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## **JASO-online**

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## INTRODUCTION: ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE MUTUALIZING UTOPIA

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### Introduction

In 1937, in between the two World Wars (see Sarró, this issue), the British philosopher and author Olaf Stapledon published *Star Maker*, a remarkable account that was to become, post facto, one of the first staples of modern science fiction. In the book, the unnamed protagonist describes his involuntary travel through interstellar space until he arrives on the planet ‘Other Earth’, inhabited by the *other men*, a quasi-human race that is different yet in many ways very similar to earth’s own.

The protagonist chooses to stay on this planet and to try and ‘understand’ it. Having experienced a process of disembodiment, he learns to inhabit the locals’ bodies in order to see and feel through them. It is a long and complicated process:

I must have spent several years on the Other Earth, a period far longer than I had intended when I first encountered one of its peasants trudging through the fields. Often I longed to be at home again. I used to wonder with painful anxiety how those dear to me were faring, and what changes I should discover if I were ever to return.

Through these words, the protagonist confesses his dual and conflicted frame of mind, in which he simultaneously longs for his familiar ground while being attracted by the discovery of new worlds. The process is not entirely intentional, and is affected by the interpersonal character of his experience. This occurs because of his relationship with one inhabitant of Other Earth: Bvalltu, the peasant.

Bvalltu was partly responsible for my long spell on the Other Earth. He would not hear of my leaving till we had each attained a real understanding of the other’s world. (...) I had come to feel a very strong friendship with him. In the early days of our partnership there had sometimes been strains. Though we were both civilized human beings, who tried always to behave with courtesy and generosity, our extreme intimacy did sometimes fatigue us. (...) In time each of us came to feel that to taste

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the flavour of life in isolation from the other was to miss half its richness and subtlety.

Stapledon's protagonist, although sojourning in a planet millions of miles away from Earth, struggles to identify with his interlocutor, creating a space of intimacy and mutual recognition, aware that this is a process that can only occur within a mutualizing framework in which commonality is established by identifying each one's 'humanity'.

Stapledon's *Star Maker* is commonly read as a novel that critically addresses moral and philosophical themes such as the life, growth and decay of civilization and the particular insignificance of humanity in the universe. However, it is remarkably anthropological in the way it develops a distanced, reflexive gaze unto problems of social life and resorts to ethnographic experience (not just method) in order to present a moralizing philosophical argument concerning human diversity.

Due to its optimistic description of 'galactic utopias' as expressions of 'good community' in Chapter 9, *Star Maker* has also been referred to as one of the cornerstones of the utopian literary genre (e.g. García Landa 2002), also populated by well-known oeuvres such as H.G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia* (1905), B.F. Skinner's *Walden Two* (1948) or Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974); or the dystopian counterpart *1984* (1949) by George Orwell, for instance. Fredric Jameson in fact refers to Stapledon as 'the Fourier of Science Fiction' (2005: 124) by analogy with the nineteenth-century French philosopher known for his utopian socialist proposals. Thus what is interesting for us is the fact that an 'ethnographic novel' becomes an illustration of utopian desire.

Here we propose to discuss the ethnographic endeavour as a method and experience that relies upon an expectation of mutuality—preliminarily defined an ideal of empathy and egalitarian reciprocity—which in turn has ethical, historical, political and epistemological implications. One such implication is the highlighting of a specific strain in anthropology: its utopian character (see Graeber 2004). This trait reveals itself in multiple fashions: in the moral, ethical and political implications of the anthropologist and his work; in the epistemological ambition to write ethnography as an attempt to 'do good' with our knowledge; and finally, in the egalitarian expectations and assumptions that we entertain in the process of fieldwork, which may or may not be realized.

Utopia and ethnography thus share a space of commonality, and it is our intention to explore some of the multiple dimensions of this connection in this special issue.<sup>3</sup> We will first explore the historical and theoretical dimensions of this connection, and then speculate on the potential for considering ethnographic fieldwork through a utopian perspective.

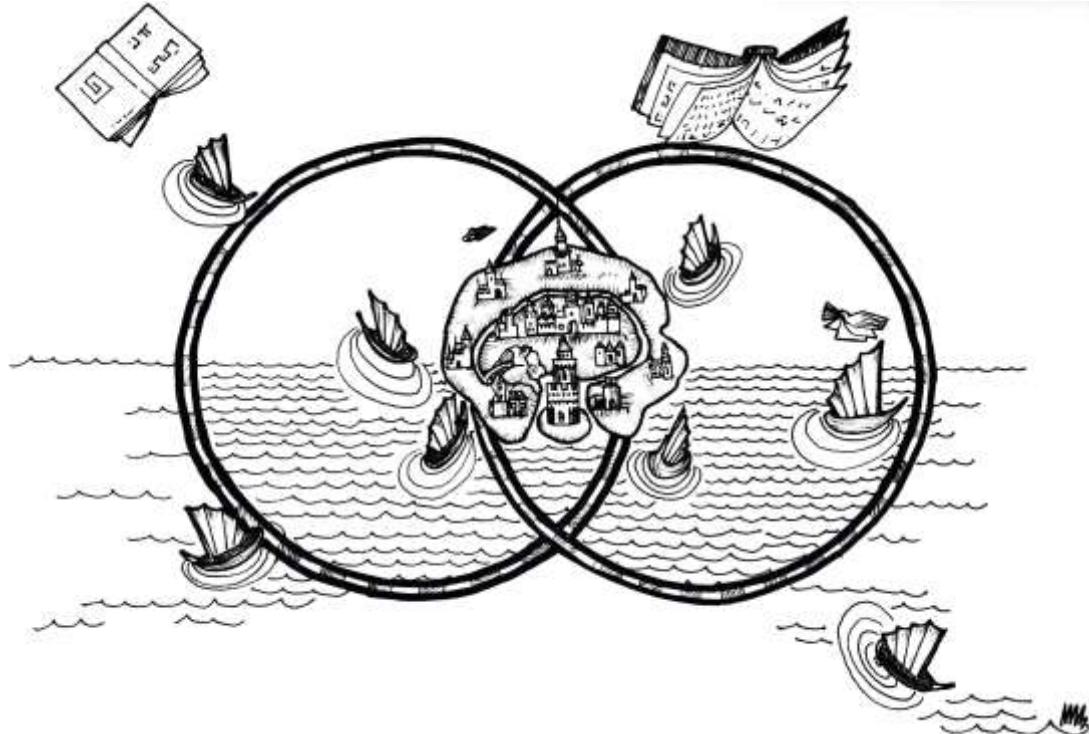


Figure 1. *Ethnography and Utopia*. By Monir Bestene (2016)

### The invention of new worlds

Ethnography and utopia can be said to share a common foundation: what we can call the ‘journey of invention’. On the one hand, as we have discussed elsewhere (Maskens and Blanes 2013), the practice of ethnography implies an act of (physical, geographical, mental, symbolic) separation from the ordinary in order to motivate a concomitant process of reflection and self-reflection. This process of separation is in itself generative, creating a space for interaction in the everyday that is ultimately an alteration of an already unstable social life (Greenhouse 2002). From this perspective, ethnography replicates the ‘utopian move’. In 1516 Thomas More coined the concept

<sup>3</sup> This is part of a more ambitious project in which we are attempting to constitute an anthropological debate on utopia through its different dimensions – methodological, ethical, political, and heuristic. We would like to thank Dr Ramon Sarró for his continuous inspiration in respect of this project.

of utopia to name an island allegedly discovered in the New World by Hythloday, the central character in his masterpiece.<sup>4</sup> Playing with Greek etymology, More devised the island of Utopia, the ‘perfect society’, as both an ‘ideal’ (eu-) and ‘non-existent’ (ou-) place (-topos). In the narrative, Hythloday discovered the island in the course of a fourth journey, having accompanied Amerigo Vespucci on three previous journeys. A friend, Peter Giles, introduced Hythloday to More in the following terms, a quasi-ethnographer: ‘For there is no mortal alive today who can give more information about unknown peoples and lands, and I know that you are very eager to hear about them’ (2014: 11).

More was ultimately intrigued and attracted to what was then a novelty: the discovery of the ‘New World’, subsequently known in Europe as the Americas,<sup>5</sup> which was informed by a historical moment of transformation. In Europe, the shaping of new geographies and the concomitant fascination for unknown countries, lands and societies was at its height, shaping the desire for encounters in many European individuals. Thomas More wrote his fiction a few years after Christopher Columbus initiated the Spanish colonization of the ‘New World’, and, as several specialists have recognized (e.g. Davis 2000), his work has been profoundly influenced by the geographical redefinitions motivated by the ‘discovery’ of the New World on behalf of European cultures (see e.g. Mann 2011). Besides the genre inaugurated by Thomas More, this ‘discovery’ opened the way to what Michel de Certeau qualified as a ‘conquering mode’ of writing where the *nuova terra* of America appeared as an unknown body – a blank, ‘savage’ page ready to host the Western will of expansion and civilization written unto it (1988: xxv-xxvi).

In what could be called the ‘pre-history’ of anthropology, this age of geographical reconfiguration also constituted a crucial period of self-questioning about identity and alterity in Europe. Travel books by explorers and other adventurers circulated and stimulated the imagination of non-traveller Europeans. One example

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<sup>4</sup> As we also note below, More’s book is also a pioneering oeuvre in its production of a narrative conjunction of fact and fiction, using real, historical figures and events to frame his fictional narrative.

<sup>5</sup> In 1515 Henry VIII sent More to Flanders, a place of trade and circulation, where he heard exotic narratives about other people living differently, for example, disregarding gold and individual property. There he read the *Quattuor Americi Vespuccii Navigationes*, printed in 1505, in which Amerigo Vespucci described the four voyages he made to the *Mundus Novus* (in 1497, 1499, 1501 and 1503) in letters to friends in Italy (Davis 2000; Lacroix 2004).

that is relevant to our discipline can be cited: Bartolomé de Las Casas' famed *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (first published in 1552), in which a morally charged, accusing proto-ethnography of the Spanish colonization in the Antilles and La Hispaniola is given (see also Whitehead 2011). But before Las Casas, oeuvres such as Ibn Khaldun's famous *Muqaddimah* (1377), part of his attempt to conduct a comparative worldwide civilizational history (*Kitab al-Ibar*), also acted as imaginative sources for sociological and philosophical thought. In such cases, discoveries of 'other' societies encouraged wild and creative imaginations concerning the 'marvels of the world', in similar fashion to the curiosity stimulated by Marco Polo's travel diaries in the fourteenth century, which provoked equal doses of exoticisms and orientalisms. Such accounts are, from a contemporary anthropological perspective, necessarily problematic in their bias (see Clifford 1983), but they also spurred a will to approach and understand alterity, a form of empathy, as it were. This becomes particularly obvious in the work of Las Casas, a Dominican friar, for whom the description of the atrocities committed by the Spanish crown was the outcome of a recognition of humanity in the souls of the natives.

This sense of empathy, often described as a central exercise for the method of anthropology,<sup>6</sup> is also present in More's story:

And so he told us how, after the departure of Vespucci, he and his companions who had remained in the fort gradually began to win the good graces of the people of that land by encountering and speaking well of them, and then they started to interact with them not only with no danger but even on friendly terms, and finally they gained the affection and favour of some ruler, whose name and country escape me. He told how, through the generosity of the ruler, he and five of his companions were liberally supplied with provisions and ships on the sea and wagons on the land—together with a trustworthy guide who took them to other rulers to whom he heartily recommended them. (More 2014: 12-13)

Gentleness and friendship were the attributes chosen by More to describe the relationship these fictive Europeans maintained with the natives. Some four centuries later those same attributes would become a methodological injunction in the writings

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<sup>6</sup> As we have suggested elsewhere (Maskens and Blanes 2013), this notion of empathy does not necessarily imply a naïve acceptance of the myth of the 'good savage', but is rather an attempt to take complexity beyond the stereotype of the other, even when, for instance, we find ourselves having to work with people we disagree with.

of some grandfathers of the then emerging method of anthropology. Alfred Cort Haddon, for instance, in his President's Address to the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, highlighted that 'efficiency and economy as well as kindly and righteous dealing in the government of other peoples are the practical result of a sympathetic study of those peoples...' (1903: 20). In a context in which the notion of ethnographic fieldwork was still a mere hypothesis and expressions such as 'participant observation' were unheard of, William Rivers, in the revised version of the *Notes and Queries* of 1912, described the posture of the investigator who has to work with real 'sympathy and tact' with natives unaccustomed to Europeans in order to 'break their reticence' (1912: 125).

But obviously, it was with the establishment and legitimation of the empirical ethnographic method, with staple references that all students of anthropology have been asked to read—Bronislaw Malinowski's *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) and, to a lesser extent, Radcliffe Brown's *The Andaman Islanders* (1922)—that such concerns became central to anthropology's heuristic project, henceforth referred to as 'systematic fieldwork'. As we all read in Malinowski's introductory chapter, this systematic fieldwork included 'the feeling of hopelessness and despair after many obstinate but futile attempts' to get 'into real touch with the natives' (1922: 4), as well as attempts to go beyond the 'biased and pre-judged opinions inevitable in the average practical man, whether administrator, missionary, or trader' (*ibid.*: 5), in order to achieve the 'ethnographer's magic' (*ibid.*: 6; see also Stocking 1992).

After such pre-historical, precursory and foundational moments, the story of ethnographic empathy knows several famous twists and turns, the publication of Malinowski's diary (1967) being a case in point. It is not our goal to perform a systematic review of those histories (for that, see Stocking 1992; Krotz 2002). But we insist that the notions of empathy and connection remained central to the disciplinary ethics of anthropology. Here we feel somewhat obliged to return to Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*, in which we discover, among a myriad of recollections and connections, a puzzlement in the acknowledgement that 'our world has suddenly found itself to be too small for the people who live in it' (1961 [1955]: 23), mourning what Marshall Sahlins (1993: 7) described as the rusting of shanty towns in the tropics and the sadness provoked by the West's destructive hegemony both

economically and epistemologically. This sensation is precisely what David Berliner (2014) has recently described as ‘exonostalgia’, the vicarious sentiment of shame and longing for disappearing worlds and vanishing cultures that continues to pervade the way anthropologists conduct fieldwork and write anthropology.

We also observe other conceptualizations that engage, in one way or the other, with the problem of empathy. For instance, Eric Gable’s proposal (2011) for a ‘egalitarian anthropology’ that emerges from the ethnographic encounter, one in which ‘professional anthropology’ (what is produced in academia) is not authoritatively exclusive, but instead is on a par with what Gable calls ‘vernacular anthropology’, the cultural account that is produced by the ‘professionals’ own interlocutors. Here, ethnography emerges as a particularly powerful way of accounting for the competition of worldviews and the subsequent pluralist contexts in which they dwell. Gable thus sees ethnography as ‘part philosophy’—or theoretical assumption—and ‘part confession’—or personal implication (*ibid.*: 9). It is this particularity that allows for an explication of inequality, but also the generation of a space for ethical interlocution. Johannes Fabian (1995, 2001), Michael Carrithers (2005), Marshall Sahlins (2011) and João de Pina-Cabral (2013) have explored this problem in terms of ethnographic mutuality and its methodological, theoretical and ethical consequences. In such approaches, questions of co-responsibility emerge from the process of enticing and provocation (Pina-Cabral 2013: 261) that characterizes ethnographic presence, encounter and interlocution. However, as Fabian noted, the idea of ethnographic mutuality is in fact ‘the promise of nontrivial understanding’ (1995: 47), what João Pina-Cabral calls ‘shared revelations’ (2013: 258). This has found fruitful outcomes in ethnographic genres that have grounded themselves in the mutual alteration between ethnographer and interlocutor (see e.g. Behar 1993). Catherine Besteman, for instance, pushes this argument further when she exposes the emotional and interpersonal dimensions of the experience of mutuality in her debate on “ethnographic love” (2014). For her, the experience of mutuality is what makes anthropology unique: ‘the process of doing anthropology is the process of creating our own humanity. (...) It is a creative, imaginative process of becoming’ (*ibid.*: 268). The key point here, we feel, is that of the ‘promise’, which invokes ideas of ‘full’ understanding but is nevertheless subject to a process of communicative

indeterminacy that characterizes intersubjective relations, ethnographic (Duranti 2010; Fabian 2014) or otherwise.

We could thus argue that there is in such cases an ethical continuity where we discover what we could call a ‘desire’, a will for commonality and equality that is no different from what Samuel Moyn described concerning the story of Human Rights: a utopia (2010) which is an acknowledgement that—so the slogan goes—‘another world is possible’. But this ‘other world’ can be a product of a desire for transformation as well as of nostalgic longing. This statement, we concede, is obviously problematic from a political point of view. We contend that this politics is not only inescapable but should also be at the centre of ethnographic reflection.

### **Writing ethnography, writing utopia**

Our minds are flooded with images of places we have never been, yet still know, people we have never met, yet still know and in accordance with which we, to a considerable extent, live our lives. The feeling this gives that the world is small, tightly enclosed around itself, without openings to anywhere else, is almost incestuous, and although I knew this to be deeply untrue, since actually we know nothing about anything, still I could not escape it. The longing I always felt, which some days was so great it could hardly be controlled, had its source here. It was partly to relieve this feeling that I wrote, I wanted to open the world by writing, for myself, at the same time this is also what made me fail. The feeling that the future does not exist, that it is only more of the same, means that all utopias are meaningless. Literature has always been related to utopia, so when the utopia loses meaning, so does literature. (Karl Ove Knausgaard, *My Struggle*, Book 1)

We thus understand how utopia, as a model of relationality, incorporates notions of empathy and egalitarian interaction that are in many ways similar to the way ethnographic practice, as the cornerstone of the production of anthropological knowledge, has been configured since the very beginning.

But perhaps what is more striking in this connection between ethnography and utopia is the critical juncture of the genres of both imaginative *and* concrete, historically informed experience that envelope the process of writing. In the epigraph above by Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgaard—master, in his *My Struggle* volumes, of combining the description of the mundane with philosophical rumination

in ‘apparently autobiographical’ style—is, although invariably pessimistic in its rationale, a contemporary literary example of such a juncture. In the eponymous novel of Thomas More, the first part is devoted to a precise and detailed list of European social ills resulting from English feudalism and nascent capitalism, while Book 2 is often interpreted as an answer to the defects, vices and pleas of sixteenth-century England: the perfect state of *Utopia*, thought as a framework for the exercise of virtue, organized as such in order to discourage pride and erase competitive spirit.

Within this framework, as Laurent Loty (2011: 85) noted, the new genre inaugurated by More was above all a cunning textual apparatus. *Utopia*, as a genre, rests on three major operations: first, the writings of More ‘denounce’; then his words kindle political imagination; and finally, his text engages in a paradoxical and ambiguous statement, such as the idea that ‘there is a superior imagined world but this last doesn’t exist, it’s a fiction!’ (Loty 2011: 94-95). In any case, More plays with the gap between reality and fiction as a productive process. He never makes claims for absolute realism but constantly blurs the boundaries or clear oppositions between the Old and New Worlds, between Europe and Utopia, suggesting affinities and continuities between these real and imagined places (Davis 2000: 112). Indeed, Hythloday, unlike Vespucci, succeeds in establishing friendships with the local inhabitants, achieving another connection between the two worlds involved, another kind of integration and therefore another way of envisaging what was conceived as an alterity. This may be why, as we noted above, he is given unquestionable authority on behalf of Peter Giles. The upcoming journey, unlike the past ones, takes another direction; it is no longer a case of the absorption of the New World in the Old, in a reduced alterity, but the replenishment of the old by transformation (Lacroix 2004: 28). In this sense, and as Letonturier suggests (2013: 20), *Utopia* promoted both cultural relativism and contrasted ideologies of ethnocentrism by showing other ways of being, living or existing. Alterity, therefore, is no more about radical difference, but instead about mutuality, connection and comparison.

This particular utopian genre is thus profoundly political in essence, and the fictional form could ultimately be understood as a mechanism to downplay its critical drive, a way to avoid an evident transgression or direct confrontation between the writer of *Utopia* and the authority of his time. It is worth remembering here that

Thomas More was an important councillor to Henry VIII and Lord Chancellor from 1529 to 1532 and was thus part of the sphere of power.

In any case, this writing process is articulated above all else in order to produce effects on the readers:<sup>7</sup> awakening their utopian ‘impulse’, as Ernst Bloch (1989: 214) formulates it. More’s goal was thus to destabilize his audience, to push into action, to engage with multiple realities, to refuse political fatalism, to encourage the reader to take destiny in his or her hands. From this perspective, this genre must be considered a call for action. What was once described as ‘oblique writing’ (Lallemand and Ramos 2010) encourages the reader to apply a mental exercise to realities and its ‘lateral possibilities’ (Ruyer 1950) by questioning the apparent evidence of our surroundings, going outside the real or establishing a distance from the political realities as they emerge, and decentering oneself in the world because other humans live differently and we can learn from them. And finally, to appropriate a recent and actual formulation of the utopian impulse in radical politics, the question ‘What if another world were possible?’ illustrates how these mental operations stimulate the political imagination and conduce to the refusal of apathy and fatalism. The ‘utopian spirit’ could be considered as a medium for the emergence, appearance, spouting and eruption of potential changes and transformations.

Such intellectual configurations also gave an impulse to multiple and creative operations with temporalities: by ‘opening a breach in the thickness of the real’ (Ricoeur 1997: 405), the genre of utopia mobilized or destabilized temporal imaginations and produced a range of new concepts by putting present realities into effervescence. In 1857 Charles Renouvier coined the term *uchronie* (‘alternative history’) by suspending the historical past time in order to interrogate what we could have become if other options had been chosen (Lallemand and Ramos, 2010). Decades later, Michel Foucault stated that the heterotopias he detects within our society are often associated to *hétérochronies*, specific spaces where humans are in rupture with traditional linear times. Dystopia is also an imaginative operation on future time, a

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<sup>7</sup> At this stage, we may wonder why the commonsense understanding of utopia undermines this process and its effects on readers, associating it with a wider feature of ‘unrealism’. For Loty (2011: 91), we can find culprits in More’s contemporary political opponents – Christian philosophers who are carriers of an optimistic theology according to which God created an optimal world winning the semantic war, which was also a political one: it was neither possible nor desirable to transform society because it was perceived a godly creation.

kind a future (im)perfect based on a logic of alert: to anticipate the worst in order to avoid its realization (Claisse 2010). Therefore, this genre is ultimately a ‘revolt against history fixed in destiny’ (Godin 2000).

All those operations, potentially provoked by utopia as a literary genre, may also be provoked by the specific genre of ethnography. For the philosopher Patrice Maniglier, ‘the highest promise’ of anthropology is that of ‘returning us an image (of ourselves) in which we do not recognize ourselves’ (2005: 773-4; our translation). But simultaneously, as Jorge Luis Borges once suggested, every description of an ‘other’ carries the risk of transforming itself into a self-portrait (1983). There is no ultimate separation between the two movements. Ghassan Hage (2012) recently pointed out that critical thinking enables us to move outside of ourselves reflexively. For him, while the critical dimension of historical knowledge can ‘take us outside our ourselves’ in time and ‘permit [us] to compare ourselves with past versions of ourselves’, sociology allows us ‘to capture the existence of forces that exist outside of ourselves’, and psychoanalysis ‘takes us outside of where our ego dwells’, there is a further specificity to critical anthropological thought (2012: 287). The initial project of anthropology resides in the study of radical others, the study of human culture situated outside the dynamic of our capitalist modernity. If the primitivist anthropologists were thus first disoriented by the study of radical alterity, they began a process of re-orientation that widens the sphere of what is socially and culturally possible. This process of trying to understand others’ ways of living, being or existing results, according to Hage, in the idea that ‘we can be radically other than we are. (...) Anthropology works critically through a comparative act that constantly exposes us to the possibility of being other than what we are’ (*ibid.*: 6-7). Thus, the utopian assumption that ‘another world is possible’ finds concrete grounding in the anthropological idea that ‘others worlds do in fact exist’.

Ultimately, this recognition produces an effect, not only in how we do ethnography, but also in how we write it. After the postmodern turn of the 1980s and 1990s, when several anthropologists explicitly questioned the anthropological style of writing (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988; Geertz 1988), almost every anthropologist easily recognizes the fictional element in all cultural description. But long before that turn, in the French academy, Michel Leiris’s *L’Afrique Fantôme* (1934) had already opened up the field for an understanding of ethnographic writing

as genre and experiment, where analysis and self-analysis become part of one and the same effort (see Clark-Taoua 2002; see also Augé 1997). Such recognitions of the constructed and fabricated dimensions of the anthropological text helped erode the binary and mutually exclusive oppositions between the invented fiction and the ‘truth’ on which social science relies. The boundaries between fiction and ethnography were definitively blurred and gave birth to reflexive and intense debate in the discipline. Within this framework, Clifford (1988) talked about ethnography as an ‘emergent interdisciplinary phenomenon’ involved in diverse economies of truth situated between powerful systems of meaning. From this perspective, truth in ethnography is necessarily partial, like any other analytical/compositional tradition or art form, but it is also creative and generative.

Here, through the different case studies below, we propose to expose these dynamics of ethnographic mutuality, empathy, experiment and creation through a utopian lens.

### **Ethnographies of mutualizing utopias**

The case studies presented here reveal the range of possibilities that emerge from a utopian configuration of ethnography in respect of its relational potentiality, its egalitarian expectation and its creative dimension. Together, they explore three different moments of the ethnographic endeavour: from the inaugural expectation that marks the initial stages of our work to the serendipitous moments of intersubjective interaction, and finally the creative moment of writing.

In her ‘Snapchat essay’, Karen Waltorp assumes that mutuality is a prerequisite for building the kind of knowledge that people share with the anthropologist, often configured in the same transitory and experimental terms as a smartphone ‘snap’. Concerned with ethnographic practice as empathic relational mutuality in her fieldwork with young Muslim women in a social housing area in Copenhagen, Karen Waltorp presents us with a case study of what she calls a ‘moral laboratory’, that is, a collaborative and experimental form of ethnographic fieldwork in which ideas of reflexivity, creativity and mutuality are confronted with specific limits, from privacy to publicity, from intimacy to scrutiny, etc. In her case, the hyperbole emerges from the fact that the ‘moral laboratory’ is inherently ‘mediatic’, emerging from the

continuous and quotidian production of audiovisual statements on behalf of ethnographer and interlocutor alike.

In turn, Sergio Varela and José Luís Flores act as ‘inhabitants’ of a utopian world devised by their main interlocutor in their fieldwork among the indigenous Otomí community of central Mexico, the charismatic Don Pancho. In their case, their mutualist ethnographic expectations are confronted with their interlocutor’s own utopian understanding of anthropology and the academic endeavour as a way of producing knowledge—and, ultimately, ‘culture’. For Varela and Flores, Don Pancho shares the same kind of utopian drive towards resistance and protest as can anthropology (see e.g. Graeber 2004).

Rodolfo Maggio, in turn, addresses in critical fashion the problem of ‘writing ethnography’ as a utopian function that creatively allows for the inauguration of possibilities through the multiple expectations involved in the ethnographic endeavour, but also the recognition that our literary ambition towards perfection, coherence or wholeness is challenged by the open-endedness of the intersubjective and the ‘loose ends’ that mark the ethical dimensions of ethnographic practice. From this perspective, his contribution, nurtured by his ethnographic encounter with the Kwara’ae of the Solomon Islands, dwells in the space of emergence mentioned above, where meaning and truth are inscribed within ethnographic writing in complex fashion.

Albert Piette and Gwendoline Torterat depart from the kind of questionings rehearsed in the other articles in this issue by proposing what is assumed explicitly as a ‘utopian anthropology’, one that inserts ethnography within a complex that includes the discipline’s pedagogic and ethical role. Deliberately experimental and thought-provoking, their essay advances anthropology’s ‘attention to singularity’ as its most relevant, yet most provocative and radical contribution to the social sciences and humanities. While doing so, they incorporate a very utopian *dispositif* of questioning and transforming the philosophical and political status quo: what happens if, instead of focusing on the common, collective traits that produce ‘social formations’ (which in turn ‘de-humanise’ the human), we focus on what is distinctive, singular, personal?

Finally, Marie-Pierre Gibert incorporates the transformative potential of utopia by proposing an ethnographic experiment: conducting an ethnography of the tension between work and pleasure in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through the lens of a famous

nineteenth-century utopianist, the French philosopher Charles Fourier. She invites us to consider the ethnographic valence of pleasure as an epistemologically productive element in two professions marked by an apparently contrasted connection with pleasure (artists and waste-workers).

Pleasure, in terms of the expression, consequence or pretext of love and friendship, is also at the core of Valerio Simoni's contribution, in which we learn how, in the Cuban tourist industry, intersubjective, personal relationships emerge precariously in between commodified, rationalized ideologies of suspicion and monetary exchange. Through the recollection of various – serendipitous or planned – encounters with foreign tourists and Cubans engaged in the tourist industry, Simoni unveils how utopia appears as a model of relationality, one that counteracts the 'imperfect present' of tourism-mediated relationships. Interestingly, the utopia that emerges from the encounter with the 'other' (be it the tourist, the Cuban or the ethnographer) involves the recognition of the possibility of plural understandings – and thus the rejection of totalizing, normativizing formulations – of what personal relationships are about, what they can generate.

Simoni's article explores a point that appears in the centre of Ramon Sarró's highly evocative afterword: the positional problem of the 'point of view'. Evoking post-WWI fiction, anthropological forefathers and his own fieldwork recollections in Guinea-Bissau and DR Congo, he takes the reader into a journey through utopian-anthropological islands and mountains – from the Trobriands to Zomia – that ultimately become heterotopian geographies of (personal, intellectual) unsettlement. What emerges from these contributions is a significant practical complication of the problem of mutuality, which we preliminarily defined as an ideal of empathy and egalitarian reciprocity. With its empirical testing, as it were, we realize that, more than establishing a horizontal, dyadic relationship, acknowledging ethnography as a 'mutualizing utopia' in fact involves 'opening up' and creating a space of interaction – the island, the mountain, as Sarró (this issue) puts it – that is inevitably serendipitous but ultimately creative, generative.

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## ETHNOGRAPHY, MUTUALITY, AND THE UTOPIA OF LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP IN TOURISTIC CUBA

VALERIO SIMONI<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

...seeking among the things of life, I found something more beautiful and valuable than all the most precious jewels in the world, I found that which fills all my void, which satisfies all my mind, I found love, I spoke to it and it convinced me, I feel happy for this, but I also feel a bit sad because as I live in an imperfect world, everything that comes in this world is imperfect, and trying to improve things is a waste of time ... perhaps happiness does not exist and I am a bit selfish because I demand a bit more than what I have.<sup>2</sup>

This excerpt from an email I received from my Cuban friend Ernesto<sup>3</sup> is a good entry point to the topic I would like to explore in this article on ethnography, mutuality and the utopia of love and friendship in touristic Cuba. In the quote, Ernesto reflects on his love story with Jessica, a Canadian woman he met a couple of years earlier in the streets of Havana who visited him repeatedly in Cuba after that first encounter. In the spaces of dialogue we have created since we first met about four years ago, Ernesto has often shared his aspiration to find true love and friendship in his relationships with foreign tourists, contrasting the widespread trope that portrayed Cubans as cunning tricksters intent on ripping tourists off by establishing deceptive relationships. It is not the first time that he complains to me about the light-hearted and downright suspicious ways in which tourists tend to view his expressions of love and friendship. He is highly aware that the striking inequalities that traverse these relationships constitute a permanent challenge to being taken seriously when making such claims, and that tourists must inevitably think that there must be some kind of interest behind his eagerness that they establish intimate bonds with him: an interest in profiting from the tourists' comparative wealth or, as part of a longer term strategy, in migrating from Cuba by means of an invitation from a foreign friend or partner. Such is the predicament of Ernesto and many other Cuban men and women I met

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<sup>2</sup> Like all other quotes from research participants in this article, this is my translation from the original Spanish.

<sup>3</sup> All personal names and some details in the examples presented in this paper have been changed to protect the anonymity of research participants.

in the course of my fieldwork on this Caribbean island, fourteen months of ethnographic research on what I have called ‘informal touristic encounters’ (Simoni 2016a). Such is the ‘imperfect world’ to which Ernesto refers, a world in which wealthy tourists visit an impoverished island like Cuba, in people like him find themselves stuck while foreigners come and go at will, a world in which structural conditions of inequality threaten to tarnish the genuine character of any relational claim that is made.

This is what Ernesto had told me a couple of years earlier, as we discussed Cubans’ friendships with tourists:

It would be great if things here could be like over there, with higher salaries, and one could just go out simply to get to know people, to enjoy oneself, to make some friends just for fun and not for money, out of necessity. If one did not need to go and look for friendship (*que uno no tuviera que ir a buscar una amistad*), if it would be just like over there, normal.

However, while deplored Cuba’s exceptional circumstances, Ernesto maintained that the aspiration to ‘normal’ relationships guided his very personal way of dealing with foreigners, which he contrasted with that of other Cubans. This kind of ‘aspirational normativity’, as Berlant puts it (2011: 164) – the ‘feeling of aspirational normalcy, the desire to feel normal, and to feel normalcy as a ground of dependable life’ (*ibid.*: 170) – is part of what interests me in this article, notably in its connection to people’s claims of love and friendship. In the encounters I studied and engaged with in Cuba, we could argue that such aspirational normalcy acquired a utopian character, delineating a utopia that was linked not so much to the quest for a radically different and unfamiliar reality, but rather to the desire to belong to something one knew all too well – a way of living and relating that was ‘just normal’ ‘out there’. The ‘out there’ (*allá*) was exemplified by the countries tourists come from, places where one could simply live a ‘normal’ life, one that was not dominated by scarcity, necessities (*necesidades*) and economic preoccupations, the latter being the conditions that many of my Cuban interlocutors associated with life in Cuba. This was a utopia, and this is the other point I wish to explore in this article, whose emergence the ethnographic/touristic encounter could facilitate and potentiate. Taking stock of scholarship that has examined the parallels between tourism and anthropology, between being and relating as a tourist and/or an ethnographer in certain field sites (see in particular Bruner 1995; Crick 1995; Frohlick and Harrison 2008; Salazar 2013; Simoni and McCabe 2008), I prefer not to set out by implying a clear cut divide between these two modalities of engaging with alterity. Rather, I aim to reflect more broadly on the

sensibilities and ways of knowing that encounters between foreigner visitors and Cuban residents could entice and propitiate, as well as the difference, if any, that ethnography could and/or should make.

Anthropological research on tourism has uncovered the utopian dimensions of touristic encounters: from the seminal work of Graburn on tourism's potential for re-creation and self-creation (Graburn 1983), to Bruner's conceptualization of the 'touristic borderzone' – 'a zone of interaction between natives, tourists, and ethnographers' (1996:177) – as 'a creative space, a site for the invention of culture on a massive scale' (*ibid.*), up to the remarks of Causey on 'utopic space' as space tourism offers people the opportunity to 'explore possible ways of being ... between reality and unrealizable desires' (2003: 167). Foucault's notion of 'heterotopia' (Foucault 1986) has similarly been used to theorize the qualities of certain tourist spaces (Edensor 1998) and their potential to act as 'places for exploration and self-expression' that 'subvert dominant practices and meanings' (*ibid.*: 43). Scholars have also focused on the utopic qualities of love and intimacy in their connection with travel. For Illouz (1997), the idea of romantic love can be productively approached as a utopia of transgression, an imaginary that defies 'the normal arrangements and divisions by gender, class, or national loyalties' (*ibid.*: 8) and which finds a perfect ally in those ritual dimensions of travel that evoke a 'suspension of ordinary constraints and a shift to a purely gratuitous, noninstrumental mode of relationships' (*ibid.*: 142). 'Travels', Illouz tells us, 'take people to the frontier of liminality', embodying 'our ideal-typical definition of romance' (*ibid.*).

While similar entanglements between travel and fantasies of love and intimacy could be discerned in touristic Cuba, my work (Simoni 2016a) also chronicles how the utopic dimension of touristic encounters on the island was increasingly threatened by suspicious and cynical assessments of what such encounters were 'really about'. In such scenarios, subterfuge, deception and double-dealings emerged as key interpretative frames for both tourists and Cuban people to unmask their allegedly 'real' motivations and intentions respectively. In the most extreme cases, this 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (Sedgwick 2003) led foreign tourists to avoid dealings with Cuban people altogether (aside perhaps from employees in tourism installations) for fear of being cheated and deceived.

In what follows, I wish to reflect on these narratives of suspicion on the one hand and to contrast them with the claims and aspirations I heard from my Cuban interlocutors on the other hand, which the ethnographic encounter helped bring about. The overall aim in considering this specific case is to contribute to the debate raised by the editors of this

special issue on ethnography as a mutualizing utopia (see Maskens and Blanes, this issue). Where the example of love and friendship in touristic Cuba can be particularly helpful is in the reflection on utopia as a model of relationality, given that forms of relationality were themselves at the core of my interlocutors' preoccupations.

### Cunning and suspicion

When I first went to Cuba in February 2005 to start fieldwork on encounters and relationships between foreign tourists and members of the Cuban population, I was aware of the likelihood that Cuban men and women I met on the streets of Havana would perceive me as a tourist like many others. As I have considered more extensively elsewhere (Simoni and McCabe 2008, Simoni 2016a) in writing about positioning issues in ethnographic research on tourism, it was indeed as a tourist that I was initially approached by Cubans eager to make my acquaintance, be it to offer some Cuban cigars, suggest a place to eat or, more commonly, to hang around together and establish some sort of relationship. As in the case of most of the tourists I spoke to, one of the questions that started preoccupying me on such occasions related to the intentions and agendas of the Cuban interlocutors involved: what did they want from me? The ascription of instrumentality implicit in such a question comes as less of a surprise when we consider the many stories and anecdotes I had already absorbed prior to my travel through guidebooks, travel sites and world-of-mouth warnings from friends and acquaintances on the risks of getting involved with Cubans in tourist areas of the country, given the likelihood of them having an instrumental agenda. *Jineterismo* was the frame of legibility coming to the fore: a Cuban neologism from the Spanish '*jinete*' (rider), which, in the context of tourism in Cuba, evoked the 'riding' of tourists for instrumental purposes, thus conjuring up notions of tourism-hustling.<sup>4</sup>

The Cubans I met on my first days in the island were also responsible for raising the suspicion of *jinetismo*. When engaging with me and other foreigners, they tended to refer to the prevalence of *jinetes* and 'fake friends' in tourism areas, only to cast themselves, by way of contrast, as the exception, as the real friend one could trust and rely on. 'As a foreigner in this place, you would not know where to go! As long as you hang

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<sup>4</sup> Scholars have also shown how ascriptions of *jinetismo* often remain very ambiguous and operate along several lines of discrimination that bring issues of morality, nation, race, class and gender into play (see in particular the work of Alcázar 2009, Babb 2011, Berg 2004, Cabezas 2009, Daigle 2013, Fernandez 1999, Roland 2011, Simoni 2008).

around with me, you are safe ... You were so lucky to find me, and not some *jinetero*: a real friend, a sincere friendship.' These are some of the sentences I recalled Pepe, one of the first Cubans I met in Havana, uttering as he tried to reassure me of the genuineness of his friendship. I soon realized that this kind of discourse was very widespread, so much so that it could quickly lose all its appeal to more experienced visitors. 'Be careful; not all Cubans are the same!' was the typical refrain of this 'idiom of exception' (Torresan 2011).<sup>5</sup> Weary of the widespread warning not to trust 'other Cubans', and increasingly suspicious of the 'how lucky you are to have found me' kind of narrative, Gilberto and Dario, two young independent travellers from Italy, came to the conclusion that it was actually these self-proclaimed exceptions who were most likely to cheat you.

Conforming to this prevailing idiom of exception, it was rare to see Cubans explicitly refer to themselves as *jineteros* in the presence of foreigners with whom they hoped to establish longer term relationships. But while in these moments of tourist–Cuban interaction the *jinetero/a* was generally the 'Other' Cuban tourists should refrain from engaging with, more positive identifications with the practice of *jineterismo* emerged in moments of peer sociability, when Cuban men and women chatted among themselves about their relationships with tourists. In such moments, which I only managed to share with some of my Cuban companions with time, people could easily refer to their engagements with tourists as *jinetear* – e.g. *estaba jineteando*, I was engaging in *jineterismo* (more seldom assuming the overarching identification of *jinetero/a*). In these conversations, it was frequent for people to objectify tourists and to talk about relations with them in instrumental terms. The widespread expectation was to avoid dwelling on any emotions one could feel for a foreign 'friend' and 'partner', an attitude that could give the impression of being too naïve, and thus be frowned upon by the audience. More often, people would instead align their talk with the semantic registers and moral discourse of *jineterismo*, for instance, telling funny anecdotes about relationships with tourists that could give them the allure of insubstantial and superficial affairs, and widely conforming to the image of 'tourist riders' guided by the instrumental purposes of securing their socio-economic needs and desires, as well as those of their families. Brennan's (2004) remarks on normative expectations among female sex workers in the Dominican Republic,

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<sup>5</sup> In her article on Brazilian immigrants negotiating friendship in Lisbon (Portugal), Torresan suggests that 'friendship between Brazilians and Portuguese created a bridge that crossed over cultural patterns which were then subsequently strengthened by the idea that friendship was only possible because someone in the relationship was an exception to the rule' (2011: 245).

specifically regarding ways of talking about love with foreign partners, provide an interesting parallel to reflect on these instances and the kinds of peer pressures they could respond to. As Brennan puts it: ‘Positing love could make Sosúan sex workers appear foolish. No matter what they feel for their foreign boyfriends, these women have an incentive to portray themselves as not naïve enough to actually fall in love’ (*ibid.*: 96). A similar moral expectation not to portray oneself as too vulnerable also seemed to predominate among Cuban men and women as they discussed with peers their relationships with foreign tourists. Elsewhere (Simoni 2016b), I elaborate further on how the adoption of these moral stances can be understood in relation to claims and expectations of belonging, in the sense that casting tourists as an instrument for achieving economic goals and aspirations and interpreting relationships with them as clearly economic in nature could help clarify where one’s allegiance lay, positing We Cubans as the primary site of belonging.

Interestingly, similar pressures not to appear foolish or naïve also prevailed among visitors when talking to fellow travellers about their encounters and relationships with Cuban people. Avoiding being cast as gullible, as the quintessential just-arrived tourist who believes everything they tell him and does not have a clue how things ‘really’ work, could lead to visitors adopting a precautionary, cynical stance when discussing relationships with Cubans and avoiding getting carried away in emotional speeches that that could be judged totally out of place – proofs that people were living in the utopic world of tourism fantasies and fabrications. The views of experienced travellers, especially people who had come repeatedly to Cuba in the past, could prove particularly authoritative in shaping the opinion of recently arrived tourists and in setting the tone for future encounters with the locals. Regularly, their tips tended to emphasize the instrumental dimensions of Cubans’ engagements with tourists, warning novices about their Machiavellian plans and economically oriented agendas. ‘They are all looking for ways to get hold of our money!’ was the bold statement I repeatedly heard. The reiteration and prescriptive tone of these warnings challenged the emergence of other views and narratives. Emphasis on instrumentality and deception did not favour, for instance, the emergence of narratives of friendship, love and romance. ‘You must be crazy to fall in love with a Cuban girl!’ was the frequent rejoinder to ‘naïve’ admissions of love for a Cuban partner. In this context, tourists who openly declared themselves to be in love with their Cuban partners could quickly become objects of scorn and derision (see Simoni 2016a).

Cuban men and women I met during fieldwork recalled with nostalgia the ‘good old days’ of the 1990s, when tourists were less sceptical and easier to deal with. According to these narratives, tourists are now getting tougher and more suspicious. ‘Now it’s getting harder, they know it all; of the ways we try to get on with them, to court the girls!’ – complained, for instance, Luis, who, in his early thirties, saw his hopes of marrying a tourist woman slowly fade away. For Luis, as for many of the Cuban men and women I met during fieldwork, encounters with tourists held promises that went well beyond the prospect of making some easy money with commissions in bars and restaurants or some informal cigar deal. What many hoped for was to establish longer term relations within the idioms of friendship and love, relations that were judged more gratifying at an emotional and moral level and that could also ensure higher degrees of commitment from the tourists, including the possibility that one might visit them abroad one day, as friends or, more permanently, as a spouse. In order to establish any such long-term relationships, the suspicions tourists nourished towards their Cuban partners’ motives and intentions had to be overcome.

The suspicion of possible deception, contrived emotions, interested friendship, false professions of love and other instrumental machinations at the tourist’s expense was, however, a tough one to overcome. Such lines of reasoning tended to reify a divide between Cubans’ self-presentations to outsiders and their actual motivations and agendas, which were deemed ineluctably strategic. As I have elaborated more extensively elsewhere (Simoni 2013, 2014a), this interpretive logic is extremely widespread in an increasingly globalizing field of tourism discourse and critique. It needs to be understood in the context of the tourists’ drive to reach into the most intimate realms of the places they visit and with their preoccupation with being deceived by ‘fake’ touristic displays, aspects that have been at the centre of social-science theorizations of tourism since the early 1970s (MacCannell 1973, 1976).<sup>6</sup> The tourists I met during fieldwork tended to despise the idea of being cheated and puzzled over the ‘real’ intentions and motivations of the Cubans who interacted with them. Here is where narratives of *jineterismo* could act as a key interpretative resource to ‘unmask’ the allegedly covert motivations of the locals.

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<sup>6</sup> MacCannell (1973, 1976) famously made the quest for the ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ Other the key tenet of his theorization of tourism. Drawing on Goffman’s front versus back distinction (1959), this author maintained that modern tourists were longing to ‘enter the back regions of the places they visited’, regions ‘associated with intimacy of relations and authenticity of experiences’ (1973: 589). For MacCannell, this quest was ultimately doomed to failure, given that ‘tourist settings are arranged to produce the impression that a back region has been entered even when this is not the case’ (*ibid.*).

In terms of social scientists' approaches, similar frames of legibility still retain much analytical purchase when assessing touristic encounters from a critical(-cum-cynical) perspective (Simoni 2014a). Such interpretive grids may appear all the more compelling when combined with a strong focus on structural inequalities, an emphasis on local resistance to global forces and a conceptualization of the (liberal) individual that foregrounds economic agency. The risk I see in such analytical endeavours is to adopt such a framework *a priori* (Fassin 2008), to 'romanticize resistance' (Abu-Lughod 1990; also Piot 2010) and with it the image of cunning locals, who, despite their subaltern position, are able to trick and deceive the structurally advantaged tourists, a category of people for whom academics have traditionally displayed little sympathy (see Crick 1995). Going a step further, I would argue that we may easily be tempted to suppose that the disadvantaged inhabitants of tourism destinations in the South are not only able to take advantage of tourists but should legitimately do so, and that we – as critical researchers sensitive to domination and ways of resisting it, and eager to highlight the economic agencies and rationalities of the 'weak' – expect them to and like to see it.<sup>7</sup>

To prolong this reflection, we may fruitfully draw on Kelly's (2012) recent remarks on the process of 'imagined identification' and its implications in terms of picturing other people's agency and ability to dissimulate. What happens in the case of the assessment of claims about torture in the British asylum process, on which Kelly grounds his reflections, is that, 'rather than turning people into passive objects, the process of trying to identify with those who have suffered can also lead to a sense of all too active agency among those who claim to have suffered' (*ibid.*: 763). '[T]he fiction of the "rational man"', continues Kelly, includes the recognition of 'a capacity for dissimulation' and brings to the fore '[t]he spectre of *Homo economicus*', which 'always hangs behind that of *Homo victimus*' (*ibid.*). In the case discussed here, the hypothesis of 'duplicity and dissimulation' as the

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<sup>7</sup>. This interpretation may become even more appealing and self-evident – therefore making its moral underpinnings less likely to be reflexively acknowledged – in a Caribbean context where cunning responses to colonial domination have captured much anthropological attention (Browne 2004; Freeman 2007). The image of disadvantaged people who deploy subtle tactics and 'economic guile' to get by in unfavourable circumstances is indeed long-standing in anthropologies of the Caribbean region, an image that has been held 'to embody the most authentic in Caribbean culture' (Wilson 1964, cited in Freeman 2007: 5). A useful parallel may also be drawn here with Cole's (2009: 111) assessment of recent scholarship on African intimacies, which tends to foreground 'the instrumental, as opposed to the emotional, nature of intimate male-female relations...either to highlight African agency despite difficult social and economic conditions or to illuminate the underlying logic behind seemingly promiscuous behaviour'. But putting too much emphasis on 'the strategic nature of relationships' (*ibid.*), argues Cole, risks reproducing stereotypes of Africans – and particularly African women – as 'purely instrumental' (*ibid.*), a danger I could also detect in the case examined here.

quintessential ‘arms’ ‘of the dominated’ (Callon and Rabeharisoa 2004: 20) seemed to have gained much interpretative purchase among foreigners visiting Cuba, hampering the emergence of alternative narratives and possibilities in their relationship with Cuban people.

### The hybridity move

Besides the emphasis on Cubans’ sense of cunning, which oriented the evaluation of relationships along true/false, front/back and appearance/real dichotomies, an alternative grid of legibility deployed what I would refer to as a hybrid take on relationships, one that saw Cuban’s relationships with tourists as potentially motivated by a mix of ‘interest’ and ‘emotional attachment’. After several disappointing encounters with alleged ‘cheaters’/*jineteros* earlier in his journey, Julien, a Canadian teenager with whom I spent a few days towards the end of his one-month stay in Cuba, had managed to discover ‘more authentic relationships’ and what he called ‘intimacy’: the fact of ‘feeling good with somebody’ (*être bien avec une personne*). This, he argued, is what created friendship. However good and gratifying these friendships with Cubans had been, Julien also recognised that they were not like the ones he had back home, which were of a more ‘intimate intimate’ kind. Instead, the Cuban ones were slightly special friendships (*une amitié un peu spéciale*), friendships that could hardly be completely disinterested, given that even when people did appreciate you – as opposed to just being interested in your cash – they still ‘had nothing’ (*ils n’ont rien*), and so you were expected to pay. Drawing on Povinelli, we may argue that the friendships Julien had managed to develop with Cubans exemplified a ‘necessary compromise in an imperfect world’ (2006: 198) of striking inequalities, one that left unscathed his normative ideals of purer friendships, which were simply relocated ‘back home’.

Working over his experiences and notions of friendship and being encouraged to reflect on them in the course of our conversation, Julien progressively managed to soften the overarching tension between ‘interest’ and ‘affection’ – what Zelizer (2005) conceptualizes as the ‘hostile worlds’ perspective – that is, between ‘instrumental economic relationships’ and ‘friendship’ that traversed so many of the relationships tourists had with Cuban people. Julien’s nuanced take resonates with recent anthropological writings on friendship, which urge us to move beyond purified and idealized approaches to uncover its variegated expressions in different ethnographic

locations.<sup>8</sup> In touristic Cuba, one may thus argue that what was emerging was a kind of hybrid version of the allegedly western, purified model of friendship as a voluntary and disinterested affective engagement between autonomous individuals (Carrier 1999), a version in which economic interest, intimacy and emotional attachment could easily intermingle. What is important to note here, however, was that these ‘impure’ (Coleman 2010) approaches to friendship could easily be resisted by the Cuban friends in question, who were unwilling to subscribe to any sort of hybrid ‘compromise’ (Nachi 2004a, 2004b; Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991]).

A clear illustration of resistance to an ‘impure’ view of friendship – the view of the ethnographer, in this case – is evident in the offended reaction of Pablo (a self-professed friend with whom I spent a couple of afternoons in Havana) to my provocative allusion to the commission he was likely to gain on the drinks I had just bought for us. On this occasion, he and his friend Augusto had insisted on drinking *mojitos*, the cocktail on which, I had been told, the gain was highest. Aware of the sensitivity of this issue and of the awkwardness of discussing tricks that foreigners were not supposed to know about with Pablo, I quickly added that I did not really care if making some money was part of his agenda and that this would not jeopardize our friendship, trying to show understanding and even admiration of his tactics for gaining hard currency from foreigners like me. In a quite outraged and emotional denial, Pablo retorted that he valued friendship and *el corazón* (the heart) well above money, that by so doing he now had friends all around the world, and that he would not risk ruining our friendship just for a commission of one or two pesos.

Why was Pablo’s reaction so adamant? Why did he judge my intimation to be so offensive? These questions kept puzzling me as I tried to make sense of this awkward moment. Part of the explanation may lie in the inextricable relationship between forms of intimacy and sense of self, in which the former can easily become the measure of the latter so that, as Povinelli (2002: 231) eloquently puts it, ‘challenges to intimacy seriously threaten the modes of attachment the subject has to herself and others, and thus challenge the basis of social coherence’. Following Povinelli (2006: 208), we may argue that my move to frame our relationship as a hybrid – a mixture of interest and affect informed by structural inequalities – relegated Pablo to a ‘genealogical society’ made of socially

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<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, most of the chapters in Bell and Coleman (eds.) (1999) and Desai and Killick (eds.) (2010), the articles of Dyson (2010), Mains (2013), Nisbett (2007), Santos Granero (2007), and Torresan (2011), and the discussion of this literature in Simoni and Throop (2014).

determined subjects, the ‘mirror image’ and ‘contrasting evil’ (*ibid.*: 199) of another, more valued way of being in the world, namely, that of the modern autological subject freed from societal constraints.<sup>9</sup> Demanding that he occupy such a position could therefore imply marking a ‘geographical and civilizational difference’ (*ibid.*: 200) between us. By frustrating his claim to a pure friendship, I was, in a sense, depicting his social status in comparison to mine as inescapably constrained by his social context, as ‘a form of bondage’ (*ibid.*: 191) that determined his actions, his motivations and the subject position available to him.

### Calls for understanding, aspirations of true love and friendship

‘You don’t understand Cuban people!’ (*;Tú no entiendes a los cubanos!*) was a recurrent reply to tourists’ insinuations of hidden instrumental behaviours and multipurpose friendships. Visitors could see this complaint as yet another deceptive, *jinetero*-style self-victimizing manoeuvre to elicit foreigners’ guilt, compassion and help. However, these dejected claims of a lack of empathy also call for a more empathetic understanding of their emotional and moral foundations (Hollan 2008; Hollan and Throop 2008). Reflecting that ‘empathy is never an all or nothing affair’, Throop (2010: 772) has recently argued that ‘it is possible to see that, in some cases, it is precisely experiences of misunderstanding that potentiate possibilities for new horizons of mutual understanding to arise, even if fleetingly so’. Foreigners in Cuba, including myself, were encouraged to explore precisely these possibilities for new understanding, following the Cubans’ resistance to our interpretations.

During fieldwork, this led me to recognize that to imply an inevitable horizon of self-interestedness in Cubans’ declarations of love and friendship, and to force this interpretation on them, was to deny them the possibility, or at least the aspiration, of becoming ‘free’, ‘autonomous’ moral subjects of fully fledged ‘pure’ love and friendship characterized by ‘spontaneous and unconstrained sentiment’ (Coleman 2010: 200).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>. For Povinelli, ‘autology’ and ‘genealogy’ ‘are two coexisting and intersecting forms of discipline that are constitutive of postcolonial governance’ (Venkatesan et al. 2011: 225):

‘Autology’ refers to multiple discourses and practices which invoke the autonomous and self-determining subject, and which are therefore linked to, but not exhausted in, liberalism’s emphasis on ‘freedom’ more narrowly conceived as a political philosophy. ‘Genealogy’, on the other hand, is taken to refer to discourses that stress social constraint and determination in processes of subject constitution and construe the subject as bound by ‘various kinds of inheritances’.

<sup>10</sup>. Building on Carrier’s (1999) work, Coleman (2010) locates the roots of this purist stance in ‘Aristotle’s notion of perfect friendship as justified in and for its own sake’ (*ibid.*: 200).

Several of my Cuban interlocutors assumed that such love and friendship would prevail under the ‘normal’ conditions of existence to which they aspired, as opposed to the context of exceptional and enduring crisis, scarcity and isolation they associated with Cuba, and which many wished to overcome.<sup>11</sup> This was Ernesto’s inference in the passage quoted in the introduction to this article, as he reflected on the difference between friendship in touristic Cuba and friendship ‘over there’ (*allá*), in the tourists’ countries of residence, the type of friendship to which he aspired.

Casting true love and friendship as a universally valued relational idiom and presenting it as something everyone should cherish was also a way of inciting one’s tourist companions to live up to this virtuous model and inspiring them to treat each other as this exemplary form of bonding demanded. As such, the world to be shared with foreigners was not only a sought-after ideal at a moral level – for instance in terms of one’s values and emotional interiority – it was also a more concrete aspiration that love and friendship could address, eventually helping Cubans get closer to the normality they associated with life abroad, making this common world enter the realm of possibilities. Acting as ‘ethical demands’ (Zigon 2009, 2010), friendship and love (Zigon 2013) called for mutuality and a certain commitment and continuity in relationships, a commitment that could ultimately help Cubans realize other socio-economic aspirations too, like never again having to worry about being left in need with no one to turn to, or perhaps even being able to travel abroad thanks to a foreign friend or lover.

Such relational ideals, which my Cuban interlocutors called on me to recognize, carried implications that recent anthropological literature on love may help us elucidate. The ability to engage in ‘romantic’ ‘selfless’ or ‘pure’ love has been considered a key marker of modernization and of being an autonomous and self-determined subject.<sup>12</sup> According to Povinelli (2006) it is precisely in love – and in friendship, we may add – that one may ‘locate the hegemonic home of liberal logics and aspirations’ (*ibid.*: 17). In this view, ‘the ability to “love” in an “enlightened” way becomes the basis (the “foundational event”) for constituting free and self-governing subjects and, thus, “humanity”’ (Povinelli 2004, cited in Feier 2007: 153). When seen in this light, the links between the ideals of

<sup>11</sup> In her research on Cuban *jineteras* and their discourses of love for foreign tourists, de Sousa e Santos (2009: 422) similarly quotes an informant’s argument that ‘people here want to have what is normal to have, simply what any person in the world can have [‘the world’ here representing Western countries]’.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, the articles in Cole and Thomas eds. (1999), Hirsch and Wardlow eds. (2006), and Padilla and al. eds. (2007), as well as the writings of Povinelli (2006), Patico (2009), Feier (2007), and Hunter (2010).

love and friendship considered here and the forms of mutuality and subjectification they strived to bring about seem all the clearer. To engage with each other on the grounds of an aspiration to individuality and to belonging to a common world and humanity, as well as to move beyond reductive typifications and objectifications, there could be hardly any better path, we may argue, than through a mutual engagement in true love and friendship.

Povinelli's considerations on the hegemonic nature of liberal aspirations for love, coupled with my interlocutors' explicit references to their longing for 'normality' and a 'normal life' abroad – Berlant's (2011) 'aspirational normativity' – raise the question of the kind of utopian visions we are confronting here and their political dimensions (see Maskens and Blanes, this issue). Following Berlant, my interlocutors' aspirations may be read as an aspiration to get as close as possible 'to the fantasy life of normativity' (Berlant 2011: 167), a proximity that 'might be what remains to animate living on, for some on the contemporary economic bottom' (*ibid.*). Most of the people I worked with did indeed express a feeling of being stuck in something like such a bottom. In other words, the utopic vision at issue here was not driven by a desire to discover an unknown new world out there, and it was a far cry away from any exotic/science fiction/radically different alterity we may more commonly associate with the utopic genre. Instead, it was a reality that my interlocutors knew well and one they were fully prepared to inhabit. Turning on its head the more frequently ascribed attributes of 'everyday reality' vs. 'ideal utopia', it was ordinary life in Cuba that was deemed exceptional here, out of the ordinary, while utopia, in the form of an imaginary elsewhere, was simply equated with normality, with how things ought to be. Politically, this sort of vision may seem to have little potential to unsettle dominant global narratives and hegemonic constructs or to 'kindle political imagination' (Maskens and Blanes, this issue). The aspiration to attain and live the fantasy of a 'normal life', one may argue, did nothing but reinforce that same hegemonic ideal. While this may well be the case, I suggest that other readings are also possible, especially once we start to look for politics elsewhere, from another angle, one that moves us beyond the dyad of domination and resistance.

Inspired by Piot's (2010) theoretical insights on the new cultural imaginaries that are taking shape in contemporary West Africa, we could interpret for such professions of true love and friendship as a way for my Cuban interlocutors to 'embrace the future, through acts of mimetic engagement with that which they desire' (*ibid.*: 10). In order to account for these mimetic endeavors, Piot urges us 'to fight the impulse to make theory adequate to political desire' (*ibid.*: 169), to resist 'the romance of resistance' (*ibid.*) and to be ready

to ‘measure “agency” through engagement with rather than rejection of Euro-otherness’ (*ibid.*: 10). Subscribing to the ideals of true love and friendship could thus express the aspiration to overcome the limitations of life in Cuba and claim ‘membership’ in a ‘global society’ (Ferguson 2006), from which many of my Cuban research participants felt excluded.

Raising the issue of ‘agency’ and its ‘measurement’ beyond the paradigm of ‘resistance’, Piot’s remarks find a useful complement in Laidlaw’s (2002) proposals for an anthropology of ethics and freedom. Criticizing the ubiquitous use of the notion of agency and the ‘self-evident virtues’ (*ibid.*: 315) that tend to be attributed to this notion, Laidlaw warns anthropologists against ‘the temptation to describe the world as we would like it to be, rather than as it is’ (*ibid.*). ‘As an index of freedom’, continues Laidlaw, ‘the concept of agency is pre-emptively selective’ in that ‘[o]nly actions contributing towards what the analyst sees as structurally significant count as instances of agency. Put most crudely, we only mark them down as agency when people’s choices seem to us to be the right ones’ (*ibid.*). The assumption that should be overcome here is ‘that freedom is only possible in the total absence of constraint or relations of power’ (*ibid.*: 323).

Extending these reflections, I think that Sedgwick’s (2003) methodological insights on ‘paranoid’ versus ‘reparative reading’ can also be very pertinent when thinking of my own ethnographic encounters. This author criticizes the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ that characterizes a widespread ‘paranoid critical stance’, a ‘relational stance’ that is anticipatory, retroactive and averse to surprise (*ibid.*: 146), which disavows other ways of knowing as naïve, and which values ‘knowledge in the form of exposure’ (*ibid.*: 138), including for instance the ubiquitous exposure of ““The modern liberal subject”” (*ibid.*: 139). For Sedgwick, ‘[t]he paranoid trust in exposure seemingly depends...on an infinite reservoir of naïveté in those who make up the audience for these unveilings’ (*ibid.*: 141), being nourished by the concern not to be taken for a ‘sucker’ (*ibid.*). As shown earlier, this concern was widely shared by Cubans and tourists alike when respectively they interacted with their peers. What must be preserved to counter this hermeneutics of suspicion and its totalizing dimension, and what Sedgwick’s proposal for a more ‘reparative’ relational stance supports, are ever more empathetic readings that do not reduce people’s efforts to ameliorate their condition to a merely reformist (*ibid.*: 144) move or to the exposure of their complicity in the maintenance of ‘an oppressive status quo’ (*ibid.*: 149). This call for a less suspicious hermeneutics seems to resonate well with Robbins’ (2013) recent proposal for an ‘anthropology of the good’, which shows the interest in investigating ‘the

way people understand the good and define its proper pursuit' (ibid.) and encourages us 'to be attentive to the way people orientate to and act in a world that outstrips the one most concretely present to them, and to avoid dismissing their ideals as unimportant or, worse, as bad-faith alibis for the worlds they actually create' (ibid.).

All in all, what I think we should avoid here, in response to the utopian calls for love and friendship of my Cuban interlocutors, is replacing the interpretative objectifications of *jineterismo* and hybridity with another reading that saw them only as complicit in the reproduction of hegemonic ideals of love and friendship. In other words, refraining from substituting a conceptual grid and interpretative closure with another totalizing understanding that is equally blind to, and not interested in, my interlocutors calls for open-ended relational possibilities, their hopeful invitation to engage together in the construction of something in common, no matter how naïve and utopic this new trajectory may be. The ethnographic/touristic encounter could provide the space for such utopic trajectories, a space in which unconstrained possibilities for being and being with could at least be imagined.

### Beyond typification, towards mutualizing utopias

'For me you are not a tourist. You are a person, a human being!' (*Tú para mí no eres un turista. ¡Tú eres una persona, un ser humano!*). On several occasions, I heard this kind of statement addressed to me and other foreign visitors in Cuba. Here the stress fell on grounding relationships in the fundamental commonality of tourists and Cubans as human beings (Simoni 2014b). Rather than being dichotomously catalogued and targeted on the basis of their assumed privileged status and the asymmetry of their resources, tourists deserved to be recognized, understood and treated as persons, with all their peculiarities, idiosyncrasies, unique circumstances and ways of being. The problem and the source of many of his Cuban colleagues' mistakes in dealing with tourists, according to Ernesto, was that they considered themselves superior, that they were vain (*vanos*) and looked down on tourists as if they were *bobos* (stupid, naïve). This major error in judgement, he maintained, went on to colour their ways of relating to visitors, anchoring them in typifications and objectifications that the latter were bound to sense and resent. Instead, Ernesto advocated remaining open and respecting the individuality of every tourist.

This was also a call for tourists to reciprocate by doing the same with their Cuban friends and partners, as opposed to confining them to the realm of *jineterismo* and *jinetero/a* identifications. The moral demand at stake was thus for tourists to step out of a

world governed by structural inequalities, where interpretations of each other's behaviour were based on inescapable instrumentality, and commit themselves to a relationship that would respect the integrity and sheer complexity of the Other and avoid reducing him or her to a type, a 'summative account' and illustration of a more general pattern (Throop 2014: 72, 75). Seen in this light, Cubans' invocations of love and friendship can be read as a call for openness, for partaking in a world as yet unwritten and unscripted, but full of generative potential for ways of being and doing things together.

The kind of openness that Ernesto preconized resonates with Throop's (2014) recent reflections on the moral experience of friendship and its ethical dimensions. Drawing on Aristotle's 'friendship of virtue', Throop draws our attention to '[the] asymmetrical mutuality of beneficence and care that allows individuals to maintain an openness to the complex integrity of the being who is our friend, despite the fleeting and ever-changing realities of feeling, knowledge, desire, and circumstance that may otherwise conspire in disclosing to us a specific aspect of our friend's existence in that given moment (*ibid.*: 76). '[W]hat is precisely at stake in friendships of virtue', continues Throop, 'are intersubjectively distributed efforts to instil an openness, vulnerability, susceptibility, responsivity, and mutuality that ideally works against reductive, partial, and segmental renderings of those whom we take to be our friends' (*ibid.*). Ernesto's warning not to treat tourists as types and his call for crediting his aspirations of love and friendship can be read in the light of Throop's remarks in that they encouraged a respectful and sensitive approach to both persons and relationships. Besides the acknowledgment of claims of true friendship and love, what comes into relief here are the pitfalls of imagined identification as described by Kelly (2012), an 'assumption of similarity' that, in the context he studied, ended up reducing the other to the 'an image of the "rational man"' (*ibid.*: 765), refracting the recognition of alternative motives and drives in people's conduct. For Kelly, '[t]he line between the incomprehension of assumed difference and the illusory understanding of enforced similarity...is faced by all attempts, including the anthropological, to understand the motivations, hopes, and desires of other people' (*ibid.*: 766).

When dealing with the declarations of true love or friendship I encountered in fieldwork, we may still object that what we essentially have are discourses, ideals and aspirations that do not tell us much of how things actually took place in practice and that could hardly be grounded in any contextualized ethnographic reality.<sup>13</sup> In deploying this

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<sup>13</sup> See Simoni and Throop (2014) for a similar reflection in relation to recent literature in the anthropology of friendship and its plea for 'making friendship impure' (Coleman 2010).

kind of criticism, however, we should not forget ‘the enabling and animating aspects’ of people’s hopes and desires (Moore 2011: 25). According to Moore (2011), it is this ‘ethical imagination’ – [t]he forms and means...through which individuals imagine relationships to themselves and to others’ (*ibid.*: 16) – that ultimately ‘links human agency to the forms of the possible’ (*ibid.*: 18). Heeding this author’s call to recognize the importance of ‘the aspirational character of our relations to others’ (*ibid.*: 10) and to pay attention to our research participants’ interest ‘in creating new connections, new meanings, novel forms of relation’ (*ibid.*: 9) is a productive way to shift the focus of our analyses towards the future, its potentialities and the utopic drives that inspire people’s actions. It is precisely the generative potential of Cubans’ ‘fantasized relations with others’ (*ibid.*: 28) and their utopian dimension to which I wish to draw attention here, as well as to the possibilities for self-formation and transformation it could open up. Drawing on Maskens and Blanes (this issue), we may argue that, when seen through the lens of utopia as a model of relationality, declarations of love and friendship played ‘with the gap between reality and fiction as a productive process’. They acted as a ‘call for action’ (*ibid.*), a call to inhabit such a relational space, to work together in order to bring about such ideal forms of relationality. Acting as a ‘refusal of apathy and fatalism’ (*ibid.*), as a demand to leave behind cynicism and its relational dead ends, such utopic endeavors called for a mutual engagement that could potentiate changes and transformations, an invitation to build together a path towards a better future and a world in common.

A similarly productive way to rethink the relationship between the ethical imagination, utopian ideals and actual practices and engagements can be detected in Willerslev’s (in Venkatesan et al. 2011) research on love and the significance of ideals of love among Siberian Yukaghir hunters. Drawing on the notions of ‘actual’ and ‘virtual’, Willerslev is able to use his ethnographic material to show that ‘[t]he actual does not exist separately from the virtual’ and that ‘the two dimensions are given as facets of one and the same expression or reality – that is, our actual existence duplicates itself all along with a virtual existence’ (*ibid.*: 228). Accordingly, the presence of such virtual ideals should be apprehended as an aspect of the real, as having a significant impact on reality. This is what sustains actual engagements and exchanges, which would be impossible to actualize otherwise. Willerslev’s reflection inspires Zigon’s remarks on love and the remaking of moral subjectivity when he argues that ‘[a]s a motivating ethical demand (...) love guides moral experience in ways that may not always be contained by the local’ (Zigon 2013: 203). To recognize how love can ‘figure centrally in moral and subjective transformations’

(ibid.) is also to acknowledge its potential force as a ‘decision event’ that calls for particular subject formation to emerge (Zigon ibid.; Humphrey 2008), a decision event that, however, ‘does not cut off the multiplicities of the individual but rather recomposes them’ (Humphrey ibid.: 374).

If love could act as a ‘decision event’ calling for a specific subjectivity to emerge forcefully, what about the effects of those instances in which love was disrupted? For many of my Cuban research participants, tourist girlfriends kept coming and going, and fantasies of true love remained frequently frustrated. Such ruptures and (heart)breaks could act as equally decisive events prompting further recalibrations of one’s morality and subjectivity. In the course of 2013, spending more time with Ernesto one year after our first encounter, he told me that he was becoming more and more *negativo* (negative) in his dealing with tourists. In the last year or so he had received many blows and disappointments, seeing how relationships in which he had invested a lot, emotionally, did not match up to their promises. A year earlier, Ernesto had insisted that his way of relating with tourists was grounded in truth (*la verdad*) and sentiments (*los sentimientos*), but now, even if he himself didn’t like it, he was growing more and more cynical and full of *maldad* (wickedness). But true love could still be on its way, he maintained, and so he retained a certain disposition to give it his all when a promising relationship was in sight. Confronted with similar disillusionments and drawbacks in his relationships with tourist women, my Cuban friend Manuel reached the conclusion that the game was too unsettling for him, that continuous investment in intimate relationships with foreigners made for a ‘crazy life’ (*una vida loca*), offering no guarantee whatsoever that one would ultimately be able to find a true lover, settle down and fulfil the aspirations to a family life he cherished. These contrasting examples draw attention to the unsettling dimensions and risks inherent in pursuing such utopic scenarios, highlighting the impacts that living in a projection of a better future could have on people’s every-day, present lives.

The kind of resilient openness advocated by Ernesto and the related refusal to fall back on reductive objectifications of tourists and of the types of relationships one could expect could become a very demanding moral disposition. It implied devoting a lot of energies and emotional commitments to what were sometimes very transient intimate encounters with people one was never sure ever to see again. To evaluate whether a given relationship deserved such intense engagements, Ernesto strived to acquire a sense of how truthfully the tourist in question was ready to ‘surrender’ (*entregarse*) to love. Thinking in terms of a mutualizing utopia, what was at stake here was the other person’s ability and

readiness to take a leap of faith, to let oneself be enticed by a little known Other and its invitations to love and/or friendship, accepting an offer that may seem unrealistic, unfeasible, unlikely. Ernesto was himself always ready to do this – ‘when someone gives you love, you have to give love back’ he argued – but tended to back away if he felt there was no mutual predisposition or response from his partner.

### **Concluding remarks**

Anthropological research on tourism has shown how productive the exploration of parallels and linkages between tourism and anthropology can be for our reflections on the discipline and its methods (see, for instance, Bruner 1995; Crick 1995; Frohlick and Harrison 2008; Michel 1998; Salazar 2013; Simoni and McCabe 2008). Reflecting on the parallels between cultural tour guides and anthropologists, Salazar (2013) has recently considered the extent to which ‘[b]oth involve essentially the same kind of symbolic representations, attempting to fixate the “Other” in a specific way’ (*ibid.*: 675). By looking at my Cuban interlocutor’s reactions to attempts to ‘fixate’ them and their ways of relating to foreign visitors, this article has highlighted their resistance to processes of typification and has called for ethnographic and anthropological stances that eschew the temptation to indulge in definitive classification. The processes of categorization I addressed seemed all the more resilient and limiting when they were informed by an ‘epistemology of suspicion’ (Sedgwick 2003) that made all other relational stances look naïve or downright stupid. Tourists, as much as ethnographers, may be seduced by readings that, as Sedgwick (*ibid.*) has pointed out, grant much power of anticipation, can easily be deployed retroactively and, in the context examined here, help pin down elusive realities and secure one’s position in a relational terrain fraught with unsettling ambiguities and paradoxes. If we wish for the ethnographic encounter to retain ‘the promise of nontrivial understanding’ (Fabian 1995: 47, cited in Maskens and Blanes, this issue), its qualities as a privileged ‘space of ethical interlocution’ (Maskens and Blanes *ibid.*) and ‘mutualizing utopia’ (*ibid.*), we should work to maintain a certain naïveté and constantly (re)awaken our sensitivity to the moral demands and calls to understand our interlocutors.

The most obvious of such demands fought against the reductive identification of Cubans as cunning tricksters whose deployments of friendship and love with tourists were inevitably superficial, deceptive and ‘fake’. This deceptiveness could be valued among Cuban peers in a context in which any talk of ‘true’ love towards tourists could make people look foolishly naïve and question their allegiance to a community of fellow Cubans

(see Simoni 2016a). But it could also become an interpretative straightjacket, a reductive prism and prison leaving no room for other desires, aspirations or possibilities of being with and relating to foreigners. The hybridity move that conflated interest and affect as a legitimate mixture in people's motivations and intentionality did not solve the problem either, as it had the effect of weakening Cubans' declarations of love and friendship, thus tarnishing their alleged genuineness and the transformative power people associated with such utopic ideals. Hybridity can dissolve differences in a 'theoretically limitless' (Strathern 1996) blurring of boundaries, boundaries that could matter in the opening of new utopic scenarios and their calls for action, in taking these possible futures seriously and struggling to realize them.

Rather than having to privilege or chose one among the different and paradoxical deployments of love and friendship that emerged in my field research – which we may schematically address as the cunning, the hybrid and the utopic – the range of ethnographic encounters I experienced encouraged me to keep these various possibilities open and to avoid reducing relationships to a single interpretation. Striving to understand my interlocutors and to heed their calls for understanding, I tried to take seriously, without condescension or facile cynicism, the competing claims of truthfulness of these different ways of relating to others. Reflecting on 'the complexity of our engagement with the world' and 'the crossing of different perspectives in our own persons', Pina-Cabral (2013) considers that '[o]ur simultaneous engagement with different persons and different groups implies a mutualistic plurality of interests' (*ibid.*: 2). In the case examined here, it is precisely to such plurality that I strived to remain attuned, ready to follow my interlocutors as they articulated their ideal visions of true love and friendship, seeking recognition for them, and thus revealing ethnography's potential as a mutualizing utopia.

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RE-INVENTING CULTURE: UTOPIAN INDIGENOUS OTOMÍ IDEALISM IN  
MEXICO AND ITS EXOTIC ANTHROPOLOGICAL EXPECTATIONS

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## Introduction

The philosopher Paul Ricoeur once said that the differences between ideology and utopia<sup>2</sup> were not as marked as one may think (Ricoeur 1986). He argued that there were similarities based mainly on the discursive treatment of social imagination (*ibid.*: 1). Both ideology and utopia, he said, depended on narratives about creativity and reproduction, which stand in a dialectical relationship with one another. For Ricoeur the main difference between ideology and utopia was the authoritative placement of the Self in the latter. On the one hand, ideology has always been attributed to other people. Thus as Ricoeur points out, ‘The ideological is never one’s own position; it is always the stance of someone else, always *their* ideology’ (*ibid.*: 2). On the other hand, for this French philosopher, utopias are always authoritative and self-acknowledged: ‘utopias are assumed by their authors’ (*ibid.*). However, both terms, according to Ricoeur, have positive and negative sides related to the power of social imagination, and they both place and displace the location of the self.

In this article we would like to focus on the self-referential stance of utopia that exists in the relationship between the anthropologist (or any academic) and the persons we have traditionally defined as ‘informants’. Our aim is simple: we would like to explore the potential of the self-referential utopian world view of ‘informants’ for the assumption and imagination that academics create about others. In this sense, what we present here is a model of cultural imagination and utopian thinking devised by a charismatic and authoritative key ‘informant’ of the Otomí culture in the central

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<sup>2</sup> In this article, we define ‘utopia’ not in the sense given by Thomas More (2005), of a place (an island) that is imagined to preserve the commonwealth of individuals with the establishment of specific norms, but as a self-referential discursive genre that is ‘situationally transcendent’ (Ricoeur 1986: 272), projected into the future, and that refers to an authoritative, identified subject, the subject being individual or collective. The utopian narrative, we argue, bears parallelisms with the work of fiction in the sense that both use the imagination to convince the reader about the existence of a possible world.

Mexican Valleys, Don Pancho,<sup>3</sup> and the active role he performed as an ambassador and creator of his own culture. We consider that the sublimation and invention of culture (Wagner 1981), like the discourses it implies, are not aspects that can be understood in isolation. We argue that we need to see all these aspects in their historical dimension in order to offer a general explanation for utopian thinking.

Don Pancho (see Plate 1), who unfortunately died on 1 May 2015, personally established an agenda to transform his culture into a centred reference for the understanding of the world. In this article we offer a historical contextualization that will help the reader to comprehend the origins of his utopian thinking, while at the same time delving into the details of the discourses and practices that accompany his personal invention of culture. In a sense, this text is a tribute to this indefatigable indigenous intellectual, who was always willing to share his knowledge of Otomí culture with academics and people in general.

The first part describes how indigenous colonial thinking used the world of the utopia as a form of cultural resistance in order to assert a different tradition. Here we analyse the cultural adaptation that indigenous groups experienced from the sixteenth century (after the conquest of their territory) onwards, and their way of resisting and opposing Spanish domination. We state that the intersection between myth and history lies at the core of the foundations of utopian indigenous thought. Finally, we argue that the seeds of this utopian thought in New Spain have their origins in the traumatic context of the conquest and the submission to superior power of the vast majority of the indigenous population.

The second part analyzes some narratives of Don Pancho and his utopian thought. We argue that the centering of Otomí culture – seen as the obligatory reference point for any argument that Don Pancho produced in his life – derived from a form of Otomí-centrism, where invention and imagination intermingled in a sophisticated form of authoritative explanation.

The third part deals with the practical interventions that Don Pancho made into his cultural heritage in order to build his own utopian vision of culture. We analyse the particular case of the manufacturing of artistic ritual masks, the discovery of cave painting and other artistic techniques that Don Pancho used to reproduce his own perspective of Otomí culture.

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<sup>3</sup> His full name was Francisco Luna Tavera, although he preferred his friends to call him simply Don Pancho.

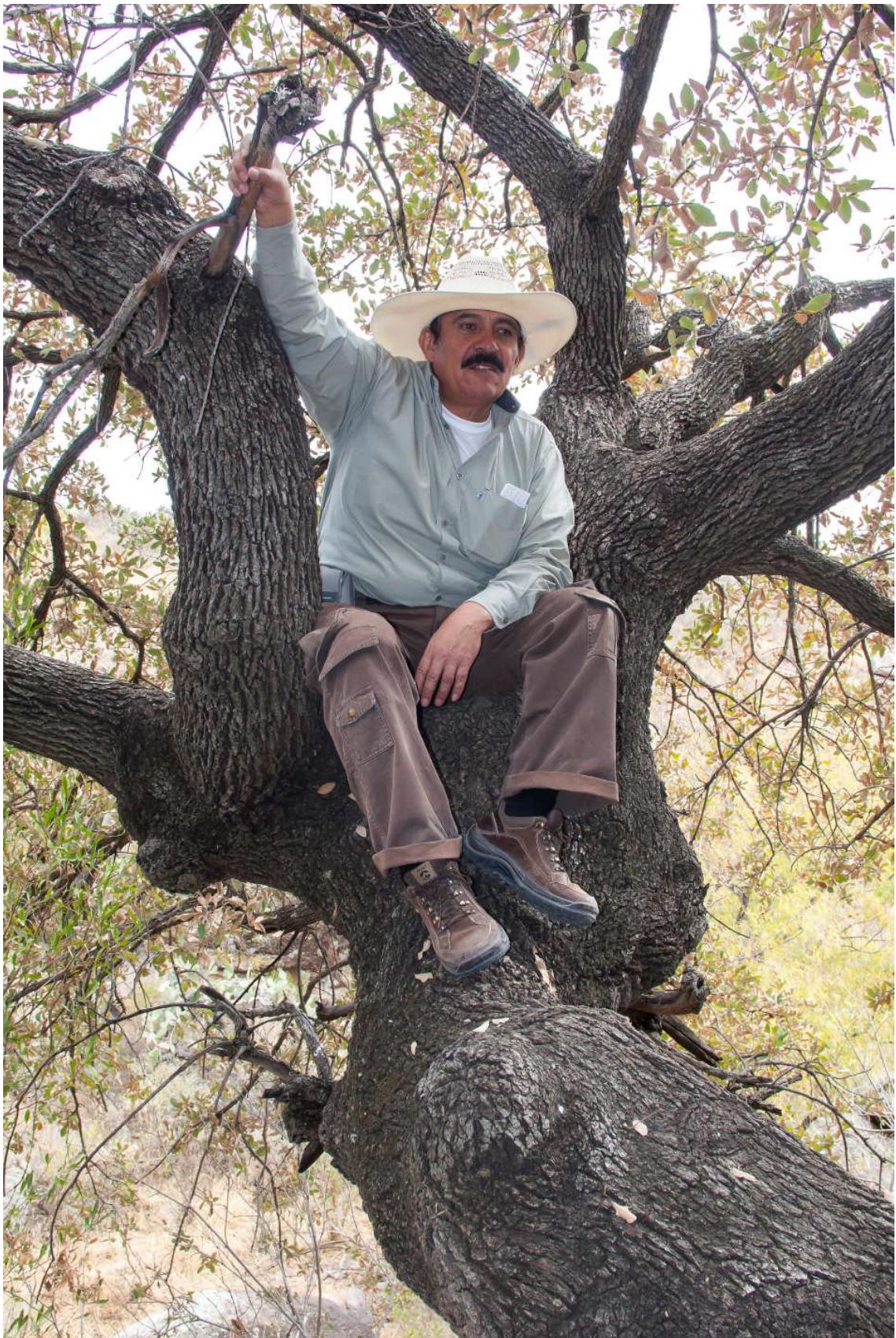


Plate 1. Don Pancho sitting on a tree during one of our visits to Huichapan Hidalgo.  
Photograph by José Luis Pérez Flores, 6 February 2011.

The fourth part describes the counter-utopias that analysts have constructed in their study of other cultures. Our main concern here is with alterity and the imaginative theoretical assumptions that academics project into others. We argue that this form of utopia should be conceived as the other side of the coin of the indigenous utopian thought we have discussed in Parts Two and Three. In this way, by analysing both utopian configurations, we are in a position to establish a symmetrical value for the concept of utopia, which is perceived as something inherently human and as something that relates intrinsically to power relations, hierarchies and historical processes.

### **The seeds of utopia: indigenous historical narratives in the ‘New World’**

The documentation of the indigenous past of what is called today Mexico is one of the most fascinating topics in modern historiography. The study of pre-Hispanic cultures, as well as research into the first decades after the conquest of the territory by the Spanish Empire, has produced a prolific number of works that are not exempt from controversies today. However, for many years these kinds of studies, in particular the analysis of indigenous written documents,<sup>4</sup> was neglected, despised and, even in the best of cases, misunderstood by both colonial and Mexican intellectuals.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, indigenous and mestizo chroniclers like Tezozomoc, Ixtlixochitl and Muñoz Camargo, supported by indigenous sources inherited from the pre-Hispanic period, wrote books and documents in Latin and Spanish. This served the purpose of translating both the information found in codices and the phonetic oral tradition preserved by elders.

Apart from the indigenous sources, there exist important works by Fray Diego Durán (2002) and Fray Bernardino de Sahagún (1985), who, supported by indigenous informants, wrote books about pre-Hispanic cultures; Durán mainly wrote in Spanish, but Sahagún intercalated Spanish with the indigenous language Nahuatl.

Historians consider the work by Sahagún to be the most complete register of indigenous cultures in the sixteenth century, due to its extent and quality. The methodology used by Sahagún consisted in presenting his informants with surveys that combined Latin writing with pictographic traditional characters. Therefore, in his *magnus opus*, the *Códice Florentino*, we find a mixture of textual and pictographic elements.

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<sup>4</sup> In this article we will focus on sources written in the Latin alphabet, for the analysis of pre-Hispanic codices require a different methodology that would take us well beyond our aims of this text.

Unfortunately, the majority of indigenous works in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have been lost due to the censorship of the Catholic Church, the destruction of Nahuatl documents and prejudice against indigenous cultures in general. Those cultures were preserved mainly in the cultural memories of travellers, conquerors and missionaries. One of the few exceptions was the works of the Jesuit Francisco Javier Clavijero (1991) in the seventeenth century. During the nineteenth century many of the indigenous sources were again neglected and considered too irrelevant or complicated to translate or decipher by positivist thinkers.

It is not until the twentieth century that we find a change in the study of indigenous sources. For instance, Eduard Seler was interested in the mythology and religion of Pre-Hispanic indigenous culture in the first decade of the twentieth century (Seler et al. 1904; cf. Hanffstengel and Tercero 2003). However, perhaps the most original pioneer in the study and use of indigenous sources has been Miguel León Portilla, who in the 1950s and 1960s began to use indigenous sources directly as a form of interpretation of the past. In works like *La Filosofía Nahuatl*<sup>5</sup> (2006), and *Aztec Thought and Culture* (1990), León Portilla describes the foundations of native philosophies and indigenous poetry in a manner that departed radically from the usual way of analysing history.

In recent decades, more and more intellectuals have used indigenous sources in their works, although how they do so has been the object of an intense debate. Some authors, like Michel Graulich, consider indigenous sources to be representative of mythology rather than a historical record (Graulich 1990: 13-14). Graulich argues that mythological narratives tend to pass as historical evidence even when they are not: ‘Myths are not always immediately recognized in our sources, therefore it is advisable to recover what passes wrongly as history, or what is, perhaps, a “matched” up history’ (Graulich 1990: 15).

The importance of the increasing interest in indigenous sources in our article resides in what Graulich points out about the intersection between myth and history. Utopian narratives have borrowed some of the projections they intend for the future from mythologies. Sahlins has argued that many local cultures interpret their history as a form of mytho-praxis, narratives permeated by a set of cosmological principles that order social practice (Sahlins 1987: 54). We contend that the scope of mythology also builds an image about the future. In this sense, the myths found among the historical

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Nahuatl Philosophy’.

records of pre-Hispanic and colonial indigenous cultures could be seen as a form of utopian thought.

Historians and anthropologists working on indigenous sources also foment the seeds of utopia. They are in part responsible for either idealizing an indigenous past or for the construction of an image that the same indigenous groups today appropriate as their vision of culture.

For instance, Enrique Florescano also shares the idea popularized by Graulich that mythology permeates cultural and historical formations. For Florescano there is a direct link between pre-Hispanic history and political formations in the sense that all these histories are based on the existence of origin myths. He says:

We can conclude that the main ideological function of the myth that narrates the creation of the cosmos, and the principle of kingdoms was to propagate the idea, which states that rulers descended from gods and had been born to exercise power, while the artisans and normal people's duty was to give sustain to the former. (Florescano 2002: 52)

This relationship between mythology and political formation, says Florescano, was found among all the Pre-Hispanic groups in Mesoamérica. (*ibid.*: 67). Most of the sources refer to migrations, a move from nomadism to permanent settlements, where the origin always resides in a faraway geographical place, and a main god directs people's actions of displacement (Florescano 2002: 89). For him, this is proof that myths had a direct influence in the establishment of pre-Hispanic settlements.

Florescano's view nourishes the idea that indigenous groups oriented their actions exclusively in relation to mythological narratives, as if forces beyond their comprehension were guiding them. Other intellectuals have contested this. For Carlos Navarrete, for instance, behind the elaboration of mythological narratives of origins lie true histories that refer to real facts (Navarrete 1999: 231-232). He argues that not everything about the pre-Hispanic and colonial past is fiction. He points out that archaeologists have confirmed the existence of some of the places found in the pictograms in codices that in previous investigations were initially thought to be only myths. Therefore it is necessary to take into account the separation between a myth's elaboration and its factual foundation.

Florescano, Graulich and Navarrete, although starting out from different theoretical frameworks, agree that social interests lie behind the uses of mythologies as formal justifications of culture. Similarly, Adam Seligman argues that utopian thought plays

with the projection of a structural ideal order situated in the future as a justification for the maintenance of a present hegemonic power: ‘Utopian thought and the search for a perfect political and social order were thus not only posited in critique of a given order or attempts to transform it, but were also constitutive elements of dominant systems of order’ (Seligman 1988: 3).

During the colonial period, the relationship between indigenous thought and Catholicism was tense. We find that these asymmetrical power relations affected the way indigenous cultures organized their worlds. Although depending on the region, this antagonism was never clear cut, and many indigenous cultures accepted the new religion and its consequences without further implications. In other places, as in the north of New Spain, the influence of Catholicism took time to make itself felt, and many indigenous people remained foreign to its influence for many decades during the sixteenth century and later, well beyond that century. In other cases, there were wars and uprisings against the Spaniards. In the Mezquital Valley, the Otomíes were able to negotiate with the colonial authorities. Although they converted to Catholicism, this was always adopted according to their local cosmology. They preserved their rituals and their form of life, taking advantage of their closeness to the Mexican Valley and the northern territories of the Great Chichimeca.

We are not saying that Otomí culture has remained petrified until the present: what we argue is that some sort of cosmological thought moulds the formation of culture as a set of principles that orders the cosmos. This is also a view shared by many local intellectuals, who say that they are the inheritors of an authentic historical past. They are, as Edgar Morin has recently declared, people engaged in the reproduction of a mythical past that has been lost to all but them (Morin 2006: 136).

In the sections below, we offer an example of how an indigenous intellectual uses his knowledge to produce an ‘authentic’ and ‘original’ form of utopian narrative. We will show how these narratives are able to combine mythologies and facts in a single projective figuration. This is not something that our ‘informant’ Don Pancho invented: on the contrary, he was following an indigenous tradition that used the juxtaposition of myths and facts as a form of cosmo-praxis (Descola 2005), which represents a way to deal with a situation of cultural differentiation.

### **Utopian Otomi-centrism**

We met Don Pancho in August 2011 as part of a collaborative project we were carrying out at our university. As Pérez Flores, a historian of art, had been working in the Otomí Central Valley of the Mezquital for more than ten years analysing mural paintings from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we decided to pay a visit to his main informant. Don Pancho had been working closely with him during all this time. Later we would discover that this same man had been helping many other researchers in their work (historians, sociologists and anthropologists) since at least the early 1980s. In this way, we began a project in which we wanted to compare historical warlike mural paintings and current ritual practices in the Mezquital Valley. This was why Don Pancho became a key figure in our research, as he was the guide in our academic project.

Don Pancho was a man in his early fifties, no taller than 1.60 metres, well built, with a moustache and a hat. He was a very talkative man who could not stop telling us about the greatness of his own native culture. We went to the church where he had been working for many years in his independent investigations, the ex-convent of Ixmiquilpan (see Plate 2). The murals that adorned the sidewalls were well preserved, showing impressive warlike images dating back to the sixteenth century (see Plate As we walked, Don Pancho gave us a thorough explanation of the possible origins of the murals. He was sure that they had not been painted by Spaniards but by local people, Otomíes. He said that only Otomíes could have painted murals in that style because these were the same patterns he had learned from his ancestors. Some details of the murals were fading or had been erased. However, Don Pancho told us that, if he were allowed to do so, he could easily fill in the missing parts of the paintings and restore them to their original form, as he was sure he knew the possible content of the murals. He told us that his knowledge of history and culture were good enough to guess the patterns that the Otomíes from the sixteenth century wanted to paint, so he could recreate them without problems. We remained silent.

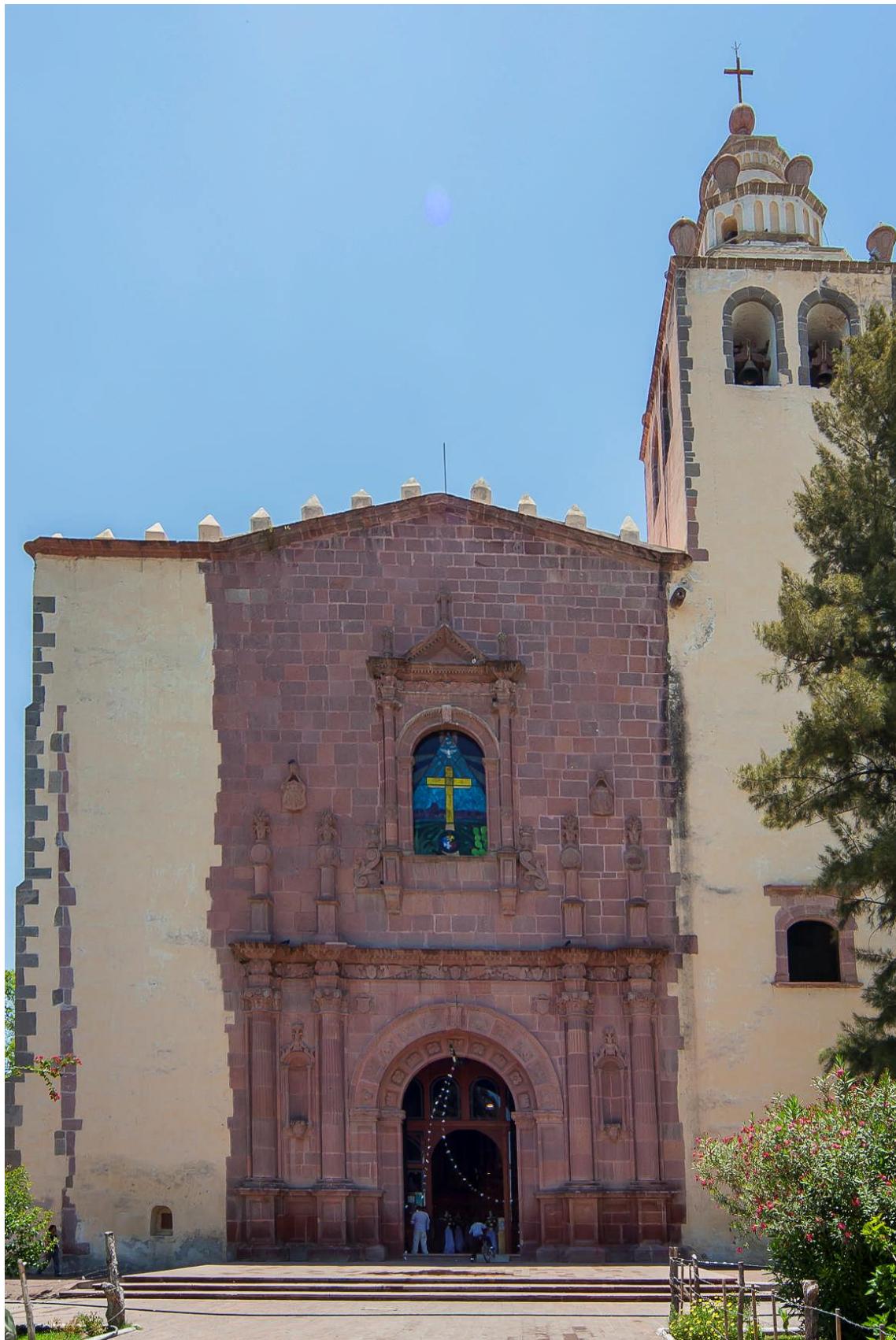


Plate 2. The temple of San Miguel Arcángel Ixmiquilpan. Photograph by José Luis Pérez Flores, 20 May 2006.



Plate 3. An anthropomorphic warrior subduing a ‘wild’ Chichimeca. Mural painting inside Ixmiquilpan church. Photograph by José Luis Pérez Flores, 21 March 2014.

We knew that the desire to make alterations to historical monuments or paintings was nothing new. As part of the history of many places in the world, buildings experience alterations and modifications, and their uses change with time. Therefore history is always something that is viewed from the present. As we noted in the previous section, rulers of pre-Hispanic empires used the narratives of the past as a means of legitimization in their present circumstances, altering facts and modifying them for political purposes. As the Italian historian Benedetto Croce argues, ‘The practical requirements that underlie historical judgment give to history in general a character of “contemporary history”; it does not matter how far away in time those past deeds might look, history in reality relates to the present needs and situations in which the facts reverberate’ (Croce 1992: 11). In the twentieth century, the symbolism that places occupy in the social imaginary of people foments the modification of façades, the alteration of motives, and in cases like warlike intervention, the complete obliteration of edifices and historical monuments. Intervention could be violent or symbolic. Places located at the centre in one period may change to the periphery, a theme Iuri Lotman has probed in his semiotics of culture (Lotman 1996). What was regarded as meaningful

can be deemed superfluous in a short period of time. As Utopian narratives may have an influence in this changing of perspectives and values, the purposeful alteration that Don Pancho wished to effect is one example of the practical connotations of utopian thought.

The authoritative and fluid discourse that Don Pancho elaborated gave us a hint about a man who was familiar with academics too. Until his death, Don Pancho worked as a researcher at the local Technological University of Valle del Mezquital,<sup>6</sup> and he had been invited to give lectures and participate in seminars at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. He had also published non-academic texts about Otomí culture. He had been a local politician too. He was the president of Alfajayucan, a municipality in the Mezquital Valley for many years, and his son currently holds an important position in the local government. As Don Pancho was leading us to different places in the locality of Ixmiquilpan he greeted practically everybody, some of them still calling him ‘President’. He was, without a doubt, a very well-known person. He embodied what Max Weber would describe as a charismatic aura (Weber 1947).

He also embodied many of the ideal anthropological attributes one expects in the field from ‘informants’: a person capable of giving extensive and coherent explanations about his culture, someone who can reflect critically about his own traditions in an academic fashion. The only problem we faced was that he appeared to be too good. In fact, his knowledge of Otomí culture seemed to be extensive regarding any topic we discussed. He was able to connect any historical fact to his own local point of view. For instance, when we were discussing the conquest of Mexico and the role that Otomíes had played in the resistance against the conquerors, Don Pancho rapidly tried to convince us that, without the intervention of Otomíes, the Aztec Empire would have never fallen so rapidly. We agreed with him.

As we were talking about this, out of the blue he suddenly changed the subject and told us that actually the real origin of the Aztecs, and also of the Otomíes, was in certain Canadian cultures. His explanation was that the migration that brought the nomadic people down from the north to settle down in the Mexican central valleys was due to their following species of butterflies which migrated from Canada to the south of Mexico. He quoted some unidentified sources which, he said, assured him that the real cause of the migration was not completely mythological but simply a cosmic following

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to mention that Don Pancho did not possess a formal university education, so it is notable that, although he did not have academic degrees, he was considered a man of knowledge and was a figure respected in intellectual circles.

of butterflies in their natural environment. Then he continued telling us about the complex contextualization of the importance of butterflies in the cosmology of the Otomíes. After a couple of hours he assured us that the origin of Otomí culture was in Canada and that historians should rewrite the history of the pre-Hispanic world.

Bizarre though this extrapolation of one's culture may look, in fact this was not the only time we were confronted with a mixture of scholarly and fantastic data mixed up together. I remember him talking about the reason why some Otomí people looked Asian. He said that this was because, during the colonial period, many Otomies were taken as slaves to the Philippines. He ventured the hypothesis that perhaps some cultural traits in this Asian country may be of Otomí origin and that some ancestors of the current Otomíes may be of Southeast Asian ancestry. Here too, we remained silent.

We could cite more examples of this kind. However, our intention is not to provide a 'distorted' perception of a culture or to characterize Don Pancho's view as meaningless. On the contrary, what fascinated us is how this 'Otomí-centric' perspective permeated almost everything Don Pancho thought and reasoned about Otomí culture and how this became second nature to him. On most occasions Don Pancho provided profound and historically supported explanations; he was not a liar or somebody who deliberately tried to pull tricks on people.<sup>7</sup> However, he seemed too eager to confirm at all times the relevance of Otomí culture in any aspect of local, regional, national and even international contexts. His thought had taken him so far in the development of his explanatory system that sometimes it seemed too good to be true.

As we have seen in the previous section, discourses emerging from an indigenous past exemplify a desire to assert subaltern identities in a context of colonial domination (see also Benedict Anderson 1990). These opposing views to dominant discourses mean that indigenous cultures, at least from central regions of New Spain, elaborated a form of resistance that still has an influence in the way they refer to their traditions today. Although we are not arguing in favour of an essentialist continuum from the past into the present (López Austin 2004, López Austin y López Lujan 2009), we do suggest that

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<sup>7</sup> Among his most important findings was the location of the Coatepec, the mythical birthplace of the god Huitzilopochtli, which is a reference place for the Aztecs' journey from Aztlan to Tenochtitlan in the Mexican Valley. Don Pancho's findings were revealed and hinted at many years before archeologists corroborated this information in 2013 ([http://www.milenio.com/hidalgo/Ubican-mitico-cerro-Coatepec-Hidalgo\\_0\\_226177664.html](http://www.milenio.com/hidalgo/Ubican-mitico-cerro-Coatepec-Hidalgo_0_226177664.html)).

the seeds of utopia that we find in Don Pancho's discourses are rooted in the past of the Otomís' culture of resistance.

The utopia of an all-encompassing Otomí culture pervading any form of explanation raises many questions about the motives and limits of ethnocentrism. If, as Lévi-Strauss argued, humans are all ethnocentric at the core when we are faced with the task of valuing our own cultures (Lévi-Strauss 1995: 308-312), then it is not strange to find Don Pancho using his position as an indigenous intellectual to exploit his knowledge about his culture personally and politically. His discourse can legitimately be described as utopian, as it is intended to project a view that locates indigenous culture at the centre of both past and future creations.

His motives may never be clarified, as he left no testimonies about his personal pursuits or his work with other academics. What is true is that specialists knew of his importance and his position as a local intellectual (Galinier 2004, Pérez Flores 2010). Without doubt, Don Pancho has spread his utopian thought to others, affecting the way they perceive the world of the Otomí. But before describing the effects of Don Pancho's utopias on the minds and expectations of researchers, we would like to offer an example that moves from utopia to the realm of cultural intervention, of what we have called inter(in)ventions.

### **Inter(in)ventions: how to build your own utopias**

As we have said, Don Pancho was also an artist who presented his own works in local and regional museums. Until his death he was a curator of ethnographic and archaeological exhibitions. In 2014 he was actually invited to give a workshop about the manufacture of traditional ritual masks in San Luis Potosí.

During another of our field trips to the Mezquital Valley in 2014, Don Pancho told us that this time he was going to show us something different. He said that he was fed up with churches and that we needed to go somewhere deep in the valley. We took our truck and after a long ride going over endless small hills, we arrived at a small dry field terrain, property of one of Don Pancho's friends. We don't remember his name, but he and his family treated us with respect. We left the truck and then walked for around thirty minutes over the rough terrain. We descended into a ravine in what appeared to be the bottom a dry river (see Plate 4).



Plate 4. Cave painting in Huichapan, Hidalgo. Photograph by José Luis Pérez Flores, 6 February 2011.

We were walking along the path when Don Pancho, who had not stopped talking to us for a second, suddenly climbed up one of the rocky walls. We followed him, and in the middle of the wall, covered by a small rocky protuberance, there was an amazing cave painting. We were very surprised. He explained that this was a sacred place for Otomíes and that the whole ravine was full of similar cave paintings, containing more than thirty sites in total. He also said that more ravines with cave painting existed in the valley and that nobody knows who painted them all or how old they were.

We made a photographic record of the paintings while Don Pancho provided many explanations about the symbols that appeared in them. However excited we were, we were slightly suspicious, as some parts of the paintings looked marvellously well preserved. Don Pancho said that the priests never came here. Therefore the Otomíes had mostly been able to keep these caves hidden from the religious authorities. Some of the other cave paintings we saw were in a bad, faded state, and it was impossible to discern any details.

Our point here is not to make an analysis of the paintings but to ponder on the doubts we had about Don Pancho and the veracity of the paintings. He was an artist, he

even confessed to have made different attempts to recreate the cave paintings in his home. We thought that perhaps he had either painted them singlehandedly or retouched them. Later we would find out that there is actually a register of these paintings in documents dating back at least fifty years (Acevedo et al. 2000). Thus they were not fakes, but we couldn't discount entirely the possibility that some possible retouches had been made recently.

As already noted, Don Pancho was an inventor of culture in the more Wagnerian sense of the term (Wagner 1981). In his desire to preserve intact the Otomí heritage, he may have been an 'interventionist' in culture too, someone who models Otomí patterns in utopian and holistic ways (see Plates 5 and 6). No other local indigenous specialist matched his artistic and discursive creativity. Let us bear in mind that Don Pancho had one of the most extensive libraries about Otomí culture at his home, with documents dating back to the middle of the sixteenth century being part of his personal archive. He seemed a man ready to make his utopias about his culture a reality.

From the different cave paintings we saw, we surmised that they were there for a hidden purpose, hidden away from the public. Don Pancho affirmed that the paintings should be seen as a form of resistance. He said that this was the only way to preserve intact a cosmology that was not compatible with the Catholicism of the region. Don Pancho said that, although the details of the paintings are not clear, they still retain elements that are genuinely Otomi, like the double-headed eagle, the sun on the top of a pyramid and the division between the worlds above and below.

Asking ourselves about the possible interventions of Don Pancho in the cave paintings we saw, we had to acknowledge that we had no obligation to judge them, nor to investigate the veracity of the findings. What we agreed was that utopia has to be modelled in practice and that such practice must be a testimony for the future. It does not matter if the materiality on which practice is impinged is fake or artificially modified – what is important is to be able to refer it as belonging to a past that can be projected to the future, a future ideally constructed by local invention.



Plate 5. Model of an eagle on amethyst, paper. Author: Francisco Luna Tavera. Photograph by José Luis Pérez Flores, 1 June 2007



Plate 6. Original eagle from the presbytery of Ixmiquilpan church. Photograph by José Luis Pérez Flores, 20 March 2014.

### Counter-utopias

It is a commonplace of anthropology that its development has focused on the invention and reinvention of native cultures, their exotic character and the fascination for minority groups (Fabian 1983, Sahlins 1999). In the case presented here, Don Pancho appears as a man who has also shaped the imagination and creativity of researchers. His all-encompassing explanation of culture as always related to the Otomíes has made an impact on researchers from different disciplines who have listened to what Don Pancho has told them and believe it. Until recently, if you wanted to do research of any kind in the Mezquital Valley, you ended up working with Don Pancho at some point. Don Pancho had become the man to listen to and to learn from regarding the local indigenous cultures of the valley. Thus he modelled his own vision of Otomí culture as the canonic and authoritative discourse of academics. In some way he was playing with us, tricking us, but also informing us. He fed researchers with what he thought they wanted. In the period we are referring to in this article, we could say that he was instilling in us the seeds of a counter-utopia to the exotic. He wanted us to see Otomí culture deliberately as a true example of alterity, projecting a utopian desire to preserve an ideal cultural form for the future.

We do not know his motives for certain, but following the track of his discourses and practices has been one of the richest experiences we have ever had in the field. He was a wise man, and although he was becoming more extreme in his explanations towards the end of his life, this does not detract from his role as an inventor of culture. He almost singlehandedly created a new version of his cultural heritage. Historians, anthropologists, historians of art and archaeologists were his main channels for the diffusion of this knowledge.

Don Pancho's utopia found an echo in academic research circles, which, he said, reproduced an idealized image of indigenous culture. He actually criticized the findings of anthropologists like Jacques Galinier (2004), who could not understand the differences between the 'authentic' cosmology and the data that the Otomí created on the spot for him as a form of joking around.<sup>8</sup> Don Pancho said that although Galinier

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<sup>8</sup> For a comparative analysis of forms of joking, see Handelman and Kapferer (1972).

had done an amazing job in understanding Otomí culture, he did not realize that his ‘informants’ were tricking him (personal communication).

In the utopian narratives, humour and creativity assume an important role in the development of authoritative cultures. Don Pancho was an expert in this area. He could, for instance, talk about an important codex in academic fashion and a moment later jump to a hyper-speculative interpretation of the material. He could focus on the symbolism of eagles and weapons in the codex, only to say later that the first ones to use that kind of symbolism were in fact ancestral Otomíes. In general, Don Pancho was always willing to make up information about his culture, so that his utopian discourse became a mixture of fiction and reality, a proper narrative that sought to transcend the limits of historical interpretation.

## Conclusion

We have created our own utopias concerning the Otomíes, we have irremediably fallen into the trap of Don Pancho, and we are happy to follow him. How to strike a balance? How much of his explanations are true? Which ones are pure lies? These are pointless questions to ask. Invention means the creative potential of devising new exotic relations that are neither true nor false. Maité Maskens and Ruy Blanes (2013) have called for a return and assertive commitment to a romanticist anthropology. We agree with them. It is necessary to acknowledge the ideal expectations we have, the utopias we create and the ones we are seduced by, and not be afraid of indulging sometimes in the art of self-confession. Anthropology is created in the field, and it is through ethnography that we shape the world we want to show. This is done by listening to utopian discourses, as well as by following our own romantic expectations about participant observation.

To conclude, we may say that unfortunately our utopian ideals are not always explicit and that we keep them for ourselves, remaining a footnote in our researches or a necessary evil to exorcize. This is an essential part of our world creation. In the case presented here, Don Pancho’s apparent inventions were a form of cultural resistance, the by-product of a form of thought that, as for his indigenous ancestors, suggests an intermingling of mythology and factual data. As it is impossible to discern which parts are true and which are false, we have to concede that, although some of his statements may have looked too fantastic to be a reality, they were elicited with the clear intention of affecting our views about his culture. Independently of what we think about the

veracity of Don Pancho, what we can conclude is that in his narratives we can clearly perceive the modelling of a planned utopian world-view that was intended to project an authoritative vision of Otomí culture.

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THE UNBEARABLE IMPOSSIBILITY OF FIELDWORK:  
ETHNOGRAPHIC DILEMMAS, MORAL LABORATORIES  
AND NARRATIVE PHENOMENOLOGY

RODOLFO MAGGIO<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

Writing ethnography is a creative experience. It produces outputs and, more importantly, it leaves traces. However, such creativity is of a particular kind, for it is mutually poietic. Objects are subjects, and the practice of fieldwork makes and re-makes subjects in unexpected and indecipherable ways. From this perspective, therefore, understanding the other, knowing the world and being ethically engaged with both appear ephemeral and, as a consequence, fundamentally unsubstantial. It is as if ethnography initiated a set of possibilities while at the same time incorporating these as impossibilities. In this sense I take ethnography to be utopian because its aims are inherently unattainable: looking at the world through the eyes of the other, pretending to do so without hijacking the other's perspective and establishing an ethical relationship of mutuality and fairness is always impossible in the concrete, everyday practice of ethnographers. In this article, I intend to explore this utopian character throughout the examination of three themes: the unattainable perfection of inter-subjectivity, the unattainable perfection of epistemology in the social sciences, and the unattainable perfection of the ethic of fieldwork.

### **Utopia: a mutual experience**

'Please, would you write the story of my life?' a Kwara'ae man from Gilbert Camp asked me once. I was strolling along the rugged road that connects the illegal settlement to Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands. I laughed, because I was surprised by the request. During my training as social scientist, I had been learning that friends and informants are not so easy to find. Ethnographic encounters, furthermore, are delicate moments requiring extreme discretion. I was told that one has to be as unobtrusive as possible. Participate and observe, the 'commandment' dictates. Sometimes it's even

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better to go unnoticed, sit in a corner and write notes, taking action only when and if invited. Influenced by these ideas, I could not imagine that my informants and friends would have been so keen on getting to know me. ‘You anthropologist, right? Then sit down and listen to my story’.

That is not exactly the way it goes elsewhere. When I introduce myself as an anthropologist in Europe, North America, Asia and other places, I am very often taken to be something else – an archaeologist, perhaps, or a forensic anthropologist at best. Somehow there have to be skulls and bones involved, at some point. And it is far from easy to get the message across when I explain that my interest is in cultures, customs, ideas, beliefs, and especially the people who embody them. In contrast, for the people of the Solomon Islands it is just obvious. Everybody knows what an anthropologist does, to the point that I had the following exchange countless of times:

‘So, you, what are you doing here?’

‘I am here to do anthropological research...’

‘Oh, really?! Anthropology?! Man! And which group are you gonna work with? Malaita? West? Which one? They are veeeery different, so very different, did you know that?’

I felt I was being taken seriously, that what I was doing was not devoid of significance. Most importantly, I felt that what I was doing mattered to them. Initially, as I was preparing my research, I was not expecting to feel like that. I settled in Gilbert Camp with the uncomfortable feeling of being a sort of disturbing factor. I was afraid of interfering with a small system in equilibrium and being regarded as an intruder, an uninvited nosy parker. But I was welcomed as exactly the opposite. Everybody seemed happy to have me there, and they could not wait to tell me of the many things that happened to themselves, to their fathers, the fathers of their fathers, and so on. The only truly disturbing factors were, ironically, things such as my informed consent sheets. It was just so out-of-place, so out-of-the-atmosphere to ask my hosts to complete and sign those printed, white pieces of paper. We felt as if that was holding us up. It was as if a bureaucratic impediment was preventing us from delving into each other straight away.

That is how the Kwara’ae man seemed to feel. He wanted me to sit down, listen, and then write his story down. He was looking for an opportunity to meet me and, especially,

to weave together the segments of his life into a meaningful narrative. As Michael Jackson wrote, storytelling is

a vital human strategy for sustaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances. To reconstitute events in a story is no longer to live those events in passivity, but to actively rework them, both in dialogue with others and within one's own imagination. This narrative imaginary involves an interplay of intersubjective and intrapsychic processes, since every transformation of inner monologue into social discourse—and every countervailing appropriation or subversion of this discourse in individual consciousness—depends as much on private reveries, fantasies, daydreams, and undeclared thoughts, as on public speech. In other words, while storytelling makes sociality possible, it is equally vital to the illusory, self-protective, self-justifying activity of individual minds. As Joan Didion observes, 'We tell ourselves stories in order to live'. (2002: 15)

To put it in other, perhaps less existentialist words, 'the phenomenal and the discursive, life as lived and life as talked about, are like the intertwining strands of a braided rope, each complexly involved in the other, in time' (Desjarlais, 2003: 6).

An opportunity to weave these strands into a meaningful narrative – that's what the Kwara'ae man was looking for. Coincidentally, I was looking for an opportunity to write his story. That's why I was there, to collect the stories of the inhabitants of an illegal settlement on the outskirts of a Melanesian capital. The coincidence of wants that characterized this encounter gave us a site in which to become transformed throughout the negotiation of our reciprocal position. I was transformed into who I wanted to be, thanks to his genuine willingness to become an informant. And he was transformed by the retrospective narration of what his life meant to him, which necessarily required a dedicated and regardful listener. We gave each other the opportunity to participate in each other's lives, leaving marks that time won't erase. And we kept doing so at regular intervals, for thirteen months, until the day of my departure. He offered me his genealogies, whose branches extended to almost five ascending generations. He offered me proverbs, legends and his personal views on my doubts and questions. Without realizing it, I was slowly turning into the anthropologist I wanted to be, or at least the kind of anthropologist he wanted me to be. And that is because he was looking at me as if I already was.

Perhaps a certain degree of *illusion biographique* contributes to such an ordered rendering of these events. As Bourdieu wrote,

On est sans doute en droit de supposer que le récit autobiographique s'inspire toujours, au moins pour une part, du souci de donner sens, de rendre raison, de dégager une logique à la fois rétrospective et prospective, une consistance et une constance, en établissant des relations intelligibles, comme celle de l'effet à la cause efficiente ou finale, entre les états successifs, ainsi constitués en étapes d'un développement nécessaire. (Bourdieu 1986: 69)

That, however, reinforces the idea that retrospective narratives are constructed in order to live, whereby what is told (the discursive) co-exists with what appears to be (the phenomenal). Here, biography and ethnography merge, while at the same time the limits of both become explicit.

I am not sure what happened to the Kwara'ae man, how exactly he was transformed as a consequence of my listening to his story – but I am sure that he was. And so were many of the other men and women I spent my time with, doing the ordinary housekeeping, or chatting under *the* mango tree. There were moments when the conversation became very intimate, in the sense that we were sharing the space of a sort of ‘cognitive bubble’ in which questions, answers, memories and hopes were extremely specific and detailed. Regularly, I would reciprocate their gifts of knowledge and intimacy with anecdotes about my life in Italy, England, France and other places where I had lived. My stories would inspire them and provide them with elements to rethink their views and opinions about the world, life and people. Sometimes the conversation (should I say the unstructured interview?) took unexpected directions, and I found myself reflecting on my own culture from novel perspectives. I remember one of these, which still makes me smile.

Gordon: So, you do not shower under the rain in England?

Rodolfo: No, not really.

G: Why?

R: Eh... I don't know.

G: Is it forbidden? I mean, people are not allowed?

R: No, no, we are allowed to shower under the rain... just... we do not do it.

G: Mmm... and when people play football... and it starts to rain... do people stop?

R: No, they go on.

G: Eh eh, that's funny.

R: Mh? Why do you find it funny?

G: Just... People do not have shower under the rain, but if they are playing football, and it rains, they stay under the rain! It's just funny!

Excerpt from Field Diary, November 6<sup>th</sup> 2011

Although this is not exactly the sort of discursive epiphany that could change one's worldview or life trajectory, not to speak of far-reaching anthropological conclusions, it is an epitome of ethnography as a mutualizing utopia. One might compare it with classic examples of greater significance, such as Lévi-Strauss's rendering of the dialogue between the missionaries and the Caduveo Indians:

The missionaries condemned the Indian men who, forgetful of hunting, fishing, and their families, wasted whole days in having their bodies painted. But they would ask the missionaries, 'Why are you so stupid?' 'In what way are we stupid?' the latter would reply. 'Because you do not paint yourself like the Caduveo.' To be a man it was necessary to be painted; to remain in the natural state was to be no different from the beasts. (Lévi-Strauss, 2011: 201)

Another classical example is the conversation that the missionary anthropologist Maurice Leenhardt had with a Pacific Islander:

Once, waiting to assess the mental progress of Canaques I had thought for many years, I risked the following suggestion: 'In short, we introduced the notion of spirit to your way of thinking?'

And he objected, 'Spirit? Bah! You didn't bring us the spirit. We already knew the spirit existed. We have always acted according to the spirit. What you have brought us is the body.' (Leenhardt, 1979 [1947]: 194)

These anecdotes marked the history of anthropology not only because of their pithy and revelatory character, but also and especially because of their narrative structure. They are structured like a joke, although they are not intended to make you laugh. They are

supposed to make you think, and perhaps change your perspective about a few human facts. They feature people, sentences, events and a punch line. Once that line is crossed, the story subverts what we were supposedly thinking about the meaning of man, soul and (if I dare placing my humble scribbles beside these immortal writings) rain.

Those few lines suggest that an ethnographic encounter might take the form of a mutual experience of transformation, the utopian character of which depends on the impossibility of grasping each other completely. In other words, despite their brevity they seem to be fulfilling the central mission of ethnography: getting as close as possible to those who are distant. It is as if these short stories were sufficiently illustrative to make a point. The inverse proportion between their illustrative power and their paucity of words prompts us to reflect upon the extent to which anthropology is fulfilling its project of knowing the other, the different, the distant. To what extent do contemporary anthropologists tell this kind of short, pithy, meaningful stories?

The American anthropologist Alex Golub writes, in a critical fashion, ‘The one lesson (American) anthropologists want to spread across the world is “It’s complicated”. In classrooms and publications, our goal is to show the complexity of human life to our audiences.’<sup>2</sup> That is not necessarily an ‘American’ tendency only. Such an emphasis on complexity arguably emerged at different times and in different places from the reflexive turn and the postmodern critique of ethnographic writing. Reflexivity, as the etymology suggests, is an inward-looking movement. In order to be interested in it, the reader has to be interested in anthropologists more than in the cultures anthropologists study. As for the postmodern turn, its disjunction between the world and the words, between epistemology and knowledge, between representation and communication, arguably undermined the ethnographic ideal of mutualizing experience as I describe it above.

This is not to say that the reflexive and postmodern turn did not bring positive, needed and timely changes. These include an injection of theoretical humility, a strong statement about the epistemological limits of ethnography and a constant awareness of its fictional character. But it also resulted in undermining its narrative potential and therefore in establishing a limit to its relational power. If possible, it made ethnography as a mutualizing utopia even more utopian. For the emphasis on complexity and the

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<sup>2</sup> Golub, <http://savageminds.org/2014/07/02/game-of-thrones-and-anthropology/>

continuous reflection on the validity and legitimacy of anthropological epistemology shifted the focus from the mutuality of the ethnographic experience to a set of professional and specialist dilemmas. The result was a kind of experience, analysis and writing that has often been described as impenetrable. Impenetrable, coincidentally, is the best antonym of ‘mutual’ I can think of.

In my research notes, ‘The Anthropology of Storytelling and the Storytelling of Anthropology’, I connected these issues – what Thomas Eriksen called a ‘crisis of communication’ (2006) – with the possibilities offered by a narrative turn (Maggio 2014). I argued that an anthropological understanding of the storytelling practices of anthropologists might suggest new ways in which ethnography can engage people who, with varying degrees of professionalism, are interested in knowing about different cultures. Towards the end of the article, I asked, ‘How to reconcile anthropology and storytelling as a form of communication in professional contexts?’ The present article and the thematic focus of this issue provide an opportunity to reflect upon ethnographies of mutualizing utopias as a possible answer to that question.

### **Mutuality: a moral laboratory**

Marshall Sahlins, in his boldly titled *What Kinship Is-and Is Not* (2013), argues that it is ‘the mutuality of being’. With the expression ‘mutuality of being’ he indicates the condition of humans who experience each other’s lives as reciprocally dependent and intrinsically connected. Their communal dependence relies, on the one hand, upon the genuine acknowledgement of an existential contribution (I would not be who I am if you were not who you are). On the other hand, mutuality draws on the consciousness that this contribution cannot be obliterated and, hence, the connection cannot be severed. ‘If love and nurture, giving food or partaking in it together, working together, living from the same land, mutual aid, sharing the fortunes of migration and residence, as well as adoption and marriage, are so many grounds of kinship, they all know with procreation the meaning of participating in one another’s life’ (*ibid.* 29). It follows that kinship does not depend upon genealogical connections, or at least not exclusively. Rather, it draws on the socio-cultural construction of human experience. ‘*Aeba, kyoudai,*’ as my friend

Hideaki Gushiken once said, to express this concept with a traditional Okinawa proverb: ‘Once we have met, we are brothers.’

Ethnographers who conduct long-term fieldwork through the classic method of participant observation not uncommonly pride themselves of becoming their informant’s post-natal brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, grandchildren and even parents. Most frequently, it is one’s informants who bestow these titles, and the act is usually interpreted as granting the ethnographer privileged access to indigenous kinship networks, broadly defined. Although the extent to which ethnographers gain full membership can be questioned, being referred to and even addressed with kinship terms usually corresponds to moving to a closer degree of proximity. Kinship is a particularly useful concept with which to think about the utopian quality of ethnography. The ethnographer is never completely entitled to assert that he grasped the point of view of his particular ‘other’ in much the same way as he is never fully sure he has become his other’s brother. After the mother’s brother, the other’s brother has good chances of becoming a new anthropological obsession.

From the practical point of view of conducting the research, there are obvious advantages in increasing proximity and, hopefully, intimacy. Ethnographers are allowed to enter and operate in the most private spaces, notably the household, but also other areas of cultural importance. Furthermore, their new status allows them to take part in the important events of a group, including births, deaths and life-changing rituals and experiences such as weddings, graduations, legal trials, accidents, diseases, travels and the kind of discursive epiphanies cited above. This is really the best kind of data.

Beyond a shadow of doubt, these relationships are by no means stable: they must stand the test of time and the many challenges that threaten to dissolve them. Breaking a promise, disappearing for many years, failing to help when help is needed, expressing envy rather than joy for the other’s achievements, all constitute social situations in which the movement towards increasing proximity and intimacy can be reversed. However, nothing can nullify one’s participation in the life of the other. Not even the degeneration of brain cells can obliterate the traces of reciprocal existence, if only because the person’s entire character has been marked and shaped by mutual experiences, even for just a few imperceptible elements. When death comes, it does not eradicate these marks from those

who survive. As existential companions, the living have those signs fixed in their own character, and hence their destiny – which are actually the same thing.

From a theoretical standpoint, these elective affinities constitute the elementary building blocks of the mutuality of being during fieldwork. Living the lives of our informants means not only being in the same place at the same time and sharing their feelings, such as joy at a wedding party or sorrow at a mourning session: it also, and especially, means participating in each other's situated perceptions. In technical terms, it is not just empathy, but sympathy.

Emotions are culturally constructed; they are sensations with a meaning. That meaning depends on group cohesion. Hence the ethnographic challenge is precisely to feel what our informants feel, rather than what we are inclined to feel in a given situation on the basis of our background. The eighteenth-century political economist Adam Smith clarified the concept of sympathy very effectively with the following example.

Sympathy [...] does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it. We sometimes feel for another, a passion of which he himself seems to be altogether incapable; because, when we put ourselves in his case, that passion arises in our breast from the imagination, though it does not in his from the reality. We blush for the impudence and rudeness of another, though he himself appears to have no sense of the impropriety of his own behaviour; because we cannot help feeling with what confusion we ourselves should be covered, had we behaved in so absurd a manner. (Smith 2009: 10)

From a rationalistic point of view, it follows that feeling with the ‘breast’ of our informants is no less utopian than seeing the world through their eyes. I remember an elderly scholar who, during the Q&A that followed a brief talk I gave at the University of Manchester in 2013, stood up and shouted, ‘I cannot imagine a statement more meaningless than “grasping the native point of view”! How the hell are you going to do that??’ At that time, I empathized with him. I even imagined what he would have said if I had hinted at the possibility of feeling his sentiments. But then I went on fieldwork and changed my mind.

The utopian character of an ethnographic epistemology based on sympathy is reinforced by its inherent political premises. Asserting that ethnographers could strive to experience the emotions of their informants rests on the fundamental assumption of

ontological similarity. If we wish we could feel what they feel, it means that we emphasise what makes us similar and under-emphasise what tells us apart. An alternative possibility is that we might just be projecting, placing our understanding of our own feelings upon them.

However, the perils of projection are not devoid of mutualistic outcomes. We all go to the field looking for ourselves, not just the other. Our research questions are never our ultimate research questions, if only because tentative answers are like slashing at the neck of a hydra. The more I listen to the stories of anthropologists, the more I share their workspaces and engage with their leisure time, the more I seem to perceive a limpid correlation between their character (or destiny) and their researches.

Even though we anthropologists might ask, say, how the Bororo negotiate their strategic search for romantic love with the value of moiety avoidance, we are actually learning to articulate our own love question. Even though we might be theorising the power of ritual to turn Burkinabe men into hunters, we are simultaneously asking what kind of masculinity would that ritual engender in us. I strongly believe that any anthropologist can establish some sort of correlation, if only unconscious, between the questions of his research and those of his personal existence.

Since doing that implies delineating psychological profiles, it is better not to attribute this kind of correlation to anybody in particular. As I am not in the position to declare that existential connections exist between what my fellow anthropologists say, their inner lives and their research questions, I will only speak about myself. And to illustrate how this aspect is closely connected with the mutualizing character of ethnography, I will let my informant speak again:

‘So, your house is in England and your home is in Italy, right?’

‘Yes. I went to Manchester to do my Ph.D. in Anthropology.’

‘I see. So... I mean... you are just like us. We are from Malaita, that is our home, but we come to Honiara in search for work. We don’t call this a home. It is a house, for us, you know, like you.’

Obviously, there is much more than the search of a job lying behind both my decision to migrate and that of my informants. The point, however, is that a correlation might exist between our research questions and the particular moment we are getting through. It

follows that the ethnographic encounter is not the beginning of mutualization. Rather, it is the concretization of the mutualizing process, which begins before the ‘first contact’, when a sort of Nietzschean imperative to become who we are directs us towards the distant, the different, the other.

The reflective moment that follows the encounter should therefore include a serious examination of who we have been before entering the field. Also, and especially, it should concern who or what we are becoming as a consequence of our ethnographic encounter. For example, I had to take into account the possibility that, in dealing with the moral dilemmas that originate from tensions between the values of Malaita and those of ‘the city’, between home and house, I was projecting my own, culturally constructed feelings of adventure, guilt and nostalgia. That was fundamental to the analytical process, because it helped me to differentiate between the specificities of home values in Malaita and in my region of origin.

The risk was that of projecting the shape of my feelings upon the ‘breast’ of my informants. My research question focused on the moral dilemmas faced by the migrants living in Gilbert Camp. They leave Malaita and come to Honiara because they value what is lacking in the former and can be found in the latter, but in Honiara they would like to live according to their Malaitan *kastom*. Doing so is far from easy because the meaning of their values changes when they attempt to concretize the *kastom* in their daily urban life, particularly in contexts as varied as the household, the church, the community and the market.

The challenge of overcoming these tensions results in uneasy sensations that acquire a specific meaning when shared in communal action. These tensions can escalate into authentic disputes if neglected, with the consequent threat of blood feuds. Having experienced many years of civil war, the inhabitants of Honiara know all too well that these tensions over the meaning and use of their values must be managed as quickly and efficiently as possible. And so they make use of their cultural competence to organize rituals, trials, compensations, meetings and household routines to cope with these conflicting values. How they do that is the wonderful workings of culture. The task, for me, was to describe these tensions, emotions and challenges, but the question was obviously from what perspective to do so.

I attempted to write an ethnography of the Kwara'ae people of Gilbert Camp from the perspective of the 'domestic moral economy'. This is the phrase that has guided the research project in which I have been collaborating for the past five years. This project drew primarily on the concept of 'moral economy' developed by E.P. Thompson and later re-elaborated by Peterson and Taylor for the purposes of applying it in the context of Oceanic societies. The focus on the household, the 'domestic' that Peterson and Taylor added, brought to the fore the importance of intimate spaces of negotiation in the development of the moral self.

In the several households in which I lived at different times during the thirteen months of my fieldwork, I repeatedly took part in intersubjective negotiations in which I was called to take a stand, notably a moral one. For instance, I could not accept a broken promise on the part of somebody who was calling me brother (because his father was calling me son). I stood firm on my personal conception of what a promise is, and for some reason that position prevailed. One day the rest of the family gathered in the kitchen, and I was told I was right. At that point my 'brother', who was older than me and the eldest son of my 'father', started to call me 'big brother'. And that was the end of the controversy; we never talked about it again.

But before the gathering, I had no idea of what the outcome would have been when I stubbornly decided not to insist on my definition of giving one's word. I repeatedly told myself, 'Maybe he has a different, more flexible definition of promise? Am I completely missing something? Am I being immoral with my insistence on his obligations?' It was an ethical risk that I took, as I was unable to predict how the negotiations would have ended.

That experience transformed my perception of what ethnography is supposed to be. I had begun fieldwork with the conviction that the ethnographer should refrain as much as possible from having a personal judgment of what he observes. But on that occasion I could not help it. I had my own personal and somehow commonsense idea of what a promise is. And now, after that experience, my take on ethnography has changed: nobody is less equipped to understand the point of view of another person than somebody who has no point of view at all.

Cheryl Mattingly defines as ‘moral laboratories’ ordinary situations like this event, where the morality of everyday life is negotiated in unexpected ways. By moral laboratories, she indicates not only households, but also hospitals, schools, clinics and any other place where personal transformation can happen as a consequence of moral negotiation. ‘A soccer field’, for example, ‘is hardly an obvious space of social experiment, moral critique, or personal transformation. And yet, it emerges as a kind of moral laboratory that is created in the midst of everyday life’ (Mattingly 2014: 17).

Mattingly looks at contexts of this kind as everyday sites where people ‘experiment’ with morality and negotiate their position in a moral ordinary that is, nevertheless, constantly new and unpredictable. In the process, they are transformed. This way of conceptualizing moments of moral tension, negotiation and transformation points to the etymological connection between the Latin words *experiri* (to try), *experiencia* (experience), *experimentum* (experiment) and *expertum* (expert). ‘Moral experiments are not challenges to something literal so much as challenges to cultural imagination’ (*ibid.*: 157). This conceptualization therefore suggests that the mutualizing character of ethnography can be identified in the process by which ethnographer and informant get to imagine themselves as ‘experts in each other’. To what extent, though, do they become expert in each other?

### **Testimony: a narrative phenomenology**

The intersubjective experience made possible by increasing degrees of intimacy is a foundational feature of ethnography as a mutualizing utopia. Utopia is the right term not because it indicates the impossibility to feel with the breast of the other, nor because it is impossible to entirely grasp his point of view. Rather, it is the right term because it conveys the desire to reach something that cannot be achieved. The adjective ‘utopian’ sits comfortably beside ethnography, for ethnography works precisely because its ultimate goal cannot be realized. Could the ethnographer see with the eyes of his informants or feel with their hearts, he would not be able to observe them and hence to describe them. He would meld with them, hence losing the possibility of perceiving them as separated and, hence, different. That distance is necessary. The utopian desire to reach a perfect degree of intimacy drives the ethnographer *as close as possible* to their

perspectives, feelings and trajectories. But no further. If he could, there would be no ethnographer anymore. The impossibility of perfect perception is, it follows, a necessary condition of perception itself. And the same holds for description.

Due to this set of affairs, it is common to meet social scientists who openly display, at best, a sense of inadequacy and, at worst, an inferiority complex with regard to the so-called ‘hard sciences’. Such a sense of inadequacy may overwhelm the research trajectory if approximations are seen as euphemistic equivalents of errors. No honest researcher would want to disseminate inaccuracies.

As a matter of fact, however, approximations are generally used in the world of scientific research, and not necessarily because more precise measures are not possible. For example, the resistance of air is often neglected when calculating the trajectory and speed of a falling body. To take another example, in physics the shape of the Earth is commonly approximated to a perfect sphere in order to simplify calculations of a whole array of variables, including gravity. Approximations, thus, are not to be seen as intellectual defeats, but rather as methodological appreciations of the specific qualities of the objects of study.

The subject matter of the social sciences is characterized by constant change and unpredictability. Just like medicine, biology, astrophysics and any other intellectual enterprise devoted to the observation, analysis and understanding of the universe, ethnography is bound to the impossibility of perfect description. For some reason, this impossibility may be perceived as unbearable, rather than necessary. Its necessity nonetheless relates to the very *raison d'être* of ethnography, namely the description of that highly unpredictable and constantly changing subject matter that is people, with their temporary enterprises, unfathomable actions and intricate relational work.

Each and every question should be approached with a methodology that suits it. Mattingly proposes that we understand the processes of moral transformation (of which ethnography is part, I add) by means of a methodological construct that she labels ‘narrative phenomenology’. Narrative phenomenology is an epistemological perspective that seeks to connect the situated experiences of specific actors to larger social histories through a dramatist rendering of ethnographic events. This narrative framework is arguably well suited to moving between the particular and the large scale in a *practice*-

*oriented way* because narratives show us life in process; social life emerges not as completed act, or as the mere enactment of a pre-given cultural logic, but as the local improvisation of everyday actors' (Mattingly 2010: 217).

Mattingly's conceptualization of narrative phenomenology reminds one of the main theories of storytelling. Stories are often seen as low-cost sources of information and low-risk opportunities to experience vicariously. Through stories, children are socialized into their group and society, develop a theory of the mind and become able to act socially. Listening to the retellings of the *Odyssey* might not necessarily equip them to confront cyclops or sirens, but it does allow them to consider the advantages of brilliance, guile and versatility to prevent and/or survive dangerous situations (Boyd 2009). Similarly, narrative phenomenology might not necessarily prove exemplary, let alone nomothetic, but it provides a testimony to the possible concretions of history.

It follows that narrative phenomenology might not enable us to predict, but it provides accurate descriptions of what people do when they attempt to predict. Mattingly writes,

Furthermore, and I think this is one of narrative's most important potentials, such a lens can help us to look at social life not just as a past flowing into the present but from the perspective of the future-life as imaginatively constructed, as hoped for, as dreaded, a vulnerable thing. A narrative phenomenology offers an especially powerful vantage point from which to see how the past and present are saturated by dreams – and nightmares – of the future. (*ibid.*: 217)

Rather than prediction, therefore, I argue that the epistemological reach of narrative phenomenology coincides with a conception of ethnography as testimony. This kind of ethnography is as much precise and realistic as it describes how ethnographic encounters shape and change the ethnographer. That is the reason why narrative phenomenology is methodologically coherent with the concept of a moral laboratory. The inherent quality of moral laboratories is their being non-exemplary, gradual, mutual, and 'story-like'. The tensions that exist between the values that are negotiated in these labs operate like a segment connecting the beginning and the end. As Mattingly writes (*ibid.*), 'to reveal the deeply experimental qualities of little moments, it is necessary to recognize the temporality of these moments in which the narrative qualities of moral experiments

become apparent as temporal moments and spaces in larger narrative trajectories.<sup>7</sup> Any episode, any ethnographic encounter, any negotiation is unique and variable, whereas they are all underscored by the reciprocal modification between those who experience the mutuality of being.

It follows that this ethnographic enterprise is, at best, equipped to provide a testimony of the cultural encounters, of social life, of reciprocity, of agency and structure, not to solve their mystery. The ethnographer is seen as one who writes what he saw while preserving the limits of what he knows. These limits are not meant to be conceived as missing knowledge, but rather as the inherent condition of ethnographic knowing. That means visualizing them not as the perimeter that marks the difference between what is epistemologically accessible and what is not. Rather, it means conceiving of these limits as an internal quality of ethnographic knowing, that is, one that makes ethnographic knowledge fundamentally possible.

In this sense, the utopian tension between ethnographic encounter and ethnographic knowledge is reproduced in the tension between writer and reader. The kind of ethnographic writing that narrative phenomenology encourages is itself a moral laboratory. The narrative phenomenologist offers not his knowledge to the reader, but his utopian desire to know, his attempt to do so, and his desire to share what he experienced.

## Conclusion

‘Time and again I would get a call from her, sometimes in the middle of the night, where she would simply break down. “It’s too much Cheryl,” she would cry. “What can I do?” I never knew what to say. I could see that she was staring straight into an abyss.’ (Mattingly 2014: 149). As I move through these lines, a process of negotiation develops. On the one hand, I am still trying to understand why and how narrative phenomenology offers an alternative theoretical trajectory to the mediation between neo-Aristotelian first-person ethics and post-humanist third-person perspectives. On the other hand, I am surprised by the charming suspension of disbelief engendered by Mattingly’s dramatist rendering. What is the relationship between a perspective that sees the small moments of everyday life as moral laboratories, the theoretical positioning of narrative phenomenology with different degrees of adherence to alternative (sometimes

incompatible) conceptualizations of morality, and the ethical consequences of the ensuing triangular relationship of mutual transformation between the informant, the ethnographer and the reader? That is another question for another time.

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WAS FOURIER'S JOY IN WORK SO UTOPIC?  
RESEARCHING WORK AND PLEASURE IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

MARIE-PIERRE GIBERT<sup>1</sup>

*'When people ask me if I'm playing tonight, I answer: "No, I'm working"'.*

(Musician, London, February 2011)

## Introduction

Every musician, dancer or choreographer I have met during the last fifteen years of research felt that s/he often had to fight against the presupposition that, because s/he was enjoying what s/he was doing (or at least some of it, as we will see later), it could not be considered 'real work'. S/he would therefore feel a need to have his or her friends or family, as well as some 'employers', understand that artistic work comprises many of the dimensions that are considered to be more 'classical' for work: it includes some tiring and stressful activities, it is time- and energy-consuming, there may be economic constraints on what and where they are performing, power relations are present and so on.<sup>2</sup> I was so struck by the discrepancy between the daily workload and work-related anxieties that artists expressed during formal and informal discussions, and this common view of artists as '*individuals who do not work, because they are having fun playing/dancing with friends*', that it forced me to question the inadequacy of thinking in terms of a duality between work and pleasure, not only for artistic work but in every work situation.

Common assumptions, media and political discourses in Western Europe usually present work as a source of displeasure (if not of deep suffering), often linking this negative perspective on work to the Latin and French etymology of the English word 'labour' ('toil, exertion, hardship, fatigue, distress, pain, work' (Klein 1967: 855)); the Latin etymology of the French word 'travail' (*tripaliare*: torture with an instrument called *tripalium*); the Christian perspective of God cursing Adam and Eve to have to suffer in work (Genesis 3:17-19),<sup>3</sup> as well as to give birth with 'painful labour' (Genesis 3:16);<sup>4</sup> and/or the Protestant ethic of life which emphasises the necessity to work

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<sup>2</sup> Although a specific area of sociology has addressed the question of 'artistic work' for decades (Becker 1982, Buscato 2002, 2004, Faulkner 1983, Menger 2002), it remains seldom acknowledged outside of it and is a continuing struggle in the everyday life of artists. One can also note striking resonances with the situation of academics (on this note, see Latour 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Hannah Arendt insists on the fact that God's punishment is not work per se, but the harsh dimension of such activity (1958: 107). She quotes J. Leclercq: 'La peine du travail est le résultat du péché original... L'homme non déchu eût travaillé dans la joie, mais il eût travaillé' (1946: 31, quoted by Arendt 1958: 107).

<sup>4</sup> The words 'labour' / 'travail' are still used in English and French to describe the process of giving birth.

hard on earth to deserve one going to heaven afterwards.<sup>5</sup> Pushing the argument only a bit further, one could say that, if there is pleasure, it is not work.

More surprisingly maybe, not so many social scientists, including anthropologists, seem to have questioned this assumption, although, as the German anthropologist Gert Spittler has argued, ‘the answer to many questions about the way people work depends on certain basic anthropological assumptions: do people enjoy working by natural inclination or do they find it abhorrent? (Spittler 2008: 144).’ Spittler continues, stressing that most scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who have written about work and labour start their philosophical, economic, political or sociological reflections with the assumption that ‘man has a natural aversion to work (*horror labouris*)’ (2008: 144). Closer to us, work is also more often than not looked at from the viewpoint of hardship and suffering (Volkoff 2006, Michel 2011), domination (Absi et al. 2015), and so on. Yet, one singular author departs from such a consensus: the French philosopher Charles Fourier (1772-1837). According to him, Man naturally enjoys working provided certain conditions that Fourier develops in what he calls his ‘*theory of attractive labour*’ (1808) and that he suggests putting into practice through a utopian new society, *Harmony*, which he describes at length and in meticulous detail in his numerous volumes. Born into a merchant family, at the heart of the development of a new industrial society driven by technological progress and concentrations of money that deeply modified the conditions and structure of work through a radical transformation of the systems of production and economy, Fourier is not against such progress, but condemns its negative consequences in terms of the terrible working conditions and unequal distribution of wealth it gives rise to. At a time of a lack of social legislation protecting workers, and when the organization of workers in trades unions was only at its early stages, Fourier, like several other thinkers at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Owen, Saint-Simon and Louis Blanc, to name but a few), is seeking a socio-economic answer rather than a political one. However, Fourier himself vigorously rejected the description ‘utopian’. And indeed, as Brémand (2014) has pointed out, the expression ‘utopian socialist’ that is frequently used to describe these authors (both in Fourier’s time and up until today) can be problematic, as it is often used in a derogative way to minimize or even discredit their suggestions, implying that the latter were simply unrealisable pipe dreams, or even totalitarianism in the making (Brémand ibid.). My understanding of the notion of ‘utopia’ follows a different path, closer to that developed by Maskens and Blanes in the introduction to this issue, and suggesting a productive combination of fiction and reality, a process of imagination rooted in reality, which permits both reflection and action to be expanded further. In

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<sup>5</sup> On discussions of the notions of ‘work’ and ‘labour’ in various Indo-European languages, see for instance the distinction made by Arendt between *labour-travail-Arbeit* and *work-œuvre-Werk* (1958: 79ff.). See also Godelier and Ignatieff 1980.

this article, I therefore suggest that Fourier's apparently utopian notion of 'joy in work' could help us bring forward the notion of 'pleasure' in anthropological research in order to shed new light on today's anthropology of work. As some of the fieldwork invoked here has only just started (see below), this article should be seen as involving exploration rather than producing a very polished theory, exploring this utopian suggestion at two entangled levels: the theoretical and the methodological.

To follow the alternative route of 'joy in work' permits us to explore further the numerous issues surrounding 'work'. I argue that the combination of work and some kind of pleasure exists to some degree in every working activity, and moreover, I advocate examining pleasure as one of the motors for work. Indeed, if we take the other side of the etymology of 'travail', the *tripalium* can also be looked at as an instrument that permits something to be produced (in this case, unfortunately, prisoners' confessions),<sup>6</sup> hence the question becomes: *How does work produce pleasure?* However, the notion of 'pleasure' must be made more complex. As various authors have stressed,<sup>7</sup> 'pleasure' can be approached as a combination of the individual level (psychological, emotional, neuro-physiological and so on) and the collective level (as a socially, culturally and historically constructed set of values and of ways to express them), thus encompassing a wide range of positive feelings such as joy, happiness and satisfaction, but also desire or lust. This concerns in particular two fields of anthropology, the now well-established anthropology of emotions (Lutz and White 1986, Crapanzano 1994, Beatty 2005) and the newly growing anthropology of happiness (Walker and Kavedžija 2015) and well-being (Corsín Jiménez 2008), the scope of which is too large for this article to be able to review all of them. In the specific context of work, the notion of pleasure is often linked to the processes by which workers attempt to give meaning to their work activities. The sociologist E.C. Hughes paved the way for such approach (1951, 1962) and was then followed by reflections concerning the 'self-satisfaction' and 'realization' of workers (Applebaum 1984), the 'meaning(fullness) of work' (Gamst 1995; Overell 2008; Spittler 2008), and the 'value of work' (Zimmerman 2011).<sup>8</sup> By revisiting Fourier's own notion of the 'attractiveness of work', I intend to connect these various perspectives.

Despite claiming a rather optimist perspective, I do not intend to embrace a naïve irenic one, and shall try to avoid the down-pits of ideologies such as the National Socialist slogan *Arbeitsfreude*

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<sup>6</sup> On this suggestion to reverse the Latin etymology of 'travail', see also Vatin 1999.

<sup>7</sup> For a good overview of the notion of *bonheur* (happiness) in anthropology, see Berthon et al. 2009, as well as the articles in their collection, in particular Demanget 2009.

<sup>8</sup> A vast quantitative sociological research on 'happiness and work' was also conducted a decade ago in France under the direction of Baudelot and Gollac (2003).

('joy in work'; see Campbell 1989), or more recent management's discourses (Savignac 2009).<sup>9</sup> Indeed, I do not wish to negate the difficulties or suffering that work situations can produce, but to reflect on them from a different perspective. By postulating that work is hard *per se*, existing studies of work and labour induce researchers to focus on difficulties and problems, thus mainly approaching the dimensions of 'pleasure at work' as ways in which workers have managed to cope with what is perceived as the fundamental negativity of work.<sup>10</sup> Departing from this restrictive perspective, an approach focused on 'pleasure' could shed new light on what is work about, though not only on its good parts, as we will see shortly. In other words, what is work 'made of' that leads to it being both enjoyable *and* difficult? A good example of this connection could be this remark made by a choreographer of Israeli Folk Dance during a three-day workshop in France: 'I'm so tired! It's difficult, but I'm here because I love it. I love it, but it's hard'.<sup>11</sup>

To explore further this hypothesis of pleasure also implies rethinking the methodology involved. What are the methodological consequences of this theoretical choice? How can one conduct an ethnography of 'work and pleasure'? Building on the research already mentioned with dancers, choreographers and musicians (Gibert 2007, 2011, 2014; Gibert and Meinhof 2009; Gibert and Kiwan 2016), I have decided to attempt a comparison between professions usually perceived as 'pleasurable' and those more commonly thought of as 'unbearable', hence exploring the two ends of a continuum constituted by stereotypes of what one considers to be the most and least pleasurable professions. By 'pleasurable professions', I mean professions or 'work worlds' (Becker 1982) in which the notion of work seems to overlap very much with the notion of pleasure. The so-called 'vocational professions' belong to this category (see Weber 1904-1905, Sapiro 2007). Conversely, 'unbearable professions' are professions in which the work-and-pleasure combination is rarely if ever mentioned or perceived, at least by outsiders to it. According to 'the man on the street's' perception, but also to the relevant literature,<sup>12</sup> and dedicated scientific publications (Corbin 1982, Corteel and Le Lay 2011, Dagonet 1997, Douglas 1967, Fourrier 1808, 1829, Hughes 1951, Jeanjean 2006, Lhuilier and Cochin 1999, Perry 1978, Volkoff 2006), activities conducted by waste workers (rippers/garbage men, sanitation/sewage workers, street cleaners,

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, the emergence of the label 'Great Place to Work'; or the movement towards 'liberation management' developed by the consultant Tom Peters (see his own website : <http://tompeters.com/writing/manifestos/>).

<sup>10</sup> There are some notable exceptions, such as Marchand's research on what he calls 'the pursuit of pleasurable work' (2015), or Corteel's article on the internal logic articulated around the notion of *Spaß* (pleasure, amusement) within a group of factory workers (2005).

<sup>11</sup> This comment was made in Hebrew. Translations from the author unless otherwise stated.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, the impressive novel by Tristan Egolf, *Lord of the Barnyard : Killing the Fatted Calf and Arming the Aware in the Corn Belt*, New York : Grove Press, 1998.

cleaning ladies, and so on) are amongst the hardest and the least desirable professions,<sup>13</sup> largely because, as Corteel stresses (2010), such professions concentrate a large proportion of 'dirty work' together (also Hughes 1962). I have therefore chosen them to constitute the frame of my second case study and am therefore currently conducting participant ethnography with French *cantonniers* (street cleaners). This somehow tongue-in-cheek framework permits me to first examine the hypertrophy and paradoxes of the imbrications between work and pleasure within artistic work in order to shed further light on their relationship in many other work situations, but in a less visible manner.

As this research with street cleaners has only just started,<sup>14</sup> this article should be seen as explorative rather than a well-polished set of results. In both cases, in addition to the more 'classical' and inductive participant observation, I also intend to develop an alternative way of conducting fieldwork in order to encourage people to reflect on the 'bright side' of the working parts of their lives<sup>15</sup> and hence to acknowledge fully the subjective dimension of pleasure. My interest on 'what does one like in his/her work' is soon announced when meeting new people during fieldwork and is one of the main themes of formal interviews. This has so far provided interesting results in terms of surprisingly rapid and copious comments from whoever hears about my research focus, as well as providing a stimulus for the workers to point out everything that is not enjoyable in their work.<sup>16</sup> In addition, in the case of the street cleaners, I heard many appreciative comments of this subject from workers who felt that they are usually only perceived negatively (their work is dirty, under-qualified, degrading, and so on) and who expressed their pleasure at showing the good sides of it. Yet, I am fully aware that this type of prompting creates a specific bias, starting with the risk of ascribing my own optimistic view of life to the people I am

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<sup>13</sup> They easily fit into the '3 D's jobs', a category deriving from J. Connell's work in Japan, with its notion of the 3 K's jobs: *kitanai* ('dirty'), *kiken* ('dangerous') and *kitsui* ('difficult') (Connell 1993).

<sup>14</sup> Three months of participant observation were conducted between May and July 2015, in full light, with the authorization of Lyon Metropole, but no formal interviews have as yet taken place. I first took part in an induction or training week for new street cleaners and then went on working with them, on average for three full days (6am-1pm) per week. I therefore worked in the morning shift of two different depots, each of them composed of approximately twenty workers divided into smaller teams, some of which I have not directly worked with. In depot #1, most of the workers work with small trucks in and around three villages in the suburbs of Lyon. In depot #2, everyone is a *cantonnier à pied* (walking street-cleaner) in a rather wealthy neighbourhood of Lyon city centre. Although most of the street cleaners in Lyon are male, the depot #2 team was composed of more than one third women. This is one of the reasons why I was sent to this depot, not because I had asked for it, but because the management enforces the rule that access be provided to specific changing rooms for any female worker, myself included.

<sup>15</sup> By using the phrase 'the working parts of their life', I reject the expression 'work-life balance' often used both by management and social sciences. Although this article is not the place to develop my position, I would argue that this expression merely leads to an intellectual dead-end by opposing work and life.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, one day, when I was questioning my co-workers after the shift on 'tasks that they like more than others', one answered: 'Well, let's say that some activities are less difficult than others', hence challenging my positive formulation.

working with.<sup>17</sup> I am therefore continually monitoring such bias in many ways. First of all, this focus on ‘pleasure at work’ only started in 2013; hence participant observation and formal interviews conducted with the same artists prior to this date offer a good ‘control group’. Secondly, during my fieldwork with street cleaners, prompted discussions are brought into comparison with informal conversations and verbatim statements constructed during work, at times when my co-workers are not explicitly focused on my interest on ‘pleasure’, yet have been informed, so might still be very aware of it. Finally, comparisons of my first results with those of other researchers also working with waste workers (in particular rippers and sewage workers) have so far shown to be quite consistent with them (Corteel and Lelay 2011; Jeanjean 2006; Lhuilier and Cochin 1999; Perry 1978; Volkoff 2006).

In the next section I will briefly describe Charles Fourier’s notion of the ‘attractiveness of work’ before confronting it with one specific work-world which, at first glance, could be seen as a model of ‘joy in work’, the world of artistic work. Using this discussion as a point of departure, the next part of this article will move to the other end of the pleasurable—unpleasurable continuum to present exploratory data constructed with street cleaners. Drawing on these two sets of data, the final section will interrogate further the combination of work *and* pleasure by unveiling unexplored dimensions of work.

### **Fourier’s joy in work**

Made desperate by his observation of work and economy of his lifetime (1772-1837), at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, the autodidact philosopher Charles Fourier became convinced of the necessity to re-evaluate labour, to reorganize it and with it to reorganize the entire way of living of his fellow citizens. In order to do so, his reflections follow various interlinked trajectories.<sup>18</sup> The overarching one is his ‘theory of passionate attraction’, which permits him to discover what he calls the ‘riddle of the destinies’ (i.e. God’s plans for the universe) and to discard ‘reason’ as an inadequate way to organize human life. Within this larger theory lies his ‘theory of attractive labour’ (*industrie attrayante*), which will particularly interest us here. His second set of thoughts is dedicated to the organization of a new society (*Harmonie*) composed of communities (*Phalanges* or Phalanx), in which it would be possible to reorganize one’s entire life according to his ‘theory of passionate attraction’. Even though, through lack of financial support, Fourier

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<sup>17</sup> On the consequences of the ethnographer’s own values for the process of ‘taking sides’ in the field, see, for instance, Armbruster 2008.

<sup>18</sup> A large part of Fourier’s life was devoted to this gigantic project, giving rise to thousands of pages of analysis and projects. This section of my article is an attempt to convey Fourier’s main ideas concerning work, and has no ambition to be exhaustive. A vast literature on Fourier exists, for instance, Beecher 1986, Beecher and Bienvenu 1971, or a recent issue of the French review *Critique* entitled ‘Fourier revient’ (2015).

himself was never really able to experiment with his own plans, several attempts by either communities or enterprises following Fourier's directions in part or as a whole have been conducted over the centuries (on such attempts, see Desmars 2014, Lallement 2015, as well as Beecher's biography of Victor Considerant, Beecher 2001).

In a nutshell, Fourier postulates that, if God has given various passions to human beings, it is not in vain: human passions are good in themselves, but they have been corrupted by the social use we have made of them. Therefore Fourier's aim is to understand how human passions work (hence his '*calculus of the mechanism of passions*') and from there, to completely reorganize life (including work) around the human passions, instead of against them:

The first science that I discovered was the theory of passionate attraction. When I had recognized that the progressive series assure full development to the passions of both men and women, and to people of diverse classes; when I had recognized that in this new order the more passions one has, the stronger and wealthier one will become, I surmised that if God had given so much influence to passionate attraction and so little to reason, its enemy, his purpose was to guide us to the system of progressive series, which is completely consistent with attraction. Then I supposed that attraction, which is so much maligned by the philosophers, must be interpreter of the designs of God concerning the social order. By this means I arrived at the ANALYTIC AND SYNTHETIC CALCULUS OF PASSIONATE ATTRACTIONS AND REPULSIONS. (C. Fourier, *Oeuvres Complètes*, T.5, 1841: 149, translated by Beecher 1986: 65)

It was within this framework that Fourier developed his theory of 'attractive labour', based on the assumption that humans are by nature attracted to work. Furthermore, he postulated that, provided that work is properly organized around Man's passions, it is not simply a pleasure for the human being, but the answer to an essential need, the only way for the individual to realize him- or herself fully (Beecher 1986: 274). His theory is therefore an attempt to understand the conditions that will permit work to regain its attractiveness. According to him, a few dimensions are of particular importance in inducing and enhancing the pleasure in work:

(1) Not every human being likes to do the same thing, and there is an enormous range of tastes amongst humanity. This permits every workload to be taken care of.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the activities of each member of the Phalanx will depend on what he or she likes to do, and will be chosen freely by the worker. As a corollary, specific education aimed at developing personal passions must be created and enforced amongst the children, which he calls 'vocational education'.

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<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, Fourier's idea of the 'Little Hordes': groups of children aged 9 to 15 who will take care of dirt and filth, based on his assessment that a majority of children before puberty 'incline to dirtiness and impudence', hence will perform with pleasure, 'honour and intrepidity any repulsive work' (*Théorie de l'unité universelle*, t.5, pp.140-148; reproduced in Charles Fourier, *L'attraction passionnée*, Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1967, pp. 180-4).

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- (2) Boredom at work often comes from repetition, therefore activities have to be changed frequently during the day.
- (3) As human passions play an important role in social relations, they should not be repressed, but on the contrary their potentialities should be exploited to enhance the pleasure of working (Fourier insists in particular on competition and seduction). As a corollary, co-workers must be chosen freely, and by common choice, with no overarching authority deciding for them.
- (4) Remuneration must be by means of a share of profits (not wages), according to a combination of a/ the attractiveness, difficulty and utility of the work; b/ the economic capital invested by the individual in the community; and c/ the skills, abilities and efforts displayed by the worker. As a corollary, pleasure can only be complete if the workers are free from anxiety over their (or their dependents') welfare. Therefore, in the Phalanx, there must be a guarantee of a minimum income sufficient for present and future needs.
- (5) The work place itself must be attractive (clean, elegant, etc.).<sup>20</sup>

At first glance, artistic work seems to corroborate many of the points suggested by C. Fourier for attractive labour to be realized. Would this mean that utopia has become reality? Let us have a closer look...

### **The attractive labour of artists**

If one listens to discussions with and between artists on their perceptions of work, what they consider to be so pleasurable in their professions are the dimension of creativity, the pleasure in playing and/or dancing, the good feeling of producing something which gives pleasure to others, the diversity of 'work places', and the autonomy and freedom of time, space and companionship management. These elements fit into two overarching themes that resonate highly with Fourier's reflections on the conditions for the 'attractiveness of labour':

- (1) Freedom of choice: what, where, when you work, how, with whom, for what, for whom;
- (2) Diversity of what composes one's work in terms of time, space, actions and people.

However, what emerges from fieldwork (conversations, interviews, observations) is that this apparently ideal situation is full of invisible and contradictory limits, and moreover, it is precisely

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<sup>20</sup> I have rephrased these five dimensions from Fourier's numerous texts. See in particular *Théorie de l'unité universelle II* (1812/1822) and *Le nouveau monde industriel et sociétaire, ou invention du procédé d'industrie attrayante et naturelle distribuée en séries passionnées* (1829). For translations into English and discussions, see Beecher 1986, Beecher and Bienvenu 1971.

certain dimensions linked to these two overarching themes that seem to fail to provide pleasure to the artists. In practice, their artistic creation and pleasure are actually undermined and sometimes heavily influenced by a vast series of constraints that are precisely linked to some of the characteristics of such 'pleasurable jobs'. On one hand, their 'self-organization' incurs very self-demanding, unscheduled working times, often consisting of a succession of 'paid work' and 'unpaid work', the later often being composed of very time-consuming tasks. Indeed, in order to succeed in obtaining paid gigs, concerts, shows and workshops, a large part of their time must be spent in activities for which they are usually not paid, and which in addition to be time-consuming, might include intensive physical effort (mechanical and mental), boring repetitive actions and tasks requiring competences very different from those required to play or create music or dance. Beyond the now well-studied unpaid tasks of rehearsing and creating,<sup>21</sup> other such activities consist in meetings with other artists, musical/dance industry actors and/or financial providers; on feeding the news of various online and offline social networks and other medias in order to develop and nourish their own networks; and on listening to and watching other artists for inspiration and information. Artists might even find it necessary to accept unpaid or underpaid gigs that they see as 'communication work', since such exposure might help them secure paid work later on. In addition, another large part of their time is usually devoted to administrative and logistical tasks<sup>22</sup> unless they are sufficiently well paid to allocate some of their earnings to an accountant and/or an agent. This range of activities has only recently been conceptualized in the social sciences under the terms of 'relational labor' (Baym 2015),<sup>23</sup> 'reputation work' (Zafirau 2008) and 'informational labor' (Menger 2009, Dumont 2015). As a consequence, one of the more recurrent problems mentioned by the artists themselves is to let themselves be swamped by the social-public work times (i.e. performances and concerts, but also workshops and classes, meetings, networking activities etc.), as well as administrative and logistical work (accountancy, communication and promotion, financial applications, and so on), and therefore to neglect individual-private work-times, in particular creative ones, even though 'doing only music or dance' was *precisely* why they wanted to make it as a profession on the first place. In addition, not only are such activities often unknown or unrecognized dimensions of artistic work on the part of the outside world, so also are

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<sup>21</sup> Apart for artists working for a monthly salary, it is very rare for an artist to be officially paid for rehearsing or creating. Among the main exceptions to this are commissioned work or artistic residencies for which an artist receives payment (as well as working space and accommodation in the case of residencies)-in order to create a specific piece of art.

<sup>22</sup> Ranging from 'basic' grocery shopping by the choreographers and teachers of Israeli folk dance, who offer food and beverages in each of their dancing sessions, to sophisticated travel arrangements for gigs and workshops all around the world.

<sup>23</sup> By 'relational work', Baym is referring to how musicians are engaged in 'regular, ongoing communication with audiences over time to build social relationships that foster paid work' (Baym 2015: 16).

those are tasks that they themselves were often not expecting when they embarked on artistic activity, tasks they were not trained for and/or that they strongly dislike.

Regarding the 'freedom of choice' aspect, according to artists this freedom seldom occurs, as working conditions are more often decided by contingency than by choice. Strong discrepancies between musicians' artistic desires and their professional constraints were already studied by Becker as early as the 1950s, followed more recently by Faulkner (1983), Menger (2002, 2005, 2009), Buscato (2004, 2008, 2010), Cottrell (2004) and Perrenoud (2007), to name but a few. This conflict is a common figure for professional musicians, who often need to water down their artistic standards to satisfy those (audience and producers) who will provide them with a salary and career opportunities. We have talked elsewhere of 'the tri-dimensional matrix' when this two-dimensional conflict is combined with a transnational dimension (Gibert 2011; Gibert and Kiwan 2016). Indeed, there are multiple indirect and often invisible constraints and sources of authority that play a role in their artistic production: the demands of the 'client' (event organizer, audience, financial support, etc.), peer pressure for recognition (to be good and to remain so), conflicts of ego and self-censorship, the need for connections, the 'burden of representation' (Tagg 1988), and so on. Moreover, Fourier's suggestion that use be made of human passions such as competition and seduction could be developed here, as the question of social interactions and relations of power is quite central for artists, though apparently seldom researched *per se*. A positive perspective on rivalries or seduction processes between co-workers as a possibility to provide and enhance pleasure at work is indeed rarely adopted by researchers, for whom interactions such as help, humour, play or antagonism are more often looked at as strategies to cope with the difficulties of work (see Mainsant 2008, Gernet and Le Lay 2011), although, as Corteel has shown (2005), some workers have indeed imagined other ways around this.

At this point in the analysis, it seems that Fourier's suggestions for reaching pleasure in work might indeed only be utopian, as in the case of artists such conditions seem to produce more constraints than pleasure for the workers. However, I suggest we confront this result with a world of work that is considered particularly 'non-pleasurable' from the outside.

### ***Au bonheur des cantonniers*<sup>24</sup>**

According to their job description, the labour of street cleaners consists in keeping the streets and roads clean, that is, in removing any discarded object (paper, plastic, cigarette butts, etc.) or any matters (dust, excrement, etc.), including 'natural' matters that are perceived as dirty once on the ground of a street or city (weeds, leaves, etc.). They are also expected to report any problems with

<sup>24</sup> Paraphrase of Emile Zola's title, *Aux bonheur des dames* (1883), a novel in which he describes the working conditions of department store employees in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century.

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or malfunction of the public space and street furniture. Hence the main activities of *cantonniers* consist of cleaning the streets with brooms, pliers, water and shovels, regularly emptying wastebins, shovelling dead leaves, cutting grass springing up sidewalks, etc., as well as collecting any rubbish dumped beyond the circuit of the rippers or that is not the proper shape for the rippers' domestic garbage trucks (large electrical appliances, car tyres, etc.).

When prompted on their satisfactions at work,<sup>25</sup> street cleaners emphasise what they call the 'advantages', such as:

- security of employment,<sup>26</sup> stressing that this is not so common for under-qualified workers;
- specific working hours (6am-1pm for the morning shift, 1pm-8pm for the afternoon one), which permits workers to have what they consider to be 'a second life', i.e. to spend time with their families, to practise leisure activities intensively (sport, art, etc.), to have an additional part-time job (with the authorization of the employer), and so on;<sup>27</sup>
- a good atmosphere within the team, between colleagues and with the boss, being happy to go to work every morning, or at least not being stressed out:

We're lucky. For the guy who has been assigned to a warehouse with a nasty boss, or colleagues he doesn't get along with, it's a nightmare!<sup>28</sup>

Some of them also stated their appreciation of being able to work in a nice environment,<sup>29</sup> as well as it being a pleasure to contribute to keeping the city clean: 'Why should I despise my work? This [a clean street] is what I want to see when I go for a walk in a city'.

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<sup>25</sup> Since formal interviews have not yet been conducted, such prompting has so far only happened during informal discussions held during fieldwork, in particular when I first introduce myself to a new team or worker.

<sup>26</sup> The choice of two very different case studies (artists vs. waste workers) also permits a comparison between the situation of self-employed, irregularly paid workers with no retirement schemes (true for most of the artists I have been working with) and a situation of wage labour in which waste workers are often civil servants, or employees of outsourcing enterprises hired by national, regional or local authorities. My own research is taking place with a group of workers who are territorial civil servants and local council workers.

<sup>27</sup> Informal discussion during a demonstration of street cleaners in Paris in October 2015 revealed that they were demonstrating against the Paris council because 'they want to have us work on day time hours'. (Many thanks to M. Fansten for pointing out this event to me).

<sup>28</sup> All the quotes of this section are informal comments (i.e. not obtained during formal interviews) in French (translations by the author). I scribbled them down on my notebook as soon as possible. For reasons of anonymity, unless it is necessary for understanding, I have not indicated who made them.

<sup>29</sup> This was particularly the case during the first half of fieldwork, when I was working in small villages in the area of Monts du Lyonnais, with its beautiful landscapes, where the workers would often comment on a nice view or panorama. This also appeared during induction week, when I announced to the group what my research was about. One of the future street cleaners exclaimed that it reminded him of one day when he was a ripper and was covering for another worker in a round that he did not know, in the Monts du Lyonnais: 'It was getting light, and I was collecting collecting, collecting, bin after bin, without looking around. At some point we had a bit of 'haut le pied' [technical jargon to designate the moments when rippers are travelling instead of running beside the truck fetching and emptying containers in the dumpster; this can either be done standing on the back of the truck or sitting by the side of the driver] so I looked around, and it was incredibly beautiful: the sun was rising out of the vineyards. So I got my phone out and took a picture!'.

Therefore, in this case, and contrary to what arises from research conducted with artists, prompted discussions convey a sense that working conditions provide these workers with greater satisfaction than the content of work itself (the activities performed). Indeed, as one worker explained to me: 'I will not tell you that I like what I do, but I like the conditions of it.' He soon nuanced this comment with a laugh by adding: 'But well, I won't say that it is not very hard when you wake up at 5 am!'

However, observant participation during the working activities themselves (i.e. unprompted) underlines the additional dimensions that seem to bring the workers some satisfaction at work. First of all, many workers expressed their appreciation at having a diversity of tasks composing their everyday labour, as well as the possibility to organize them according to their or their team's own wishes, depending on various conditions and priorities that they can analyse themselves:

Let's cut [weeds] and blow [the weeds in the gutter] at most today, because tomorrow the mechanical street sweeper will be here, so he'll collect them in no time, and the streets will be perfect!

Let's go to street X, I've seen yesterday [when he was off duty] that it's getting full of leaves.

Other research conflates this pleasure with a degree of autonomy in work and decision-making: authors have shown that many street cleaners or rippers appreciate 'being alone', that is, with no management around (Corteel 2010, Corteel and Le Lay 2011, Jeanjean 2006). Research and social movements advocating greater autonomy for workers are also echoing this satisfaction. Indeed, this freedom of organization is directly linked to what the workers described as a relation of trust within their team, and with their boss:

He (the boss) knows that we are working well, and that he can always count on us if there is an emergency, so he knows that if one morning we cannot work as hard as usual [because we're very tired, or because it's very hot, etc.], we'll work harder the next day and the streets will be clean anyway.

However, this feeling of freedom to decide how to organize their tasks is qualified by an understanding of the limited spectrum of their possibilities of decision, as this comment shows:

We are the ones doing ('*les exécutants*'), they are the one thinking ('*les têtes pensantes*'). [If] they say we must not touch those [cut weeds in specific areas], we do not touch, even if we don't understand why.

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In addition, they also feel that this ability to prioritize their tasks is being challenged by the ever-growing number of streets that they are supposed to be taking care of within the same amount of time.

Secondly, every street cleaner I talked to has, at some point, mentioned the potential for finding and/or recycling discarded objects, although this advantage is never completely disconnected from the downside of manipulating dirt and potential danger.<sup>30</sup> This is a subject on which one can hear unending anecdotes. For instance, one Saturday morning, while I was arriving at depot #2, I met one worker who told me that prior to his shift he would rush to the area around the nearby discos, as he would often find objects or cash left over by partygoers who had been sitting on the outside pavements there. One can also see in both depots several objects found in the streets by the workers, who then use them to furnish or decorate the depot or their personal lockers,<sup>31</sup> a practice that acts to provide them with a working environment that they enjoy.<sup>32</sup> This benefit of finding useful objects echoes one of the first invitations I received from workers of depot #1 to participate in their informal work routines: ‘In this job you can always manage to find something useful. You should go and have a look at the dumpsters [recycling disposal containers in the depot yard] – you might find something for yourself’. This aspect of finding useful or unexpected objects contrasts interestingly with *cantonniers*’ resentment at performing endlessly repetitive labour, as the streets they have just cleaned must repeatedly be cleaned again.<sup>33</sup>

Thirdly, while workers often mention how their work in the public space can be source of conflicts with local residents, shopkeepers, pedestrians and/or car drivers, many of them also underline in both informal discourses and their actions how much they appreciate the dimension of social contact with these various local actors. One day, when we were discussing the importance of fostering good social relations in the field, one of the workers exclaimed: ‘Before, it was the postman who was doing this kind of link, now there is only us left to do so’. Hence some workers even consider their work to be part of the vast professional group involved in ‘care’, as they feel that they are providing services ranging from exchanging greetings with lonely neighbours to giving directions to lost tourists. They also often link these additional services and their feelings of usefulness to the society directly to what is considered to be the main function of their job: to provide a nice (i.e. clean and safe) public space. Yet, regrets at not being recognized as such often

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<sup>30</sup> In her work with sewage workers, Jeanjean also notes that workers underline their paradoxal power of changing filth into gold when they find jewels within the dirt of sewers (2006: 91).

<sup>31</sup> So much so that it has led one French anthropologist, D. Cortel, who has been working for several years with garbage collectors, to start a new project on waste recovery (introductory speech to her conference paper, AFEA, July 2015).

<sup>32</sup> For a more general perspective on such practices of personalizing work places, see Monjaret 1996.

<sup>33</sup> On this repetitive dimension of labour, see Arendt, for whom this is a distinctive criterium between labour and work : ‘unlike *working*, whose end has come when the object is finished, *laboring* always moves in the same circle’ (1958: 98).

follow such discussions, permitting us to reflect on the paradoxical visibility and invisibility of workers in the public space.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, the use of mechanical tools (mainly leaf-blowers, weed-cutters and street-sweeping trucks) seems to be a source of enjoyment for several workers I have met (though not everyone). Already during induction week, I was surprised by the numerous enquiries made by the new staff regarding how long they would have to wait until they can finally get to use them, arguing that this is one of the highlights of the job.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, one day when we were talking about a worker from another depot, someone exclaimed: 'Yes, with him, as soon as you put down your (leaf) blower, forget it! He seizes it, and he doesn't want to give it back. I guess he loves it!' In addition, I personally soon started to really enjoy using such tools, both because I felt like 'playing with toys' and because they gave me the feeling that you could get more work done in less time than with just your broom and shovel. Hence other workers often teased me about my 'new friend the blower', though did not seem surprised by my apparent pleasure in using it.<sup>36</sup> However, this does not mean that pleasure only comes from such activities: the tools are heavy and often produce musculoskeletal pain, thus bringing us back to the notion of hardship and suffering. They are also quite noisy, and consequently often source of conflicts with residents, who complain about their disturbing sound, especially when they are being used in residential areas early in the morning.

### **From utopian ethnography to the invisible dimensions of work**

Fourier's theories and ideas are rather complex and luxuriant, if not obscure, as well as being theoretically imprecise or even problematic.<sup>37</sup> I do not propose to adopt them as a theoretical framework, but some of his analysis and imaginative suggestions can be quite stimulating, in particular his starting point that work should be seen as a positive activity, a need, a pleasure for a human being, provided that some conditions are respected, which need to be thoroughly studied (and in his case, experimented with).

With this perspective in mind, research with artists has shown how a situation that is apparently close to many of Fourier's suggestions is bringing results the reverse of what would be

<sup>34</sup> See similar comments and feelings amongst rippers, described in Corteel and Le Play 2011, Pueyo and Volkoff 2011, Soares 2011. On the articulation between public space management and the notions of dirty and clean, see the recent issue of *Ethnologie Française* entitled '*Propreté, saleté, urbanité*' and its introduction by Guitard and Milliot (2015).

<sup>35</sup> This type of satisfaction could be linked to what Gernet and Le Lay have described as 'seeking the 'beautiful gesture' (*beau geste*)' (2011: 263-4), a conscious display of agility and force by the rippers when throwing rubbish bags into the truck.

<sup>36</sup> Obviously this remark is only at its anecdotal stage, but to integrate the pleasure of the researcher within the *dispositif* of observant-participation is also one of my methodological concerns and part of my framework.

<sup>37</sup> For instance, Fourier adopts a pre-evolutionist perspective, suggesting that evolution's phases for human beings are: 1-Eden; 2-Sauvagerie; 3-Patriarcat; 4-Barbarie; 5-Civilisation (his time and society), and 6-Harmony, yet to be achieved through his work (see, for instance, his foreword to *Le nouveau monde industriel*, 1829).

expected. At first glance, what Fourier analyses as the necessity to change activities often parallels the proclaimed pleasure of artists in having a job which comprises diverse activities, but this is soon challenged by their real difficulties in managing and mastering them all. In contrast, street cleaners' unprompted discussions show that it is precisely the diversity of tasks that provides them with some satisfaction at work, even though this is not seen as one of its main characteristics. Hence this apparent contradiction becomes useful as a starting point from which to reflect on the multiple layers and dimensions composing any specific work and their unequal visibility. As already pointed out by E.C. Hughes, a single work label (here designations of 'musician', 'dancer', 'choreographer' or 'street cleaner') may encompass a wide multiplicity of tasks and dimensions of work in terms of actions, protagonists and/or working conditions.<sup>38</sup> Yet, what has come to light very clearly when focusing on two very different types of work is that many of these dimensions are partly or completely invisible, that is, unknown, unrecognized and/or 'hidden' (Wadel 1979), although as important (if not more so) as the known and recognized dimensions, precisely because they play a central role in what really brings pleasure for and/or constraints on the workers. While it seems particularly the case with artistic work, as seen earlier, the study of *cantonniers* has shown that this multilayered character of work also exists in other work situations. The fact that each of these invisible dimensions is invisible potentially provides workers with different types of feelings and emotions (satisfactions, frustrations, and so on), hence calling for an in-depth study of each layer to be able to unpack the multiple dimensions of a human multilayered activity further.

In turn, the invisibility of the side-dimensions of a specific profession often goes along with a lack of their social and/or official recognition. For instance, in the case of what are considered to be the 'passion' or 'vocational' professions, what is very striking is how 'to have pleasure at one's work' creates an external perception of this work 'not being a serious job', 'not a hard job', 'not a proper job',<sup>39</sup> although research has shown that pleasure does not mean a lack of seriousness, of huge physical effort, of affective implications, and so on.<sup>40</sup> More surprisingly, perhaps, the process seems to be identical for street cleaners: they feel that they are not recognized for some of the dimensions to which they precisely attach importance, such as bringing some 'social well-being' to the public space, whilst this is precisely one of the hidden dimensions of their work that provides

<sup>38</sup> See also Godelier: 'a work process can never be reduced to its material and social aspects because these imply the active presence of diverse types of representations which are an essential part of it, the '*idéelle*' one (...), and diverse values attached to these various forms of work which are conferring different status to those practising them, inferior, superior or equivalent to status given by other forms of human activities' (1991: 718).

<sup>39</sup> Hence the need felt by artists to reinforce the difference linguistically, as shown in the opening quote of this article. Similarly, the anthropologist must often explain: 'No, I'm not on holidays, I'm doing fieldwork'.

<sup>40</sup> This had already been analysed by Karl Marx, who stated: « Que le travail soit *travail attractif*, auto-effectuation de l'individu, (...) ne signifie aucunement qu'il soit pur plaisir, pur amusement (...) Des travaux effectivement libres, la composition d'une œuvre musicale par exemple, requièrent à la fois un sacré sérieux et l'effort le plus intense » (*Manuscrits de 1857-1858*, Paris, Ed. Sociales, 1980, t.2, p. 101, quoted by Vatin 1999 :16).

them with satisfaction. In addition, what the ethnography of artistic work has shown is that, precisely because their work is mainly seen as bringing them pleasure, it is often inferred that they should consent to many unpleasurable invisible dimensions, including the extra load of unpaid work in order to foster potential future paid engagements.<sup>41</sup> In other words, if it is not (recognized as) 'real work', why should it really be paid?

Finally, this invisibility of tasks within a specific type of work also raises the question of expertise. As one musician in London pointed out, 'You have to be able to survive, so you become a handy man, but you don't master any of the things'. While a professional musician is apparently judged mainly on his expertise in playing such and such an instrument or repertoire, in creating music and so on his working experience shows him that he must also acquire competences in very different domains, sometimes to the point that the skills needed to satisfy the side dimensions of his work will overwhelm the skill needed for its core activity. Hence the multiplicity of unknown facets of one's work brings with it the risk of failing to master all of its dimensions. Here we could also invoke Fourier once more through his suggestion that the world contains a much wider variety of human tastes than one usually assumes, and that to examine it more closely could permit individual interests and collective ones to be combined, rather than their being opposed. Myth or reality, one former ripper told me once how one of his colleagues, an amateur rugby player, was pleased by his work as a ripper because he saw it as paid exercise fostering his sporting life!

### Towards a utopian anthropology of work

How can work provide satisfaction and pleasure to workers? How can anthropologists deal with this perspective both theoretically and empirically? How can utopia meet ethnography? Considering Fourier's so-called utopian 'attractive work' as an imagined yet possible reality that one has to search for through fieldwork, rather than as an impossible fiction, as would a depreciative acceptance of the term 'utopia', has permitted discovering 'what is going well' – yet in close relation to 'what is not going so well' for the workers. It is precisely because I was explicitly searching for 'work and pleasure' that I paid specific attention to many aspects of fieldwork that I might have neglected otherwise, as did my interlocutors and co-workers. This is particularly true for my own pleasure as an anthropologist at work! Doing so is not merely to admit 'the uncomfortable fact that [I] was always already implicated in "the field"' (Collins and Gallinat 2010: 3), but to make proper use of 'the ethnographic self as resource' (*ibid.*; see also Halloy

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<sup>41</sup> This situation also calls for a development of what is fundamentally different between Fourier's model and the situation of non-salaried artists. Indeed, as Fourier stressed, real pleasure can only be achieved if work is freed from anxieties over subsistence, an idea that is at the centre of today's social movements that are advocating a guaranteed minimum income (see, for instance, the notion of a '*revenu universel*' developed by Mylondo 2010).

2006). Without moving towards what I would call an egocentric ethnography,<sup>42</sup> which would generalize my own perceptions and values, but nonetheless using my senses and experiences on the field as hints to further my investigations, this reflexive process was mainly conducted in two directions: what I would feel while performing my work as apprentice street cleaner,<sup>43</sup> and how a reflection on my own multi-layered work as an academic (a teacher and researcher in anthropology) would resonate with artists' or street cleaners' own professional experiences:

This morning, I feel that I am again very clumsy with my broom and shovel, and then a feeling of ease comes back. I also decide (after several trials) to place my broom on my shoulder when I make the clamp with the shovel (before that I was placing it under my armpit, mimicking someone but I forgot who it was... I remember I observed several, but maybe I did not copy right). It feels a lot better, and this way the stick is not caught in my safety jacket [which is] a bit too big for me... It's funny, I was sure I had tried this way before and that it was not comfortable. . I also practice on the strength to give to the broom: in the course of the morning, I test several positions in order to find the perfect angle which will give enough strength to properly scrape, yet not too much (it stops the broom!). I thus recall the discussion we had with B, C and E before setting out into the streets: a comparison between different professions. It happens often; sometimes it starts out from something about my own work [as a teacher-researcher in anthropology], sometimes not. I was telling them that there is a technical nature to their work, and some technical jargon. They had a laugh, reproaching me 'to say so in order to please them'. I didn't have time to explain what I meant, we had to leave. (field notes, 27/7/2015)<sup>44</sup>

This quote touches on both of the trajectories mentioned earlier. On the one hand, my own perception of the activity – here my growing satisfaction with being able to master my tools slightly (broom and shovel), the pleasure given by a gesture that I finally find efficient, and a hint of the use I can make of this personal experience to discuss it further with other workers – although here the attempt fails, as I do not have time to develop the discussion. When I picked up this thread on another day, explaining to them how I would experience several gestures, positions and so on, they were quite surprised by my description, but validated it and started to describe their own beginnings. On the other hand, here one can catch sight of the way my own experience as an academic (with its pleasure and displeasure) is brought up in the field (often at their demand) to debate with my co-workers about their own work. In the case of the artists this comparative mode soon became regular, as we were often struck by the many similarities: beyond the apparent evidence of having chosen to make a living out of activities we enjoyed even before they became our professions and the same frustration with our relations' misunderstandings of the sense of our

<sup>42</sup> Not to be mistaken for 'auto-ethnography', that is, 'fieldwork in which the ethnographic self is the only informant involved' (Collins and Gallinat 2010: 10).

<sup>43</sup> Although an experienced amateur dancer myself, I did not actually 'practice' being a professional musician, dancer or choreographer the way I practised being a street cleaner. However, I did participate in several invisible dimensions of artistic work, such as helping in administrative, logistic or communication tasks.

<sup>44</sup> Notes in French, translated by the author.

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activities ('I'm not spending time making friends, I'm doing fieldwork') appeared to involve a similar intellectual pleasure of finally finding the right way to express, whether through music, dance, or anthropological analysis and words, something that one 'has inside oneself'.

To summarize, this voluntary perspective has brought to light various aspects of work, both pleasant and unpleasant. Could this be a pathway for a more applied anthropology of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What if research focused on the good things that one could emphasize and expand, from there seeing how it could be developed to enhance the pleasure of/at/in work? Could this help us to grant pleasure to the thousands of workers who are indeed suffering in their professional lives?

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## A HOMINIST MANIFESTO: ANTHROPOLOGY, UTOPIA AND ETHICS<sup>1</sup>

ALBERT PIETTE<sup>2</sup> AND GWENDOLINE TORTERAT<sup>3</sup>

### Introduction

This article is not an anthropological analysis of a utopia. It is an anthropological utopia: on what anthropology could be, its educational and ethical role, and on the world it can create. One cannot be radical without running the risk of a certain naivety, hoping—as Kant wrote (Kant 2006: beginning p. 67)<sup>4</sup>—for a world without war, a world in which all peace treaties ban war, a world without armies, a world in which the courage to wage war and support war is not exalted, a world without terror in the name of divinities or territories, a world without hungry children, a world in which every situation demonstrates that tolerance is the mark of humanity (Voltaire 2010: beginning p. 302), also a world where everyone remembers that they themselves were once children who played, who loved toys. This means hoping for a world where it is extremely important to protect every singularity in the name of its existence, to cultivate the emotional feeling that when babies grow up they should not go hungry, become terrorists, kill or be killed in the name of various values. The possibility that this world could exist feeds the hope that all human beings could reconnect with their humanity in order to be reconciled with the essentials: the differentiation of individuals and each person's unique identity. Then, behind each singularity would lie the possibility of a new way of existing in reaction to those who contradict, divert or trample on what makes us human beings. Going beyond these frightening realities means considering and adopting another perspective for humans in general, as well as for anthropology. We are therefore opening the door to a new existential utopia that finds a place alongside other utopias imagined by researchers in the human and social sciences, such as the sociological utopia (Elias 2014),<sup>5</sup> the cultural utopia (Levitas 2011), microtopias (Sansi 2014), real utopias (Wright 2010; Cooper 2014) or concrete utopias (McGuire 2011). The nature of the link we are establishing between an existential utopia and anthropology distinguishes our view from these propositions. These

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<sup>4</sup> On the contemporary promotion of Kantian ethics in anthropology, see Hart (2010), also Wardle (2010).

<sup>5</sup> Discussed in a lecture delivered in 1986.

forms—from a sociogenesis of utopias rooted in the social or cultural *topos* to utopian projections implemented in limited environments—do not set out to articulate a new role for anthropologists such as us, with the humans that surround us. This articulation is essential in order to lay the foundations for a world in which the anthropologist would have a role to play and every individual would rediscover his or her singularity.

We accept the naivety and the risk involved in playing the prophet and in being seen as ridiculous, but we prefer this to the discomfort of not saying what we think. The subject of ‘improvements’ is out of place in our time. Social and political improvement is a recurring theme, the technical improvement of the human body is very contemporary, with its accompanying ethical debates. But do these carry any weight in the face of murderous violence? What we wish to consider here is a radical improvement in the way people exist.

There would be no reason to present this text—which is written like a manifesto, in the tone of a manifesto—in an anthropological journal if we did not think that anthropology could play an important role in the creation of what we call ‘hominist ethics’. We call it hominist because it directly concerns human beings and is connected with anthropological knowledge of *Homo sapiens* and its evolutionary transformations. What is at stake is a true passion for humanity, an intellectual passion for *anthropos* in comparison with all living things, and a moral and emotional passion with regard to the atrocities that humans manage to commit. In this article, we will make a distinction between, on the one hand, what, based on anthropology, triggered our thought—an interpretation of the difference between the Neanderthal and *Homo sapiens*—and on the other hand, the underlying principles of hominist ethics, which are themselves also connected with anthropological knowledge and practice. Hominist human beings have four traits: they are singularists, ‘noters’, lucid and tolerant. Let us start with a scenario of their origins.

### **The story of how it all started: who are these *Homo sapiens*?**

When examining human specificity, social and cultural anthropology broadly focuses on the sociocultural dimension. In the scenarios of origin occasionally presented by anthropology, the originality of human beings is linked to rules, norms and prohibitions, to mechanisms of exchange and transmission. The existence of the first human beings, as evoked by Morgan, Malinowski or Lévi-Strauss, is presented either as a rupture for the sake of survival, made possible by an increase in cerebral powers, or as a continuation transformed by human complexity and a capacity for openness that has replaced inflexible animal behaviors. In any case, from the outset, human beings were well and truly sociocultural human beings,

sometimes conquerors of order and creators of traditions, sometimes always-already part of a system of constraints that get the better of them. This has provided the social sciences – sociology or social anthropology – with the foundations of their research.

But who are these *Sapiens*? We think one of the key elements of the human mode of living is the rarity of lively thoughts and of consciousness about what the individual is doing, will do, or will no longer do, about what is happening around him, including atrocities and death. These words of Pascal ring very true: ‘That something so obvious as the vanity of the world should be so little recognized that people find it odd and surprising to be told that it is foolish to seek greatness; that is most remarkable’ (Pascal 1995: 5). What can surprise an anthropologist? Social life; but this exists among most animals! Cultural differences? Why not? The origin of intelligence and reflexive consciousness? No doubt! What most fascinates us is precisely the everyday suspension of lucidity that can occasionally be effected by intelligence and consciousness. Not really thinking, thinking but not too much, suppressing thought, but without effort, without really being aware of it. Lethargy, restriction, detachment, reserve or hesitation, hypoconsciousness, hypolucidity. Hypo: not only through the effect of the automaticity of habits, of natural continuity, but also through the effect of a new cognitive ability that leads to living as a human being. This is our hypothesis. Modes of being present are what are characteristic of human beings.

For 100,000 years, probably more, human beings, *Homo sapiens*, have been living with the risks of intelligence, consciousness (especially reflexive consciousness), the ability to know what they are doing, and the ability to conceive of passing time and death – the deaths of others as well as their own deaths, which they know they cannot escape. Perhaps it is this risk and its consequences that Neanderthals succumbed to, but *Homo sapiens* avoided. What happened? It can be said that animals live in a world in which perception and action are carried out without much gestural or cognitive laterality, without surrounding details. The species of the *Homo* genus have for their part gradually developed forms of distance from the immediacy of the situation that are more perceptual and behavioural than existential, thanks to their habitat, to the presence of objects, and to the use of material signs, identity marks and recognition marks. And here arises the particular and fascinating case of Neanderthals, which can teach us a lot about the specificity of *Sapiens*. Their lives testify to the presence of burials indicating consciousness of time and death. Could this capacity for lucidity have been hampered by the fact that they were unable to defuse their consciousness of death, something that might explain their long evolutionary stagnation? In short, they were excessively and

insufficiently intelligent! Could the failure of Neanderthals have been to know they were mortal, to be ‘too’ conscious of their mortality?

Neanderthal Man, who knows he is going to die, thus takes care of corpses. This would be our scenario of origin: many prehistorians – not all of them – agree that, contrary to preconceived ideas, Neanderthal burials are not accompanied by offerings.<sup>6</sup> However, a survey of *Homo sapiens* burials contemporaneous with those of Neanderthals does not rule out the possibility of offerings. On this basis, our hypothesis is to associate *Homo sapiens* with a specific ability that did not develop in the Neanderthals: to imagine a dead person as still alive – not just as a former living being, but as someone living a new life. Offerings are a sign – an uncertain one, of course – of belief in this new life after death, or at least of belief in unbelievable statements, those that require the cognitive ability to associate two contradictory qualities, for example, death and life. Thus *Homo sapiens* were or became capable of producing statements that combine contradictory categories (the dead person is alive, or the stone is a spirit), to which they started to give a kind of consent. So let’s say that they believe in it: ‘And what if he were still alive! And what if it were true!’. The act of believing has just appeared, as has, at the same time – and above all – the need not to carry one’s understanding of this statement all the way to its conclusion, to accept its uncertainty.

Thus the life of *Homo* would have changed. It is at that point that everything would have shifted. Human beings accept uncertainty, not fully understanding those contradictory statements, not looking any further. From that moment, they learn semi-consciousness and cognitive loosening. Imagine day-to-day life in a space–time in which reserve and distance are learned and gradually become new cognitive skills for human beings, who also develop them in other areas of activity or thought. The ability to accept indecision, not to take things literally, but also – and no doubt unfortunately – not wanting to be conscious, not facing up to things, becomes more widespread. Another world starts to develop.

The act of believing would therefore have encouraged a new cognitive aptitude, a mental loosening that was able to spread into all of human activities. It corresponds to a hypolucid mode of being connected with the mental and discursive association of implausible things. Human beings would have just learned to use consciousness minimally: from then on, the individual would have known to what extent he could be conscious and what he could be conscious of. Without sufficient support to face up to cognitive tension, Neanderthal Man lacked not so much reassuring divinities but rather hypolucidity. Unlike what we so often

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<sup>6</sup> See the work of Steven Mithen (1996), also Ian Tattersall (1998), Wynn and Coolidge (2004). And see Piette (2015b) for further references.

read, we cannot say that human beings, modern humans, have effected a triumphant departure from animality. If there has been a departure, it is relative to other species of *Homo*, and there is nothing triumphant about this departure since the success of humans (or at least their survival up until now) has been achieved through a cognitive loosening. But while religious statements generated this new mode of life, they inspired a kind of solace and created the need for humans to stabilize, secure and transmit them. This generated the risk of entrenching, and therefore of absolutizing, forgetting that it is only a belief in an implausible statement because human beings have just learned to suspend, to delay, and therefore to forget, to avoid thinking too much. Without this minimality, would human beings have been able to invent collective beings and everything else? Such is the minor mode of human life, an original way of being present in the world.

How should this scenario of origin be read and interpreted? It could correspond to a historical reality—we do not rule that out. It could, as Rousseau (Rousseau 2013 [1755]) suggested, be considered a hypothesis that could serve as a basis for examining the present, seeing the distance that separates humans from this described situation. Why? It would be possible to distinguish three phases:

First phase: Sapiens and Neanderthal are different, particularly in their cerebral anatomy, cognitive connections and vocal organs. The potential of these differences is not really actualizing yet. Both *Homo* are conscious of themselves and of time. They know they will die, in a difficult lucidity and tension. The lives of both are tense, ‘untrquil’.

Second phase: Sapiens leave offerings in burials, invent contradictory statements ('the dead person is alive') and then start thinking that a dead person can still be alive, corresponding to an existing referent. They know they invented this type of statement and have doubts as to its realistic impact. They doubt, they believe, they start believing while still doubting. This gradually moves them to suspend their usual requirement of verification and understanding.

Third phase: Sapiens get ensnared by the comforts of indifference and passivity. They acquire a taste for mental relaxation and learning indifference. This relaxation also enables creativity and the development of culture, technology and politics (over a period of a few thousand years), whereas Neanderthals vanish from the earth. This is not to say that other factors did not play a part in these developments.

Neanderthals did not undergo the second and third phases. There is also reason to believe that they left objects in burials, and that these were possibly associated with a sentimental and emotional value, without generating a contradictory statement and the act of believing in it. Neanderthals kept having the need to understand, to know before accepting, whereas accepting would have been natural and more obvious for Sapiens at the risk of falling into error, unimpeded as they were by possible contradictions, by the unverifiable and unfalsifiable. And do Sapiens not believe too much? It is as if passivity prevailed over doubt and uncertainty. This was at the cost of a reduction in lucidity.

In various writings (for example, Piette 2015a, 2015b), our ethnographic descriptions have often stressed the consistency, to varying degrees, of the presence-absence of human beings, the human ability to be here and elsewhere, to be here and thinking about something else, to be here and doing something else, to be not very attentive, to be not ‘really’ here or there. This is something that would support wide-ranging, endless, bustling activity, which is all the more remarkable in light of this potential for lucidity. Have human beings—potentially so lucid—reached the point of forgetting themselves in this way? There is a great risk of resting too much, of not wanting to know, of accepting.

Each living species presents various characteristics. Humans have this in particular: that they give their assent to things that they have imagined, that they have invented. Giving one’s assent means believing, thinking that these things existed before they were imagined or invented. It is not a very common characteristic. It testifies to a capacity for credulity that implies another one, namely not seeing, not knowing and not wanting to know this operation: that these invented things have been invented and do not exist in the other world in which they are placed. This mode of being has not always existed, and it may not always exist over the course of the 4 or 5 billion years that separate us from the explosion of the universe. When thinking about this specificity—with its origins in relatively recent time (about 100,000 years ago) and its limited duration—it can generate a feeling of amazement, not just at the extreme violence committed in the name of inventions, but also at the suffering experienced, all of the preoccupations to which humans abandon themselves day and night, and the sadness that everyone feels at the loss of things and beings that are felt to be singular. This is one of the characteristics of the human species: not knowing, not wanting to know, being passive. It also means having lost—by leaning upon various supports like divinities and institutions—the feeling of amazement that there is nothing but the singular, this one, that one. This passivity linked to a lack of lucidity also makes it possible to be inattentive to others, whom we deal with in a state of agitation. In a way, humans have forgotten how to marvel at presence, at the

fact that each person is there and will soon no longer exist. Faced with this state of affairs, what can anthropology offer?

### **Attention to singularity**

An anthropology of human beings is far from obvious, given the constant absence of humans in the history of social and cultural anthropology. Implicitly or explicitly, this field usually explores cultures, the separation between cultures, by dividing the work into cultural areas, through scientific programs and through the institutionalization of research teams. Such has been the anthropological tradition for over a century, and as Keith Hart (2013) reminds us, it has not changed much, neither in its methodologies nor in its interests, which continue primarily to emphasize societies without electricity. The so-called ontological turn of recent years, which rejects every kind of naturalism and extends the construction principle to the physical sphere, looks to us like an intensification of this underlying culturalism. The position and function of the now-porous boundary between nature and culture fluctuates according to the culture (Descola 2013). Some have not omitted to condemn this as an essentialism of cultural differences (Palecek and Risjord 2013), or at least condemn the risk of backing up thought in terms of radical differences, those of the native or autochthonous people thus grouped into cultural sets. According to French philosopher Frédéric Nef: ‘This argument challenges the very possibility of an opposition between physical beings and social beings. By going down the slope of this cultural relativism, one can be led to assert that, in a culture in which fairies haunt isolated fountains, they are natural beings’ (2009: 56).

Anthropology operates based on a Platonic model: human beings are not interesting, and true reality lies elsewhere, in cultures, structures, the unconscious, actions, relations and even ontology. Today’s anthropologists think that the idea of *anthropos* is untenable (Henare et al. 2007: 10). In their view, the legacy of the socio-structuralist paradigm is not far away, and human beings still depend on a variability in the contingent phenomena to which they are subjected—classes, social institutions, cultural transmission, historicity, etc. According to their own methods, most disciplines determine which properties they consider ‘essential: a certain individual trait that is essential in the view of sociologists (social origins) will be considered inessential by psychologists; another trait that is essential in the eyes of ethnologists (marriage between cross cousins) is only accidental in the view of psychoanalysts’ (Wolff 2014: 19). Anthropology is perhaps the only discipline which thinks that its subject of study does not exist: the human being. Geographers think space exists, organization specialists think organization exists, sociologists think societies exist, and

theologians think God exists. Are human beings so disgusting that they are unwanted as the root subject of an anthropology—preference being given today to nonhumans, nature, the planet, preference having been given yesterday to cultures and social relations—to the extent that anthropologists feel reassured when humans are presented as dissolved into nexuses, sets and networks?

Then whose task is it to study humans, without dispersing and losing them in a set of properties, to study the singularity of each of them and the continuity of existence? Relative to plants and animals, humans have attained a high level of individuation. This is obvious. Humans know they exist, that their existence belongs to them, that each of them is unique and that only death will put an end to them. 'The young Nietzsche saw in this "mourning play" (which is in fact the German name for tragedy, *Trauerspiel*) the combination of a consciousness of the horror of a human life destined for death and the dream of an Olympian world inhabited by gods' (Dastur 1996: 14-15). The ultimate question of an anthropology of existences would be: what does it mean to be this man with that knowledge? Hence the importance of individualized, detailed observation of degrees of consciousness and obliteration, degrees of engagement and disengagement, forms of active and passive presence. This implies examining states that are inherent in the individual and that are fluid when observed continually over several experienced situations. This confrontation of a situation or specific moment is that during which the individual continually densifies. The observer should not pre-select any situation for the sake of relevant elements likely to support a selective analysis.

From this perspective, the operation that 'sameifies' or associates individuals is the very antithesis of an anthropology. Beyond social strata that are incorporated but, as a whole, create a singular stylistic effect, beyond the relational capital stored in a volume of being, beyond gestures and words appropriate to a situation, there is the obvious fact that the singularity of existence cannot be shared. There is also the attachment that everyone feels for their own particular existence. This being the case, what is a person like when in the process of writing, speaking, eating or drinking? Not focusing on points like these almost amounts to committing an error of type.

A human is primarily an empirical unit that is separate from all others and never identical. Its constituent set of molecules is the foundation of a system that is perpetually ageing and therefore constantly changing. Every individual is unique from the biological point of view, but also from an existential perspective. Existence is by definition private and inseparable from oneself. It is that of an empirical unit; it is itself the empirical unit, the

singular, continual assembling of more or less shared facets—desires, values, social relations, self-image, etc. It is the complexity and richness of this ephemeral assemblage that makes humans singular. It is up to anthropology and anthropometry alone to consider human beings as human beings, to observe them as such, and not primarily as social and cultural entities (Piette 2015a). Anthropologists should observe the individual as he exists, that is to say, as he appears, the individual who is there, goes out, the individual who continues, a reality that lives and is also lived. Among philosophers, Levinas gave remarkable expression to this principle of separation (though he was not the only one): ‘We are surrounded by beings and things with which we maintain relationships’ (Levinas 1987: 42). This is a principle in which the social sciences are deeply anchored. Levinas continues: ‘All these relationships are transitive: I touch an object, I see the other. But I *am* not the other. I am all alone’ (*ibid.*). Thus each person is riveted and chained to himself, sensing that he is an existence, knowing it and speaking about it, feeling what causes his body to be his own body and his thoughts to be his own thoughts.

Anthropologists can teach this singularist position to everyone, and not just to anthropologists. Who is amazed that each empirical unit is singular? In the flow of situations, humans have no time for this amazement. There are even social forms of attention, institutionalized forms that develop in minimal ways, which are certainly sufficient in social situations and are pleasing to their beneficiaries. Being routinized, they in turn risk not requiring that each person’s singularity, life, uniqueness and fragility be taken into account. An essential element of hominist ethics is this: ‘O, you human, I am looking at you because soon you will no longer exist...’ Is this unbearable? But precisely, this could specifically be the anthropological view or the hominist view: he who seeks the singularity of each human being, only to find his fragility.

Human eyes are accustomed to a gestaltic, global, general vision. Anthropologists want to encourage another way of looking at things: isolating a figure, seeing him in the singular and in detail. They allow themselves to take an interest in every detail, in the very existence of this figure. Singularity is sometimes said to be unbearable and indescribable, but is this difficulty not due to evolutionary formatting? We know the importance of specifically social forms of cognition, capable of detecting relational and situational signs with a view to inferring the behaviour of others, and we know about our cognitive system’s sensitivity to the social properties of our environment, its ability to process social information (Kaufmann, Clément, 2007). Our brain was prepared for abilities like these, selected in the course of evolution. The ability to detect relations, pinpoint groups and build alliances is better rooted in the history of

evolution than the ability to perceive singularities. The sociopolitical era of the living generated significant changes for the life of human beings, but also limitations.

### **Being a noter**

Writing, the act of noting, would be one support for activating a singularist way of existing while at the same time tempering the risk of lucidity in the face of everyone's fragility. This act of writing about oneself or about each other individual is not simple: it must be learned. This can be done in a university anthropology course, but from a hominist perspective this learning process is crucial for all individuals. Lucid anthropologists who place much ethical hope in the view taken of each person would have to set an example by integrating their way of being noters into their thoughts.

The message of lucid anthropology is that every human is an existent being. It is up to anthropologists to use their concern for observation and detail to teach everyone to speak or write about their existence, about that of each other person, to think about being a singular, irreducible I, and to help them consider the fact that everyone else is also a singular I, to learn to talk about themselves, write about themselves and look at every other 'self'. Writing, photographing, filming, recording, noting situations, moments or people: it is as if part of the observer's know-how—consisting in watching, observing, noting and describing—has been transferred into the singularist perspective. Being a noter: this is the anthropologist's job, and one of the key elements of hominist life.

Anthropologists could become anthropo-analysts, observers of existences, not listeners of stories. 'Being analysed', psychoanalysts say. 'Being anthropologized' anthropologists of existence would say. Everyone would have their anthropo-analyst! The anthropologist could be summoned in the final moments of life (but not only then) to describe and save traces, to teach people to look and write. A new profession: anthropologist, anthropo-analyst, with his 'professional' side in addition to his 'scientific' side. One could pay an anthropologist for an anthropography! Just as people used to get their portraits taken in a photographer's studio. We are convinced that anthropology is yet to be invented: creating a virtual space of archived singularities, digitizing one's own life with the help of mounted cameras, following and filming the existence of others. The web abounds with examples of experiments like these. A father films his son over several years, a few seconds each day, each week. Tour de France racers switch on their mounted cameras. The lives of cats are also tracked, as they wear tiny cameras capable of recording their movements and points of view. To this end, one could use

a set of cameras, microphones, GPS devices and other equipment like very small detectors that can be implanted in the body (Bell, Gemmel, 2009).

At the centre of hominism, this anthropological viewpoint can only be realized by setting aside the apprehension of commonalities and the togetherist interpretation that favours interpreting individuals in terms of belonging or relational effects. Existence is what remains when these marks of belonging, of trajectories and of relations have been removed, while still enabling them to be reintegrated in their rightful place.

### **Knowing arbitrariness**

This is another point of hominism: knowledge of origins, which is another form of lucidity. Human beings are profoundly quotidian. The educational injection of a dose of knowledge and lucidity into presence is no doubt essential to avoid an imbalance of passivity or bustling activity, as we have seen. The right dosage needs to be proportioned also in order to avoid hypersensitivity. Discussions of political or moral philosophy, ethics and education should not avoid the exploration of lucidity, knowledge and especially its receptivity.

Then what are we? A mixture of activity and passivity, of criticism certainly, but also and especially of blunted lucidity, as shown by the scenario of origin. Of course, relaxation is fruitful, it even makes art and science possible. It also makes it possible to bustle about bizarrely in a shopping centre on a Saturday afternoon and accept television advertisements. And also to kill on the orders of others. Believers turned soldiers: this is the mark that *Sapiens* will leave behind of themselves. In our view, it is essential to teach human beings not to misjudge the arbitrariness in everything that surrounds them, in their beliefs, culture, gods and states. Knowing origins necessarily means knowing the arbitrariness of things. It is also important for everyone to remember that every symbol and every hierarchy of goods is an invention.

Our scenario of origin taught us that the act of believing and its associated relaxation generated new abilities: believing, not really believing it or thinking it, but becoming passive, absolutizing and also organizing and suffering a collective violence. When human beings start accepting not following things literally, therefore distancing themselves from them, they run the risk of distancing themselves too much and therefore accepting everything, not thinking, etc. In this case, absolutizing and accepting a state or a god means fundamentally not thinking that one is absolutizing or accepting while still absolutizing and accepting, against a backdrop of oblivion, of non-thought, of the lethargy of performed actions. Bustling proselytism and passive following unite in this oblivion. Is it not on the basis of this lethargy that human

beings are able to kill in the name of religious and political ideas? From the observation of withdrawal and lethargic consciousness, one must retain that they are, to a certain extent, a necessity in the human balance, but that they also lie at the root of excessive ‘withdrawals’ that make it possible to kill and be killed in the name of an imposed absolute. What is therefore necessary is a knowledge of beginnings, of the circumstantial arbitrariness of all beginnings. This implies the possibility of at least remembering that gods were invented by human beings, and that it cannot be peremptorily asserted that gods existed prior to this invention – a God that orders acts. On packs of cigarettes there is a warning that they kill. Moderate smokers also read it. Should there be a warning at the top of religious books and in religious buildings that God, who does not exist, can kill?

Is it therefore necessary to state the obvious: God does not exist? We think that one must posit this non-existence as the major principle of every hominist position, and therefore one should not consider all opinions valid, from religious ideas to atheistic points of view. It is well-known that Bertrand Russell saw religious ideas as false and harmful (Russell 2004), even if it is important to take account of the evolutionary impact we have attributed to them. In our view, radical remarks by intellectuals are quite rare today, especially by anthropologists, who are often ensnared by cultural populism, with their essentialist discourse on the radical difference between worlds and on respect for other people’s worlds. According to them, fostering interconnections between multiple worlds would ultimately make real peace possible, whereas uniting humans around one single cosmos is a delusion typical of societies characterized as modern, destructive, arrogant and bellicose. ‘Here, in any event,’ writes Latour, ‘is a branching point that our investigator does not want to miss: to be anxious whereas there is actually nothing outside; or, on the contrary, not to realize that, if one is frightened, it is because there really is something that provoked the fright, something pressing!’ (Latour 2013: 186). Very anecdotally, remember the title of the incipit with which Bruno Latour begins his *Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, taken from the Gospel of John: ‘If you knew God’s gift’ (*Si scires donum Dei*). The trivialization of this debate is quite scandalous, feeding a semantic hodgepodge, and it is high time that someone sorted out.

When it comes to ontologies, philosophers are not unambiguous. Markus Gabriel criticizes constructivism, which supposes there is no thing in itself. In constructivism, there is only a thing from X’s view. New realism supposes the possibility of knowing things in themselves, with the possibility of errors: there is, of course, a thing from X’s view, and there is also a thing in itself (Gabriel 2015: 6). There exist thoughts, as well as facts that these thoughts concern. Up to this point we agree, and there is a broad consensus about this

distinction between exteriority and interiority, which includes constructivism. Gabriel subsequently advances the notion of ‘fields of sense’ as a basic ontological category. Existence would then be an occurrence that causes something to manifest itself in a field of sense (ibid.: 65-6). This is something that immediately brings states, unicorns and God into existence. But Gabriel specifies that something can appear in the field of sense and be false, like witches or unicorns. ‘Note: that something appears false (and thereby exists) does not mean that it is true’ (ibid.: 66). He acknowledges that it is an erroneous idea that witches exist. The same goes for God when we leave his field of sense. Contrary to this position, we do not wish to accept this equivalence between appearing-for-X and existing. The apparition of something that does not exist is important to grasp: not just the presence effect for X, but also the human states of mind concerned. But it is just as important to point out that, in a situation such as a liturgy, there is not *really* a God.

Does ontology only have to show the multiplicity of fields of sense and their difference? We do not think so, since this gradually generates a kind of obscurantism. This implies describing humans as idiotic and treating readers as idiots. It is a stage of our profession to translate what happens as accurately as possible, but also to employ a more radical sense of the ontology of what reality is.

In our view, it is irrelevant to consider truth a useless notion and to treat objectivity, reality and truth as an evil (Ferraris 2014: 13). As Maurizio Ferraris reminds us, there is an outer world that precedes our conceptual models and perceptual apparatus (ibid.: 39). We believe this reality is worth describing, but without any complacency in the name of some kind of respect for multiple truths. Anthropology would be an empirical, methodological science of humans and of what they are confronted with. It is on this point that one must avoid all complacency. ‘If someone fights against the windmills, the best thing is to make him see the truth, namely, that they are windmills and not giants spinning their arms’ (ibid.: 68). This type of discourse is a step towards criticism as well as justice. ‘The right response,’ Ferraris writes, ‘to those who manifest a wish to kill in the name of truth would not lie in attacking truth and pointing the finger at its social dangers, but, if anything, in observing that certainties not grounded in facts can have disastrous results’ (ibid.).

Postmodernism made reality into simply the medium of our representations. In other words, the being, the ontological side (what is before our eyes) is abandoned in favour of knowledge, the epistemological side (what I know about what is before my eyes). Real knowledge implies stepping outside a specific field, seeing what is going on in that field from the perspective of science and what it teaches about empirical reality. Therefore, reality does

not necessarily include what has been invented, constructed or named by humans. In order for God to be real, it is not enough to say that he exists, to think that he existed before being named. In order for him to exist, it is not enough that he has representatives or mediations. The same goes for the state. Thus the anthropologist raises questions about ‘reality’ and ensures the proper usage—a parsimonious usage—of the notion of existence.

### **Creating an interval**

The principle we have just posited is that one should not treat scientific positions and religious beliefs as equal. This is a requirement for hominist thought, but it is not everything. This is where it is worth remembering primitive times and the uncertainty of the first believer, of he who invented the first religions. Lethargic passivity is excluded from hominism, but not the good use of doubt. What we learn from this first believer is that he did not take his new point of view—his new temptation—all the way. He hesitated, left an interval between his religious statement and the assent he gave to it. It would be much too radical, and non-hominist, to forget this practice of the interval.

Then what must anthropologists teach in the face of religious discourse? They must be teachers in the city, incorporating a kind of uncertainty into the interval, creating compromise, making sure that acts and words do not stand in the way of other acts and words, and they must also accept being the first to take a step back in line with this logic of tolerance. And for this it is important to introduce an education in distance. The important thing is to get rid of inflexibility and discover the art of making principles nuanced so that they are not stifling, so that one does not die for one’s ideas. Peter Sloterdijk, for example, presents various ways to de-supreme God without eliminating him: negative theology, such as an intellectual litany of negative characterizations of God; hermeneutics, such as a movement of multiple interpretations; the humour that militant zealots do not accept. These are three ways of creating intervals, moderating the fervour of certainty, not forgetting uncertainty (Sloterdijk 2009). It really is a matter of ‘de-supreming’, which is tantamount to restoring the ‘not’, re-injecting an interval, that of the first believer. This is because positing God as the highest and personifying him means raising requirements and running the risk of forgetting uncertainty and overlooking one of the principles of hominism: that there is no god.

So how does one settle something in order to transmit it, and accept something while not absolutizing and not accepting it, while at the same time maintaining the margin of uncertainty through which there is no certainty in the existence of contradictory things? In short, how can one be, remain or become this human of the origins, when he believed, when

he was uncertain and did not want to be certain, when he accepted not knowing? What must one do: on the one hand, cultivate knowledge of the origin, since a lack of knowledge is not beneficial; on the other hand, cultivate the right interval of doubt and reserve.

In the history of ‘wisdoms’, the interval is in fact often a key element. Therefore, in full, lucid, knowing being, an interval—the ‘not really’—slips in as anthropological data that cannot be eliminated. It is even a hope to be cultivated. The perfectibility of the act performed without reserve, without any rupture, exclusive of whatever happens, completed consciously in accordance with a goal, is the opposite of reserve and restriction in being: cultivating humility and prudence, as we can read in the thoughts of Lao-Tzu: ‘Therefore the Sage is devoted to non-action / Moves without teaching, / Creates ten thousand things without instruction / Lives but does not own, / Acts but does not presume, / Accomplishes without taking credit’ (Lao-Tzu 1993: 2). Acting without acting, doing without doing, saying without saying, looking without seeing, listening without hearing, Lao-Tzu writes: ‘Act without acting / Serve without serving / taste without tasting / Big, little / Many, few’ (ibid.: 63). This is a true education in the human interval and its implied ‘not really’. Avoiding excess, not seeking to outdo or confront, not calculating, learning to yield, absorb, abstain, defuse: ‘The softest thing in the world / Rides roughshod over the strongest / No-thing enter no-space / This teaches me the benefit of no-action’ (ibid.: 43).

It is essential to learn that religion is only human, that God and all other supernatural entities do not exist, while allowing this interval that consists in believing in it, but immediately linking it to a restriction, a reservation, a doubt. For anyone who wishes, the divinity would keep its place in the small interval of uncertainty between its implausible existence and its unproven non-existence, in the incomprehensibility that it is and that it is not. It is a matter of every person being a hominist in actuality, not just lucid, singularist, loving, not just a noter and an expert in arbitrariness, but also a master of the interval! This must be cultivated, not in order to create a remarkable state of clear-sightedness, but rather to maintain, at least as a backdrop, the anthropological idea of human beings as a species belonging to the genus *Homo* alongside other species that disappeared long ago. *Homo sapiens* have existed for 100,000 years, maybe more, maybe less. They are inventors of the cognitive act of giving assent to religious statements: one must know it! And also doubt. This obviously causes ideological controversies in the name of opposing, arbitrary truths to become hollow.

Then what does anthropology teach? That belief is a natural, cerebral, cognitive ‘phenomenon’. But it also teaches that, in human beings, belief generates an equally cognitive

way of being that is new relative to other species. A crucial element of this way of living resides in the ability to ‘not really’, which is sometimes extolled in systems of philosophical or religious thought. The impact of the latter is not negligible, since it creates, in the contents of the former proposition, a restrictive interval.

For example, this would mean keeping a divinity, while introducing something more that prevents one from settling on the idea, that opposes a firm militancy. If there must be perfection of the human species, let us rather imagine natural selection in favour of that ability to absolutize without absolutizing, to reintroduce reserve and doubt in action as much as possible. Relaxation and withdrawal should not cause one to forget the uncertainty, indeed the implausibility of a statement. Withdrawal that reaches the point of avoidance must learn to free itself from the absolute without lapsing into a disengaging carelessness and indifference. Cognitive withdrawal that risks generating various forms of hypolucidity also implies considering the proper adjustment of intensity: imposing without imposing and accepting without accepting, accepting without discussing, but still, not accepting at the same time as. Each situation must find its interval, at least without blocking the intervals of others. It is important to consider the fact that an act of violence is committed when, through his action, a human being leaves another human being no interval of thought or movement. Thus a soldier can accept killing, and a believer can accept being blinded. This implies activating the human potential for lucidity. Anthropological knowledge is therefore quite essential, sometimes only as a backdrop.

Hominist ethics does not see the solution coming from human beings’ ability to accept their freedoms, responsibilities and commitments, but rather from their capacity for lucidity and for using their abilities to ‘not really’. This does not lead to experiencing existence as a politically engaged, rebellious consciousness, but as someone who measures out a certain form of negation in action and presence. It is therefore not a question of advocating blindness and even delusion. On the contrary, what hominism favours is not a blinded, deluded human being, nor one who searches for truths and reasons to exist, but rather a being who is able—under all circumstances—to know, and also to introduce and enable the interval of reserve. All acts that follow one another against a backdrop of some sort of political or religious ideal, whatever it may be, without any wavering, are problematic, especially if they lead to violence and disregard the singular force that each individual represents. In each and every situation, it is important that every individual can give concrete form to the principle of the interval and its liberating powers. Thus, even if a singular opinion is contrastive by nature, it is important to allow for the possibility of a certain shading within human knowledge itself. By this, we

mean that a retreat in the face of a difference of opinion is a regulatory principle for a hominist position that only makes sense if it promotes tolerance. The interval therefore also means letting everyone be free. It means admitting the profoundly fallible nature of human beings.

### **Utopia: everyday ethics**

Anthropology and utopia are at the intersection of a period of expectation and a real, potentially reactive space. Maïté Maskens and Ruy Blanes (Maskens and Blanes 2013) pointed out that utopia is inherent in the very idea of an anthropological praxis in its ethical and political configurations. It gives meaning to our perspectives and guides their orientation. Every anthropologist draws on it.

Singularity, truth and human nature are the pivots around which our anthropological utopia revolves. However, the academic conditions of such a proposition do not leave it much room. Debating these questions does not seem to be the order of the day. It is good to remember the ideal of the Enlightenment and the legacy that the human and social sciences owe it, today more than ever. How does one avoid a state of supervision, a gilded cage with assigned compartments for each sociocultural category? Tearing ourselves away from dominant anthropological ideas would make it possible to attain a critical ideal.

Kant proposed a shared world founded upon common principles, universal rights that went beyond the coalitions of his time. The premises of the anthropological vision that we support is similar to the philosopher's desire to attract everyone to an independent, empirical academic discipline. This would make it possible to respond to the problems of human existence while at the same time releasing it from the reserve of codes and political rights in order to insert it into a universal right of humanity (Kant 2006). Keith Hart writes that 'histories of anthropology have rarely mentioned this work, perhaps because the discipline has evolved so far away from Kant's original premises' (Hart 2010: 442), though at the same time Hart maintains that it is 'indispensable to the formation of world society in the coming century' (*ibid.*: 446). Thus anthropology would be an essential vehicle for decentering and broadening our localist visions. It would be the only discipline that has a legitimate, asserted place alongside human beings on the stage of the universal.

This universality conveys a desire to profoundly change human nature or, at least, reorient it through the prescription of a certain kind of ethics. These ethics would connect an individual's singular power to act freely with human behaviour guided by the hominist principles we have set out. The initiating conjugation of our hominist vision would be that of

the ‘can’ and ‘should’, both cautiously distancing themselves according to an appropriate interval and a principle of tolerance. It is no longer simply a matter of supporting sociocultural particularities and being ‘prepared to view without surprise, repugnance or revolt whatever may strike us as strange in the many new forms of social expression’ (Lévi-Strauss 1952: 49). Despite his support for a dynamic, uncontemplative movement, Lévi-Strauss did not succeed in inspiring a new way of living together. The proposed tolerance principle, by not resting on unity but on relativity, and by emphasizing differences instead of similarities, marked an epoch in theory. In a practical sense, this proposition was unable to connect the contemplative, evolving ‘can’ with the empirical, prescriptive ‘should’. As anthropologists, we do not forget this connection, a bias that is necessary with regard to a realistic, mono-naturalist position, accepting the fact that truth is a good against obscurantism, delusion and manipulation.

This connection corresponds to an empirical process that too few intellectuals support when it is a question of ethics, from the ‘can’ towards the ‘should’. It is accepted today that ethics does not reside explicitly in one province of our mental activity. Ethics is what profoundly characterizes our human nature. Consequently it slips into, and sometimes conceals itself, in our most ordinary actions, in the most trivial events. Therefore our ideals, our absolute values, must not be separated from our ordinary actions. The first movement we support consists, on the one hand, in observing and describing attitudes adopted in the face of reality, that is to say, truth—the ‘can’. What are its external conditions and internal frames of mind? It is not a matter of passing a critical judgment on the representations and actions we face, but rather of recognizing the influence of beliefs, their inner workings and everyday manifestations. Veena Das maintains that ethics is not a separate field, and regrets that this question should be treated as an object towering over our existences, as a strategy for overcoming the problem of subjective predispositions. As she writes in the tradition of Wittgenstein, on this level ethics is simply made up of judgments that emerge ‘in the small disciplines that ordinary people perform in their everyday life’ because life should be considered ‘the natural expression of ethics’ (2012: 133-49). In anthropology, it is no longer a matter of solely taking an interest in unsettling events that radically contradict or challenge our ethics, but rather reincorporating dramas right into the triviality of our ordinary lives. Through description and observation, every anthropologist should initially be able to detach himself from transcendent values in order to go back to those sensibilities that drive individuals to act, such as fear, love, anxiety or hate.

The process into which we would like to launch anthropology consists, on the other hand,

in bringing the truth to the ears of those who are unaware of it, ignore it or scorn it. This second ethical movement, the ‘should’, does not let everyone’s responsibility disperse through sociocultural worlds out of the simple principles of tolerance and benign neglect. It is therefore a matter of conceiving ethics as a self-education. Teaching the truth: this is the prescriptive path that would give anthropologists a role that is very different from the one they shoulder today. How can some of the current mind-sets of human beings be changed? How can they be inspired with a reflexive movement that would be beneficial and, above all, that would make it possible to live together more virtuously, in a world where hatred of others would no longer be tolerated? Reality would then be accessible to all, and everyone would accept being responsible for their own actions, without answering to a non-existent entity. If I cold-bloodedly kill a woman sitting on a cafe terrace, I am not submitting to the commandment of a god, since this god does not exist. So why would I do such a thing? If I mobilize my soldiers in a war-torn country that is not my own, I am not submitting to the patriotic values of my country because it does not exist. So why would I do such a thing? Every anthropological investigation practice would therefore also be established on the basis of an educational relationship. What everyone needs is a reversal of our usual way of conceiving the world, before becoming ‘people of Earth’ and good ‘ecologists’.<sup>7</sup> In our view, thinking and rethinking about becoming ‘human’, and about what this means, has never been a higher priority.

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<sup>7</sup> We are alluding here to Bruno Latour’s most recent book (2015).

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A SNAPCHAT ESSAY ON MUTUALITY, UTOPIA,  
AND NON-INNOCENT CONVERSATIONS

KAREN WALTORP<sup>1</sup>

*Objectivity is not about disengagement but about mutual and usually unequal structuring, about taking risks ... We are not in charge of the world. We just live here and try to strike up noninnocent conversations by means of our prosthetic devices, including our visualization technologies.* (Haraway 1988: 595-596; 594)

## Introduction

This visual essay argues for reciprocity between interlocutors and anthropologist as an underlying premise for obtaining access and qualitative insight into private platforms of social media. I use interaction with interlocutors through the *Snapchat* platform, a photo- and video-messaging application for mobile devices, as my example here. Mutuality is built into Snapchat, making it a poignant example of how the principle of reciprocity applies as much to the online sphere as to any other field site of the anthropologist.

Utopia<sup>2</sup> to me is an ideal, non-existing place worth striving for, even if it can never be (found): what is meant by such a place or plane of existence for different people is open to interrogation through encounters. The commitment to this openness, to mutuality, is ethical: it is at once utopian and, to paraphrase Donna Haraway (1988: 579), a no-nonsense commitment to situated, partial and faithful accounts of a ‘real’ world that can be partially shared. The smartphone and my video camera were my ‘prosthetic devices’

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2 Anthropology teaches us to question our own categories in the encounter with others in the field and to be wary of translating in any straightforward way between concepts, thus flattening the worlds that can be in a word. This goes for *utopia* too, as pointed out by Henry Corbin, who writes: ‘Na-koja-Abad is a strange term. It does not occur in any Persian dictionary, and it was coined, as far as I know, by Sohravardi himself, from the resources of the purest Persian language. Literally...it signifies the city, the country or land (*abad*) of No-where (*Na-koja*). That is why we are here in the presence of a term that, at first sight, may appear to us as the exact equivalent of the term ou-topia, which, for its part, does not occur in the classical Greek dictionaries, and was coined by Thomas More as an abstract noun to designate the absence of any localization, of any given situs in a space that is discoverable and verifiable by the experience of our senses. Etymologically and literally, it would perhaps be exact to translate Na-koja-Abad by outopia, utopia, and yet with regard to the concept, the intention, and the true meaning, I believe that we would be guilty of mistranslation.’ (Corbin 1976: 3).

and my ‘visualization technologies’, as I made use of both classical participant observation and a variety of social media platforms, as well as working with my video camera in the field (Waltorp 2015).

My prior fieldwork in urban areas dubbed ‘ghettos’ in Cape Town, and later in Paris and Copenhagen (Waltorp 2010, Waltorp and Vium 2010), had insistently drawn my attention to the importance of mobile telephones and social media in relation to place-making, belonging, networking and self-representation. In my PhD fieldwork and film-making with young Muslim women in a social housing estate in the Danish capital of Copenhagen, I had set out to explore these themes with a starting point in the affordances of the smartphone for a group of young second-generation immigrant women in Danish society with origins in the Middle East. The women were all born and brought up in Denmark, in a specific local urban setting, but with transnational networks in Arab countries, Iran and Pakistan. The notion of ‘affordance’ is used in the relational sense, rather than as qualities intrinsic to an object: I was interested in the affordances of a built environment with specific groups of inhabitants, at specific historical junctures, as well as the affordances of an object, such as a smartphone, in relation to the person using it (Waltorp, forthcoming). In this sense the project was from the outset not *on* social media, the urban social housing milieu or young Muslim women in Denmark, but situated at the junction of these.

I did not decide which particular social media applications I would be using before embarking on fieldwork, but instead let my interaction with interlocutors lead the process. One of the most frequently used apps among interlocutors is Snapchat. This photo-messaging application allows users to take so-called *snap*s: photos or short videos, onto which they can add text and drawings, and send them to a controlled list of recipients *immediately*. The users of Snapchat do so to speak ‘chat’ using ‘snapshots’ from their lives. The snap is automatically deleted after a set time limit of up to ten seconds. You can make a selection of snaps into ‘MyStory’, which all of your contacts can see for a limited time, or you can send snaps individually. The focus is not on editing, filtering and framing things, as with other platforms such as Instagram. As the snap is only seen once, the ephemeral feel is the framing<sup>3</sup>. A snap cannot be saved and sent at a later point in

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<sup>3</sup> In this essay, I have chosen to be true to this aesthetic in not editing any of the pictures.

time: it is for sharing the fleeting moment you are in with persons you choose. Should the receiver choose to take a screenshot of the snap, and thus save it, the sender will be notified of this.

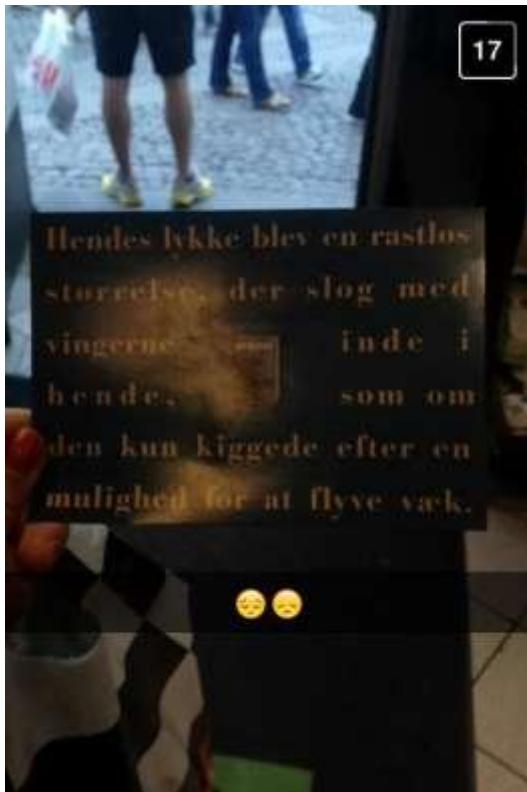
I was allowed by interlocutors to take screenshots of the snaps they sent me, and in that sense I went against the ephemeral nature of the app because of my need to go back to the snaps and analyse them in juxtaposition with other material. I am not able to share here the intimacy of the platform, as the message and its ‘encoding’ and ‘decoding’ in Stuart Hall’s terms (1980) are changed fundamentally when taken out of their initial context and put into an open-access online journal article that can be linked, shared, and the pictures viewed publicly over time (as opposed to appearing in a private online space for up to only ten seconds). It is thus only the snaps of less private situations that I have included in this essay. Not all of my interlocutors wear a hijab or veil, but most of them do. They will not have their hair covered, though, in the privacy of their homes, in the company of other women or men of the immediate family, and it is often in the private sphere of the home that they use Snapchat.

How to communicate intimate and visual aspects without revealing and exposing interlocutors has been a continuous challenge. It has been a ‘creative obstruction’ in that working visually has prompted reflection on representation, as well as on the public imperative and the variously configured and historically contingent understandings of visibility and concealment in (gendered) public and private spaces. The young Muslim women I worked with engage in experimentation with self-representations and the possibilities of identification on a daily basis in various media platforms. They carve out distinct private spaces for themselves within what are otherwise very ‘public’ platforms, which they modify, censor, or make revealing, depending on audience and context (Waltorp 2015). Snapchat works particularly well for this purpose as it can be controlled (or at least feels as though it can). Creative experimentation takes place within the confines of various (opposing) dominant socio-cultural conceptions of ‘the virtuous woman’, ‘the free, modern woman’ etc. (for a critique of these notions and their supposed opposition, see Hirschkind 2006, Mahmood 2004).

If you do not share the fleeting moments in your life with someone on Snapchat, most likely that someone will not share with you. The fact that you can follow someone’s

open profile on Instagram or on Facebook without befriending them might give a sense of having access to someone's life and self-representation, yet these platforms have private functions and spaces for interaction that imply mutuality, and these are not easily accessible. 'Big Data' research and methods building on mining the Internet allows for one kind of insights, yet in-depth ethnographic fieldwork that follows the interlocutors into the digital sphere as an inextricably entangled dimension of social life raises questions of another sort than 'Big Data' does on its own. There is access to interesting information online *without* mutuality, yet it is the multitude of surfaces, self-representations and performances across the digital and physical spheres that I find interesting as an anthropologist, and reciprocity and mutuality are implied in getting at them.

Below, I share *my* selection of a few of the snaps that *we* exchanged, a few snaps out of thousands. As captions I have offered snippets of *our* conversations around the snaps and *my* contextualization or juxtaposition of the snaps with other texts. This is now shared with *you* as an audience, and altered by *your* reading. All of this is enabled through – and invariably shaped by – various technological devices: software and hardware. In this sense it can never only be *my* text, and throughout this essay I ponder what forms mutuality has taken in the work.



*'Her happiness became a restless creature, flapping its wings inside her, as if only looking for an opportunity to fly away'.*

The first image is a snap of a women's hand, fingernails painted in light red, holding a postcard. As is typical of a snap, the legs of strangers, who happened to be in front of the window where the snap was taken, can be seen within the frame. The snap is about a mood that is shared, a state of mind that the juxtaposition of the postcard and the emoticons convey.

The text on the postcard reads: '*Her happiness became a restless creature, flapping its wings inside her, as if only looking for an opportunity to fly away*'. Two emoticons are on top of the picture, two different 'smiley' faces, both expressing sadness.

The mood and the poem reminded me of another poem recited by an interlocutor of Stefania Pandolfo, and reflected on by her in her monograph *Impasse of the Angels* (1997): On the power of poetry and the imaginary:

*'The house of my love is empty. Birds flying in it...I feel oppressed, confined, anguished, exasperated... At the moment of Impasse, then, an overflowing, and a passage to another scene: hâj khâtrî, my mind, thoughts, and desires rise and overflow, like water is moved by the wind. They spill out and depart from my body, from my narrow and confining present, and journey away. They migrate back to my blâd, the land from which I am separated, for the intemporal and atopical journey of a 'saying'. The kelma, the poem, is an impossible return. However much I cry I can't reach: my wings are broken... Yet the broken wings of the body, the powerlessness in the real world, liberates the wings of the imaginary.'* (Pandolfo 1997: 268-9)

The second image is a screenshot of a short video-snap: a woman is filmed from behind dancing to the music in the car while driving in a city at nighttime. Driving around is about socializing and having fun. Sending a snap to girlfriends who are not there with you physically in the car is inviting them into the moment and mood with you.

Waltorp, Snapchat essay



The Everyday, the mundane: The text on the first snap above left reads: ‘Fajr (morning prayer). Breakfast. School. Routine’. The text is followed by a smiley having a hard time, and a heart-emoticon. In the picture is a plate with an omelette, hummus, bell peppers and cucumber. A cup of coffee is standing next to the plate on a table. In the background, the television is tuned in to a Danish television show.

The text on the second snap reads ‘Morning Gymnastics’, followed by a happy smiley with a drop of sweat on its forehead. The television is showing a man working out in an exercise program on the national broadcaster Danish Radio (DR).



Hårdt arbejdet 😕 men du klart det 😊



The text on the first snap reads: ‘Hard work’, with a smiley that looks perplexed or lost for words, followed by ‘but you made it’ and a smiley with hearts as eyes. The picture shows the author in the living room of an interlocutor, having just finished presenting a paper. On the table are my smartphone and video camera, and her laptop, and books. She was studying for an exam, I was working, and her cousin was taking a nap on the couch.

The text on the second snap reads: ‘How did it go, sweetheart?’ referring to the presentation I did on which she had given me feedback. The text is placed in front of her eyes, her face partly covered by smoke from her cigarette. When moving around the local neighbourhood of Nørrebro, none of the women I worked with would ever be caught standing in the middle of the street smoking: instead we would find a quiet courtyard, a hidden corner or a back alley. This was out of respect for one’s parents as it would reflect back upon them should their daughters (or sons) behave badly in public. In this regard, a Snapchat is a private space, defined just for the eyes of the carefully chosen recipient. So it is my indiscretion to show the picture in this essay, though with the permission of the interlocutor in the snap.



A snap of the Kaaba – the cube-formed building at the centre of Islam's most sacred mosque, Al-Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It is the most sacred Muslim site in the world and is here surrounded by pilgrims. The text reads: ‘Goodbye Mecca’ – emoticons of a waving hand, a sad smiley and a heart – ‘on to Madinah’ and an emoticon of a bus. Religion is an integral part of the everyday for the majority of my interlocutors. Some go to the mosques in Copenhagen, some pray five times a day, others rarely pray. The Qur'an and the life of the Prophet Muhammad as set forth in the *hadith* provide a set of fundamental guidelines for navigating everyday life. Negotiations with oneself and others regarding how to understand and implement these guidelines in Denmark prompt debates about autonomy, sexuality, modesty and possible futures. These negotiations, I have argued elsewhere (Waltorp 2015), take place in dynamic ways among these young women, including through the use of social media.



An informant of Iranian descent snapped the Arab Idols contestant she was cheering for from her living room in Nørrebro, Copenhagen. The format of Arab Idols is American, the show broadcast by MBC. The former chairman of the right-wing Danish People's Party, Pia Kjærsgård, asked rhetorically in an interview with the daily newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* in 2010: 'Should it really be allowed that, for example, Vollsmose (an area designated a ghetto) is plastered with satellite dishes directed towards the Middle Eastern world? Remove the satellite dishes...it's indoctrination from the Middle Eastern world. Controlling minds...'.

The majority of flats in Nørrebro have satellite dishes, but spending time with the young women inside and outside the home provides a more diverse picture of how the mass media are received by this part of the Danish population and how this overlaps and entwines with other kinds of media use. The young Muslim second-generation immigrant women combine inspiration and influences from different worlds, while their everyday lives are played out in the specific places of Copenhagen. (see Waltorp 2013).

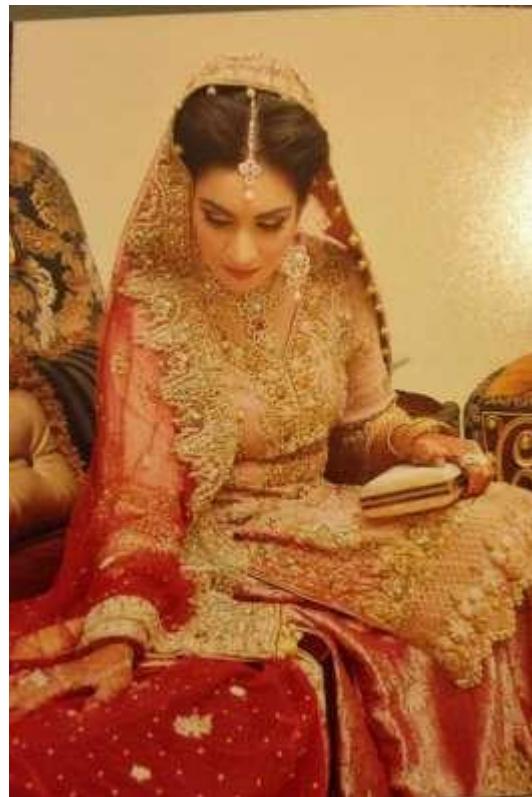
Waltorp, Snapchat essay



Above are four snaps from a longer series of ‘selfies’. So-called selfies (self-portraits made in a reflective object or at arm’s length) are seen by some as frivolous and self-absorbed, by some as a way to assert control, agency and power, and by others as power-ambiguous or even an oppressive reinforcement of consumerist, hetero- and body-normative discourses that create a commodified body (Tiidenberg and Gómez-Cruz 2015: 2, 4). Kathrin Tiidenberg and Edgar Gómez-Cruz point to the tensions between the act of self-shooting, normative assumptions about gender and body image, and the ecology of the images themselves in the practices of looking and being seen (2015). Keeping these aspects in mind, here I juxtapose the selfies above, taken in an apartment in Copenhagen, with the selfie below, taken while we were on the metro in Tehran.



Group selfie on the metro in the ‘women only carriage’ in Tehran.



The weddings I have attended are extravagant, and the women look like movie stars or singers from one of the popular shows, whether U.S. reality shows, Danish shows or Arab/Middle Eastern *musalsalat* (Arab soap operas). One informant, Fatima, of Pakistani descent discussed this essay with me, and we agreed that love and marriage should be represented somehow. The first image above is a picture of her cousin who recently married: she works in a pharmacy in downtown Copenhagen, and the image presents her as a vision of beauty, traditions, histories and new figurations of all of this. Most of the pictures from Arab weddings I cannot share in this essay, as the women have taken off their hijabs and are in festive attire while celebrating only with other women. The second snap above is from one such wedding and shows the ‘thrones’ where the couple will be seated for picture-taking etc. prior to the groom leaving the women’s wedding celebration (along with the fathers and brothers of the bride and groom).



The first snap above is of a dinner table filled with mezes and a text reading: ‘Once again she is cooking food/lunch’ followed by a smiley with heart-eyes.

The second image is of café lattes and hot cocoa in a Copenhagen café: everyday socializing in the house and out of the house. As there is no alcohol involved when the women socialize because of their religious beliefs, it is cafés that are preferred meeting places, never bars or clubs. Dancing and partying is done in private spaces such as the home, the car or at large events such as weddings and engagement parties, where hundreds of women will attend and dance to music played by a DJ all night.



The picture above was taken in the Milad Tower, in Tehran by a professional photographer. The women in the picture are wearing historical costumes. They work, in random sequence, at McDonalds, as a receptionist, as a stay-at-home mom, and as a PhD student (i.e. the author of this essay).

The text on the snap reads: ‘Tehran’, followed by emoticons of a hand signalling ‘excellent’, a smiley with heart-eyes, a smiley crying with laughter and a monkey with its hands in front of its eyes (the monkey here signals ‘it is embarrassing’). This is the meaning of the monkey emoticon as used by my interlocutors, even though it is in fact one of the ‘three wise monkeys’, who ‘see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil’). The text continues: ‘Can I use this picture in an article?’



Two interlocutors broke out in laughter (*flækkede af grin*) at one of them parodying me when I wanted to ‘talk about my project’. She imitated my voice, but in a particularly slow and monotonous way. ‘...then you start talking really “Dane-like”’, she says, directed at me, and turns to her friend, who is also participating in the project: ‘And after half an hour you’ll hear Karen ask: “But did I get it right? Do you see it this way?” And you’ll just affirm, “Eh yeah yeah, and you didn’t understand a word, ha ha ha ha”’.

We are out having a coffee in a café in downtown Copenhagen and talking about what has been happening in our lives since we saw each other last. I have moved to another city, and we do not see each other so often. However, we keep updated via the social media platforms. As I go into the mode of formally talking project and feedback, I apparently become the most boring person to be around. What happens when the encounter turns into the mode of official ‘feedback’, I wonder? Am I to determine the form of the feedback encounter? Whom am I having this conversation with, after all? The

principle I believe in first and foremost in fieldwork is that we should not forget to follow our interlocutors' leads. So where does this lead me? In what shifting registers does mutuality emerge and come to 'count', and for whom? Above is a picture of an interlocutor taking a picture of me in a train carriage that is about to leave Copenhagen, her friend standing next to her laughing. I am taking a picture of my interlocutor as she is taking a picture of me, and my reflection in the window is caught on the picture I am taking. A moment later, I receive the picture she took of me as a snap. Mirror-images, mutuality, morality?

### **Non-innocent conversations and the anthropologist as trickster**

'Our relation with the Other (*autrui*) certainly consists in wanting to comprehend him, but this relation overflows comprehension' (Levinas 1996: 6). Accordingly, ethics comes before the epistemological in our encounter with an Other. I discussed moral and ethics with the women I worked with. In one of our conversations Noor, a close interlocutor, used the word *moralhed* (moralness), which is not in the Danish vocabulary, when she explained to me what she understood by the concept:

*Nour 'Moralness is, let me explain it like this: How do I treat you?'*

*Me 'Ehhmm – Good, good, I think' (not prepared to be quizzed).*

*Nour 'What do you think of me!'*

*Me 'Well, I think well of you, I like you!'*

*Nour 'Yes, I know, I feel that as I get the same thing back from you. Sometimes you don't, I mean...even though you treat people well. But then you know yourself, deep down inside, I know I'm a good person – and Allah knows, he sees everything and keeps score... ''*

(Excerpt from field notes, April, 2014)

I repeatedly discussed themes and emerging insights with the young women I worked with. Sometimes the feedback process was straightforward and sometimes I was laughed at, as described above; but layers and new understandings were, and are, continually added through this process. I prioritized a dialogical approach grounded in the belief that the communication of knowledge to interlocutors, different audiences and publics should

be a central part of the knowledge production itself. Technology- and media-related activities are inextricably entwined in this, as is the anthropologist, inadvertently or not. The methods we apply in our research do not just describe social realities but are integral to their creation: being a body and knowing go together, and representation and intervention are wilfully bound together (Law 2004; Law 2015:9). Being a body – *with* the prosthetic devices, visualization techniques and other technology we make use of – and *knowing*, go together, what I have elsewhere conceptualized as fieldwork as an interface (Waltorp, forthcoming).



The image above was received as a WhatsApp message (as my Snapchat did not work). It was a reaction to my choice of pictures for this essay, which the two interlocutors in the photo did not find beautiful enough.

It is never ‘non-innocent conversations’ we are having, or non-innocent interventions or representations that we craft. In this light it might be an overstatement, or misrepresentation of our work, to describe our projects as participatory or collaborative, as many anthropologists have done, myself included. A nuanced account or qualification of the work done by interlocutors tracking, tracing and documenting themselves should be pursued. There is a fine line between ‘giving voice to’ and letting people form the representation of themselves on the one hand, and the simple extraction of labour, and thus of surplus value, for the anthropologist wrapped up in correct buzzwords with the prefix ‘co-’ on the other hand.<sup>4</sup>

Rather than inviting people to create data according to our project design, fitted to a certain output while checking boxes of co-creation and co-analysis, mutuality is about the anthropologist doing the uneasy job of learning to become ‘other-wise’ and of straddling worlds. The anthropologist in his or her ‘in-betweenness’ (Stoller 2008) might come to work as a trickster: ‘...during episodes of personal crisis, frustration, attempted integration, incorporation, or absorption into others’ worlds and so on, the anthropologist becomes the trickster, a participatory agent in the context he is studying, and is able to engage in a process of mutual, creative understanding’ (Maskens and Blanes 2013: 261). What effects could this trickster-role imply when the anthropologist is doing fieldwork at home?

Anthropology is always already entwined in power relations, political agendas and public debates, so what role do the personal and political ideals of the anthropologist play in the understanding of fieldwork and its products and effects, as Maïté Maskens and Ruy Blanes asked when they invited me to contribute to this special issue on ‘Mutualizing Utopias’. I continuously grapple with how to avoid political correctness, stereotypes, (mis)understandings and my own fear of playing into the stereotypes blending together. The choice of methods is always also a political choice, as is the choice of knowledge dissemination. It is difficult to wrestle oneself free of ‘scripts’ that are already in place (Rabinow and Marcus 2008).

My project is entwined in political debates about integration, minority-majority relations, ‘ghettos’ and the notions of freedom, gender roles and democracy in Denmark

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<sup>4</sup> See Foster (2007) for a similar argument on value creation within marketing and business.

that I share with my interlocutors. My home city of Copenhagen has changed during fieldwork, having turned into multiple, overlapping cities to me at a time when Denmark has turned into a somewhat dystopian place in terms of the very harsh rhetoric used by several Danish political parties of immigrants and foreigners. Political measures against letting refugees and immigrants into the country (and bringing their families with them) have been implemented. The symbolically potent ‘Migrant Bill’ (L87), whereby valuables are taken from refugees when they arrive at the Danish border (among other measures), has just been approved by Parliament as of 26 January 2016, being passed with 81 Members of Parliament voting in favour, 27 against and one abstention.

As I write this text, Danish citizens are taking to the streets to protest and, paraphrasing Hannah Arendt ((1998 [1958]), letting their voices be heard in the (semi)public spaces of social media. Others agree with those politicians who perceive the integration of people from the Middle East as utopian. Among them is the MP for the Danish People’s Party, Kenneth Kristensen Berth, who stated, ‘We know, *as a fact*, it’s impossible to integrate these people’ (*The world right now with Hala Gorani*, CNN London, 26 January 2016).<sup>5</sup> The stakes are high: how can one write in a climate where it seems that everything you write about your interlocutors can and will be used against them?

Taking responsibility and committing ourselves to be accountable for the representations and projects we pursue might begin by speaking of our research projects as *overlapping* with others’ projects, and being more open to those occasions when they do not overlap and the mutuality is absent. Anthropologists should be alert to the oscillations between different modes of working together, alongside and adjacently, as well as alone. Following George Marcus, our purposes are bound to differ from those of our counterparts, yet generative relationships in fieldwork are predicated on mutual usefulness – on stakes and mutual appropriations for different purposes (Rabinow and Marcus 2008: 66). If we are lucky, the knowledge we create, taking the encounter with the Other as starting point, overflows both comprehension and collaboration.

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<sup>5</sup> This interview was posted in full on Hala Gorani’s professional Facebook page on 26 January (<https://www.facebook.com/halagoraniCNN/?fref=ts>).

In 1942 Margaret Mead urged anthropologists to forget the Western script that deals in only *means* and *ends*: instead she suggested we should be:

...including the social scientist *within* his experimental material, and...recognizing that by working towards defined *ends* we commit ourselves to the manipulation of persons, and therefore to the negation of democracy. Only by working in terms of values which are limited to defining a *direction* is it possible for us to use scientific methods in the control of the process without the negation of the moral autonomy of the human spirit. (Mead 1942, cited in Bateson 2000 [1972]: 160)

I view this as a very relevant piece of advice: daring to let go of our own scripts, our ‘means and end-thinking’, and rigorously including ourselves within our experimental material. This is a utopian ideal, or rather a utopian *direction* worth pursuing in the ‘real’ world(s) we partially share, even if we cannot know where we are headed beforehand. Where we are headed cannot be foreclosed, which makes of the anthropologist more of a trickster than an activist, a trickster accountable and committed to both openness and mutuality in the encounter with others.

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**AFTERWORD**  
**ISLAND AND MOUNTAIN:**  
**REFLEXIONS ON UTOPIA AS A POINT OF VIEW**

RAMON SARRÓ<sup>1</sup>

Nothing can teach us a better lesson in this matter of ultimate importance than the habit of mind which allows us to treat the beliefs and values of another man from his point of view. Nor has civilised humanity ever needed such tolerance more than now, when prejudice, ill will and vindictiveness are dividing each European nation from another, when all the ideals, cherished and proclaimed as the highest achievements of civilisation, science and religion, have been thrown to the winds. The Science of Man, in its most refined and deepest version should lead us to such knowledge and to tolerance and generosity, based on the understanding of other men's point of view.

Bronisław Malinowski (1922: 407)

I would like to thank Maïté and Ruy for encouraging me to participate in the organization of a panel on anthropology and utopia in 2014, and in particular for inviting me to write a last word in this special issue, challenging me to gather together some thoughts on utopias and mutuality.

People trained in my country (Spain) have known of the relationship between anthropology and ethnology ever since Gustavo Bueno published his provocative essay entitled *Etnología y Utopía* (Bueno 1971), which made us aware of the intimate connection between anthropological and utopian projects. The study of peoples beyond the limits of our world, which for many defined anthropology (though now we all know that we can also do anthropology at home), is an invitation to become utopian. In a famous short story of 1913,

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Kafka expressed his desire to become an Indian (although the German text says *Indianer*, the concept is often translated into English as ‘Red Indian’, as it is clear that Kafka is alluding to native North Americans). I am sure many of us have felt this adolescent temptation, the lure to break away, to drop out and become an ‘absolute beginner’ elsewhere – to borrow the title of a famous novel on youths in London (MacInnes 1959) – and to behave like a free Indian, galloping on a horse, on the prairies of Nebraska or in the depths of ‘the wild’, like the tragic young man, now an American icon, who two decades ago died in his romantic search for autonomy and adventure in the coldest parts of the Alaskan wilderness (Krakauer 1996).

However poetic this search for freedom may be, ‘we’ (I mean we professional anthropologists) know that Indians too can create oppressive cultures, dominant systems of power and local forms of injustice, and that most likely adolescent Indians also dream of becoming something else. Indians too have their Kafkas; nobody can claim a monopoly on imagination.

In discussing these issues with colleagues like Ruy, Maïté and many others, including some of the authors in this special issue, I have come to the conclusion (and this is my interpretation of their useful concept of ‘mutuality’) that ethnological utopias mirror each other. In their praxis, anthropologists are not only ethnographers, but ethnographers twice over. Our ethno-poïesis works in two opposite ways: we describe to our readers (most of the time, sadly, other anthropologists) the worlds we have been inhabiting with other humans for a year or two, but we also describe to the latter the worlds from which we come. We feed the latter’s imaginations as much as those of our readers. In our heterotopic boat, to borrow Foucault’s naval metaphor (Foucault 1984), we bring utopias back and forth, along with the ability to be critical about their inhabitants and makers. ‘Someone told me that your people have been to the moon’, said an old rice farmer to me whom at the time I regarded as my adoptive father, in Guinea, in 1993. ‘That’s true’, I said, though I was not sure that the American citizens who did those journeys to the Moon really belonged to ‘my’ people. I then expected some sort of envious comment, or some sign of utopian dream. But no. ‘I think this is wrong’, he reprimanded me. And in a quasi ‘purity-and-danger’ style, he added: ‘God made the sky to be in the sky and the earth to be on the earth. We are not birds. We belong here and have nothing to do up there’. Indeed, I thought: why are ‘we’ trying to escape to the moon when so many people down here, certainly in the country I was residing in at the time, are suffering from hunger, disease, deprivation and toxic debris thrown up on to their coasts by richer countries who send rockets to the moon? Perhaps ‘we’ belong here, as my wise elderly interlocutor was suggesting…

Remembering that verbal interaction now, 23 years later, I realize that it is closely connected to what Malinowski was trying to teach us a hundred years ago. Our culture hero did fieldwork among the Trobriander Argonauts in 1916, at a time when Europe was falling apart under illusions of heroism, making soldiers fight and die under the ‘old lie’, *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori...*, as the war poet Wilfred Owen tragically lamented only two years before being killed in the trenches. Malinowski published his monograph in 1922, when Europe *had* fallen apart; it was *The Waste Land*, as another poet, T.S. Eliot, put it in a long poem published the same year (Eliot 1922). The Trobriand archipelago for Malinowski was not only a jolly good ‘object’ of study, but also a platform from which to look back at where he was coming from: the European wasteland. The inspired finale of the *Argonauts*, cryptically, almost like an initiation, entitled ‘The Meaning of Kula’ (the meaning for whom, I wonder?), provokes the reader into thinking that the European ‘crisis’ (a word that had little currency before the First World War) was one of meaning and of value. Looking at Europe from the utopia of the Trobriand Islands was Malinowski’s contribution to the restitution of the devastated continent from which he came. Eliot, Joyce, Mann, Huxley and many others were doing it poetically and spiritually; Malinowski, scientifically and rationally.

Because he was thinking and writing about the failings of European ‘civilized humanity’ from an island, Malinowski’s work inscribes itself in a long series of insular utopian and dystopian thinking which includes fictions such as Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, Huxley’s *Island* and many others. The history of literature shows that islands are indeed good to think and to imagine potential societies, either based on some form of peaceful contract, or as the loci of Hobbesian struggles, or as idealized, almost celestial places based on the prosaic British Isles, like the lyrical ‘Sceptr’d Isle’ evoked by Sir John of Gaunt in Shakespeare’s *King Richard II*, so different from the real island the King was expected to be ruling but was destroying instead. Ever since then, the utopian notion of a ‘Sceptr’d Isle’ has been used to refer to the ideal British Isles, an ideal of isolationist purity still inspiring many local politicians and actors today (and, I suspect, ‘Brexit’ voters too).

But all these islands in literature are, like the Utopia island of our founding father, Thomas More, invented places. Malinowski was the first to take the trouble to actually *travel* to the island. Certainly it is true that in the very beginning of his text he asks that the ancillary imagination be an accomplice to his labour: ‘Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach...’ (Malinowski 1922: 13). But this poetic licence aside, his is a most rigorously scientific piece of work. We the readers have to imagine

ourselves there, but he, the scientist, really *was* there. He is not inventing a world, he is reporting the one he was co-inhabiting with other humans, probably with the same accuracy as he was describing to them the lunatic frenzy of journeys into the sky to which his native Europe was the backdrop. I fancy an elderly local telling him: ‘I think these things your people are doing are wrong. We are not birds, we should not be dropping dirty things from the sky on to the heads of other human beings.’ But this is me, utopian as I am. In any case, Malinowski was on the island, and from the island we read about his confidence that reading about the Kula will help us regain our lost humanity, to recapture some sort of ‘meaning’. It is particularly relevant here to note that Malinowski’s preferred object of study, the one that made him most innovative and famous, was not the nitty gritty of social life itself (though he also wrote about that, kinship, economics and all), but the exchange systems known as the Kula. The Kula is a particularly heterotopic place for the Trobrianders. It is not one island or another, but a third space in between them all, an ideal world of exchange against which they measure their lived reality, like those archetypical rituals Jonathan Z. Smith talks about, which present the state of things not as they are, but as they ought to be (Smith 1980). Reality is not quite like the Kula, but it should tend towards it. The Europeans of 1922 are not like Trobrianders, but ideally they should learn ‘the meaning of Kula’ in order to mend their wounded humanity. Because, unlike many other famous utopian islands, Malinowski’s are real, his criticism of European mores is much more unsettling than Defoe’s, Swift’s, Shakespeare’s or Huxley’s. The latter in particular was a creator of utopias who published his first novel, *Crome Yellow*, in 1921 – almost contemporary with the *Argonauts* – in which much of his utopian thinking is already prefigured.

As Malinowski was collecting his data on islands, another intellectual European, equally worried about the effects of the Great War, was writing about mountains. Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* (German edition 1924) was published only two years after Malinowski’s monograph and must also be understood as an allegorical portrait of pre-war society. Like the island, the mountain has offered paradigmatic heterotopic places in which to think about ideal societies. The mystical mountain of Montserrat at the geographical heart of Catalonia, with its perfect, heavenly ordained Benedictine abbey, is still today the mirror on which a Catalonia thirsty for freedom observes the paradigmatic ideal rhythm that should guide Catalan society. Some have seen in mountains places of ideal education, as was the case for the anarchist thinker and geographer Elisée Reclus, whose 1880 lyrical description of the mountain, including a most utopian analysis of its role ‘in the crucial job of the education of children and, through them, of the humanity of the future in general,’ was reissued in

France ten years ago (Reclus 2006). Others have used mountains as places of mystical perfection and symbolic contact between realities, like the surrealist novel *Mount Analogue* (Daumal 1952), which presents the mountain as a fractal of the entire universe and contains some spiritual reflections on the sacredness of mountains that are every bit as insightful as the phenomenology of mountains as universal sacred places presented by phenomenologists of the Mircea Eliade school (e.g. Eliade 1958). Shangri-La, one of the most popular references in utopian literary production (Hilton 1933), is a perfect city found and lost in the mountains of Kunlun, a real chain in today's China. James C. Scott (2009), bringing ethnographic reality to mountaineering imagination (somewhat as Malinowski did with the insular one), has presented Asiatic mountains not as ideal Shangri-Las, but as real places of resistance through the art of not being governed (which I reinterpret as the art of being self-governed). Many other real mountains that have offered, in human history, places of resistance and self-governance are reviewed in the beautiful essay 'Pirate Utopias', part of the collection on 'temporary autonomous zones' (T-A-Z) authored by American anarchist thinker and poet Hakim Bey (Bey 1991).<sup>2</sup>

Like many of you I have been to the mountains, and I would like to finish this short reflection by taking you on a journey. Let me introduce you to 'the' mountain, my analogous, fractal mountain: the micro-cosmic mountain that is all the mountains, and that contains the entire cosmos. This mountain is called N'kamba, and it belongs to the chain of Bangu, a series of sacred hills, valleys, forests and caves in the south of the Democratic Republic of Congo. N'kamba is today the most important place for the millions of members of the Church of Simon Kimbangu, as well as many other pilgrims who visit it as a place of meditation or to be healed by the spiritual leader who inhabits it, the grandchild of the historical prophet Simon Kimbangu (1887-1951). It was on this hill that the prophet – at the time probably a mere Baptist catechist – realized several miracles back in 1921 (as Malinowski was sending his manuscript to the printers), and it is here that today a huge temple, capable of housing 37,000 people, is located. From N'kamba, a city of cosmic perfection – the 'city as symbol' of which Paul Wheatley wrote so eloquently (Wheatley 1969), the city that Anne Mélice, a specialist on Kimbanguism, described as a 'realized heterotopy' (Mélice 2001) – my own world looked very different. This is, of course, *my* 'meaning of N'kamba', probably different

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<sup>2</sup> Hakim Bey is the pseudonym of Peter L. Wilson, who, using this latter name, has published a book also entitled *Pirate Utopias*, though it is less concerned with mountains and more with pirates as producers of enclaves of alternative forms of governance (Wilson 1995).

from the meaning the sacred mountain and its sanctuary have for many other visitors. Such is perhaps the beauty of analogous places.

I have visited N'Kamba on many occasions, sometime by car and sometimes walking from Mbanza Ngungu, some fifty kilometres away. My first visit there was in October 2009, when I went to the Democratic Republic of Congo with a group of Kimbanguist pilgrims from Lisbon whom I had known since January 2006. The objective of my trip was to attend the exhumation of Mama Mwilu, Simon Kimbangu's wife, on the very significant date of 12 October, the most solemn day of the Kimbanguist calendar: it was on 12 October 1951 that Simon Kimbangu died in jail in Elisabethville (today Lubumbashi). According to today's Kimbanguists, this is the same day that his grandson, Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, current spiritual leader of the Church and living in N'kamba, was born. Marie Mwilu Kitawala, who had died in the Belgian Congo in 1959, had been buried in her native village, on a hill adjacent to N'kamba. Separated from her husband since 1921, Mwilu lived her tragic life under the strict surveillance of the Belgian authorities until her death on 27 April 1959. In 1960, her late husband's coffin was transferred by boat from Lubumbashi to Kinshasa, and then taken by car to the Mausoleum of N'Kamba. In 1992, their sons Charles Kissolokele and, shortly afterwards, Joseph Diangienda Kuntima passed away and were buried in the Mausoleum with their father. Almost a decade later, in 2001, their third son, Solomon Dialungana Kiangani, followed them. Mama Mwilu, however, had not been transferred to N'Kamba. The family was separated by a deep valley and a six-mile tortuous path. It was only in 2009, fifty years after her death, that she was finally transferred and could join her husband and children posthumously in N'kamba. The second burial of Mama Mwilu, normally referred to within the Kimbanguist Church as 'The Triumphal Entry of Mama Mwilu in N'kamba-New Jerusalem', was a big success for the Church. They had had to negotiate the exhumation and second burial not only with the huge and fiercely divided Kimbangu family, but also with local traditional authorities and the national government. The negotiations took much longer than planned, and as a result the Triumphal Entry could not take place on 27 April 2009 as logically intended, but only on 12 October (i.e. on the date of Simon Kimbangu's death, instead of the date of her own death). Still, the exhumation took place within the fiftieth anniversary of her passing away.



*Images of the arrival of Mama Mwili's coffin at N'kamba (photos by Ramon Sarró, October 2009).*

There was joy and there was sadness, there were tears, and there were interminable songs of gratitude. The actual transfer of the body on October 11, in the same car that had brought Kimbangu's coffin to N'kamba in 1960, was awe-inspiring. The coffin was surrounded by young women disguised as angels, and thousands of women were singing next to the car in

its very slow progress from one hill to another. I had never seen anything like it before, and I very much doubt I will ever witness anything remotely similar again.

As well as the moving combination of songs and landscape, I was particularly impressed by the words of the Pastor, who, in the meeting's sermon on the 12 October, very solemnly proclaimed: 'This is the moment.' The coffin had already reached N'kamba and was resting within the main temple so that people could pray to it before it was taken into the adjacent family mausoleum. The pastor gave an unusually long sermon, speaking for about an hour and a half, and devoting a great deal of that time to the slave trade in historical Kongo. He explained to thousands of members of his Church that in 1609 Galileo had demonstrated, with his telescope, the Copernican theory according to which the sun, not the earth, was at the centre of the universe. This, he said, was considered by many historians to be the most important historical moment for humanity. But it was certainly *not* 'the' moment, he insisted, for while Galileo was doing these academic demonstrations in Europe in 1609 (exactly four hundred years before the N'kamba gathering), many Europeans were in Kongo, buying slaves and forcibly taking human beings to the other shores of the Atlantic. The 'moment', he insisted, was *now*: the day Mama Mwili was finally being transferred to N'kamba-New Jerusalem and reunited with her husband. *This* was the moment, the *kairós*, the exceptional time breaking the continuity of *kronos*, the ordinary secular time, which contains things like history, slave-traders and telescopes.

The pastor's sermon left an unsettling impression on me, the only white European in the huge temple that on that day contained more than 10,000 people. I had always assumed that overcoming Ptolemaic geocentrism in the seventeenth century had been one of the greatest achievements of Western science, and, moreover, that I had *never* realized the connection (or disconnection) between Galileo and the slave trader. Geocentrism may have been long overcome, I thought that day, but certainly Eurocentrism is still at the root of our modern cosmography. Ever since that day in N'kamba in October 2009, I cannot help but think about the Copernican revolution with an ironic 'Yes, that *was* a great revolution for humanity' and remembering the millions of humans who were bought and sold on African lands while such a revolution was taking place in European academia. From the mountain's point of view, the meaning of my world was shattered. Perhaps provoking such shattering is the objective of both anthropological and utopian production. Let us hope, at any rate, that Malinowski was not too utopian when he expressed his hope that the understanding of other people's points of view would lead to 'tolerance and generosity' and act as an antidote to mutual antagonisms and divisions.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**REGNA DARNELL and FREDRIC W. GLEACH (eds.)**, *Anthropologists and their traditions across national borders*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2014, xi, 279 pp.  
ISBN 9780803253360.

*Anthropologists and their traditions across national borders* is an eclectic collection of essays on the history of anthropology. Ostensibly integrated around ‘how anthropologists’ careers have intersected across professional generations and allowed them to navigate national boundaries and national traditions’ (ix), the reader will find it difficult to connect an account of Berthold Laufer’s early anthropological expedition to China under Boas’ auspices (Kendall), an appraisal of A.M. Hocart’s life and works (Laughlin), a critical essay on the parallels between Malinowski’s functionalism and the doctrine of indirect rule (Lamont), an institutional history of Radcliffe-Brown’s administrative practice in Cape Town and Sydney (Campbell), an intriguing story of the succession to S.F. Nadel’s chair of anthropology at the Australian National University (Gray and Munro), three essays in praise of Lévi-Strauss’s legacy (Darnell, Rosman and Rubel, and Asch), an application of Sahlins’ theories of history to two nineteenth-century massacres in the United States (Rodseth), and a reflexive essay on anthropology as oral tradition (Flynn). Although the collection is eclectic, each chapter stands as an interesting addition to the wider project of the *Histories of Anthropology Annual* series, of which this is the eighth volume.

The interest of this volume is twofold. On the one hand, it is an invaluable source of information on non-canonical trends in the anthropological tradition(s), whether or not one concurs with the generally laudatory tone (with the exception of Lamont’s critical essay on Malinowski). Laughlin, to give one example, makes a great summary of Hocart’s contributions to anthropology, showcasing how his views on myth, ritual, methodology and political organization could be seen to anticipate the works of Malinowski and Lévi-Strauss, among others. Asch, for his part, delves into Lévi-Strauss’s work on kinship to find evidence, *contra* the view of his works as being ahistorically rigid, that he engaged with issues in universal history, such as the origins of inequality and the origins of agriculture. Likewise, one may cite Rodseth’s in-depth engagement with Sahlins’ arguments in *Apologies to Thucydides* as an exemplar of the kind of little explored yet refreshing intellectual genealogies traced by the volume.

On the other hand, the collection embodies the manifold ways in which a history of anthropology can be practised with relevance to contemporary anthropology. Lamont’s essay is a good example of critical scholarship committed to showing the insertion of anthropological theory in its wider historical context, by making a convincing case about the parallels between

Malinowski's functionalism – ‘an early example of academic branding’ (78) if there ever was one – and his promotion of social anthropology as an ally of colonial administration. The more conventional historical writings on Laufer’s early anthropological expedition in China (Kendall), or Radcliffe-Brown’s ambitious projects as a university administrator (Campbell), or the corridor intrigues behind Nadel’s succession (Gray and Munro) confer interesting lessons on the institutional settings within which anthropology was – and sometimes still is – practised. In so doing, such essays reflexively illuminate our own insertion in academic institutions which, as much as they may invoke a language of ‘necessity’ to impose certain reforms, seem largely contingent in light of the detailed histories presented in this collection.

In a further twist of reflexivity, Flynn’s decision to publish an undergraduate essay on her university lecturers as storytellers invites us to reflect on the importance of orality in the transmission of anthropological knowledge, which tends to be overshadowed by the role of reading and writing in our pedagogical discourse. Furthermore, this essay acts as an interesting primary source for the historian of anthropology, implicitly broadening our outlook on the kinds of materials that are available to trace the discipline’s intellectual and institutional legacy. Upon reading this essay one wonders what a history of the transmission of anthropological knowledge through a serious examination of undergraduate student essays would look like.

The main criticism one could address to this volume are its lack of coherence and its sometimes overly deferential tone to past theorists, as their lesser known writings become drawn into a process of canonization that may obscure their insertion into wider intellectual and institutional trends. On their own, however, both criticisms would be too harsh, considering the wider project in which this volume is situated, as well as the wealth of insights into the discipline’s history provided by each chapter. This collection therefore acts as a series of interesting contributions to the history of anthropology, with some interesting implications for our contemporary practice. It is worth a look for anyone specializing in the history of anthropology, as well as any scholar or graduate student with an interest in exploring atypical avenues into the intellectual tradition of which s/he is becoming a part.

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**ERNESTO DE MARTINO**, *Magic: a theory from the south* (transl. Dorothy Louise Zinn), Chicago: Hau Books 2015, xvi, 204 pp. ISBN 9780990505099.

Ernesto de Martino's study of magic, ritual, lament, possession, the evil eye, fascination and tarantism in southern Italy draws innovatively from a range of intellectual sources. Although ethnology, philosophy and psychology, as well as literary theory and sources, make for an original and engaging framework, de Martino's work is little known outside his native Italy. This is a shame because his thought has much to offer. However, this new translation of his 1959 *Sud e magia* might be a step towards greater recognition of his work in the Anglophone world.

De Martino's study of ritual and magic is set within a larger context of historical exchange between enlightenment thought and vernacular practice in southern Italy. It aptly demonstrates that the dynamic between dominant and subaltern cultures is often one of complex interaction and tension between ways of knowing and engaging with the world. He shows little interest in the question of whether magic is rational or irrational, choosing instead to focus on how magic subverts dominant categories of truth and knowledge to present a meaningful alternative for being in the world. His theory of magic emerges from a series of field expeditions in the 1950s to the southern Italian province of Lucania (present-day Basilicata), a few hundred kilometres south of Rome, but an altogether different world. The ethnographic descriptions bring to mind Carlo Levi's sensitive portrait of southern Italian peasants in *Christ stopped at Eboli*. Like Levi, de Martino approaches his subjects without condescension; the result is not only an engaging piece of ethnography but also an original theory of magic, precariousness and truth that remains relevant today.

De Martino develops his theory in three parts. The first is an ethnographic documentation of vernacular magical techniques for dealing with anything from headaches to possession as they double and permute from town to town in Lucania. The second part places these within their socio-economic context by relating magical practices to the day-to-day plight of poor peasants in the south. The final part provides a historical discussion of these practices in relation to hegemonic religious life, or Catholicism with a particular southern bent, as de Martino explains.

De Martino's ethnographic description is matter of fact and delivered with little initial commentary. By letting magic techniques and incantations stand by themselves within their ethnographic context, he restores a certain dignity to their practitioners at a time when Italy's politically sensitive 'Southern Question' was being hotly debated. By exploring subtle variations in technique and spells while drawing attention to the promiscuous intermingling of magic and Catholic thought, he weaves a convincing narrative of magic as neither irrational nor anachronistic but above all a timely way to engage with the here and now. It does so by introducing and

navigating competing notions of truth and reality. Faced with extreme hardship, Lucanian villagers are kept in an emotionally distressing double bind: they are continually acted upon by an external world whose small accidents might turn into existential disasters, yet have few options for engaging with this world through conventional means. This toxic mix of precarity and powerlessness leads to what De Martino calls an essential loss of presence in the world, an alienation from one's surroundings and from oneself. It is no coincidence, remarks De Martino, that the fundamental theme in southern Italian magic is that of binding, a state of mental and physical paralysis connected to the experience of being acted upon by forces outside of one's grip.

In this dire situation, the constant repetition of magical rituals and sayings serves to introduce a ritualized horizon against which the existential risks individuals face can be inscribed in a meaningful representative universe. The extensive use of rituals and formulas creates their own self-referential world in which repetition establishes magical ways of knowing as truth. A rather different version of truth from the one forwarded by the Enlightenment, this representative horizon serves to de-historify the perils faced by Lucanians, thus allowing them "to be in history as if they were not in it" (95) The ideology of binding, omens, possession and exorcism that emerges through the field notes offers techniques for converting loss of presence into a 'meta-historical order' where personal risks can be inscribed in a larger narrative against which the re-integration of the person can take place. The Lucanian answer to 'the Southern Question' is a constant de-historicized and re-historicized gesture, allowing the otherwise immobile residents to transit between two very different truth claims about the world.

We can begin to see why the editors of *HAU* deem this a worthy addition to their roster of ethnographic publications. Beside the declared goal of developing an ethnographic theory of magic, de Martino's work also engages originally and deeply with the anthropological problem of incommensurability. This has a special place at *HAU*; at the inaugural issue of the *HAU* journal, editors Giovanni Da Col and David Graeber proposed incommensurability as the creative engine for ethnographic theory (da Col and Graber 2011), in De Martino's work we see how this might work. The rituals of Lucanian magic become effective in the way that they subvert one version of reality by introducing a competing notion of truth and knowing. In this they can be seen as creative engagements with culture in the sense put forward by, for example, Roy Wagner (1981) and more recently by Martin Holbraad (2012). Indeed, by showing the ways in which these seemingly incommensurable worlds of 'low' magic and 'high' enlightened modernity can co-exist within the same moment should be an exciting contribution of de Martino's theory for any social scientist faced with situations where local customs grind against the truth claims of modernity, science, and capitalism.

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**ROY DILLEY and THOMAS G. KIRSCH (eds.)**, *Regimes of ignorance: anthropological perspectives on the production and reproduction of non-knowledge*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books 2015, 215 pp. ISBN 978-1-78238-838-8 (hardback); 978-1-78238-839-5 (ebook).

What is ignorance? What role has ignorance played in cultures and societies? These deceptively simple questions have long preoccupied thinkers, writers and artists alike. Throughout Western history, from Plato to the present day, there has been a tendency to treat ignorance as the negation of knowledge, an obstacle to action and an undesirable human condition. The new volume *Regimes of Ignorance: Anthropological Perspectives on the Production and Reproduction of Non-Knowledge* has two main aims: to problematize the way in which ignorance and knowledge have been treated as antagonistic, and to turn ignorance from a residual category of knowledge into an autonomous object of study by itself. The editors of the volume are highly aware of the challenges that the study of ignorance might pose for contemporary scholarship, particularly for their discipline of anthropology. As they explain, until recently much of the anthropological work has been underpinned by the idea of ignorance as the ‘absence of proper scientific knowledge’, which has led anthropologists to attribute ignorance to the ‘natives’ (pp. 2-15). Against this background, the contributors to the volume re-think the ontological status of ignorance in anthropology, as well as the epistemology of research methods. The editors contend that any anthropological study of ignorance should pay attention to three overarching conceptualisations: *regimes of ignorance*, *reproduction of non-knowledge* and *ignorance as positivity*. The aim of these conceptualisations is to frame ignorance as an equal partner to knowledge. Like knowledge, ignorance can be seen as being produced through historically specific practices and mechanisms. In the same way, they both act within the world upon individuals, practices and

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ideas (pp. 20-23). Unfortunately, the editors only briefly explain how they have used sociological and philosophical theories of knowledge and ignorance by Robert Merton, Niklas Luhmann, Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault to develop these conceptualisations. Hence readers new to the study of ignorance or unfamiliar with sociological and philosophical scholarship may find the theorisation of these conceptualisations somewhat opaque. On a more positive note, the three conceptualisations are useful for guiding readers through the volume and present the chapters of the volume as a coherent whole.

Overall, the eight chapters are well written and accessible and offer vivid and detailed accounts of configurations of ignorance and knowledge across multiple sites of fieldwork. In Chapter 1 (pp. 31-49), Carlo Caduff analyses the role that ignorance plays in the contemporary discourse of emerging infectious diseases in the U.S.. Caduff argues that microbiologists have accepted and embraced their inevitable ignorance of the natural evolution of new viral strains. Caduff's analysis demonstrates that ignorance of viral evolution does not hinder scientific practices, but can become the basis and justification of its practices. In Chapter 2 (pp. 50-69), Christos Lynteris addresses the 'native knowledge hypothesis' of the pneumonic plague of East Asia in 1910-1911. He shows how scientists misinterpreted Mongol and Buryat practices by projecting the scientist's own principles of epidemiological hygienism on to the locals' interactions with animals. Yet Lynteris argues that dismissing the hypothesis as being the result of misunderstandings would overlook the social and political effects of generated by both knowledge and ignorance in this case-study. In Chapter 3 (pp. 70-90), Trevor Marchand reflects upon his many encounters with ignorance during his training as a fine woodworker in a London college. He observed trainees as they chose to ignore specific aspects of their training and to remain ignorant of specific features of the job market. Thus Marchand demonstrates that ignorance can be used as a productive strategy and that it should be studied as such. In Chapter 4 (pp. 91-114), Casey High examines the way in which the Waraoni of Ecuadorian Amazon claim ignorance of shamanic practices in order to achieve a privileged moral and social position. This allows us to see that, like knowledge, ignorance can be used to actively define ones' role and position in a positive way within societies. In Chapter 5 (pp. 115-137) John Borneman examines the therapeutic treatment of child sex offenders in Berlin. He argues that offenders experience a personal struggle between the need to come to know about their offence and the desire to stay ignorant of the true motivations of the abuse. As Borneman observes, this struggle may be experienced not only by the offenders, but by all those involved in the discourse of child abuse. Chapters 6 and 7 are both based on historical analyses of governmental practices in French West Africa

and British India. In Chapter 6 (pp. 138-158), Roy Dilley analyses the ways in which French society officially concealed uncomfortable truths about the offspring of colonial officers with indigenous women and practices of slavery. Dilley shows that practices of concealment can have multiple effects throughout history, both wanted and unwanted. In Chapter 7 (pp. 159-187) Leo Coleman looks beyond bureaucratic systems of colonial administration to analyse an Imperial British pamphlet. By drawing upon Freud's theory of the fetish, Coleman argues that political power can be achieved and maintained by obscuring 'real' knowledge of power while producing ignorance about the realities of governmental practices as well as about needs of the population. In Chapter 8 (pp. 188-208), Thomas Kirsch draws upon fieldwork in Christian Zambia to argue that practices of secrecy are discursive practices that constitute subjects as Epistemophilic Others. In other words, the concealing of any objects inevitably constitutes others as wanting to know about the objects concealed from them.

The editors can be commended for having integrated the eight contributions into a compelling and coherent whole, creating synergy among the chapters that should be of value to readers from different disciplines. Yet I feel this volume could have benefitted from a broader reading of Foucault's work on discourse. The editors point to the fact that Foucault overlooked the link between power and ignorance (pp. 22-3). Yet in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1998 [1976]), Foucault establishes a dynamic between speech and silence which is very similar to the dynamic between knowledge and ignorance that the editors of this volume have identified. For Foucault, 'talk' and 'silence' act together in the world and transform it. This means that they are related as equal partners and are not each other's flip side. In Foucault's words:

Silence itself – the thing one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.  
(Foucault 1998 [1976]: 27)

In the same way as speech and silence, knowledge and ignorance may thus be conceived as acting as unified and inseparable systems. This suggests that there might a possibility of adding a fourth conceptualization focused on the inseparability of systems of

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knowledge/ignorance. Such a way of framing knowledge and ignorance as inseparable may also raise the question of whether ignorance functions as an autonomous actor to transform the world, or whether it needs to always been seen in conjunction with knowledge. Overall, this book is a very well-thought-out volume that adds a valuable anthropological perspective to the growing interdisciplinary field of ignorance studies.

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**ADI KUNTSMAN and REBECCA L. STEIN**, *Digital militarism: Israel's occupation in the social media age*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 2015 (Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic Societies and Cultures), xiii, 173 pp. ISBN 9780804794909.

During the most recent Israeli incursion into Gaza in 2014, Operation Protective Edge, which left 2,251 Palestinians and 73 Israelis dead (OHCHR 2015: 6), a Facebook page dedicated to ‘bomb-shelter selfies’ drew widespread attention: a wealth of amateur photos of often smiling Israeli individuals and families in their shelters displayed a shocking banalisation of the violent Gaza incursion and, at the same time, a surprising rendering of the Israeli public as victim. In *Digital militarism: Israel's occupation in the social media age*, Adi Kuntsman and Rebecca Stein offer fascinating insights into some of the ideologies behind digital militarism. While their treatment of the militarist use of social media stops at the previous 2012 Gaza operation (apart from an afterword), they suggest their book be read not as up-to-date documentation, but as an “archive of Israeli occupation violence” (xiii) and as a potential resource for different political solutions – which can also be applied to the explosion of digital militarism in more recent Israeli history.

‘Digital militarism’ is defined by the authors as the ‘process by which digital communication platforms and consumer practices have become militarized tools in the hands of state and nonstate actors’, and sometimes even ‘sites … of militarist engagement’ (6). Aware of the use of digital militarism in diverse war zones, Kuntsman and Stein track its development over the last two decades in Israel, one of the most prominent cases. Explaining both the exponential growth of

digital militarism and its undergirding tensions, the authors argue across five chapters that the digital literacy of the Jewish Israeli public, growing militarism, and denial of the occupation go hand in hand: ‘public secrecy has taken new forms in the social media age’ (15).

With the help of some of the most viral examples of social media use in times of heightened tension, or war – such as the 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon, and Israel’s 2008-2009 and 2012 incursions into the Gaza strip – the authors show how the ordinary public is being conscripted into the state’s military operations and its support. While in the early 2000s cyber-violence was a matter of war between competing hacking experts, the rise of social media has created a much larger current project of digital warfare. Thus, the deadly 2010 *Freedom Flotilla* incident (the Israeli military assault on activist boats aiming to break the blockade of Gaza) showed a hitherto unseen mobilization of social media activists, both in defence and condemnation of Israel’s actions. In this context, Kuntsman and Stein discuss the initiatives launched by the Israeli military itself or grassroots organisations, such as the 2012 ‘Israel Under Fire’ Facebook initiative (similar perhaps to the 2014 ‘Bomb Shelter Selfies’), which defends Israel’s image nationally and globally in times of war through personal testimonies and digital protests (e.g. pictures of individuals holding up ‘Stop the Rockets’ signs).

One of the most striking examples of the book is the study of the Eden Abergil Facebook scandal, which occurred shortly after the *Freedom Flotilla* incident. In an album entitled ‘IDF [Israeli Defence Force], the best days of my life,’ Abergil published images of herself posing next to blindfolded detainees among a selection of other nondescript photographs. The Israeli public responded in shock, but as it emerged that most current and former IDF soldiers have similar pictures, the ensuing discussion focused on Abergil’s faulty Facebook privacy settings and the dangers of social media, rather than on army abuse and the violence of the occupation – a phenomenon of ‘public secrecy’ in which, eventually, Israel becomes the victim. This is rendered even more starkly in the book’s discussion of ‘digital suspicion’ (59), which emerged after the appearance of a faked picture of a dead Palestinian boy after an attack on Gaza during the 2012 war. The discovery led to an ‘obsession with digital forensics’, which ‘substituted matters of life and death with questions of technological literacy and accuracy.’ (69). This suspicion portrays public secrecy at its height, denying not just the death of Palestinians (since every image of a Palestinian death was possibly faked), but also confirming the image of a military that doesn’t kill, thus turning public secrecy into a ‘matter of ontology’ (69).

Kuntsman and Stein manage to present a convincing narrative that reads well, despite its shocking content. Their arguments are supported by screenshots of social media examples, which are excellently and skilfully analysed. Violence is a difficult topic to research, all the more so when

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focusing on its twisted denial or warped justification. Despite the challenging content, the authors maintain a remarkably academic objectivity, and only rarely slip into the cynicism the object of study could so easily foster. The book is well researched and features good referencing of contextual literature. It would have benefitted from an accompanying ethnography of Jewish Israeli social media use and the militarisation of society, in order to uncover the motivations for sharing posts or taking part in social media campaigns defending the state's military actions. In addition, it would have been helpful to provide greater insight into the parts of society that are drawn to these activities (the impression, perhaps rightly so, is that digital militarism is all-encompassing among social media users). Such data could perhaps have taken the analysis a level deeper, exploring the underlying themes and motivations of digital militarism, such as nationalism and other ideologies, which the authors claim (without in-depth discussion) to have been present since the founding of the Israeli state. While their 'public secrecy' argument is convincing, it will be helpful to read this book in the context of studies of both Palestinian and Israeli social media use in this setting (see, for example, Stein's (2013) separate article), which might present alternative interpretations of the sharing and documenting of violent acts via social media outlets. Overall, for readers concerned with digital militarism, social media use in violent or war-like situations, and the Israel–Palestine conflict in general, this is an insightful and well-executed study.

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**WALTER FRIEDRICH OTTO**, *The Homeric gods: the spiritual significance of Greek religion*, [Anthropology n. 1], n.p.: Mimesis International 2014, viii, 287/310, ISBN 9788857523996.

Walter F. Otto (1874–1958) was a reasonably well-known German classicist who specialised in Greek religion and is still occasionally cited – for instance, in the standard overview of the topic by Walter Burkert (1985). The present edition mentions the German title and includes the foreword by Moses Hadas, who translated the book in 1954, but is otherwise excessively sparing of bibliographic detail. The translation was of the 3rd edition (1947), which differs little from the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of 1929. The references, originally incorporated into the German text, have been moved to end-notes, and the 1947 index has been redone. Unfortunately it now omits references to the Homeric texts; should one ask whether, or in what terms, Otto comments on a particular passage in the *Iliad*, the index is less helpful than the German one.

The original date of the book helps to explain some of its curious silences and essentialisms. For instance, predating the influence of Milman Parry and Alfred Lord, it ignores the relationship between orality and literacy, and its views on gender now read very oddly. ‘In Apollo we recognise the wholly masculine man. The aristocratic aloofness, the superiority of cognition, the sense of proportion, these and other related traits in a man, even music in the broadest sense of the word, are, in the last analysis, alien to a woman.’ ‘Woman is more elemental than man and much more centred on indirect existence... Whereas man strives for the general, the impersonal, the non-sensual, her energy is wholly concentrated upon the immediate, the personal, the present reality.’

Indeed, one way to read the text would be to situate its particular point of view within the history of ideas. Otto himself does not undertake this. He cites around twenty classicists, nearly all German, but more for particular points than for general approach. His aim is to present the Homeric gods as offering a type of religion that he both admires as a philhellene and apparently accepts as an individual believer. Certainly he prefers it to the Christianity which, he feels, most historians of religions have mistakenly seen as representing an advance. Though he does not cite Nietzsche (he prefers to cite Goethe and Hölderlin), that philosopher’s influence seems likely.

After the introduction comes a chapter called ‘Religion and Myth in High Antiquity (*Vorzeit*)’, which attempts to characterise a pre-Homeric religion. Dominated by ‘earth, procreation, blood and death’ – interrelated realities which ‘all flow together into a single large essence (*Wesenheit*)’ – this belief system was to be forced into the background by the rise of the Olympians, of whom the most important were Zeus, Athena and Apollo. Although in Homer glimpses appear of the gods as living on the summit of Mount Olympus in northern Greece, they are really visitors to earth from heavenly ether – a realm of light. This opposition between earlier chthonic and later Olympian deities has

often been made and no doubt goes back to the succession myth in Hesiod's *Theogony*. But the modern student has no need to read the ancient myth as if it narrated real history, and in the light of Indo-European cultural comparativism, I doubt the whole idea. Even if one accepts the usefulness of the category 'chthonian' (which can be challenged – cf. Parker 2012: 316), a category can be a separate and devalued component of a theology or ideology envisaged as a synchronic whole. Indian myths say that the demonic *asuras* are elder brothers of the heavenly *devas*, but few historians would postulate a period when the *devas* had not yet been born.

The eighty-page chapter on the Olympians has sections on Athena; Apollo and his sister Artemis; Aphrodite; and Hermes; Zeus is seen as too all-pervasive for a separate section, and accounts of the other six Olympians are dispersed. Otto's favourites are clearly Apollo and Artemis, 'the most sublime of the Greek gods'; peculiar to them is 'the attribute of purity and holiness.' The relation of Artemis to untouched nature elicits some of Otto's most lyrical and romantic writing. 'The solitudes of nature possess geniuses of diverse form, from the fearful and wild to the shy spirit of sweet maidenhood. The loftiest of all is the encounter with the sublime. It dwells in the clear ether of the mountain peak, in the golden iridescence of mountain meadows...' At the other end of the scale, Otto (understandably) detests Ares, who 'can hardly be considered a god at all'.

More than half the book still remains. First come 'theological' topics – the gods' relationship to time, their aversion to death, their interaction and their anthropomorphism. 'Poseidon is too closely involved in matter to possess the majesty of the divine in the sense of Homeric religion.' Two chapters discuss how the gods relate to humanity in general and to Homeric heroes in particular contexts. Many topics are treated that are familiar to anthropologists under different names. Thus, regarding the sacred and nature, Otto writes of the Greek divine (*Göttliches*) as being 'neither a justifying explanation of the natural course of the world nor an interruption and abolition of it: it is itself the natural course of the world [*der natürliche Weltlauf selbst*]'. Regarding the person and agency, Otto sees in Homer much to meditate on and admire: 'what a man wills and does is himself and is the deity. Both are true and in the last analysis the same.' But, as the final chapter emphasises, even the gods are impotent against Fate or Destiny – which for humans usually implies death.

No doubt some would regard Otto's book as a dated curiosity. But Homer is inexhaustibly interesting, and there is room for a variety of approaches. Even a comparativist like the reviewer, though temperamentally averse to theories that are essentially ahistorical and phenomenological, can benefit from its insights. I like the judgement of Graf (2009: 179), who calls the book 'splendidly one-sided'.

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**S. BRENT PLATE** (ed.), *Key terms in material religion*, London etc.: Bloomsbury Publishing 2015, 284 pp.

Over the last thirty years, scholars have become increasingly interested in material religion, a vibrant and interdisciplinary field that attends to the ‘stuff’ of belief. Leading this charge has been the publication of *Material Religion: Journal of Objects, Art, and Belief* and several influential works by its co-editors, S. Brent Plate, Birgit Myer, Crispin Paine and David Morgan, among notable others. The latest product of this collective scholarly effort is the anthology *Key terms in material religion*, edited by Plate. This ambitious overview of the materialist approach confirms its pivotal position in contemporary religious studies. Written by leading scholars in the field and edited with an undergraduate audience in mind, it will be a valuable resource for introducing students to material religion.

In *Key terms*, Plate encourages students of religious life to ‘get back to the basics’ and consider the ‘physical substrate’ of people, images, objects and landscapes upon which all religions rest (2015: 3). Where the prevailing modernist tradition of scholarship has relied heavily on textual sources and conceptualized religion as an internal state of belief, the contributors to this volume point out the entanglement of religion in the concreteness and messiness of everyday life. Matter is not merely an expression of higher doctrine; rather, ‘religions originate and survive through bodily engagements with the material elements of the world’ (Plate, p. 3). Plate’s introduction offers a passionate defence of this approach and a helpful working definition of its subject, built around five components: ‘bodies meet objects’; ‘the senses’; ‘time and space’; ‘orientation and disorientation of communities and individuals; and ‘strictures and structures of tradition’. These motifs run throughout the body of the text, which is comprised of thirty-seven single-authored chapters, each dedicated to a key concept in the discipline. The chapters are a mixture of hard-hitting theoretical contributions (Meyer on ‘media’, Latour on ‘fetish-factish’, Morgan on ‘thing’) and more

ethnographically grounded pieces (Zito on ‘body’, Gaskell on ‘display’). Happily, however, all contributors have avoided simply listing influential theorists or publications, and readers searching for an annotated bibliography will have to look elsewhere. Rather, the chapters offer ‘short, creative and ideally evocative essays’ (p. 7), each centred around a different ethnographic case study and accompanying photograph, which plunge the reader into the tangible, multi-sensory experience of religious traditions. Anthropologists in particular will be gratified by the diversity of these case studies, from Japanese zen ‘aesthetics’ (Prohl) to Victorian spirit photography ‘magic’ (Pels). Indeed, as several of the contributors (Prohl, Ch. 4 and Maniura, Ch. 14) argue, it is precisely the coupling of religious studies with an iconophobic Protestant tradition that has often led to materiality being dismissed as unimportant, inauthentic or sacrilegious. Whilst the book can be read entire, the chapters and case studies are self-contained, making the text a useful reference resource and ideally suited for dividing into modular readings to accompany undergraduate lectures.

The list of key terms has been derived from prominent themes emerging in the first ten years of publication in *Material Religion*, expanding on the journal’s highly successful 2011 Special Issue. Whilst there is an inevitable degree of arbitrariness in the various inclusions and exclusions of an anthology such as this, a survey of its contents does provide valuable insight into the discipline’s current intellectual landscape. Plate’s list both presents a view into history and ‘chart(s) a course for the future’ (p. xvii), solidifying theoretical gains where they have been made and directing the reader towards fertile new areas of enquiry. Thus we see established concerns of religious scholarship, including ‘ritual’, ‘belief’ and ‘sign’, alongside perhaps more surprising contributions, such as ‘brain-mind’, ‘city’ and ‘technology’. For those unfamiliar with recent developments, even a cursory glance at this book demonstrates the breadth and ambition of the materialist approach, which supplies multiple new inroads into an already interdisciplinary field. In his introduction Plate earmarks two areas of enquiry as deserving of further attention. First, critical studies of ‘race’ (Ch. 22) and ‘gender’ (Ch. 13) still have to be sufficiently conducted through a materialist lens. And, secondly, whilst studies of the body in religion have become increasingly popular, the sensory dimension of religious life, with regard to ‘taste’ (Ch. 32) and ‘smell’ (Ch. 28) in particular, is still under-explored. *Key terms* serves as a powerful illustration that materiality is not just a specialist sub-set of religious studies, but an expansive new framework through which to address all its concerns. Finally, for scholars with a background in material culture studies, it is notable that certain contemporary trends in this field have yet to make an impact on the *Key terms* list. Most prominently, this includes the shift from studying the consumption and production of social artefacts to considering transformations in material properties, as well as work on the processes of

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disposal, destruction and recycling. Much could be gained from greater cross-fertilisation between these closely related disciplines.

*Key terms in material religion* is beautifully presented, with glossy colour photographs marking the beginning of each chapter. A renewed focus on materiality within the social sciences demands not only new theoretical models, but also new methods for conducting and presenting research, among which photography is one of the most powerful. Too often, these methods are restricted by publishing constraints, but both Bloomsbury Publishing and the editor should be praised for the high production quality of this volume. This accessible and attractive volume will be of equal interest to students of religious life and to more established scholars seeking to broaden their understanding of the implications of the material turn.

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**CARLO SEVERI**, *The chimera principle: an anthropology of memory and imagination*, transl. by Janet Lloyd; foreword by David Graeber. Chicago: Hau Books 2015, xxxiv, 362 pp. ISBN 9780990505051.

What is a chimera, and how do pictographs function as such? Carlo Severi introduces the reader to a world of chimeric evocations provoked by visual representations to participants in a ritual context. This highly engaging and deftly written book is the fruit of exemplary scholarly work and is likely to become an indispensable reference for future research on the anthropology of memory and the so-called ‘oral’ cultures.

*The chimera principle* starts with a story from the Hasidic Jewish tradition. The story is about what is lost, and what remains, in a religious tradition from one generation to the next. Its relevance to the book is diligently unfolded as the author invites the reader to follow his outstanding analyses of pictographic systems of ritual communication. Unlike the Greek chimera, in which ‘an imaginary creature [is] depicted in relatively realistic terms’ (p.67), Severi takes the case of the Hopi chimera to illustrate that it is instead ‘a collection of abstract visual indices’ that yield ‘an interpretation of what is implicit’, generating the ‘invisible part of the image’ in ‘a mental, not a realistic, space’ (*ibid.*). The author seems determined to do justice to ‘one of the most persistent prejudices regarding Native American pictographs’ (p. 123), a point applicable to pictographic elements from non-Western cultures from around the world in general. Far from being unintelligible ‘private drawings’, or ‘imagistic monologues that only one individual, their creator, could decipher’ (*ibid.*),

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Severi shows instead how they were complex but identifiable visual languages transmittable through memory techniques and used in ritual contexts.

In a carefully deployed analysis carried out throughout the book, the author brings several examples of pictographic systems of ritual communication to a new light. Drawing on important, but not always remembered works of scholars and thinkers such as Erland Nordenskiöld (1930), Hjalmar Stolpe (1927), Diego Valadés (1579), Emanuel Löwy (1900) and Aby Warburg (1923), Severi sets out to unravel the nature of mnemonic evocations and to decode non-Western drawings and pictographs. One of the principal aims here seems to be the construction of an elucidatory way to grasp not just the kinds of stories that these pictographs could tell, but exactly *how* they were told. In sharp contrast to notions associating ‘oral’ cultures with a memory void, Severi masterly illustrates this subtle and sophisticated ‘art of memory’.

Through a mental process that involves decoding and associating heterogeneous features, the ‘parallelist cognitive organizing force’ that guides the ‘exercise of memory’ is described by the author as ‘an organizing technique that leads one to manipulate linguistic features and iconic features in the same fashion, like pieces in a *mosaic*’ that will eventually create a unified entity. Form is particularly important here. Much like, for instance, ritual songs in eastern European folklore (p. 246) that are built upon verbal repetition while having other parts open to improvisation and change, the author compellingly illustrates that it is not the stories but rather ‘typical scenarios’ that acquire a certain stability within a specific context. Sound, and a special use of speech, are equally important. In a ritual context, what shapes the *effect* upon the listener/participant ‘over and above the meaning of the words’ is determined by certain ‘pragmatic aspects of communication’ that are highlighted and subjected to ‘an unexpected elaboration founded upon a reflexive and parallelist definition of the locutor’ (p. 224).

Looking closely at Lévi-Strauss’ study of the Kuna song ‘The Way of Mu’, in his article ‘The effectiveness of symbols’ (1963), *The chimera principle* probes into, and calls for a redefinition of, the ‘nature of belief.’ It also invites anthropologists to broaden conventional understandings of ‘belief’ in a ritual context, and to ‘consider belief from a psychological perspective’ (p. 234). Making space for an understanding of ritual where incredulity and doubt play an essential role in establishing belief and acceptance, Severi is directing our attention to the unique, reflexive, relationship created between a person and a (visual/aural) representation in a ritual context.

From the Plains Indians to the Inuit, to the Kuna and Amerindian peoples, Severi illustrates with brilliant adeptness how they ‘all obey common criteria from the point of view of the mental operations implied by the drawings’ (p. 189) that generate and shape social memory. Of course social memory, in any context and time in history, is never unitary and can be antagonistic and

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painful. Nevertheless, it proves to be more resistant to confrontation or suppression than one would perhaps expect and successfully operates in cultural and political conflict, as the last chapter of the book skilfully shows. However, in understanding the creative ways of the ‘figurative mnemotechniques’, the mechanics of social memory of many so-called ‘oral’ peoples will fall between memorization and iconography (p. 198).

There is one minor point about this otherwise excellent work I would like to raise here. It has to do with the author’s use of the terms ‘traditional societies’ and ‘traditions’, which in some cases appear to be substituting ‘peoples’ or ‘cultures’. Closely related to this, at several points the author seems to be addressing a specific (Western) public (‘our own tradition’, ‘distant peoples’). Severi uses these terms throughout the book and in various contexts (e.g. ‘European tradition’, ‘pictographic tradition’, ‘traditional societies’) something that leaves the reader wondering about the referential breadth these terms encompass in different parts of the book. It would perhaps have been useful to have such definitions set out in the beginning in order to avoid misconceptions or the reproduction of contested terms.

Overall, Carlo Severi’s *The chimera principle* is an exceptionally detailed and analytical work of great academic value, which can nevertheless be read by non-specialists and be of interest to a broad and diverse reading public. Putting the old argument about the supposed fragility of memory among so-called ‘oral’ societies, as well as the common view that pictography was either a communication system that is forever lost to us or an ‘unsuccessful attempt to invent a type of writing’ (p. 14) on an entirely new basis, *The chimera principle* is a fascinating work that makes an important contribution to the anthropology of memory. This is especially the case with regard to non-Western, ‘oral’, societies- as well as to the anthropological study of ritual and belief. Lastly, and given that this review is being published in JASO, I could not help but mention that this book appeals especially to Oxford anthropologists. Given Severi’s insightful examination of some of Pitt-Rivers’s own work, having read this book one can never walk amongst the Museum’s collections again without being urged to look beyond ‘abstract’ shapes and trying to grasp the ‘hidden transcripts’ of even the ‘simplest’ of forms.

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## KATERINA CHATZIKIDI

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**VIBEKE STEFFEN, STEFFEN JÖHNCKE and KIRSTEN MARIE RAAHAUGE (eds.),**  
***Between magic and rationality: on the limits of reason in the modern world***, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press 2015, 380 pp. ISBN 9788763542135.

*Between magic and rationality: on the limits of reason in the modern world* is a collection of ethnographic studies examining forms of reflection and interaction that inflect the ways in which different societies create and challenge the limits of magic and reason. The study of magic and rationality as a contemporary interdisciplinary field has drawn strength and substance from anthropological inquiry. Using ethnography, this book explores the emergence and development of approaches to ‘rational’ and ‘magical’ frames of understanding as coexisting rather than in binary opposition to each other (p. 11). The editors of the book argue that, in order to provide a deep analysis of the complex ways in which the notions of rationality and irrationality are intertwined, it is necessary to understand how people engage in their practices, as well as ‘their attempts to make sense of and argue over the meaning of the world’ (p. 14). As such it can be argued that this collection is at the forefront of key debates in the study of the ‘rational’ and the ‘magical’ in that it examines how the study of these concepts as evoked in social processes allows for the frictions between the dynamics of the local and the global to arise.

*Between magic and rationality* opens with a section entitled ‘On the limits of institutional rationalities’. This section provides an exploration of the marginal position of magic with respect to the tensions that arise when formal institutional practices meet unorthodox means of pursuing

individual goals. Morton Hulvej Rod and Steffen Jöhncke explore these tensions by examining the unforeseen social effects of evidence-based practices in welfare-state institutions. Also included in this section is Cecilie Rubow and Anita Engdahl-Hansen's exploration of the practical symbology of the wedding horseshoe as an entry point to the investigation of the diverse ways in which Christianities are enacted within a single church institution. The final study in this section is Tine Tjørnhøj-Thomsen and Helle Ploug Hansen's ethnographic account of the complex ways in which magic is embedded even within institutional contexts such as hospitals, a study of the 'uncertainties caused by infertility, cancer and medical treatment and how magic is a common, mundane way of dealing with these uncertainties' (p. 96).

This book thus represents an important contribution to examining the complexity and nuances of the intersections between magic and rationality by highlighting the ways in which these debates have often been mired in simplistic reductions. This is best illustrated in the second section of the book, which begins with Martin Skrydstrup's chapter on climate modelling and magic. He describes understandings of magic in anthropology and its resonance with 'non-linearity' in contemporary climate research, where what has been understood as 'science' echoes with what these scientists claim about 'linear' community' (p. 125). Inger Sjørslev expands on this discussion by using some examples of gestalt-making in science. Gestalts, Sjørslev explains, are 'holistic, visual complexities shaped into some kind of material form' (p. 150). Further discussion of materiality is provided in the chapter by Mikkel Bunkenborg, who suggests that spirit mediums in rural North China offer a solution to this problem by foregrounding processes of dissolution in which things are divested of their materiality (p. 177).

Expanding on the theme of science and materiality, Bunkenborg also presents the idea of unmaterialized transcendence as a problem for signification because, within the process of signifying something, what is materially absent will in effect make it present. The study presented by Vibeke Steffen in Part 3, on the individualised character of personhood in spiritual cosmologies, provides a micro-analysis of 'the transgression of the boundaries between individual selves and bodies, and their implications for notions of personhood' (p. 236). In terms of the macro-level social changes, also in Part 3, Nils Bubandt's examination of ghosts and of regimes of the self in Indonesia allowed for the globalisation of psychological understandings of the self to emerge and be analysed. This study successfully raises the complexities and nuances of how rationality and irrationality, while discursively held to be separate, 'are in social practice folded in upon each other' (p. 225). The final chapter of Part 3 focuses on the phenomenological analysis of how the voice-hearing experience is interpreted as meaningful by people in the Hearing Voices Movement. Tying in with the overarching theme of the book, Sidsel Busch demonstrates the tension between magic

and rationality by revealing how the ‘meaning-making process entails a recognition of a different kind of reality than the one prescribed by conventional rationality, at the same time as it draws on resources from our cultural repertoire of trauma’ (p. 262).

The final section of this book, Part 4, focuses on the limits of ontology and epistemology. This section in particular provides a valuable resource for social science researchers. For instance, Maria Louw’s ethnography on ‘Dream omens and their meanings in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan’ provides a micro-analysis of the ambiguity behind Kyrgyz’s people’s belief/disbelief in dream omens. Through her ethnography, Louw captures the moments in which people reach for strategies to deal with things they do not believe in. Also in this section is Kirsten Marie Raahauge’s study of haunted houses in Denmark, an excellent topic for exploring strategies of reasoning, as well as examining the particularities of ‘perceiving something on the limits of reason, lacking natural explanations, adequate concepts and social resonance’ (pp. 315-16). Diverging from current academic assumptions that modern societies are characterised by disenchantment, Jenkins reconceptualises enchantments in the empirical plural rather than using a monolithic concept of enchantment. Doing so illustrates the extensive bricolage of narratives about the world that go beyond what is ordinarily visible locally (p. 344).

Overall, this book offers both a broad approach and a nuanced analysis of magic, rationality and the limits of reason in the modern world. The approach adopted here is intended to be of use to scholars in a range of different disciplines and locations. This book offers an innovative, engaging and theoretically rigorous account of the dynamics of the local and global tensions that shape ideas and experiences around magic and rationality. It will be essential reading for those researching, theorising or working with religious and spiritual groups of people.

#### **EMMA QUILTY**

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**MICHAEL STODDART**, *Adam’s nose and the making of humankind*, London: Imperial College Press, 2015, xxi, 258 pp. ISBN 9781783265183.

Smell has been largely neglected in anthropology. Indeed, Brian Moeran, noting Claude Lévi-Strauss’ description of ‘olfactory intoxication’ in *Triste Tropiques*, has suggested that, ‘if taken into account at all, smell tends to act as an entrée or afterthought to other more “important” matters’

(2007: 155). In contrast, Michael Stoddart, a biologist, zoologist and professor emeritus at the University of Tasmania, has put smell front and centre in his recently published work, *Adam's nose and the making of humankind*. In the book, Stoddart argues that one of the most significant developments for humanity occurred sixteen million years ago, when a particular gene mutation, nicknamed ADAM by the scientists who discovered it, appeared in our primate ancestors. This gene served to disrupt the flow of information received by the brain from the vomeronasal organ (the VNO), a sensory organ located above the palate of the mouth. The result of this disruption was to remove the ability of males to gauge, through smell, the time of female ovulation. As a result, smell is not the preeminent force behind human sexual activity, as it is for the majority of the animal kingdom. Stoddart goes further, however, to contend that the advent of the ADAM gene is one of the key reasons that our ancestors organised themselves as sexually monogamous yet communal, a key determinant of our 'success' as a species.

*Adam's nose and the making of humankind* is written in the populist style of academics turned authors, abounding with illustrations and easy-to-understand analogies. In the introduction, for example, the extent of human evolution is explained in relation to the Empire State building, namely, if we take street level to represent the time that the Earth was formed (approximately 4.6 billion years ago), humankind would only be in existence from the Empire State's 102<sup>nd</sup> floor (the top floor) onwards. The first half of the book establishes the prevalence of human attempts to alter our smell, through perfumes and bathing rituals, and compares this curiosity to the animal kingdom, where no such pretensions are made. The science behind olfaction is described, for humans and a range of other animals, and we learn that, unlike sight and sound, smells pass directly to the emotional quotient of the brain first, only sometimes continuing onwards to rational processing. The implication is that 'your first reaction to a smell is always emotional; only secondarily do you rationalise it' (p. 81). Midway through the book, the chapter 'Sex, smell and "ADAM"' outlines the book's core assertion: that we are not behaviourally driven by 'pheromones', or sex smells, in the same way as other animals (despite the claims of many perfume manufacturers). For this reason, Stoddart assumes, we have 'developed' beyond other animals. Having established this biological consideration, *Adam's nose* then turns to the cultural significance of smell for the latter half of the book, looking predominantly at Western history, art and literature.

As readers of this review may have already gathered, a number of Stoddart's assertions will raise the pejorative anthropological eyebrow. Monogamy, Stoddart argues, is the biologically informed state of human sexual relationships, enforced by the need to care for human children, who are helpless far longer than animal young. So that we could live communally and grow as a species to 'dominate the world' (p. x), certain gene mutations such as ADAM ensured that males were not

waywardly controlled by their sexual impulses. As such, the family unit (male, female and child) could live productively with other families without the negative effects produced by polygyny, such as violent competition between males and infanticide. While conceding that there is a wealth of anthropological data to contradict such biological determinism, Stoddart rounds off his argument by dichotomizing culture and nature: ‘I don’t deny that 21<sup>st</sup> century humankind has organised its societies differently from the way in which natural selection arranged them’ (p. 152). As Tim Ingold has discussed at length across multiple works (cf. 1986, 2006, 2007), such an argument, which treats biology ‘as a constant of human being, and of culture as its variable and interactive complement’, is not only ‘imprecise’ but incredibly problematic, forcing us to ‘endlessly recycle the polarities, paradoxes and prejudices of Western thought.’ (Ingold 2006: 376).

Without delving into the alternative proposed by Ingold, the extent of this problem becomes particularly evident in Stoddart’s final chapter. Having argued earlier in the book that humans generally choose mating partners that have different immune systems to their own, thus boosting the immunity potential of their children, Stoddart also suggests that smell could be a determinant of these choices. This then provides the tenuous basis for his later proposition that children raised without the smell of their ‘natural parents’ (p. 224) may make biologically less advantageous partner choices. This suggestion is made despite admitting that there is no longitudinal study to support this speculation. This consideration is followed by another concerning menstruation, in which he suggests that menses may occur earlier in women who do not live in the presence of their paternal father’s smell. It is not shown why this would be at all detrimental to the future of humankind, yet nonetheless Stoddart warns that, in an era ‘where the modern family is changing...our lack of knowledge [with regard to olfaction] is verging on the dangerous’ (p. 224). What is also dangerous, one may counter, is biological reductionism. Given that the book is intended for a wide, non-academic audience, such ‘suggestions’ are not only controversial but also negligent, supporting the odorous idea (pun intended) that familial environments may be either ‘natural’ or ‘unnatural’. While Stoddart does caveat his work with the acknowledgement that, ‘if you don’t accept that humankind is the product of Darwinian evolution, you’ll likely find much to rile against in the following pages’ (p. xix), a more comprehensive detailing of his particular brand of Darwinism and its apparent conflation with the philosophies of Herbert Spencer (cf. Ingold 1986) would have been preferable.

Ultimately, the value of *Adam’s nose and the making of humankind* lies in its bringing smell into focus. In accordance with Moeran’s observation, cited earlier, the anthropological consideration of olfaction is under-theorised. With visual anthropology now an established sub-discipline and sound (often in conjunction with landscape) now a subject of ethnographic

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consideration (see Stokes 2010; Feld 1990), we may well expect smell likewise to become a site for anthropological inquiry. In the meantime, however, as Ingold has asserted, anthropologists should be working to make ‘our voices heard’ in matters concerning the progression of humankind, rather than leaving the discussion to those who ‘find in [Darwin’s] work a holy grail that consigns all else to worthless idolatry’ (2007: 17).

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## Obituary

### W.S.F. ('Bill') Pickering, 29 January 1922 – 23 May 2016

JASO is greatly saddened to learn of the death of the Revd Dr William Stuart Frederick ('Bill') Pickering, General Secretary of the British Centre for Durkheimian Studies since its foundation at his initiative in 1991; throughout its existence the Centre has been based in the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography or its institutional predecessors in the University of Oxford.

'Bill', as he was affectionately known, was born in Enfield, north London, in 1922, the son of a bank clerk. Later the family moved to Surbiton in Surrey, where Bill attended the local grammar school. In the Second World War he served in the RAF in India, chiefly as a radio mechanic. Immediately after the war he began the process of becoming ordained as a priest in the Church of England, a step he achieved in 1951. This led to his first academic appointment as a Tutor in Theology in King's College, London, from 1953 to 1956. While there he also embarked on a doctorate in sociology (on lay church-goers), which he was awarded in 1958. From then until 1966 he taught sociology at St John's College, Winnipeg, Canada, before transferring to the Department of Sociology at Newcastle-upon-Tyne. He retired from the latter position in 1987.

Originally interested in the sociology of religion generally, with a special focus on the Hutterite communities of Canada, this led Bill to a long-term interest in the life and work of the French sociologist Émile Durkheim and his circle, in which he became a world expert. Although he retired to live in the village of Coton, near Cambridge, where he and his wife had a house, he chose Oxford to set up the Centre for Durkheimian Studies and regularly visited the city for the Centre's termly study days and more occasional conferences; the former in particular were generally held at the Maison Française d'Oxford and were accompanied by very convivial lunches, often provided by Bill and his wife themselves out of their own pocket. Bill was also very active in publishing work of his own and in editing collections of essays on topics of Durkheimian interest, as well as launching the journal, *Durkheimian Studies*, and a press, the Durkheim Press, with his longstanding colleague, Willie Watts Miller.<sup>1</sup> For his work in furthering Anglo-French academic cooperation, he was awarded the prestigious Palme Académique by the French government at a ceremony held at the Maison Française d'Oxford. He is survived by his wife Carol and a family of step-children and step-grandchildren.

Bill was kindly and sociable, keenly interested in and sympathetic to others, with a wry sense of humour, but not at all prepared to compromise on academic standards, about which he could be quite direct, as the author of this notice has reason to remember himself. Not only his vast knowledge and understanding of things Durkheimian, but also his own personal presence pervaded the Centre's meetings, and he was intimately associated with all its constantly expanding activities until the very last months of his life; indeed, his level of activity and achievement right through his retirement was truly astounding. In both this sense and personally he will be irreplaceable, as well as greatly missed.

Robert Parkin (editor)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Both Durkheim Press books and *Durkheimian Studies* are now published under an arrangement with Berghahn Press.

<sup>2</sup> I acknowledge the help of a more detailed but unpublished memoir produced by Anthony Waterman, of Winnipeg, Canada, on which I have drawn for certain basic facts and dates about Bill's life.