

## **Specters of Marcus: Lively Capital, the Work of Friendship, and 'New' Objects of Ethnographic Interest**

Kaushik Sunder Rajan  
Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology  
University of California, Irvine

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Not being trained in any formal disciplinary sense as an anthropologist, I feel particularly ill-qualified to talk about multi-sited ethnography. It's not like I can "theorize" it in any formal way. A second possibility would be to perform it – provide you with snippets of my work as one example of multi-sited ethnography. I have decided, here, to embark on a third route, in many ways a cop-out, but hopefully a productive one, by letting others theorize it for me, and by pointing out others' performance of it. The venue that I describe is a workshop that I organized last fall at Irvine, called "Lively Capital: Biotechnologies, Ethics and Governance in Global Markets". I will not talk through the workshop in any complete or synchronic sense. Rather, I want to think about it as an example of a setting that was precisely intended *not* as a holistic marker of the state of research on the conjuncture of the life sciences and capital today, but rather as an example of a collaborative, multi-sited inquiry into a particular nexus – loosely speaking, of "biocapital" - by a group of people with shared intellectual investments, if not, purposely, shared disciplinary investments. I want to talk about the workshop as itself an event that will lead to a collection that can hopefully be read as a multi-sited work on the life sciences and capital, on the liveliness of capital, on the capitalization of life. But I also want to talk about some of the multi-sited concerns that animated the contributions *to* the workshop, and some of the debates and conversations that arose therefrom.

So what I plan to do is the following. I wish to start by outlining what *I* understand of Marcus and Fischer's notion of multi-sited ethnography – a dubious undertaking at best, but one that, at the very least, will hopefully clarify my stakes in the methodologies we are discussing at the outset. I then want to jump from there to Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, an apparently incongruent leap, but one that is essential in order to discuss three terms that Derrida particularly concerns himself with – *inheritance*, *conjunction* and (elsewhere) *friendship*. All of these three terms relate in different ways for Derrida to questions of the ethical, and I wish to spend some time on that question in relation to Lively Capital. They also relate centrally to questions of temporality, another key theoretical issue that came up in the workshop whose contours I wish to narrate.

*Multi-sited ethnography as a conceptual topology*

Instead of pretending to represent, in any "proper" way, Marcus and Fischer's notion of multi-sited ethnography, let me begin by posing the problem that confronts the study of the articulations of the life sciences and / with capital. Lively Capital is a project intended to trace, through the works of its contributors, a global system of knowledge

production and political economy (where “knowledge production” and “political economy” are not distinct from one another, but completely intertwined). While not all the contributors are anthropologists, there was a general shared sensibility amongst them regarding the desirability of utilizing ethnography, either as the primary mode of empirical inquiry, or as a strategic complement to other (historiographic, cultural studies, literary criticism) modes. There is already incongruence here between ethnography, which effectively sets out resources well equipped to study *locality* and *particularity*, in order to map a set of *global* systems, structures and terrains. In many ways, it is this incongruence that captures the spirit of what Marcus and Fischer diagnosed for social and cultural anthropology in the 1980s, the constitutive element of what they called an “experimental moment in the human sciences” (Marcus and Fischer 1986), and that indeed typifies the fundamental contradiction of ethnographic practice.<sup>1</sup>

This necessitates reconfigurations of the spatial boundaries of ethnographic practice to map onto the spatial reconfigurations of the relationships between “local” and “global” brought about by, in this case, globalizing techno-capital. Traditional, “single-sited” ethnography, as Marcus and Fischer point out, tends to be insufficient for capturing the complexities and multiple causalities of contemporary social systems and structures. They therefore proposed multi-sited ethnography as a methodological solution to the problems confronting “experimental” social and cultural anthropology. By multi-sited ethnography, they do not simply mean a multiplication of the number of field-sites that an anthropologist travels to, a quantitative “adding on” to single-sited ethnography. Rather, they argue that multi-sited ethnography is a *conceptual topology*, a different way of thinking about field sites in relation to analytic and theoretical questions about the world we live in. This might require different methodological strategies (for instance, involving new types of collaborations, formal and informal, between anthropologist colleagues, or between anthropologists and their informants); access to a different range of sources (for instance, web sites and other sources of mediated information in addition to participant observation and formal interviews); or different narrative strategies (more dialogic and polyphonic).<sup>2</sup>

The other challenge of tracing something like biocapital is to confront the fluidity of the systems and objects of study. Any analysis of high-tech capital needs to relentlessly emphasize it as *process*. Therefore, central to a multi-sited ethnographic methodology that emphasizes the spatial scale and incongruence of global systems, is a necessary emphasis on *temporality* as a consequence of the fact that these systems are not rigid or eternally resolved but are rather processes constantly in formation. It is these questions of spatiality and temporality as they emerged in the workshop, and their intersections with the ethical and political, that I wish to spend some time on today.

### *Inheritances*

I now move to the first of the three key concepts I wish to analyze from Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*, inheritance. Inheritance is operational for me at three levels in these reflections. First, there is the inheritance of multi-sited ethnography, which is what we are

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<sup>1</sup> For which see also Geertz 1983: 68.

<sup>2</sup> See also Marcus 1998 for an elaboration of the methodological strategies of multi-sited ethnography.

gathered here to discuss. Regardless of, in purely empirical terms, the place or the use of a multi-sited sensibility in ethnographic research design and practice today, there is no question in my mind that Marcus and Fischer's work since the mid-1980s has brought into play a conceptual space, a methodology and vocabularies for thinking about ethnographic practice and its narration, that have to be reckoned with, especially given the velocities and complexities of the processes in the world that anthropologists study. Even if one's work is localized in a single specific site, multi-sited sensibilities – in terms of, for instance, the location of that site in a constellation of field of forces that speak to multiple scales of analysis and impact, local, regional, transnational, global – are hard to escape. “Local” and “global” are increasingly untenable as oppositional categories, for these are but two of a number of scales at which something like techno-capital operates, and in any case each of these is inhabited by the other.

Derrida insists in *Specters of Marx* that we are all Marx's heirs. By this, he emphatically does not mean, either descriptively or normatively, that we all are / should be Marxists. What he does mean is that progressive intellectuals who share a certain sensibility – for instance, towards an idea of justice, which is a very important one for Derrida – cannot escape the various inheritances of Marx. These inheritances, in equal measure, include the ways in which Marx reconfigured philosophy in a manner that allowed certain questions to be posed that fundamentally altered the grounds of philosophical practice,<sup>3</sup> and the more violent inheritances of Marxism in the former Communist countries.

Derrida's point is that we cannot escape Marx's legacy, philosophical and practical. In a more modest but similar manner, I wish to state here that we cannot escape Marcus and Fischer's legacy – where the “we” in question refers both to those of us intellectually and / or institutionally invested in anthropology as a discipline, but also, I suggest, to a larger “we”, those of us who are interested in understanding the contemporary world in ways that resist the quantoid hegemony of a rational choice economic worldview. To that extent, multi-sited ethnography has everything to tell to the multi-/inter-discipline of Science and Technology Studies, which is the department in which I received my Ph.D. (I know that George is very interested in looking to STS for examples of work that could serve as templates for the doing and teaching of experimental ethnography. My stakes are almost the inverse, for I think there is much to be learnt by STS from looking at the types of methodological and disciplinary risk that anthropology departments, certainly in the US, are taking, almost always in the cause of a sensibility that is resolutely multi-sited).

And so, this speaks to a more direct and personal inheritance that needs to be noted here, if only as an acknowledgment, and that is the inheritance of being Mike Fischer's student. I do not make this acknowledgment here simply as a parenthetical self-reflexive gesture, or in an attempt to brand myself with some distinguishing mark. It is rather to underscore the situatedness of my own investment in “experimental” ethnography, of which Lively Capital is one manifestation, which is a *different* investment from Marcus's. Marcus, in my understanding, cares very much about what he

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<sup>3</sup> No place, alas, to elaborate upon this, but see Balibar 1995, who does with great clarity.

refers to as the “norms and forms of ethnography” – it is a methodological investment that is simultaneously disciplinary, ethical and aesthetic. My investment in disciplinarity cannot but be different, since I have never consistently inhabited a disciplinary space for any significant period of time (having received degrees, successively, in Human Biology, Biochemistry and STS, a post-doctoral fellowship in a policy school, and now employment in an Anthropology department). I make this statement because, essential nods to disciplinary canons aside, anthropology in my learning in some sense really did begin in 1986. I do not mean this facetiously, for of course there is a huge tradition of anthropology prior to this date that I do draw upon in my work, and that I will, in a few short months, be called upon to teach to our graduate students as part of their introductory pro-seminar. What I do mean here is that there is a specific conjuncture in anthropology, marked significantly by the publications of *Writing Culture* and *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, that signifies, as part of the “experimental turn” that Marcus and Fischer write about, an explicit turn towards technoscience as an object of ethnographic attention, in a fashion qualitatively different, I think, to anything seen in anthropology before, and that has been consequential not just for anthropology but also for STS. It is this conjuncture, which has led over the past two decades to the increasing attentiveness within anthropology towards technoscience, and the increasingly constitutive place of ethnography within the methodological “toolkit” of STS, within which something like Lively Capital must be situated. When I joined Irvine two years ago, all the graduate students there were busy reading Bruno Latour – and *that* is the conjuncture that I’m talking about here, because I think it is completely non-obvious, and very significant, that they were doing so within a department that has been branded in many ways by its deep commitment to the anthropology of modernity.

But there is also an inheritance of *Marx* that is central to the conceit of Lively Capital. A point I have alluded to very quickly above is that Marx provides us with a *methodological* pedagogy that is rare to find in the pantheon of social theory, and it is a methodological inheritance, I argue, that we cannot afford to ignore in studying the life sciences. This is, implicitly at least, a critique against a certain type of reification of Foucault that occurs in some quarters in the study of the life sciences. Let me work through this assertion a little more slowly, because I am emphatically *not* setting out a Marx / Foucault opposition, or even worse, a “Marxist” / “Foucaultian” one.

Any study that is interested in the question of the relationship of the life sciences to society is evidently biopolitical, since it squarely concerns the question of how modernity puts life at the explicit center of political calculation (see for instance Foucault 1976). This is a question that, in various ways, was front and center for each of the participants in the workshop. What was also crucial was that, in the spirit of Foucault, the modes of power that were being traced operate through *institutional*, *epistemic* and *discursive* mechanisms. Of particular interest in terms of the methodological undercurrents of the workshop is the relevance of *The Order of Things* (Foucault 1973), where Foucault argues, firstly, that a constellation of disciplines collectively concerning the knowledge of Man becomes fundamental to the operation of modern rationality, and secondly, that three such disciplines of particular importance are biology, political

economy and philology, corresponding respectively to understandings of life, labor and language.

In such an articulation, political economy *as a discipline* is but one of a central triad of disciplines involved in the constitution of modernity. At the same time, however, political economy speaks to and of a system (or in Foucault's formulation, a regime) of global capital that is hegemonic in our contemporary world, a hegemony that shows no signs of receding. A conceit of Lively Capital is that the life sciences today are *overdetermined* by the capitalist political economic structures within which they emerge. Overdetermination is a term used by Louis Althusser to suggest a *contextual* relationship but not a *causal* one (Althusser 1969 [1965]). In other words, even if a particular set of political economic formations do not in any direct and simplistic way lead to particular epistemic emergences, they could still disproportionately set the stage within which the latter take shape in particular ways. And so, even if capitalism represents particular types of political economic formations, in this current moment in world history, as Slavoj Žižek argues, it "overdetermines all alternative formations, as well as non-economic strata of social life" (Žižek 2004). Therefore, even while emphasizing the historicity and the far from natural emergence of capitalism as a set of political economic forms and structures, it is important to acknowledge the importance of capital as being what Žižek calls the "'concrete universal' of our historical epoch" (*ibid*). This, I feel, is the crucial acknowledgment that Foucault does not make.

Further, I read Marx as himself only able to achieve a critique of capital by means of critiquing political economy as the emergent foundational *epistemology* of the time that had consequences for structuring social formations. If life sciences such as, for instance, genomics or various types of bioinformatics have a similar place to those occupied by biology, political economy or philology in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, then there is place for a *form* of critique that is faithful to those employed by both Foucault and Marx in their moments of epistemic critique. Lively Capital was very deeply influenced by the specters of Marx and Foucault, but one of the conversations they were having precisely concerned the necessity of locating these epistemic critiques of the life sciences within contemporary social formations that are overdetermined, materially and through various forms of abstraction, by the haunting of global capital.

Tom Boellstorff, for instance, made the following remarks in a comment on Joe Dumit's paper at the workshop. The paper concerned Dumit's "Biomarks" experiment, which involves substituting the keywords in Marx's labor theory of value with an alternative set of "biopolitical" keywords. Boellstorff said:

I suggest that the entire concept of Lively Capital is a databasing project of putting together Foucault and Marx. This is an ultimately Hegelian synthesis. This is not just a game of Marxist Mad Libs.... How does Foucault haunt the text? Why does bioMarx make sense but bioFoucault would not and bioFreud would be irrelevant? ... Issue I want to push: why is Foucault in the air we breathe while Marx must be 'funkified' with a logic of substitution? ... Bio-Althusser also haunting this conference.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Many thanks to Elta Smith for generating all the transcripts of the workshop that I use here.

If the inheritances of Marcus and Fischer concern both anthropology and STS (at the very least), then that of Marx concerns the place of social theory in our analyses of the empirical. Lively Capital reiterates the fact that we cannot just “pick” our social theorists off the shelves of a theory supermarket in a supreme act of neo-liberal consumer choice, and see which theory matches which ethnography. There are certain theorists we stub our toes against in the study of certain objects, discourses and practices in the world, and one of the important (if not always explicit) conversations that ran through Lively Capital regarded the impossibility of avoiding Marx’s inheritance in a study of the contemporary life sciences.

These two sets of inheritances – of Marcus and Fischer on the one hand, Marx on the other – are, respectively, disciplinary and theoretical. The third inheritance at Lively Capital was conjunctural, and that was the inheritance of Derrida himself. There was the question of the broader relationship of Lively Capital to the tracing and theorization of emergent structures of neo-liberalism. That this conversation was occurring in Irvine was appropriate, both because of the particular type of place that Irvine, as a town, is (any of you who are familiar with the place will know exactly what I mean – a friend aptly described it to me before I went there as “postmodern plastic dystopia”), and because of the strong interests and strengths of the Irvine Anthropology department in the study of neo-liberal phenomena using ethnography. But it was a conversation that was lent particular urgency (or desperation if you prefer), held as it happened to be on the weekend after George W. Bush’s re-election. In that context, Lively Capital felt like it was occurring in a similar conjuncture to a workshop held less than twelve years previously at an adjacent University of California campus, at Riverside. This other workshop was the “Whither Marxism” conference, from which, indeed, arose *Specters of Marx*. Lively Capital also occurred in the shadow of the recent death of Derrida, who had (though not in my time) himself taught at Irvine. There was an indebtedness called into account here, and we were / are in debt to him – not least for outlining a Marxian inheritance that a number of us could invest ourselves in. Lively Capital, at one level, was one performance of the work of mourning for Derrida. It was, in that spirit, a workshop that was in many ways about friendship, and I will talk about this at greater length in a little while. But first, a little bit about Derrida’s second key notion in *Specters of Marx*, *conjunction*.

### *Conjunction*

Derrida speaks of conjunction in terms of the temporality that inhabits Marx’s invocations to revolution, particularly in *The Communist Manifesto*. He argues that the type of future that is envisaged in such an invocation is *not* one that is teleological or determinist, but rather one that is oriented towards a future that is yet-to-come. This future, *l’avenir*, is precisely distinct from the future that “will be” – the work of the manifesto is, in Derrida’s eyes, resolutely not the work of prediction. And therefore, it has an inherent undecidability to it, and brings with it not teleological design, but rather an ethical obligation to realize the “promise of justice” that is, in Marx’s articulation, the promise of communism.

A way in which Derrida makes this argument is by analyzing temporality, both in Marx (in a statement such as “A specter is haunting Europe; the specter of communism, with which the *Manifesto* opens) and more generally. This is an analysis of temporality that segues directly into a study of the sorts of objects, discourses and practices that Lively Capital is invested in, and also directly into methodological questions of tracing novelty for anthropology. Derrida points out that there are a number of meanings of time – time itself (*le temps*); time as that which temporality makes possible (history or event, *histoire*); and time as the state of the current world, a present (*monde*).<sup>5</sup> Conjunction is a performative mode of calling time into being (and into Being, since Derrida is centrally concerned with ontology here); it is also a pact, a secret, a certain structure of obligation that is distinct from the contract. It is an invocation of a future that makes certain types of presents possible.

There are two levels at which conjunction, temporality and the study of futures that are yet-to-come inhabit the concerns of Lively Capital. First, there is the constant conjunction of futures in the objects of Lively Capital’s study. Speculative capital and high-tech are both inherently future-oriented, and contend constantly with tropes of emergence, novelty, and the magic and glamour attendant to that. A word such as “innovation”, which is such a central one for the informants of many of the presenters at Lively Capital, is completely temporally loaded – as are knowledge, value, promise and a host of others. What time means for those who inform Lively Capital is of central importance.

But conjunction and temporality are also important in the context of the emergent moment in ethnography that Marcus and Fischer are concerned with, and that Lively Capital is one marker of. Marcus and Fischer, after all, insist on the current *experimental moment* in the human sciences (an experimental moment that extends from its initial diagnosis in *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* in the mid-1980s, through the *Late Editions* series of the 1990s, through the publication of the second edition of *ACC* just after the start of the new millennium). I read experiment here in the sense that Hans-Jorg Rheinberger does in his Derridean history of the discovery of tRNA (Rheinberger 1997) – as constantly open-ended, its own closure deferred to the future that is yet-to-come. As Rheinberger shows, “conclusive” experiments in molecular biology are only provisionally so. Anything that claims a definite finality ceases to be experimental, it resolves into dogma.<sup>6</sup> The multi-sited ethnography of a moving target such as techno-

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<sup>5</sup> Derrida 1994: 18. For an analogous analysis of temporality and its importance for anthropology in the context of Foucault’s genealogical method of epochal analysis, see the conclusion to Paul Rabinow’s *Anthropos Today*, “Epochs, Presents, Events” (Rabinow 2003). I do not have the time to discuss Rabinow’s position here, though my critique of it is based in the way in which Foucault, as Rabinow points out, solves the problems concerning the methodological limits of epochal analysis by instead resorting to a methodology that emphasizes contingency. As Mike Fischer (2003) shows in the methodological moves he makes in *Emergent Forms of Life and the Anthropological Voice*, the challenge when “life is outrunning the pedagogies in which we train” (37) is not to abandon those pedagogies at the altar of documenting a multiplicity of contingent emergences in absence of a structural grounding, but rather to recalibrate the “pedagogies” themselves. This, folding back to a discussion of anthropology and STS, are precisely, in my reading, Fischer’s stakes in multi-sited ethnography.

<sup>6</sup> Extremely interesting here are arguments by Creationists in the US against evolution, precisely pointing to the uncertainty and debate within evolutionary biology as a symptom of its lack of scientificity. As

capital is similarly placed – caught between a desire to talk about new technologies prospectively, instead of engaging in the primarily retrospective jurisdiction of institutionalized bioethics, but also, at the same time, struggling to keep pace with stories, events and discourses that often change over the course of research projects. There is an experimental ethic central to Marcus and Fischer’s invocation of multi-sited ethnography, and it is an ethic that, in significant measure, concerns what Kim and Mike Fortun, in the context of their study of toxicologists, refer to as “care of the data” (Fortun and Fortun 2005). Care of the data is ethical, it is temporal, and it is important both to ethnographers themselves and to those whom the ethnographers of Lively Capital study. In the case of ethnography, at least some of the questions regarding care of the data regard friendship, which is the question that I would like to move towards as the third aspect of the Derridean triad I am concerning myself with here.

### *Friendship*

Questions of temporality, I have suggested above, are not just methodological questions (how do we *trace* phenomena that are both rapidly evolving in the present, and that look to the future for their presents, their presence?) but are also ethical ones (at the very least, how do we *respond to* phenomena that are often too rapidly evolving in the present for judgments about them to hold up – the reason why bioethics based in analytic philosophy is often so vapid?). And also, what is the ethical valence of rapidly emergent market-driven technologies, situated as they often are within political economies of both hope and hype?<sup>7</sup> How do we (whether producers, consumers, subjects or analysts) of techno-capital live with a future that is yet-to-come, what obligations do dealing with indeterminate techno-futures entail, what is the “promise of justice” that is at the ethical horizon of something like Lively Capital?

Equally, the performance of ethnography is also completely tied in to questions of ethics. For instance – what qualities of encounters are adequate to an “ethical” ethnographic encounter, especially when they might be with informants, such as corporate scientists, who are extremely articulate, and who in some instances at least might be thought of in adversarial terms by those of us studying them? For Derrida, as Mike Fortun (2000) shows, ethics is not about a good or a bad answer, but about the “quality of an encounter”. This is where, in Fortun’s reading, ethics parallels ethnography, both being involved with the staging of an encounter.

A particular dimension in regard to which Derrida obsessed with the ethical was through the question of friendship.<sup>8</sup> The actual solidarity and affect of friendship was

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Rheinberger’s work shows, it is this debate that is a signifier *par excellence* of its scientificity. Unfortunately, positivist biologists themselves defend evolution in dogmatic rather than experimental terms, thereby lowering themselves to the Creationists’ level, and losing many a battle in school boards across the American heartland over the teaching of Creation and evolution in schools. But all of this is a digression, and a topic for other times and places.

<sup>7</sup> The term “political economy of hope” is that of Nikolas Rose and Carlos Novas; see Rose and Novas 2004. For a more detailed ethnographic exploration of the political economy of hope, see Miyazaki ref. For an analysis of the political economy of hype as it pertains to biocapital, await Sunder Rajan forthcoming.

<sup>8</sup> See especially *Given Time, Politics of Friendship*.

central to the conceit of Lively Capital, and indeed much of the friendship that weekend served for a number of us as solidarity in the face of the election results. The work of friendship, like the work of mourning or the work of politics, demands an ethics, indebtedness, obligation, commitment – and oftentimes, indeed, a failure of all of these. Lively Capital as an exercise in collaborative multi-sited inquiry was animated, explicitly, by an ethic of friendship. This is why I said, earlier, that the primary attempt of the workshop was not an effort to synchronically map the state of the study of biocapital in the humanities and social sciences today. It was something else, an attempt to initiate and hopefully continue conversations that feed off one another, in a certain spirit.

But there was a second level at which the question of friendship operated, and that had to do with questions of the sorts of friendships and complicities struck up by ethnographers with their informants. This is something that has been a central debate in the anthropology of life sciences; it was already inaugurated as an explicit research question through the *Late Editions* series and again by Marcus in *Ethnography through Thick and Thin*. But it acquired a particular salience in the context of the anthropology of the life sciences, I think, through the remarks made on complicity by Gisli Palsson and Paul Rabinow on the one hand (ref), and by Mike Fortun on the other (M. Fortun 2000), in the context of the controversy over the Icelandic Health Sector Database and DeCode Genetics having an exclusive license to genotype the Icelandic population, using in the process Iceland's public medical records to create their proprietary database. Palsson and Rabinow did fieldwork at DeCode, and argued in *Anthropology Today* against a rushing to judgment about the controversy in the manner that bioethicists in particular were doing. Excerpts of this article appeared, amongst other places, on the DeCode company website, again pointing to the mediations and complicities in contemporary ethnography, and it was precisely this sort of complicity that Palsson and Rabinow were interested in teasing out as a constitutive challenge for ethnographies of techno-capital. Fortun, too, was interested in the question of complicity, and in his complicitous role in representing, as an ethnographer, the position of Mannvernd, the leading oppositional NGO to DeCode. Ironically, both Palsson and Rabinow and Fortun were saying very similar things about complicity, though Fortun was taking a more careful position on the representational politics attendant to complicitous ethnographic situations. Of course, they ended up on opposite sides of the fence as far as the DeCode issue was concerned.

But the question of how to talk with and about scientists, when conclusions drawn from these conversations cannot help but be normative, was a central one for Lively Capital. Two of the papers specifically concerned fieldwork with scientists. The first was Mike Fischer's, who traced the institution of five new "thematic centers" at the Massachusetts General Hospital as examples of promissory interdisciplinary institution-building in the life sciences. I think here, in parallel, of Marilyn Strathern's (2004) interest in the Cambridge Genetics Knowledge Park as an example of interdisciplinary knowledge production, which very quickly leads to questions about the ownership of academic knowledge, and indeed, therefore, about the meanings of "ownership", "academic" and "knowledge". Fischer is very interested in this question of interdisciplinarity, in a context overdetermined by capital, but also, in a manner typical of the conceits of the *Late Editions* experiments, is reflexive about *his* challenges in

narrativizing this story. He says before he starts his paper, for instance, something that I hope we can talk a great deal about in our discussions, which gets to the heart of the question of ethics and “care of the data” for ethnography:

One of the perennial questions is how much to rely on my own summarizing voice and how much to evoke and directly display scientists voices and discourse patterns. I’m convinced that there is an aesthetics, a music, to the latter that all too often gets lost especially in journalistic accounts, which also block understanding by substituting “dumbing down metaphors” for the analogies, associations, comparisons, and diversions that constitute scientific discourse.

A second paper that drew deeply on interactions with scientific communities was Kim Fortun’s on ecoinformatics. She showed the number of scales at which environmentalism can now be depicted thanks to the capabilities that exist to informationalize environmental data, and the different levels of expertise that get called into account in accessing each of these levels of representation. (The most “lay” form of ecoinformatic representation being something like the scorecard.org website, which allows anyone to directly access information on a range of environmental indicators in any particular area). There are many things going on in Fortun’s paper, but part of her concern has precisely to do with the way ecology and informatics comes together as an interdisciplinary sphere of knowledge production, and further how these ecoinformaticists are constructing forms and objects of knowledge that are not just interdisciplinary, but are also more open-ended, in terms both of their potential for appropriation and consumption, and of their consequences. This is neither, in her reading, a hegemonic “science” bearing down upon a disempowered “society” (which is the tone of the anti-development critique that has been fairly forceful in places like India through the 1990s), nor the model of scientists making the “right” information available to an ignorant “society” needing to be educated by “science” (the form in which “public understanding of science” questions tend to be posed). There is something altogether uncertain, open-ended, experimental here – both in terms of the work being done within ecoinformatics, and in terms of the ethnographic work Fortun does in tracing it.

But change the scale of analysis, and something very different appears. And therefore Geoffrey Bowker’s paper on biodiversity databasing, based on *long duree* structural analysis, showed that, far from the emergence of experimental forms of knowledge production, what persisted in the database were very old modernist ontologies of classification. This led, after Fortun’s paper, to comments such as the following from Sheila Jasanoff:

A structural argument: it seems to me that a post-millennial turn toward multiple meanings is “it’s not that simple.” There’s not a single hegemonic argument. We have to look at other sites (information is one of those sites). I guess my personal preference is not to think in sequential terms, one thing then another. Instead, the world we see includes the one that came before: new formations around ones that are already there. What about all the other stuff that went along with the databases? Did it survive? In comparative terms, risk discourse is actually perfectly alive and well. That raises methodological questions about where one should be looking to produce an interventionist critical discourse... This paper is a marker of a shift in critical

historiography, but also raises methodological questions about how to structure the argument, especially with interventionist moves in mind?

On the face of it, Jasanoff's critique of Fortun might look like a historian's critique of anthropology, something that could be deflected, as can the historian's critique of Foucault, by pointing out that something other than history is being performed here. But that elision won't work here. On the one hand, Fortun insists (as all good ethnographers do) on the absolute historicity with which she traces her emergent phenomena. On the other hand, Jasanoff is not simply claiming that Fortun is getting the history "wrong" in some empirically straightforward sense. Rather, what she is pointing to is that, the emergent contingencies of ecoinformatics notwithstanding, some rather consistent structural patterns remain as the contingencies move outwards in the larger world. And so, for instance, informaticists maybe making ecological information available to the lay public through media like scorecard.org in ways that seriously decenter older hierarchies of scientific expertise, but when it comes down to making policy, it is still risk analysis, a modernist top-down methodology that has been hegemonic for at least two decades, that gets employed, certainly in the context of the US, certainly in the institutional minds of places like the Kennedy School where Jasanoff is located. In that sense, Bowker's argument for a hegemonic continuity in the logics of databasing seem to "fit" better into a picture of practice in the world that translates knowledge production into practical formulations than Fortun's.

How to account for these incongruences, such as those between Palsson and Rabinow and Mike Fortun, or between Jasanoff and Bowker and Kim Fortun? One could simply say that this is a function of the people each of these analysts are talking to, that ultimately analysts' categories as a re-presentation of actors' categories, and we end up representing the positions we re-present, and leave it at that. But I think there are more interesting and complicated issues involved and at stake here, that have, on the one hand, to do with the ethics and complicities of friendship – how much do we decide to re-present scientists' voices through our own, as Fischer asks us, and why listen to scientists' voices anyway before or in preference to those of policymakers for instance?<sup>9</sup> – but on the other hand also have to do with the place of the "new" in the ethnographies of something as self-absorbed with novelty as techno-capital is. This is not a new that has to do with the tradition / modernity dichotomy – it is a qualitatively different new, the neo of neo-liberalism – volatile, unpredictable, risky, hard to grasp let alone judge, yet hugely consequential to the lives we lead. I wish to conclude by analyzing the challenges of theorizing novelty that cropped up in Lively Capital.

*"New" objects of ethnographic interest*

So here, in a nutshell, is the challenge of tracing novelty that came up at Lively Capital. I shall pose this challenge as a crude binary, though of course it is infinitely more complicated than my representation here. We have, on the one hand, the obvious empirical fact that technoscience, and certainly the life sciences, are moving very

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<sup>9</sup> And to complicate the question of complicity further, it is perhaps interesting to point out that one of the scientists Fischer interviews at great length in the paper is George's brother-in-law!

quickly. To distort Fischer only slightly, the life sciences have outrun the pedagogies in which I trained, less than a decade ago, so as to make them almost archaic. A challenge of good ethnography is to keep pace with this rapidity, which often involves entering the belly of the technoscientific beast one is studying – to get at the epistemes, the discourses, the technologies, the practices, from the “inside”. This is not just a disciplinary concern, it is, resolutely, an ethical one as well, one that demands a diligent accounting for technoscientific worlds from actors’ categories and perspectives (while still, of course, retaining the right for critique). On the other hand, the critical sensibility that is also a part of the anthropological project of knowledge production (and that indeed animates anthropology as cultural *critique*) is one that is suspicious of techno-capitalists’ claims and celebrations of utter novelty, precisely because such claims often embed an ahistoricity which masks the “old” that persists in these new emergences. A challenge of temporality – as Derrida would say in *Specters of Marx*, quoting Hamlet, time is out-of-joint here – and of ethics.

It is not my place to resolve this contradiction – indeed, I think it a contradiction that is an extremely productive site for ethnographies of something like Lively Capital. So instead of interpreting this contradiction and the way it played out in the workshop, let me instead lay out some of the conversations that happened in this context, from the concluding discussions to the workshop.

I start with Jean Comaroff, who provided her summary of the workshop to start discussion with:

**Comaroff:** ... Lots of what our discussion takes for granted is the point at which modernity is made strange. [There are] implications for how we think about modernist social theory—what we take and what we leave....Our late modern sensibility, critical post-colonialism, sees modernity itself as a process. We’re not sure where it goes. ...What determines flow? What about the sedimentations? ... Flow is never random. ... With an older language concerned with issues like class, like politics, require some kind of counter process that everything is fluid, moving... How do we talk about in this current moment? ...

....The way this sifted out for me is time, space, affect, and ethics.

Temporal question came up in everything: in conception of space, time, commodity flows. They create particular kinds of temporalities. So some questions we ask ourselves: are we looking at something that is particularly marked at this time—the temporality of life sciences and capital? Tremendous emphasis on emergent and new: modernity always creating the new through destruction. So one wonders about question of emergence and creating novelty, constant search for distinguished product and emphasis on experimentation as at frontier. That whole process is continuing. How do we judge that? Is there something about velocities of flow, abstract human value at this point, which is different? ... Lots of talk here about futures, venture, venture capital: futures and finance capital circulating at speed, an abstract speed that seems to have this connection to more tangible forms of production. ...

Similarly on questions of space and production of space, production of life science knowledge. Interesting things said about scale—absolutely essential here.... New forms of media, mediation, forms of media, forms of code, list, coin, ways in which you move

value around. That seems to me part of what we're talking about—the degree to which spatializations are particular to the moment.

Affect: degree to which we talked about love and promise, and language I know, apology, reconciliation. There's a return of the repressed, separating fact from value. ... Affect connects to an older presence; life of commodities is full of meanings, animations in Marx, highly erotic quality to it, language of desire. Meshes beautifully with the way the world works.

How does this relate to a question of ethic?... I wonder with emergence of affective ethics, how we get to philosophy of praxis that Kaushik mentioned at the end. I'm not sure how that gets us to the questions we need to attend to. Urgent questions that raise immediate concerns about a politics of direct attachment.

There is too much in this summary here for me to go into, not least the relationship between the ethical and the affective. I have alluded to some of that in talking about friendship, but have done so in all too rudimentary a fashion. In fact, what was at stake analytically was much more than the instrumentalism of friendship in the construction of anthropological knowledge production, but a whole range of affective registers that spoke to questions of intimacy and erotics, of desire and sacrifice – for instance, as already mentioned, Kim Fortun's concern with scientists' *care* for their data; Mike Fortun's analysis of the ethics of the *promise* in genomics, and the *obligations* entailed in it; Lawrence Cohen's analysis of *commitment* and an *order of debt* that structures global transactions in organs; Donna Haraway's and Chloe Silverman's analysis of *love*, in the former case as constitutive to what she called the “encounter value” of trans-species interactions that have themselves been rapidly capitalized; in the latter case as central to the praxis of parent advocacy groups organizing around autism research, to name but some. All of these affective registers are part and parcel of the regimes of value that are being constituted by / in / as biocapital. But for the purposes of this discussion, I want to hone in on what Comaroff has to say about temporality, which is – what is the consequence of the vocabulary of emergence with which we speak of the temporal changes concerning Lively Capital? What words drop out? What violence is masked in languages of emergence? How to account for the silences and elisions that this in itself emergent ethnographic vocabulary might bring with it? Sensibilities, indeed, similar to those of Jasanoff's in her response to Kim Fortun's paper that I read earlier.

So, let me in that spirit read you some of the responses to Comaroff's comments:

**Mike Fischer:** I just wanted to ask where the place of the ethnographic and the real is in this discourse? The question about emergence: anything new is a mapping and empirical question. Is there a difference between 19<sup>th</sup> Century and late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, our state now? I think the answer is not—cannot be yes or no. It is variegated terrain of multiple layers. It's instructive that so many people are returning to Marx. Those processes are still there. It's not a return to the same but to difference (Derrida). All these processes to talk about movement from production to commodities are too simplistic.... As part of that mapping, the other crucial thing is the generation of meaning through commodity circulation, through velocity—returns never the same—but also through reconfiguration. Return to Derrida's distinctions between law and justice. It's in that gap between ideals and realities put forth.

And then Bill Maurer, in a comment that suggested some of the specificities of these questions to Lively Capital and to the anthropology of science, rather than simply symptomatic of the general challenges of performing ethnography in a neo-liberal world:

**Maurer:** Question of empirical troubling me all along. ... We also need to un-sunder evidence and ethics. ... Plea for thinking more seriously about ethical form of evidence being deployed. Makes me want to ask why return to Marx of *Capital*. Why is it so comforting? Why that now? What if we disappear the empirical—what pops up? If we literally dissolve those, what do we see? Worlds where the very question of evidence and real is already obviated? I think one of the things from anthropology of finance and law is that ... STS people seem to want to get in there and change the world with tools. If only I had the right hammer, then I could change the world. The world follows the word. For finance people, nothing really matters because if you fail you win, you never really lose.

What Maurer is doing in these comments is opening up a space of reflection on the interactions between the anthropology of science and of finance – remember, Lively Capital, while about the co-production of science and finance, consisted almost exclusively of people concerned with *science* studies who were looking to see how their worlds were getting overdetermined by neo-liberal market relations. Maurer’s concern is especially around the question of the way the ethical is lodged in an ultimate conception (hope?) of reality in science studies – real fact, real truth, real experimental results, real praxis... a reality that just does not exist in speculative capitalism.

And then:

**Kim Fortun:** Struck and sobered by use of emergence here: Strips historicity out of it. I find emergence useful as object of ethnographic attention because it mandates resistance. Emergence is not free flow—It occurs within weighted systems that push back. We need to clarify it; it’s a historicizing move.

And a final comment, from Donna Haraway, that in a sense reinscribes the sort of ethical and methodological sensibility that resides at the heart of the ethnographic project of science studies, certainly amongst those gathered at Lively Capital:

**Haraway:** I was thinking of ways to rewrite my paper.... Each paper has had a moment of precision that has given me a little whiplash. I want to ask how what I’m doing is very different from what other people are doing. I want to be in deep conversation with at least a couple of other folks. I want conversations that aren’t necessarily about the large concepts. I care about the cases. I care about the stuff and that’s what makes me change my stuff. I want folks to be doing collectively careful distinguishing one or two points that matter to our own work. Three matters: biology, capitalism, and things on the earth being inquired into. New beings that were not here before. I don’t want to reduce it simply to discourses of political economies or science studies, but the stuff of the earth under question.

I wish to stop here, not least because I have spoken too much already, but also because I want to leave things as they are – not, I do not think, as irreconcilable difference between two modes or camps of ethnography, but rather, as the friendly posing of the dilemmas within which the ethnographies of contemporary biocapital, at the very least, are caught. These include methodological questions of friendship, complicity and

representation; temporal questions of emergence that cannot be reduced simply to contingency or absolute novelty; and ethical questions concerning the relationship between abstractions and “real” political life-worlds, between an “affective ethics”, in Comaroff’s words, and a philosophy of praxis, in Gramsci’s. Dilemmas, hopefully, that are generative, and that we can keep talking about.