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Introduction: Culture Without Cultures—The Culture Effect

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Anthropology has often been handmaiden to administrative and political activity that requires bounded social groups mapped onto territories and possessing defining characteristics such as language, values and behaviours. This introductory essay sets the scene for the papers in this Issue which show that actual sets of social relations in their particular places cannot easily be made to conform with this hermetic construct. Acknowledging this, post-colonial theory has been driven to theorise borderlands, hybridisation and metissage, liminal and interstitial social spaces. Yet these necessarily reinforce and privilege primary concepts of the pure and the central, the bounded and situated. This paper places the hermetic view of culture in its formative period, which also saw the emergence of nationalism and scientific atomism. The paper proposes that positing pure and bounded cultures, even as an idealised abstraction, is an error of theory which is influenced by an attachment to metaphors of the material world, usually 'Euclidean'. Finally, the paper explores ways that analyses of cultural interrelation, such as those in this Special Issue, can proceed without imagining a resulting 'culture', and what this may do for the political landscape of localised cultural rights.

The ethnographies in this Special Issue all question in some way the usefulness of bounded conceptions of discrete cultures.[1] The title of the Issue—*Delimiting Indigenous Cultures: Conceptual and Spatial Boundaries*—is intentionally ambiguous. It refers to the tendency in anthropology and wider discourse to set limits upon 'cultures' conceived as bounded (delimited) entities, and it also calls for their de-limiting, or for acknowledgement that it is inappropriate to use metaphors of entity for the limitless effects of human interaction. Although the following papers each produces descriptions of cultural distinctiveness and cultural reproduction, this does not happen within bounded realms of self-referral that construct and delineate 'a culture'. Rather, each of the studies emphasises how culture may be inextricably embedded within culture, cultures within cultures, internally heterogeneous, externally diffuse and lacking essential characteristics that would enable their extrication and alignment in a series of distinct entities. Nevertheless, culture as an effect of relation persists.

Sider's wide-ranging essay launches the Issue. He describes both the creation of north American 'distinct and bounded "Indian" societies' in the colonial period, and the recent internal differentiation of one of the groups, the Lumbee, under present political and economic pressure. The state/capital forces that Sider investigates in general are analysed

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in detail by Bauman. Here much the same historical processes that gave rise to the Lumbee, and then their need for internal differentiation, are described for the Jawoyn, Wardaman and Dagoman of the Katherine region in contemporary north Australia. Also in Australia, though at the other end of the continent and in a more closely settled region, Correy describes the structuring effect of the land rights and native title regimes, which create self-conscious groups around criteria established by the state. Langton, Mazel and Palmer's purpose is tangential but complementary. In the adjudication of native title rights in the sea for the northern Australian people of Croker Island, their customary intermeshing with people from contemporary Indonesia is misconstrued as trade relations between two distinct peoples, and therefore incapable of recognition as a native title right, which the state has decreed must remain untainted by trade.

The resonances between Sider's description of early colonial America, the current state of its indigenous people, and the contemporary construction of groups in Australia, described by Bauman, Correy, and Langton, Mazel and Palmer lead us to consider the colonial nature of state/indigenous relations everywhere and, perhaps, to move beyond this. Settler colonialism, I suggest later in this essay, is not simply a set of relations based on exploitation and oppression, but is also a particular instance of the global reach of modernity, itself a cultural system. McKay's essay on the Igorot of the Philippines speaks to these concerns. It explores well the contradictions of a people enmeshed in modernity, with village-level relations affected by emigration, yet retaining the economic presence of those departed which is mediated by contemporary information technologies. These very modern people are driven to construct themselves as a singular traditional people that never, as McKay shows, in fact existed in the ways now characterised. Indeed the relations between lowland and highland Philippine people was similar to that of the island people of present-day Australia and Indonesia, and they have been separated politically, economically and, finally, conceptually by the same historical processes.

Nakata's paper is illuminating of these questions because it is very much the view of an indigenous intellectual enmeshed in the processes of modernity, in this case the contemporary academy, looking both backwards and forwards, internally and externally. To maintain an indigenous voice with which to articulate indigenous knowledges as distinct from, but in dialogue with, the non-indigenous disciplines, he suggests indigenous people need to adopt a narrative of survival, rather than loss. He rejects the possibility of a singular indigenous identity, or even a series of identities separated from each other and radically distinct from the settlers. More productive, he says, is to reflect on where these identities and the groups they represent are situated within a knowledge landscape, with many features both indigenous and non-indigenous, from which they can map their origins and chart their progress.

These are not studies in hybridity. The collection emphatically questions the validity of the cluster of concepts grouped under the rubric 'hybridity' (metissage, creolisation, interstitiality, mongrelisation and liminality). All such approaches are given explanatory power by positing an antithesis, the existence of a social formation that is essentially pure. It is this trope of pure unified entity, rather than the derivative idea of hybridity, that this Introduction will concentrate on unravelling. While these papers deal, each in its own way, with largely empirical descriptions of cultural interrelation played out in practice, this Introduction attempts to show how the mongrel/purebred dyad is inadequately binary for an understanding of complex systems, and that it arises from certain kinds of metaphoric thinking.

Calling into question the 'entification' of social groups may seem to fly in the face of common sense. Isn't it essential for establishing the sense of self that all humans refer to their social groups as having a separate and distinct identity both from the individual and

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from other groups? Of course, they do; but these groups of which we are all a part are usually labile, malleable, open to interpretation, negotiation and exegesis, and often both internally and externally inconsistent or contradictory. We need to distinguish, as Correy does (this Issue), between entification (by which relationships are described as things) and objectification (by which sets of relationships are seen to stand apart from those who are enmeshed in them). While human groups always see themselves in objective terms, they have not always seen their groups as having the nature of 'things'. As Correy says: 'in making themselves the object of their own thought, [Aboriginal] claimants are compelled to pay attention to acts of understanding and of constitution which may otherwise have remained outside of critically conscious awareness.' These essays do not, of course, argue against cultural difference. They see culture and difference as being generative of each other in a creative process not chained to locality, period or inherent nature. The papers in this Issue agree with Francesca Merlan that the anthropologist's task is to explain 'how differentiation is reproduced without having to assume notions of social totalities, or distinct "cultures", assumed as fully present repertoires in terms of which [people] act' (Merlan 2002: 2-3). The problem for each of the peoples discussed in these papers is the dissonance between the lived experience of mixing and the need, in the face of modernity, to represent themselves as unmixed.

These are not studies in hybridity, because, as Pieterse says: 'in the end the problem is not hybridity—which is common throughout history—but boundaries and the social proclivity to boundary fetishism. Hybridity is unremarkable and is noteworthy only from the point of view of boundaries that have been essentialised... The importance of hybridity is that it problematises boundaries' (Pieterse 2001: 220).

This can be taken a step further: by problematising boundaries we should bring our attention to the neglect of cultural difference *within* these boundaries, to the neglect of temporality, mutability and context, all of which set cultural boundaries *within* the bounds of a supposed culture. It should bring our attention to an important and rarely addressed fact. As Weiner has observed, it is impossible to discriminate, in anything but an arbitrary manner, between differences of culture within social configurations and differences of culture between them, bringing down the particular metaphoric use of 'culture' that allows us to say 'within' or 'between'. He questions 'overly-hypostatized notions of culture—that it is a thing, or a collection or catalogue of things or traits or practices, that itself has distinctive boundaries as well as an interior volume and configuration within which a collection of "traits" reside'. And he argues, to the contrary, 'the critical position I am trying to establish here, however, is that we cannot distinguish between the "difference" that emerges within a culture as opposed to the "difference" that emerges between two "cultures"'. He asks:

> ... why not start with 'one world', wherein people, languages and more-or-less well understood 'laws' contingently and praxically exist, and posit as our subject matter the culturally differentiating activity that emerges from it and results in such categories as 'indigenous' and 'non-indigenous'. This would make the two articulations relational at the outset, a function of the creative perception of difference, rather than of the existing qualities of things considered discrete before they come into a relationship. (Weiner 2006: 17-18)

These observations are radical but not without precedent in anthropology. From Gluckman's (1949 [1947]) suggestion that distinctive cultural behaviours nevertheless occur within unified social fields, through Wagner's (1974) questioning of 'whether we need "groups" at all to explain social organisation' (Correy, this Issue), to Strathern's (1990: 5-8, 27) proposition that the concept of 'society' is theoretically obsolete, Weiner recovers tracks laid down by the ancestors, though obscured perhaps by the highway of

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modernist thought that has rendered them less influential (see Sullivan 2005). The work of these anthropologists must calm our sense of panic that the removal of boundaries leads to the collapse of everything that we hold dear, an incapability to make the distinctions upon which thought itself depends. The consequences are not so extreme. It is possible to decouple analysis of the forms of interrelation in any instance from the assumption that they either occur within or themselves constitute a wider structuring entity that, nevertheless, in some sense stands apart from them. Forms of interrelation, the culture effect itself, becomes the object of our attention. Consequently, centrality occurs wherever the centre is imagined, and as we re-imagine other centres, so the periphery shifts. Borderlands have the same contradictory status as peripheral vision—a category without a stable referent, since as the gaze shifts towards it, it reappears as non-peripheral. Culture is no longer the derivative of assumptions about the nature of the social, political, administrative or historical context in which it occurs.

It is not because boundaries can leak that they invite being crossed, and so their function as boundaries can be called into question. It is more because boundaries are contingently applied to different persons and groups distinguished by activity and period. Boundaries should not be categorised by whether they are hard and fast or relatively weak and permeable, but rather as to their operation in context. By this I do not mean to dismiss the real effect of boundaries, whether physical, political or ethnic, but rather to reconceptualise them so that we see them operating in a different fashion. A concrete example will illustrate this more clearly. There is no doubt that many thousands of people die each year attempting to cross political borders, many are turned away, and many die because they have not made the attempt. Those that succeed do find themselves constrained as immigrants by their ethnicity and race. However, this is a particularly cruel barrier that occupies our attention to the exclusion of others. People flee leaving behind those who are more impoverished, and barriers no less material (the steps to the veranda of the homestead, the portal of the police station, the airport or the town hall). Far from denying the existence of barriers, the view put here risks seeing them proliferate into boundary paranoia—and somewhere between the two the reality of social class must be recognised. Those who succeed in crossing borders are aided by those not so inhibited by the barriers, and they integrate with their hosts more firmly than with some of their compatriots. To say the horrors that they escape are 'internal', that the barriers they cross are more 'real', and that the subsequent immigrant situation is an 'external' environment, is simply to restate the case I argue against in a circular and unproductive fashion. Measures may be devised, of course, to distinguish cultural interactions at the perceived core that would present them as different in kind from cultural interactions at the perceived periphery. They would be measures, though, that are essentially arbitrary, arising from extrinsic concerns, and which are therefore self-fulfilling.

While 'culture' remains in our intellectual repertoire, 'cultures' should not. This argument gains force when we consider the historical origins of the idea of bounded cultures as natural phenomena. Anthropology's inherited subject of unified cultures derives from questionable truths in the foundation of modern social inquiry—these are the atomism and segmentary analyses informing the rise of modernity and the scientific age (Latour 1993), the development of the concept of race and its assumed behavioural attributes (Kohn 1996: 28-33), and the disintegration of the unifying governance principle of the realm with the need to control populations which produced defined territory (Foucault 1978). Though Foucault does not make this point himself, the rise of the nation and nationalism was a consequence of this. These are interrelated developments at the core of modernity.

The modern discovery of nation and the rise of nationalism are particularly important for

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our present recourse to the idea of 'a culture'. By 'nation' I do not mean the political states that increasingly in the 20th century instituted themselves around this never realised ideal. I mean ethnicities with a certain self-consciousness and incipient political system, extricated from their embeddedness in other ethnicities and other systems, in order to provide the ideological rationale of the nation state (see Sullivan 2006: 20). As Gellner (1998: 123-5, 131-3, 136-7) shows us, the roots of anthropology are also the roots of nationalism, from which we have borrowed not only the techniques of folk studies, but also the concept of primordial groups (the folk) that underlies them. Nationalism (about which Benedict Anderson (1991[1983]: 5) reminds us that 'there is no there there') patterned the emerging concept of a culture, tribe or people that similarly bound the primitives.[2] There is, of course, an evolution of ideas from the emergence of the non-reified term 'culture' itself, which is older, and the description of a world populated by cultures, nations, or ethnic groups. The two, however, are quite distinct in their underlying assumptions. The culture concept developed from ideas of a community of shared values and behaviours knowingly elaborated by the participants as right, just and civilised (Williams 1981). From this, the idea of a culture evolved wherein the members are trapped by these same values and behaviours, setting them apart from others.

Each of the ethnographies here struggles, then, with modernist anthropology. More deeply, they struggle with the modernist mode of thought that permeates the institutions, the political/legal/administrative structures, with which the people of these ethnographies must engage. It is a mode of thought that indigenous peoples both strive against and struggle to appropriate. These papers show that the modern state, itself founded on principles of boundedness, and reconstituting itself continually through the rational economy of formal principles of bureaucratic administration, is condemned to rediscover, to re-institute, nations even where these challenge its own legitimacy. It denies them, however, the political status that flows from this, and this is a weakness that indigenous groups relentlessly attempt to exploit. The modern state is necessarily late to recognise the redundancy of ever multiplying nationalisms. Yet attempts to normalise its indigenous peoples, whether in the Philippines or in northern Australia, by the reproduction of subjugated nations with lesser rights flies in the face of increasing academic scepticism about nations in modern scholarship. This scepticism must lead us also to re-examine cultural hermeticism, since, if the nation is suspect so is its progeny, 'the culture'.

Scepticism about the naturalness of nationalism owes much, of course, to the seminal work of Anderson in his *Imagined Communities*. He is convincing in his argument that nations began to be imagined as the powerful forces we now know in the mid-19th century (Anderson 1991 [1983]). Since then there has been much supporting work. Patrick Geary (2002) in the *Myth of Nations* undermines the view that nations are primordial, suppressed by artificial sovereignties for a period, and now resurgent. He shows that the peoples of the early Middle Ages could not be called nations in any sense (and incidentally makes the case for primordial hybridity instead). Davidson (1992), in his book *The Black Man's Burden*, subtitled *Africa and the Curse of the Nation State*, bases his scepticism on a lifetime's observation of African states, and asks how a concept apparently offering liberation has degenerated into one that produces so much oppression, corruption and suffering. Eller, writing on *Culture, Ethnicity and Conflict*, points out this dark side of the nationalist project, suggesting it is often the vehicle of extremist elites for their political advancement (Eller 2002: 41-7). This view receives support from more fine grained historical work such as Judson (1993) who, in his paper *Inventing Germans*, shows how German nationalism was constructed by bourgeois political forces as a counter to growing class schism during the period of industrialisation.[3] This resonates with Sider's contention (this Issue) that the entification of indigenous cultures is also the process of creating class

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inequality. This nationalist scepticism, well-founded in post-colonial and post-socialist experiences everywhere since the end of the Second World War, leads to a resistance at both international and domestic levels to further claims for minority rights and the collective rights of peoples (see Sullivan 2004).

The papers in this Issue, while often pursuing other purposes, nevertheless show how cultures are naturalised by reference to an ideal of the ethnic nation. They are all in some way concerned with the effect of colonialism, but they do not find a consequent fragmentation and pollution, and therefore the need to reconstitute a pre-colonial whole. Rather they describe the opposite effect—colonialism's need to delimit its subject(s), denying their diversity and the complexity of their relationships. Sider (this Issue) is perhaps the most explicit:

> The most revealing peculiarity of Native American ethnohistorical studies is the way that authors discuss discrete, bounded, culturally and socially distinct societies ... and simultaneously point out the multiple ways that these societies, particularly in the early colonial period, were neither discrete, nor bounded, nor even easily distinguished from one another.

He goes further, suggesting that conjuring cultures into being institutes social class—relations of exploitation and inequity—among the colonised themselves. This illuminates his later argument that the Marxist concept of primitive accumulation should not only refer to a founding moment in capitalism, it is an ongoing necessity of the capitalist process, particularly for global capital.

This argument is not foreign to McKay's analysis. She also shows how Igorot culture has been produced as a category in the Philippines, sealing it in relation to the culture of the lowlands. Yet she shows how *Igorotisation* (to coin an ugly term not her own) depends upon a national narrative and an international field of politics. Not surprisingly, in view of Sider's thesis, this brings relations of inequality to the Igorot that are characteristic of the penetration of global capital (see Friedman 2002). Among the Australian cases in this collection, the concretisation of groups under the pressure of native title and land rights regimes is described step by step in Bauman's analysis of group formation over two decades in the Katherine region. Correy's experience in the south-east, a region normally radically contrasted to Bauman's north, mirrors Bauman's and the two papers can usefully be read in tandem illustrating an Australia-wide tendency. Correy discusses alternative voices in the anthropological repertoire, Schultz, McKinley and Wagner, that are notably absent from native title discourse. Langton, Mazel and Palmer focus on a single case under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Commonwealth of Australia), claims to the sea in the region of Croker Island. They show that the people are constituted within the gaze of the state only by recognising a separation from, rather than a relation with, the people with whom they customarily exchange produce. The cruelty of the Croker case lies in characterising social relations as commercial relations which both denies a customary right to the produce of the sea and a complex pre-colonial identity. None of the Australian cases explicitly identify the emergence of class, or more broadly the relations of domination and exploitation, that Sider's thesis predicts. It is perhaps rendered less visible by the continuing poverty of the people, but may be read into the descriptions by considering future gender relations arising from a male dominated claims process (see Rose 1996), by elite capture of the Aboriginal organisations described by Bauman, and by contrasting the landed and landless in each of the case studies.

While all of the groups described here would nowadays assert their rights as definable groups in the face of the state (no matter that group identity is a mutable commodity as Bauman shows), all of these studies implicitly argue that these indigenous groups have as

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much right to recognition of their relatedness to others and of their embeddedness within regional, national and global processes, as they do to their distinctiveness. It is this embeddedness that Nakata (himself, like Langton, an indigenous intellectual) grapples with in his paper on indigenous knowledge systems. He sees both the necessity and the danger of arguing for the integrity of indigenous knowledges as against the disciplinary knowledge of the academy. The danger lies in adopting the language of the settler society. While arguing for their integrity they become themselves disciplinary, potentially distorting their unique characteristics and bequeathing the youth a whited sepulchre in substitute for a rich reality and diversity. Yet, like group and territorial rights, how else can they be argued for in the face of modernity? Nakata argues for indigenous people to teach their children, not simply objectified knowledge, but their 'locatedness' or 'situatedness', thus 'authorising the position from which we speak back to the disciplines but not so arrogant that we suggest a singular Indigenous intellectual position' (Nakata, this Issue).

These papers show, though the authors may not explicitly argue it, that culture in operation may best be conceived of as an effect of relation, the 'culture effect', and (following Weiner 2002: 3-4) an active practice of differentiation, not something that a people may have or belong to. The culture effect has some of the following characteristics. Being inherently interpretable it is inherently indeterminate. Its indeterminacy is inescapable since it cannot be accessed directly, but only through the interpretation of another order of information, the observation of what people do and say. It can always be traced to blended rather than uniform histories. It has a temporal ambiguity, incorporating the past and prefiguring the future. In any instance it is a labile compound. It is capable of being traced out along so many axes of variability, both material and ideational, each of which is reflexive and interpenetrative of the others, that chains of causality cannot be established with certainty and permutations of the interaction of its instances are too complex to be definitively unravelled. The relationship of its parts or subsets to the whole, the boundaries of the subsets and the boundaries of the whole, cannot be decidedly distinguished without making arbitrary[4] decisions about the criteria to apply in unravelling the interactions that produce the culture effect.

While Gellner (1998) describes the historical reasons for anthropology imagining cultures wherever it finds culture, there are also reasons embedded in a habit of thought, which is itself historically based. This is the tendency to think in metaphors of the material world that are often mechanistic or biological. Perhaps this tendency is itself produced by the historical prejudice in favour of ethnic nationality that I have referred to earlier, or perhaps both derive from other deeper historical conjunctures described in different ways by Foucault (1973, 1978) and Latour (1993). Metaphoric thinking, or metaphoric representation of thought, is useful and perhaps inescapable (Thrift 1999: 34-37),[5] yet the metaphors anthropology uses as its currency often mislead us to look for things that are not there, because they tend to be 'Euclidean'. They are drawn from images of the natural world bound by our inability to picture more than three dimensions, each of these in a linear fashion and linearly related. Certain types of metaphoric thought may be at the root of Wagner's problem with anthropology.

The tendency for 'as-if' to be transmuted into 'is', which Correy (this Issue) tells us Wagner discerned, is one of the dangers of metaphor. Illustrations of this tendency are manifold. For example, Rosaldo (1993), who argues for the study of borderlands, describes the 'classic' view of culture as a kaleidoscope. This metaphor is attractive for its inclusion of the aesthetic of fascination with beautiful complexity, but is still contained, circumscribed, and flat. While, in common with the authors represented here, he finds this unsatisfactory as it makes 'it difficult to study zones of difference within and between cultures' (Rosaldo 1993[1989]: 28), his ambivalence is clear, with the phrase 'within and

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between cultures' setting up the entification of culture at the same time as he attempts to break it down. He is capable of saying that 'borderlands surface not only at the boundaries of officially recognized cultural units, but also at less formal intersections, such as those of gender, age, status, and distinctive life experiences' (Rosaldo 1993[1989]: 29), but he can also say 'we can learn about other cultures only by reading, listening or being there' and that a New Yorker transferred at birth to Tikopia will become a Tikopian (Rosaldo 1993[1989]: 26). He retains to this extent the idea that culture is grounded in a place that we can be at, as in the sense of 'visiting other cultures'.

Deleuze attempts to vivify the kaleidoscope, through his rhizome metaphor but, like the kaleidoscope, it is also, intentionally, flat (he produces the image of the rhizome in opposition to arboreal metaphors). Yet it is satisfying in the way that it emphasises connectedness and the lack of centre that is characteristic of the rhizome (and of my observations on the culture effect above) (Deleuze and Parnet 1987 [1977]). Edouard Glissant (1997) gives us the image of an archipelago integral to his poetics of relation. Again it is flat (he refers to representation on a map), and a variant on the rhizome except that, in this metaphor, that which connects also separates. Yet it is useful in that it is similarly centre-less and unbounded.[6] Papastergiadis provides us with the streaming river of many currents moving at different rates and intensities as a way of summarising Lotman's approach (Papastergiadis 2000: 183). This is not quite so flat, perhaps, but bounded by its banks and tending teleologically towards its delta. Lotman has also given us the semiosphere, which is: 'the totality of semiotic acts: from squeaks to sonatas, from blips on the radar to burps at the dinner table. It also includes all acts past and present, possessing a "memory which transforms the history of the system into its actually functioning mechanism, ... the mass of texts ever created and ... the programme for generating future texts"' (Lotman and Uspenskij 1984: xii, summarised by Papastergiadis 2000: 183). The semiosphere coincides in some ways with the characteristics of the culture effect described here (as long as it is not spherical) since it is generative. Yet Lotman and Uspenskij are ambiguous in their imagery, telling us that the semiosphere is a '*working mechanism* whose separate elements are in complex dynamic relationships (their emphasis)' but cannot 'be represented as an immobile hierarchy of statistically disposed strata'. It remains, nevertheless a structuralist conception (Lotman and Uspenskij 1984: xii).

In order to free up anthropology from the ideology of critical external boundaries and non-critical internal ones we need to escape the terrestrial chains of Euclidean geometry informing much current metaphoric thinking. In the culture effect the shortest distance between two points is not necessarily a straight line, distant phenomena are stuck to each other in ways difficult to image, entities occupy the same space, an object viewed from one angle may have dimensions altogether incompatible with the view from another. If this were to be pictured it would require an Escherian geometry. In our need to remain comprehensible, describing culture in images of the everyday has led us to theorise things that aren't there, rather than to accept the peculiar nature of the processes that are.

What is to be done? How do we describe the culture effect without resorting to metaphors that delimit culture? Above all, how may we translate an understanding of labile culture into the practical terms required for the fulfilment of both needs and rights? Abstractions that de-limit culture and account for the varied cultural expressions described in these papers face a dilemma in both advocacy and pedagogy. The horns of this dilemma, which we appear condemned to fall upon, are the approachable but false in metaphor or the true but unintelligible in language. Our theorists inevitably reach an impasse of explanatory power when they describe culture with metaphors drawn from the world around us, if we then expect cultural processes to behave in the manner of these

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metaphorical cousins. On the other hand, using a language of art such as philosophy, poetics or arcane terminology devised for the project itself, suffers from the problem of lack of communicability. It is therefore difficult to draw on it for practical interventions in the real world of policy, practice and recognition of rights. There is little point in explaining with great accuracy a particular phenomenon if the language used is understood only by the explainer. Nor can the world at large be inducted into an understanding of specialist language. Not that it is unwilling; it is often all too willing, and subverts specialist terms by converting them back into the language of common sense in the field of what everybody already knows.

Culture is an emergent property of complex systems (Thrift 1999: 33, 60). Both the complexity of the system and the qualities of emergent phenomena require deft use of language. If we are to continue to use the language of everyday life to describe the operations of the culture effect, perhaps tempered by a language of art such as social philosophy or poetics (e.g. Glissant 1997), and to be suspicious of Euclidean metaphor, the language adopted must nevertheless strive to become both comprehensible and pragmatic. As Deleuze tells us, language is itself a material instrument. It does not merely mediate material outcomes, it is a material affect in its application. This is important not least because the re-conceptualising of social reality (which is needed as a result of dismissing both the central and the peripheral from descriptive analysis) has far-reaching consequences for political struggles, the pursuit of rights, and the public administration of diversity. We need deeply subversive languages for the assertion of rights without group boundaries, since we need to subvert both the rights discourse and its adversaries. This is not simply an intellectual exercise. The papers in this Issue describe actual living peoples in relationships of subordination in their respective polities, relationships supervised by the state and riven with differentials in power that translate into significant hardship. The papers also show, however, that the assertion of the rights of one group as against another does injustice to their interrelations. As well as their concern with accurate representation of complex realities, these papers are also concerned with social justice and the recognition of rights. Contemporary minority rights discourse, however, is still largely trapped in the nationalising rhetoric dealt with earlier in this introductory essay (e.g. Kymlicka 1995, 2001; see Sullivan 2006: 18-24). It undermines minorities' rights to be interrelated at the same time to other groups, capable of other practices, implicated in other processes.

The inequities that underlie indigenous struggles, which are now articulated in the terminology of cultural rights, do not disappear as a result of the end of cultures proposed here, but they do need to be advanced by new explanatory vehicles, modes of expression, and, consequently, methods of recognition. If we are to do away with, or transform our understanding of, the terminology of cultures, nations and ethnic groups as meaningful descriptors of social processes, there will be a significant knock-on effect in the areas of politics, ethnic and indigenous administration, the debate over minority and collective rights, and the field of governance, since so much has been invested on all sides in the assertion of delineated cultures. Certainly the present argument for separate minority rights on the basis of people-hood must be re-articulated for co-embedded interrelated peoples. As Merlan (2006: 101-2) has said, in the Australian context: 'Much might be gained by approaching restorative measures in ways not so thoroughly invested in the distinctness of Aborigines' culture and social situation, and more explicitly informed by understandings of accommodation and relationship, historically and presently, with institutions of settler and post-settler Australia...To open the issue of the interactive constitution of Indigenous-non-Indigenous identities and a diversity of relations to land would require the conjuring up of a new post-liberal conceptual framework'. Clearly, this does not make these issues disappear. This is a sentiment that all of the authors represented here would take comfort

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from, even though it points to a problem rather than posing a solution. Replacing the abstraction of separateness with new terminologies of embeddedness, interrelation and co-construction, may allow a productive rephrasing of old questions. Networks replace structures. Performance, belief, behaviour and need become more important indicators for appropriate governance than essential characteristics or membership of essentialised groups. This does not result in lesser rights or greater disadvantage. On the contrary it may lead the way out of many debilitating dead ends and the decay of political process no less in local indigenous rights than in international ethnic and sectarian conflicts.

Notes

1. Bauman, McKay and myself contributed initial drafts of these papers to the 'Critiquing Ideologies of Boundaries and Borderlands' session of the annual Australian Anthropological Society Conference in Sydney in 2002. Sider's paper is a condensed version of his keynote address at that conference. The other papers have been specially solicited for their contribution to this topic. Nakata's is adapted from the annual Wentworth Lecture of 2004 at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra. In this Introduction I am indebted to the encouragement of Gerald Sider and to the thoughtful commentary of anonymous referees.
2. This is particularly evident in Malinowski's work on cultural change (1958 [1945]), which occasioned Gluckman's (1949 [1947]) critique (see Sullivan 2005). In the current period of post-nationalist disillusionment, it is less and less possible for the jobbing anthropologist to continue, in Malinowskian fashion, to investigate the practice of 'something' among the 'somebodies' of 'somewhere' (as a glance at the contents list of anthropology journals would show has been the practice).
3. Indeed, Hale (1993: 68), in his history of pre-national Renaissance Europe, reminds us that the first bible to be translated in north Germany was a dual text with the mutually incomprehensible Frankish and Saxon forms of the language printed side by side.
4. By 'arbitrary' I do not mean haphazard, capricious or random. I mean choices made in a field of decision extrinsic to the subject at hand which, when applied to the subject, necessarily construct and structure it, such that they appear intrinsic. Cultures, then, are necessarily teleological; they tend toward the end that has been presupposed in the act of identifying them. It is this characteristic that gives them their apparent naturalness that our 'common sense' finds so hard to shake off.
5. In his review of Alan Lightman, Dyson (2005) suggests: 'as science has become more abstract and remote from everyday experience, the role of metaphor in our descriptions of the world has become more central. The language that nature speaks, as Galileo long ago pointed out, is mathematics. The language that ordinary human beings speak, especially those of us who are not fluent in mathematics, is metaphor'.
6. He tells us, as well as being without centre, thinking the archipelago is a thought *tremblante*, tremulous or trembling, and *nous avons besoin du pensées tremblantes, nous suffoquons de pensées systématiques qui sont sûres d'elles-mêmes*, 'we need tremulous modes of thought because we are suffocating with systematic theories which are [so] sure of themselves' (Glissant 2002: 78-9), a sentiment that informs this paper also.

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