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ENGAGEMENT AND CRITIQUE IN ETHNOGRAPHIC PRAXIS
The Anthropological Messenger as Seduced Seducer

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EXPERIENCING

> In England people make much of becoming totally dispassionate and free-thinkers in moral matters: Spencer, Stuart Mill. But they do nothing but f o r m u l a t e moral sentiments. Something altogether different is required: for once, to f e e l something different (something other) and to be able thoughtfully to analyse this afterwards. That means, dear moralist, new inner experiences (Nietzsche 1969:203; my translation; emphasis in the original).[1]

One could not easily imagine a more pithy statement, or passionate plea in response to the dilemma besetting the anthropological profession since its inception as empirical study with the – until recently – unspoken agreement of the majority of its practitioners about the canon of methodology as introduced by Malinowski through the oxymoron 'participant observation'. Nietzsche's 'revaluation' is indeed a turning upside-down of the agreed modern practice of doing science by putting ethics as experience before epistemology.

What field is better equipped than anthropology to put these precepts into practice, where, as Malinowski formulated it, fieldworkers aim "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world" (Malinowski 1961:25) through what he labelled "plunges into the life of natives" (1961:22). In the first quarter of this century, the new 'science of mankind' was based on the methodological primacy of experience of Otherness via the Self which could be called an 'immersion therapy'. In the last quarter of the century the discussion about ethnography seems to revolve around the problem of a n a l y s i s not of data but of w r i t i n g about others, not of the m e t h o d of being with others, but merely of the p r o d u c t, the p r o c e s s of knowledge acquisition becoming expendable.

While the instigator of 'thick description', Clifford Geertz, has doubtlessly done the long-overdue job of deconstructing the process of writing ethnography, his critique of all attempts to bring the author into the text seems to have gone to the extreme sar-

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1 "In England meint man Wunder, wie freisinnig die höchste Nüchternheit in Sachen der Moral mache: Spencer, Stuart Mill. Aber schließlich tut man nichts als seine moralischen Empfindungen zu f o r m u l i e r e n. Es erfordert etwas ganz anderes: wirklich anderes einmal e m p f i n d e n zu können und Besonnenheit hinterher zu haben, um dies zu analysieren! Also neue innere Erlebnisse, meine werten Moralisten!"

castic position, possibly born from despair about the impossibility of the task, of declaring all such attempts so far as basically futile. On the other hand, he does understate the importance of the self-reflective stance which only the encounter in the field can generate. The deconstruction of texts must remain vicarious as long as the deconstruction or otherwise of the field-work paradigm is not taken on seriously.

If the ethnographic enterprise is supposed to range from participation through mediation to communication, or from understanding to interpretation, as I once put it[2] – whereby its knowledge is authenticated by participation while the communication could potentially lead to emancipation of self and others, the latter not needing us to authenticate them –, then to establish the status of that kind of knowledge which participatory research obtains must remain an urgent task, coming before consideration of the form which the transmission of this knowledge takes is entertained as a moral and epistemological question.

The anthropologist may often feel like the mythical blind seer Teiresias who after having been granted the boon of changing his sex, when rechanged into a man and asked how it felt to be female could not recall the experience. But then the anthropologist knows that "the other establishes me in truth: it is only with the other that I feel I am 'myself'" (Barthes 1990:229); without pretending to 'be the Other' in the Diltheyan mode of 'empathetic re-experiencing' (*Nachempfindung*), the anthropologist is more beholden to the insight that the 'me' that he writes about is a self established as a composite a f t e r having encountered t h e O t h e r, as S e l f transformed. It is this transformation process which I shall pursue in the following through a diversity of perspectives.

The Metaphor of Hermes

Over the years, a variety of different metaphoric comparisons has been applied by practitioners to the anthropologist's field-work activities in order to convey the importance as well as the existential, epistemological and moral dialectic inherent in the figure of the stranger who as participant observer has to shuttle between contrasting attitudes to t h e O t h e r, between nearness and distance, engagement and detachment, involvement and critique, experience and analysis. Following previous suggestions (Köpping 1985, 1989; Crapanzano 1987, 1992), I shall refer to Hermes in his function as 'messenger' who straddles the worlds of gods, humans and the dead. I thereby take cognizance of two aspects of Hermes' nature, on the one hand of the bridge from b e i n g w i t h o t h e r s t o w r i t i n g about others, while on the other through the intimation of Hermes as seducer I refer again to the double bind, between self and other in the field as well as the researcher's self in relation to readers.

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2 "von der Teilnahme über die Mitteilung zur Vermittlung"

I shall engage in a polemic and eristic deconstruction of some of what I consider excessive statements by postmodern deconstructionism, but I shall not maintain this mode of the trickster's puckish delight in subversion consistently throughout, as I want to carry on what Geertz has called the "hackneyed" discussion of the epistemological status of field-work. By circling the problem from historical as well as epistemological angles, the overriding metaphor remains the one of the anthropologist as trickster through literal logic driven to abstruse conclusions and through bodily exaggeration, as the deceived deceiver of Radin and Kerényi (see Köpping 1985). I intentionally make use of the ambiguity of Hermes who not only subverts through clumsiness and pretended naivety, but as one who through applying charm, stealth and cunning becomes the creative genius of the boons of mankind. I therefore take Hermes as icon for the herald and messenger who through dialogic encounter, through speaking and other challenging forms of seductive communication, engages in a process of gaining knowledge, while as translator revealing and hiding truth and 'half-truth' in the products of communication.

As Hermes was also the inventor of the lyre, the comparison to the seduction through music to which the listener succumbs is implied in my pleading for a rethinking of the modes – and metaphors used for that mode – of field-work as more than 'data-gathering' activity. I suggest that the often aggressive epitheta used for the gaining of information (cracking of codes, investigation etc.) be recast in the mode of 'surrender', a word which most critics of Malinowski's assumedly 'imperialist' posture conveniently overlook in his œuvre where he uses it – without epistemological implications – in his "Diary" as follows: "I went to the village and I s u r r e n d e r e d artistically to the impression of a new Kulturkreis".

The epistemological elaboration of 'surrender' as a key concept for doing research, relating it to a 'catch' (the conceptualizations in written work) has been introduced by Kurt Wolff in several publications since 1976. I shall refer more extensively to them, further on: suffice it here, in order to avoid immediate misunderstandings, to state that the term 'surrender' (*Hingebung*) does not entail a 'giving up' (which would be *Aufgabe*) of self or a 'merging' of self and other. Surrender rather implies the attentiveness with which we listen to musical performances, or that characteristic of lovers' relationships, these relationships which lead not to a losing of self but to a finding of it, as expressed in the mediaeval concept of *amor ut intelligam* ("to love in order to understand" by Augustinus) which should, in Wolff's understanding of social science research, accompany, or be the foundation of our 'intellectual curiosity' (see Wolff 1976).

Yet, I do not think that any one metaphor or one single trickster icon however versatile and multi-faceted will suffice to figuratively encompass the ambiguities of the ethnographic enterprise as praxis of living and praxis of writing. We may have to resort to a variety of such figures. George Steiner has recently made a bold and convincing suggestion to reduce the European intellectual heritage of modes of being in the world

to the fourfold iconicity of Prometheus/Faust, of Hamlet, of Don Quixote and of Don Juan which Arnold Hauser has previously shown to be emanations of a narcisstic consciousness (Hauser 1964), and I have come to the conclusion that all four also typify European forms of tricksterhood (Köpping 1985). I try here then to extend the fourfold division by the figure of Hermes who shares a number of traits with the other four while lacking some of theirs. While Hermes as critic and interpreter goes beyond the self-referentiality of the other four tricksters, he shares the inventiveness and cunning of Prometheus (who lacks charm while Hermes lacks the other's *libido sciendi* as well as the rebellious attitude, being more diplomat than revolutionary); the charm of Don Juan (lacking his desparation, but charming his way out of desperate situations); the played naivety of Don Quixote (lacking his delusions and showing not much of the holy fool trait). Similarities with the vacillations of Hamlet seem least developed while in his beguiling musicality he resembles the singer Orpheus. Hermes' main trait is his multilingualism, as it were, his ability to carry messages between different realms of the universe, being able to cross boundaries, protecting travellers, and to be 'persuasive' in his function as diplomat, psychopomp and adjudicator. As master of dissimulation, he could take on strange disguises and play the part of the perfect thief.[3] He is also the master and guardian of 'secret knowledge' adduced later to him (as a double of the Egyptian god Thot who invented sciences, writing, numbers and books), and his charm was apparently strong enough to attract Aphrodite out of which union the hermaphrodite was born (see also Brown 1969).

Seduction and Annihilation: Europe's Quest

I here put my options on Hermes as metaphoric image for the field work encounter – other trickster icons would certainly throw a different light on our understanding of the essence of ethnographic work – because of the seductive qualities of his dialogic disposition and because European history starts with the metaphor of a seduction through the story of Europa and Zeus, a seduction which – according to Steiner's pessimistic assessment of the modern European consciousness – ends in a boundless striving for destructiveness which can only find its fulfilment in utter annihilation. Whether anthropology's search for this Other is an attempt to overcome the destructive impulses which permeate reality – where reality overtakes anthropology by throwing its essentialist theoretical concept of cultural difference back at it through using it to legitimate genocide and other atrocities –, whether its endeavour can be perceived as an

[3] In this essay I intentionally abstain from comparing Hermes as thief with anthropologists as appropriators of indigenous knowledge. Such equation would be an oversimplification which however has been made off and on also by indigenous anthropologists. My contentions about re-appropriation will become clear in a later section through recourse to the musical mode of 'recital'.

answer to the only vision which could – in Steiner's thinking – save the occidental consciousness from annihilation by merging the Judaeo-Christian and the Greco-Roman worlds, the unfinished project of the Renaissance to weld Athens and Jerusalem together, remains an open challenge. It is the challenge which philosophy has begun to accept through the writings of Levinas who develops what he himself calls an anti-totalitarian, anti-Platonic and anti-Heideggerian philosophy which rests not on the claim for Being and Subject as self-fashioned, but in which the Other becomes as much of a focus as does desire and the messianic impulse of Judaism (Levinas 1961).

Anthropology as Redemptive Process?

The question remains whether anthropology can contribute to the salvationist enterprise of welding culturally divergent ontologies together through the moral stance of exposing the Self to them. Forms of perceiving anthropology as a redemptive process were entertained by some of its practitioners. Lévi-Strauss gave a negative answer with his notion of cultural entropy. By contrast we may infer a more positive image from Malinowski's vision of the aims of anthropological field-work, the metaphorical suggestiveness of which has to my knowledge not been perceived (least of all, by any of the busy deconstructionists who still seem to revel in anti-imperial pounding of o t h e r chests).

There exists however an original metaphorical relation to redemptive processes. In his introduction of 1922 to "Argonauts of the Western Pacific", Malinowski refers to the collecting of demographic and census information of kinship terms and genealogies as "dead material" (1961:5) which become, nevertheless, the "firm skeleton of the tribal life" (1961:11). This, as may be recalled, he later designates as the firm foundation for the "constructive drafting [...] of the charters of native institutions", whereby those whose life is largely determined by them are not aware of the values governing the institutions or are unable to formulate these coherently (Malinowski 1935:137). The second feature to be aimed for is the "intimate touches of native life" (Malinowski 1961:17), to acquire "the feeling" and "being in touch with the natives" (1961:8). He summarizes this double requirement by contrasting his own approach with previous scientific work: "[...] we are given an excellent skeleton, so to speak, of the tribal constitution, but it lacks flesh and blood" (1961:17), and repeating emphatically: "[....] the full body and blood of actual native life fills out soon the skeleton of abstract constructions" (1961:18). These are obtained through attention to the ethnographer's breaches of etiquette (1961:8) or those "imponderabilia of actual life" (1961:18; his emphasis) such as the routine activities of body care, food preparation and eating, as well as through a knowledge of the meaning of the "intimacy" of family life – as opposed to the ideal concept – as expressed in "the affection, the mutual interest, the little preferences, and the little antipathies" (1961:19).

The third aim of scientific field-work, as he calls it, is recording "the native's views and opinions and utterances" which make up the "spirit" of native life as well as ethnographic work (1961:22), and, seeking to "convince those Here that one has been There", claimed as an important novelty by some deconstructionists and textualists, Malinowski adds a "third commandment": to "formulate the results in the most convincing manner" (1961:23). What then did Malinowski end up with: anthropomorphization of data or redemption of the researcher?

A Personal Encounter

It has become customary for anthropologists to authenticate their data or deliberations through reference to a field-incident, as exemplified by the indignant reply of Lévi-Strauss to his critic Gurvitch: "They are my witnesses". I shall therefore follow suit and relate one such incident from field-work in Japan in 1966, because the incident is one which first made me aware of the precariousness of the ethnographic method and thus ultimately led to the present meta-discourse on participation.

When I approached the founder of one of the many post-war so-called "New Religions" (*Shinko Shukyo*) in Japan, the late Mrs. Sayo Kitamura of *Odoru Shukyo* ("Dancing Religion") or *Tensho Kotai Jingu Kyo* ("Religion of the Heavenly Shining Goddess and the Sacred Shrine"), she got rather tired of my insistent questioning about her relation to the deity, which was assumed to speak through her mouth and reside in her belly, and of my inquiring about the state of "non-ego" (*muga*) which followers were believed to achieve through participation in the ritual "dance of loosing one's ego" (*muga-no-odori*). She curtly advised me: "*Bakayaro*" ("you simpleton" or "stupido")! – "You try to grasp with your head what you can only achieve through your heart (*kokoro*). You should participate in the dance of non-ego" (see Köpping 1967, 1968, 1994)!

The meaning of Mrs. Kitamura's advice seems clear: she meant me to abandon my questioning, observing, interviewing and all forms of ratiocination in order to gain 'understanding' or insight by joining in the dance of her followers, which would help me to reach the state of emptiness which would reveal the divinity and thereby answer all my questions through experience. To put it differently, the message seemed to be – and it was startling for me at that time and has remained startling until today – that I surrender to the occasion, leaving my scholarly interests and orientations and my rationality aside. For the sake of the participatory requirement, I realized that she was right, but I also realized that I could not give in to the occasion – for, as Gouldner put it once, I had to satisfy both requirements of my professional life, those of passion as well as of reason. Because without passion "man would be a computer, but without reason he would be a naked ape".

Mrs. Kitamura was right insofar as my professed belief in gaining knowledge through participation should entail immersion in the activities, but besides observing my own self in this process of participation, and the activities of others, I was also committed to conveying my insights to the outside world. The latter required me to attain distance instead of involvement, detachment instead of engagement, or at least always the application of rational analysis in order to gain a horizon of reflexivity, and reflection on what the group was trying to do in the light of a wider context, be it that of modern Japan or that of the correlation of messianic movements to social, political or economic circumstances in other times and other places.

My initial self-set task was for a comparative analysis, informed by theories as well as descriptions already available on similar phenomena outside Japan. Little was I prepared to encounter a wall of non-comprehension for my task of 'writing about' by inquiring from 'outside' among the practitioners of the group who, like the founder, wanted me to become a member, a part of their community of believers.

Selected Contexts of the Field Encounter

The founder and the group members (largely the several dozen key administrators and missionaries at headquarters in the town of Tabuse, as well as several hundred members coming on pilgrimages or work-duties for several days, sometimes two weeks, to the headquarters, and later many individual members all over Japan and overseas) were prepared to let me as 'foreigner' share in their experiences. This was a relief and surprise for me at the same time – as it would be for anyone else who has tried to do participant research in Japan – since foreigners are usually a category of persons who are considered 'crazy' or 'odd' (*henna gaijin*): if they try to emulate Japanese ways too closely, they easily become a laughing stock as well as a source of embarrassment.

The group I encountered had no qualms about my notion of participation which often creates the greatest difficulties in other research areas: Anthropologists who are neither doctors or nurses, nor development agents with specialized knowledge, cannot easily justify or legitimate their presence, not to speak of their wish to participate like 'one of them'. However, the members of this religious group could not understand the reason for writing about them through the tool of rational inquiry: The only way any writing was to be done was as 'testimony' to conversion and to the experience of divine blessing in order to spread the truth of their gospel. I, on the other hand, was willing to participate and share in their experiences, happy to get away from the often only vicarious way of 'gazing at otherness' so common in most field-work, but I was not prepared to surrender to the degree of 'becoming one of them', to fake conversion or even to give up my analytic task.

The compromise reached in the end was for the group to accept the idea of my

writing about them as approximating their notion of conversion literature while granting the foreigner the freedom or spleen of a 'learned man' (*erai hito*), as those who write books for a living in Japanese society are known by people in the countryside. However, being in close contact with many adherents at the headquarter of a founder of teachings which were literally taken as 'God's truth' for world salvation, at a place which was to be the 'future paradise' (*tengoku*) on earth, I was also often challenged in my private self when involved in questions of truth or of 'my beliefs'. I soon realized that I could not bring off a 'neutral' stand, nor could I fake belief in their specific truth: the encounter led me to rethink my own beliefs of which my professional anthropological pursuits are an inseparable part.

Authentication

My example touches directly on the issue of the authenticity of the researcher. While it has become customary to claim that a written ethnography gains its authenticity through reference to field-work, in the recent deconstructionist literature the concept seems to be devalued to mean the 'persuasiveness of fiction' and not the existentially and morally more challenging question of what authenticity truly entails, the 'being true to oneself'. The question which we ought to be able to answer is not whether we are convincing to a readership but whether our findings rely on an authentic human being's involvement with other human beings, and that question can only be assessed through attention to the primary praxis of field-work, not by reference to good or bad writing or to rhetorical adumbrations. What does 'being true to oneself' entail, in general terms, for the anthropological profession? Surely, the reader will say, no answer can be expected or given in detail as only the researchers could answer this for themselves. I recently wrote confidently on this as follows: "The only authenticity we may claim in this enterprise we derive from our participation in other ways of perceiving reality, and not from the casual voyeurism of the tourist or the persuasiveness of our 'fictions' in our world" (Köpping 1994:25). I still maintain this position, but with an extension or rather addition resulting from a variety of influences which forced me to re-think my position, influences ranging from 're-creating' the field-encounter in my memory to the literature of the 'writing culture' adherents, from teaching field-work methods to undergraduates through rereading carefully Malinowski's introduction to "Argonauts" to encountering colleagues thinking about similar problems during conferences. As the reaction to my participatory attempts in the field showed to me then, and more pronouncedly show now, my informants did share to a degree my own idea of true knowledge to be gained through action and experience, but we parted at the point where I insisted on holding to my own beliefs which included the aim of writing about them in an analytic way. Nevertheless, in spite of disagreements true dialogic

interactions did develop, b e c a u s e of the differences being maintained, I would think, because we – informants and myself – were indeed mutually curious and willing not only to suspend pre-judgements, but also to suspend disbelief in the possibility of a meeting of thought and feeling.

Two Forms of Access to Reality: Knowledge of the Head and the Heart

Little was I prepared to encounter a cultural setting where a split of two kinds of knowledge was taken for granted, where knowledge through giving in and surrendering to experience was considered the highest form of realizing full humanity while all ratiocination was considered an inferior form of living, a form which the founder Mrs. Kitamura made responsible for the 'decline of the world' (using the Buddhist term *mappo*, the third of three ages after the death of Shakyamuni, being the age of decline before the Apocalypse).

While I was not prepared to relinquish my own pursuit of rational analysis, the encounter with this different concept of knowledge made me aware not only that anthropology was caught in the same bind which Mrs. Kitamura was describing, but that the close encounter of participation was indispensible as a praxis in order to be able to detect the similarity or difference on a more than intellectual level of game-playing. I was challenged in my belief that I could possibly keep my personal self separate from my professional self. And I now became aware that the professional orientation to write and be involved with analysis does belong to my authenticity.

Authenticity thus encompasses the combination of what Gouldner called the two forms of knowledge, knowledge as information as well as knowledge as awareness (Gouldner 1972:493; for a similar position emerging see also Kauffmann 1990), whereby the latter as self-reflective mode cannot come about without participation and engagement with concrete others. This engagement and participation does involve the full Self, not a compartmentalized section of it, since, as Diamond once expressed it, when we talk about generalized others we are most inauthentic. Roland Barthes put it very aptly by quoting Nietzsche:

> Supposing that we experienced the other as he experiences himself – which Schopenhauer calls compassion and which might more accurately be called a union within suffering, a unity of suffering – we should hate the other when he himself, like Pascal, finds himself hateful (Barthes 1990:174).

In his own comment Barthes continues this line of thought: "Now, whatever the power of love, this does not occur: I am moved, anguished, for it is horrible to see those one loves suffering, but at the same time I remain dry, watertight. My identification is imperfect" (1990:57).

There is no guarantee that we can ever bridge successfully the gap between experience and analysis or between the two forms of existence which Levinas labelled the different attitudes to the world: either we are giving in to it and are taken over by it (then we are existing in the mode of ecstasy), or we appropriate and assimilate it to us (then we are in the mode of knowledge), but prior to both are forms of enjoyment (*jouissance*) and all enjoyment is a way of being (Levinas 1987:63). But, we might add, our way of being is in different worlds. While we may reach an understanding through reaching out to the Other, by imagination, or by negotiation of meaning, we will not be able to change places. Rosaldo's example of understanding the head-hunter's rage refers to the flash of recognition of meaning through our own hurt and the accompanying 'natural' reaction of rage, but it is 'his' hurt and rage, or in Laura Bohannan's words: "The greater the extent to which one has lived and participated in a genuinely foreign culture and understood it, the greater the extent to which one realizes that one could not, without violence to one's personal integrity, be of it" (Bowen 1964:291).

Appropriations of Self and Other

Rethinking the field-encounter with a religious founder, I would now state that only through this encounter could I become aware of the second pole of my authenticity as anthropologist and person: the aim to analyse and write or what Roland Barthes would have called 'the pleasure of the text'. Yet, I could only give in to that by having first given in to the encounter. Thus both forms of praxis belong certainly to the anthropologist's authenticity, and no matter how many texts I read previously or subsequently, the encounter remains the primary source for the reflexivity to take place. The example of the encounter also makes it clear that no form of 'text-positivism', no laying open all possible memories of influences, whether before, during or after the field encounter, can help to elucidate the sources of my interpretations of Japanese attitudes to knowledge, which – while partial inspite of all the above given contextual analysis – are my own 'map' to make sense of a plethora of single incidences; whether it provides a reader with the same map is open to debate.

The encounter clarified many questions I had about Japanese religiosity and many previously incomprehensible behavioural incidences fell into place. However, the meaning of what Mrs. Kitamura said also was informed by previous experiences in Japan, including misunderstandings. Moreover, the epistemological and existential impossibility of the task of anthropology became clear to my startled re-cognition: how could I have or pretend to have similar participatory access to half a dozen messianic groups?

My above given translations and interpretations of Japanese concepts of knowledge are certainly reappropriations of my own experiences for other purposes, like the

one at hand of presenting an essayistic approach, reappropriations in the light of information and purposes which were not at issue at the time of the encounter in the field or of its first analysis.

The encounter ultimately also made sense of my anthropological vocation (for the time being), but foremost made me realize my difference through the alterity of t h e O t h e r, throwing me back upon my own alterity and forcing me to explain myself to myself, authenticating myself not only to the Other, but also to the Self (and in this sense of course also legitimating my continuation of research as well as writing). The encounter itself is possibly responsible for my quoting of Levinas in this context, but certainly is decisive – here and now – for my agreement with or critique of Malinowski or other colleagues who have addressed the problem of otherness in fieldwork and writing, or for my quoting certain authors and not others in the essay: put simply, I read my own culture history and my intellectual heritage in the light of the field-encounter. And that is, after all, what comparative anthropology is really about, namely to re-read and re-interpret the Self as individual life-history as well as from the point of a collective memory, thus critically re-appropriating it for personal (and professional) purposes. (For an extension of this idea by a researcher who reads his fieldwork through Forster's works and vice versa, see Rapport 1994.)

Jean Pouillon put the dilemma very aptly as follows: "The notion we have of others is a function of what we are ourselves", and, so he continues, a proper anthropology comes about through the integration of our "prejudiced" ideas and what we know about others. But how, he asks, can our "prejudiced" ideas become true knowledge: "This means admitting that he (the anthropologist) can become conscious of the traditions which orient his thought, that he can judge them and need no longer submit to them even if he still accepts them" (Pouillon 1980:37–39).

This does sound like the advice of Gadamer that while we may not be able to overcome our prejudices the chance at least exists "to free ourselves through reflection from that which otherwise oppresses us unbeknown to us".[4] This still leaves open the question: how do reflection and self-reflection (reflexivity) get set into motion? Before trying to prove that self-referentiality does not open the way to this, I take a detour through a discussion of another familiar form of re-appropriation in the field of artistic re-creation in the musical modality.

Original and Copy: Citation and Re-cital

While the research subjects (partners of a dialogue) provide the original information (possibly maieutically induced), they end up disembodied in the literal sense of the

[4] "die Reflexion befreit, indem sie durchschaubar macht, von dem, was einen undurchschaut beherrscht"

word, made over into new bodies in the 'body of the text' providing the 'pleasure of the text' to distanced readerships, thus loosing control and power in a similar way as do researchers when writing, although the latter's disempowerment is at least mitigated by the control over the authorial shaping of texts as 'woven things' (I shall later discuss the power of seduction the informant retains). This problem relates to the 'appropriation' of knowledge in the written text to which I shall turn now.

An issue that relates directly to the notion of appropriation is that of the translation from experience to expression (Dilthey's *von der Erfahrung zum Ausdruck*), the problem of 'citation'. Some textualists convey the impression that we would be closer to the truth or would gain a more accurate picture of the Other (or the Other and the Self of the researcher in their interactions) if we only had all the field-notes and diaries of field-workers and thus could re-construct their 'path' (a typical example with these aims is the collection of field-notes or rather of meta-discussions on field-notes in Sanjek 1990). It should be abundantly clear that a return to a new textpositivism is futile as every text is the absorption and transformation of other texts (for an incisive critique along these lines, see Kauffmann 1990). Since Schleiermacher, interpretation always entails the appropriation of a 'text', the past, while addressing the present and the future. The original is thus appropriated for the present audience's (and interpreter's) relevances. Pouillon put it cogently by positing as minimum requirement to translate "faithfully from the 'language of departure'" and "intelligibly to the 'language of arrival'" (Pouillon 1980:38).

It is for this reason that conductors of Beethoven's symphonies and performers of Schubert's *Lieder* are hailed as 'creative' persons, as they 're-create' and are insofar original and creative because while taking both sides into account they are appraised by the 'taste' of the present as to how a symphony or a *Lied* should sound, while the audience rarely cares whether Beethoven or Schubert would have played or sung it in the same way. It is not the identity of the copy, the exact replica, which is desired but a 'convincing' rendering of an original in what is appropriately called a 're-cital'. The very problem of the age of exact mechanical or electronic reproduction (the examples of Disneyland or of Hearst's collection mania are the serious examples, the ironic breaking of this fad in the works of Roy Lichtenstein or Andy Warhol the playful comments on it) is that it leaves the audience rather listless, as a million Raphael Madonnas or the rebuilding of Medieval townships are known to be exactly what they try to hide: fake imitations, without life or 'spirit'.

By contrast, each 're-creation' of a piece of music or a dramatic role by a gifted artist is considered unique, rivetting, soul-stirring and possibly 'cathartic' in Schiller's sense, because the interpreter 'got it right' in accordance with the taste and the imagination as well as the desire (the fantasy) of the audience. This experience is replicated and re-experienced by anybody who reads a poem the first or the hundredth time for private pleasure (or edification), when the pleasure is not derived from the author's intentions but from the relevances the reader, listener or viewer attaches to the occa-

sion. Clifford's statement that "ethnographers can no longer claim this sort of originary or creative role, for they must always reckon with predecessors", because "one writes among, against, through, and in spite of them", is utter nonsense in the light of an interpretative framework (it would barely hold in a positivistic environment; see Clifford 1990:55). Australian Aboriginal religious practitioners and artists could have taught Clifford a different perspective. Aborigines of the Northwest of Western Australia 'touch up' the paintings on rocks where the *Dreamtime* creator beings left their 'imprint': this re-painting activity is enacted in periods of sacred time, during seasonal 'increase' ceremonies, in truly 're-creational' time, in order not only to 'remember' (or anamnetically re-collect the ancestor creators), but specifically to effect the increase of all species, thus perceiving 're-creation' as a creative act (repeating the *Dreaming* as the Creation).

By re-creation the present performers appropriate indeed the powers of the original creators, and in this sense each appropriation has to encompass an apprehension or rather comprehension, an understanding of the creative original process. Each reading (or writing or playing of music or conversation) is an original experience: that is the true message of the art of interpretation. This also empowers each reader as last interpreter while the author loses control over the production, as does the mediator. In my present frame of reference, the informant as well as the translator/mediator-anthropologist must empower the reader to make sense of the product. As I tried to show through the explication of a personal field-encounter, another feature gets short shrift if 'originality' in appropriation and re-casting in interpretation is denied: the transformation of the researcher involved in an encounter has to be taken into account, in particular the changing of his theoretical perspective or personal frame of interpreting his and other cultural arrangements in critical 're-appraisal' or what I have called previously the 'emancipatory' effect of research (which may work also for the research partner).

A Break-Down of Occidental Confidence?

In regard to the Malinowskian 'spirit' of gained information, Geertz speaks of an "ethnographic ventriloquism: the claim to speak not just about another form of life but to speak from within it" (Geertz 1988:145), making Malinowski's ethnography (meaning his field-work) an "oddly inward matter, a question of self-testing and self-transformation, and making of its writing a form of self-revelation", which, so concludes Geertz, dramatized for Malinowski "his hopes of self-transcendence", while for most descendants, "it dramatizes their fears of self-deception" (Geertz 1988:22–23). It is difficult to imagine that Geertz as advocate of 'thick description' here resorts to such pessimistic views about anthropology's search for what is human in us all. An unchar-

itable explanation would be to see this remark not as rhetorical hyperbole but as based on the world-view of a hermeneutics of suspicion which may be the logical outcome of an attitude of misanthropy (see Köpping 1995). As originally defined by Kant and further developed by Helmuth Plessner, the misanthrope is convinced that human nature is governed by egoism and deceit, resulting often from a feeling of failure (see Plessner 1974:213). This is a trait discernible very early on in the written works of Geertz. Thus in 1968 he claimed that "the relationship between an anthropologist and his informants rests on a set of partial fictions half seen through", having first asserted that the tears which many anthropologists see in the eyes of informants "are not really there" (Geertz 1968), for which the unacknowledged original is Evans-Pritchard's note : "[...] an anthropologist has failed unless, when he says goodbye to the natives, there is on both sides the sorrow of parting" (Evans-Pritchard 1951:79).

We may quibble with Evans-Pritchard whether all field encounters are amiable, as in many field situations there may have been a mixture of hate and love, of greed and anger, there may have been moments of suspicion and disgust, and there may also be relief at the parting of the stranger who knows so much, who was such a pestering nuisance, and on the ethnographer's side the expectation of reward, fame and re-union with 'civilised' life. But there will always be sorrow on both sides if engagement and negotiation over a long period have occurred (other forms of anthropological field work are not under discussion here). Otherwise, we find that which Evans-Pritchard labelled 'competent' ethnographic work, but if it was only won through physical proximity and if field-work did not affect "the entire personality, the total human being", no "deeper level of Understanding" will have been reached (Evans-Pritchard 1951:82).

Twenty years later, Geertz states categorically that modern anthropology – in contrast to the founding fathers and mothers to whom he grants superior rhetorical skills – has become the business of "half-convinced writers trying to half-convince readers of their half convictions" (Geertz 1988:139). As clue to the conviction about the "prevalence of deceit" (to use one of Bailey's recent titles) the incident which Geertz reports about his field-work offers itself, when he refused to lend his typewriter to an indigenous writer which led to a break-up of the relationship. Geertz puts this into the following framework of polite deceit:

> Borrowing [...] my informant was, tacitly, asserting his demand to be taken seriously as an intellectual [...], i.e. a peer; lending it, I was, tacitly, granting that demand [...]. We both knew that these agreements could be only partial: we are not really colleagues [...] (Geertz 1968).

As Simmel pointed out at the beginning of this century about the emptiness of social courtesy, we should not infer from their observance any esteem or devotion (Simmel 1950:400).

Early insight to this effect comes from Pascal's treatise "Trois discourse sur la condition des grands" of 1560 where he advised that one can require that one greets a

duke but one cannot require that one holds him in esteem. One could argue with Geertz against himself: he did not see the 'winks', but mistook courtesy on his side for showing of esteem (the base reason may have been plain inconvenience) and inferred that the informant's request for courtesy implied an equality he, Geertz, did not believe to be there in the first place, a result – if I may speculate – possibly of the lack of the very same confidence which he requires of present writers of ethnography.

While chiding Geertz for trying to wheedle his way out of this conundrum through recourse to a theory of 'cross-cultural communion' for a case which is a straightforward personal miscommunication or a clash of personalities, Robert Jay admits in the same breath that he too mismanaged personal relations, as he could not remember a single personal informant, and that "any awareness I had of particular individuals as they related personally to me, to others, and to their own lives, except as it bore on my perception of such patterning" – of systems of rice agriculture as dynamic of social and economic power – "slipped by me, or, if registered because of some intimacy in my relation with them, got set apart into the separate realm of my private life" (Jay 1969:376). Jay admits in retrospect that the facile distinction which he made in his earlier fieldwork between relevance and responsibility, the former being related to the scientific project, the latter being relegated to the 'private' or 'personal' level, cannot be maintained, because relevance as knowledge and responsibility as action are inextricably intertwined in the relationship between researcher and informant (Jay 1969:377–378).

Humour, self-irony and surrender to seduction

Jay's 'confessions' are an example of insight about the limitations of the Self won a f t e r field-work; but it is the very attention to 'scientific' anthropology which brings about this realisation of the lack, dimly felt in the field, leading now to a new 'self-realisation', rejecting the old 'me' and creating a future 'me' with different orientations, thus leading to a changed morality of being in the world.

This is also the conclusion to which Lévi-Strauss comes in his reading of Rousseau's "Confessions": The long reliance of European thought on the self-fashioning Cartesian "cogito" cannot establish the Self as a reflexive object of the reflecting subject. For Lévi-Strauss, Rousseau's importance lies in his realisation that – against the attempt of Montaigne – the Self has to be established as a third person through the dialogic interrogation only possible through the presence of others, in order to arrive at the insight of Rimbaud's "je est un autre". Lévi-Strauss therefore agrees with Rousseau in the pronouncement that "when I hear music, I am hearing myself through it".[5] It is

[5] See Lévi-Strauss' address in Geneva for the 250th anniversary of Rousseau's birth (Lévi-Strauss 1973).

from this perspective surprising that Lévi-Strauss, who had previously indicated that no particular view of the world should be considered as superior and that anthropologists have to follow Rousseau's adage that one has "to refuse oneself in oneself in order to accept oneself in others" (Lévi-Strauss 1973:242), does not get to the point of criticising his own society but rather feels himself as a "manipulated being" (Sontag 1966:69–81). At the same time chiding those anthropologists who criticise their own society while becoming most conservative in supporting even the abstruse customs as soon as they enter the field. But if no society has the prerogative of the 'good life', then criticism at both ends should be possible. Standing aloof from engagement is that very attitude which came into prominence with the notion of Scheler and later of Mannheim about the "free-floating class of the intelligentsia", and it is an attitude the anthropologist cannot afford. If anthropology chooses to deny its own precepts of t h e s u s p e n s i o n o f d i s b e l i e f in the impossibility of the 'psychic unity of mankind' underlying the field-work endeavour, it should indeed not be surprised to be taken (by informants and readers) as untrustworthy as that cosmopolitanism which Rousseau regarded with great suspicion. We cannot retain the attitude of the limping Oedipus if we want to do field-work. The adherents of the 'writing culture' form of deconstruction – if taken as major pursuit of 'cultural studies' – are feeding into and relying on the very notion of the untrustworthiness of all re-creative productions, maybe because, as J.A. Barnes suggested, they are "discouraged with the partial and philosophical difficulties of discovering what goes on in the real world" and therefore diverting "their energies to exegesis to the industry and other self-contemplating pursuits" (Barnes 1979:188).

In contrast to Robert Jay's attitude stands that of Laura Bohannan who d u r i n g field-work realized her own 'tricksterhood' as follows: "I was one who seems to be what he is not and who profess [sic!] faith in what he does not believe" (Bowen 1964:290). She achieved the supreme feat of self-irony when she joined in the laughter of her informants performing a pantomime in her face about the anthropologist as a writer, but also perceived the unacceptable side of the Other when they laughed about a blind man stumbling about, stating: "In an environment in which tragedy is genuine an [sic!] frequent, laughter is essential to sanity" (Bowen 1964:295), and further: "These people know the reality and laugh at it. Such laughter has little concern with what is funny. It is often bitter and sometimes a little mad, for it is the laugh under the mask of tragedy, and also the laughter that masks tears. They are the same" (Bowen 1964:297). But she could not share in that laughter, or as she put it: "It is an error to assume that to know is to understand and to understand is to like" (Bowen 1964:291). Here we are on different ground, argued from the level of experience with otherness, of being-for (to use Heidegger's and Zygmunt Bauman's terminology) in togetherness, not the distancing reflection of one's own writing. Bohannan thus avoided the pitfall of moral indifference or condescension which Bauman characterized once as the attitude "you are wrong, I am right, [...] the fact that I bear with your otherness does not

exonerate your error, it only proves my generosity" (Bauman 1992:XXI). Bauman therefore calls for a dialogic acknowledgement of the equivalence of knowledge-producing discourses, when we take this legitimacy of the interests of others seriously. That would be true tolerance as well as a sign of solidarity (the only value Bauman wants to save from modernity's project).

Bohannan achieves this kind of insight through a sense of the anarchic power of humour which, as the art of balancing between self-enjoyment and sympathy for the suffering, has been perceived as a sign of true humanity since Roman times; or as Friedrich Schlegel, the great theoretical mind of the German Romantic Movement of the 1820s put it: "Irony contains something of and creates a feeling for the insoluble struggle between the impossibility and at the same time the necessity of compete dialogue. With irony one surpasses one's self".

Any other attitude, such as the indignation ("but I was a field-worker" or "that is beyond the bounds of scholarly civility") of some members of the anthropological profession, who reacted violently against the charge by Sangren and Jarvie that deconstruction was the best excuse for armchair-ethnology since Frazer, would have been regarded by the Romans as the vice of *gravitas*, that 'heaviness' which is the very opposite of the levity of the poetic imagination of which Schlegel again said in unsurpassed clarity the following: "Behind the creative impulse stands the buffoon, and the inspirational force of poetry is the divine breath of irony, permeated by truly transcendental buffoonery".

It is this buffoonery of the trickster who delights in his own pranks and the faults or folly of others, or as La Rochefoucauld said: "If we had no faults we would not derive so much pleasure discovering them in others"[6] (La Rochefoucauld 1959:72), which makes the encounter with the other a salutary experience. The limitations as well as the surpassing of boundaries only become clear to us when we see ourselves as third parties through encountering the Other. But field-work is beset with the very illiberality in which we are caught, following Schlegel, when we are creative. Therefore, to be able to analyse we have to embrace distance, for only then do we gain freedom from our undivided attention to a task. We have then, after all, to revert to writing, and writing leads to the irreverent freedom of the buffoon, the trickster, the sender of messages, to Hermes as herald.

There is a very fine example of reflection by an ethnographer about the attempt to escape the self-referentiality of the monologic disposition and the temptation to write. Michel Leiris commented on the Djibouti-Dakar expedition as follows:

> Intense work, to which I give myself with a certain assiduousness, but without an ounce of passion. I'd rather be possessed than study possessed people, have carnal knowledge of

6 "Si nous n'avions point de défauts, nous ne prendrions pas tant de plaisir à en remarquer dans les autres."

> Zarina, rather than scientifically know all about her. For me, abstract knowledge will never be anything but the second best (Leiris 1934:324).

Leiris was one of the few who saw that dangerous poison which lies behind the demand and the aim to publish an ethnography of lived experience, that which Susan Sontag has called the revenge of the intellect upon art, as each interpretation implies that the original is not good enough. Such a hermeneutic is not only aggressive but also impious: "From the start, writing this journal, I have struggled against a poison: the idea of publication" (Leiris 1934:215). He adds also a melancholic note: "In the year 1933 I returned and had at least destroyed one legend: that of travelling as the possibility or escaping oneself [...]" (1939:202–203). When he produced finally a text, Leiris says about it: "I like very much what Genet told me when we met first: 'I write in order to be loved' – that seems to me of unconditional sincerity" (1934:209).

Thus, while wishing in vain to embrace the research subject, he ends up yearning to embrace the reader: from the impossible to the potential. This is possibly the same attitude which Devereux suspected behind all writing: the surpassing of anxiety (of Otherness in the Self?) through method (i.e. writing).

Letting go

Behind Leiris stands another problem, that of the constant seduction of the Other and by the Other. As Burridge once formulated it, anthropology stands at the cross-roads of European philosophies, between Platonic Eros and Christian love, between the "faith in the rationally objective" as antidote to what he calls: "[...] the inertial human drift toward a viewpoint based wholly on the participation and interrelatedness" (Burridge 1973:12). Michael Jackson referred to it recently in similar terms:

> My own field-work among the Kuranko had reflected a profound dilemma. On one hand I found myself striving for a wealth of data which I could convert into a book, a durable object which might make my name. But on the other hand I felt my ego threatened by a world of opaque languages, bizarre customs, and oppressive living conditions. Running counter to this will to amass knowledge was a profound desire to give up and let go, to allow my consciousness to be flooded by the African ambience (Jackson 1989:163).

Jackson's conclusions for anthropology are worth quoting as well. Relying on Gadamer's notion of the ongoing tradition and its reflective appropriation, he states:

> An anthropology which so forthrightly reflects upon the interplay of biography and tradition and makes the personality of the anthropologist a primary datum entails a different notion of truth than that to which a scientific anthropology aspires. It is a notion of truth based less upon epistemological certainties than upon moral, aesthetic, and political values (Jackson 1989:167).

For Jackson meanings are created intersubjectively as well as intertextually, embodied in gestures as well as in words: "[...] quite simply", he says, "people cannot be reduced to texts any more than they can be reduced to objects" (Jackson 1989:184).

The dilemma appearing here, that between 'giving in' to the Other and 'giving in' to the text, was clearly perceived by Kurt Wolff who offered the prospect of surrender as a methodical answer, derived from phenomenology and existentialism, as a synonym for "total experience" (Wolff 1976:22) as follows under the requirement of 'identification':

> [...] in surrender the individual identifies (the main point of the attitude, besides suspension of received notions, the pertinence of everything, the total involvement and the risk of being hurt): in surrender the individual identifies with it, its occasion, moment, object, self. But idenfication [sic!] is the aim of surrender, not the aim of the catch. For if it were the aim of the catch, surrender would not be cognitive love, the surrenderer would not want to know, but, by definition, would want to identify, assimilate, go native, or change in some other fashion: the experience of surrender would be consummated as a state and remembered as an episode – perhaps even as a turning point. But since the surrenderer wants to know, there is the love of the catch, of understanding, conceiving, considering so that others can be told what has occurred, must lose himself to find himself, not to lose himself, otherwise he would be self-destructive (Wolff 1976:23).

If it were not so, if surrender would mean identifying assimilation or kowtowing to every whim of others, always being polite, one might also end up disgusted with oneself when leaving the field. Dialogic appropriation and casting in a new context or confrontation, implies the coming to the fore of conflicts. As an Aborigine said to Stanner: "White man, him go different. Him got road belong himself" (Stanner 1979:24). Acknowledging the autonomy of difference is the precondition for the attaining of self-respect, by not making the Other over into the Self or the Self becoming Other. Dialogue also has to show the Otherness of the Other to that other, giving him or her autonomy of Self. Only if this is realized in engagement, the statement that the anthropological enterprise is "the comprehension of the self by the detour of the comprehension of the other" (with which Rabinow modernizes Malinowski's adage of 1922; see Rabinow 1977:IX) can be agreed upon without making the Other only a tool. With this we must finally agree with Nietzsche's insight with which I started the essay: It may be time to put ethics before epistemology (as also pursued by Levinas). A secondary epistemological result entails the insight that translation of messages means that "it is finally not some mysterious primitive philosophy we are studying, but the extreme potentialities of our own thought and our own language" (Lienhardt 1954:97).

WHICH CATCH?

The catch of surrender seems to me to lie in several results. One is the risk we run by embracing a method of gaining knowledge which involves the Self as subject and object at the same time, and a subject as third person which can only come to the fore through encounter with concrete others. It entails the risk, as Zygmunt Bauman pointed out, not to be taken as a kind of knowledge compatible with the 'scientific community':

> The price a theory which subjects itself to the text of authentication pays for pulling down the barrier dividing the experimenter and his objects [...] is likely to be considered exorbitant by a science concerned more with certainty than with the significance of its results (Bauman 1976:109).

Participation rests on the desire to reach out personally without the guarantee of reciprocity and for this reason the method is endemically ridden with irregularity and cannot be taught or learned: It certainly cannot be required of all, for it has to remain a personal decision. Surrender however can only be achieved if alterity retains its seduction, and this it can only retain if it is permitted autonomy as difference. Seduction is therefore the life-blood of the field-encounter: to want to know the Other, but never be able to achieve complete union, being aware of this divisiveness without despondency or self-disgust (about which Nietzsche warned as much as about the adulating attitude as detrimental to historical studies), to retain as well as regain the utopian desire with the knowledge that fulfilment would end the seductiveness of alterity which would then become, as Levinas put it, "banalized and dimmed in a simple exchange of courtesies which are signs of the interpersonal", and I would add, of impersonal 'commerce'. That remains the challenge of field-work (for this view of Levinas see also Bauman 1995:60).

Only this way can seduction itself retain its ironic form which provides "a space, not of desire, but of play and defiance", because, as Baudrillard extends his explanation of the concept, "the law of seduction takes the form of an uninterrupted ritual exchange where seducer and seduced constantly raise the stakes in a game that never ends" (Baudrillard 1990:21–22). The anthropologist must surrender to seduction which in this case has several faces: the seduction of the field (and the imagination about it), of the Other, and of text as well as reader. But this is also the only way by which the ethnographer can maintain utopian hope: "The togetherness of being-for is cut of the same block as hope, [...] but what keeps the hope alive is precisely the unfulfilment" (Bauman 1995:69).

The ethnographer is a Hermes who has not been called to receive a message, but becomes possibly seductive through being and remaining an enigma to the host community, seducing the Other to engage. While the power differential, on moral as well as epistemological levels, has often been described as insurmountable, the argument

forgets the power of seduction of the Other over the ethnographer's imagination. It must be added that the seduction of Otherness in the field-encounter is ultimately also one of the ethnographer's own making: his imagination projects the desire to reach this imagined Other in reality.

The ethnographer, therefore, is moved by two forces of seduction: his desire to engage on both levels, the field-level as well as the level of writing. But both are to a large degree projections of his own desires, his system of imaginings: he is therefore ultimately seduced by his own desire which does not emerge through solipsistic existence. Indeed, a strange messenger: Hermes as seduced seducer!

A final catch emerges for me from the essay of writing about the field engagement in relation to the praxis of writing: it is the insight into what Roland Barthes called under the word *potin* (gossip) in his "A Lover's Discourse" the "wickedness" of the third-person pronoun: "[...] it is the pronoun of the non-person, it's absent, it annuls [...] For me, the other [sic!] cannot be a referent: you are never anything but you. I do not want the Other to speak of you" (Barthes 1990:185).

While I should have liked to address the readership as 'you' (even if unknown, imagined), I have referred to the generalized Other, the colleague anthropologist. Worse, t h e O t h e r of my field encounter becomes the generalized 'they' (see also Favret-Saada's critical re-assessment of this issue), but that is the inauthenticity of all discourse as opposed to lived dialogicity, a discourse which, as Barthes also intimated, leaves me caught in a cage: "I do not get out of the system" of the "*image-repertoire*".[7] Yet in dialogical engagement, it is the Other who makes an appearance when we surpass the Self. We may have to suspend disbelief in the unity of humankind as a moral community, even if we have to surrender to the epistemological diversity of ontologies. Nothing prevents us from the moral 'but'. Only one catch is clear: It is not through intertextuality that we become authentic, but in the realm of *Zwischenmenschlichkeit*, the 'interhuman' interphase.

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