie ou d’une institution objective, les symptômes même ont disparu, ou se sont montrés rebelles aux interprétations unifiantes” (Lévi-Strauss 1962:1).
2. For the Daribi, the name *Para*, rather than representing a group, seems to operate borders, create contrasts, and promote elicitation (Wagner 1974).
3. I address these issues in recent works such as Dullea (2022a, 2022b).

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