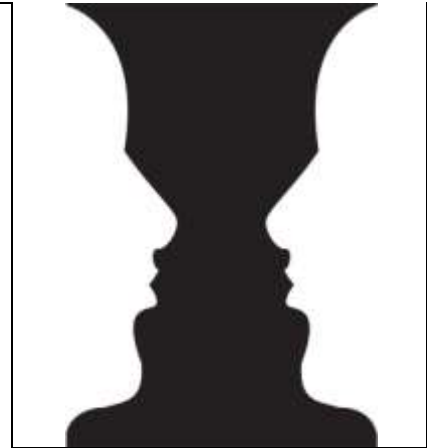

JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE RESEARCH IN
ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY

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Volume 3, Number 2, Winter 2012
ISSN 2068 – 0317
<http://compaso.eu>



Reduction and representation: the function(s) of understanding and comparison in, and between, Anthropology and Literature

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Abstract

This article addresses the manner in which the anthropological and literary subjects are fashioned, imagined and transmitted to their audience, being mindful of the manner in which misunderstandings occur in this delicate transposition. It starts by reviewing the longstanding tension in anthropology between modish theoretical strains, which ethnography incorporates, and anthropological purists who believe that the input from extraneous disciplines cheapens the discipline and renders trivial studies conducted by previous generations of anthropologists. This work adopts a comparative stance borrowing from ethnographies, novels and conventional philosophical work, but the main focus relies on their fundamental comparability to anthropology, as well as the opposite. To close, some in-roads concerning the possibility of synthesising both perspectives are outlined whose special relevance to understanding anthropology is more contingent upon a shift in perspectives and disciplines which renders anthropology both a subject which seeks to understand as well as an understanding subject.

Keywords

Anthropological representation, Literature, Deleuze, Ethnography, Comparative Anthropology

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I would like to begin, at the outset by employing Ernest Gellner's radical reappropriation of the relevance of culture to anthropology in the wake of Anthropology's 'writing culture crisis'². He claims, and, reminding anthropologists in the process, that:

"Culture is too important to be left to Lit Crits." (Gellner, 1993, 4)³

There is a feeling that a certain amount of tension is emerging, in Gellner's instance with respect to Edward Said's work, but more generally between the field of culture studies and with anthropology. The bone of contention began in response to Said's work 'Orientalism' (1978) in which said advances the notion of a reductive, Eurocentric gaze which holds dominion over others casting them among the lower orders of civilization. Gellner's response was two-fold; the first is that orientalism erred in its observation of European dominance when the Ottoman Empire (among others) posed a great threat to Europe during their reign. The second depended more closely on whether or not an outsider (British anthropologist, Gellner) could approximate the complexities of Algerian society in terms of anything beyond an 'occidental' reduction.

As our initial point of departure we must question whether ethnography is the most apposite manner through which a culture's inner workings can be relayed to a third party. Is it not best that we leave discussions of non-European society to non-Europeans? However, Gellner's response was not simply based on this emic/etic distinction relating to his origin, but in Said's own failings in romanticising Algeria from the perspective of a literary scholar⁴. Gellner's fundamental issue with Said is not so far removed beyond the realms of the interpretive and is either better or worse buttressed by evidentiary support. Although this quote has already been included in the greater history of anthropology, my initial contention would be that in order to best approximate understanding we might not delimit our discipline in the manner which Gellner does and instead express that: Culture is too important to be left to Lit(erary) Crit(ic)s solely.

There exist many avenues of pursuit which serve anthropological modes well; two examples are staged here that of Literature proper and Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of 'becoming' that stems therefrom. Anthropology is multi-tiered, allowing it to be applied in a multitude of seemingly irreconcilable ways; this allows it to be applied, interpreted and critiqued in a variety of ways. This is especially obvious when examining recent efforts undertaken to try to apply the philosophical apparatus of Wittgensteinian thought, phenomenology, existentialism and most recently in the work of Deleuze and Guattari to anthropology (respectively these works are, for Wittgenstein see Das, 1998. for phenomenology see Casey, 1996 and Jackson, 1996 in existential parallels see Csordas, 1995, Jackson, 1998, 2005, 2012 and finally for Deleuzian though see Biehl and

² I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer at *Compasso* for their instructive insights and analytical clarity. Any error that remains within the text is the author's solely

³ Interestingly this exact quote has been included, in no small part due to its iconoclasm, in Eriksen, T. H., & Nielsen, F. S. (2001). *A History of Anthropology*. Pluto Press, London.

⁴ A fuller analysis is available at: <http://wjholland.wordpress.com/2010/08/02/edward-said-the-bitter-orientalist/> (Accessed on date 14/12/12)

Locke 2010, and Bruun Jensen & Rodje, 2010). These ventures have received a differential amount of traction- making them in no way different to any other epoch-informed⁵ study of the emerging complexities which are evident in the social field. The social field itself is, for this reason, often thought to be rather liquid (would liquid be a better word?) in nature with a range of epistemologies built in different shapes and sizes to contain this aqueous matter, occupying whatever container they fill⁶. More than simply occupying this space with its liquidity, and in keeping with the analogy drawn here, is that the discerning act is only brought to light with respect to the perspective adopted with respect to the Other. This is also the case where, as highlighted earlier, anthropologists can transpose understandings of continental philosophers onto anthropological thought for the betterment of both. Even within Biehl and Locke's work (2010) on bringing 'becoming' over into anthropology, (a move many before have done in a variety of philosophical fields see above) Michael Fischer in the commentary section of their work adopts a strong position of defiance in which he contends: This bit needs to be re-arranged. It is not very clear...

The "theoretical quick fix" of philosophers' names, like attributing trademarks to ordinary words—assemblages, friction, equipment, concept work, multisided (attribute and use them quickly, expiry looms, next arrives)—is a self-defeating neoliberal game of valuation, hardly an improvement over Cold War ideological schools (you evil deconstructionist, postmodernist, bioculturalist, structuralist, functionalist). (Ibid, 2010, pp 357-358)

The intention here is to evoke this problematic rather than offering rebuttal to this refutation, particularly as this present work relies on the perspective that the movement in and between perspectives and across disciplines can lead to new varieties of understanding. That said, what remains important in Fischer's commentary is the employment of philosophers' names simply as sufficient evidence for an ethnographic contention. It is for this reason that the parallels elicited in the comparison drawn below retain, as their focal point, ethnographic and anthropological thought. This is by no means definitive and any theoretical constructs placed around an irreducible entity or upon an abstract contextual notion will never be final or complete. Biehl and Locke posit, in relation to Fischer's criticism, that:

In emphasizing the powers and potentials of desire (both creative and destructive), the ways in which social fields ceaselessly leak and transform (power and knowledge notwithstanding), and the in-between, plastic, and ever-unfinished nature of a life, Deleuze lends himself to inspiring ethnographic

⁵ I have deliberately employed the term epoch-informed rather than something akin to modish or fashionable.

⁶ This is demonstrated in the section which follows in relation to importance of citing cues as evidentiary support in the manner of where, in the optical illusion employed by this journal, the vase begins and where the two faces staring at one another begin and end.

efforts to illuminate the dynamism of the everyday
and the literality and singularity of human becomings. (Biehl & Locke, 2010, 317,
Emphasis in original)

Here we acknowledge that the deployment of Deleuze, if he is to be successfully deployed, is in the capacity in which his thought can be said to be of immediate salience to anthropology as such. One work omitted for consideration by Biehl and Locke is that of Deleuze and Guattari's interpretation of Kafka in their 1986 work "Kafka: towards a Minor Literature" (is this sentence grammatically correct?). The adoption of a comparative perspective by the philosopher and psychoanalyst respectively can be instructive in the instance of an anthropological reading of literary works; the efficacy of such a method and its validity is scrutinised in the section which follows by employing the notion of 'becoming' and its parenthetical relation to signification and truth.

Comparison and areas of expertise

My (why is it my here, but we in the first line?) contention is that many errors can be, and are, incurred via the lack of evidentiary support in ethnography particularly as there are errors which can arise in the sublimation of multiplicity in singularity; consider the violence involved in selectively handpicking sections from interviews conducted which to the ethnographer's mind better speak to the context under scrutiny. [By its nature, etymologically at least, Ethnography requires a reduction to writing, a graphos or graphying, of an entire ethnicity?]. We need the counterweight of scientific understanding, not as much in its bearing as a methodology that requires falsifiability but in its cogency, as a discipline which recognises and understands its' subjects. We have already reviewed the notion put forward by Deleuze and Guattari that the aqua-like quality of understanding the composition of the social field prevents the dominion of one variety of understanding the manifold and multifaceted aspect of the subject over another⁷.

This work attempts to explore what the purposive application a philosophical and literary perspective to anthropological works achieves. It would also highlight the transgressions and mistakes made through such interdisciplinary transpositions. The problem of interdisciplinarity invites solutions and fosters efforts made to discuss these difficulties where differing representational phenomena come into juxtaposition with one another and the primacy of a particular metaphysical interpretation tends to dominate. While it is unclear where the idea of 'proper belonging' or the notion of sole authorship over an episteme within a discipline comes from but the clearest, finest example of this calibre of, what I refer to as 'epistemological territoriality' is evidenced in Stephen Hawking's "A Brief history of time". In the closing lines of his book he reminds philosophers that, in order to understand his work, they will first have to apply the

⁷ This is evidenced in his account in "A Thousand Plateaus" (1998) where they liken the nature of the subject to that of the Rhizome- a vast complex and multifaceted biological entity).

comparative perspective by ignoring their present efforts and refocusing them on a science-oriented world-view. He chides philosophers:

[T]he people whose business it is to ask why, the philosophers, have not been able to keep up with the advance of scientific theories. In the eighteenth century, philosophers considered the whole of human knowledge, including science, to be their field and discussed questions such as: did the universe have a beginning? However, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, science became too technical and mathematical for the philosophers, or anyone else except a few specialists. Philosophers reduced the scope of their inquiries so much that Wittgenstein, the most famous philosopher of this century, said, "The sole remaining task for philosophy is the analysis of language." What a comedown from the great tradition of philosophy from Aristotle to Kant! (Hawking, 1988, 168)

This state of play is not all that far removed from the situation of Anthropologists attempting to approximate the state of their field at the outset which requires scrutinising a large cross-section of recent criticism within anthropology (which does not simply criticise anthropology itself). Hawking also insists that an emic perspective is insufficient in order to understand a particular matter (science has become too technical to the layperson, in a sense evading understanding in the employment of their subject-specific lexicon). We are led to understand that 'Comparison' is doomed to fail, as it is an activity which...which does not lend itself to understanding but rather by virtue of adopting an interrogative bent from a position outside of the object of study.

This strain of the emic/etic perspectives can also have the opposite intended effect where the perspective held by the author/fieldworker is simply projected onto the cultural milieu, what they (the natives) are doing and what I (as a fieldworker) am conversant with, theoretically at least, are collapsed and become analogous. This is observable in criticisms levelled against theorists who fail to observe anthropology's well-worn evidence yields hypothesis rule, and instead render their 'field-findings' in terms of the most recent move in anthropological theory generally. This is evident in Rabinow's criticism of Geertz's over-reliance on postmodern-cum-deconstructive approaches⁸:

If Geertz is still seeking to conjure and capture the demons of exoticism - theater states, shadow plays, cockfights - through his limited use of fictionalized stagings in which they can appear to us, the textualist/deconstructive move runs the risk of inventing ever more clever filing systems for others' texts and of imagining that everyone else in the world is hard at work doing the same thing. (Rabinow, 1996, 38)

⁸ This is by no means a standalone example of the fitting of evidence around an a priori understanding of the world which is often instilled during a fieldworker's training. This is excellently critiqued in Brown (1996) where the author contends that the employment of 'resistance' as a modish term caused the erosion of its proper analytical relevance.

For our purposes here it is important to restate the degree to which both ends of the anthropological endeavour have been slightly re-worked from the receipt from text-espousing-automata to grand theorisations which serve (by necessity) to collapse this superfluity of information, to being contingent on broader epistemological (here read deconstructive) strategies. The issue here could stem not only from speculation concerning the cosmologies of others (through the lens of interpretation) but from a broader pattern of collapsing the appresentational (in the Husserlian sense of givenness, which are assumed) into the representational (which are employed mimetically to refer to things beyond themselves).

The three R's: representation, reference and relevance

Let us turn now then to a consideration of the very nature of representation itself. First in relation to what can be represented, what *can* be read into (an interpretive strategy) and where the very limits of representation can be said to lie. It is important, I feel, to turn my attention to works of literature in this regard. I have also drawn a case study from the work of Kafka that I find to be broadly allegorical⁹ in nature.

The poststructuralists of modern times have set an obstruction in the path of representation and of speculation. It is my intent to find out the exact nature of this insoluble problem or crisis of representation¹⁰. Once I have outlined the problems of representation and the notion of an exclusively-authored text, a troubling and reductive consideration where anthropology is concerned, I wish to discuss the problems of representation and the Other, broadly conceived. What is it that Ethnography can offer to alleviate or even solve, if it can be achieved at all, this crisis?

The very construction of a novel is based on the following kind of equation: 'X = Y'. That is that the architecture erected by the author will always be reinterpreted by the reader, rendering it no longer the exclusive property of the author. If I am to say that one hue of green, where described in a text, is brighter than that one the author intended, who is the author to say otherwise? This is also the case for tacit meanings or symbols in a text. In the above X can be seen to be any passage in the text, and Y is *any* explanation or speculation about the passage in question, provided there is sufficient evidentiary grounds exist. One need not be excessively hermeneutic and seek to find *something* in *everything*. While many disciplines, within the humanities specifically, find critical legitimacy in this exercise this kind of endeavour can also serve to "do violence" in reducing the importance of the text (or increasing or artificially increasing the importance of a text giving undue prominence thereto). This type of absolutization serves to retard the polysemic and multiple reactions and thoughts of readers by totalising them, positing them squarely in a right/wrong dichotomy, or more accurately a continuum. This undemocratic approach to the supposed accuracy of a text also stems from a duality in our own perspective, which informs our reading.

⁹ Allegorical is not strictly representational, the reasons for which are dealt with thereafter.

¹⁰ Specifically what is it that makes it insoluble or whether it should be subsumed under a grand narrative.

I would like to illustrate this point by referring to the logo selected by this journal which appears in the header of this work.

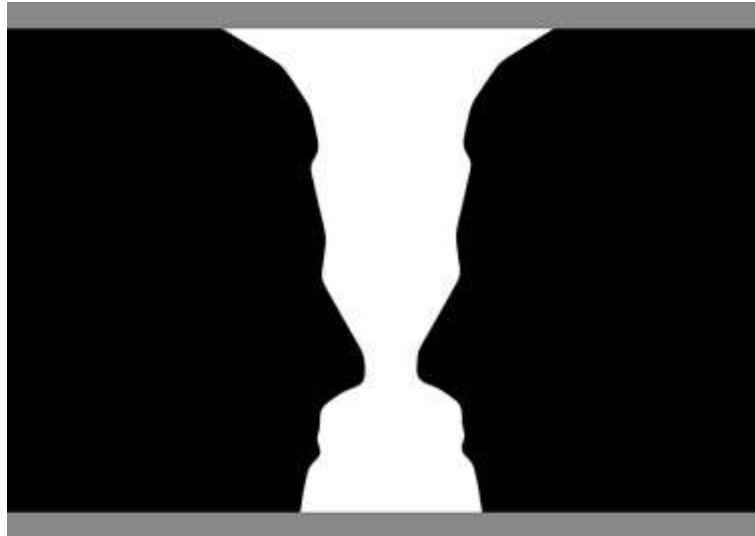


Figure 1: Two silhouettes or a vase?

The continuum of evidentiary based support for one (or in the instance of the Rhizome, many) interpretation(s), which have been argued for rely on evidentiary support, which also has its limitations, and one such limitation is encountered here. While the optical illusion, I contend, generally serves to show the movement or shifts that *can* happen between perspectives, there remains an antithetical strain which suggest that it can also illuminate another facet of understanding, namely contextually-determined understandings arrived at through prior experience. This is illustrated in Wittgenstein where he considers the express impossibility, in this instance of recognising the vase in the above image, if one had not already encountered the ‘signified’ of the vase in real life- or had another word for the same concept. His exposition in “On Certainty” provides the clearest illustration of this phenomenon:

18. "I know" often means: I have the proper grounds for my statement. So if the other person is acquainted with the language-game, he would admit that I know. The other, if he is acquainted with the language- game, must be able to imagine how one may know something of the kind. (Wittgenstein, 1991, 141)

When something is said to be real, but exists outside of the realms of common experience, as something with which we are not conversant or otherwise implicated, what are we to do? While certainly a disconcerting experience, and one which anthropologists occasionally employ at the outset of their monographs and ethnographs, the latent notion is that, given time, the context will become familiar to us. I shall illustrate this with reference to the idea that a novel or a stage *can* signify a world even if it is one with which we are not conversant. This usually involves a suspension or deferral of disbelief on the part of the reader/observer. This is an immensely important practice in the observation of symbolic production as well as how information is “transmitted”. I believe this idea is best illustrated in Shakespeare’s Henry V:

“.....But pardon, Gentles all:
The flat unraysed spirits, that hath dar’d
On this unworthy Scaffold, to bring forth
So great an Object. Can this Cock-Pit hold
The Vastie fields of France? Or can we cramme
Within this Wooden O, the very Caskes
That did affright the Ayre of Agincourt?” (Henry V, Lines 8-14)

The finite stage or the numerous pages of a novel, then, can encompass a much larger space than the sum of its parts. This can only be said to be the case if symbols are entertained, otherwise the stage is just a stage and the actors merely actors. In this way we symbolically supplement the appresentational for the representational. Our understanding is supplemented by the stagecraft or novelist once we concede, in a sense, our lack of familiarity with the reductive contentions of ‘fiction solely’ or ‘play actor’¹¹.

This interpretive/critical venture is demonstrated in the section which follows by establishing comparisons between anthropology and literary criticism¹².

Understanding something irreducible: Kafka and his ‘metamorphosis’

It is here that I wish to turn my gaze upon the work of Franz Kafka. I want to demonstrate how Kafka removes the security of being able to compare X to Y (the possibility of drawing any comparison of any kind in his work *at all*) and how this idea once more delimits the speculations of readers and critics alike. His short story *The Metamorphosis* is said to be expressly *not* a metaphor. Symbols are removed from the equation and we are presented with something that *must* be literal. Deleuze writes:

Since things are as they are (“it is as it is, it is as it is,” a formula dear to Kafka, marker of a state of facts) he will abandon sense, render it no more implicit¹³: he will retain only the skeleton of sense, or a paper cut-out¹⁴.

All of our attempts to “understand” a text until now have involved reducing or relating some facet or feature of it to something else (The stage *is* the world etc.) It is this idea that I find has the closest semblance to the anthropological concern of

¹¹ A similar frustration with the literal-minded approach to these matters is also expressed in Roland Barthes ‘Mythologies’ (1972) where Barthes staunchly insists that while wrestling is indeed staged, in a sense, that this in no way invalidates the theatricality and showmanship of the performance.

¹² Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari are very seldom thought of as being literary critics first and foremost. They are only employed here in such a manner due to the author’s reliance on their critique of Kafka and what they refer to as ‘Minor Literature’ generally.

¹³ My interpretation of this sentence is: render it no longer implicit: where it would be understood that things are as they are and that is all. There is no definite hidden meaning just as there is no, singular, overt meaning.

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari “Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature” Page 20-21

“epistemological hypochondria”¹⁵. In the so-called poststructuralist age we can no longer deduce something about the Other through some arbitrary facet or fact of their existence (from their cranial measurements for instance). I still believe that is quite untenable to say that *all* the information gleaned by understanding *Metamorphosis* qua Metaphor is immaterial; but that it is just not in cohesion with the authorial intent. It might be resigned to an insoluble perspective-based difference between author and reader.

It is somewhat contradictory, however, of Deleuze and Guattari to propound that while there should be no attempts to absolutize the text (as they show in their venomous attack on the Freudianization of literature¹⁶) and then to go on to say that it is expressly *not* a metaphor. A move of this kind would be akin to our contending that the optical illusion displayed, *infra*, is both *not* an illusion and *not* two faces staring at one another. We have reached, therefore, insoluble dimension of representation. Do we propound and postulate our own explanations, which are based on our individual perspective, as postulated here or do we follow the inclination of the author in order to find the latent truth within the text?

The report to an Academy is the only story by Kafka I have studied that directly confronts the idea of reconciling subjective experience to an academic-type context. Kafka presents us with a narrator who claims that he has spent some time as a chimp. To the study of the so-called hard-sciences (which are so grounded in the demonstrable and the factual) the idea is laughable- akin to Hawking scoffing at Wittgenstein for suggesting the primacy of language over philosophical-scientific enquiry. The reason for this is quite simple, that it has never occurred in recorded history. It must be reduced to a falsehood, a dream perhaps or even a psychotic delusion. The reader can resign, if he or she is so-minded (or if that be their perspective upon the case), this tenet to the realm of metaphor. This should not retard speculation or understanding absolutely; but rather it refocuses it as I have said already in the instance in the *Metamorphosis*. What then can Anthropologists, for comparison's sake, make of the suggestion that K was a monkey? The dichotomy of subjective experience/existence and the presence of the absurd immediately strike us. However it is simply inexcusable for us to dismiss this simply to the realm of fantasy. We cannot dismiss this evidence out of hand, nor is it our place to molest the story by subsuming it under some other theoretical model that serves only to suffocate it.

In the annals of Anthropology this suffocation or repression is too frequently the case; the one example I will employ in evidence is that of Evans-Pritchard's frustration at having to converse with the “Nuer” in terms that made sense only to his perspective and contextually-informed epistemology. He writes:

¹⁵ A terms employed by Adam Kuper to describe the sense of trembling encountered when anthropologists attempt posit broader proofs on our microcontextual data and of which an excellent critique can be found in Wilson, 2004.

¹⁶ In “An Exaggerated Oedipus” and “One or Several Wolves”, both contained in Deleuze and Guattari, 1988

I defy the most patient ethnologist to make headway against this kind of opposition. One is just driven crazy by it. Indeed, after a few weeks of associating solely with Nuer one displays, if the pun be allowed, the most evident symptoms of “Nuerosis.”¹⁷ (Cited and discussed in Peacock, 1986, 64)

The rupture between the kind of validity with which Evans-Pritchard is conversant and the kind held by his informant to Evans-Pritchard’s mind, so vast as to require a pathological mediator to separate what is factual from what is nonsense. Kafka also takes this notion to task by scrutinising what form that transmission of narrative would take between subjects and perspectives, between man and monkey. It is written:

Of course what I felt then, in ape fashion, I can now only represent in human terms, and misrepresent it therefore; but even if I can no longer reach back to the old ape-truth, this does at least lie in the direction I have indicated, of that there is no doubt.¹⁸

We are caught in a kind of double-bind, that is to say that the becoming-monkey cannot represent concisely what he has experienced and we do not know whether the conditions for this state of affairs that he presents us with are possible at all. But we can suspend our disbelief¹⁹, as is so frequently required of us in engaging literature.

Is Kafka presenting us with a new brand of irreconcilable Other or is he simply underlining this in relation to the present crisis of representation generally? Is it possible that the author is suggesting that we cannot speculate upon the very foundation of consciousness of being? What I mean is how can I suggest that Monkeys don’t have the equivalent of consciousness? I have no evidence to the contrary- It is unverifiable in hard-factual terms. Deleuze tries to reconcile this idea, without totalising it, to the idea of a becoming-animal. He writes:

The act of becoming is a capturing, a possession, a plus-value, but never a reproduction or an imitation. “[T]here was no attraction for me in imitating human beings; I imitated them because I needed a way out, and for no other reason,” In fact, the animal captured by the man finds itself deterritorialized by human force, as the whole of the beginning of “A Report” tells us. But, in turn, the deterritorialized animal force precipitates and intensifies the

¹⁷ Another excellent analysis of Evans-Pritchard’s interpretation can be found in “On Authorial Authority” by Robert Paine (1989) which appears in *Culture IX* (2) 39-47. Parallels could also be drawn between the Naiveté (or alleged naiveté) under which Margaret Mead worked, according to Derek Freeman (1983). This example has not been opted for due to the perspective that Freeman adopts, namely that of an alleged misogyny.

¹⁸ Franz Kafka: “Report to an Academy”: Pages 189-190

¹⁹ The ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ is generally thought of as a function of poetic or literary analysis. I employ it here simply as an entry point into engaging with writing that defies one’s immediate understanding of logic and metaphysics. This is in a manner similar to Tolkien (I would like to thank my anonymous reviewer for drawing this to my attention. See: http://bjorn.kiev.ua/librae/Tolkien/Tolkien_On_Fairy_Stories.htm)

deterritorialization of the deterritorializing human force (if we can express it that way).²⁰

What I believe is being explained here is that the animal and the man have formed a kind of deterritorialized dialogic, where the pair start to emulate one another as a sort of reciprocal bond. The pair becomes intrigued with one other for their respective, mutually beneficial reasons, which are “escape” and a pseudoscientific intrigue (K, Kafka’s protagonist, drinks the ‘hated-liquor’ as the man attempted to “solve the riddle of my being”²¹). Kafka’s point, from our perspective at least, and it may not marry exactly with that of the reader’s, is that animals, like man, is not a bound category. The thing most important to stress in all of this is that the connection is only perspective-informed. Levi-Strauss in “The Savage Mind” (1972), and in ‘Totemism’, devotes a great deal of critical attention to this concern. The author attempts to “solve” the testimony of a group of tribesmen who claims that they *are* animals. He hypothesizes that these animals are, rather than being “good” to emulate, are useful in disseminating and reconciling differences between various tribes. I do not wish to go into too much depth on the matter but suffice it to say that Levi-Strauss convincingly demonstrates that a totally alien thought-schema (first consigned to be illustrative of hunger as prime urge and therefore primitiveness) can be made intelligible to the ‘occidental’ intellect, but without totally explaining it²². In effect he takes an absolute character i.e. savage/primitive and “makes” him intelligent. Still, like as in Kafka, something is lost in translation when we attempt to represent an ape-truth to men²³ and vice-versa.

Throughout this section I have made reference to anthropological constructions, even though it may appear to be somewhat broad, I will here attempt to reconcile these ideas. Kafka has placed crises in our path, which have been taken up by poststructuralist theorists such as Derrida and as examined in Deleuze and Guattari. How can anthropology and ethnography uniquely serve to overcome this stumbling block? How can we attempt to form a dialogic between our perspective-informed selves and the Other?

Metamorphosis, metaphor and judgment

One strength, among many, which ethnography possesses is that it is an encounter at grass-roots level which extends to the Other a kind of dialogical olive-branch. It involves the verification and re-verification of the phenomena which are included in the final ethnographic document which are drawn from speculations concerning the culture being written about. In the instances of Evans-Pritchard and Levi-Strauss we see a divergence, with respect to method, emerging. We can consign/reduce/make absolutes of people by diagnosing them as irreconcilable Other (they are Nuer-otic) in the first instance. We can

²⁰ Ibid, Page 13-14

²¹ Ibid, Page 192

²² While interesting food for thought, this is meant in no way to do an injustice to the efforts taken in the anthropological endeavour to describe and explain phenomena as they are in context

²³ This turn of phrase is in no way meant to serve as a kind of incendiary form of “primitive”-bashing

also strive to convey something larger in scope than our understanding allows (that animals are good to think- that is that they are good to think *in terms of*- which is Levi-Strauss's conclusion) which is a possible reading and summary of Kafka's *Report to an academy* with which Deleuze and Guattari may be satisfied. We can say of a character in a play that he is X, and X alone or we can form a dialogue with a character leading often to more questions than answers (Is he a historical figure? Is he comparable to me?). Inherent to this process though is a projection of understanding, that understanding is something which at one time we can possess (be familiar with, building upon Wittgenstein's phrasing slightly) and is something we can extend to Others. It has been contending that if the representation is bracketed or reduced it can only be determined in its literal capacity. There are many more capacities besides. One must allow the author and the Other sufficient space to convince and persuade us that something is indicative of something else, which is usually larger in scope than ourselves. I hope I have argued convincingly that this is the case.

This synthesis has its problems in its turn which I have tried to incorporate in the entire course of this section. What if someone's perspective-informed conclusion is that X is Y? What are we to say to the people who believe that *The Metamorphosis* is a metaphor? I cannot denounce these endeavours without being a hypocrite (who am I to disabuse someone of the contention that metamorphosis is a metaphor). Language, broadly stated, is almost completely dependent on linguistic fixity, so that a consensus can be built around language. What are we to say to the ethnographer, who without forming a dialogue with his data, contends that it (here subjective accounts of phenomena) are themselves social facts? The difficulties in representation continuously re-state themselves. The problem of speculating *anything* is still at issue. My suggestion is an incremental one, but I contend, an important one. We must allow the Author and the Other the space to express themselves, which is contingent upon our exposure and facilitation in imaginative understanding, and even if their perspective is unintelligible we cannot molest and refigure these narrations within a grand narrative which serves to destroy a dialogue, replacing it merely with a definite and singular answer.

The preoccupation of having one's testimony collapsed and reified is also dealt with in Kafka's literature through the character of Georg Bendemann. The difficulty and problems of making assumptions on the part of the Other by whom, the audience or the author (in this instance the lead characters father) is teased out in relation to the ascription of the category of infirmed old man, a judgment we are unsure the young Georg is fit to pass. In "*The Judgment*" we see Georg visiting his father to inform him of a meeting with a friend of his from St. Petersburg. This is an important encounter because Georg at first assumes that his Father has forgotten their encounter (which is indicative of addle-mindedness- a kind of static category Georg is trying to fit his father into). Kafka describes it as a strange attempt on the son's part to entertain and placate his father, the expected attitude when caring for the elderly. This is coupled with his father's dementia which is indicated by his forgetfulness. Kafka writes Georg's pleas to his father:

It's a trivial thing, it's hardly worth mentioning, so don't lie to me. Have you really got a friend in St. Petersburg? Georg rose to his feet in embarrassment. "Never mind my friends. A thousand friends can't take the place of my Father. Do you know that I think? You're not looking after yourself properly. But age needs to be treated with care. (1992, 42)

This kind of strange logic is prevalent in the text. We discover eventually that it is not Georg at all who has this contact in St. Petersburg when his Father reveals that he's been consulting in secret with him to detail information concerning Georg in a manner which is "A thousand times better". It is the elderly father who has subverted the authority of the son by claiming it is not he who has the friend at all. The judgments made by the son are thus invalidated and he is removed from his authorial position by the least likely source. This is another way in which Kafka subverts 'Freudianization' by supposing a kind of oppositional state in the desire of the father to destroy the son, as we observe at the close of the story. Georg's testimony of friends never taking the place of the Father also becomes all the more insidious upon the realization that the Father has taken Georg's friend- relayed the information "a thousand times better" and will soon cause the son to destroy himself.

This is an example on Kafka's part (in my assessment) to illustrate the problems in Freudianization (which is discussed in Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) but also to intra-human speculation and comparison more generally. Remember previously that Kafka has only tried to obfuscate metaphor and speculation by introducing becoming-animal creatures. Here we have only an ageing father and a judgmental and abreactive son. The complexities of divining the meaning behind the work, the author's intention, is no easier than it is in "Metamorphosis" but an understanding concerning the invalidity of judgment is certainly evident in the text.

This has been taken, in anthropology at least, to mean that there is no single-truth and no absolute need be placed over human beings because such absolutes are usually unsuitable to detail each nuance of every single individual's radically different daily lives. One party cannot be privileged over another or over an Other. What I mean here is that the ethnographer cannot be given a *carte blanche* with which he/she can analyse "culture", leaving individuals out of the equation because they do not enunciate cultural practices in same way the ethnographer does. This is both ill-advised and, if we agree with the Wittgensteinian notion of reliance on the objects with which we are already familiar, rather impossible.

This exercise is in no way meant to be the case for every branch of literature or to every branch of philosophical thought but rather in analysing the literature of Kafka, with reference to Deleuze and Guattari's literary/philosophical exegesis. We can, however, begin to see how much crossover there is between anthropology and literature, especially considering that anthropologists have already 'crossed over' if we accept the claim that Ethnography is, at its basest level, a form of literature, a genre, in its understandings of meanings, metaphors and allegory as well as "plain-spoken truths"²⁴.

²⁴ James Clifford "Partial Truths" in "Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography" Page 5

To return to Gellner's criticism though, do we not, by employing comparisons to literature, a discipline of which anthropology is supposedly a subset, render the pursuit of anthropology invalid? This final question is addressed in relation to a long overdue response to Derrida's criticism of Levi-Strauss and is followed by an outline on the way in which refiguring understanding might augment our capacity to pursue ethnography.

Derrida, deconstruction and the emergence of Anthropology as a pursuit of 'bothness'

Let us begin, then, by re-examining the exact criticism that Derrida levels against the discipline of structural anthropology in "Structure, Sign and Play in the discourses of the Human sciences" (Derrida, 2004 (1967)). Derrida's work is a sustained critique of classical structuralist thought²⁵ through the prism of one notion (that of incest) which cannot be consigned to either of the structural (and therefore intelligible) binaries of nature or culture. Is incest, therefore a fully natural phenomenon (existing in nature, not-regulated) or is it a cultural phenomenon (requiring restrictions and punishments for those who practice it):

[Lévi-Strauss] begins from his axiom or definition: that which is *universal* and spontaneous and not dependant on any particular culture or any determinate norm, belongs to nature. Inversely, that which depends upon a system of norms regulating society and therefore is capable of *varying* from one social structure to another, belongs to culture. [The scandal] which no longer tolerates the nature/culture opposition he has accepted, something which *simultaneously* seems to require the predicates of nature and culture. The scandal is the *incest prohibition*. The incest prohibition is universal, in the sense that one could call it natural. But it is also a prohibition, a system of norms and interdicts; in this sense one could call it cultural. (1967, 357 Emphasis in Original)

Derrida's observation is here well illustrated and evidenced. The criticism rendered here though, and that which has been traced throughout this paper, is the specific role adopted not by nature/culture (his distinction is quite clear) but between variation and simultaneity (the specific vs. universal). Derrida not only mentions that this simultaneity (evidenced by the notion that incest is *both* cultural and natural) is a trend which runs throughout, not only anthropology, but also the social sciences generally, rendering the efforts made in discerning between perspectives (in Figure 1) irreconcilable, duplicitous and problematic:

There are more than enough indications today to suggest that we might perceive that these two interpretations of interpretation- which are absolutely irreconcilable even if we live them simultaneously and reconcile them in an obscure economy- together share the field which we call, in such a problematic fashion, the social sciences (Ibid, 370).

²⁵ The object of his criticism here can be said to be Levi-Strauss's or Mary Douglas's thought and not, say, Roman Jakobson or Roland Barthes.

What is important to emphasise is the pivotal role that Derrida's work has played in the construction of poststructural anthropology, but this importance was also contingent on the comparative approach it adopts, Derrida is by no stretch of the imagination an anthropologist. My rebuttal is that anthropology, as a social science or as a humanist art form, relies heavily on the notions of 'bothness' and simultaneity that they come to occupy the same spatio-temporal arena. Anthropology eludes a standard definition, not simply because it has been applied in a broad multitude of contexts, as stated at the outset, but because it attempts to approximate and collect as many diffuse notions as possible. I shall give a summary of the manner in which this is so concerning the definition of our discipline and the methodology which it employs.

[Anthropology] is less a subject matter than a bond between subject matters. It is in part history, part literature; in part natural science, part social science; it strives to study men both from within and without; it represents both a manner of looking at man and a vision of man-the most scientific of the humanities, the most humanist of sciences. (Wolf, 1964, 88)²⁶

Anthropological epistemology, if the (oft)quoted tract above is the case, must approximate the humanities and the social sciences proper in a manner which does not incur the same duplicity of sentiment that the proscription of the incest taboo to both nature and culture does. A similar conjecture is exemplified in examining the manner in which anthropologists conduct their research namely 'Participant-observation'. The method here appears more immediately as an approximation of a simultaneity than the definition of anthropology itself does. Here we require the notion that the methodology be bound to a continuum owing in large part to the fact that it is an impossible feat, like thinking of the word 'bank' in both senses, or more, of the word simultaneously²⁷. That is not to say that approximating either notion in their full capacity of 'bothness' is impossible, but rather that they might be considered as continuums along which we can rate our epistemological progress.

Although the analogy might appear trite or facetious, we return to the element of binary opposition in the example of the silhouettes or lamp. I would contend that the exact same perception-informed, evidentiary-supported interpretive claim (whether lamp or silhouette) is, broadly speaking, made of the same 'stuff'. Can the image be rendered in terms of a singularity? For our purposes, and for those of anthropology generally, this does not need to be executed- the reduction of one in terms of the other, which usually involves the strict negation of one in terms of the other²⁸.

Let us return then to the notion that if we can allow for the role of a certain latitude regarding the appresentational and the representational in relation the theatre (the two become indistinguishable) why might we not be able to do the same by

²⁶ This citation has become almost apocryphal over time and is often attributed to the anthropologist Alfred Louis Kroeber.

²⁷ This example is borrowed from Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigation"

²⁸ This is a classically structuralist endeavour to determine Saussure and Douglas notions of 'meaningful difference' and 'matter out of place' respectively.

eschewing the immediacy of having to collapse simultaneity. What is presented might be mediated, in the development of this final claim, with reference to Foucault's exposition on 'heterotopias':

The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. Thus it is that the theatre brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another, thus it is that the cinema is a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three dimensional space.²⁹

Why then do we have difficulty discerning epistemological duality at a two-dimensional level in this example? Our difficulty derives from the fact that we are a subset of that which we study,³⁰ coupled more generally with the fact that an inductive participant-observational method cannot be enacted in this regard. Our being a subject, among other subjects and intersubjects only serves to bring to light the effort towards a holism, an accurate, non-reductive understanding of our fellow beings. The possibility of this being achieved is similar in vein to the exercise involved in determining the simultaneities outlined herein (better thought of as continua: participant-observation, nature-culture and subject-object). Anthropological studies of culture, whose examiners are themselves always-already inextricably involved therein, can succeed if we examine it in terms not of its discernability but in its *non-impossibility*. This simultaneity, I contend, will and can exist in a non-circumspect and clichéd way only if anthropology extends to the subject, from itself, the entertainment of non-impossible states of affairs. It is in this way that our epistemologies and presuppositions will lend themselves to understanding, and not the delimitation of the social field. Understanding is something we possess (as a presupposed condition of intersubjective involvement) but it is also something we can project onto others, lend to them, and I hope to demonstrate this by taking recourse to literature one final time.

The final vignette I wish to outline is that of David Foster Wallace's Kenyon Commencement speech of 2005. Here Wallace outlines the relation between perspective and understanding (in a manner which Wittgenstein fails to acknowledge; that our being conversant in something does not determine the manner in which I am conversant with it, that is how I relate and re-examine it, over time. Wallace, speaking to college graduates on the best manner in which the application of a degree in the arts might be applied, points directly to the perspective we can elect to adopt and the understanding we can extend to other subjects:

But most days, if you're aware enough to give yourself a choice, you can choose to look differently at this fat, dead-eyed, over-made-up lady who just screamed at her kid in the checkout line. Maybe she's not usually like this. Maybe she's been up three straight nights holding the hand of a husband who

²⁹ Michel Foucault "Of Other Spaces" Page 25

³⁰ What is meant here is that Inter- and Intrasubjective perspectives are employed.

is dying of bone cancer. Or maybe this very lady is the low-wage clerk at the motor vehicle department, who just yesterday helped your spouse resolve a horrific, infuriating, red-tape problem through some small act of bureaucratic kindness. Of course, none of this is likely, but it's also not impossible. (2009)³¹

This contention serves here to acknowledge the strand of understanding mentioned elsewhere, that of the adoption and entertainment of non-impossible states of affairs; a kind of perspective switching, from faces facing one another to vase and back, whose acknowledgment can only be yielded through comparison. Foster Wallace's lesson here is akin to Weber's notion of 'Verstehen' (Weber, 1922 [1977], pg 390), as a kind of 'mutual understanding' as something which can be both possessed and given to others. We enact 'verstehen' by empathically presupposing something on the others part which derives from a selfless, fictional construct. It is only once we have come to acknowledge the presence of multiple perspectives that we can adopt those perspectives and employ them in a manner which serves to expand the field of enquiry, rather than delimiting it.

Conclusion(s): in-roads to a non-dualistic mode of understanding

This work has attempted to outline the persistence of a kind of dualism, here argued as simultaneity which requires that the reader be conversant in the signs about which the author is discussing (evidenced in Wittgenstein) and which often go un-assumed and uncritiqued in anthropology (do we posit the method of participant-observation along a continuum or do we contend that a simultaneity of viewpoints is both a possibility and preferable?). The presence of simultaneity (strictly opposed, in Derrida's critique, to a kind of structuralism in the Saussurean and Levi-Straussian sense where dichotomous relations sustain a kind of differentiation) has not waned in anthropological discourse, despite the death knell having been rung on structural anthropology. The best way in which anthropologists can advance a paradigm which is conducive to yielding an understanding, or more accurately an understanding to be understood, is by beginning from a point which does not seek to flesh out 'bothness', render one perspective with respect to another, in the reduction but rather to be vigilant about the employment of understandings which advocate an impossible position- the simultaneous adoption of two (or more) perspectives.

Anthropology's great strength lies in its receptivity to alterity (both theoretical and abstract but also in the applied interpersonal conducting of fieldwork) and in its ability to add a contextual, experiential and intersubjective depth of perspectives which are supported by in-field evidence. Its epistemology, and there is doubtless more than just one, is contingent on this variety of exteriority and does not seek to occupy dominion over one strict delineation. We have seen an example of the maintenance of

³¹ This was republished as "This is This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life" (2009). The transcript of the talk itself is available in its entirety here: <http://moreintelligentlife.com/story/david-foster-wallace-in-his-own-words> (Accessed 22/09/2012).

this dominion in Hawking. Interdisciplinarity is difficult to perform while maintaining equilibrium and paying due attention to multiple perspectives and simultaneity might be better thought of as an incitement and an invitation to adopt other perspectives. 'Bothness' is a position which requires that we offer our own understanding to the application of understanding the other. Understanding the other, even in a supplemental manner and in a partial or incomplete fashion, we might say, is not impossible.

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