Introduction

In this article I explore how certain anthropological debates about being—properly reframed with regard to difference—can provide crucial insights into the reality of the digital. The debates I have in mind commonly go by the moniker "the ontological turn." Some will roll their eyes at mere mention of this "turn." Not only has it been extensively reviewed (Bessire and Bond 2014; Course 2010; Laidlaw 2012; Ramos 2012; Vigh and Sausdal 2014); there exist reviews of reviews (Pedersen 2012) and even reviews of reviews of reviews (Laidlaw and Heywood 2013). Yet the ontological turn is more than academic fad. As a valuable scholarly conversation that need not be relegated to scare quotes, I will argue it turns for thee. Building on its insights, I will extend (rather than critique) this varied and internally debated body of work as means to a broader end.

That broader end is responding to a key sticking point in contemporary theories of technology: opposing the digital to the real. This fundamentally misrepresents the relationship between the physical and those phenomena referred to by terms like "digital," "online," "virtual," and "cyber."[1] Moreover, it does so in both directions. First, opposing the digital to the real flies in the face of the myriad ways that the online is real (if you learn German online you can speak it in

Germany; if you lose money gambling online you have fewer dollars). Second—and just as problematically—it implies that everything physical is real, despite the fact that depending on one's definition of "real," many aspects of physical world existence are unreal, as in forms of play and fantasy (Bateson 1972).

These conflations of physical/real and digital/unreal are more than slips of the conceptual tongue. They reflect deep-seated assumptions about value, legitimacy, and consequence, foreclosing examination of the social construction of reality in a digital age. We might as well pack up our scholarly bags and go home if we presume that which is in most need of explanation.

While documenting the distressingly interdisciplinary character of this false opposition between virtual and real lies beyond the scope of this article, it appears with alarming frequency. To take just one example from a top-notch scholar, Christine Hine framed her important discussion of ethnographic approaches to the "embedded, embodied, and everyday" internet by noting "I would reject the notion that there is a pre-existing distinction between virtual world and real world" (2015:36). By opposing "virtual world" to "real world" at the outset, Hine predicates her analysis on assuming that the real world is the physical world, and thus that the virtual is unreal. From such ethnographic projects to neuroscientists

studying hippocampal activity during what is taken to be "real-world" versus "virtual reality" spatial processing (Aghajan et al. 2014), the ubiquity of analyses based on a presumptive space "between the virtual and the real" (Elwell 2014:234)—rather than between the virtual and the physical—underscores our desperate need to understand how the digital can be real. What are the forms reality takes online; how are such realities realized? How does this show that the physical is not always real?

These questions regarding the real are questions of being, of ontology; as a result, the ontological turn can provide important insights. But this potential is lost if the "real" is preassigned to one side of the digital/physical divide. It has become a truism to note that the internet has transformed what ethnographers study and how they study it. But if the sociality in question is unreal, how are we to participate in it and why would we bother?

My goal is to lay the groundwork for using ontological turn scholarship to challenge this conflation of physical/real and digital/unreal. I say "lay the groundwork" because as it stands, this potential contribution is limited by *the role of difference* in the ontological turn. Thus, my focus is on the ontological turn and difference, as a prolegomenon to rethinking the digital real.

This is not a review essay, but given my goal it must be deeply citational. My argument will be significantly voiced through quotations from the authors who inspire this analysis, to honor their insights and show I represent their work accurately.[2] These authors come from all sides of the ontological turn; some are participants, others commentators, still others both; some are more central, others more peripheral. After locating the ontological turn conceptually, socially, and politically, I build on my own research to delve more deeply into the question of difference. I then link these various lines of analysis by reflecting on the mutual constitution of being and knowing. To aid me in these reflections I draw on Gabriel Tarde's discussion of "having" rather than "being." This will lead me to inquire after what I will playfully term a "habeology" of the real (building on the Latin word for "have"). In doing so, I suggest that an analytic of being founded in grids of similitude and difference (rather than difference in isolation) can contribute to a more accurate understanding of the digital.

Ontologies and turns in anthropology

Questions of being—"who are we?"—have always been central to anthropology: for instance, with regard to monogenetic versus polygenetic debates of the

nineteenth century, where the notion of a single human race was at stake. This has included a longstanding interest in "indigenous" or "native" ontologies (e.g., Evans-Pritchard 1937; Hallowell 1960; Malinowski 1935). In this sense "all good anthropology has always been ontological in that it opens us to other kinds of realities" (Kohn 2014). The ontological turn builds on this history:

> Since roughly the 1990s, a growing number of anthropologists have become interested in the study of ontology... This generally takes the form of ethnographic accounts of indigenous non-Western modes and models of being, presented in more or less explicit contrast with aspects of a Euro-American or modern ontology imputed to conventional anthropology. (Scott 2013:859)

Typical entailments of the ontological turn appear in "Cosmological deixis and Amerindian perspectivism," one *locus classicus* of its explication (Viveiros de Castro 1998). The focus is on "the conception, common to many peoples of [South America], according to which the world is inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human and non-human, which apprehend reality from distinct points of

view" (469). This "multinaturalism," understood as "one of the contrastive features of Amerindian thought in relation to Western 'multiculturalist' cosmologies" (470), is an "indigenous theory according to which the way humans perceive animals and other subjectivities that inhabit the world... differs profoundly from the way in which these beings see humans and see themselves" (470). For instance, certain animals "experience their own habits and characteristics in the form of culture—they see their food as human food (jaguars see blood as manioc beer, vultures see the maggots in rotting meat as grilled fish, etc.), they see their bodily attributes (fur, feathers, claws, beaks etc.) as body decorations or cultural instruments" (470). Viveiros de Castro concludes this indigenous theory asserts "animals see in the *same* way as we do different things because their bodies are *different* from ours" (478).

Ontological turn analyses (and many of their critiques) draw primarily from ethnographic work with indigenous groups in South America or inner Asia. The discussion typically centers not on Brazilians or Mongolians but collectives defined in terms of ethnolocality (Boellstorff 2002) like "the Buryat," "the Yukaghirs," or "the Altays," or in comparative ethnolocal terms like "Amerindian thought" (Viveiros de Castro 1998; see also Descola 2013) or "indigenous ontologies of

North Asia" (Pedersen 2001). This recalls the traditional paradigm wherein "the study of a small group of hunter-gatherers, living in the depths of the Amazonian forest, with none of the comforts of modern life—was expected to furnish critical data for the elaboration of grand theories" (Bloch 2013:112). A frequent focus is "the virtuoso's point of view" (Swancutt 2007:238), particularly ritual experts like shamans (Holbraad 2012; Pedersen 2011).

This locatedness is not a flaw. All scholarship is situated; many of these scholars address how those they study live in a context "far from any image of a pristine or wild Amazon... thoroughly informed by a long and layered colonial history" (Kohn 2013:3). At issue is location work: asking what benefits might accrue from expanding the ethnographic contexts informing the discussion. But we cannot exempt anthropologists from this location work—particularly given the notion of a "turn," which despite its presuppositions and polysemies has not received the same attention as "ontology."[3]

The earliest notions of a scholarly turn were associated with the "hermeneutic turn" and "linguistic turn" in philosophy (Hoy 1993; Ramberg and Gjesdal 2013; Rorty 1967). The German word used was *Kehre*, referring to a sharp turn or bend, and thus to rotating movement. In French, *tour* implies turn-

taking, even a tournament; both meanings show up in English uses of "turn," though the sense of rotation predominates. Since the 1960s the number of turns has exploded, including the practice turn, the material turn, the technological turn, and the mobilities turn. Although dismissing this language of a turn is de rigueur, it can have important ramifications (Heur, Leydesdorff, and Wyatt 2012). Against the persistent myth of the lone scholar, the notion usefully frames inquiry in terms of research community: "a mutual awareness of each other, such that we work, think and write in the atmosphere of that anthropologists' collegiality" (Carrithers in Carrithers et al. 2010:160).

One unhelpful entailment is that a turn implies turning away from something else: in this case, "an epistemological turn, that dominated the last decades of the twentieth century" (Kelly 2014:264; see Paleček and Risjord 2012; Vigh and Sausdal 2014), and particularly the "reflexive turn" epitomized by *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986). The phrase "ontological turn" thus captures only half of a trajectory "from epistemological angst to the ontological turn" (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007:7). With this entailment of turning away from something prior, it can be hard to know when to stop turning: if

attention to ontology is framed as a "turn," then some at least can infer a subsequent turn back to epistemology (Toren and Pina-Cabral 2009).

This entailment is also caught up in "the sociology of the environment of social anthropologists" (Leach 1984:3). In the essay from which this citation is drawn, Edmund Leach discussed "not only the overwhelming dominance and academic prestige of Oxford and Cambridge but also the conservatism and social arrogance of those who were effectively in control of these two great institutions" (1984:6). Institutions change but there is certainly value in considering the centrality of a "vaguely defined cohort of mostly Cambridge-associated scholars" to the ontological turn (Pedersen 2012; see Geismar 2011). Indeed, Cambridge played an important role in defining "fieldwork." The Cambridge scholar A. C. Haddon brought this notion from zoology into anthropology, helping instigate a persistent hierarchy of fieldsites wherein those seen to be most different and faraway were most valuable (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Methodologically this meant that difference become the assumed precondition for fieldwork itself (Bunzl 2004). While everywhere reworked (including the United Kingdom itself), this history shapes the ontological turn.

If scholars involved in the ontological turn "turn away from" epistemology conceptually, with a nod to Leach we can ask: who do they "turn away from" sociologically? The place of the United States and particularly California is noteworthy and allows me to locate myself in this analysis. I received my undergraduate and graduate training at Stanford University and have taught my entire career at the University of California, Irvine. In 2013 I was invited to be a visiting faculty at Cambridge. The intellectual engagement I enjoyed included an invitation to give a lecture. A faculty introduced me by remarking "now I know how to pronounce 'Irvine'." Sadly I did not have the presence of mind to return the complement and express gratitude at finally knowing how to pronounce "Cambridge!" But prior to my employment I did not know how to pronounce "Irvine" either: it is a young campus, founded only in the late 1960s. More broadly, the massive University of California system (with nearly 13 times the student body of Cambridge) is central to a West Coast intellectual formation that has played a vital role in American anthropology. This formation is shaped by legacies of the frontier and a range of bitter inequalities. While East Coast elites sometimes marginalize its importance, from gold rush wealth to Cold War aerospace and—

crucially—the current Silicon Valley/Hollywood nexus of digital culture, California has been central to maintaining the power of those elites.

While to my knowledge never acknowledged as such, California represents much of what the ontological turn "turns away from" sociologically:

> The ontological turn in anthropology is thus presented as the way out of the epistemological angst of the 1980s.... [But] I might... try to rescue even the most criticized of usual suspects in this debate, namely "the writing culture people".... I am thinking of anthropologists such as George Marcus, James Clifford, [and] Paul Rabinow.... (Candea in Carrithers et al. 2010:174)

Could it be coincidence that these anthropologists are all faculty in the University of California system? How might California anthropology shape the assessment by three Cambridge-trained anthropologists that the ontological turn has been "performed in the shadows of far more flamboyant theoretical gyrations which took place in the 1980s and 1990s under the banner of 'reflexivity'" (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007:7)? One can almost see the rainbow banners waving down San Francisco's streets. I do not equate the intellectually rigorous

with the staid. As a gay Californian I hope my theoretical gyrations will be sufficiently flamboyant to indicate how the ontological turn (which thankfully has its own flamboyances) can speak to the digital real.

In attending to the social contexts of anthropologists, I seek to honor the acknowledgment of research community that is one of the best entailments of the notion of a turn. And just as the indigenous/Western dichotomy dissolves into fractal complexity on closer examination, so the Cambridge/California dichotomy I identify here is more heuristic than fixed.[4] Many scholars associated with Cambridge continue to produce cutting-edge work on questions of epistemology. Conversely, many anthropologists powerfully exploring questions of ontology are located in the University of California system, even if they do not necessarily identify themselves as part of a "turn" (e.g., Marisol de la Cadena, Bill Maurer, David Pedersen, Anna Tsing, Mei Zhan). Key scholars linked to the Science and Technology Studies (STS) variant of the ontological turn are located in the University of California system as well (e.g., Karen Barad, Geoffrey Bowker, Donna Haraway). These complex imbrications inform my analysis as it unfolds.

The bolt of difference

Metaphors are not all-determining but their entailments matter, shaping and revealing pathways of thought and practice.[5] With regard to ontology, the most damaging entailment of the "turn" metaphor is that *turning takes place around an axis*, a still center held constant. And true to metaphorical form, there is one "pivotal" thing the ontological turn shares with the interpretive paradigm it ostensibly turns against—difference. Observers have noted how those involved in the ontological turn "want to preserve cultural anthropology's traditional concern with difference" (Paleček and Risjord 2012:5) because it acts as a foundational presumption regarding the nature of being: "the laudable aim of the 'ontological turn' in anthropology to take seriously radical difference and alterity.... [It] is premised on the notion that anthropologists are fundamentally concerned with alterity" (Heywood 2012:143). Heywood correctly observed how "difference is to be understood... as ontological rather than epistemological, as that between worlds and not worldviews" (ibid., p. 143).

The move might be from *different* worldviews to *different* worlds, but difference remains. The "conundrums which dogged the anthropological study of cultural difference do not disappear when we shift to an anthropology of ontological

alterity" (Candea in Carrithers et al. 2010:179) precisely because ontology is understood as ontological *alterity* in the first place. When difference is assumed to be "ontological difference" (Alberti in Alberti et al 2011:896), it is logical to conclude one has "the option of examining alterity as either an epistemological or an ontological phenomenon" (Fowles in Alberti et al. 2011:906), so long as it is understood that *there is no option not to examine alterity itself*: difference is the pivot around which all sides turn.

In the ontological turn difference is not established; it is not even really asserted. The "treatment of alterity as the major premise of anthropological analysis" (Holbraad 2012:50) is doxic, a pregiven predicate to inquiry: "ontologically inflected anthropology is abidingly oriented towards the production of difference" (Viveiros de Castro, Pedersen, and Holbraad 2014), so that the goal is "to take difference—*alterity*—seriously as the starting point for anthropological analysis" (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007:12). Note how in this quotation, the quotation from Haywood above, and several quotations to follow, attention to ontology understood as difference is equated with a "serious" approach. This is a valuable counter to the claim by some thinkers like Richard Rorty that there are views that cannot be taken seriously (Viveiros de Castro 2011:130). Against a

long tradition in anthropology of treating what interlocutors say as localized case studies for etic analysis, "'taking seriously' [involves] a self-imposed suspension of the desire to explicate the other" (Candea 2011:147), such that "taking native thought seriously is to refuse to neutralize it" (Viveiros de Castro 2013:489). However, if the turn to ontology is a turn to the "serious," it is hard not to see interpretation as frivolous. But interpretations can be serious; seriousness inheres as well in the partial connections between meaning and being, difference and similitude. Conflating ontology with "taking seriously" obviates the serious flamboyance of ontological camp, something that destabilizes the place of difference as the ostensible predicate of the real.

Such destabilization could be helpful because difference in the ontological turn is the presumed condition of being for the Other: "ontology" usually references "indigenous ontologies" (Pedersen 2001:411), and specifically "the attempt to describe the ontologies of non-Western peoples" (Course 2010:247). Even when addressing contexts taken to be closer to one's own, the assumption is typically that "one finds just as much difference as one might find in setting sail to farther shores" (Candea 2011:149).

This is a disciplinary (and disciplining) view that "anthropology is alterity that stays alterity or, better, that *becomes* alterity, since anthropology is a conceptual practice whose aim is to make alterity reveal its powers of alteration" (Viveiros de Castro 2011:145). Difference and reality are fused in this view that "ontology is an attempt to take others and their real difference seriously [sic].... The turn to ontology is thus... a powerful move to re-inscribe difference into the very heart of the world—or at least into the heart of anthropological method" (Candea in Carrithers et al. 2010:175). Why there is any need to re-inscribe something so taken for granted on all sides is unclear, but this certainly represents a view that "since anthropology is centrally concerned with alterity and since alterity is a matter of ontological rather than epistemological differences, it follows that anthropology must reflect upon its modus operandi in ontological rather than epistemological terms" (Holbraad 2009:82).

It is important that I be as clear as I can at this juncture. I am not saying that an interest in difference is misguided. Alterity is extremely important as a feature of existence, as a condition of knowledge production, and as a politics. It is central to a range of postcolonial, feminist, antiracist, and queer interventions, among others; it is key to my own work. Notions of ontological difference run

though a set of conversations from Heidegger to Derrida, as well as vitalist arguments shaped by thinkers from Simmel to Deleuze that "all being is difference" (Lash 2005:2).

Of concern is how difference is framed and deployed. With regard to interpretive approaches we know that "cultural difference needs to be dislodged from its position as the enabling principle of ethnography and turned into the very phenomenon in need of historical explanation" (Bunzl 2004:440). But ontological difference is no less in need of dislodging and explanation.

At present, the ontological turn pivots on the axis of difference. What if we remove the bolt?

Many scholars involved in the ontological turn do problematize difference—for example, by noting that "if anthropology stands or falls by its capacity to register difference in its own terms, then it must find a way to stop delimiting the scope of difference by deciding in advance what it must look like" (Holbraad in Blaser 2013:563). This has included a concern that if the goal is "engaging with non-Euro-American ontologies... [anthropologists] probing European or American forms of life... would once again end up out in the cold" (Candea 2011:146). By this measure digital anthropologists would freeze at absolute zero—precisely when

they can contribute to understanding the reality of online cultures and their offline implications. If the ontological turn pivots around a bolt of difference shared with its epistemological foil, what results is a form of closure, rather than an opening to new conceptualizations of the human and parahuman.

Given that the conflation of ontology with difference shapes understandings of the real, it also shapes understandings of politics (recalling the English phrase "to make a difference;" see, e.g., Blaser 2009). It is incomplete to claim that "domination is a matter of holding the capacity to differ under control" (Viveiros de Castro, Pedersen, and Holbraad 2014). There is ample evidence that domination can also work through holding the capacity to be similar under control—an incitement to alterity. This has been a feature of many forms of colonialism where subjects were defined via tribal difference so as to thwart nationalist movements (Mamdani 1996).

Without a language of similitude as well as difference, it is difficult to articulate a political ontology outside "radical alterity and exotification... [which] constitute... some of the primary ways that anthropology has been put to use outside of the academy for all the wrong reasons and in all the wrong ways" (Vigh and Sausdal 2014:63). Without explicitly addressing "the pertinent questions of

how difference comes to matter and what kinds of difference are allowed to matter" (Bessire and Bond 2014:442), the risk is "rendering as political the ontological turn's own methodological commitment to the constant production of difference... tak[ing] the very fact of differing as political [such that] nothing is political" (Candea 2014). In terms of both politics and the real, removing the bolt of difference means not "turning back" to epistemology, but reframing knowledge and being in terms of practices of worldmaking and possession. It means considering an anthropology of similitude as one element in theorizing ontology itself.

From laboratories to archipelagoes

To further develop my argument, I will draw briefly on my research in Indonesia and Second Life. First, however, readers may have noticed that I have mentioned only once, in passing, work in Science and Technology Studies (STS). This lineage complements the ontological turn in anthropology, despite being quite distinct (Mol 2014). A detailed bibliometric analysis of the ontological turn in STS included no citations to Descola, Holbraad, Pedersen, Strathern, or Viveiros de Castro, but did reveal some "evidence of a turn in other fields towards notions of ontology specified by STS scholars" (Heur, Leydesdorff, and Wyatt 2012:342).

But while the two turns "are affiliated in various complex ways" (Jensen 2014), the fundamental form of their affiliation is simple: both pivot around the bolt of difference. STS scholarship broadens the discussion in terms of fieldsites studied, but there is conceptual continuity insofar as it turns "away from epistemology" (Mol 2002:vii) and frames ontology in terms of difference: "the turn to ontology in STS can be better understood as another attempt... [to attend] to the multiplicity and degrees of alterity of the worlds that science and technology bring into being" (Woolgar and Lezaun 2013:322–323). As in anthropology, politics is thereby articulated primarily through difference, an "alter-ontological politics" (Papadopoulos 2010:178), though here as well the equation of ontology with difference is contested (Lynch 2013).

Many anthropologists involved in the ontological turn have responded to the centrality of indigenous Amazonia and Inner Asia by emphasizing "there is no limit to what practices, discourses, and artifacts are amenable to ontological analysis" (Viveiros de Castro, Pedersen, and Holbraad 2014). Recognizing that a focus on indigenous communities is due to "professional trajectory and experience rather than to an implicit claim that there is an inherent association [with ontology]"

(Blaser 2013:553) opens the door to a broader comparative base of discussion, including but not limited to work in STS.

Consider how since the 1970s, a growing number of Indonesians have used the terms *lesbi* or *gay* to refer to at least some aspect of their subjectivities. As in all my published work, I italicize these terms because they transform the English terms "gay" and "lesbian;" they have their own trajectories and implications.[6] *Lesbi* and *gay* Indonesians can be found across Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago and fourth-most populous nation. Most are middle-class to below and have never met a Western gay or lesbian person. During fieldwork I was struck by how these Indonesians often linked their same-sex desire to a sense of sameness with *lesbi* and *gay* Indonesians across the archipelago. In other words, while they might identify as Javanese or Balinese with regard to kinship, religion, or any number of other domains, with regard to their sexualities they identified as *Indonesians*. They also frequently highlighted connections to gay and lesbian persons transnationally, as if Indonesia was one island in a global archipelago of queer subjectivities and communities, linked through grids of similarity and difference. They would identify such national and global linkages fully cognizant of colonial histories, contemporary inequalities, and differences between *gay* men and

lesbi women. This was not a veneer of inauthentic similitude covering eternal and essential difference.

These assertions of similitude challenged my anthropological predilection for difference as the goal of ethnographic inquiry. Was it contamination or even false consciousness? Learning to appreciate that similitude for these Indonesians was transcalar—constituting subjectivities, national imaginaries, and global connections—reminded me how ontologies are produced not found, countering the "neglect of... the infrastructures that facilitate the exchange of perspectives" in some (but by no means all) ontological turn scholarship (Maurer 2013:69).

At the risk of overly flamboyant theoretical gyrations, I might characterize this as archipelagic perspectivism, a view predicated on worlds understood as archipelagoes and thus as ontological assemblages defined in terms of exteriority not bounded shores (Escobar and Osterweil 2010). Islands of difference in seas of similitude, reefs and atolls that are sometimes islands and sometimes not, effected by climate change, currents, the inhabiting work of everything from humans to microscopic coral.

Toward an ontology of similitude

Non-Euclidean geometry, the foundation of much contemporary mathematics, arose from exploring what happens if we set aside the "parallel postulate" that parallel lines never meet. Even this brief discussion of *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians suggests how removing the bolt represented by the ontological turn's "difference postulate" might enable other theorizations of being and the real. What might constitute a theory of ontology that contextualized alterity within an analytic based in grids of similitude and difference?

Some observers of ontological turn debates have made precisely this point, questioning why "everything is about difference, rather than about sameness" (Werbner in Carrithers et al. 2010:185) and suggesting we "look at anthropology as the project of understanding what it means to be human and put both similarity and difference within that ongoing experience" (Glick-Schiller in Carrithers et al. 2010:192). An important insight in this regard is that a focus on difference "is in no way incompatible with the obvious observation that alterity is hardly an all-encompassing predicament, and that the people we study are in all sorts of ways eminently comprehensible to us" (Holbraad 2012:249). Yet the implication that

people are more comprehensible to the degree they are more similar to us remains fixed to the bolt of difference.

A key problem identified by these observers is that the "discussion of what we actually share... is dwarfed in... the ontological turn's highlighting of difference" (Vigh and Sausdal 2014:57). Consider how in the indigenous Amerindian data that has strongly informed work to date in the ontological turn, "ontological predation appears to be the crucial idiom.... The relative and relational status of predator and prey is fundamental" (Viveiros de Castro 2004:480). *Gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians are just one example of persons whose subjectivities, shaped by a desire for the same, allow theorizations of ontology alongside this predator/prey relationship of difference. Such theorizations do not necessarily originate in an ostensibly homogenizing modernity; for instance, in Māori cosmological accounts "the *a priori* ontological condition is sameness [and] difference has to be generated" (Salmond 2012:122). Similarity is serious too.

Rather than predicate ontology on difference, we can theorize difference and similitude together *in an archipelagic style*, where difference is internal and relational. After all, both the English term "archipelago" (derived from Italian) and the Indonesian term "nusantara" refer not to islands but to the waters connecting

them. Difference laps at the shores within; there is no a priori exterior to an archipelago. This reflects how "alterity is never a dissonance between two autonomous cultures any more than it is a dissonance between two autonomous ontologies. Decades of postcolonial critiques should by now have sensitized us to this fact" (Fowles in Alberti et al 2011:907). Given that ontological turn scholarship has been criticized for "skipping over an entire generation of anthropologists that took up these same problems and worked them out in very different ways" (Bessire and Bond 2014:441), and that "decades of [relevant] work in STS is being disdainfully discarded" (Mol 2012:380–381), attention to ethnographic interplays of difference and similitude can help enrich the conceptual repertoire brought to bear on questions of the real. This is one reason why "perhaps the time has come to move beyond not only the relational anthropology upon which 'ontological turn' ethnographies have hitherto been so dependent, but also the idea of 'radical alterity'" (Laidlaw and Heywood 2013). Theorizing both similitude and difference gives us a better way to think about the relationality of being, what I take up below as an ontology of possession.

This attention to similitude has political implications. Given that "the political axis [in politics of ontology debates] is about enabling difference to flourish

against the coercive powers of sameness" (Battaglia and Almeida 2014), questioning the assumption that difference is the axis around which a political ontology must turn permits addressing the possibility of *the coercive powers of difference*, and the implications of enabling similitude to flourish *as a politics*. Similitude is not always an inauthentic mischaracterization: it can be ontologically real and linked to a politics of equality, coalition, and mutuality. While it is certainly legitimate for the "ontologically-minded anthropologist" to be concerned that "in making accounts equivalent as enactments, we are doing sameness and leaving no way out for our interlocutors, partners and circumstantial political foes who would not describe their accounts as enactments" (Blaser 2014), a more comprehensive theorization should address how *doing difference* can also leave no way out for interlocutors. Without a framework that accounts for difference and similitude, analyses can overlook "the possibility of a shared ontology or interpretive framework... Focusing on 'worlds' rather than 'worldviews' claims to deny a form of conservative ethnography that in fact is perpetuated by this radical essentialism" (Geismar 2011:215). When notions of the public good are challenged by neoliberal ideologies that atomize citizens into self-interested, rational

individuals who are members of incommensurable cultures, the incitement to difference merits scrutiny.

There are methodological implications as well. If the Other is radically different, what are we to make of them doing things like using the term *gay*, wearing blue jeans, or updating Facebook profiles? The ontological turn is solidly in the Malinowskian framework insofar as in this body of work, "ontology is currently used to emphasize incommensurable difference, as it is only by seeing the other as absolutely different that we can approach the ethnographic field unprejudiced" (Vigh and Sausdal 2014:55). Yet ethnography depends on similitude as well as difference: "anthropologists regularly remind us of the hazards of translation... But I have yet to hear of an anthropologist who returns from the field announcing that she could understand nothing about the people she was studying" (Lloyd 2011:837; see Keane 2013).

Observers of the ontological turn have noted that "within the ontological turn difference... serves as an instrument for destabilizing our own ways of thinking" (Vigh and Sausdal 2014:62). By extension, an anthropology of similitude is necessary to a comprehensive instrument addressing how similitude can also destabilize ways of thinking. This is why I respectfully disagree with the

view that "I have in past writings made the mistake of associating the notion of ontological difference with the image of multiple worlds" (Holbraad in Blaser 2013:563). In my view, Holbraad's association of ontological difference with multiple worlds is valuable (not mistaken) if clarified in two respects. First, multiplicity is not isomorphic with difference: multiplicity can in some cases produce similitude (as I discuss below with regard to imitation and repetition). Second, a notion of multiple worlds is not necessarily mistaken because depending on your definition of "world," they are not just "images" but realities. To assume otherwise contributes to the mistaken view that the digital is not real.

Virtual worlds and the digital

To focus more closely on the relationship between the digital and the real, I now turn to online socialities, which include social network sites like Facebook, mobile phone apps, texting, blogs, email, games, and streaming video. These phenomena differ and constantly change, but also have more perduring and broadly shared characteristics (for instance, the notion of "friending" someone). My ethnographic work in this domain has focused on virtual worlds. Scholars involved with the ontological turn have asserted that "[i]f we are to take others seriously [sic],

instead of reducing their articulations to mere 'cultural perspectives' or 'beliefs' (i.e. 'worldviews'), we can conceive them as enunciations of different 'worlds'" (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007:10). In this regard virtual worlds interrupt the conflation of reality and physicality that contributes to the dismissal of cultural perspectives, beliefs, and worldviews with terms like "reducing" and "mere."

The most distinctive feature of virtual worlds is that they are places, which underscores how not all online phenomena are media. Virtual worlds do not mediate between places; they are places in their own right that persist as individuals log in and out of them. They exist even if no one is currently "inworld," whether they take the form of online games or have a more open-ended character, as in the case of my fieldsite of Second Life.[7] Residents of this virtual world, which had around a million active residents at the time of my fieldwork, could join for free and engage in almost any imaginable activity—from business meetings to watching movies, from dancing to sex, from creating a medieval city to a suburban housing development to a space station. Objects, parcels of land, and services could be offered freely or sold for Linden Dollars (convertible to U.S. dollars). Through these activities and social relations, residents created a world within which they could interact in a synchronous manner, but also asynchronously (for instance, by

starting work on a house and logging off, with another resident logging on to work on the house an hour later). Second Life was structured to permit anonymity or continuity between online and offline identities. It allowed for avatar embodiment that could be changed at will and as often as one wished—gender, race, and age, or even the ability to take the form of an animal or object.[8]

Residents of virtual worlds teach us that they are real places that must be understood in their own terms. Consider a hypothetical group of four Second Life friends who in the physical world are located in France, England, the United States, and Brazil, and who meet regularly to dance in a virtual disco. To demand an ethnographer fly to all these countries would not just be impractical, but inaccurate. The persons in question are not meeting in the physical world; given the principle of "follow the people" (Marcus 1995:106) participant observation should occur in the real place of Second Life. Meeting these persons in their physical world locations could be useful for a range of research questions as well, just not as an assumed point of privileged access to the real.

Virtual worlds must be understood in their own terms, but these "own terms" include influences from beyond the virtual world context. The reality of our hypothetical group of Second Life friends in the virtual disco is shaped by time

zones, language skills, cultural logics, and the speed of internet connections and chips, as well as the materiality of computers, server farms, and bodies. But these influences do not "blur" the gap between virtual and actual, a point of commonality with other forms of online sociality. For instance, if someone living in Chicago posts on Facebook, it is misleading to assert that posting is located "in Chicago," even though that is where the poster's physical body is located (or "in Dallas," should that be where the server storing the posting is located). If fifteen friends responded with comments, their activity would not be located "in Chicago"—none of these friends may even live in Chicago; they could be posting while walking on a street with a mobile device, or even using a tablet on an airplane at 30,000 feet. In the sense of social action, a key place where these activities occur is "on Facebook."[9] The online sociality is real, not in an exhaustive or privileged sense, but in a perspectival sense.

What does it mean to say virtual worlds are real (Brey 2013)? "In real life" (irl) has been well-known since the earliest days of digital communities. Second Life residents would sometimes use this phrase informally, yet insist that Second Life was real, an assessment found in other online contexts (Boellstorff 2008:20–24, 237–240; Markham 1998:115; Taylor 2006). "Real life" often acted as a

shorthand for "physical world," "not roleplaying," or "not gaming." These persons clearly knew that roleplaying could occur in Second Life or more gaming-oriented virtual worlds like World of Warcraft, but that it could also take place with physical world friends in a basement using paper and dice. Reality is not an exclusive property of the online or offline. Residents were aware that if they learned something in Second Life, that knowledge could be used in the physical world. They knew that if they fell in love with someone, those feelings could have physical-world ramifications. They knew that money spent inworld was real money (a reality on which the technology industry depends).

The reality of virtual worlds is shaped by their status as persistent contexts of social immersion. One source of confusion involves the distinction between virtual worlds and "virtual reality," which typically refers to sensory immersion using devices like 3D goggles. Virtual worlds can involve virtual reality technology, but this is not necessary; most residents of virtual worlds access them via a computer screen or mobile device, and many contemporary virtual worlds like Minecraft have less graphical "realism" than virtual worlds that came before them. On the other hand, virtual reality technology can be used with a flight simulator run from a single computer not connected to the internet, and which is not a virtual

world because it disappears when the computer is turned off. The reality of virtual worlds is not due to virtual reality but virtual worldmaking: "there is no ontological difference between virtual reality and actual reality" (Zhai 1998:xiv).

By not assuming reality is exclusive to the physical, the ontology I have in mind here would not treat the digital as a "lossy" approximation of the analog. This is an understanding of the gap between virtual and actual as real precisely because it is a space of connection and alteration, rather than a teleology from online to offline, as if from spirit to flesh. It is not that virtual worlds are potentially real, but that they are additional realities.

Having, being, knowing

The ontological turn provides resources for theorizing the reality of the digital, if reframed so not pivoting on the bolt of difference. One promising way to do this is in dialogue with the notion of "having" developed by Gabriel Tarde. The work of this contemporary and rival of Durkheim already influences ontological turn scholarship—directly or via Deleuze, who found in Tarde that "the perpetual divergence and decentering of difference [corresponds] closely to a displacement and a disguising within repetition'" (Deleuze 1994:xx; see Toews 2003:91).

Clearly, I do not have space for exploring Tarde's thought in depth. For my purposes here, what is crucial is this notion of repetition, through which Tarde insisted that difference is not ontologically prior to similitude. This stems from the place of *imitation* in his social theory: "the social being, in the degree that he is social, is essentially imitative... society undoubtedly existed before exchange. It began on the day when one man first copied another" (Tarde 1903:11, 28). This view of sociality as imitative can be placed in productive dialogue with work on mimesis that has a long tradition in anthropology and beyond (Auerbach 1953; Benjamin 1979; Caillois 1984; Frazer 1915). This "mimetic faculty" has also been helpfully linked to the question of alterity and "the nature that culture uses to create second nature" (Taussig 1993:xiii).

Imitation is a relation of similitude that preserves difference: it causes "both social similarities and dissimilarities" (Tarde 1903:50), so that "represented similarity is what gives birth to difference" (Karsenti 2010:72). Tarde conceived of such represented similarities, the stuff of imitation, in terms of a "'suggestive realm' as an ontology of the social" (Blackman 2007:579; see Leys 1993). Reflecting nineteenth-century interest in hypnotism, he asserted "society is imitation and imitation is a kind of somnambulism" (Tarde 1903:87).

This "analytical line running from Tarde to Deleuze" (Sampson 2012:8) via repetition, imitation, resemblance, and somnambulism reframes difference in terms of *possession* as an alternative to being. This is typified in a passage oft-cited by scholars engaging with the ontological turn:[10]

> All philosophy hitherto has been based on the verb *Be*... if it had been based on the verb *Have*, many sterile debates and fruitless intellectual exertions would have been avoided. From this principle, *I am*, all the subtlety in the world has not made it possible to deduce any existence other than my own: hence the negation of external reality. If, however, the postulate *I have* is posited as the fundamental fact, both that which *has* and that which *is had* are given inseparably at once. (Tarde 2012:52)

Tarde sees an analytics of being as fostering an inaccurate division between real (equated with the Self) and unreal (equated with the "external" Other). His alternative of having "obviates... precisely this opposition between self and other" (Candea 2010:126). As an ontology of mutual possession, it is consonant with his broader theory of repetition and imitation: "Tarde rejects the idea that something

can exist beyond the relations which constitutes it as such" (Vargas 2010:230). Appreciating the potential of this framework requires "avoiding from the start the wrong step that consists of considering the philosophy of Having as a bizarre variation of possessive individualism" (Vargas 2010:230). We have known since Hobbes that liberalism and capitalism are linked through the idea that a specific notion of possession, in the form of property, confirms being (Maurer 1999; Radin 1982). Tarde's more hypnotic understanding of possession presumes a dyadic relation (indeed, a kind of a digital relation) where "that which has" and "that which is had" are inseparable yet distinct. A gap connects them—a connection possible precisely because the category of the "real" is not exclusive to either side.

A gap connects them. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida developed the notion of "hauntology" to theorize contemporary implications of this gap in terms of a "frontier" instituted in "the medium of the media themselves... tele-communications, techno-tele-discursivity, techno-tele-iconicity" (1994:50–51). Derrida does not cite Tarde in this argument, but his invocation of a spirit possession in the context of ontology certainly recalls Tarde's interest in "having" rather than "being" as the foundation of human worlds understood in terms of "social somnambulism" (1903:85). What Tarde offers is a way to conceptualize a

relation of similitude and difference: a gap of difference is necessary for imitation, repetition, and resemblance. In other words, Tarde gives us a vocabulary not for an ontology of self and object, but a relational coming-into-being that recalls spirit possession or hypnotism more than "possessive" individualism.

In search of alternatives to the bolt of difference, we might seek inspiration from Tarde to posit alongside hauntology the possibility of a *habeology* (from the Latin *habeo, "to have*," another conjugation of which is *habitus*). With this term I am considering the possibility of a "metaphysics of Having" (Vargas 2010:229)—in place of my neologism we might simply say an "ecology"[11]—in which it is possible to theorize grids of similitude and difference in a way that that treats similitude as equally in need of explication. Habeology troubles the notion of radical alterity, because having something implies some link of similitude as well as some distinction of difference. And troubling the notion of radical alterity through possession opens a space for treating the real not as a property that the digital lacks, but as a relation that may or may not manifest in virtual contexts—or actual contexts, for instance in the unreality of play where "the playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite" (Bateson 1972:153).

I am gesturing here toward possession and imitation as possible alternatives to the bolt of difference. Similitude alone cannot play this role because it simply represents a further "turn" around the bolt in question (and because, as I have emphasized, an interest in difference is not misguided, only incomplete). A more fully developed habeology of the social might provide tools for rethinking being outside a presumed tropism of reality toward difference. This might open valuable lines of inquiry for considering the reality of the digital.

The real stakes

In "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam," Bruno Latour claimed "a certain form of critical spirit has sent us down the wrong path... The question was never to get *away* from facts but *closer* to them" (2004:231). His remedy was an empiricism that could show how "Reality is not defined by matters of fact... [they are] very partial... renderings of matters of concern" (ibid).

A conceptual "turn" critiques that which it turns against for ostensibly having run out of steam. In this article I have eschewed critique as a theoretical/affective stance and sought to stand outside the "turn" metaphor. My engagement is one of productive extension; I frame my intervention as engaging

with a body of work just gathering steam. The ontological turn represents a diverse scholarly conversation that can speak to an emergent paradigm in digital theory that takes reality as its matter of concern.

My goal has been to think outside the "bolt" of difference that currently anchors the ontological turn to the epistemological framework it supposedly rejects, limiting its analytical purchase regarding the category of the real. If being is difference and the physical is self-evidently real, it is hard not to conclude that the digital is unreal. In a context where the offline is increasingly experienced as the temporarily not online, rethinking this inaccurate conclusion is of the utmost theoretical and political importance. The digital is not linked to the real because it "simulates" the physical: many forms of online practice and sociality are unconcerned with simulation. Indeed, we live in a world where it is quite common for the physical to simulate the digital, as in forms of offline social interaction that draw norms, assumptions, or even networks from the online (like a "meetup" of persons in the physical world whose primary interactions are digital). The category of the "real" is not a point of distinction between the digital and the physical: it is the very thing that possesses them.

Removing the bolt of difference in favor of a more expansive attention to grids of similitude and difference can help ontological turn work speak more effectively to questions of the digital real. More broadly, removing this bolt helps align our conceptual apparatus with the modes of practice and becoming through which being and knowledge are mutually constituted. In other words, the framing of current anthropological work on ontology as "turning" on difference does a disservice to its own potential; without attention to similitude as well as difference, we are left with the silence of one conceptual hand clapping.

Rather than a turn from epistemology to ontology (and inevitably, back to epistemology), I wonder about a kind of Heisenberg principle that could allow for the possessive co-constitution of ontology and epistemology as fact/perspective, like a photon can be a wave or a particle. Meaning is ontological—enacted in representational practice. "Epistemological turn" scholarship can be quite eloquent on this point:

> The thing to ask about a burlesqued wink or a mock sheep raid is not what their ontological status is. It is the same as that of rocks on the one hand and dreams on the other—they are things of this world. The thing to ask is

> what their import is: what it is, ridicule or challenge, irony or anger, snobbery or pride, that, in their occurrence and through their agency, is getting said. (Geertz 1973:10)

"Import" in Geertz's sense speaks to worldmaking processes of meaningful realization, to the "practices of abstraction and specification that create and set in order distinctive epistemological and ontological domains" (Zhan 2012:109). By questioning "the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent" (Barad 2003:804) we can develop forms of onto-epistemology, "the study of practices of knowing in being" (ibid., p. 829)—what Foucault termed a "historical ontology of ourselves" that asks "how are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge" (1984:49). This "challenges any attempt to erect barriers between something that can be called the real, material, or physical world and something else that can be called thought, discourse, or narrative" (Alberti in Alberti et al. 2011:905); it is an approach predicated on the idea that "how we represent the world around us is in some way or another constitutive of our being" (Kohn 2013:6). This is important because "talking about reality as *multiple* depends [not on the metaphors] of perspective and construction,

but rather those of intervention and performance. This suggests a reality that is *done* and *enacted* rather than observed" (Mol 1999:77),[12] "an interpretation that transforms the very thing it interprets" (Derrida 1994:51).

Inspired by these lines of analysis, I proffer habeology as a way to understand reality as enacted through having, possession across constitutive gaps of both difference and similitude. I seek to extend the insight that "[the language of ontology] acts as a counter-measure to a derealizing trick frequently played against the native's thinking, which turns this thought into a kind of sustained phantasy, by reducing it to the dimensions of a form of knowledge or representation, that is, to an 'epistemology' or a 'worldview'" (Viveiros de Castro 2003). To construe something as a worldview need not be a reduction; at issue is precisely that epistemology need not be derealization.

Challenging the derealization of the digital is of pressing importance. The perspectival insights of ontological turn scholarship, if not predicated on the bolt of difference but instead framed in terms of "having," might destabilize the logic of adequation—*intellectus et rei*; how does thought correspond to reality—in favor of a processual framing of being and knowing. Such a habeological perspective can underscore how the "ontological question" (Evens 2012:5) is a question of reality

and difference: "unless, then, we are prepared to suspend our received notion of reality—that the world must be perfectly identical to itself—we are in no position to take full advantage of the ethnographic encounter with otherness" (ibid.).

Our era of the Anthropocene is now a "Digitocene" as well. We live in a Digital Age where the relations between online and offline transform human relations to climate change, income inequality, and social belonging, among many other domains of contemporary struggle. It really matters, and conceptualizing the reality of this mattering will shape how, for good and ill, technology transforms our actual worlds.

Acknowledgments

Parts of this argument were beta-tested as the keynote speech for the conference "The Contours of Algorithmic Life," sponsored by the Mellon Research Initiative in Digital Cultures at the University of California, Davis. I thank the organizers of that conference, particularly Evan Buswell, Xan Chacko, Ksenia Fedorova, Gretchen Jude, Tanner Jupin, Emelie Mahdavian, Josef Nguyen, Martin Weis, and May Ee Wong. A more complete draft was presented at the "Working Title" workshop held by graduate students in the Department of Anthropology at the

University of California, Irvine. I thank the organizers of that workshop—Emily T. Andrews, Elizabeth DeLuca, Rebecca Hasselbeck, and Megan Neal—and the participants, particularly the discussant, Taylor Nelms. For their comments and suggestions, I thank Geoffrey Bowker, Keith Hart, Casper Bruun Jensen, Bill Maurer, Valerie Olson, David Pedersen, Morten A. Pedersen, Kavita Philip, Justin Richland, Leah Zani, and Mei Zhan.

References Cited

Aghajan, Zahra M., Lavanya Acharya, Jason J Moore, et al. 2014. Impaired Spatial Selectivity and Intact Phase Precession in Two-Dimensional Virtual Reality. *Nature Neuroscience* 24 November:1–10.

Alberti, Benjamin, Severin Fowles, Martin Holbraad, Yvonne Marshall, and Christopher Witmore. 2011. Worlds otherwise: archaeology, anthropology, and ontological difference. *Current Anthropology* 52(6):896–912.

Auerbach, Erich. 1953. *Mimesis: the representation of reality in Western literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Barad, Karen. 2003. Posthumanist performativity: toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter. *Signs* 28(3):801–831.

Bateson, Gregory. 1972. A theory of play and fantasy. In *Steps to an ecology of mind: collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution, and epistemology*. Pp. 150–166. New York: Ballantine Books.

Battaglia, Debbora, and Rafael Antunes Almeida. 2014. "Otherwise anthropology" otherwise: The view from technology. Fieldsights—Commentary, *Cultural Anthropology Online*, February 28, 2014, http://culanth.org/fieldsights/493-otherwise-anthropology-otherwise-the-view-from-technology.

Benjamin, Walter. 1979 [1933]. Doctrine of the similar. *New German Critique* 17:65–69.

Bessire, Lucas, and David Bond. 2014. Ontological anthropology and the deferral of critique. *American Ethnologist* 41(3):440–456.

Blackman, Lisa. 2007. Reinventing psychological matters: the importance of the suggestive realm of Tarde's ontology. *Economy and Society* 36(4):574–596.

Blaser, Mario. 2009. Political ontology: cultural studies without "cultures?" *Cultural Studies* 23(5-6):873–896.

———. 2013. Ontological conflicts and the stories of peoples in spite of Europe. *Current Anthropology* 54(5):547–568.

———. 2014. The Political Ontology of Doing Difference... and Sameness. *Cultural Anthropology Online*, January 13, 2014, http://culanth.org/fieldsights/474-the-political-ontology-of-doing-difference-and-sameness.

Bloch, Maurice. 2013. *In and out of each other's bodies: theory of mind, evolution, truth, and the nature of the social*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

Boellstorff, Tom. 2002. Ethnolocality. *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 3(1):24–48.

———. 2005. *The gay archipelago: sexuality and nation in Indonesia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

———. 2007. *A coincidence of desires: anthropology, queer studies, Indonesia*. Durham: Duke University Press.

———. 2008. *Coming of age in Second Life: an anthropologist explores the virtually human*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Brey, Philip. 2013. The physical and social reality of virtual worlds. In *The Oxford handbook of virtuality*. Mark Grimshaw, ed. Pp. 42–54. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bunzl, Matti. 2004. Boas, Foucault, and the "native anthropologist": notes toward a Neo-Boasian anthropology. *American Anthropologist* 106(3):435–442.

Caillois, Roger. 1984. Mimicry and legendary psychasthenia. *October* 31:17–32.

Candea, Matei. 2010. Anonymous introductions: identity and belonging in Corsica. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 16(1):119–137.

———. 2011. Endo/exo. *Common Knowledge* 17(1):146–150.

———. 2014. The ontology of the political turn. *Cultural Anthropology Online*, January 13, 2014, http://culanth.org/fieldsights/469-the-ontology-of-the-political-turn.

Carrithers, Michael, Matei Candea, Karen Sykes, Martin Holbraad, and Soumhya Venkatesan. 2010. Ontology is just another word for culture: motion tabled at the 2008 meeting of the Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory, University of Manchester. *Critique of Anthropology* 30(2):152–200.

Clifford, James, and George Marcus, eds. 1986. *Writing culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Course, Magnus. 2010. Of words and fog: linguistic relativity and Amerindian ontology. *Anthropological Theory* 10(3):247–263.

DeLanda, Manuel. 2006. *A new philosophy of society: assemblage theory and social complexity*. London: Continuum.

Deleuze, Gilles. 1994. *Difference and repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton. London: Athlone Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 1994. *Specters of Marx: The state of the debt, the work of mourning, and the new international*. New York: Routledge.

Descola, Philippe. 2013. *Beyond nature and culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Elwell, J. Sage. 2014. The transmediated self: life between the digital and the analog. *Convergence* 20(2):233–249.

Escobar, Arturo, and Michal Osterweil. 2010. Social movements and the politics of the virtual: Deleuzian strategies. In *Deleuzian intersections: science, technology, anthropology*. Casper Bruun Jensen and Kjetil Rödje, eds. Pp. 187–217. New York: Berghahn Books.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1937. *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Evens, T. M. S. 2012. Twins are birds and a whale is a fish, a mammal, a submarine: revisiting "primitive mentality" as a question of ontology. *Social Analysis* 56(3):1–11.

Foucault, Michel. 1984. What is Enlightenment? In *The Foucault reader*. Paul Rabinow, ed. Pp. 32–50. New York, Pantheon Books.

Frazer, James. 1915. *The golden bough*. New York: Macmillan and Co.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture. In *The interpretation of cultures*. Pp. 3–32. New York: Basic Books.

Geismar, Haidy. 2011. "Material Culture Studies" and other ways to theorize objects: a primer to a regional debate. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53(1):210–218.

Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson. 1997. Discipline and practice: "the field" as site, method, and location in anthropology. In *Anthropological locations: boundaries and grounds of a field science*. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, eds. Pp. 1–46. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hallowell, A. Irving. 1960. Ojibwa ontology, behavior and world view. In *Culture in history: essays in honor of Paul Radin*. Stanley Diamond, ed. Pp. 19–52. New York: Columbia University Press.

Henare, Amiria, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell. 2007. Introduction: thinking through things. In *Thinking through things: theorising artefacts ethnographically*. Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell, eds. Pp. 1–31. New York: Routledge.

Heur, Bas Van, Loet Leydesdorff, and Sally Wyatt. 2012. Turning to ontology in STS? turning to STS through "ontology." *Social Studies of Science* 43(3):341–362.

Heywood, Paolo. 2012. Anthropology and what there is: reflections on "ontology." *Cambridge Anthropology* 30(1):143–151.

Hine, Christine. 2015. *Ethnography for the internet: embedded, embodied and everyday*. London: Bloomsbury.

Holbraad, Martin. 2009. Ontography and alterity: defining anthropological truth. *Social Analysis* 53(2):80–93.

———. 2012. *Truth in motion: the recursive anthropology of Cuban divination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hoy, David Couzens. 1993. Heidegger and the hermeneutic turn. In *The Cambridge companion to Heidegger*. Charles Guignon, ed. Pp. 170–194. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jensen, Casper Bruun. 2014. Practical ontologies. *Cultural Anthropology Online*, http://culanth.org/fieldsights/466-practical-ontologies.

Karsenti, Bruno. 2010. Imitation: returning to the Tarde–Durkheim debate. In *The social after Gabriel Tarde: debates and assessments*. Matei Candea, ed. Pp. 44–61. New York: Routledge.

Keane, Webb. 2013. Ontologies, anthropologists, and ethical life. *Hau* 3(1):186–191.

Kelly, John D. 2014. Introduction: the ontological turn in French philosophical anthropology. *Hau* 4(1):259–269.

Kohn, Eduardo. 2013. *How forests think: toward an anthropology beyond the human*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

———. 2014. What an ontological anthropology might mean. *Cultural Anthropology Online*, http://culanth.org/fieldsights/463-what-an-ontological-anthropology-might-mean.

Laidlaw, James. 2012. Ontologically challenged. *Anthropology of This Century*, issue 4, http://aotcpress.com/articles/ontologically-challenged/

Laidlaw, James, and Paolo Heywood. 2013. One more turn and you're there. *Anthropology of This Century*, issue 7, http://aotcpress.com/articles/turn/

Lakoff, George. 1987. *Women, fire, and dangerous things: what categories reveal about the mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lash, Scott. 2005. Lebenssoziologie: Georg Simmel in the information age. *Theory, Culture & Society* 22(3):1–23.

Latour, Bruno. 2002. Gabriel Tarde and the end of the social. In *The social in question: new bearings in history and the social sciences*. Patrick Joyce, ed. Pp. 117–132. London: Routledge.

———. 2004. Why has critique run out of steam? from matters of fact to matters of concern. *Critical Inquiry* 30(2):225–248.

Leach, Edmund R. 1984. Glimpses of the unmentionable in the history of British social anthropology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 13:1–23.

Leys, Ruth. 1993. Mead's voices: imitation as foundation, or, the struggle against mimesis. *Critical Inquiry* 19(2):277–307.

Lloyd, G. E. R. 2011. Humanity between gods and beasts? Ontologies in question. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17(4):829–845.

Lynch, Michael. 2013. Ontography: investigating the production of things, deflating ontology. *Social Studies of Science* 43(3):444–462.

Malinowski, Bronisław. 1935. *Coral gardens and their magic*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Mamdani, Mahmood. 1996. *Citizen and subject: contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Marcus, George. 1995. Ethnography in/of the world system: the emergence of multi-sited ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24:95–117.

Markham, Annette. 1998. *Life online: researching real experience in virtual space*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.

Maurer, Bill. 1999. Forget Locke? From proprietor to risk-bearer in new logics of finance. *Public Culture* 11(2):47–67.

———. 2013. Transacting ontologies: Kockelman's sieves and a Bayesian anthropology. *Hau* 3(3):63–75.

Mol, Annemarie. 1999. Ontological politics: a word and some questions. In *Actor network theory and after*. John Law and John Hassard, eds. Pp. 74–89. Boston: Blackwell.

———. 2002. *The body multiple: ontology in medical practice*. Durham: Duke University Press.

———. 2012. Mind your plate! The ontonorms of Dutch dieting. *Social Studies of Science* 43(3):379–396.

———. 2014. Other words: stories from the social studies of science, technology, and medicine. *Cultural Anthropology Online*, January 13, 2014, http://culanth.org/fieldsights/472-other-words-stories-from-the-social-studies-of-science-technology-and-medicine.

Paleček, Martin, and Mark Risjord. 2012. Relativism and the ontological turn within anthropology. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 43(1):3–23.

Papadopoulos, Dimitris. 2010. Alter-Ontologies: towards a constituent politics in technoscience. *Social Studies of Science* 41(2):177–201.

Pedersen, Morten A. 2001. Totemism, animism, and North Asian indigenous ontologies. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 7(3):411–427.

———. 2011. *Not quite shamans: spirit worlds and political lives in Northern Mongolia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

———. 2012. Common nonsense: a review of certain recent reviews of the "ontological turn." *Anthropology of This Century*, issue 5, http://aotcpress.com/articles/common_nonsense/

Radin, Margaret Jane. 1982. Property and personhood. *Stanford Law Review* 34(5):957–1015.

Ramberg, Bjørn, and Kristin Gjesdal. 2013. Hermeneutics. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2013 Edition). Edward N. Zalta, ed. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/hermeneutics/.

Ramos, Alcida Rita. 2012. The politics of perspectivism. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41:481–494.

Rorty, Richard. 1992. *The linguistic turn: essays in philosophical method*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Salmond, Anne. 2012. Ontological quarrels: indigeneity, exclusion and citizenship in a relational world. *Anthropological Theory* 12(2):115–141.

Sampson, Tony. 2012. *Virality: contagion theory in the age of networks*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Scott, Michael W. 2013. The anthropology of ontology (religious science?). *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19(4):859–872.

Swancutt, Katherine. 2007. The ontological spiral: virtuosity and transparency in Mongolian games. *Inner Asia* 9(2):237–259.

Tarde, Gabriel. 1903. *The Laws of Imitation*. Translated from the second French edition by Elsie Clews Parsons. New York: Henry Holt & Co .

———. 2012 [1895]. *Monadology and sociology*. Melbourne: Re.press.

Taylor, T.L. 2006. *Play between worlds: exploring online game culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Taussig, Michael. 1993. *Mimesis and alterity: a particular history of the senses*. New York: Routledge.

Toews, David. 2003. The new Tarde: sociology after the end of the social. *Theory, Culture & Society* 20(5):81–98.

Toren, Christina, and João de Pina-Cabral. 2009. What is happening to epistemology? *Social Analysis* 53(2):1–18.

Vargas, Eduardo Viana. 2010. Tarde on drugs, or measures against *Suicide*. In *The social after Gabriel Tarde: debates and assessments*. Matei Candea, ed. Pp. 208–229. New York: Routledge.

Vigh, Henrik Erdman, and David Brehm Sausdal. 2014. From essence back to existence: anthropology beyond the ontological turn. *Anthropological Theory* 14(1):49–73.

Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. 1998. Cosmological deixis and Amerindian perspectivism. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4(3):469–488.

———. 2003. (anthropology) and (science). *Manchester Papers in Social Anthropology* 7, http://nansi.abaetenet.net/abaetextos/anthropology-and-science-e-viveiros-de-castro.

———. 2004. Exchanging perspectives: the transformation of objects into subjects in amerindian ontologies. *Common Knowledge* 10(3):463–484.

———. 2011. Zero and the art of anthropology: of lies, beliefs, paradoxes, and other truths. *Common Knowledge* 17(1):128–145.

———. 2013 [2002]. The relative native. *Hau* 3(3):473–502.

Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo, Morten Axel Pedersen, and Martin Holbraad. 2014. The politics of ontology: anthropological positions. *Cultural Anthropology Online*, January 13, 2014, http://culanth.org/fieldsights/462-the-politics-of-ontology-anthropological-positions.

Woolgar, Steve, and Javier Lezaun. 2013. The wrong bin bag: a turn to ontology in science and technology studies? *Social Studies of Science* 43(3):321–340.

Zhai, Philip. 1998. *Get real: a philosophical adventure in virtual reality*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Zhan, Mei. 2012. Worlding oneness: Daoism, Heidegger, and possibilities for treating the human. *Social Text* 29(4):107–128.

---

[1] These are sometimes usefully assigned differing meanings, but in this article I treat them as rough synonyms; I follow the same strategy for "difference," "alterity," and "Otherness."

[2] Italics in citations are original. Page numbers do not appear for online publications without them.

[3] Not all discussions of ontology are of an ontological turn; for example, while theories of social ontology are sometimes cited in ontological turn debates, they are distinct (e.g., DeLanda 2006).

[4] For instance, Marcus was not in the University of California system when *Writing Culture* was published, though he was deeply collaborating with University of California scholars at the time.

[5] I gesture here at the rich literature on metaphor, particularly Lakoff 1987. Another biographical thread is that I was briefly a graduate student in the Department of Linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley, working with George Lakoff and Eve Sweetser on questions of metaphor and thought.

[6] Due to limitations of space I focus on similarities between *gay* men and *lesbi* women, and will not discuss the transgender subject positions *waria* and *tomboi*. See Boellstorff 2005, 2007 for detailed analysis of these issues.

[7] The name "Second Life" can misleadingly imply separation from a "first life" assumed to be physical. Had Linden Lab, the company that owns Second Life, kept the original name of Linden World, its character as a virtual world would have been more clear.

[8] This summarizes fieldwork discussed in Boellstorff 2008.

[9] This issue is not unique to the online: if conducting fieldwork with a group of *gay* Indonesians meeting in an urban park, it would misrepresent the reality at hand to insist an ethnographer also travel to San Francisco or Amsterdam, even though notions of homosexuality from the West shape the social reality under consideration.

[10] For instance, Candea 2010:125; Latour 2002:129; Vargas 2010:212; Viveiros de Castro 2003.

[11] A term suggested in this context by Jean Milet; see Vargas 2010:229.

[12] Cited in Blaser 2013:554.