

Chapter Three

Exchanging Equations

Anthropology as/beyond Symmetry

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‘What imaginative work do measurements do?’ asks Marilyn Strathern in an essay on the imagination of scale in compensation payments and gift exchange in Melanesia (1999, 221). In the Papua New Guinea Highlands, exchanges of pigs and shells index the exchange of human capacities, which index in turn the exchange of body expenditure, such as body exertion and body loss over reproduction, land cultivation, pig rearing or caring for relatives. As Strathern puts it, ‘what keeps one equation in place can only be other equations’ (1999, 209).

Marilyn Strathern’s contribution to anthropological and ethnographic theory is of course far ranging. There is little point and no avail in trying to pin it down to a singular moment or insight. But I think it is fair to say that a great deal of her theoretical impulse comes from her elucidation of the work of ‘relations’ as both sociological *and* analytical descriptors. Relationality is a form of knowledge, Strathern has long taught us, capable of making both the social and the analytical visible at once.¹

In this chapter I would like to take inspiration from Strathern’s writings and dwell on the relation as a theoretical object. I am inspired here by the citation with which I opened above. In this Melanesian vignette, the relational moment is inflected by what Strathern later in the same text calls ‘measurement by ratio’ (1999, 218). A ratio is simply a form of measurement in which ‘part of the measurement is also what is being measured: one item valued in terms of another yields a ratio’. Significantly, measurement by ratio is a scale-independent activity. The scale is internalized in the relation

between values: '[W]hat is held constant is not the values on the scale but a relation between values' (Strathern 1999, 205).

The internal relation between values makes such forms of measurement by ratio work as 'an equation or . . . an analogy' (Strathern 1999, 205). According to Strathern, certain economies of information operate under a form of ratio elicitation: ratios that elicit other ratios. Thus, for example, 'while the cost of houses will not in itself indicate the cost of food, the capacity to earn will tell us something about the capacity to spend – they are not the same activities at all, yet information on one also provides information on the other' (Strathern 1999, 205). Ratios elicit information that enables other ratios to come into being. The conversion of one ratio into another fares in this context as an analogical extension. In this context, then, it would seem that the cultural apparatus of analogy is fuelled by what we may call an epistemic regime of *exchanging equations*.

Although I am no Melanesian specialist, I would argue that Hageners do not of course exchange *equations*. The idiom is Strathern's analytical shorthand for an analogical economy of relations. Hageners exchange pigs that 'stand for' (embody) the food grown on clan lands, that stand for human bodily work and strength, that stand for kinship nurturance and relations, that stand for streaming entanglements of capacities. These are relational moments that are 'measured' in terms of, or 'equated' to, other relational moments. Thus, 'equation' is Strathern's choice of idiom for describing a cultural economy of relationality. It is an evocative descriptor that helps readers reimagine the theoretical conditions of social process.

In this chapter I want to take Strathern's provocative descriptor seriously and attempt to unpack it as an epistemic object. I shall introduce an ethnographic context in which social form is deliberately and consciously deployed as an *exchange of equations* – in which the 'equation' is not only a measured form of something else (another relational moment) but an epistemic form on its own terms and, therefore, in which social form is effected, bundled and put in circulation as streams of equations. What follows, then, is an attempt at writing an ethnography of a Regime of Exchanging Equations.²

A final interest of the chapter is to use the ethnography to ponder on what the exchange of equations might say about our own cultural economy of relations and information – that is, about the cultural epistemology of a Euro-American knowledge economy. As we will see, the logos-equation has been an engine of Western epistemology since antiquity, although social theory has rarely reckoned its own internal organization as one such building and stacking-up of equations. In the ethnography below, I hope to offer insights into one such building process.

Some of the questions that I want to pose upon making explicit such reckoning include the following: What does the knowledge economy have in store when ‘exchanging equations’ becomes its internal model of organization? What do analogy or indeed ‘relations’ look like when they work as equations within a Regime of Exchanging Equations? What might happen to anthropological theory if we were to substitute its canonical ‘epistemological device’ (Strathern 2014, 55), namely, the relation, for an alternative device: a relation of relations, that is, an equation? Placing the equation at the heart of anthropological knowledge suddenly complicates the discipline’s own *symmetrical* project: the project of theorising its *ad-equation* to indigenous theories of knowledge. If the anthropological project is to produce relational accounts of other people’s relationships – a relation of relations – should it not be considered itself, too, a project in the production of novel forms of equations?

The first equation I shall be talking about is a building. I am interested in how a building becomes an object of knowledge: how this object comes to be, what it does, and what it may take for granted. The ethnography that follows examines the cultural and epistemological resources employed in the building-up and summation of knowledge about a building: how knowledge grows, what engines are used in building it up into an epistemic object.

WHAT IS A BUILDING FOR?

The question was posed by a management consultant at a meeting with senior executives from one of the world’s largest oil companies. ‘A building’, he proceeded, ‘is a lever for change: a privilege, a unique event. Few people in a corporation’s history have the opportunity to be part of a relocation to a new building’. ‘A new building’, he added soberly, ‘offers us the opportunity to pause, reflect, and start anew’. A building is a source of hope, promise and wealth.

Some weeks earlier, at a meeting with senior clerks and general back office administrators, the same consultant had offered a rather different image of how employees might want to relate to the new building. Some of the clerks pointed out that the new building was looked at with suspicion by a large part of the workforce. There appeared to be a spell of uncertainty around the building. Thus, rather than in temporal terms (an event, an opportunity), such people seemed to relate to the building in spatial terms: a gigantic vacuum, an empty place, even a source of emptiness itself, for apparently there were rumours that in relocating to the new building some jobs would be shed.

These two vignettes are part of ethnographic work I carried out in 2007–2008 when I moved to Buenos Aires to collaborate with an international ‘innovation consultancy’ firm in designing the ‘knowledge environment’ of one of the world’s largest oil company’s new headquarters in Latin America. On arriving, I joined a team of ten people, including architects, engineers, geologists, public relations managers, information technology (IT) specialists, consultants and graphic designers, who were dedicated to the task of designing a new office environment for the company’s new purpose-made 34-storey building. The plan was to relocate over 2,000 people from a variety of office locations in Buenos Aires to the company’s new flagship building in the luxury harbour area of Puerto Madero.

The change of building was seen by management and consultants as an opportunity to restructure the company’s ‘workplace strategies’, coming up with a blueprint for an ‘ecology of new ways of working’ that would promote knowledge and managerial transparency, teamwork, work flexibility and mobility and the reconciliation of professional and lifestyle values. The movement of people from a variety of offices to a central location was taken as an opportunity to shake up and lose old and antiquated work habits and practices – an opportunity for making work more dynamic and adaptive to change. The corporate strategy for the new building included a new spatial design, a new ecology of work practices and a new corporate culture. These were to be integrated and fleshed out in a year-long ‘change management’ programme to be rolled out to the company’s workforce in the months prior to the move.

The design of the new building’s knowledge environment was of course a complex project, and I cannot offer here a comprehensive description of all its facets. I shall limit myself to one aspect of this project: the design and implementation of a ‘paperless office’.

The myth of the paperless office, as Abigail Sellen and Richard Harper call it (2003), partakes of the longer history of the making of corporate architecture in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Central in the history of such architecture are modernist experiments with spatial flexibility and ‘modularity’, where the spatial module epitomized the architectural equivalent to ‘a unit of exchange passing through invisible [communicational and network] circuits’ (Martin 2003, 6). As a unit within a network, the status of space in midcentury architectural discourse was equivalent to the status of information itself, or indeed of media in systems theory: an object or resource whose circulation was at once a communicative and an infrastructural event, a message and a medium. Informational resources thus understood fed back and contributed to their own sustenance as metastructures. They were self-organized. The organization of information followed the principles of cybernetics.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the organizational architecture of cybernetics was mapped onto a preference for open environments and glass buildings (Martin 2003). Circular flows of information were mirrored on spatial flows and the movement of people. Spatial and informational exchanges converged, too, on a number of social tropes, such as ‘collaboration’, ‘coordination’ and ‘interdisciplinarity’. Norbert Weiner’s projects on weapons research and human-machine intelligence at the Rad Lab or Arthur Rosenblueth’s physiological work at Harvard Medical School, for instance, were ‘actively facilitated [by the] networking and entrepreneurship’ of cybernetic rhetoric (Turner 2006, 25). The spaces of the 1950s interdisciplinary military-industrial laboratory became therefore a model for the organization of corporate knowledge at large. It is this tradition, then, of open, flexible and informationally resourceful spaces and spatial relations that informed the work of the ‘new ecologies of workplace’ consultants (Becker et al. 1992; Becker 2007).

LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATORS

As noted above, a fundamental aspect of the projection of the new building as a knowledge environment was the programme for a paperless office. When the programme was set in motion, however, the concept of a paperless office encountered a number of lines of resistance.

The first step in the design programme towards a paperless office was the implementation of a ‘clear desk policy’. This required of employees to leave their desks clear of all papers, personal objects and removable storage media before they left the office every day. A central part of the consultants’ philosophical approach to knowledge management, the clear desk policy was intended to maintain the appearance of a new working environment on a daily basis, to discourage the retention of unnecessary paper, to promote the storage of classified and sensitive documents and thus reduce the risk of unauthorized access to information, and in the long run to help promote mobile work by ensuring that shared workspaces would not become owned by individuals over time.

Some people at the oil company, however, felt that ‘clear desk’ and ‘paperless’ were not identical terms, and some further disambiguation was necessary. A communications manager, for example, concerned about her own role in designing a communications campaign for the programme, noted at a meeting that ‘paperless’ was often interpreted by people as ‘deskless’. Not unreasonably, people feared that the promotion of mobility enabled by a paperless environment would in time encourage the ‘deper-

sonalization' of workspaces. And there was much anxiety over losing one's own personal workspace, for a variety of reasons, including losing one's capacity to 'personalize' (that is, decorate and furnish) one's workspace, but perhaps more importantly, the fear of not knowing where one would fit in a new work structure and workflow of information. The ultimate fear here was that in the new work environment some people's jobs might no longer be deemed necessary.

At the meeting the comment by the communications manager triggered a discussion on the convenience of paperless or clear desk as overarching design concepts. The discussion was put to an end, however, when a senior consultant observed that what was really at stake was neither paper or desks but 'a whole new way of working'. An IT manager seconded the observation, noting that it was 'crucial to keep the *global project* in view at all times'. Neither paper nor desks, nor indeed people, were of ultimate concern here, but the lowest common denominator of the project's global reach as a 'knowledge environment', or an 'ecology of new ways of working', as it is sometimes referred to in the management literature (Becker et al. 1992).

It was crucial, the senior consultant noted, that concerns about paper trails, archives or desks be reconceptualized in terms of spatial and knowledge flows. Thus a number of equations were set in place, as we will see shortly, in which the paper form was invested with an imaginary of spatial and epistemic immobility. Paper was seen as immobile and weighty, as were desks, archives and drawers. These were high denominators of knowledge that did not facilitate conversions and flows. An example often proffered by consultants concerned some people's idiosyncratic archiving of files: 'If a filing system is only known to the person who keeps the archive', they would say, 'then knowledge is fixed to that person and place. It cannot travel'. To have knowledge travel, they insisted, one has to start with knowledge as the lowest common denominator. Knowledge ought to be the basic or fundamental integer underlying other epistemic multiples.

If the invocation of a knowledge environment contributed to silencing doubts about people's own relationship to the project in one context, it was however of very little avail in other contexts. The many bifurcations that the implementation of a clear desk policy had been opening up called for the organization of a 'less-paper task force' (LPTF). The change of emphasis – from paperless to 'less-paper' – was a response to some of the anxieties that the imagery of a weightless office had provoked. The LPTF enlisted representatives from IT, human resources, facility management and communications as well as two management consultants. The LPTF was in charge of developing an actual corporate-wide operations programme for bringing into existence the paperless environment. In the context of LPTF discussion

there was never any mention of a ‘knowledge environment’, and indeed its invocation as a lowest common denominator would have made no sense.

In its stead, what figured centrally in most LPTF meetings was the ‘digitization’ of information at a corporate level. Within the corporate intelligentsia of the LPTF, the weightlessness of a knowledge environment turned around the lightness of the digital rather than the absence of paper. For the LPTF, the lowest common denominator in the project turned out to be, not the global reach of knowledge management but the informational economy of digital bytes.

WEIGHT

Clear desks were the tip of a wider knowledge management programme that encompassed a new architecture of digital information storage and archiving, new ways of handling the paper legacy and an overall effort at generating cross-cutting and transversal organizational synergies. In this model, paper became a token and emblem of informational pollution. ‘Information’, consultants would argue, ‘is free; what varies are the mediums (paper, digital) through which it travels.’ Paper was therefore seen as a (superfluous) intermediary between information and efficiency. In its ideal form, pure information was paper-free. It was weightless.

Over the coming months, weight became indeed an arithmetic of cultural change. The focus on digitization led the LPTF to develop a three-fold strategy for streamlining paper processes, in printing, archiving and internal communications. The strategy was self-consciously articulated as a ‘knowledge management’ programme, which was in turn incorporated into the corporate-wide ‘change management’ programme that had been set in motion in preparation for the relocation. The programme established a set of ‘short term wins’ (STWs) that were devised to motivate and help employees visualize their own progress towards the less-paper office.

There were four such sets of STWs, which were represented in the shape of steps in a ladder. Each step was explained at a dedicated workshop. The first step was a call to consciousness: to becoming aware of how paper circulated through the office space. The second step was an introduction to classificatory practices and standards. The third step, an introduction to how to organize one’s own personal files. The fourth and last workshop, finally, described the clear desk policy proper.

The company’s senior managers were asked to select eight representatives from the various units and departments that would attend each of the four workshops. Following each workshop, attendants were then

given a month to downstream the project to their departmental peers and colleagues and upstream back their comments and reactions to the next workshop. (The use of the idioms of downstream and upstream was a sympathetic nod to the oil industry. Upstream refers to those areas of business concerned with the extraction of oil; downstream refers to the business of servicing and marketing final products.) The whole STWs programme thus stretched over approximately six months.

Central to the various step changes envisaged in the STWs ladder was the place of paper as a mediator of cultural change. Paper became the focal epistemic object of change as a cultural programme: it centralized people's reflexive orientations towards, as well as their new practices and habits of, knowledge making. Thus, at the workshops employees were asked to think about the role that paper played in their everyday work routines; to think twice every time they printed something; to think about the kinds of paper files they stored and archived; to think about the types of documents they copied or asked for duplicates; to pause for thought before printing out an email. People were asked to use paper as a film through which to make work processes transparent to themselves. This would help them better conceptualize the structure of the information they were dealing with and therefore make better judgements as to whether the ideal format for its output ought to be digital or paper based, people or machine related.

Although it was acknowledged that different units and departments were likely to have different work processes, a number of recommendations were made for general use and adoption. Paper trails, for instance, ought to be classified into 'closed' or 'alive': the former indicating work processes that were unlikely to produce further documentation; the latter referring to processes that were still producing red tape. People were also encouraged to ascribe different temporalities and spatialities to different kinds of paperwork. Thus one should try to distinguish those documents that should necessarily stay with oneself in the office from those documents that, although necessary and important, could be sent out to third-party archivists for filing.

Further recommendations included appointing a 'less-paper coordinator' in every department. This person ought to find a suitable time when every member of the department would leave his or her immediate tasks aside and dedicate 'around one hour' to go through his or her paperwork, deciding what should stay and what should be thrown away. It was generally agreed that a good time to do this would be on a Friday after lunch, when the loom of the weekend could help invest in the activity 'a certain festive mood'. Resorting to a convivial and festive mood soon became a standard practice. At a meeting of the LPTF, for example, it was reported

how a less-paper coordinator had improvised a less-paper breakfast in her department. On a Friday morning she had arrived at work with freshly baked croissants and biscuits. She encouraged her colleagues to join her in taking a break from their routines and use the 'social breakfast' to start sorting out paper files. The event was a success and was quickly identified by the LPTF as a best practice. Friday breakfasts became a standard practice across the organization.

The success of such less-paper boutades was measured in terms of the amount of paper thus disposed. It was established that every department would weigh the amount of paper and cardboard thrown away on a weekly basis. The clearance was also incentivized: the earnings derived from selling the paper and cardboard thrown away were given to a local children's hospital. Within six months some 23.5 tonnes of paper and 3 tonnes of cardboard had been thrown away across the corporation. Another paper disposal experiment much publicized involved the firm's corporate directors.

Over a month a team of people in the Facility Management Department calculated the amount and cost of newspaper clips printed for use by the corporate directorate and then decided that the latter would receive an electronic, rather than a paper-based, file of press clips. The savings amounted to some 30,976 pages worth of clips. A number of equations and equivalences were quickly put together. All that paper weighed some 160 kilograms; it was worth some \$700, including the cost of copying, and it occupied $0,22\text{m}^3$, or the equivalent of six boxes and two packs of paper.

EXCHANGING EQUATIONS

Of course, the STWs and less-paper programmes did not go unchallenged. All kinds of problems arose. Lawyers complained that the distinction between 'closed' and 'alive' paperwork was utterly meaningless to them. Documentation long archived and forgotten could suddenly acquire fundamental relevance, should it become, for example, the centrepiece of a legal case. Indeed, such was their concern about the naturalization of paper as an epistemic object – an object about whose knowledge qualities one could speak in general and for all – that they successfully argued for and obtained a special treatment for their paperwork. Legal documents were denaturalized as paper objects.

Central to the reclassification of paperwork as legal objects was the question of time. Legal objects have an indefinite temporality: they may remain archived for years before they are summoned as evidence in a legal court. The temporality of the legal object is therefore different from the

temporality of the ordinary paper document. Everyday paperwork has a short lifespan: it dies and is 'buried' in the archive within days. Certain legal documents, on the other hand, remain alive well beyond their move to the archive. Indeed, their being buried in the archive, lawyers argued, is not evidence of their death. Their potential to resurrect at any time was mobilized as an argument by the legal department to keep control of their own archiving and storage. It was in these terms that some lawyers spoke of their archives as an equivalent to accountants' cash banks: 'It's our documentary treasure, our patrimony', they would say.

The ontological distinctiveness of the legal document vis-à-vis ordinary paperwork was further established by some additional criteria. In particular, there were three aspects of legal work that lawyers thought required special consideration when designing the new building's knowledge environment. On the one hand, the archival temporality of the legal document was supplemented and enhanced by lawyers' obsession with photocopies. Running starkly against the grain of the whole less-paper programme, lawyers called for an expansion of the photocopying capacities at the new building: they wanted more and more powerful photocopying machines.

It was common of lawyers to complain of employees' general ignorance of the diligences of legal process. 'People just don't realize', they would often say, 'that the documents they work with on a daily basis could well become the centrepiece of a judicial process in the future'. 'We need to figure out a way to teach people from different departments', they would tell consultants, 'which documents are the key legal documents in each case'. Theirs was a call, then, for an awareness of the inherent proliferation of legal documents: their capacities for generating more paperwork in the future but also, more importantly, their own proliferative qualities as self-replicable forms. For it was paramount that one kept copies of all documents because of all documents' dormant capacities as generative of judicial process. Legal copies helped hoard in the present the proliferousness of documents in the future – thence lawyers' demands for more photocopying machines.

The idiosyncratic character of legal knowledge was expressed, too, in their robust defence for a 'legal library'. This also ran counter to the design of the knowledge environment that architects and consultants were arguing for. A document-based space, enclosed and guarded from passers-by, represented the exact antithetical image of what consultants had been preaching all along. But for lawyers the library was a fundamental place of study and learning. This was the place where they came to when they had to prepare for a case hearing. For lawyers, the process of documentation was not about paperwork but about study, consultation and legal practice. The library was not a paper space but an intellectual space. Perhaps management

consultants thought that a paper-free environment was conducive to the production of knowledge – not for lawyers, however, for whom the bookish endowment of the library was fundamental for the production of robust legal knowledge.

The library was employed also to illustrate what some lawyers called the ‘nonlinearity’ of legal work. If the knowledge economy of the paperless office was epitomized by a linguistic space of frictionless communication, where mobile workers bumped into each other and smoothly interchanged units of verbal knowledge, lawyers insisted on the importance of preserving a cultural space for ‘invisible’ and ‘silent’ work. A senior legal director put it thus:

I don't read off a computer screen. I cannot annotate a computer screen; I cannot reference and cross-reference marginalia on a computer screen. The practice of law is the practice of corrections. We write and rewrite texts. We produce layers upon layers upon layers of text. This is not a linear process. I do not start working on some case early in the morning, make progress with it throughout the day, in anticipation of its closure in the evening. Legal knowledge does not progress linearly. I may be working on up to fifty cases at once. We move forward one day only to take various steps back the following day. We take a book out of the library one day only to realize that we should have in fact been reading something completely different by the evening. Our culture of work is characterized by unpredictability. If you do not make room for such unpredictability, if you do not account for it, you'll be blind to the enormous ‘hidden costs’ of legal practice. If a lawyer is not allowed to work in silence, you have no idea what the scale of such hidden costs may rise to.

The most intriguing and remarkable of lawyers’ hesitant relationship to the new building, however, came in the form of their demands for paper shredders and shredding equipment for heavy office use. The terms of the request challenged the knowledge-paper equation that organized much of the consultants’ programme. On the one hand, the request for paper shredders was initially welcomed by consultants. It was seen as an endorsement of the general call for liberating the office environment of paper weight.

However, this enthusiasm was quickly curtailed on two fronts. It soon became obvious that the paper-shredding equipment lawyers were asking for would immobilize, rather than liberate, office space. The type of shredder bailers the lawyers had asked for were far larger than anything consultants or interior design architects could have envisaged. Their accommodation would require on the part of architects an expansion of the floor space originally allocated to the legal department in the new building. Moreover, it also turned out that bailers required specific materials, such as shredding bags and oil, which would require additional storage space.

Second, the focus on paper shredding brought attention to the distinct temporality of legal documents, and indeed of paper itself as an epistemic unit. A less-paper office environment, consultants argued, opened up new spaces of interaction, mobility and exchange. It would enable, they insisted, a focus on *work processes* rather than *work outputs*. If documents were digitized, one could access them from any and everywhere in the building. A favourite example of consultants put it like this:

Imagine you are on your way to get a coffee from the refectory downstairs. At the lift you run into Peter, who works in accounting. You two have long been after each other but never quite found the time or place to meet (meeting rooms are always booked weeks in advance). You need to check some numbers against Peter's accounting records. Because the accounting department has digitized the latter, however, and Peter is therefore no longer dependent on having his physical files close to hand, your casual encounter turns suddenly into a work encounter. Peter brings out his Palm, logs into the department's server, opens and downloads the relevant file, and subsequently emails it to you. The *process* of casually bumping into Peter turns into a *knowledge exchange*.

When the LPTF and the team of management consultants met with lawyers, however, the description of knowledge's processual qualities encountered a certain friction. Sure, they understood that people may bump into each other and walk away with new information. They may even walk away with an *electronic copy* of a file. But there are files and *files*, copies and *copies*. For not all copies weigh the same. Legal copies carry an additional epistemic weight: the burden of legal proof. That is why the shredding equipment was of central importance to the legal department. One can only make knowledge disappear if you can make paper disappear. It is paper that is epistemically consequential. You may exchange knowledge in a casual encounter, but that has no serious epistemic consequences. The real objectual qualities of knowledge, for lawyers, resided in its ontological qualities as a paper-object.

Altogether, then, to all the talk of open-plan offices, transparency and the spatial flow of people and knowledge, lawyers counterpoised the importance of 'sealed' environments, of ontological circumscriptions to the epistemic consequentiality of knowledge. They went as far as to suggest that, should the architects not be in a position to accommodate their spatial and archival requirements, it would be preferable for them not to move to the new building. Theirs was truly a claim for the *separation* of powers between the law and the rest of social forms.

The question of the temporality of paper documents was soon to emerge as a concern for employees everywhere, not just lawyers and legal clerks.

Although seldom expressed with the assertiveness of lawyers, consultants' sets of equations between knowledge, paper and processes were often challenged on a diversity of grounds. An explanation commonly given, for example, was that people held on to paper copies of all information because they did not want to find themselves empty-handed when their bosses came around asking for copies of paperwork. Paper mediates the relation that people have to information through the relationships they have to other people (and to their bosses in particular) – and paper archives embody the structure of all such personal relationships.

Consultants would reply that a central (ideally digital) archiving system would help take responsibility away from people and distribute it equally among everyone: information would no longer be 'owned' by an individual but would be publicly available in and accessible through the system. Bosses would not need to go around asking for information because this would be available for them to access it directly. Individuals would therefore be spared the embarrassment and shame of not knowing or not having a particular piece of information when asked by their bosses. Relations (to information) and relationships (to people) would be kept apart. Notwithstanding, on being told about the alleged shamelessness and relational purity of information, some employees grinned and murmured 'Bosses *boss* – that's their job. They do not relate to information. Theirs is a relationship to knowledge through people'.

A novel inflection on the question of the temporality of paperwork was offered by the fiscal and internal auditing department. The department held some 400 kilograms worth of insurance-related paperwork and customer guarantees, located in a room-sized fireproof archive. Not only should these archives not be moved outside the new building, the auditors insisted, but it was imperative that the standards of the archival system itself, including the rights of access and consultation of such documentation, be kept distinct from those used elsewhere in the organization.

This had to do for the most part with issues of confidentiality: the files contained information that was most definitely not for general use. But a number of auditors, including some of the departments' most senior members, noted on a number of occasions that this archive 'contained the company's historical heritage'. These, they argued, were historical documents that required certain conditions for their preservation or, at the very least (not being archivists or historians themselves, they pointed out), a certain awareness of their patrimonial importance. Across the organization, on the other hand, the historicity of paperwork was not something often reflected upon, and indeed, although there was a certain sense of pride about the company's 'national, historic character', there were few occasions on which

people reflected on the historicity of their own practices. Interestingly, however, the appeal by the auditors to the ‘historic and heritage qualities’ of their archive was something that left consultants disarmed and to which they offered no resistance at all in their general call for downsizing paper spaces. The economy of history, in this context, overpowered the economy of knowledge.

METROLOGY

When consultants launched the STWs programme, they invited participants from every department to take photographs of the spatial layouts and the archiving and storage spaces in their units. Further, a management consultant took a tour of the organization, measuring ‘linear metres of shelf space’ in every department. The idea behind the photographs and the measurement was that, upon concluding the STWs programme, a second set of measurements and photographs would be taken with a view to obtain ‘motivational evidence’ of the improvements made in every department. It was hoped, or rather, firmly believed by consultants, that the second round of photographs would display neatly ordered and tidy spaces, work desks devoid of paper columns, empty shelf spaces and perhaps even a reduction in archival drawers and cabinets.

When consultants returned to the departments to take the second round of photographs, they confronted, however, a rather different scenario. Some departments simply did not understand the purpose behind measuring ‘linear metres of shelf space’. Of all departments it was the engineers that expressed their bewilderment with most eloquence:

We thought you wanted us to get rid of paper. We just don’t get why you have decided to measure our capacity to bin paper in ‘organizational’ rather than ‘volumetric’ terms. Where and how we decide to file our paper records is our business. It says nothing about our capacity to throw away rubbish, let alone our capacity to streamline our work processes. If you want to measure the former, you should employ a metric such as ‘cubic metres of waste’, not ‘linear metres of shelf space’. The latter simply says nothing about waste disposal, nor, moreover, about the organization of knowledge.

Perhaps daunted by the engineers very own professional capacity at thinking metrologically, the consultants opted not to challenge their argumentation. Not surprisingly, then, when the time came to tabulate comparatively how the different departments had done throughout the STWs programme,

the engineers offered their own 'metric': they had piled up two boxes worth of paper and cardboard, which they had duly sent to the children's hospital.

Engineers were not alone, however, in concocting their own metrological imagination. When the team of consultants toured the organization in search of data on paper wastage, they encountered a diversity of numerical outputs. Some departments had indeed opted for 'boxes' as the numerical denominator of their paper output. In fact, most of such departments spoke of such boxes as 'hospital boxes', in allusion to the children's hospital which had been publicly announced as the recipient of the earnings of the recycling programme. Such 'socialization' of the wastage programme was interesting because neither consultants nor the LPTF had ever suggested 'boxes' as a metric of wastage. The original call was to weigh the amount of paper disposed. However, with one exception (marketing), no department handed in weighted numbers of paper waste. In its stead, most departments handed in the 'socialized' versions which were the charity boxes.

But even the metrology of charity boxes was differently put together by different departments. Some departments produced daily numbers for their boxed output. Others, perhaps less committed to the programme, aggregated their output into total outputs (say, ten boxes over the whole six-month programme). Others distinguished between 'hospital boxes' and 'external boxes'. The latter were boxes of paper destined to the external archive: an archive subcontracted to a specialized archivist company. The status of such material was ambiguous. On the one hand, sending paperwork to an external archive was in compliance with the requirements of the less-paper programme: paper was indeed made to disappear from the local office environment.

But it was doubtful that in doing so a department had accomplished a reorganization of its work processes. If anything, the relocation seemed rather to duplicate the costs of managing information and knowledge unnecessarily: now there was a waiting time associated with retrieving information (the time it took for the subcontractor to retrieve the file and transport it back to one's desk), as well as the fee associated with such service. Last, some departments opted for producing their own 'measurements by ratio', such as indicating the percentage of reduction in paper space. One department thus reported that they had reduced their paper stock by 95 percent, a figure not only a little unrealistic but altogether incomprehensible, because there had been no prior indication of what their point of departure was. 'You may see loads of paper around us', they thus explained to the consultants, 'but this is only 5 percent of what there used to be' – a wonderful example of the use of exchanging equations for epistemic self-sufficiency.

WHAT IS PAPER FOR?

Hirokazu Miyazaki has recently written on how different documentary practices are deployed to make the temporality of the present available to participants in a social event (2006). He looks at participants in Fijian gift exchange mortuary rituals, in which the anticipation of reciprocation elucidates a sociology of hope and promise.

Miyazaki's ethnographic analysis centres on two documents: a matrix used to record gifts received during the mortuary exchange and a second document written as a report for overseas clansmen that summarized the scale and success of the event. The matrix had a simple format: rows where gift givers were named and four columns for each of the four types of gifts. The process of filling in the matrix, Miyazaki tells us, replicated the temporality of hope and expectation that gift receivers invested the ritual with. Every empty cell in the matrix pointed to a moment of exchange to come: 'On the document, a moment of hopeful anticipation was made visible repeatedly in the grid and stretched over the entire period of mortuary exchange event' (Miyazaki 2006, 214).

Unlike the matrix, the summary report invoked a different temporality. In providing a retrospective account of the ritual, the report 'described the *outcome*, not the process, of the successful execution of the mortuary exchange' (Miyazaki 2006, 218, emphasis in the original). But the document's very own prospective travelling overseas gestured, too, towards a temporal extension of the exchange of greetings and thanks that characterized the ritual encounter. Thus, although the report had a different temporal format than the matrix, in its own internal replication of the mortuary exchange it helped make the ritual present available in ways not unlike the matrix's own processual recording of it. As documentary practices, both the matrix and the report thus contributed to the replication of the ritual present as a placeholder for sociological knowledge.

Echoing the vernacular Fijian description of giving and receiving gifts as an act of 'attending on' (*veiqaravi*) each other, Miyazaki recalls that the report sent to the overseas clan was 'part of the hosting clan's own "attendance" on its fellow clansmen' (Miyazaki 2006, 207, 219). I would like to suggest, however, that a corollary to the carrying of attendance to outside parties was the report's *attestation* of satisfactory exchanges. What was being carried forward for the *attention* of the overseas clan was the *attestation* of a successful ritual encounter. Attendance/attention and attest are the two sides of what Miyazaki calls the replicative structure of presencing.

The matrix and the report that Miyazaki dwells on are paper forms. Miyazaki notes in passing that the matrix was 'produced in part with the use

of a word processor', which was relatively uncommon at the time for 'other clans drew such tables by hand on a school notebook' (Miyazaki 2006, 210). Notwithstanding, the matrix circulated in paper form, and it is the annotated paper form that replicates the temporality of the ritual exchange. The report, too, circulated in paper form. The materiality of the paper form thus enabled the documentation of presencing as a replicative structure. The cultural work of prospection and retrospection, attention and attestation, which both the matrix and the report enacted, was facilitated in important ways by the materiality of the paper form.

In this sense, the investment of the paper form with replicative capabilities is not unlike the temporal investments that lawyers credited legal documents with. On the one hand, lawyers insisted on treating their documents as ontologically different from ordinary paperwork. Legal documents inhabited a temporality of their own. They were suspended in their own temporal condition: buried in the archive, yet dormant, in tension, in a condition of permanent alertness. A legal document could activate itself at any time. Importantly, the dormancy of the legal document was inherent to its paper form. Thus, the legal archive or the legal library institutionalize such cultures of paper dormancy. They are spaces of attestation: they attest to time's very own *durée*.

But legal libraries, of course, are also spaces of attendance. Lawyers attend libraries in preparation for court hearings; the library's legal corpus 'attends' to its visitors. There they search for papers that may be brought to, or distract, people's attention. Lawyers' obsession with copies and photocopying is an index of a culture of preparedness and attentiveness, in which the paper form is the ultimate pre-emptive and anticipatory technology. As Annelise Riles has put it, 'Moments of document creation anticipate future moments in which documents will be received, circulated, instrumentalized, and taken apart again' (Riles 2006, 18). No paper, no reproduction, no legal agency.

Not only lawyers but also accountants and auditors saw too in the paper form an enabling technology. The auditors' fireproof archive was thought to house the organization's historical consciousness. Here was another space of paper dormancy whose value, albeit unclear and not necessarily prospective in the way legal documents were said to be, was felt to be important. The archive embodied a patrimony endowed with unbeknownst temporal value. Paper, then, seemed to enable certain modalities of residence in time and in the temporalities of agency.

If for Miyazaki the replicative function of documenting gift exchanges offered participants in Fijian mortuary rituals a modality of access to the temporality of the event's present, I would like to suggest here an alternative

function and operation of temporal apprehension. Namely, in its oscillation between dormancy and agency, historicity and anticipation, attestation and attendance, the paper form seemed to function as a *prototype* of a temporal culture of organizational knowledge. The paper form indexed both to its own continuity as an inscriptive and legal artefact, as well as to its discontinuity and future suspension as an archival object. It signalled both a *type* of institutional practice and a *proto*-organizational form.

ARCHITECTURAL OPTICS OF VOLUMES

The idea that a piece of paper could function as a prototype of organizational self-knowledge was alien to management consultants. At the risk of oversimplification, we may say that one of the aims of the ‘less-paper’ programme was to introduce and make known a cultural imagination in which paper was emptied of its epistemic productivity. A piece of paper was *not* a form of knowledge. If one were looking for knowledge, we should look for it elsewhere: in relational exchanges, in work processes, in spatial distributions. Never in a piece of paper.

When management consultants emptied paper of epistemic consequentiality, they were of course shifting the latter to other domains, in particular, to space itself as a cultural economy. For consultants, the building of a knowledge environment revolved fundamentally around a conceptualization of space as a mobile and flexible resource. A common way in which consultants framed such an economy of space was, simply, to ask for the number of uses that a given spatial resource (a meeting room, a desk, storage space or a filing cabinet) could be put to. The economy of knowledge was thus calculated in terms of occupational and mobility ratios: How many uses can a room be put to? How many people can take productive residence in a space?

Such an economy of knowledge had of course little use for paper. Paper is bulky, immobile, physical. It acts as a gravitational pull for space, for it constrains alternative spatial uses. Thus, when in the course of the STWs programme, management consultants invited people to reconsider their work culture and processes, the question they offered as a prompt was ‘What is paper for?’ In the last instance they encouraged people to measure the epistemic consequentiality of their documentary practices in terms of the following: Where does a piece of paper take residence? Who and how many times is it retrieved? Where does it travel to? How many times does it need to be reproduced? How long does it remain alive? When is it likely to die? These are questions that retrace the spatial itinerary of a paper document.

They locate the paper in a spatial economy of relations. The paper form is therefore conceptualized as one kind or another of a spatial ratio.

Consultants modelled the circulation of knowledge on space as a circulatory asset. There was a certain rationality to this practice, for the craft of the consultants' expertise was to work upon and around an otherwise apparently immobile and fixed object: the architectural form of a given building. The consultants' magician trick was to make their clients believe they could bring to life and animate what looked like an immobile and rigid object. They argued for a separation of spatiality and space. Theirs was the craft of disambiguating spatial uses from architectural form. Space was therefore consultants' lowest common denominator. It was their model for, and function of, organizational knowledge.

There is of course an ancient tradition that models the workings of epistemology on the forms of space, the articulation of spatial relations in particular. In this tradition, how to think about space has become an epitome of how to think about knowledge. Michel Serres, for example, has described the 'instauration of the moment of representation' by philosophy as an instauration brought about by the use of 'a perspectival geometry, of an architectural optics of volumes' (Serres 1982, 92). According to Serres, the internal configuration of space as a geometrical object is the epistemic engine fuelling the philosophical logos.

Serres' argument builds on the tale of Thales' measurement of the height of the great pyramid. Thales accomplishes this feat by placing a post in the sand. As the sun sets, the triangular shadows cast by the pyramid and post are then compared. In so doing, Thales invents 'the notion of a model' (Serres 1982, 86):

By comparing the shadow of the pyramid with that of a reference post and his own shadow, Thales expressed the invariance of similar forms over changes of scale. His theorem therefore consists of the infinite progression or reduction of size while preserving the same ratio. From the colossal, the pyramid, to the small, a post or body, decreasing in size *ad infinitum*, the theorem states a logos or identical relation, the invariance of the same form, be it on a giant or a small scale, and vice versa. Height and strength are suddenly scorned, smallness demands respect, all scales and hierarchies are demolished, now derisory since each step repeats the same logos or relation without any changes! (Serres 1995, 78)

Steven Brown, who has commented on the originality of Serres's oeuvre for social theory at large, glosses Serres's analysis thus:

Here truly is the 'Greek miracle' – one man dominates a mighty pyramid. In this 'theatre of measurement' invented through the simple act of placing a

peg in the sand, it is as though everything changed place. The weak human overcomes ancient hewn stone, the mobile sun produces immobile geometric forms . . . There is an interaction or communication between two diverse partners (Thales, Pyramid) which involves a switching or exchanging of properties (weak/strong, mortal/durable). (Brown 2005, 220)

The world's intelligibility, then, holds itself together in this account as a set of volumetric equations. An ontological exchange of equations – between weak/strong, mortal/durable, colossal/infinitesimal, human/nonhuman – allows Thales and the Western philosophical mindset thereafter to imagine the organization of knowledge as a calculus of ratios, the world, in other words, as a regime of exchanging equations.

THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE EQUATION

When lawyers or accountants expressed their resistance to and scepticism of the consultants' programme, it was common for the latter to offer a counterargument by 'occupying' the formers' point of view. The occupation of the 'enemy's point of view' was articulated in two steps. First, consultants would nod in approbation and voice their sympathy: 'I understand your point of view', they would say. Then, they would proceed to 'expand' the point of view by globalizing its epistemic grounds. This was done by the operation, noted above, of 'lowering' its common denominator. This operation was as much a body as a cognitive effort. A narrative much favoured by consultants in this regard was the 'judo combat'. One of the consultancy's top managers offered the narrative to me on a number of occasions as a 'technique' I ought to learn:

Think of clients as your judo opponents. You cannot defeat them by force or simple aggression. On the contrary, you need to use *their* aggression to your advantage. Their strength is also their weakness. You need to move swiftly and elegantly, re-appropriating their ideas as your own; the sluggishness and stubbornness of their bodily movements ought to be what energizes your own movements.

Thus, for example, when lawyers' protested about employees in other departments and divisions not being aware of the legal purchase of the documents they worked with, consultants rushed to agree and point out that what was in effect needed was a 'legalization' of the global flow of information in the company. 'If only we could have a global strategy for defining the legal qualities of information', they observed, 'there would be no need

to worry about this or that paper. We could do without paper altogether, for all information, indeed the very vehicular structure of informational flow itself, would be defined in accordance with legal requirements'. The point of view of the law was thus expanded to become identical with the point of view of organizational self-knowledge. Legal knowledge and organizational knowledge 'met' in the common denominator of global informational transparency. They were equated in the point of view of knowledge management. Therefore, the point of view of the equation became the point of view for all subsequent forms of managing knowledge.

In a recent synthesis of his theory of Amerindian multinaturalist ontology, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has coined the image of 'exchanging perspectives' as a shorthand for describing the transformative dynamic through which bodies undergo processes of subjectification or objectification. As Viveiros de Castro puts it, such 'bodily metamorphosis [are] the Amerindian counterpart to the European theme of spiritual conversion' (2004, 476). The transformation of the body, Viveiros de Castro tells us, actuates a process of epistemic transformation: when bodies change, knowledge undergoes exchange too. The production of knowledge, to use a Eurocentric formula, obtains thus through processes of predation:

At the risk of falling into allegorical excess, I would even venture to say that, in Amazonian cosmologies, the generic attributive proposition is a cannibal proposition. The copula of all synthetic a priori judgments, in a universe articulated by a 'logic of sensory qualities,' is carnivorous copulation . . . [where] the self is the gift of the other. (2004, 480)

Whereas the *exchange of perspectives* offers a model for the transformation-cum-predation of knowledge in the Amerindian context, it is the *exchange of equations* that fuels epistemic productivity in the Euro-American tradition.

Elsewhere, Viveiros de Castro and Goldman have observed, 'Exchange and perspective are trans-epistemological notions inasmuch as they establish a continuity between the object of description and the description itself. In sum, the process of anthropological description is, itself, a process of the exchange of perspectives' (Viveiros de Castro and Goldman 2008/2009, 31 see also this volume). If an exchange of perspectives in the Amerindian context demands a transformation of the bodies of knowledge, then, as Viveiros holds, what is ultimately at stake here are the ontological spaces wherein such bodies reside. One can only exchange knowledge if one's ontological ground changes – if we move from one ontology to another. Thus it is that the theory of Amerindian multinaturalism must be read as a call for 'richer ontologies' and for putting 'epistemological questions to rest' (Viveiros

de Castro 2004, 484). Nevertheless, insofar as anthropological knowledge works to move in and out of ontology and epistemology through exercises in comparative description, ours is therefore a trans-epistemological project.

IN THE PRESENCE OF EQUATIONS

The trans-epistemological purchase of anthropological knowledge, suggests Viveiros de Castro, may reside in anthropologists' efforts at 'symmetrizing' (across, within) different epistemic cultures:

If an anthropologist that studies Melanesia aims at a type of understanding of Melanesians that is predicated in the taking utterly seriously what they say, this does not mean that such an aim must be pursued in the same way and with the same means as when we work with scientists [Viveiros de Castro is alluding here to Latour's work]. Because the points of departure are asymmetrical, and the operation of symmetrization does not mean to suppose that everything 'is the same thing'. Symmetrization means choosing the right procedures, which may be the very opposite of those employed in a 'Melanesian-type', so that the *process* is symmetrical, producing a certain epistemic *discontinuity vis-à-vis* the interlocutors. Latour seems to have little interest in what the scientists *say* about what they are *doing*. (Viveiros de Castro and Goldman, 2008/2009, 37, see also this volume)

The status of the symmetrical in contemporary social theory is certainly worth a pause, and I would like to bring the chapter to a close with some reflections on 'symmetry' as a descriptor for the type of work that theory does.

When lawyers spoke of their legal archive as a 'cash bank', their 'treasury and patrimony', they were invoking an imagery of wealth and liquidity, of flow and storage. The archive was mobilized as a repository where legal paperwork would accumulate dust, but also as a place where it might accrue fiduciary and pecuniary value. The archive would therefore 'seem both to carry the flow *and to stop it*'. The phrase is Marilyn Strathern's, who is referring to indigenous descriptions of Highland (Hageners) brides as repositories themselves: 'as the repository of nurture from her kin which she contains, a bride is also a "store" or "bank" of the wealth due her kin in return' (Strathern 1996, 518, 517, emphasis in the original).

There are of course significant differences in Hageners' and lawyers' resort to the image of the repository as a deposit of wealth and relations. For one, in the Hagen case it is the person of the bride that sources the flow of wealth. As Strathern notes, this is likely to run counter to Euro-American

conceptions of the person, who like to keep their ‘persons’ separate from what may be owned as ‘property’, if only because it ‘was a hard-won project of their modernism’ (Strathern 1996, 518). Exploring what happens when we press forms of modernist knowledge against their ‘others’ is in fact one of Strathern’s aim in that very piece: how and on what terms can we try to symmetrize bodies of knowledge hitherto kept separate? What role does the symmetrical play when imagining how an analysis carries out its own analytical work?

A form that symmetrization takes in actor-network theory, Strathern observes, is ‘summation’. If our analytical stance invites us to look for concatenations between different kinds of elements, then ‘a network is as long as its different elements can be enumerated. This presupposes a summation; that is enumeration coming to rest in an identifiable object (the sum)’ (Strathern 1996, 523). The sum holds the network together as a self-proliferative object. The network grows in additive fashion.

Thus, although enumerating elements is no doubt part of what the analyst does to help keep the fiction of the limitless network in place, in actual fact the figure of summation is exogenous to the network itself. We may say that the sum is placed in an *external* rather than an *internal* relation to the network. Summation is not something the network itself does. Someone has to do the sums for the network.

Now in this ‘doing the sums for the network’ what emerges as internally consistent is the very process of summation. We sum, and we sum, and we sum. With every sum we *build up* the network into an epistemic form. As Strathern notes, enumeration comes to rest in the identifiable object of the ‘sum’. So if there is a symmetry at play here, it is a symmetry that is inscribed in the very process of ‘building-up’, of summation: to build up a network is to deploy symmetry as an internal engine of epistemic combustion. To sum is to symmetrize.

Although there are no doubt good reasons for social theory’s recent enthusiastic deployment of symmetry, most notably for warranting symmetrical status to different ontologies (Henare et al. 2007), I wonder whether this has not been carried out at the expense of a close examination of *symmetry’s very own internal organization* as an epistemic object. In this chapter I have offered one such attempt at unbundling the epistemic interiorities of symmetry: an ethnography of how the building-up of ‘knowledge’ is equated with the imagination of a building, and of modular space in particular, as an epistemic form: an ethnography of equations.

Let me make very clear that I am not concerned here with arguing for epistemology versus ontology. The distinction seems sterile to me. If anything, this is an argument for *ethnography*: where symmetry turns out

to be an indigenous category for knowledge reckoning. Take for example consultants' and lawyers' projects at symmetrizing their own bodies of organizational knowledge. Here the symmetrical emerged indeed as a fundamental epistemic operator. The process of lowering the common denominator of mutual understanding was of course an attempt by consultants to symmetrize or level the playing field of knowledge.

They did this by using symmetry itself as the interpretative space in which to 'stop', 'rest' or 'cut' further interpretations (Strathern 1996, 522)³ – thus their insistence on symmetrizing all knowledge processes and forms: into boxes, linear metres of shelf space, weight or even, if necessary, the 'legalization' of all informational flows. As the judo combat narrative put it, they translated heavyweight bodies of knowledge into lightweight techniques: 'one man dominates a mighty pyramid', in the terms in which Steve Brown translated Serres' 'theatre of measurement'. Thus the different 'sizes' of knowledge were made to disappear into consultants' own choice of symmetrical ratios and in particular volumetric and spatial ratios, the cultural epistemology of an 'architectural optics of volumes'.

Lawyers, however, seemed little concerned with sizes or ratios. They could not care less if their archives, libraries and shredders occupied far more space than was prudent or than had been assigned to them in the new building. With David Dery (1998) we may want to call their documentary culture, a 'papereality', for it was the paper form of knowledge that best condensed the temporal flights that most preoccupied them. For lawyers the paper form was a prototype of organizational knowledge: what the organization might lead to and how it ought to be conceptualized today. Between the proto and the type, the flow and the storage, the legal archive offered a place for knowledge to rest: where papers lay dormant, awaiting, perhaps, some future resurrection. The prototype of legal knowledge thus occupied an unstable zone *between* symmetrical equations.

The auditors' fireproof archive dwelled, too, in such an asymmetrical space. Its invocation of historicity and historical knowledge left consultants unable to effect equivalent conversions. They were left without equations. Not so with engineers, whose call for using 'cubic metres of waste' as opposed to 'linear metres of shelf space' was a little disarming initially but allowed consultants to set up a regime of exchanging equations.

The regime of exchanging equations that management consultants strove to set up was far from omniscient and comprehensive. It left many people indifferent; it provoked suspicion and offence among others; it was tweaked and modified by yet further people. And yet it remained the template with and against which people organized their social relationships of 'knowledge management'. They managed knowledge of others and of

themselves through the exchange of ratios and equations: a spatial ratio of paper occupation was equated to a spatial ratio of desk occupation, which was equated to a spatial ratio of people occupation. Paperless was equated to jobless. Equations were set up that would hold in place and make significant other equations. Knowledge circulated as an internal stream of equations.

In the symmetrization between legal, auditing, management and perhaps even anthropological knowledge, the equation therefore became the engine that allowed trans-epistemological operations. It offered a modality of description in which part of what was being described (legal or financial or engineering cultural practices) was internalized in the register of description itself.⁴ The equation became the internal engine of description.

Of course there was a lot of descriptive and imaginative work that the exchange of equations did not accomplish. Lawyers preferred, for example, the image of latency and potentiality, of the prototypical features of the legal document, to convey impressions of epistemic consequentiality. Notwithstanding, what I believe is particularly interesting is the very invocation of prototyping (by lawyers and auditors, among others) when pressed to symmetrize their knowledge practices. The epistemic culture of law took its defining features *against* a symmetrizing enterprise. One wonders, in this context, where anthropological knowledge itself might lie – before, in between or against the trans-epistemological purchase of symmetrical equations? Perhaps the task of ethnography is more modest, after all, such as finding ways for redescription that breathe and transpire a certain ‘inadequacy’, that is, that are not *ad-equate*, where the entanglement of capacities and social forms does not mirror an exchange of equations.

NOTES

1. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Marcio Goldman (2008/2009, 24) thus note that ‘Strathernian anthropology is the most sophisticated theory of the relation that our discipline has produced since Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism’.
2. The equations I shall be talking about are epistemic objects: they are self-consciously produced by participants in this regime as objects of knowledge. Once thus manufactured, these equations enter into a system of exchange. The system is of course itself formatted and performed by the transactional register of equations. There is no system proper outside and prior to the circulation of equations.
3. It is worth noting how in her account of how the process of interpretation requires of moments of stoppage or ‘cut’ to be rendered useful, Strathern resorts to a legal example herself: ‘Thus the force of “law” cuts into a limitless expanse of “justice”, reducing it and rendering expressible, creating in the legal judgment

a manipulable object of use; justice is operationalized so as to produce social effects' (Strathern 1996, 522).

4. Per Strathern's definition of 'measurement by ratio' cited in the opening of the chapter, where 'part of the measurement is also what is being measured: one item valued in terms of another yields a ratio' (Strathern 1999, 205).

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