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# Anthropology and diplomacy

Is another form of diplomacy possible? [introduction]

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- 1 The diplomatic innovations introduced by Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin or Xi Jinping have yet to prove their adequacy in response to the major challenges facing humanity in the twenty-first century. This is not for want of creativity, however, since many of the contemporary changes being introduced into the realm of foreign affairs are in evidence in the styles of these three men. Trump, more than any other world leader, uses “digital diplomacy” to address himself directly to other heads of state and to his electorate, thereby short-circuiting the traditionally hidden work of foreign ministries. Putin seems to do without diplomacy altogether, marrying brutal irony and an increasing recourse to force. Xi Jinping proposes a doctrine of articulations (Eckman 2018; Zhao 2018) which, by multiplying bilateral partnerships in the service of an ambitious strategy in economic and foreign policy—sometimes referred to as the “new silk road”—bypasses the Westphalian model of a game of alliances. At the same time, by relying on *soft power* strategies (Confucius Institutes that promote Chinese language and culture, coupled with trenchant efforts to gain international respectability), China presents itself as the bridgehead of an alternative diplomatic model to that espoused by Western powers. Furthermore, as the scales and types of actors engaged in diplomacy multiply to include towns, regions, public opinion, NGOs and transnational companies, Indigenous peoples, etc., and as non-Western powers continue to emerge on the global stage, pronouncements about a crisis of traditional diplomacy, and even “diplomats’ blues”, abound.<sup>1</sup>
- 2 In his interview in this issue, French diplomat YVES SAINT-GEOURS remarks that this crisis is, in fact, merely that of a certain kind of diplomacy, namely of multilateralism and its ambition that international relations should be governed by something more than self-



interest and the balance of power. The spectacular decline of this model of diplomacy is palpable in the UN's struggle to influence the decisions of individual nations. By contrast, power politics and the quest for influence—the most traditional diplomacy—is faring well, notably in those countries—China, Turkey, Brazil—that have until recently been spoken of as “emergent”.

- 3 The UN is regrettably proving moribund at precisely the moment when the idea of the planet as a tripartite entity, i.e. territory, resource and moral community, has become self-evident, demanding of humans an ever-greater accord in the service of a new relationship with planetary life. Mass extinction; the deconstruction of Cartesian dualisms; the recognition of cosmological systems that reserve a place for plants and animals beyond that of quasi-objects, have all allowed the social sciences to admit non-humans into their fields of investigation and to defend their status as subjects. In this vein, various authors have made cosmopolitical or diplomatic propositions in recent years (Descola 2013 [2005]; Latour 2004b; Morizot 2016; Stengers 2007), stressing either the inter-human or inter-species dimensions of an expanded political sphere.
- 4 This issue of *Terrain* offers neither a solution to our ecological crisis nor the key to world peace. It simply takes our curious failure to agree to prevent the end of the world as the sign that the anthropology of diplomacy still has work to do. Our theoretical predilections are two-fold. First, we wish to open up the spectrum of comparison, which requires that we adopt an inclusive working definition of diplomacy as the “art of managing separations” (Badie 2016). In the canonical definition, diplomacy is the peaceful conduct of relations between states by polite representatives.<sup>2</sup> Despite, or rather because of, its hegemonic character, we take this to be but one case among others. Our second bias is towards a pragmatic and interactionalist approach. This implies that we consider diplomatic arts as social and linguistic realities and that we are critical of the idealisms that have marked anthropological evocations of diplomacy, both in the post-war period and in the recent work of Bruno Latour and others. It also implies that we insist on emergent forms of diplomacy. By this we mean that diplomatic situations are by definition uncertain ones in which the situation itself, and its stakes, are thrown into question. A focus on diplomacy as something that emerges from uncertain situations allows us to see it in the making, before it becomes institutionalised or fixed, and to see communities constructed through the process of representing themselves to the outside world.
- 5 This method will allow us to propose some hypotheses of a general character, founded in part on the cases presented in this issue and in part on our own ethnographic work in Central Brazil, a place where a sort of tropical cosmopolitanism was constructed historically, and continues to exist today. These hypotheses are that diplomacy always entails modelling; that political representation is an inescapable aspect of it; that the exercise of diplomacy, ritualised or not, implies mimicry or mirroring; and that in the arts of diplomacy the vanquished are more inventive than their conquerors.

## Homo diplomaticus?

- 6 Finnish diplomat Ragnar Numelin wrote *Beginnings of Diplomacy: A Sociological Study of Intertribal and International Relations* in 1949. The book had an idealistic mission: to demonstrate that everywhere and in all epochs, it has been human destiny to seek peace: “the green branch, is a symbol more powerful and stronger than the sharp-

pointed spear” (1950: 315). Numelin was writing when it was unclear if the fledgling UN would endure or collapse, as had been the case first with the Geneva Peace of 1919 and then with European diplomacy in 1939. By assembling data about “primitive diplomacy”, Numelin sought to defend a naturalist interpretation of diplomacy, departing from the tendency to trace a restricted historical genealogy from ancient to modern European states. The sending of envoys, diplomatic immunity, symbols of peace, neutrality in conflict, war emissaries, peace covenants and the right to asylum are all discovered in the ethnographic record, from Aboriginal Australia to North America, to prove that “corresponding institutions” (1950: 169) exist in the civilized and primitive world. By reviewing ubiquitous ethnographic observations of symbolic acts such as the breaking of spears, the taking of oaths, sham fights, intermarriage, animal sacrifice, blood brotherhood, compensation and exchange, as well as numerous other forms of peaceful alliance-making, Numelin stresses the universal priority given to “security” at the expense of war. War, when it breaks out, is not spontaneous or lightly undertaken, but “preceded by long negotiations” (1950: 179). There is little chance that this hefty volume of accumulated instances, cherry-picked and glossed by an ideologically driven author, will convince anyone today, and we will not defend the idea that humans have always and everywhere preferred to maintain peace and avoid warfare.

- 7 To naturalise diplomacy is no more convincing than to affirm that aggression and mutual destruction are innate tendencies that have everywhere to be regulated by institutions functionally equivalent to Western law and justice. This was the tendency that dominated anthropology when it detached itself from evolutionism. For example, Bronislaw Malinowski (1985 [1933]) compared Melanesian conflict resolution methods and responses to criminal behaviour to the judicial and legal institutions of Western countries. In a less explicitly functionalist vein, Meyer Fortes and Edward Evans-Pritchard (1940) made a similar move by envisaging Tallensi or Nuer kinship as political systems in the full sense of the term. In both cases, the aim was to counter the evolutionist assumption that politico-legal institutions belonged only to states and to show that “primitive” societies were not anarchical. For Marilyn Strathern, however, such analogies are misleading in their own way. While they rehabilitate non-Western politics, they do so only to confirm the Hobbesian ideology at the heart of Western justice, which presents itself as “a societal mechanism which meets *basic human needs* for regulation” (1985: 113), thus assuming that hostility will prevail in the absence of regulation. For Strathern, it would be a mistake to read the dispute resolution practices of the inhabitants of Mount Hagen in Papua New Guinea as “implementations of a separately constituted and normative social order” (1985: 129). For those who orchestrate them they are rather occasions to consolidate political power, just as they may affirm it through warfare. In this conception of politics, whether by means of peace or war, what matters is to act and to force others to act. In the hour of “disaster capitalism”, when no one is surprised when the world’s big men deliberately instigate trade wars, precipitate constitutional crises or boast equally of a symbolic handshake and the assassination of an enemy general, it will be difficult to convince anyone that the normative order is one of the resolution and regulation of conflict in the service of peace and stability. As so often occurs with anthropological challenges to a supposedly “Western” cosmology, the mirror of alterity breaks down and British and American politicking comes to resemble its Papua New Guinean homologues.

- 8 To return to Strathern's own conclusion, it would be disappointing if by drawing attention to how analogies may mislead us, we foreclosed the possibility that anthropology might contribute to the understanding of the exercise of diplomacy in general. In fact, the previous generation of anthropologists whom Strathern critiqued for their excessive analogical fervour had been beacons of hope. The effort to pluralise politics and think beyond the state had inaugurated a period in which the discipline had played a role in opening up the political imaginary. As Heonik Kwon<sup>3</sup> notes, this culminated in the post-war period, when anthropologists like Margaret Mead, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Alfred Métraux were the soul of UNESCO, creating an ideal of world peace constructed on the basis of mutual understanding between peoples that would be enabled by anthropological knowledge.
- 9 Sixty years later, the hope of the post-war period now feels very distant indeed and anthropology and diplomacy need to produce new concepts and institutions to address a new, darker, planetary horizon. Only the Anthropocene and the rapid establishment of the climate as a major political actor allow the spirit of the UN occasionally to reignite. One UN Climate Change Conference after another shows nonetheless that this spirit struggles to incarnate itself in a specific project. Is cosmopolitanism dead?

## From cosmopolitanism to cosmopolitics

- 10 The modern notion of cosmopolitanism is defined in two famous essays by Kant, *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View* (1784) and *Perpetual Peace* (1795), in which he draws the contours of a federation of republics which, unlike a monarchy, would foster universal harmony rather than the advancement of particularistic interests. As citizens of the world, individuals would be the subjects of rights that trumped customary rights or local laws. Joseph Thériault and Frédéric Dufour (2012) note the extent to which cosmopolitanism is based simultaneously upon the recognition of universal reason (which defines the individual as the subject of rights) and human diversity, whose previously unsuspected amplitude was revealed in the period between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. This cosmopolitanism, which lies behind the creation of first the League of Nations and then the United Nations, rests thus upon a modernist constitution that while absolutely compatible with the way Lévi-Strauss articulated nature and culture, for example, is much less so with anthropology as it has developed since the postmodern turn. Isabelle Stengers (2010 [1996]) and Bruno Latour (2002, 2007) have drawn out the consequences of this shift for cosmopolitical thought. Latour formulated this clearly in his critique of the cosmopolitan sociology of Ulrich Beck.

What he does not realize . . . is that whenever cosmopolitanism has been tried out, from Alexandria to the United Nations, it has been during the great periods of complete confidence in the ability of reason and, later, science to know *the one* cosmos whose existence and solid certainty could then prop up all efforts to build the world metropolis of which we are all too happy to be citizens. (Latour 2004b: 453)

- 11 If, however, disagreements have an ontological status, then taking them seriously implies that we literally do not live in the same universe. For example, to retell a famous anecdote of Lévi-Strauss's also discussed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2004), Amerindians and Westerners in the Renaissance had a profound disagreement about what constituted a person. The former defined personhood by the body and left the

Whites' cadavers in the water to see if they would rot; while the latter debated at Valladolid whether Indians had souls. What's more, as Philippe Descola (2013 [2005]) has shown, within its conception of human morality the Amerindian world included most of the animal kingdom, contrary to the naturalist contract that holds animals at a distance, placing them within the sphere of Nature. Latour's cosmos is thus closer to William James's pluriverse than to the world of Kant. It is in this encounter between radical alterities, when we can no longer agree on the arbiter (Reason, Science, etc.), that Latour situates war in the full sense of the term and thus the need for a new kind of diplomacy. Where a common arbiter exists, we are faced instead with what he calls "police operations".

- 12 The anthropologists' task—heroic but overwhelming—is thus, according to Latour, to be the diplomats between these disjointed worlds, a task that can take two directions. The first consists of self-critique. In order to reinstitute confidence in Europeans' capacity to construct a new world order, we must "recall modernity" (in same way that a defective product may be recalled) by studying it deeply to discover its failings (Latour 2004a, 2013 [2012]). On the strength of this new, deeper self-knowledge, we will be able to present ourselves to others anew—politely this time. The second task is to help excluded worlds and entities repudiated in international relations because of their evanescent, uncertain or premodern status (things like mountains, Indigenous people, the atmosphere, etc.) to participate in negotiations. In May 2015, a few months before the UN Climate Conference (COP21), Bruno Latour and Laurence Tubiana presented a model of what such post-modern climate negotiations would look like at the Amandiers Theatre in Nanterre. Two hundred students, from various countries, represented not only states, but also collectives that normally are censored or have their existence denied.
- 13 Though it is undeniably a step towards the pluralisation of diplomacy, Latour's proposition suffers, according to some (especially those inspired by the work of Pierre Clastres),<sup>4</sup> from failing to question norms of political representation. This is the critique levelled by CHARLES STÉPANOFF in his contribution to this issue, following Morizot (2016). Recalling the disarray caused by the determinately acephalous *gilets jaunes* movement in France, he defends the possibility of "living without diplomats", arguing that assuming the role of spokesperson is a slippery slope to the arrogation of personal privilege, echoing a point made by Bourdieu. Stépanoff compares the destinies of different Siberian peoples submitted to Russian conquest over the centuries. This comparative endeavour allows him to establish that the role of the diplomat was adopted easily in stratified societies. These were also societies in which shamanism was diplomatic in nature, with the shaman representing the spirits rather than acting simply as their translator, and in which a "principle of substitution" existed also in other domains. For example, in these societies with political representation it was possible to buy a spouse or to resolve a murder by means of compensation. Inversely, in those societies that refused this principle of substitution and turned their back on hierarchy—societies in which a murder had to be avenged and a marriage consummated by a period of service rendered by the groom to his new wife's family—Russians struggled in vain to establish their hold over people because they failed in their habitual method of forcing their hostages to become diplomatic intermediaries between their own societies and their Russian vanquishers.

## Gaia in your body

- 14 If Stépanoff implicitly sees in diplomacy a symptom of the state, BAPTISTE MORIZOT seeks rather to renew the concept while removing it from the context of human political relations in favour of relations between species. Interested in the return of wolves in the Pyrenees (Morizot 2016, 2017), he advocates for a renewed appreciation of cohabitation, anchored in the evolutionary history of living things, in which shared territories, the reading of all kinds of indices, and mutualistic adaptation are all diplomatic practices that we share with other species, but from which humans have become estranged. A diplomacy without representatives is thus possible, and rests upon a profound reformulation of our relationship to the world, one in which we would no longer ignore the interconnections between beings, but rather in which we pay attention to signs of non-human presence and those who make them. In sum, Morizot is calling for a geopolitics that is coupled with “cosmopolitanism”. In his contribution, he deals with conflicts that arise when wolves predate upon herds of sheep. He opts to refuse the mantle of representing one side or the other and argues for the virtues of neutrality, lived as moral ambivalence. Neither God nor master, or, rather, neither wolf nor sheep (nor shepherd), the diplomat that he becomes, and invites others to become, represents “interdependencies” composed of the system of conflictual relations among coexisting collectives. He counts himself part of a movement that includes Yoann Moreau and Nastassja Martin, who share this same proposition for a return to the self as the basis on which to construct a new way of living in the world—an internal and individual reform to confront “what’s coming” (Martin 2019). In response to near-death at the hands of a bear (an initiatory encounter), Martin makes of her narrative of renaissance a plea for “alertness” (*le qui-vive*)—for adaptation, movement and the art of listening—borrowed from Arctic animist societies among whom she has worked. In a rather more pastoral register, Yoann Moreau (2019), during a lakeside walk accompanying *riberinhos*<sup>5</sup> in the Brazilian state of Para, observes that killing insects that land on his skin provokes anger among his hosts. His body is presented to him as an embassy, open to the beings who treat it as a territory and place of encounter. This is a “diplomatic body”. According to this conception, the singularity of the “I” shelters a pluriverse so that the macropolitics of the world becomes a micropolitics of the subject. Is this a new animism? Or, rather, finding in the individual body a refraction of the cosmos—a diplomatic arena, a land of asylum, a territory to be defended—is it a return to analogism? It seems unlikely that this conception of diplomacy offers an escape from representation. It is simply representation squared, by decree, authoritarian but permitted because it applies only to the self; a self that is the whole world. In the place of a representative of each party, there is an individual that represents the whole ... but at what risk of dissolution?
- 15 While we can only approve of this call to transform our relationship to life, in this celebration of interiority it is difficult not to see a mere intensification of contemporary Western logics of self-making, based on experiences of rebirth and self-transformation. How would this translate into human politics? Self-reform is so easily incorporated into the sphere of personal development that is entirely compatible with capitalist logics (Cabanas & Illouz 2019 [2018]). At the same time, it is compatible with the propositions of Chinese diplomacy, which has no quibble with political representation and indeed attempts to fold a billion subjects into the person of Xi

Jinping. And Taoism, a philosophy of scalar correspondences, is an important element of Chinese soft power ...

## The act of diplomacy

- 16 Leaning on philosophically inclined anthropological work, Latour hardens the heterogeneity of worlds which, in this new non-modern constitution, are no longer called cultures, but ontologies. Based on the recognition that “others” are not blind adherents to false and irrational “beliefs”, but rather the fully fledged subjects of their own world, the ontological turn<sup>6</sup> presents itself as the sole means of “decolonising” anthropological thought. Although politically seductive (and indeed extremely popular among social science students), the conclusion is too hastily drawn, ignoring the inconvenient fact that “worlds” are constructed on the basis of ethnographic research entailing interactions that have necessarily overcome obstacles of disjuncture and equivocation. Indeed, a consideration of the primary tools of ethnographic work, language and translation, is glaringly absent from the ontological turn. Ontological incommensurability, in order to be narrated and thus brought into being, relies on the capacity for communication. In our view, within interaction there is a universal basis or horizon for the construction of sense in the absence of a pre-existing shared code. This is a capacity that is not unique to humans. This classic universalist argument remains valid even if we recognise that translatability is eternally incomplete. In the famous thought-experiment of Gavagai,<sup>7</sup> Willard van Orman Quine showed that reference is in the last instance indeterminable, just as the mind of the other is logically inscrutable. Even in more realistic situations, translation and communication are a long way from being simple or mechanical exercises. Far from defending the idea of a universal language present throughout eternity, we insist on the fact that humans systematically exert themselves to translate. It is this effort to translate that is universal. The kinds of questioning to which translation gives rise furnish anthropology with a fruitful epistemological principle (Hanks & Severi 2014). We propose thus to take as our point of departure the existence of inter-linguistic communication, even if it is equivocal, uncertain and generative of unintentional misunderstandings, rather than starting with the encounter of frozen systems constructed as structural inversions of one another (naturalism and animism, multinaturalism and multiculturalism, etc.). A strategy that takes worlds rather than translation as its point of departure tears the ontological fabric—which is ever in the process of being co-constructed by actors themselves—only to ask where the needle and thread have gone.
- 17 Such an interactionist and linguistic bias is common to several articles in this issue. Diplomacy is envisaged as a practical exercise of coming to agreement, or of partial commensuration among opposed, or simply different, points of view. This recalls Frederick Barth’s rethinking of ethnicity from the boundary or periphery as opposed to the centre. We prefer thus to return to the ways that zones of agreement or disagreement are constructed. Humans—and non-humans as well—appear to be gifted at this: it’s what they do (even when they do it badly) more often than they do metaphysics (either well or badly). Linguistic anthropology has proved to be an effective remedy for relativist excesses. Approaching diplomacy as interaction is not to say that humans are pacifists by nature, after Numelin, but to suggest that when

societies decide, momentarily or long-term, to establish peaceful relations without thereby identifying themselves with another (a minimal definition of diplomacy), they encounter perhaps everywhere the same constraints and invent similar, or at least comparable, solutions. We can therefore identify some recurrent aspects of diplomacy.

## Metaviolence

- 18 According to the common-sense definition and as it is practised by professionals, diplomacy entails polite interactions that hold violence at bay. However, many non-European diplomats have preferred, with rituals of feigned warfare or opposition—sporting contests, duals, feigned aggressions and simulated invasions—to flirt with violence rather than to exclude it. These forms of interaction share a framing of action close to what Gregory Bateson (1972) defined as “play” and applied first to animal behaviour. In such a framing, participants assume two levels: a communicative level (the sign that points to aggression) and a metacommunicative one (a sign that the sign of aggression is feigned). Doing diplomacy often implies raising weapons in order to lower them, faking an exchange of blows, exchanging blows for real, but according to rules that attenuate their danger, or doing so just once. In contrast to play, however, diplomatic situations are constitutively uncertain. The signs of peaceful or playful intent are fragile, easily dissolved or suspected of masking hostile intent.
- 19 In the Upper Xingu, a multi-ethnic society in Brazil, alongside the wrestling matches that mark ritualised encounters between villages, there is a ritual we can qualify as diplomatic, the *Javari*. Men of each village, plumed and painted to identify themselves with dangerous animals like the jaguar or the harpy eagle, confront one another in the central arena. The festival’s unfolding stages a gradual approximation between the two sides that is simultaneously a gradual increase of aggression. Following multiple stages of ceremonial greeting, and dances in which each side keeps to itself, adversaries on each side take possession of the grotesque human effigy that is installed in the arena. The participants take turns to injure and shoot it, calling the name of a cross-cousin (and thus a potential spouse-giver) in the adversarial group as they do so. Finally, at the climax of the ritual, the adversaries confront one another by throwing darts at close range. At every *Javari* at a certain point the situation threatens to degenerate, breaking free of the diplomatic framing. This is the moment when the ritual’s chiefs and messengers intervene to calm the passions and signal the end of the contest. These are the figures who are most obviously akin to diplomats because of their role as village representatives as well as their careful ethos. After this, the champions of each group, who are made up as falcons and were the first to confront one another in the initial context, resume the duel, but this time in a trivial way: each in turn touches the other’s thigh delicately with the point of their spear in a vivid image of the remoteness of violence but one that maintains their antagonistic mutual positioning. In the final stage, the two sides exchange dance partners—a clear symbol of the reversibility of warfare and alliance—before sharing in a meal of manioc bread and fish. The hosts thereby compensate with food for the blows they have inflicted on their invited adversaries.
- 20 This example, in which hostility and violence are recognised and even exercised as a prerequisite for increasing closeness, is typical of Amazonian diplomacy in general. In an article treating “foreign affairs” in primitive societies, Lévi-Strauss (1949) noted that

the Brazilian Nambikwara had nothing resembling European total warfare nor its opposite, an ideal of universal peace. By contrast, their institutions enabled fine gradations between enmity and alliance, and their rituals seemed to be conceived not to suppress conflicts and antagonisms but to express and channel them. Trio (Rivière 1971) and Yanomami (Kelly Luciani 2017) ceremonial dialogues are two among many possible examples of a poetic embrace of hostility that allows it to be subsequently held at bay, and both demonstrate also the prominent place of affinal relations and their attendant ambivalences in Amerindian sociality.

- 21 As a matter of fact, diplomatic processes that seek to hide violence and conflict under a bushel have their limitations. GWEN BURNYEAT's contribution sheds light on the limits of conventional diplomacy, founded on politeness, based on the efforts of the Colombian government to convince its citizens of the benefits of "peace pedagogy" in the context of FARC demobilisation. We follow Filimon, an ageing peasant who lost his son to the conflict, as he listens to a young, idealistic and groomed bureaucrat from the capital preach the virtues of peace: "What can she possibly know about war?" he asks himself. And indeed, the anthropologist describes the fatal flaws of peace pedagogy and the ascent once again of martial politics with the election of Duque in 2018.
- 22 Nonetheless, a courtly ethos remains the mark of official, state diplomacy. As Yves Saint-Geours explains in his interview, an aristocratic attitude of control and restraint provides the ideal model of how states should behave towards one another. It can also be understood as a mask placed upon the reality of antagonism. As such, in certain cases, politeness can be a way of stressing, euphemistically, an underlying reality of hostility and violence. Nonetheless, diplomatic speech is opposed to ordinary speech insofar as it explicitly *forbids* violence. By means of its exclusion, violence is thus accorded a definitive role. Rather than setting up a dichotomy between polite and violent diplomacies, then, we propose that all diplomacy implies a reflexive attitude towards violence: repudiating it, simulating it, exercising it a single time, or striving for its control and sometimes failing.

## Diplomatic ritual as modelling

- 23 "By calmly dusting off Macron's suit jacket, Trump immediately showed the whole world who was Daddy," reported Sylvain Prudhomme in May 2019, after the French president's visit to the United States.<sup>8</sup> In this example political representation takes the form of a visual sign that represents, in miniature, a collectivized relationship. This is what we mean by modelling. In diplomatic situations gigantic entities find themselves replicated in small places, by small things, or singular individuals. The most ubiquitous resources of social interaction, even gestures and body postures, become pertinent for the destiny of the peoples represented. Every encounter is thus a leap in scale to what we might call the meta-political. This invites self-reflexivity and, with it, exertions or strenuous efforts, adjustments, and tinkering on a micro scale with the aim of manipulating the macro scale that is, by these efforts, summoned and shaped. Diplomatic situations, in this way, assume a causal relationship between scales such that an exchange or insult around a table will be converted and magnified in the world.
- 24 It's worth underlining that political entities are not made manifest only by humans, but also in objects. This is the case of the feminine statuette examined by MARION BERTIN. Its role as object-ambassador, a notion coined by Jean-Marie Tjibaou in the 1980s, is

conferred *de facto* by its presence in metropolitan collections. Far from demanding the return of artefacts, as other minority or formerly colonised nations have done, New Caledonian people have decided since the 1990s to leave their heritage abroad in an explicit strategy of cultural diplomacy. In a very different context, by reconstructing the process of fabricating a ninth-century Mamelouk diplomatic document, RÉMI DEWIÈRE demonstrates that the letter itself was treated as the body of the Sultan, and thus assumed the role of representative on an equal footing with emissaries and diplomatic gifts.

- 25 A causal relationship between the model and its referent, often desired, is not always achieved. In such cases diplomacy takes on a decidedly utopian character. Sophie Houdart (2013) describes the Japanese world fair of 2005, which aimed at a classically Western universalism, of the UN type (national pavilions arranged within a perimeter), and simultaneously to universalise a properly Japanese, intimate relation between the subject and nature, described by the concept *Satoyama*. Unfortunately, the fair's realisation entailed felling a forest, a hypocrisy that generated conflicts and tensions. In a similarly utopian register, the rich philanthropist Albert Kahn launched a Planetary Archives project at the start of the twentieth century. It was a vast collection of monochrome photographs from the four corners of the earth taken by specially trained operators. When Kahn received the great and good of the world at his house in Boulogne, he would show the collection before leading a visit to his world-garden, in which different landscaping traditions were reproduced, their harmonious assemblage representing the world as it should be. His friend Henri Bergson remarked upon the influence Kahn enjoyed, thanks to these grandiose displays, during the construction of the League of Nations. But Kahn's world-garden could not prevent the eruption of the Second World War.
- 26 Another example of this idea of modelling comes from a different context to this familiar one of negotiations between states at world summits and the like, namely the Central Brazilian Enawenê-nawê. Yankwa, a ritual that lasts several months, repeatedly divides the polity into opposing categories in order to put them into relation and, by this means, negotiate more encompassing oppositions. In the open sandy arena of their circular village, Enawenê people behave as though they were other to one another, making estrangement a positive basis for relationship. Their dyadic, face-to-face encounters are always a cypher for larger categories and cosmological positions. It is not as brothers-in-law, romantic adversaries or allies that men face one another in the arena but as host and dancer, cultivator and fisherman, living and dead, human and spirit. In this ritual role play, which condenses many identities, a person becomes other to himself as well as to his opposite number. Like the diplomat abroad who is empowered to speak for his country, he is a pure representative—"Norway is of the opinion ..." (Neumann 2012). Similarly, once Enawenê people enter the public arena, formality, estrangement and self-reflexivity give relationships a markedly diplomatic character: speech and gesture are measured and stylised, while movement is choreographed as people signal respectful interpersonal alignment using predictable gestural and postural codes. Unlike a president, whose "personal diplomacy" is efficacious when it draws on the resources of sincerity, the diplomat's is a detached, collectivised voice. This is the condition for, and the sign of, a person's elevation to the rank of diplomatic representative for larger forces.

- 27 It is intriguing that circular space seems to be an essential support to what we call miniaturisation, both for Enawenê diplomacy (Nahum-Claudel 2018: Chap. 4) and for national and international politics. If we look at the architectures of the flagship institutions of international communities of sovereign states—the EU, the UN, Olympic stadia or the circular meeting table that is ubiquitous in peace talks—all replicate the circular form of parliaments found around the globe and echo a hegemonic civilizational history with roots in the ancient world (the political mythology of the Greek *agora*). Michael Suk-Young Chwe (1998) convincingly shows how the circle, often mobilised by a presiding authority, engenders public knowledge; knowledge that is not only shared but acknowledged by all to be so. Circular space emerges thus as an effective means of coordinating action. Circular space is also a prominent feature of social movements since the 1980s, which are characterised by their reliance on the architecture of the roundabout (Weizman *et al.* 2019). We can understand this reliance on conventionalised spaces as a means not only of assuring diplomacy's public character but also of mitigating its inherent uncertainty. Are concentric spaces not also a necessary framework for diplomacy insofar as they are oriented to an empty centre, enshrining an ideal of shared engagement in the construction of a common world, at least in the order of interaction, if not in that of ontology? The aesthetic of the United Nations is also that of a miniature of the universe, a space conceived for the mediation of alterity that implies an idea of belonging and common responsibility. Roundabouts, transformed into forums by the *gilets jaunes*, are also circular, but this time they scale up to the universal not through a reduction of macro to micro but through a principle of replication and networking—each roundabout is among thousands of others that are the site of comparable debates.
- 28 The shared ubiquity of circles in Amazonia and in Europe may nonetheless hide a radical difference in the type of ritualism that is supported by circular space in each case. While Amerindian ritualism involves condensation (Houseman & Severi 1998), that is, ritual action as defined by the simultaneous presence of contradictory relations, Western politics resorts to a ceremonialism that mobilises a less complex, more transparent, symbolic code. Where representatives in a *Javari* dynamically combine plural identities, they are at once partners in marriage exchange, enemies, spirits, dangerous animals, women and men; European ambassadors are content to efface their own personhood and dress up in national costume. The public that is mobilised in these circular arenas is also different. The Western political arena, inheritor of the *res publica*, has a single purpose and meaning, whereas the Amazonian arena is typically the site of translations and transformative relations. Here polarities are systematically inverted and can simultaneously code very different kinds of relationship: man–woman, shaman–patient, visitor–host, etc. (Hamberger 2012; Kelly Luciani 2017; Nahum-Claudel 2018).
- 29 With the contemporary globalisation of notions of culture and heritage, Amazonian rituals have acquired a diplomatic function in countering the threats arising from colonisation. Even rituals that do not necessarily model relationships with foreigners may acquire an intrinsic political value based on their “traditional” character. In his contribution, CYRIL MENTA describes such a role for the rituals of the Pankararu and their neighbours in North-eastern Brazil. Since the 1930s this group, who until this time were considered *caboclo*, a term implying a mixed Indigenous and colonial ancestry,

began to display their *praiá* ritual as evidence of their Indigenous status, as a means to attain territorial rights.

- 30 Far from being peaceful, *praiá* stages a war against the occult powers that cause misfortune. It is not a diplomatic ritual in the sense that we've defined it but rather an indirect weapon wielded by the Pankararu against large landowners who nibble away at their lands. Brandished as an emblem for the benefit of state representatives, it has been transformed into an image of threatened Indigeneity. Interestingly, the ritual's aesthetics owe much to the *cangaceiros*, highwaymen who waged a revolt against large landowners in the region between the middle of the nineteenth and the start of the twentieth century.

## Mimicry and unsettled subjecthood

- 31 The institutionalisation of diplomacy seems to result in organisational and pragmatic similarities across Amazonian cases and international diplomacy. Looking to the history of diplomacy between sovereign states, we find a story of replication. At the end of the eighteenth century, states that had newly reified a division between the "domestic" and "foreign" lined up to establish foreign ministries—Denmark in 1772, Britain in 1782, France in 1789 (Neumann 2012: 48) until Ministries of Foreign Affairs became "a generally acknowledged accoutrement of statehood" (2012: 48). Kindred institutional structures were replicated the world over as new foreign ministries were set up drawing on institutional models provided by existing ones (particularly those of more powerful nations). This replication of forms smoothed communication between states because diplomats were easily able to identify their "opposite numbers" in other countries (2012: 51). In fact, such was the imperative for similarity that foreign ministries became more like each other than like the central administrations of their respective states. Through the cold war era, ministries around the world also grew in step, expanding their personnel, and today we are in a phase in which diplomatic practices and structures are copied by transnational corporations and NGOs, and towns and regions, which, in the globalised world order, have sought to "diplomatize" (2012: 177–8).
- 32 In a similar fashion, participation in the game of interethnic relations in the Upper Xingu assumes a common set of rules and apparatus: a circular village of adequate size and representatives (chiefs and messengers) who master another village's customs regarding the issuing of invitations. A common bodily aesthetic is equally important, marking the successful incorporation of different peoples within the regional system. Invitations to attend a festival, and the subsequent welcome, take the form of a ritual dialogue in which each party speaks simultaneously and in their own language, even as they adopt the same conventionalised body postures. What is staged is thus the coexistence of linguistic untranslatability and a common pragmatics.
- 33 Mimicry and games of mirroring that identify one, at least momentarily, with one's interlocutor also exist in less institutionalised frameworks. In a lively portrait, LÉO MAGNIN breaks down the ways in which Stéphane attempts to settle disputes arising between neighbours during the re-parcelling of agricultural land in the Auvergne region of France. Stéphane's delicate task is to prevent hedging trees from being felled. This diplomat of the hedgerows is more successful in influencing the decisions of his audience than an official representative of the State or of Nature would be in his place.

Instead of adopting the distinguished manners of a career diplomat, through his clothing, his linguistic register and other implicit signals, Stéphane cultivates a personable style similar to that of his public. He offers techniques for measuring wood to estimate its value, distils information from the policy rulebook and, rather than laying down the law, puts himself in the shoes of those inconvenienced by it. And finally, he doesn't hesitate to bluff. In short, he experiments with his role to create collusion and solidarity with his audience, offering different aspects of himself so that everyone finds something that appeals to them. As Olivier Morin (2011) remarks, imitation tends to signal a communicative intention, especially in the absence of shared codes and beyond the transmission of informational content. This is the case, for example, among children between the ages of 2 and 4 who imitate each other as they play side by side. Imitation's communicative function is explored in cinema, for example in the two scenes of extra-terrestrial encounter in Spielberg's *ET*. ET and Elliot touch their own noses in turn, and then each other's fingers. Similarly, in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, the Americans (logical ambassadors of humanity) exchange a sequence of musical notes and coloured lights with the spaceship, which are meaningless but interpretable because they can be imitated to become the index of a Gricean communicative intention.<sup>9</sup>

- 34 Morin's reminder of the value of mimicry applies not only to diplomacy. It is no doubt an inevitable consequence of rubbing shoulders with others. Practices of intermediation in the Americas of the sixteenth to eighteenth century present an extreme version. Left among Amerindians to serve as translators for later commercial exchanges (of pelts in North America, wood in Brazil), mediators tended to "go native", or at least to adopt an ambiguous, double position. Indeed, as a liminal figure, the diplomat always threatens to cross over to the other side. In our interview with Yves Saint-Geours, he reveals that this problem is recognised within diplomacy. With the importance of empathy and adopting the other's perspective comes the risk that the diplomat becomes "the host country's ambassador to his own administration" rather than the inverse. Frequent changes of posting required by the diplomatic service are designed to avoid such "Stockholm Syndrome". Thus, civil servants tend to fear that which anthropologists by contrast actively seek out when they make a profession of ensuring that their hosts' voices and points of view are understood back home.
- 35 In all cases, diplomatic speech typically implies the substitution of the self for another enunciator, typically the state. The stronger and more intrusive the latter, the more the speech of its subjects is controlled through a work of conformity and self-censorship (Wang 2019). This totalitarian character makes of each citizen a more or less consenting ambassador for its country's power, as DI WU shows in his article about the Chinese presence in Zambia. Chinese citizens working in agriculture are confronted with demands for interviews issued by African and European journalists who want to know about the covert intentions of their country, whose foreign politics they perceive as neo-colonial. In such situations, they are forced to improvise an ambassadorial role, by repeating official discourse. Di Wu is interested in the stereotyped and ritualised speech register that is used in such contexts and which serves to affirm speakers' allegiance to the Party in situations that are diplomatic in nature but are also just potentially embarrassing moments in everyday life, to be negotiated with tact. Wu's text reveals the extent to which totalitarian regimes modify language, its grammar, its

phrasing, and also its use. The Party is present in all interactions: one becomes its ventriloquist, and, at the same time, one is always implicitly speaking to the Party.

## The inventiveness of the vanquished

- 36 The idea of diplomacy as a creative modelling process allows us to envisage it as open, experimental and continually evolving. Institutionalisation comes later, after some trial and error often forced by unexpected historical circumstances. In this sense, a position of weakness may be the driver of greater inventiveness. This was the case, for example, in Italy during the Renaissance when small, regional states could not compete on equal terms with the large European monarchies and so they invented a diplomacy founded on rhetoric, religious authority and the bureaucracy of the Papacy (Ruggiero 2018).
- 37 In this issue, LIANA CHUA asks what kind of diplomacy will allow for the survival of a Bornean village once its site has been flooded by the reservoir of a hydropower dam. The majority of the village's inhabitants accepted the government's proposition and relocated to a site nearer the road, that is, they agreed to be "civilised". Others resisted, founding a new dwelling place where material conditions and thus the survival of the community as such were uncertain. Through a combination of strategies, each requiring the performance of a different identity, the village not only survived but also assured a position as an autonomous polity, capable of resisting the state's demands.
- 38 Indigenous peoples—a term that signals nothing more than a shared history of dispossession, a loss of former sovereignty—are constrained to invent a new diplomacy beyond that proper to the state. In this vein, there has been a progressive effort to lend cultural content to a common political experience, and one of the ways this has been achieved is through the concept of "mother-earth". In their online contribution to this issue, JEAN FOYER and DAVID DUMOULIN KERVRAN analyse the self-definitions that Indigenous people mobilised at the Paris Climate Change Conference (COP21). They identify three themes in these narratives: the figure of the heroic, resilient victim; the articulation of traditional and scientific bodies of knowledge and the insistence on their symmetry; and, finally, the value of Indigenous ecological knowledge for its intimate ties to interactions with "spiritual" or "supernatural" entities. By presenting themselves as the foremost victims of global warming and as its most important remedy, one of their goals is to guarantee or conquer territorial rights.
- 39 Yezidi people also present an exemplary case of the diplomacy of the vanquished. ESTELLE AMY DE LA BRETÈQUE'S contribution reveals the extent of the gap between this people and their public image which has been shaped by the massacres and abuses committed against them by Islamic State. In this context, Nadia Murad, a young woman from a minor religious lineage (a lineage of disciples), found herself propelled into the role of international media representative. In a society that privileges men of leading lineages, she was an unlikely candidate for the job. Adapting to the post-war situation, Yezidis have invented a baptism to reintegrate women who have suffered rape and who would previously, in this endogamous society, have been ostracised. Above all, finding themselves displaced and living in new host countries, they are discovering the powers of attraction and empathetic identification of their funeral laments. Having been rites internal to their community, a means of granting victims a heroic martyrdom, these laments have become a diplomatic weapon.

- 40 In the light of these examples, inventiveness clearly comes at a cost. It implies the abandonment of part of what is held dear, the transformation of an image of the self to satisfy foreign judgements—in sum, playing a part written by others. Happily, it is not a given that the transformations wrought by diplomacy should be one-sided.

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## NOTES

1. This was the title of a series of programmes presented by Florian Delorme on Radio France Culture in October 2018.
2. This definition follows Hedley Bull (1977: 156), the founder of the English school of international relations. His definition of diplomacy is three-fold: the peaceful conduct of relations between states; mediated by ambassadors or emissaries, that is to say by *official or licensed* representatives (from the Greek root *diplomâ*, a clay tablet that assured safe passage for its carrier); and in a ‘diplomatic’ style in the everyday sense of the term, that is, combining tact, discretion and subtlety.
3. Kwon, 17 October 2019, the 3rd Claude Lévi-Strauss conference entitled ‘Anthropology and World Peace’.
4. Author in 1974 of *Society Against the State*, Clastres interpreted certain Amerindian institutions and practices, especially the existence of chiefs lacking in coercive power, as the means of preventing the emergence of states.

5. Traditional mixed-ancestry (colonial and Indigenous) populations who live along Brazil's rivers, who have been recognised as Indigenous and have benefited from rights conferred by that status since constitutional reforms of 1988.
  6. The ontological turn assembles a disparate set of authors. The senior generation includes Wagner, Strathern, Descola, Viveiros de Castro and Latour, while the junior one includes Pedersen and Holbraad. These authors are often in disagreement but have all approached the problem of authority and encompassment in anthropological knowledge head on. The proposed solution consists for some in ignoring the concept of representation altogether, which risks a return to an absolute relativism in which there are as many worlds as there are visions of the world.
  7. In *Word and Object* (1960), Quine proposed a thought-experiment designed to prove that translation could never be certain. A field linguist to whom an informant repeatedly designates a rabbit by saying 'gavagai' could never be sure that it designated a rabbit rather than a 'one-second rabbit stage' or 'the spatial whole of all rabbits'.
  8. 'Nos présidents sont parfaits', *Libération*, 4 May 2018.
  9. Philosopher of language Paul Grice transformed the way of conceptualising communication and meaning by departing from the model of code in favour of a model in which meaning is inferred.
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## ABSTRACTS

Diplomacy is today undergoing rapid change, shaken by new populisms, seismic shifts in the balance of world powers, the digital revolution, planetary crisis and declining confidence in institutions of world governance that were conceived in a more hopeful era. Far from offering another idealistic solution, this introduction sketches a theorization anchored in the comparison of empirical case studies that lie outside of classic definitions of diplomacy, centred on relations between states. By privileging a pragmatic and interactionalist approach, and through attention to the particular political inventiveness of the vanquished, it aims to identify some commonalities across diverse diplomatic situations, namely a particular relation to violence (not always one of exclusion), the invention of rituals that model, in miniature, the world, and the destabilizing imitation of the other.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** diplomacy, cosmopolitics, Amazonia, pragmatics, international relations, ritual