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“Radical Empiricism:

Anthropological Fieldwork after Psychoanalysis and the *Année Sociologique*”

in Anthropological Journal on European Cultures. VI: 2 (‘Reflecting Cultural Practice’). Frankfurt, GDR.. March 1998. ISSN 0960 0604 pp. 79–107 and forthcoming in German as “Radikaler Empirismus. Anthropologische Feldarbeit im Gefolge von Psychoanalyse und *Annee sociologique* in Der Andere Schauplatz: Psychoanalyse–Kultur–Medien (Series IFK Materialien), ed. Marie–Luise Angerer and Henry Krips. Vienna: Viennese Böhlau Verlag. 2001. pp. 115–150

“let us be more wary of the dangerous old conceptual fairy–tale which has set up a ‘pure will–less, painless, timeless, subject of knowledge’, let us be wary of the tentacles of such contradictory concepts as ‘pure reason’, ‘absolute spirituality’, ‘knowledge as such’: – here we are asked to think an eye which cannot be thought at all, an eye turned in no direction at all, an eye where the active and interpretative powers are to be suppressed, absent, but through which seeing still becomes a seeing–something, so it is an absurdity and non–concept of eye that is demanded. There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective ‘knowing’; the more affects we allow to speak about a thing, the *more* eyes, various eyes we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our ‘concept’ of the thing, our ‘objectivity’” (Nietzsche 1994: 92, original 1887).

The subject–object distinction, traditionally constitutive of those discourses deemed ‘scientific’ or ‘academic’, has not ceased to bedevil anthropological practice and theorising, even in the wake of the celebration of subjectivism which was post–

modernist ethnography. Anthropological discourse has continued to depend on positioning a 'subject who knows' as the font of whatever knowledge the ethnography disseminates of the objects which are 'known'. This siting distances the observer and his or her audience not only from the human 'objects' ethnographies present but also, I will argue, from the possibility of understanding the processes by which their own cultural activities and interpretations are constructed.

Attempts to overcome the distance between the observer and the communities observed by critiquing and undermining the authority of the usually disembodied 'voice' of the anthropological narrator have produced innovative – and oftentimes fiercely attacked – programmes both to 'situate' the ethnographer more visibly in the field he/she offers up to the ethnography's readers and to 'give voice' to those living objects which are the matter on which the text focuses (see, for example, the pieces collected in Marcus 1992). Such innovations have nonetheless failed to prevent (and have arguably contributed to) an even further widening of the ontological gap opened by cultural relativism between persons and communities studied and those doing the studying. In the late sixties and early seventies, when relativism became the hegemonic mode of interpreting cultural difference, the 'modernist' stance of coming to know the other in order to enable his or her eventual transformation into something culturally and socially much more akin to the self was in large part delegitimated. Ironically this delegitimation led not to an increased appreciation of humankind's protean diversity but to a reification of alterity – notable in the transformation of 'others' to 'the Other' – which erects what seems to be wellnigh impassible boundaries between the spaces occupied by 'them' and those carefully scribed off as 'our own'. In the contemporary setting, where the inheritors of the West's enlightenment legacy increasingly portray themselves to

themselves as ghettoised within a world of potentially hostile alterity, the anthropologist is called upon to carry out the apparently heroic task of voyaging out and into those alien spaces so as to return 'home' with mappings of those alien domains.

However, just as the modernist *hubris* which had supported Western hegemony has faltered, so too has the anthropologist's confidence in being able to translate the conceptual space occupied by the 'objects' studied into a terminology comprehensible to his or her home audience. The two above-mentioned strategies – of rendering the encounter with another culture as a more or less autobiographical account of one's responses to alterity and of offering up large goblets of the other's discourses as the other's authentic voice – respectively fail to give us access to the ways other peoples see the world in which they live or to offer us translations of their ways of seeing into languages through which we can share those perspectives. The former provides salutary insight into how anthropologists ideologically site themselves at home and abroad as well as into their interpretations of what responsibilities appear to them to devolve from those sitings. The latter offers opaque transcriptions of the terms in which persons of other communities represent themselves and their practices in the presence of an outsider. Neither offers audiences more than surfaces beyond which the others reside. In the former case the surface is that of the ethnographer's awareness of an outside which impinges on his or her self-consciousness and forces a greater awareness of his or her own presuppositions and previously unarticulated agendas. In the latter the surface is that of a string of signifiers which hides beneath it the signifieds which would make it understandable<sup>1</sup>.

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As Mark Cousins points out in a review of Lévi-Strauss's *Introduction to the*

It is rare for the post-modern anthropologist – having feinted at authorial authority – not to slide back into an unreconstructed objectivist voice offering up the meanings of what was observed or the translations of what was transcribed. Ethnographers from one tendency within post-modern anthropology, having repeatedly stressed the barriers thrown up by their ideological and professional positionings before any real understanding of cultural others, will proceed to provide interpretations of the way ‘the others’ live ‘there’. Those of the other tendency, having chastised anthropological tradition for advocating speaking over the voice of the other, offer their readers long transcriptions of ‘native’ speech before proceeding to distill out of those texts (which they have transcribed, edited and arranged in place in their own texts) the significant elements of what it is ‘the others’ have to say about their worlds.

On my shelves as I write I find only one text, written in the first decade of this century, in which the ethnographer offers up, without commentary or interpretation, the words of those worked with. Edward Sapir, who was well aware of the impossibility of losing signification from the context of its enunciation, provided in his *Takelma Texts* no more than a bilingual rendering of his informants’s words, with one line of text offering a literal phonetic transcription of the North American Indian myths and the next a literal word by word translation

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*Work of Marcel Mauss*, recognizing an act of communication and comprehending the significance it carries are two distinct things: “within twentieth-century anthropological commentaries the utterance of some Bororo who said to von Steinem, ‘We are red parakeets’, resounds with a raging subjective intensity of communication. The most foreign utterance is not only still one, it is perhaps pre-eminently the one which communicates its subjective force. The problem is how to separate ourselves from it, so that we may know it, know what it signifies” (Cousins 1989: 84).

into English of the Takelma words (Sapir 1909). This is, of course, a text of little use to anyone but the North American Indian expert who brings to it the interpretative knowledge necessary for rendering its matter meaningful. One suspects that even surviving Takelmas would find the material collected by Sapir incomprehensible without some translation device to close a gap of ninety years of social, cultural and political change.

The encounter with the opacity of Sapir's *Takelma Texts*, like those with the double play of post-modernist ethnographers who say they cannot speak of or for the other and then proceed to do so, suggests that cultural translation *is* necessary if any understanding of other people's practices and discourses is to be achieved by those not habituated to the locales in which those practices and discourses take place. Talal Asad argues – in an essay which very much runs against the grain of the collection in which it is published (James Clifford and George Marcus's *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*) – that the work of anthropology must depend on some form of cultural translation. Translation must, however, be carried out with sensitivity to the fact that some sorts of translation fail to offer insight into the cultures studied or substantially distort the indigenous meanings of practices and articulations. Asad demonstrates the degree to which translating or representing entails power, and points to issues of inequality between the language of the anthropologist and his or her culture and that of the peoples studied:

“the interesting question for enquiry is...how power enters into the process of ‘cultural translation’, seen both as a discursive and non-discursive practice.... anthropologists need to explore these processes in order to determine how far they go in defining the possibilities and the limits of effective translation” (Asad 1986: 163 and 164).

He stresses that the academic writing of many anthropologists tends, “by the attribution of implicit meanings to an alien practice regardless of whether they are acknowledged by its agents,...to create meanings for a subject” (Asad 1986: 161 and 162). Such attributions are made not only with little or no regard for whether or not the people whose lives are thus rendered ‘meaningful’ would subscribe to – or even recognise the pertinence of – that interpretation but also with indifference to that question<sup>2</sup>.

Sperber notes that such ‘explanatory’ discourses tend to be products not of the fieldwork experience but of its subsequent writing up. He contends that anthropologists returning from the field erect in their writings barriers of alterity and incompatibility between cultural groups which do not seem to have been there while the anthropologists were engaged in fieldwork:

The best evidence against relativism is, ultimately, the very activity of anthropologists, while the best evidence for relativism seems to be in the writings of anthropologists. How can that be? It seems that, in retracing their steps, anthropologists transform into unfathomable gaps the shallow and irregular boundaries that they had found not so difficult to cross, thereby protecting their own sense of identity, and providing their philosophical and lay audience with just

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<sup>2</sup>

Asad contends that Ernest Gellner engages in cultural translation as “a matter of determining implicit meanings – not the meanings the native speaker actually acknowledges in his speech, not even the meanings the native listener necessarily accepts, but those he is ‘potentially capable of sharing’ with scientific authority ‘in some ideal situation’....The fact that in that ‘ideal situation’ he would no longer be a Berber tribesman but something coming to resemble Professor Gellner does not appear to worry such cultural translators” (Asad, 1986: 162).

what they want to hear (Sperber 1985: 62–63).

Contemporary anthropologists ‘other’ the people they have studied so as to publicize their expertise in penetrating and understanding the alien reaches beyond the bounds of their ordinary cultures and to convince their audiences not only that the knowledge of alterity provided is hard-earned and thus ‘real’ but also that it is a glimpse of something really ‘other’ and not just another perspective on another extension of the everyday.

In the instances of cultural translation critiqued by Asad and Sperber we note what seem to be generic ethnographic tendencies to produce anthropological knowledge by dismembering the world the anthropologist has come to know through dialogue and participant observation in the field so that it can be reconstituted in the text to accord with analytical categories foreign to those whose world is there re-presented. Such intellectual analysis engages in the same process of subordinating event to classificatory principle as does the early modernist eighteenth century natural history Mary Louise Pratt describes:

“natural history’s naming is...directly transformative. It extracts all the things of the world and redeploys them into a new knowledge formation whose value lies precisely in its difference from the chaotic original....the naming brings the reality of order into being” (Pratt 1992: 33).

The implication, explicit since Descartes’s work on the constitutive relationship of *cogito* to being, is that phenomena are in themselves effectively ‘untrue’ until the reason of the (Western) intellectual has – through abstraction, induction and *re-assembly* – reworked them so that they appear as manifestations of a-temporal laws or categories. A purely phenomenistic account of an anthropologist’s experience of a community could only, by this rule, be either a journal (i.e., a non-academic memoir) or the raw material of an ethnography in waiting; it would only



be a contribution to knowledge after after its data was transformatively reworked.

The division of the world into two distinct but interacting fields – the one a disordered mass of phenomena emersed in contingency and the other a regimented body of a-temporal laws standing over and against that chaos – is the founding move of what the West came to define as modernity (Bowman 1996). Modernity constitutes the world (including the unenlightened masses and persons of non-modern cultures) as a disordered material to be made over by its technologies in accordance with images of its potential realization discerned by the rational thought of an intelligentsia. The intellectual is located ‘outside’ the world in the ‘ivory tower’ of academia (a site the modernist professionalisation of intellectual cogitation institutionalizes) from whence the world can be gazed upon and legislated for without endangering the intellectual with implication in its inherent confusion. Bruno Latour, in *We Have Never Been Modern*, describes the process which underlies the mythology of ‘modern’ natural and social sciences as a ‘purification’ dividing the world into two essentially disjunct realms of being – those of nature and of culture<sup>3</sup>. Through this process of purification ‘natural’ entities and events are discursively constructed as operating solely in accord with the laws of nature while ‘cultural’ beings and artifacts are shown as the undiluted productions

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Latour, as an historian of science, locates the advent of modernity in the early seventeenth century with the empiricist move to separate the domains of ideology and nature. In my above-mentioned paper I argued that the advent of modernity – as a movement to impose a universal ‘truth order’ on the matter of the world – can be located much earlier with the fourth century imperial legitimation of the missionary project of Christianity (Bowman 1996: 110–113).

of human passion, will, ignorance and intellect. Between and outside the territories of these two purified fields of knowledge rests phenomenal reality – a domain marked by contingency, mutation and hybridity. Over all of these disjuncted tracts ranges the disembodied gaze of the intellectual.

Latour deconstructs this foundational mythology by demonstrating that this radical disjunction is not elemental but is the culmination of a process whereby initially unitary phenomena (events resident in the space he calls that of ‘natures–cultures’<sup>4</sup>) are defined as intermediary ‘mixtures’ of Nature and Culture which are then distilled to abstract from solution the pure forms of the Natural and the Cultural. ‘Hybrid’ knowledges, produced through the creative admixture of things and practices, are ‘purified’ by radically separating those ‘objects’ from the historical, political and ideological processes which made them meaningful in the first place. Latour instances Boyle’s ‘discovery’ of his law concerning vacuums. Boyle and his assistants, through an elaborate set of experiments involving technological inventions such as the vacuum pump, created the phenomenon from whence Boyle subsequently derived the law he then claimed to have ‘discovered’:

“Boyle and his descendants are not simply saying that the Laws of Nature escape

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*“the very notion of culture is an artifact created by bracketing nature off.* Cultures – different or universal – do not exist, any more than Nature does. There are only natures–cultures....similar in that they simultaneously construct humans, divinities and nonhumans. None of them inhabits a world of signs or symbols arbitrarily imposed on an external Nature known to us alone. None of them – and especially not our own – lives in a world of things. All of them sort out what will bear signs and what will not. If there is one thing we all do, it is surely that we construct both our human collectives and the nonhumans that surround them” (Latour 1993: 104 and 106).

our grasp; they are also fabricating these laws in the laboratory. Despite their artificial construction inside the vacuum pump (such is the phase of mediation or translation), the facts completely escape all human fabrication (such is the phase of purification)” (Latour 1993: 33).

Out of this discursive fabrication of “two entirely distinct ontological zones; that of human beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other” (Latour 1993: 10), we who deem ourselves modern have come to two world historical conclusions. The first is that there is a ‘great divide’ between our own scientific culture – which knows and mobilizes nature – and all those other cultures which unwittingly compound the laws of nature and the processes of culture and hence know neither themselves nor the world they live in. The second is that an objective knowledge of the world is possible for those who are modern, and that this knowledge is grounded on a radical distinction between a ‘subject/society’ which knows the world of objects and the world as such. One of the implications of these two conclusions is that other cultures, and the people who make them up, are objectified so that they can be studied and known by the intelligentsia of our own culture. The other implication, ironically, is that we who can know others cannot know ourselves since the laboratory of life, in which we create/discover the laws determining the being of objects and those regulating the activities of subjects, is a place which must be disregarded and excluded to protect the axioms which enable our forms of knowledge.

Although Latour’s main field of analysis is that of the natural sciences, the implications of his studies are powerful for the social sciences and for anthropology in particular<sup>5</sup>. The ‘field’ is analogous to Latour’s laboratory in being the place

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Interestingly, *We Have Never Been Modern* is marked by a profound

where anthropologists bring their presuppositions and experiences into relation with ethnological material provided by the speech and activities of the peoples they study. The interrelation of anthropologist and those who speak and reveal the raw materials of ethnographies produces new knowledges which are neither purely those of the anthropologists's own cultures nor those of the cultures they observe. Paul Rabinow, in his *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* describes the mutual understanding labouriously worked out between anthropologist and informant as "a hybrid, cross-cultural object or product" (Rabinow 1977: 152) and characterises "fieldwork...[as] a process of intersubjective construction of liminal modes of communication." (Rabinow 1977: 155). Neither the fieldworker nor the informant emerge from this process as the same person he or she was before entering into it; the process Rabinow describes (Rabinow 1977: 152) of objectifying elements of the everyday so that they can be communicated to the ethnographer, like the procedure

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ambivalence towards anthropology. Latour opens by posing anthropology as a totalising model fit to deconstruct the mythological divisions of the fields of 'modern' society ("in works produced by anthropologists abroad, you will not find a single trait that is not simultaneously real, social and narrated" [Latour 1993: 7]) but concludes by asserting that "[a]nthropology had been built on the basis of science, or on the basis of society, or on the basis of language; it always alternated between universalism and cultural relativism, and in the end it may have taught us as little about 'Them' as about 'Us'" (Latour 1993: 129). The clue to his ambivalence may lie in his assertion that "it is possible to do an anthropological analysis of the modern world – but then the very definition of the modern world has to be altered" (Latour 1993: 7); an anthropology which draws its analytical categories from the 'modern' cannot – because of the epistemology which underwrites those categories – do more than reiterate the illusions which constitute modern society's understanding of itself.

Cousins relates (see note one, above) of separating ourselves from something so that we can comprehend its significance, creates not only new knowledge but also new knowers. This defamiliarization effects informants, who refigure their relationship to their world in offering its parameters up to the ethnographer, as well as anthropologists who, taking up residence in new domains, rework their assumptions about self and its *habitus*. Thus Rabinow, writing of returning 'home' to New York from Morocco, relates that he was no more at home there than he had been in the field: "the maze of slightly blurred nuance, that feeling of barely grasped meanings which had been my constant companion in Morocco overtook me once again. But now I was home" (Rabinow 1977: 148).

This problematisation of identity rarely if ever appears in subsequent ethnographies where the voice of the ethnographer fades out and is replaced by that of the disembodied observer. Just as these texts render invisible or relegate to a brief mention in the foreword the hard collective labour of working out a series of metaphors for translating the objects of everyday life from the minds of native observers into that of an initially naïve visitor, so too do the texts replace the confused and oftentimes querulous speech of the anthropologist in the field with a cool and disembodied 'truth voice'. As Favret-Saada points out, "ethnography as I learnt it – and even taught it – is considered a science so long as one covers up the traces of what fieldwork was like....A noteworthy feature of the ethnographic text is that the stating subject (or rather, the author) is regularly hidden. He withdraws in favour of what he states about his subject" (Favret-Saada 1980: 26).

In this process of 'purification', whereby a nebulous mass of impressions and approximations is shaped into a prison house of rules said to contain the culture discussed, the anthropologist also shape-shifts. The *unheimlich* processes of

disorientation and loss which characterise the anthropologist's field experiences are generally excised from the ethnography. If they are mentioned it is to set them out as moments – analogous to those which anthropologists relate when discussing the transformation of afflicted persons into healers capable of curing the afflictions of others – in a process whereby the 'one who knows' is initiated into a position endowing him or her with the power to know even more. The, usually muted, 'mystical' character of this enhancement is wonderfully expressed by Merleau-Ponty in a piece discussing the anthropologist's development:

"He has only to have learned at some time and at sufficient length to let himself be taught by another culture. For from then on he has a new organ of understanding at his disposal – he has regained possession of that untamed region of himself, unincorporated in his own culture, through which he communicates with other cultures" (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 120).

In Merleau-Ponty's portrait of the anthropologist we see the ethnographer shedding the lineaments of contingency and historicity Rabinow so carefully sketched in so as to reveal 'himself' – for the Apollonian form is always masculine – as the bearer of the cool and all-encompassing gaze of objective (read 'absolute') knowledge.

As I have argued above, we cannot avoid this modernist deification of the anthropologist by simply expanding our autobiographical forewords into full-blown subjectivist ethnographies (which are not the same as ethnographies of the self) or appending to our objectivist texts long allegedly legitimising extracts of 'native speech'. These ploys, in different ways, serve in the final instance to keep the subjects of our inquiries at a distance. Furthermore, whereas the latter strategy falls back into anthropological objectivism as soon as the necessity to 'speak for' the indigenous texts is acted upon, with the former strategy – in those cases where the commitment to placing the self is adhered to rigorously – the anthropological

imperative of striving to understand those of other cultures is displaced by the quest to understand the self. Ironically, however, ethnographers attempting to escape objectivism's imperialist mandate by abandoning the other and seeking the self often produce little more than academic reification of the common sense categories which underwrite their own cultures<sup>6</sup>.

The initial move towards a solution lies, I suggest, neither in redefining the nature of the anthropological 'object' nor in reworking field methods but in rejecting as untenable the 'pure will-less, painless, timeless, subject of knowledge' (Nietzsche 1994: 92) through whose mask we speak the conclusions our researches are alleged to have generated. Such an unmasking entails, however, far more than a rhetorical substitution of the proscribed first person for the third person voice of classical ethnography. It involves discarding the 'one' which voices 'knowledge as such' and substituting for it the 'I' of the ethnographer who speaks as one who has discarded the certitudes of a previous identity and put in their place the provisional hypotheses of a self constituted through dialogue with persons and places organised according to 'alien' assumptions. Such a substitution, in effect, changes everything.

This move dissolves the community constructed by rhetorical conventions between the subject who knows and the subjects addressed by ethnographic discourse. No longer does the ethnographic voice speak an authoritative knowledge to an

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It is indicative of what Latour calls anthropology's failure to have taught us any more about ourselves than about others that reflexive anthropology's inability to escape the subject positions of western autobiography is mirrored by mainstream anthropology's continued enmirement in the ideological category of the self as the locus of anthropological inquiry – a position recently celebrated in the work of Anthony Cohen (Cohen 1994).

audience presumed capable of unproblematically assimilating that knowledge<sup>7</sup>. Instead the ethnographer, speaking from a site dislodged by fieldwork experience from the domain of shared assumptions that constitutes the common sense of his originary community, attempts to communicate with a 'home audience' by constructing a network of descriptions and models capable of engaging his or her audience in a work of interpretation and conceptual distortion like that the ethnographer went through in making sense of fieldwork experience. In other words, the ethnographic text, rather than inviting its readers to join its author on the Olympian heights of objective knowledge from whence they all can look down knowingly upon the anthropological objects (who – being outside modernity – are themselves incapable of occupying that vantage point of self- comprehension), calls upon its readers to enter through dialogue into community with a cultural expatriate. Out of this dialogue may emerge a shared sense of what it is for them to occupy a space other than that which surrounds their everyday lives.

The reader's imaginative occupation of the space of shared understandings which the fieldworker and his or her informants constructed is not, I would insist, a complete transposition of the reader into the fieldworker's experience of being on the edge of two cultural domains. Just as the ethnographer comes to inhabit not the life world of those he or she studies but a place which is a dialogically-constructed

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"[I]n ethnographic writings neither the speaker nor his partner – in other words, neither the stating subject, author of the scientific report, nor his reader – are defined. It is implied that the 'I' need not introduce himself because he is taken for granted, just like the 'you' who is talked to. It is so much a matter of course that the 'I' and the 'you' converse about 'him', that the stating subject can withdraw behind an indefinite subject, and call himself 'one'" (Favret-Saada 1980: 27).



approximation of that world strongly inscribed by elements of the culture in which he or she was raised and trained<sup>8</sup>, so too the people who make up the ethnographer's audience construct images of the anthropologists's liminal *habitus* which are hybrid meldings of aspects of the ethnographer's representations with experiences and expectations particular to those readers.

That hybridization of everyday assumptions with matter taken from worlds organised according to different assumptions provides the audience of the ethnographies I am proposing with the experience Victor Shklovskij of the Russian Formalist movement claimed emerged from engagement with good literary art. At the core of such poetry and prose Shklovskij located the poetic device of *ostranenie* ('making strange') which functions, in the words of Victor Erlich, in the following manner:

"Rather than translating the unfamiliar into the terms of the familiar, the poetic image 'makes strange' the habitual by presenting it in a novel light, by placing it in an unexpected context....By tearing the object out of its habitual context, by bringing together disparate notions, the poet gives a *coup de grâce* to the verbal cliché and to the stock responses attendant upon it and forces us into heightened awareness of things and their sensory texture. The act of creative deformation restores sharpness to our perception, giving 'density' to the world around us" (Erlich 1955: 150)<sup>9</sup>.

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As Rabinow points out, the informant, in developing a vocabulary through which he or she can communicate with the fieldworker, is also displaced from the life world he or she occupied prior to the necessity of communicating that world to the anthropologist (Rabinow, 1977: 152 and 162f on Driss ben Mohammed).

9

Although the ethnographic reader's experience of imaginatively occupying the space which the anthropologist was brought to inhabit by field research is bound to be less powerful than the anthropologist's own experience insofar as the reader's is vicarious, reading ethnographies should nonetheless serve to involve the reader in the same denaturalization of previous cultural assumptions as the fieldworker experienced in bringing himself or herself to understand that life can be lived according to different rules. While traditional ethnography works to provide abstract decodings of those rules, and thus both to offer them up in familiar terms and to disengage them from the worlds where the practices of everyday life make them manifest, a more direct rendering of the anthropologist's experience of living with those rules will serve to show them as reality-producing rather than as ideological errors which distort the real. The vicarious experience of 'going through' a terrain thus differently organized may induce the reader, in turning his or her gaze back to the rules which organize the space of his or her quotidian life, to perceive them (at least until the expatriating effect wears off) as yet another set of culturally-constructed models for world building<sup>10</sup>.

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My insistence, throughout this text, on using the clumsy pronominal 'he or she' and 'his or her' instead of the more familiar 'he' or 'his' is itself an intentional mobilization of *ostranenie* meant to force the reader to reflect on the cultural practice of eliding the feminine when producing a 'universal' subject position which is in fact masculine.

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What comes to mind as I attempt to formulate how *ostranenie* might function in reading ethnography is my own experience, twenty years ago, of feeling an extended sense of cognitive dissonance on finishing Larry Niven's science fiction novel *Ring World* (Niven 1972) as I 'slid back' from a reality in which lives I had imaginatively participated in were lived on great terra-

Shifting ethnography's focus so that it expresses a process of familiarization with other cultural domains rather than relaying a decoding of materials abstracted from the fieldwork experience removes the 'unfathomable gaps' Sperber describes as separating the readers of ethnographies from the peoples portrayed in them. Once the artificial 'othering' Sperber sees as written into the ethnographic text is excised, readers can vicariously experience crossing 'the shallow and irregular boundaries' the anthropologist traversed in coming to reside within the *habitus* of the people he or she studied. As a result, readers will encounter those others with whom the ethnographer enters into dialogue no longer as depersonalised types demonstrating the radical alterity of 'the Other' but – as do the readers of Rabinow's *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* or Favret-Saada's *Deadly Words* – as persons who, like the fieldworker his or her self, struggle to produce meaningful statements and acts in a world scored with contingency and potential incomprehension.

One effect of this is a redesignation of the 'objects' of ethnography as 'subjects' who, rather than being displayed as depersonalized representations of either their culture or of factions within that culture, are introduced as individuals attempting to make themselves understood to the anthropologist at particular moments and in particular contexts. This particularization undermines anthropology's typical objectification of the other's 'culture' and instead shows that culture is only manifest in expression (whether this expression be an individual utterance or the collective erection of temple complexes) and is constantly varied and reworked as different contexts place different demands upon its enunciators (and, in the case of the artifacts of material culture, interpreters). There are radical implications to

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formed hoops circling their sun to one in which people lived on orbiting ovoid rock formations.

redefining culture so that it is no longer represented as an entity which all its subjects's enunciations express but as a mutable vocabulary emerging into consciousness through subjects's expressions. If culture is a mode of expression rather than an entity – a language rather than a matrix – then ethnography does not analyse 'Culture' *per se* (which may, by this argument, be non-existent) but analyses a set of enunciations which can be grouped as expressive of a particular mode of meaning-making engaged in by a greater or lesser number of persons. In Favret-Saada's examination of what people say and do when discerning and countering the attacks of witches it is clear that she is working with small groups of persons whose discursive constructions of the realities they inhabit isolate them – in their self perceptions as well as in those of other communities they live with in the Bocage – from others around them. Similarly, in works such as Griaule's *Conversations with Ogotemmêle* (Griaule 1965) in which the reader observes the dialogic elaboration of a cosmology through the conversations of fieldworker and informant, one recognises that – despite the ethnographer's assertion that what is being 'revealed' is the authentic terrain of the culture studied – a world is here constructed which exists for the ethnographer, the informant and – perhaps – the reader of the text. In both cases the representations being relayed are those constituted by informants and ethnographer through a developing mutual understanding rather than – as the rhetoric of conventional ethnography (which Favret-Saada rejects and to which Griaule adheres) implies – those of a culture whose tenets the anthropologist has been able, with objective detachment, to discern, observe and transcribe.

Discourse makes a world which is no less real because it is occupied only by those who construct it through the process of sharing agreement on its elements. As Rabinow demonstrates with the example of how his queries about a local saint –

Sidi Lachen Lyussi – impelled the community he worked within to ‘discover’ a history for a figure they’d previously known only as a revered name (Rabinow 1977: 131–133)<sup>11</sup>, a discursively constructed reality can ‘grow’ as more and more people come to accept the world it bodies forth. The more people who come to adhere to it, however, the more ‘play’ there is in defining its terms and the rules of the ‘language games’ it calls into being. Witchcraft, like the Dogon rules of smithy–building or the legends of Sidi Lachen Lyussi, comes into being for persons when they accept that the term designates a reality, but different groups – and different individuals – may represent that reality to themselves and to others in quite disparate ways. Collective acceptance of a reality– designating term can constitute a community around the belief that that term designates a reality, but that community is continuously threatened with dissolution by interpretative conflicts over what that thing is and what dictates it imposes on those who believe in it<sup>12</sup>. As Slavoj Žižek points out, “the consistency of our language, of our field of meaning, on which we rely in our everyday life, is always a precarious, contingent *bricolage* that can, at any given moment, explode into a lawless series of singularities” (Žižek 1991: 153–154). Ethnographers, who gain their knowledge of other communities’s

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Rabinow’s observations here lead one to query whether anthropologists’s rôle in enabling peoples to ‘rediscover’ their traditions may in fact be that of facilitating what Hobsbawm and Ranger have called ‘the invention of tradition’ (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983).

12

In “A Country of Words” I have discussed the way the term ‘Palestine’ constitutes a transnational community which tends to disintegrate when its constituencies articulate different perceptions about what being ‘Palestinian’ means and demands (Bowman 1994).

ways of life through discussions with and observations of a small number of informants, must build their interpretations of the life-worlds of those communities on the foundations of acquaintance with a limited number of readings and enactments of 'the real'. If it can be acknowledged that the realities represented are in fact a network of singularities emerging from the contexts of field research, the essentialist – and othering – concept of Culture can be jettisoned and with it the 'unfathomable gaps' dividing the people of the anthropologist's originary community from those of the collectivities studied.

We appear to challenge the continuing existence of anthropology as a field of inquiry by proposing to dissolve the category of culture into a *bricolage* of utterances held together by speakers's assumptions that they are talking about the same things. Once the category of culture is delegitimated, so too, it seems, is anthropology's remit as a discipline examining human cultures. What is left, however, once that definitional shift has been effected by the loss of the generalising authority of 'the subject who knows', is what always was at the core of field-based anthropological endeavour – the study of human beings making of the world a setting in which they can live meaningful lives. Whether the ethnographer's field of inquiry be the connections between constructed environments and persons's understandings of their organising principles or the attempts of individuals afflicted by misfortune to discern the agencies behind those afflictions, anthropological inquiries have – at the moments in which their data are collected – inevitably focussed on the interpretational processes through which persons thrown into being in the world seek to render controllable and coherent the contingencies and uncertainties of that world. David Pocock wrote in 1971 that, "if it is to develop", social anthropology must constitute as the object of its study "the play of society maintaining itself against, modifying itself to meet, the steady flow of new

individuals – whether people or events” (Pocock 1971: 112– 113). I would contend that this has, despite anthropology’s own varied self–definitions, been the object of anthropological study since the time when anthropological practice determined that fieldwork would be the primary source of anthropological data. Where the perspective Pocock demands in his call for an anthropology “which enables us to conceive of society in duration” (Pocock 1971: 112) is occluded is not in ethnographers’s approaches in the field to the objects of their studies (after all, informants – like all human beings – are always caught up in the labour of maintaining their assumptions against, modifying them to meet, the steady flow of new experiences) but in the way subsequent reworkings of what informants tell them abstract sets of atemporal and generalized codes and laws out of the interpretational processes informants revealed. The ‘culture’ which emerges from those abstractions not only freezes the social flux into an allegedly enduring moment (see Fabian 1983) but also illicitly concatenates a series of statements, made by different persons in different contexts, into the univocal voice of an entire collectivity.

If that abstractive reworking is abandoned and the anthropologist records all aspects of the processes of manifesting significant acts or statements<sup>13</sup>, what will become evident to ethnographic readers is what was as well evident to the ethnographer before he or she subsumed it in interpretative abstraction – the way in which persons ‘read’ situations and contexts with reference to memories of previous encounters with similar events (and in terms of their memories of other person’s narratives of analogous encounters), assess the ways contemporary

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Favret–Saada notes that “I made it a rule to write...about the native discourse including silences, slips of the tongue, repetitions, hesitations and so on” (Favret–Saada, 1980: 150, note 2).

encounters conform with or diverge from those previous situations, and enact or adapt previous responses to situations faced. In some situations the process of evaluation and response seems to take place without hesitation whereas in others it can be long, arduous and productive of anxiety. The eventual response – whether it be a statement, a gesture, or an activity – is a reply to the query (‘how do you respond to this?’) thrown up by an event. While an abstractive anthropology would disregard the process of assessment and reify the eventual reply as an expression of ‘culture’ (thus effacing other replies), an anthropology not committed to the quest for culture *per se* would seek to perceive regularities and differences in the ways persons, at different times and in different places, reply to what they encounter as they move through their lives. Such replies need not be – and most often are not – explicit statements of comprehension or intent; articulations, as Bourdieu has shown in *The Logic of Practice*, are also choreographed activities expressing that “immediate but unselfconscious understanding which defines the practical relationship [of the actor] to the world” (Bourdieu 1990: 18). The ethnographer then must attend to and record not only what people say about their relationships with their contexts but also how they position themselves and act in response to the situations in which they find themselves.

Such attention to the various responses of individuals to situations is not – despite appearances – founded on the assumption, rejected in note six above, that the self is the locus of anthropological inquiry. In what follows I will argue that the ‘self’ is a dynamic internalization of a series of subject positions and repertoires offered it, through its development in social contexts, by others. At this point I would, however, stress simply that anthropologists must attend closely to the instances in which so-called cultural representations are produced since the traditional alternative – abstracting culture out of the contexts in which it is articulated – can



only distance the ethnographer and his or her audience from processes whereby previous experiences and knowledges are mobilized and/or adapted to meet the demands which encounters with new events or new individuals impose. The attention I propose paying to particulars does not, however, trap me in a world which can only be represented as a congeries of singularities; as Favret-Saada shows in the concluding section of *Deadly Words*, it is possible to deduce out of a field of enunciations a 'logic' or grammar underlying the diversity of particular statements. Such deduction is licit insofar as the analyst provides a sufficient corpus of original statements against which to test the generalising hypothesis and acknowledges that that logic is not an entity existing in some space autonomous from those statements but a hypothesis drawn from that series of statements.

Abandonment of the position outside the flux of events from whence one claims to discern the laws governing the practices and statements of others unwittingly emersed in that flux would bring about the ethnographer's recognition that he or she shares a fundamental kinship with those observed. The anthropologist, like 'the other', discovers a place for his or her self within an unfolding series of events taking place before audiences which assess both those events and the ethnographer's attempts to accommodate himself or herself to them. Like those he or she observes, the ethnographer comes to understand the ways the surrounding community makes the world *heimlich* by taking account of the reactions of that audience – the 'significant other' – to the way he or she responds to situations encountered. Such 'reality testing' enables the anthropologist to add to his or her repertoire of appropriate responses<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup>

Bruce Kapferer's "Mind, Self and Other in Demonic Illness: the Negation and Reconstruction of Self" (Kapferer 1979) demonstrates the testing of self-

Anthropologists familiarizing themselves with host communities, like children being socialized or migrants or refugees learning to accommodate themselves to new milieus, differ from the communities with which they interact insofar as they are 'coming into culture' from an outside. I have stressed that the anthropologist is not unlike the people he or she studies insofar as he or she shares with them the experience of continuously having to modify previous schemas of activity and interpretation to accord with circumstance and the reactions of others. Nonetheless, persons who are well accommodated to an environment will be used to performing the everyday adjustments of previous experiences to changed situations and will – except in encounters with radical anomalies or novelties – generally carry out that labour unselfconsciously. The anthropologist, like the other 'outsiders' mentioned, will be very aware of remodeling expectations and responses to fit with the new *habitus* he or she has come to inhabit; he or she, like them, does not unreflexively share a 'common sense' with the surrounding community. The experience of coming to terms with alterity through a reflexive process of *altering* characterizes the anthropologist's experience. The anthropologist, not unlike other expatriates<sup>15</sup>, is distanced from familiar modes of thinking the real and has to familiarize his or her self with new ways of perceiving and responding to events.

The act of moving, willingly or unwillingly, from one community's *habitus* to

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constructs before the gaze of significant others in describing a Sri Lankan exorcism ritual in which a range of potential future identities are staged for the victim of possession before an audience made up of the local community.

<sup>15</sup>

But unlike the child who, whilst similarly coming into a symbolic order from an outside, does not already possess another 'language' in terms of which it can gauge and self-reflexively articulate the process of transformation.

another's does not, however, mechanically provide the traveller with 'double vision' – the ability to see one milieu in both the terms of its inhabitants and those of its other. Displacement is a highly charged emotional experience, and the expatriate may respond to it by denying, in a number of ways, the altering he or she has gone through. These denials include explicit refusals to identify either with the host society (as with migrants or refugees who become even more nationalistic or religious than people remaining in the communities they left behind) or with their community of origin (as with fervent assimilationists who renounce any feeling for their previous place of residence). Such refusals are, of course, rejections of conscious and unconscious identifications with subject positions which, in the communities in which the refusers were raised, provided them with basic personality structures and which, in the milieus into which they have been adopted, allow them to communicate and act in the contexts of everyday life. Self imagings of dedicated revanchists, like those of rejectionists, are built upon foundations of disavowal. Ethnographers may, as well, engage in such disavowal in their responses to the communities in which they work, and the work of purification Latour describes, which retrospectively establishes an ontological divide between the ethnographer and the objects of his or her study, is an aspect of that denial. It is self reflexive attention to the process of altering which distinguishes the anthropological gaze from that of other displaced persons<sup>16</sup>. Coming to know how to act in a different cultural ambience involves the learner in recognizing situations as being somewhat 'like' others he or she has already encountered yet as

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It is not, of course, only the trained anthropologist who is able to relay the experience of altering to audiences, as the proliferation of culturally insightful works – both fictional and non-fictional – by émigré writers demonstrates.

demanding responses unlike those the previous encounters had demanded. It is through awareness of this dialectical play of similarity and dissimilitude that the anthropologist develops the ability to translate the terms of one world-making process into those of another. Translation is akin to metaphor, as the etymological roots of the two terms suggests<sup>17</sup>, and the cultural translator 'transfers' to his or her audience the experience of transfer he or she has already been through. Honest translation, like nuanced mobilization of metaphor, always makes its audience aware of the substantial residue of dissimilarity which remains after similarity is conveyed. Similarly, the fieldwork encounter leaves the ethnographer (and, if he or she is honest in relating that encounter to an audience, the reader of his or her monograph) with the uncanny feeling that while things 'there' are sufficiently familiar to allow one to get on with the work of communication they are simultaneously different enough that the conceptions which provided the ethnographer with his or her initial foothold in the new space must be stretched and distorted if the ethnographer is to move in that space (or the reader is to vicariously position his or her self there).

The anthropologist in the field is very much aware of the situation of moving between two worlds, and it is this Janus-faced awareness which allows him or her not only to grasp at an understanding of the field but also to formulate translations of that field experience for his or her readers at home. The ethnographer's liminal positioning facilitates insights into both the culture studied and his or her originary culture. The term 'liminal' has, I would argue, been misused since Victor Turner

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Both translation and metaphor derive from terms which, respectively in Latin and Greek, mean to transfer (translation from the Latin *translatus*, the past participle of *transferre*, and metaphor, from the Greek μεταφέρειν) (O.E.D. 1971: 3381 and 1781).

made Van Gennep's *limen* into the foundation stone of the conceptual edifice he called liminality (Turner 1967). Although liminal, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, means "of or pertaining to the threshold or initial stage of a process" (O.E.D. 1971: 1628), Turner extends both the word and its sense to *liminality* which, for him, is "the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but...in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that,...a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (Turner 1967: 97)<sup>18</sup>. Liminal, in its literal sense, is not a state but a moment in a process, yet Turner freezes that process and inserts into the stilled interim a meta-cultural viewing platform which provides, for the Ndembu and other subjects whose cultures makes available such vantage points (Turner's later work strove to prove that such points – whether 'liminal' or 'liminoid' – were available in all cultures), a site analogous to the position of the subject who knows. Turner's invention of a transcendent position from whence viewers can gaze with detachment upon the particular forms their cultures forge out of pure possibility serves the same end as does Western epistemology's siting of the subject who knows; both make it possible to imagine subjects who pre-exist the social contexts in which subjectivity is inevitably manifested. Both, in other words, are machineries for the production of ideological categories of the autonomous self<sup>19</sup>. However, the various 'liminal' positions from

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Robin Horton has revealed the theological roots of Turner's conceptions of sites of radical possibility in "Ritual Man in Africa" (Horton 1964: especially pp. 93–96).

<sup>19</sup>

Turner, with his talk of "an uncommitted man, an individual rather than a social *persona*" (Turner 1967: 108), makes explicit the ontological separation of subjects from societies which he sees as "structure[s] of

which the anthropologist looks back towards the social milieu from whence he or she came as well as into that into which he or she is moving are moments (each of them different, as Rabinow shows in *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*) in the midst of a dynamic process of remaking the self through taking into it images of identity provided by experiences within the community the anthropologist is joining. The sites from whence the ethnographer gazes are not still and detached vantage points of autonomous intellection, but wayside stops where he or she, threatened with vertigo, pauses momentarily to take bearings by looking back towards the certitudes of an identity beginning to distort with distance and forwards towards another ambience which not only reveals different ways of being in the world but also, in demonstrating how to live with others, others the self. Psychoanalysis's most significant contribution to twentieth century thought is simultaneously its most systematically disavowed insight<sup>20</sup>. Sigmund Freud's nuanced analyses of the relation of the infant to the structured world of family or carers which encompasses it demonstrate that self is not born but made. Freud shows that the human subject is constituted through identifications with subject

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positions" (Turner 1967: 93). Although his Christian humanism is apparently more generous than modernity's epistemology insofar as he suggests that all humans can at times access sites which liberate from ideology (modernity restricts this access to the enlightened intellectual), Turner's liberation is effectively millenarian in that the energies which are temporarily loosed are – in this world – always rechanneled into the work of social structuration (see Turner 1969).

<sup>20</sup>

Anthropologists willing to use psychoanalytic structures or categories in their analyses of particular cultural traits (see, for examples, essays in Heald & Deluz 1994) seem unwilling to ally themselves with psychoanalysis's more global conclusions about subjectivity and the social.

positions manifested to it through the activities of others with whom it is brought into relation in the course of its development<sup>21</sup>. Identifications with others, other's characteristics, or with the objects of others's desires impel the child – and the adult that develops out of that child's elaboration of a repertoire of identifications – to engage, unconsciously or consciously, in scenarios within which it plays out fantasies of intersubjective relations with significant others in its real or imagined environment. These fantasies more often present dilemmas than straight-forward *mise en scènes* of fulfillment, and in thinking through resolutions to these dilemmas human personalities develop. Thus, for instance, in going through the Oedipus Complex the male child sublimates desires which open it to the threat of what it perceives as castration and substitutes desexualized imagings of future relations with other persons for its scenarios of immediate corporeal relations with either the mother or the father<sup>22</sup>. Identification is, for Freud, the primal movement

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In psychoanalysis identification is used not in the sense of identifying, as when someone identifies an object or an act as being 'the same as' another or 'in the same class or category as' other objects or acts ('A is the same as B' or 'A is a B'), but in the sense of 'identification of oneself with' a person, a characteristic of a person, or (oftimes perversely) a thing (see Laplanche & Pontalis 1973: 205–208).

<sup>22</sup>

See Freud's "The Dissolution of the Oedipal Complex" (Freud 1961, original 1924). Juliet Mitchell's useful analysis of castration in her *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Mitchell 1974: 74– 100) emphasises the threat which impels the *male* child into substitutive fantasies of identification and points to Freud's failure to provide an account of female identifications. The rôle of identification, and its implications for masculinity and femininity, are further explored by Elizabeth Cowie (Cowie 1997: esp. 72–122) and Slavoj Žižek

of the infant out of the inarticulate sensorium of its body into the socially structured world of others. It is in repetitions of that process, through which the individual takes up new identifications and renounces or re-forms previous ones, that that developing person more or less successfully learns to negotiate the demands of others and to internalize from those demands what it comes to perceive as its own needs and desires. Jacques Lacan's renowned elaborations of Freudian insights, most notably in his work developing his insights into the interplay of image and identification in 'the mirror stage' (Lacan 1977a; Lacan 1977b), demonstrates that the self is constructed through identifications with others to the extent that, as Lacan phrases it, "I is an other" (Lacan 1977b: 23). Freud's above-cited essay demonstrating how negotiating the Oedipus Complex introduces the child into the series of compensatory identifications providing access to the social world of rôle-playing and language was published – through a synchronicity which disciplinary divides and antagonisms have in large part rendered invisible – in the same year Marcel Mauss presented "Real and Practical Relations between Psychology and Sociology" to the Société de Psychologie in Paris (Mauss 1924; Mauss 1979a). There Mauss assaulted, as it were 'from the other side', the same wall dividing the social and the psychological which Freud was intent on dismantling. In his address to psychologists he saw as committed to dividing "facts of the various biological and psychological orders from social facts" (Mauss 1979a: 9), Mauss asserted that

"although we said that this essential part of sociology, collective psychology, is an essential part, we deny that it can be separated from the others and we will not say that it is only a matter of psychology, for this collective psychology or 'sociological psychology' is more than that. And you yourselves have to fear its encroachments

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(Žižek 1989: 105–128).



and its conclusions....[I]t is no longer sociology that is in question. By a curious reversal, it is psychology itself. The psychologists, while accepting our collaboration, could perhaps do well to defend themselves. Indeed, the contribution of collective representations: ideas, concepts, categories, motives for traditional actions and practices, collective sentiments and fixed expressions of the emotions and sentiments, is so great, even in the individual consciousness – and we make a very energetic claim to study it – that at times we seem to want to reserve for ourselves all investigations in these higher strata of the individual consciousness. Higher sentiments, mostly social: reason, personality, will to choose or freedom, practical habits, mental habits and character, variations in these habits; all this we claim as part of our province, along with many other things.... (Mauss 1979a: 9).

He continues by asserting that the proper domain of sociological analysis furthermore

“converge[s] with physiology, the phenomena of bodily life, for it seems that between the social and the bodily the layer of individual consciousness is very thin: laughter, tears, funerary laments, ritual ejaculations, are physiological reactions just as much as they are obligatory gestures and signs, sentiments that are obligatory or necessary or suggested or employed by collectivities to a precise end, with a view to a kind of physical and moral discharge of its expectations, which are physical and moral too” (Mauss 1979a: 10)<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup>

Although Mauss continues – strategically I believe – by saying “[b]ut do not be afraid. We have an out-and-out respect for your frontiers, having a sense of justice, and it is enough that there be an element of individual consciousness, large or small, to legitimate the existence of an individual discipline devoted to it” (Mauss 1979a: 10), he concludes the presentation by stressing the necessity of the study of ‘the total man’ in which “the triple

Mauss, with Durkheim, asserted that the social provided the forms through which psychological and physiological matter took shape and found expression (see Durkheim & Mauss 1903; Durkheim & Mauss 1963), and Mauss, in his assault on the autonomy of psychology, stressed that “cries and words, gestures and rites – for example of etiquette and morality – are signs and symbols. Fundamentally they are translations. Indeed the primary thing they translate is the presence of the group” (Mauss 1979a: 21). In a later essay, “Les Techniques du Corps” (Mauss 1935; Mauss 1979b), in which he introduced the concept of the *habitus*, Mauss elaborated what he called ‘prestigious imitation’ – the process through which individuals learn the social language in terms of which they subsequently move (as well as emote, think and express themselves):

“What takes place is a prestigious imitation. The child, the adult, imitates actions which have/succeeded and which he has seen successfully performed by people in whom he has confidence and who have authority over him. The action is imposed from without, from above, even if it is an exclusively biological action involving his body. The individual borrows the series of movements which constitute it from the action executed in front of him or with him by others. It is precisely this notion of the prestige of the person who performs the ordered, authorized, tested action vis-à-vis the imitating individual that contains all the social element. The imitative action which follows contains the psychological element and the biological element” (Mauss 1979b: 101) .

The process of prestigious imitation Mauss develops is analogous to that of identification elaborated by Freud and Lacan. In both instances an image endowed with an aura of power and success is drawn by the individual from the world of

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consideration of the body, the mind and the social environment must go together” (Mauss 1979a: 31).

others which encompasses it and is internalized to serve as a model for that individual's subsequent expressions. Such expressions need not be public; Freud's studies of dreams and fantasies indicate that such interior experiences play out possible intersubjective relations while Vološinov argues that thought is itself a form of social discourse insofar as "there is no such thing as thinking outside orientation toward possible expression and, hence, outside the social orientation of that expression and of the thinking involved" (Vološinov 1973: 90). The self, in private as in public, performs itself through enacting and playing improvisations on the rôles it has learned through identifying with others.

Mauss's work differs from Freud's insofar as the former's sociological focus led him to approach generalizations about the 'total man' through arguments about collective regularities whilst the latter's attention to individual case studies meant that generalizations about psychological processes were most commonly made through observations of individual maladjustment and deviancy. As a result, Freud's work attended more closely to processes of internalizing and interpreting the demands of the social order than did Mauss's. Despite their respective valorizations of the psychological and the social, Freud and his more radical followers remained fully aware of the determinative power of the social over the individual's psychic economy (as one can see, for instance, in Lacan's stress on the force of the symbolic order) while Mauss and the members of the *Année Sociologique* were attentive to the 'play' particular histories of encounter introduced into the machinery of collective representation<sup>24</sup>. Mauss and Freud alike demonstrated that

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See, for instance, Mauss's study of Inuit social organization (Mauss 1979c), Durkheim's work on suicide (Durkheim 1951), and, perhaps most strikingly, Hertz's study of practices at the shrine of St. Besse (Hertz 1913; Hertz 1983).

the subject is not an autonomous entity standing outside the social processes within which it chooses to engage but is a matrix of energies penetrated, shaped, and directed by social exteriority. Their common perspective is summed up in Michel Henry's assertion that the subject "is nothing but representation itself, the pure fact of setting forth as the opening up of an Outside, an Outside that is the world as such" (Henry 1991: 159).

Anthropology can only escape the solipsism brought to the fore by its recent efforts to purge its practice of modernity's cultural imperialism by reasserting and developing the insights Mauss and Freud elaborated in the early decades of this century. Those insights, which stressed that the subject was incapable of transcending the social matrices which gave it the materials of its consciousness, could not be accommodated within the epistemology which had informed Western thought since the fourth century. Mauss's and Freud's respective dismantlings of the wall dividing the subject from the context in which it comes into being rendered unviable the *camera obscura* allegedly occupied by the subject who knows, and as a result their works were systematically misread by the mainstreams of the disciplines they worked within so that that wall (and the 'objectivity' it protects) would continue to appear as unbreachable<sup>25</sup>. It is, however, in fieldwork – which similarly developed its contemporary authority in the early part of this century through the

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Just as mainstream psychoanalysis reasserted the primacy of the individual psyche over the social to an extent which made it necessary that the Lacanian tendency be outlawed, so too did subsequent anthropology and sociology turn away from the radical implications of the *Année Sociologique's* inquiries into the social constitution of subjectivity. Claude Lévi-Strauss's stimulating *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* (Lévi-Strauss 1950; Lévi-Strauss 1987) intriguingly rechannels the radical constructivism underlying Mauss's *oeuvre* into a mentalism which fully extends itself in structuralism. Favret-Saada intriguingly quotes Bertrand Poirot-Delpech to demonstrate that even the *betes-noires* of contemporary rationalism, the deconstructionists, insist that they speak from a place detached from the world of which they speak – "[a] total a-topia, an absolute nomadism: to talk from nowhere, to become ungraspable, unapproachable, irrecoverable in every way" (Poirot-Delpech, 'Maîtres à dépenser' in *Le Monde*, 30 April 1976, quoted in Favret-Saada 1980: 14, n. 2).

work of figures such as Bronislaw Malinowski (whose *Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*, [Malinowski 1967] was able, fifty years after it was written, to shock those who wanted to believe in the Olympian objectivity of the master) – that the anthropologist is forced to observe the way that he or she is infected with alterity in the course of seeking to understand it. Like every subject which enters into its own subjectivity by taking into itself figures and forms from the world which encompasses it, the subject which sees itself as an anthropologist is made over by internalizing – through prestigious imitation and identification – the ‘objects’ it studies. Traditions of ethnographic exegesis insist that that subject regain its objectivity by overlooking this experience of altering in the process of ‘writing up’, but an understanding of the ‘Them’ studied, as well as of the ‘Us’ who study, can only be achieved through a meticulous observation and recounting of the process of becoming a subject in and of the *habitus* observed. Such a ‘radical empiricism’ is autobiographical but it is an autobiography of a self which mutates into something other than what it was, and the narrative of that othering can open to its readers the possibility of conceiving of the other as yet another site with which the self can identify.

Glenn Bowman  
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28 October 1997

### Endnotes

1. As Mark Cousins points out in a review of Lévi–Strauss’s *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, recognizing an act of communication and comprehending the significance it carries are two distinct things: “within twentieth-century anthropological commentaries the utterance of some Bororo who said to von Steinem, ‘We are red parakeets’, resounds with a raging subjective intensity of communication. The most foreign utterance is not only still one, it is perhaps pre-eminently the one which communicates its subjective force. The problem is how to separate ourselves from it, so that we may know it, know what it signifies” (Cousins 1989: 84).

2. Asad contends that Ernest Gellner engages in cultural translation as “a matter of determining implicit meanings – not the meanings the native speaker actually acknowledges in his speech, not even the meanings the native listener necessarily accepts, but those he is ‘potentially capable of sharing’ with scientific authority ‘in some ideal situation’....The fact that in that ‘ideal situation’ he would no longer be a Berber tribesman but something coming to resemble Professor Gellner does not appear to worry such cultural translators” (Asad, 1986: 162).

3. Latour, as an historian of science, locates the advent of modernity in the early seventeenth century with the empiricist move to separate the domains of ideology and nature. In my above- mentioned paper I argued that the advent of modernity – as a movement to impose a universal ‘truth order’ on the matter of the world – can

be located much earlier with the fourth century imperial legitimation of the missionary project of Christianity (Bowman 1996: 110–113).

4. *“the very notion of culture is an artifact created by bracketing nature off.* Cultures – different or universal – do not exist, any more than Nature does. There are only natures–cultures....similar in that they simultaneously construct humans, divinities and nonhumans. None of them inhabits a world of signs or symbols arbitrarily imposed on an external Nature known to us alone. None of them – and especially not our own – lives in a world of things. All of them sort out what will bear signs and what will not. If there is one thing we all do, it is surely that we construct both our human collectives and the nonhumans that surround them” (Latour 1993: 104 and 106).

5. Interestingly, *We Have Never Been Modern* is marked by a profound ambivalence towards anthropology. Latour opens by posing anthropology as a totalising model fit to deconstruct the mythological divisions of the fields of ‘modern’ society (“in works produced by anthropologists abroad, you will not find a single trait that is not simultaneously real, social and narrated” [Latour 1993: 7]) but concludes by asserting that “[a]nthropology had been built on the basis of science, or on the basis of society, or on the basis of language; it always alternated between universalism and cultural relativism, and in the end it may have taught us as little about ‘Them’ as about ‘Us’” (Latour 1993: 129). The clue to his ambivalence may lie in his assertion that “it is possible to do an anthropological analysis of the modern world – but then the very definition of the modern world has to be altered” (Latour 1993: 7); an anthropology which draws its analytical categories from the ‘modern’ cannot – because of the epistemology which underwrites those categories – do more than reiterate the illusions which constitute modern society’s understanding of itself.

6. It is indicative of what Latour calls anthropology’s failure to have taught us any more about ourselves than about others that reflexive anthropology’s inability to escape the subject positions of western autobiography is mirrored by mainstream anthropology’s continued enmeshment in the ideological category of the self as the locus of anthropological inquiry – a position recently celebrated in the work of Anthony Cohen (Cohen 1994).

7. “[I]n ethnographic writings neither the speaker nor his partner – in other words, neither the stating subject, author of the scientific report, nor his reader – are defined. It is implied that the ‘I’ need not introduce himself because he is taken for granted, just like the ‘you’ who is talked to. It is so much a matter of course that the ‘I’ and the ‘you’ converse about ‘him’, that the stating subject can withdraw behind an indefinite subject, and call himself ‘one’” (Favret–Saada 1980: 27).

8. As Rabinow points out, the informant, in developing a vocabulary through which

he or she can communicate with the fieldworker, is also displaced from the life world he or she occupied prior to the necessity of communicating that world to the anthropologist (Rabinow, 1977: 152 and 162f on Driss ben Mohammed).

9. My insistence, throughout this text, on using the clumsy pronominal 'he or she' and 'his or her' instead of the more familiar 'he' or 'his' is itself an intentional mobilization of *ostranenie* meant to force the reader to reflect on the cultural practice of eliding the feminine when producing a 'universal' subject position which is in fact masculine.

10. What comes to mind as I attempt to formulate how *ostranenie* might function in reading ethnography is my own experience, twenty years ago, of feeling an extended sense of cognitive dissonance on finishing Larry Niven's science fiction novel *Ring World* (Niven 1972) as I 'slid back' from a reality in which lives I had imaginatively participated in were lived on great terra- formed hoops circling their sun to one in which people lived on orbiting ovoid rock formations.

11. Rabinow's observations here lead one to query whether anthropologists's rôle in enabling peoples to 'rediscover' their traditions may in fact be that of facilitating what Hobsbawm and Ranger have called 'the invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983).

12. In "A Country of Words" I have discussed the way the term 'Palestine' constitutes a transnational community which tends to disintegrate when its constituencies articulate different perceptions about what being 'Palestinian' means and demands (Bowman 1994).

13. Favret-Saada notes that "I made it a rule to write...about the native discourse including silences, slips of the tongue, repetitions, hesitations and so on" (Favret-Saada, 1980: 150, note 2).

14. Bruce Kapferer's "Mind, Self and Other in Demonic Illness: the Negation and Reconstruction of Self" (Kapferer 1979) demonstrates the testing of self-constructs before the gaze of significant others in describing a Sri Lankan exorcism ritual in which a range of potential future identities are staged for the victim of possession before an audience made up of the local community.

15. But unlike the child who, whilst similarly coming into a symbolic order from an outside, does not already possess another 'language' in terms of which it can gauge and self-reflexively articulate the process of transformation.

16. It is not, of course, only the trained anthropologist who is able to relay the experience of altering to audiences, as the proliferation of culturally insightful works - both fictional and non-fictional - by émigré writers demonstrates.

17. Both translation and metaphor derive from terms which, respectively in Latin and Greek, mean to transfer (translation from the Latin *translatatus*, the past participle of *transferre*, and metaphor, from the Greek μεταφέρειν) (O.E.D. 1971: 3381 and 1781).

18. Robin Horton has revealed the theological roots of Turner's conceptions of sites of radical possibility in "Ritual Man in Africa" (Horton 1964: especially pp. 93–96).

19. Turner, with his talk of "an uncommitted man, an individual rather than a social *persona*" (Turner 1967: 108), makes explicit the ontological separation of subjects from societies which he sees as "structure[s] of positions" (Turner 1967: 93). Although his Christian humanism is apparently more generous than modernity's epistemology insofar as he suggests that all humans can at times access sites which liberate from ideology (modernity restricts this access to the enlightened intellectual), Turner's liberation is effectively millenarian in that the energies which are temporarily loosed are – in this world – always rechanneled into the work of social structuration (see Turner 1969).

20. Anthropologists willing to use psychoanalytic structures or categories in their analyses of particular cultural traits (see, for examples, essays in Heald & Deluz 1994) seem unwilling to ally themselves with psychoanalysis's more global conclusions about subjectivity and the social.

21. In psychoanalysis identification is used not in the sense of identifying, as when someone identifies an object or an act as being 'the same as' another or 'in the same class or category as' other objects or acts ('A is the same as B' or 'A is a B'), but in the sense of 'identification of oneself with' a person, a characteristic of a person, or (oftimes perversely) a thing (see Laplanche & Pontalis 1973: 205–208).

22. See Freud's "The Dissolution of the Oedipal Complex" (Freud 1961, original 1924). Juliet Mitchell's useful analysis of castration in her *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Mitchell 1974: 74–100) emphasises the threat which impels the *male* child into substitutive fantasies of identification and points to Freud's failure to provide an account of female identifications. The rôle of identification, and its implications for masculinity and femininity, are further explored by Elizabeth Cowie (Cowie 1997: esp. 72–122) and Slavoj Žižek (Žižek 1989: 105–128).

23. Although Mauss continues – strategically I believe – by saying "[b]ut do not be afraid. We have an out-and-out respect for your frontiers, having a sense of justice, and it is enough that there be an element of individual consciousness, large or small, to legitimate the existence of an individual discipline devoted to it" (Mauss 1979a: 10), he concludes the presentation by stressing the necessity of the study of 'the total man' in which "the triple consideration of the body, the mind and the



social environment must go together" (Mauss 1979a: 31).

24. See, for instance, Mauss's study of Inuit social organization (Mauss 1979c), Durkheim's work on suicide (Durkheim 1951), and, perhaps most strikingly, Hertz's study of practices at the shrine of St. Besse (Hertz 1913; Hertz 1983).

25. Just as mainstream psychoanalysis reasserted the primacy of the individual psyche over the social to an extent which made it necessary that the Lacanian tendency be outlawed, so too did subsequent anthropology and sociology turn away from the radical implications of the *Année Sociologique's* inquiries into the social constitution of subjectivity. Claude Lévi-Strauss's stimulating *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* (Lévi-Strauss 1950; Lévi-Strauss 1987) intriguingly rechannels the radical constructivism underlying Mauss's *oeuvre* into a mentalism which fully extends itself in structuralism. Favret-Saada intriguingly quotes Bertrand Poirot-Delpech to demonstrate that even the *betes-noires* of contemporary rationalism, the deconstructionists, insist that they speak from a place detached from the world of which they speak – "[a] total a-topia, an absolute nomadism: to talk from nowhere, to become ungraspable, unapproachable, irrecuperable in every way" (Poirot-Delpech, 'Maîtres à dépenser' in *Le Monde*, 30 April 1976, quoted in Favret-Saada 1980: 14, n. 2).

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