The Stranger
- On the Understanding of, and Socialising With, the Stranger in a Globalised and Constantly Changing World

Søren Nagbøl (ed)

Danish School of Education
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CURSIV
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Introduction

- On Complexity and Communication of Knowledge

By Søren Nagbøl

Translated by Nicolai Paulsen

Introduction

Understanding and socialising with the stranger in a globalised and constantly changing world constitutes one of the key challenges facing mankind at the start of the 21st century. To this end, the editors of CURSIV and the research programmes Subject-Related Education; Social Pedagogy, Inclusion and Leadership of Organisations; and Education and Philosophy (all Danish School of Education) decided to organise a conference around this theme where international researchers, as well as researchers and students from the Danish School of Education, were invited to present relevant research.

Bearing in mind our chosen theme, Georg Simmel’s seminal excursus on the stranger cannot be ignored. He introduces his ideas as follows:

*If wandering is the liberation from every given point in space, and thus the conceptional opposite to fixation at such a point, the sociological form of the ‘stranger’ presents the unity, as it were, of these two characteristics. This phenomenon too, however, reveals that spatial relations are only the condition, on the one hand, and the symbol, on the other, of human relations. The stranger is thus being discussed here, not in the sense often touched upon in the past, as the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the person who comes today and stays tomorrow. He is, so to speak, the potential wanderer: although he has not moved*
on, he has not quite overcome the freedom of coming and going. He is fixed within a particular spatial group, or within a group whose boundaries are similar to spatial boundaries. But his position in this group is determined, essentially, by the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning, that he imports qualities into it, which do not and cannot stem from the group itself.

The unity of nearness and remoteness involved in every human relation is organized, in the phenomenon of the stranger, in a way which may be most briefly formulated by saying that in the relationship to him, distance means that he, who is close by, is far, and strangeness means that he, who also is far, is actually near. For, to be a stranger is naturally a very positive relation; it is a specific form of interaction. (Simmel, 1950, p. 402)

Thus, part of our task was to absorb the knowledge and experiences that ‘the outsiders’ (as used by Norbert Elias, 1965/1994) bring with them, and to interpret this insight within our frame of understanding and in the form of communication of knowledge that promotes understanding of ‘the strange’ in this “globalised and constantly changing world”.

An Erasmus programme has helped spark a fertile collaboration between the Department of Education and Psychology – Anthropology and Education Section, Freie Universität Berlin, and the Danish School of Education at Aarhus University. A key figure in this collaboration is Christoph Wulf, co-founder of the Interdisciplinary Center for Historical Anthropology, and a member of the Collaborative Research Center ‘Performing Cultures’ and the Cluster of Excellence ‘Languages of Emotion’ – all at Freie Universität Berlin. Wulf opened our conference with the lecture Anthropology as a Prerequisite of Education in the Globalised World. We invited all participants to share their thoughts in the subsequent discussion, and thereby to demonstrate the complexity and diversity inherent to the field of education.

Technology and new media are very useful for the documentation and publication of performances, presentations, conferences, and such. We recorded most of the conference, and the results can be accessed via the Danish School of Education’s website.

Wulf’s lecture was based on research that has taken place for several decades at the Interdisciplinary Center for Historical Anthropology, and which is now rapidly gaining followers all over the world. This research has led to academic dialogues between universities in China, Russia, India, Japan, Africa, Europe, the Americas and Australia. All continents are involved.

This was the backdrop for Wulf’s opening lecture, in which he presented a number of anthropological assumptions in order to introduce anthropologically oriented paradigms and interpretations of education that are at play at present; a
present where we must face the ever more important issue of how to understand and address the strange in a globalised and constantly changing world.

Wulf opened his lecture by presenting some of the key issues in the field of education. His basic assumption is that the way people perceive the world around them, and the way they collaborate with others, play a vital role for how they navigate the field we call education. The notions about the world that we all carry around define the ways we relate to, and engage with, other people. This is the case in specific courses, where the communication of knowledge is dominated by practical knowledge and by the ways we interact in a teaching situation, rather than by conscious planning. This can be explained by the German tradition revolving around the concept of ‘Bildung’. In this tradition, ‘Bildung’ refers to the construction, or formation, of an individual. ‘Bildung’ and education address the individual as subject. One basic tenet of ‘Bildung’ is that every individual has its own, unique way of learning. The aim is therefore individual development, a process in which the individual’s life story and cultural diversity are merely two of many prerequisites in an extended process of formation – of ‘Bildung’. ‘Bildung’ is fundamentally different from the notion of education as a process of rote learning.

The concept of ‘Bildung’ entails a comprehensive view of the scope, aim and methods of education. Wulf asserted, in his lecture, that we all assimilate the world, the relations we find ourselves in. We all have our own way of learning: a way Wulf denotes ‘mimetic learning’, and which involves creative imitation of the ways we relate both to objects and to other people. The ways in which we relate to our surroundings help our development as individuals. With these introductory remarks, Wulf explained the roots of his interest in educational anthropology.

The discussion at the conference included an open invitation to the participants to submit manuscripts for this issue of CURSIV. A rigorous selection process resulted in the present collection of articles, which, each in their own way, provide important, new reflections about the stranger and how we deal with him:

Christoph Wulf: Anthropology – a Challenge to Education and Human Development

According to Wulf, the field of anthropology is a decentralised, or even polycentric, field of research, which emphasises questions of representation, understanding and interpretation, construction and deconstruction, and therefore also a diversity of methods. Two opposing forces dominate the world: On the one hand, we have the ‘uniforming’, or homogenising, globalisation, while the other points to the limitations of globalisation and examines cultural diversity and the
conditions for that diversity. These two forces collide in anthropology, where we find an increasing tension between, on the one hand, broad generalisations about people, and, on the other, statements that emphasise historical and cultural diversity.

In our continued discussion of anthropology in relation to the humanities or social sciences, five approaches stand out as particularly important:

1: Man’s origin and development, i.e. anthropology of evolution
2: Philosophical anthropology, which was developed in Germany
3: Historical anthropology and the history of mentalities, developed by the Annales School in France
4: Cultural anthropology as practised in the U.S.
5: Historical cultural anthropology.

Combined, these approaches, or paradigms, form the foundation for educational anthropology.

Among the dynamics that characterise contemporary globalised society, two are particularly important for the understanding of, and interaction with, the strange(r) in differentiated life situations. One is that of hominization, the evolutionary process that all human beings share. Historical anthropologists, in particular, study the fact that, whoever we are and wherever we grew up, we are all related as human beings. The second dynamic, or aspect, is cultural diversity. Through the research diligently conducted at Freie Universität, we have learned how our interpretation of ourselves and each other is in a constant state of change, and how our historical heritage and context, as expressed in disparate processes of civilisation, have a profound impact on this (self-)interpretation (Elias, 1939; 1965/1994).

These two dynamics, or aspects, must be addressed together. This is a complex endeavour, but necessary, because only by combining them do we obtain a genuine understanding of the relations in life that define the way we understand our fellow man and ourselves. In addition, by combining the two aspects, we establish multi-level connections with multiple fields of research, because the engagement with cultural diversity occurs in both diachronic and synchronic processes.

Søren Nagbøl & Ingelise Flensborg: The Burghers of Calais

One empirical example of how the relation between theoretical and practical knowledge can be enacted in practice is described in the article on historical
anthropology and cultural analysis by Nagbøl & Flensborg, in which they describe a staging of Rodin’s ‘The Burghers of Calais’. They demonstrate how research, teaching, theory and practice can be woven together to form a merger of performance and sensory practice in an experiential process. The example shows that performative pedagogical/educational activities can be enacted and combined with physical ‘Bildung’ processes. By employing a range of methods, the authors and teachers carefully develop educational courses in a community of interpretation, in which every participant creates insight and formulates their individual understanding of the importance that the transposition into the alien context of the ‘The Burghers of Calais’ affords.

Trine Halle & Ingelise Flensborg: The Sailor Within Us All

Another example is provided by Halle & Flensborg’s article, which is based on the authors’ interest in the importance of Danish naval history for the Danes’ self-interpretation. Centuries of sights and sounds from the seven seas and faraway lands have inspired production, enterprise and daily life in Denmark. With the establishment of the Maritime Museum of Denmark, the authors were afforded an exceptional opportunity to explore their topic. The museum is already internationally recognised for its spectacular architecture, with a nomination for the prestigious European Museum of the Year award the high point so far.

According to the authors, museums are a vital element in the process of educating a population to democracy. Thus, the concept of citizenship plays a key role in the dialogue-based pedagogics developed for courses held in the museum. The authors describe how students learn about their own historical background through their own actions and their own creative input. The course the authors have developed is aimed at strengthening the students’ identity in a globalised and ever-changing world. By moving through the exhibition, and through the new views of the space(s), the students can develop repertoires for new constructions of reality.

The point of the educational setting is to promote problem-solving learning processes. This particular educational approach, or pedagogics, is based on the notion that it is important not just to know about a certain period of history, but also to be acquainted with the practical work; the cultural learning processes. This is the reasoning behind the use of educational methods that can be developed through discussion and employed to impart knowledge through practical activities in a cultural community. The authors state that, in processes that involve multiple actors, it is important that the museums are confident in their own core competences: their collection and communication of history. As long as museums
keep this in mind, collaborations with outside actors will always enrich both the museums and the pedagogical practice in schools.

**Orvar Löfgren: Learning the City**

Orvar Löfgren’s contribution concerns the stranger’s encounter with the city of Copenhagen. In his article, the author asks how a newcomer actually learns to navigate the city, and explores how we acquire some of the skills and competences that we use without reflection when we explore the unfamiliar. At Copenhagen Central Station, the author has examined how Homo Urbanus learns to behave among strangers, to move through the crowds, and to stand in line. The author identifies ways to explore the behavioural patterns and social norms that are usually taken for granted and quite often also difficult to explain in words. The author applies a historical perspective and selected ethnographical experiments, and discusses how all our senses are activated in these complex learning processes. The aim is to establish a coherent understanding of the entire complex of buildings, bodies, soundscapes and emotions that all combine to make up the context of the station.

**Jamie Wallace: Makers not Users**

In his article, Jamie Wallace argues against our traditional view of human interaction with technology, i.e. that it pacifies the user, who is assumed to only use a given artefact in the way it was intended. This simplistic view hinders, according to Wallace, a genuine understanding of the relation between people and technology, and how this relation is intricately dependent on an incalculable number of people’s material interaction with technology. This insight paves the way for an understanding of a creative aspect of the way technology successfully contributes to people’s actual practice. By examining the transformative actions in our daily interaction with technology and design, we establish a potential for the user, who becomes a creator of technology. This again allows for an analytical approach that involves direct engagement and transformation.

Wallace draws on Gibson’s concept of ‘affordance’, which allows us to identify and describe the mutual relation between man and technology as the basis of perception and action. By relating affordances to creation rather than to application, it is shown how these actions cannot be predicted in the design phases of a given piece of technology. Affordances intrude, are malleable, momentary, impulsive, un-articulated and shaped through situated practice. On the one hand, affordances reveal users as actively reconfiguring technology, as the technologies
gradually become an integrated part of practice. On the other hand, affordances demonstrate that creative processes are explorative, not as explorations of finished artefacts, but of the opportunities for interaction with the materiality.

Tine Fristrup, Charlotte Tulinius & Bibi Hølge-Hazelton: Academic Strangeness as Uncomfortable Reflexivity and Academic Reflexivity as Uncomfortable Strangeness in Higher Education

In this article, the three researchers describe the participants’ experiences from a course held in 2013 for doctoral students in the field of healthcare. Reflections on and about the students’ own contributions to the research process are discussed as a relation between reflection and reflexivity, and the authors thereby explore the inherent vulnerability in the relation between the subjects and the researchers; a concept the authors describe as ‘uncomfortable reflexivity’. The authors describe the strategies they used to plan, conduct and evaluate the course, but throughout with a keen focus on the learning that takes place as a consequence of working with this topic and with these particular strategies in their teaching.

The key point of the article is that working with uncomfortable reflexivity causes academic alienation, which must constantly be addressed and alleviated. The way to make the alienation bearable is, according to the authors, to accept the fundamentally tragic condition that alienation is a basic tenet of academic endeavour, which entails an ‘academic zone of discomfort’ in which the efforts to make the unknown less unknown and the uncomfortable less uncomfortable are continuous.

Lars-Henrik Schmidt: The Stranger in Yourself

In his article, Lars-Henrik Schmidt discusses the fact that many academic disciplines turn ‘the other’ into a subject, whereby the other becomes conceptualised as a theoretical object. The conceptualisation is interdisciplinary, and the attempt therefore influenced by the particular disciplines that are brought into play, and by the theoretical beacons in the different fields. Popular theoretical approaches gang up, and the topic appears to be threatened by implosion when the second person perspective (philosophy) dissolves into a first person perspective (ideology) or a third person perspective (science). The ensuing textual bricolage excludes the other by being specific concerning the alienating difference. In this article, the author argues that the concept of ‘the other’ (the object) should be replaced by the category ‘the stranger’ – another conceptual tool – in order to preserve an ethical standpoint. The article comprises a narrative of animosity and (class) warfare.
Amareswar Galla: The Stranger is Present

In this group of European authors, Amareswar Galla represents the stranger, in that he is the only one from a different continent: Born and educated in India, a professorship in Australia, Executive Director for the International Institute for the Inclusive Museum and Senior Advisor to the World Culture Forum.

The title of this article is telling, and the message is clear: The tyranny of binary oppositions continues to determine the discourse of self and the other in Europe. Former non-Western studies departments are renaming themselves as cross-cultural centres. Ethnology museums are rebranding themselves as museums of world cultures. Major colonial museums are legitimising themselves as so-called universal museums. Can such chameleon-like transformations be possible without psychological decolonisation of institutional legacies? What is the role of the agency of source and diaspora community groups that may have a primary stake in the collections? The past continues through institutional power. Hegemonic discourse can reauthorize, often co-opting subaltern voices. Can Europe minimise the anxiety of losing its whiteness and address xenophobia by rethinking the *raison d’être* of the Stranger, bringing together diverse stakeholders and their heritage into an inclusive fabric? Do museums have a role to play? The paper is a brief interrogation of that existentialist dilemma and of understanding the Stranger.

This issue of *CURSIV* is a step into the unknown, a first step on a long journey where we shall constantly define topics and formulate questions that are relevant for our understanding and accommodation of the strange in a globalised and constantly changing world. This is an emerging field of research, and we need new landmarks to navigate dangerous waters and to address the opportunities and conflicts between people that follow from increasing interdependency in an ever more complex world.

The contributors in this issue are all experts within their different fields. The interdisciplinary get-together was set up in order to perforate traditional academic barriers and monopolies on knowledge. We emphatically did not organise the conference on the basis of a particular school of thought or predominant discourse, and we have no explicit political or ideological aims. We supply material for an open and creative dialogue in an open forum, a dialogue that gives rise to more questions than answers. And yet we are ambitious, in that we launch our project from theoretical and practical traditions that draw on insight which others, across generations, have made available to us. Their contributions demand
that we ourselves apply the highest standards, and so each contribution has been rigorously peer reviewed by internationally renowned and diligent colleagues who deserve the highest praise for their valuable – even crucial – contribution. Thank you.

Many others have provided valuable help along the way. Therefore, we also wish to thank the participants at the conference, all of whom helped establish a friendly and fertile discussion. A huge debt is owed to Serviceteam AV, who supplied and operated the recording equipment, and who registered and edited all the material into a thorough documentation of the proceedings. Thank you to Claus Holm for opening the conference. Thank you to those who helped with the editing and proofreading: Arthur Hibble, Lucy Seton-Watson, Sarah Jennings, Nicholas Wrigley and Jill Archer, as well as Simon Rolls, our in-house proofreader and English language consultant. Thank you to Nicolai Paulsen for valuable editorial assistance at a critical junction, and for his keen eye for language and his overview. I thank my co-editor Iben Nørgaard for her unparalleled work ethic and for always being ready to lend a hand, and for making certain that nothing was forgotten. And last, but not least: a huge thank you to Leif Glud Holm, whose steady hand has ensured a professional layout of this issue of CURSIV. Any remaining errors are solely my responsibility.

Søren Nagbøl, Copenhagen. March 2015

Note
1 i.e. at: http://edu.au.dk/the-stranger/

References


Anthropology: A Challenge to Education and Human Development

By Christoph Wulf

Abstract

Anthropology is a decentralized, polycentric science in which problems of representation, interpretation, construction or deconstruction, and thus also methodological diversity, are of central importance. Two contradictory developmental trends clash; one is oriented towards a “uniformizing” globalization while the other points towards the limits of this development and emphasizes the conditions of cultural diversity. This clash is reflected within anthropology, where the tensions between statements that emphasize historical and cultural diversity and more universal statements on human beings have increased. When considering anthropology within the humanities and social sciences, we have to consider the following five paradigms: 1) anthropology of evolution and hominization; 2) philosophical anthropology developed in Germany; 3) historical anthropology and the history of mentalities, initiated by historians in France and taking its cue from the Annales School; 4) the American tradition of cultural anthropology; and finally 5) historical cultural anthropology. These paradigms also provide the basis for educational anthropology.

Keywords: hominization, philosophical anthropology, cultural anthropology, historical anthropology, educational anthropology, globalization.
According to Kant, the human situation is as follows: what human beings are depends on what they have to be and on what they may be. Human beings are nothing by and of themselves, and must make themselves into who they are and turn themselves into who they must become, whilst, in so doing, they frequently hurl themselves against their very own limits. The study and categorization of these relationships and interconnections constitute, for Kant, the duty of pragmatic anthropology (cf. Kant, 1982, p. 699). In contrast to physiological anthropology, which examines the biological conditions of human existence, pragmatic anthropology studies the field of human action and human freedom.

If we wish to fulfill this duty properly, it is first of all necessary to resolve one question: what do we understand, today, by anthropology? What meaning does this term have for the humanities? As I see it, anthropology today can only be developed within the framework of the historical and philosophical study of human beings; that is to say as historical cultural anthropology. It must be guided by careful reflection on the manner in which anthropology may be conducted after the “death of God” (Nietzsche), that is to say in the wake of the disappearance of universal anthropology, and after the “death of man” (Foucault), in the sense of the abstract European and masculine being which served as the template for conceptualizing the individual.

**Anthropological paradigms**

If we wish to put the epistemology of anthropology on a more reflected footing, then a confrontation, simultaneously critical and constructive, with the internationally significant anthropological paradigms is absolutely indispensable (Wulf, 2013a). In terms of anthropology within the humanities and social sciences, these paradigms are:

- Anthropology of evolution and hominization
- Philosophical anthropology developed in Germany
- Historical anthropology and the history of mentalities, initiated by historians in France and taking its cue from the Annales School
- The American tradition of cultural anthropology
- Historical cultural anthropology.

In order to provide a framework for anthropology, I suggest using the paradigm of historical cultural anthropology as a foundation for further research. This paradigm integrates perspectives from the other four major anthropological paradigms, as outlined in the following section, and provides a basis for an adequate understanding of phenomena, processes and institutions in a globalized world.
Anthropology of evolution and hominization

The branch of anthropology devoting itself to the study of hominization stems from an attempt to fit the natural history of human beings within the scope of anthropology in order to understand the “lost paradigm” that the human is (Morin, 1973). On the other hand, the natural history of human evolution can only be understood when considered as a part of history. Its irreversibility, as well as that of the history of life itself, is grasped today as a consequence of material self-organization, which also constitutes a facet of reflexive historical cultural anthropology. Just as anthropology stresses the historical character of its analyses and of the way in which it frames its problems, the theory of evolution insists on the radical chronologization of nature and of the natural history of the evolution of human beings. Time and history are thus central dimensions of evolution.

Hominization is the long process of evolution, from *Australopithecus* to primitive man, from *Homo erectus* to the modern representatives of our species.

Hominization can be understood as a multi-dimensional morphogenesis arising from the interplay between ecological, genetic, cerebral, social and cultural factors. Current understanding is that this process required three types of change. The first type was ecological changes which led to the expansion of the savannah and thus to an “open” biotope. Second, a genetic change took place in certain highly developed primates that were already walking upright. Third, there was a change in social self-reproduction due to the splitting off of young groups and the use of new territories.

The new biotopes that resulted from the expansion of the savannah led to significant increases in the requirements for dexterity and communication skills for the two-handed bipedal life-forms which were already able to use and manufacture simple tools. These hominids, who had become omnivores, had to develop new levels of alertness, watchfulness and cunning to cope with the demands of hunting. They needed new forms of co-operation and social responsibility to protect themselves against predators, search for food, hunt and divide their prey, and rear their young. This led to a further development in cerebral capabilities. It was therefore the new ecosystem – the savannah – which triggered the dialectic between the feet, hands and brain and which became the source of technology and all other human developments.

As these processes unfolded, a paleosociety developed with a culture-based division of work between men and women and the development of hierarchical social relations. Language and culture became gradually more complex. The process of hominization was intensified by a prolonged youth or *neoteny*, incomplete development of the brain at birth and prolonged childhood with longer affective
ties between the generations, with the associated potentials for comprehensive cultural learning. Cerebralization, prolonged youth and increased social and cultural complexity were mutually dependent. The complexity of the brain allows and requires a corresponding socio-cultural complexity. The creative potential of the brain can only be expressed and develop in a socio-cultural environment that grows in parallel. This dialectic relationship means that humans have been cultural beings from the very beginning, i.e. their “natural” development is cultural.

The final stage of this process of hominization is, in fact, also a beginning. The human species, which has developed into *Homo sapiens*, is a youthful and childlike species. Our brilliant brains would be feeble organs without the apparatus of culture; all our capabilities need to be bottle-fed. Hominization was completed with the irreversible and fundamental creative incompleteness of human beings. Its course also illustrates that *Homo sapiens* and *Homo demens* are inseparably linked and that the great achievements of humankind have their downside: the horrors and atrocities perpetrated by the human race (Wulf, 2013a, 2013b).

**Philosophical anthropology**

While taking evolution into account in anthropology serves to highlight the shared lineage and mutual parentage of all forms of life and the long time-span of hominization, as well as the general laws of evolution, philosophical anthropology turns its attention to the particularity of “man’s” character.

The centerpieces of philosophical anthropology are the anthropological works of Max Scheler, Helmuth Plessner and Arnold Gehlen. Despite considerable differences between these authors, their works of the first half of the twentieth century are referred to collectively as philosophical anthropology. Their common purpose was to establish how human beings differ from animals, what the specific conditions of being human are, and to define the human condition. Despite their differences, all three authors were in agreement that the central focus of anthropology is the human body, which in itself is the starting point for differentiating between humans and animals. In a time of grave human self-doubt and a reflexive awareness of these doubts, it was hoped that by focusing on the body, knowledge gleaned from natural sciences could serve as a starting point for a revalidation of human nature. This orientation was associated with a rejection of idealism and the philosophy of consciousness. Philosophy was no longer interested in reason, but in the creative diversity of life.

In 1927, Max Scheler gave a lecture in Darmstadt entitled “Die Sonderstellung des Menschen” (“Man’s Particular Place”), which was published in 1928 under the title *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (Scheler, 2009) and is regarded as...
the beginning of philosophical anthropology. When Scheler died that same year, he left no concrete preparatory material for the anthropological work he had intended to publish in 1929. The philosopher and biologist Helmuth Plessner, meanwhile, published his own main anthropological work Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch (Levels of Organic Being and Man) in 1928. Despite large differences in material and argument, Scheler’s article and Plessner’s book share the assumption that organic life is structured in levels. Arnold Gehlen’s work Der Mensch, seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt (Man: His Nature and Place in the World, Gehlen, 1988) took a different approach and focuses on humans as acting beings.

The preoccupation of this strand of anthropological thought was to understand the essence, the nature of human beings in general. Within this framework, anthropology concentrated upon a comparison between “man” and animal (Gehlen, 1988; Plessner, 1970), with a view to distinguishing shared features and differences. To grasp the conditio humana, philosophical reflections were brought to bear upon biological insights. It was thought that the conditions for the formation of the human species could be glimpsed in such biological and, above all, morphological characteristics. This perspective has had two consequences. On the one hand, the focus of anthropological reflection and research has from then on shifted onto the human body. On the other hand, the development of a generalizing discourse relating to one unique and unitary model of man could be observed. While the latter seems appropriate for attributing typical characteristics to a species, such as walking upright, it ceases to make sense once this narrow focalization is relinquished and anthropology is stretched to accommodate the historical and cultural reality of human existence.

Due to its focus on the human being as such, philosophical anthropology fails to address the historical and cultural diversity of human beings in the plural. This is the inevitable consequence of the interesting attempt to develop a single coherent concept of “Man”, which failed to capture the diversity of human life and could hardly have achieved its ambitious goals. To investigate this is the aim of a branch of historical science that is oriented towards anthropological issues.

The Annales School and the history of mentalities

Anthropology underwent an additional development and refinement in a historical turn, which can be discerned in the historical treatments of anthropological topics by the Annales School and the history of mentalities which flowed from it (Burke, 1991; Ariès & Duby, 1985). Historiographically, this alignment with anthropological themes and topics represents a novel orientation. It fostered
the representation and analysis of the dynamic of historical events and of socio-economic conditions effected by structural and social history.

From concentrating on anthropological themes and topics, inquiries turned increasingly to exploring actual social structures, as well as the subjective elements of the social individual’s actions. In this vein, elementary types of human behavior and basic situations are analyzed. Quite opposed to those hypotheses which insist that these basic situations be rooted in a character common to all human beings, the practitioners of historical studies with an anthropological orientation inquire into the specifically historical and cultural character of each of these phenomena. Fernand Braudel’s study of the Mediterranean (Braudel, 1949), Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie’s on the village of Montaillou (LeRoy Ladurie, 1978), and Carlo Ginzburg’s on the world of millers around 1600 (Ginzburg, 1980) may be cited as prominent examples of this endeavor.

The research into fundamental human experiences or into the history of mentalities, which has been undertaken in connection with this historical turn, is inevitably less rich in detail. Often, this is due to the limits which the insufficiency of sources imposes upon the possibilities of historical knowledge, born of the tension between event and account, reality and fiction, structural history and narrative historiography (LeGoff, 1990). A precise delimitation of narrative and description is impossible: historiography represents both controlled fiction and controlled reconstruction.

Historical anthropology investigates elementary situations and basic experiences of being human. It studies a basic stock of patterns of thought, feeling and behavior that is anthropologically constant (Dinzelbacher, 1993): basic human phenomena and elementary human behavior, experiences and basic situations. Although it could be understood otherwise, these classifications are not concerned with making statements about humans in general but with gaining an understanding of the multi-dimensional conditions of life and experiences of real people in their respective historical contexts. These anthropological studies are oriented towards investigating the multitude of ways in which the different forms of human life are expressed and presented.

This diversity of phenomena is paralleled by the multi-dimensionality and open-endedness of anthropological definitions and research paradigms. In this research, it is necessary to develop a feeling for the difference between the historical world under investigation and the current frame of reference of the research. Since, for example, linguistic metaphors and terms have different meanings in different times and in different contexts, these differences in meaning must be taken into account. The same applies with regard to research into basic human behaviors, experiences and fundamental situations. From the point of view of the
historical sciences, the feelings, actions and events under investigation can only be understood in terms of their historic uniqueness. It is this that lends them their dynamic nature and makes them subject to historical change.

**Cultural anthropology or ethnology**

Even though anthropology is the result of a process of philosophical and scientific evolution, these days it can no longer pretend that only Europeans exist as human beings and act as though these putative European humans were the only possible yardstick. It is obvious that, even in an era of globalization deeply marked in its content and form by Western culture, different forms of human life exist today, influenced by various local, regional and national cultures.

The Anglo-Saxon tradition of cultural and social anthropology has turned its attention to this situation. Within this framework, the focus is on the social and cultural diversity of human life. Its research explains both to what extent cultural evolutions are heterogeneous and to what extent the profound diversity of human life remains disregarded. It is precisely the analysis of foreign cultures which makes it plain to us how limited and troublesome this disregard for diversity is. Comparisons of human expressions and manifestations across several cultures have demonstrated the great extent to which the study of cultural phenomena brings forth new uncertainties and questions.

Thanks to the analysis of cultural manifestations drawn from heterogeneous cultures, anthropological inquiries make an important contribution to the elaboration and development of anthropology, while its ethnographical methods oblige practitioners to draw upon historical sources. Besides creating a sensitivity towards the strange and foreign character of other cultures, it also creates a sensitivity for that which is strange and foreign in its own culture. The (self-) reflexive point of view adopted by cultural anthropology towards European cultures has contributed to a considerable evolution and advance of anthropological knowledge (Geertz, 1973).

**Historical cultural anthropology**

Anthropology holds considerable potential for developing new modes of reflection and research. This implies an opportunity to free anthropological research from outdated disciplinary traditions and to redefine the horizons of anthropology. In this redefinition, the global perspectives emerging from globalization are becoming increasingly important. Among other things, they have engendered criticism of the neo-liberal economic trends that are marginalizing the social market economy and of the associated tendency for many societies to become
more and more alike. Today, giving anthropology a global orientation means to open for research in all societies and cultures of the world and to address the issue of what will be the most important conditions of human life in the future (Wulf 2013a, 2013b, 2002).

Anthropology is a decentralized, polycentric science in which problems of representation, interpretation, the construction of deconstruction, and thus also methodological diversity, are of central importance. Two contradictory developmental trends clash; one is oriented towards a “uniformizing” globalization while the other points towards the limits of this development and emphasizes the conditions of cultural diversity. This clash is reflected within anthropology, where the tensions between statements that emphasize historical and cultural diversity and more universal statements on human beings have increased. If we understand anthropology as a *unitas multiplex*, i.e. as a science that brings together a multiplicity of individual disciplines, we are aware that the epistemological and paradigmatic differences in the science of the human being cannot be removed, but are in fact part and parcel of it. Anthropological research must therefore proceed from the assumption that its standpoints are relative, without dissolving them in arbitrariness and randomness.

In my view, the question also arises as to whether and how anthropology is bound by values and its social and ethical responsibility. My own research is embedded within the values of human rights, but I would not deny that human rights are also partly time- and culture-bound and therefore also open to discussion (Gebauer & Wulf, 1995, 1998).

In view of the fragmentation of the academic disciplines, the task of anthropology, as I conceptualize it, must be to make a contribution to the process of improving understanding between individuals and peoples in the different parts of the world. An anthropology that assumes this task cannot, by definition, develop a systematic approach to the investigation of human societies and cultures – the variety and diversity of the disciplines and paradigms that have relevance for this research are too broad – but, nevertheless, can and must contribute to an interpretation of humanity. Such a systematic approach would be so abstract that it would risk becoming devoid of all content. I am therefore in favor of a contribution to anthropology which takes into account the historical and cultural context (and does not, of course, claim to cover the entire field of possible research) (Hüppauf & Wulf, 2009).

Although my research is oriented mainly towards continental Europe, and Germany in particular, the principles and perspectives of historical cultural anthropology can also be applied to other societies and cultures, as evidenced by my research over the last few years. In one of my research projects, on the subject
of family happiness, three German-Japanese teams examined how families stage and perform Christmas (in Germany) and New Year (in Japan). We identified the historical and cultural conditions for family happiness in both countries, as well as a number of transcultural elements that families use to express and display feelings of belonging, well-being and shared happiness (Wulf et al., 2011). The studies I carried out with Axel Michaels on *Images of the Body in India* (Michaels & Wulf, 2011), *Emotions in Rituals and Performances* (Michaels & Wulf, 2012) and *Exploring the Senses. Emotions, Performativity, and Ritual* (Michaels & Wulf, 2013), reveal what Indian and Western cultures have in common and what makes them different in these domains. The results of these studies show that historicity and culturality are central dimensions of both European and non-European anthropological research. Through focusing on these dimensions, this research makes an important contribution to human beings’ understanding of themselves in the 21st century.

Now that the abstract anthropological norm which centered mainly on the ideas, images, values and norms of European-American culture has ceased to be binding, anthropology constitutes an attempt to conduct research on human phenomena in the conditions of a globalized world. As a result of this development, anthropological research is no longer fundamentally restricted to certain well-defined cultural areas or individual epochs. The aim of anthropological research is to contribute to a better understanding and better explanations of human phenomena and problems in our globalized world and thus also to a better understanding between people. The lively debates on the historical involvement of sections of anthropology in colonialism and racism, the problem of representation and the extent to which the Other can “speak back” are evidence of efforts to broaden the horizons of anthropology and open it up for new tasks.

There is a dual historicity and culturality in anthropology that arises from the historicity and culturality of the different perspectives of anthropological researchers and from the historical and cultural character of the contents and subjects of research (Wulf, 2006). The historicity and culturality of anthropologists themselves form the background against which the phenomena and structures that came into being in a different time or culture are perceived and investigated. New research questions and methodologies develop in a reciprocal relationship between this reflected upon dual historicity and culturality. In anthropological research it is important to think of historicity and culturality as belonging together and not, for instance, to play culturality off against historicity.

The approach to anthropology that I am suggesting employs both diachronic and synchronic methods to investigate human societies and cultures (Wulf, 2013a). In addition to anthropological issues and hermeneutic and text-critical
methods from the historical sciences that are applied diachronically, field research, with its numerous qualitative and quantitative methods, still plays an important role as a method of synchronous anthropological research (Wulf et al., 2010). The interpretative and reflexive methods, in particular, offer the possibility of expressing the individual and subjective perspectives.

Many anthropological research projects are inter- or transdisciplinary and multi- or transcultural. Because of their transdisciplinary nature, many studies transcend the limits of traditional disciplines and gain new insight by examining new research questions and objects of research, using new procedures and looking at things from new perspectives. The attempt to include multi- or transcultural aspects in anthropological research is also leading to the development of new research questions and perspectives that play an important role, particularly within the context of international anthropological research networks.

One challenge that anthropologists have long failed to address is the question of how the relationship between general insights and specific insights relating to human beings as individual beings and human beings in general should be defined. While it is permissible to make universal statements on human beings and the human species within the fields of archaeology, biological anthropology and linguistic anthropology, in historical and cultural anthropological approaches the emphasis is more on being able to use hermeneutic methods to make complex statements on particular historico-cultural phenomena. These approaches are oriented towards the investigation and assurance of cultural diversity. However, even when we are concerned with cultural diversity, one key question will always be: What is common to all human beings? In these times of globalization it is becoming increasingly important for anthropology to investigate the relationship between similarities and differences between human beings, cultures and historical epochs. In this context, the question of the role played by comparison in both diachronic and synchronic research in anthropology has taken on a new significance and urgency.

In my view, the aim of anthropological research is not to reduce, but to increase the complexity of our knowledge about human beings. This requires interpretation, reflection and self-criticism, and an ongoing, philosophically inspired critique of anthropology which must include an examination of the fundamental limits of human self-interpretation. In analogy to a definition of God in theology, there is thus talk of the homo absconditus. This term expresses the notion that anthropological insights and findings can only grasp the human condition in part; i.e., from various different perspectives, and thus incompletely. Anthropological research and discovery is location-related and subject to historical and cultural change. Its starting point is a willingness to wonder or marvel that the world is
as it is and not otherwise. Marvelling (thaumazein) is the beginning of a fascination with the mystery of the world and a curiosity about the possibilities of anthropological knowledge.

**Outlook**

The relationship between single-discipline, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research is a fundamental issue in anthropology. The anthropologist’s choice of approach has far-reaching consequences for the manner in which problems are conceptualized. Anthropological research can be conducted using either single-discipline, interdisciplinary, or even transdisciplinary methodology. There are many examples of the success of the former approach in the fields of history, social sciences and literature. The latter approach can be seen in studies on *Logic and Passion* (Logik und Leidenschaft, Wulf & Kamper, 2002), *Human Beings and their Cultures* (Der Mensch und seine Kultur, Wulf, 2010), and in several projects at the Collaborative Research Centre “Performative Cultures”. The quality of anthropological research does not depend on the form in which it is conducted. Some individual researchers have been successful in using transdisciplinary methods in their own highly specialized research fields.

While many different approaches are possible, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary constellations are particularly suitable for research in the field of anthropology. Specialists from different fields contribute expertise from a variety of scientific traditions. They contribute the findings, fundamental issues, concepts and methodology of their own disciplines to transdisciplinary collaboration. Thus questions, concepts and methodologies are developed which transcend individual scientific disciplines with the aim of establishing a transdisciplinary frame of reference and methodology. Where this is successful, research is then carried out that would otherwise be difficult to conduct within the scope of one specialist discipline.

Transdisciplinary research makes particularly high demands on researchers’ communication skills and their ability to work with colleagues. It also requires an inquiring mind, interest in other fields, versatility and a willingness to consider new issues and viewpoints. The communication and interaction skills required of the participating researchers are complex, but absolutely essential in securing the aims of transdisciplinary research.

Multi-disciplinary research projects have the sole aim of ensuring the collaboration of individual scientific disciplines. Here participants pose questions arising in their own fields to experts in another field, in the hope that knowledge specific to this new field will provide new ways of looking at their own problems.
Transdisciplinary research, on the other hand, strives to discover and investigate issues that are on the borderline of a particular discipline; these would be issues that are characterized not so much by the traditions of the discipline itself as by the constellations formed by various disciplines interacting. Many anthropological research projects are developed in such contexts, particularly when their subject matter does not fall within the remit of a single discipline and where the research is investigating phenomena, problems and objects that arise both within and outside of the designated boundaries of any one scientific discipline. Examples would be topics such as the body, the senses, the soul, time, rituals, gender and media.

This has some major consequences. Transdisciplinary anthropological research transcends boundaries. On this basis, and by applying procedures which are used in a particular discipline, transdisciplinary working methods are being developed which will cause lasting changes in individual disciplines. The consideration of the “difference” of the other disciplines is a constitutive element of transdisciplinary research. This enables new themes, concepts and methods to be developed that change and challenge established knowledge and research in the individual fields of enquiry. This results in an increased diversity and greater complexity – the more radical the selection of subjects and methodological processes, the less predictable the results of the research. This is the basis for the innovative character of many investigations in historical anthropology.

Many of the issues examined in anthropology are so complex that they cannot be explored sufficiently using the approaches of only one discipline. Transdisciplinary research helps to highlight the multi-dimensionality of the issues under study, the methodological approach and the investigation itself. In many cases, the different skills of various scientific fields can be combined to achieve the desired increase in complexity. The plurality of the scientific paradigms under consideration results in complex research that extends beyond the scope of single disciplines. If the scientific cultures of different nations also have an impact on specialist disciplines and scientific paradigms, and the research thus becomes transnational in nature, this adds a further layer of complexity. Transdisciplinarity, a diversity of paradigms and transculturality, leads to an increase in the plurality and complexity of anthropological research.

References


**Dansk abstract**

**Antropologi: En udfordring for menneskers (ud)dannelse og udvikling**


**Nøgleord:** menneskets oprindelse og udvikling, fysisk antropologi (anthropology of evolution), filosofisk antropologi, kulturel antropologi, historisk antropologi, pædagogisk antropologi, globalisering.
The Burghers of Calais
- On Performance and Experience Analysis

By Søren Nagbøl & Ingelise Flensborg

Abstract
The article deals with historical anthropology and interdisciplinary cultural analysis. We outline new and innovative paths for how research, education, theory and practice can be staged and performed in experiential processes where performance and sensuous practice are reconciled. Based on a sculpture by Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), ‘The Burghers of Calais’, displayed at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, we explore how educational activities such as performativity can unfold and be reconciled with physically based (gebildung) formation processes. Applying a combination of methods, we present a didactic course reflected in an interpretational community where the participants create awareness and new knowledge.

Keywords: historical anthropology, socialisation, civilisation, performance didactics.

We start with two students’ experiences of the process.

The Burghers of Calais – the first student’s narrative

My first encounter with Rodin’s sculpture ‘The Burghers of Calais’ happened a month ago, when I caught sight of the sculpture in London, in a small park in
front of the Houses of Parliament. It was a brief encounter. My travel companion and I were on our way to another tourist attraction and therefore walked past the sculpture quickly. Still, it caught my eye, and I thought that it was surely a work by Rodin.

To check, I went back to the sculpture, and on a small brass plaque it said that it was indeed by Rodin. The title, in combination with the scene played out in the sculpture, made me ask myself what the whole thing was about and what was at play here. As we were on our way out of the park it was not the right time for deeper reflection, but I clearly remember that I thought the sculpture to be too complex and confusing for me to study on the spot. I didn’t have the strength, either; there was something heavy and serious going on.

About a month later, when biking past the Glyptotek in Copenhagen, I see a huge poster on the wall portraying the sculpture. Strange, I think. Then I look at our syllabus and see that on Friday we are going to the Glyptotek to see ‘The Burghers of Calais’. And then, of course, the opportunity presents itself to dig deeper into the work.

As with so many other episodes in my life, things are connected in a magical way. This rouses in me a feeling of being on the right track.

In the first lesson with Ingelise, based on photos taken from various angles, she asks us to place ourselves in the same manner as the men in the sculpture. Beforehand, Ingelise has briefly told us the story behind the sculpture. I’m only half listening, but from the pictures I can see that the men are serious, despondent and desperate. We are divided into groups and go into different rooms to organise ourselves in accordance with the sculpture. It is not exactly easy to position ourselves like the men. The photos are scrutinised intensely; there are directions, modelling, shaping. It is a nice group assignment: doing something together, something that doesn’t involve reading, a blackboard or PowerPoint. Getting out of our chairs and connecting physically. There is laughter, and we get to know each other’s names. Ingelise takes pictures when we have completed the arrangement.

Then we start on clay. Ingelise demonstrates how to slowly shape a figure. It turns out that each of us has to model the figure we portrayed in the arrangement. It’s been a long time since I had my hands on clay. It is a versatile material: on the one hand, it is a hard lump; on the other, it is soft when you mould it. It can be expanded and consolidated again. It can be pulled apart and lumped together again. If we crush it, flatten it, in just a moment the figure we are working on can become the lump we started out with. People are modelling, observing, and Ingelise gives hints as to how we can create the right expression. In the end, the groups arrange the figures on a board the same way Rodin did in his sculpture. Suddenly, the sculpture can be viewed in a different perspective. The dimensions are different:
the small figures’ interplay can be viewed from above, and because we ourselves have shaped them, we feel a certain tenderness towards them.

At the Glyptotek, we see the sculpture in its entirety. It is placed at the end of its own beautiful room.

You can see it from the entrance, and I’m excited about getting up close. I observe and interpret. A drama of some kind is unfolding. It is a drama of life and death. The man in the forefront looks resigned to his fate. The stooping man seems to have accepted the situation, disheartened. The man with his hands on his head is heart-broken. The one with one hand in front of his face seems to say, ‘Yes, this is how it must be’. The man with outstretched arms with one hand turned upwards seems to lead the other men forward. I begin to doubt if he is actually with them. It is as if his expression says, ‘Yes, you must go this way. There’s nothing to be done about it’. And the man with a twisted body and one arm turned up in a gesture seems to answer, ‘It’s easy for you, you’re not the one to die’. The men are in a desperate situation that they cannot escape. I feel compassion for them. I shiver a little.

Later, we meet in the ceremonial hall and speak to Søren about our experiences with the sculpture. We get the history behind the sculpture, and many of the descriptions we have given correspond to the drama of the sculpture: it concerns the sacrifice of the men. We have witnessed a historical event from the past, which Rodin expressed in his sculpture. We have come really close.

Rodin chose to show us this particular scene, these particular expressions in the men, and they touch us deeply. We are confronted with our own frustration, desperation and resignation. When was I last desperate? In which connection was I about to give up everything? As an onlooker, you are forced to ask yourself such questions if you look at the sculpture for long enough. As I write this, I understand much better why I didn’t have the strength to approach the sculpture in London. It expresses all the dark sides that at times can catch any human being off guard. I am moved and surprised by the fact that a work of art can express so much. It confirms that the sculpture is a source of interpretation of both the past and the present. I am thinking that somewhere in the world, at this very moment, right here and now, a human being is in the exact same situation as the men in the sculpture.

As we get the assignment from Søren, I experience a phenomenon I haven’t encountered before. I see a fellow student lean on another student, staggering with troubled, rolling eyes while looking at the sculptures in the ceremonial hall. I sense that something is wrong. Later my fellow student tells me that she suffers from a phobia of sculptures.

In a very personal way, she describes how this phobia developed in her life and how it affects her. She describes what the day has been like for her at the school with
Ingelise and at the Glyptotek with Søren. As I bike home after class this description stays with me, and I cannot let go of the pictures it creates in my mind. It is frightening and fascinating at the same time. Once again, I wonder at the many features of life, at all the facets emotions give rise to. It is late and I am tired. Going to sleep is difficult, but slowly sleep takes me while the pictures from the day fade away.

Or do they? (Translation by Ella Campbell)

The Burghers of Calais – the second student’s narrative

(A sculptural group dated 1884, by Rodin)

Because of my fear of sculptures, I obviously wasn’t particularly enthusiastic about the theme of the day. My ever-changing emotions on this day could not possibly be the same as my fellow students’ – or could they?

The sculpture has a strong symbolic value and makes a deep impression on people. A story is illustrated by this imitation of man. It evokes apparently recognisable feelings, and it questions the material expression of life and death.

As we learned from Ingelise, proximity is also applicable when it comes to dead things. The accepted distance between people also applies to how close you can be to ‘The Burghers of Calais’ without your intimate space being disturbed by surprise.

It is intimidating – an attack on your intimate sphere – to be face to face with a sculpture cut in stone or cast in bronze that resembles one of us, copies our features, makes us mirror what it expresses.

‘The Burghers of Calais’ gave me a feeling of nausea and/or suffocation, as if it might move any minute and attack me. I felt anguish, powerlessness, anxiety, fear of death, injustice, desperation and a prickling sensation at the back of my head as if, at all times, I had to understand that it was a reality, that it was there, and that it was overwhelming.

For the first half hour, I view the sculpture from a distance and mainly notice how the Key Carrier stands out. He seems annoyingly anonymous, passive in the situation, and he does not show much compassion. He didn’t choose that they should die; he is only obeying orders from above. His calm posture contrasts with the five other men’s confusion around him. As a group, it is a dynamic and dramatic collection of sculptures in which strong men in rags express a development through desperation and fear of death.

They are placed in a rhythmic, continuous development around the fear of death, from incomprehension to acceptance. You can feel their despair in their
outstretched hands, as if they want to say, ‘Why should this happen to me?’ They complain; they discuss; they talk. ‘No, it can’t be true!’ or ‘It has to be done, understand it, now!’ They argue, they get annoyed with each other, and the one in the middle has given up. In their raised shoulders and the holding of their heads you can feel their irritation with one another’s inability to comprehend their fate, as well as their fear. It is not far from the way I myself looked in my fear of observing them.

The postures are interesting. We gain an understanding of this when we ourselves create miniature versions of the sculptures in the classroom. You don’t have to exert much pressure on the small figure before it expresses something new. I have to sculpt the man holding his head and give him a feeling of dignity even while he displays a moment of anxiety, turmoil and possible regret.

Actually, I do not think that the group completely comes into its own in the illuminated hall at the Glyptotek. It is quite sterile compared to the roughness of the sculpture group. Most of the other visitors show little interest and pass by. Someone from my class saw the same group in a park in London, and I can imagine that it would surprise, be a source of wonder, if discovered accidentally. Ingelise says it was meant to be placed without a pedestal, standing directly on the ground among the rest of us, to make a more realistic staging of what took place that day in the town of Calais. The placement at the Glyptotek focuses on its pure artistic form so that the details and the craftsmanship can be seen better, but in natural surroundings it would make a more profound impression.

So this day, dedicated to the sculpture for the students of material culture studies, has proved to be a great form of therapy for me. I get the chance to be a sculpture, shape a sculpture, and walk through the sculpture-filled halls of the Glyptotek. In the end, a fellow student talks me into overcoming myself and my fear by sitting close to ‘The Burghers of Calais’ and observing it. (Translation by Ella Campbell)

The Glyptotek presents itself as a ‘museum for antique and modern art in classic architectural surroundings with a lovely café in the Winter Garden’. The Glyptotek was founded by Carl Jacobsen (1842-1914) as one of the biggest private art collections of the time. Jacobsen named the collection New Carlsberg after his brewery, and added ‘Glyptotek’, which means sculpture collection.

The Glyptotek stands on H.C. Andersens Boulevard in the centre of Copenhagen, near the Tivoli amusement park. The main building was designed by the architect Vilhelm Dahlerup. From the outset, the building was thought of as a visual collaboration between art and architecture. The two are represented equally so as to create a harmonious experience for the viewing public. Additionally, the main facade makes the museum look like a palace of culture.
The facade is in Venetian Renaissance style, with the entrance reminiscent of a Roman triumphal arch. Inspired by the Italian style, the building is a cornucopia of decorative detail and exquisite materials. The proportions, as shown in the picture, are monumental.

On entering and standing under the vault, you feel a part of something much bigger than yourself. The vault opens into a vestibule that leads to an impressive Winter Garden, with palm trees and running water. If we turn right, we step up a ramp to a room full of sculptures by the French artist Auguste Rodin (1840-1917). They are scattered about a lavish hall with a mosaic marble floor, where a breathtaking vault sheds soft light on a frieze which, in turn, gives life to the sculptures carved in white marble. It is an animating overall impression. The white bodies, all with strong expressions, form an overall composition which makes the whole room feel like it is moving. If you walk a further five steps up to a platform, you face the collection’s key work: ‘The Burghers of Calais’. This is how visitors first encounter Rodin’s work at the Glyptotek. The figures in the sculpture are made of bronze and the surfaces are shiny, without trace of time or patina. In its own way, the sculpture looks flashy. For strangers and for outsiders, it is a dramatic encounter. The place seems to say that ‘Here is world art, and there are you’. Ordinary people do not venture in off the street spontaneously. We take this into account in our attempt to approach Rodin’s work on new terms.
Performance, mimesis and the intercultural

In working with our theme, we were inspired by research undertaken at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Historical Anthropology, Berlin. The research field ‘Kulturen des Performativen’, which encompasses language and emotions, seeks to create an atmosphere of learning in its approach, which is characterised by respect, recognition, order and reward for the performance. The research field also deals with the emotional processes that come with teaching. These processes are about learning to hear, see and explore life through mimetic observation and performance. As one body among other bodies, the visitor can relate to or be a participant in the stylised expression of emotion that the sculpture contains. The field’s approach also involves work on the concrete design and production of objects, and on the way they are presented. In that context it involves learning to learn, unite and transform the experienced through language. This includes body language as a prerequisite for both verbal and written registration, documentation, and dissemination.

An anthropological assumption to which Christoph Wulf draws attention is that there is a connection between the way we perceive the world and the way we communicate and teach when we work in education (Wulf, 2004). As we relate to others, our concept of what a human being is constantly comes into play. This is not just a conscious idea about how to approach things. Our own individual way of perceiving and being in the world directly impacts our relationships with other people. The relationship to others is a mutual relationship that has implications for how we ourselves develop. Practice takes place simultaneously through the mimetic processes that people create with one another. We orbit the relational interaction and situated learning.

Hermeneutics of the body

At our seminar on material culture, we recognise that movement, sensuous involvement, the participants’ active forms of interaction with one another in various kinds of interplay, and approaches at differentiated levels using different media all create new knowledge, and so we decided to expand this encounter with the sculpture.

The movement stands at the centre of a ‘whole apparatus of seeing, feeling, processing of observations and impressions, as well as a fantasy that, through a kind of “response behaviour”, produces things in the actor’s world’ (Gebauer & Wulf, 2001, p. 36 – own translation). Movements are constructive in a double sense, in that they produce the body and things in the material world, but also work in a person’s inner world. As for the characters, their individual shape,
position and direction in space constitute an action that already has a form which is materialised, staged, copied, transformed, and hence takes place in a process that Gernot Böhme calls aesthetic (Böhme, 2001). Emotions and sensations are embedded in the body and are also a self-presentation (Lorenzer, 2006). This is a rhythmic experience, transmitting and translating the relationship between figure and background in the encounter with the artwork. The physical presence is instrumental, in that the mimesis becomes not only pure imitation – thought or carried out as pure imitation – but also a structuring process, which will serve as a manufacturing transformation of one’s self: not only as I, but also as we/us/them. In connection with the performance, imitation becomes self-presentation; a construction of a practice that unites and conveys the impression, enrolled in interplay with the outside world. Mimetic identification relays, unites and gives visibility to the physical world through the social world. This expanded view of the mimetic, in which imitation, manufacturing and construction forms a continuum, is a dynamic information model that enables us to stage and understand the mutual interdependence between the ‘inner’ world and the ‘outside’ world.

Habitualisation as socialisation emphasises enrolment in the body through the embodied mind. The bodily embedded knowledge is knowledge that is embedded in our behaviour, telling of the spheres we are in or have been trained in: it spans both experience and the ability to relate to the human-made reality, to feel it and produce it in a meaningful, sensuous context. Unlike cognitive action models, mimetic models aim for practical knowledge. Human action is understood as the starting-point of knowledge: knowledge of what the person is doing; of that person’s reflections on the negotiations.³

This action represents the world, as well as the practices that the symbolic world presents: it is the product of mimetic processes that started out as an empirical reality. The mimetic processes are not the same as action, but interpret and transform the action. Through practice and constructive acts, a new conceptual framework is produced in relation to the world, or rather in relation to the context the actions emerged from. Mimetic processes are not confined to ‘the aesthetic’, but also include ‘the social’. The mimetic processes are the social dimension: they are the agent for the new sense-patterns. They are indispensable preconditions for constituting the conditions in which the relationship between the aesthetic and the social is realised. This emphasises connection, and the model’s importance to the analysis of everyday social practices. Sensory-based (aesthetic) learning is both mimetic and stylising. These knowledge-building processes take place in the recreation of the sculpture with their own bodies. The processes evoke a new vitalisation and a new, immediate connection with the work.⁴
The sculpture: The Burghers of Calais in a cultural pedagogical framework

In a cultural pedagogical framework, there are several good reasons to be inspired by the challenges and opportunities afforded by Rodin’s work ‘The Burghers of Calais’.

Since its unveiling in Calais in 1895, this sculpture has fascinated, enthralled, inspired and influenced countless people. Rodin wanted to show the range in the represented men’s states of mind – from resignation to desperation. By his own admission, he wanted to let them stand out as individuals through the expression of the indecision, as reflected in the final inner struggle between their devotion to their city and their fear of dying, symbolising the individual isolated in relation to his consciousness. It is a work that speaks greatly to the viewer as an emotional and as a physical being, and the affections move all who dare to engage with such a monumental drama.

We always experience something new when we engage in strange circumstances, whether as individuals or as a group. What can we learn from analysing this? Can we find other ways of uncovering that take the individual and the understanding of the whole beyond the approaches that currently prevail in education?

As a supplement to our work with the ‘Kulturen des Performativen’ project, we have been looking into fields of research dealing with experience analysis, forms of vitality, movement culture and social figurations. In this context we consider vitality as something mentally created, a product of the psyche’s integration of internal and external events, a subjective experience – presenting a phenomenal reality. We aim to develop methodological procedures to be able to approach subjective phenomena and verify the relationship between dynamic experiences and forms of revitalisation in practice.

In this context, we will introduce forms of cooperation, methods, and process-oriented models that can uncover how the participants can connect the material life with body anthropological practice. We are going to work with the experiential level, i.e. the way in which the individual is both consciously and sensuously involved in cultural productions, and we will explore how these experiences and processes are described and produced together with and for others.

Getting started in a classroom at the university

The students are introduced to the process which the teacher has planned in advance. They sit on chairs at tables arranged in a square, and the main character, the teacher, presents the lesson, often in the form of a PowerPoint presentation.
Today, Ingelise Flensborg is talking about the history of sculpture as an aesthetic cultural phenomenon. The history of sculpture is defined by its social functions in different periods, e.g. Egyptian, Greek or Roman times. Their functions in contemporary history are reviewed. Then the presentation turns to the medieval and Renaissance periods related to sculpture. This is followed by examples of Rodin and Maillol as exponents of a more general human symbolism. Finally, we examine the relational installation and its potential for bodily vitality and dynamic movement patterns, as well as its call for the interpretation of interaction, and invitation to interaction/participation. Dynamic sculpture and static sculpture differ in their potential for bodily involvement. Dynamic sculpture expands our rhythmic experience to include an experience with the body; static readings are more graphic, perhaps showing a front or a back, and need not draw the whole body, but only, for example, the eyes (the gaze) towards a vision. In dynamic sculpture, the gaze is led forward by volumes and surface courses through cloth folds that indicate direction, for example by hanging or fluttering, and work with light in a play of light and shade. The clothes fall in folds over the limbs and continue in a smooth motion around the individual shapes. This is emphasised by the tactile feel of the smooth bronze (Ørskov, 1967). The sensory qualities are also found in the various manifestations of closeness/openness, of rising or sinking volumes, of light or heavy forms indicating directions which affect our body in space.

Rodin’s sculpture emphasises the interaction between the figures as well as the movements that traverse the figures to shape their vital expression. Rodin, thinking about his work, said in an interview with Gsell that:

...movement is the transition from one attitude to another [emphasis in original]... There you have the whole secret of gestures interpreted by art. The sculptor obliges, so to speak, the spectator to follow the development of an act through one figure ... your eyes are forced to rise from the legs to the raised arm. Since, in the course your eyes follow, they encounter the different parts of the statue representing successive moments, they seem to see the movement actually ENACTED [our emphasis]. (Rodin, 1984, pp. 28-30)

The encounter with Rodin’s sculpture challenges us to follow up on the movements that come as the sculptor forces us to incorporate the movement and, through our practice, to vitalise the opportunities his work suggests.

The sculpture is introduced through photographs

As the teaching is taking place at the university campus, Ingelise Flensborg has asked Søren to take pictures of the sculpture from eight angles. These images are
now enlarged and arranged in a sequence so as to simulate movement around the work/installation.

The students are divided into groups of seven and asked to study the position of each character: the bend and direction of the body, the contrappostos, the direction of the gaze, the gestures. The students identify the relationships between the positions of the different characters by using chalk marks on the floor to mark the position or foothold. The varying distances between the bodies will be felt and experienced through relations of various kinds. In their peripheral vision, the students adjust and align themselves according to each other. They align their positions and the direction of their gaze (physical and emotional proximity).

Successive perspectives – from representation to presentation
Through the photographs, the students have to observe the relationships and spaces that are generated one angle at a time. Eight points of view contribute to the overall scene. The direction and orientation of each figure is determined from their gestures and their stance in each image. This operation requires a spatial orientation that translates the eight fixed points of view to a new spatial formation and presentation. The conventional approach, which we have established through our system of representation, i.e. linear perspective, is an abstract and rather passive way of looking, which is transformed into a three-dimensional scene. The approach is vitalised through the dynamic interactions of the group. This applies to the entire organisation of the students’ observations of the photographs and the marks on the floor. Like posture and position, correction and control, this approach combines movement, judgement of distance, moving and touching acts, intimacy, and tactile consistency in terms of how they position themselves relative to each other. All the multiple and differentiated forms of interaction that characterise the performance are at stake.

Performance begins with touch

An earlier version of this exercise can be seen in the ‘tableaux vivants’ – entertainment for noblemen at court. Performers would dress up as the characters in a selected painting, recreating the image ‘on stage’. In modern aesthetic theory, relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2005) speaks of formation – not the form, but rather the formation as defined by form. Previously, touch was considered a prerequisite for experience, because touch contributes to the formation of cognitive and emotional brain structures.

The main point in this action-oriented and relational model is that ‘art exhibition’ establishes a space for exchange – a social space – through performance and actions, giving rise to discussions, reflections and contacts, which in turn create better social relationships and more intense forms of life.

Form emerges in the meeting between the artwork and the viewer. Form spreads from material form; it is a summary element – a dynamic that brings various elements together through interaction. Rather than fixed elements, form and composition are part of a process; an event that has a structure that develops in accordance with the particular actor’s intent and intervention. The artist organises something – some physical conditions are established – and participants are then confronted with these conditions by engaging in interaction with the work. The participants bring their own contributions to interact with the artist’s expression so that there is a movement back and forth between the receptive and the productive process, and these movements in turn cause new reflections and new productions.
Pictorial space and physical space

Thus, we relate to the sculpture via representative space – through its representation in the pictures. The photographs show several approaches to the sculpture, and perception must take place successively, moving from image to image, while we are in fact outside in another room, the physical space from which we are viewing them. As this happens, the ‘burghers’ get together in their configuration, and each participant experiences a relationship, both to the others and to the room. The physical space is subjective, and common to all the subjects. We can experience our bodily existence: that ‘we are present’. We are involved in this space. Böhme considers the presence of the body to be the reason we know that something other than and different from ourselves exists (Böhme, 2007, pp. 14-15). Rodin states in his conversations with Paul Gsell that he had created several works in which the mimetic is strongly emphasised and where emotions dominate, including the ‘The Burghers of Calais’:

*I have always tried to express interior feelings through the mobility of the muscles… Now the illusion of life is obtained in our art by good modeling and by movement. These two qualities are like the blood and breath of all beautiful works.*

(Rodin, 1984, pp. 27-28)

The picture – the tradition – the sculpture

There is obviously a considerable difference between recalling the sculpture from images and recalling it from close contact; that is, with the sculpture in the physical space. This is especially so when we compare it with the reactions that constantly occur when we face another shape in space, another person to whom our bodies react.
Scene change

The students are still under observation, but now they have left their seats and are engaged in group activities where they are left to work together. Using another set of instructions, they work on a scenario in which the model is printed on paper. There is room for them to come up with their own individual ideas for how the group (the configuration they form with each other) can transform a cast sculptural work into a live performance in which they are the actors. In this formative feature, they have to refer to their own physical vitality, mimetic abilities, and an interplay of imagination and judgement. The space for their stance is outlined, and everyone is focused, committed to the process. They are deeply involved in one another’s tasks, while each mobilises their physical potential and experience so that an overall impression can take shape. One woman who has already assumed a posture is recorded. It is not the centre that is the focal point, but a position in the periphery. This layout does not target a centre or person located in a central perspective, as was the case during the introductory lecture. The re-enactment favours the individual players, who now find and create their expression under completely different terms. These are people in motion, and the session is about expression, control, mutuality, and trust in the process. We are all involved. As the photographer, Søren Nagbøl must observe without controlling or pretending to control for monitoring purposes. Supervisor control can block the creativity that comes with the free choice of expression and experimental movements. We call forth new sides in one another. And it is good to be a part of a process where situations are allowed to develop. This is evident in the photographs. The actors transform the area outside the classrooms, usually used as a corridor, to a place where they are genuinely present. It is no longer a place for passing through. They are present in the moment, and connections are created between people as they interact with each other (Stern, 2004; 2010). We do not know the reasons behind the choice of models for the individual’s position in the array. In the photographs, we cannot trace motives or conflicts regarding individual wishes. Yet it is noticeable that there is a consensus: that the overall impression is the benchmark in the process. This is reflected in everyone’s bodies, and in the way they take part in the process.
Documentation and the recognition tool in the process

The dynamics that arise when players begin the mimetic performance alter the relationship between all participants, both students and teachers. Since we are two people in charge of facilitating the event, we jointly perform performance recording, controlling, documenting and manufacturing of the process in words and pictures – as a polyphonic interpretation collective. In this context, photography is chosen because of its ability to record the interaction and interplay between photographer and performer. It allows for stronger expressions than video, and the photographer applies himself/herself more attentively and dynamically. A sensuous transaction arises between the staged performance and the photographer’s involvement in this process. He/she must capture the moments that are representative of the process, so that the footage will not seem static. The research process is not intended to objectify or register another person, but to engage in a mutual exchange process that shows the way to performativity and mimesis-based recognition in which experience and understanding is one dynamic cycle. The photographs stare back, both at the person who took them and at those who direct their attention to the task at hand and the self-presentation they make visible to us when we look at the photos.

In our case, Ingelise Flensborg concentrated on the execution of the task without losing sight of the details, while Søren Nagbøl concentrated on documenting
the process. Ingelise Flensborg could intervene and correct the expression, and was available as an instructor. Participants could follow their own expression through the photographs, while the photographer’s way of representing them became visible to everyone. It was open to all, and the opportunity for correction and protest was present. Anyone could discuss and contribute to the material produced.

Revisiting the reportage revealed the postures of the two young women who, with great concentration, followed Ingelise Flensborg’s instructions for working with clay. Their shoulders were raised high and their concentration was intense, as though this was no longer a game to them. In the previous photo, where they responded mimetically to each other, we can observe cheerful smiles, rhythm and unrestrained gesticulation. The women are evidently caught up in a continuous learning process that revolves around acquisition and representation of insight.

The subject modelling – touching the forms

The students now shape the figure they have come to know from first-hand interaction into an approximately 30 cm high clay figure. A method to produce human figures in clay is taught, and people practise modelling. The figures are adjusted in size to one another before being lined up in positions.

To develop their form-creating skill, the participants must imitate the artwork. Intense observation is required, as well as development of the ability to distinguish. Working with both hands involves the body. Observing directions and positions of the gaze and the body parts refreshes the body’s memory.
The Burghers of Calais
Away

Full of their experiences from the morning’s exercise, the students leave the university, headed for the museum.

We move from the educational institution into the city and the pulsating life that characterises Copenhagen. We move into a new setting in order to immerse ourselves in the drama that Auguste Rodin immortalised in a 2.13 m tall sculpture in bronze in 1889. We move from a pedagogical, didactic setting towards a social drama, which we will try to understand while we bear in mind that sculptures and art galleries are not only temples to art, but also institutions of socialisation and social productions. Despite the fact that ‘The Burghers of Calais’ is now exhibited in a museum, it was created in a workshop. The artist was intensely interested in a historical tragedy that took place in 1347. He involved himself in a historical drama, and using all his sensuous and cognitive potential, he recreates a frozen manifestation full of movement. It contains the scope of man’s emotional state of mind, from resignation to desperation and hopelessness, by depicting individuals who, each in their own way, fight against a shared destiny. Rodin revived the memory of those who had made their mark in history and rendered them visible to us several hundred years after their death. They live on in Rodin’s work.

It is with this in mind that we move on to meet ‘The Burghers of Calais’ at the New Carlsberg Glyptotek, where they stand enthroned on a platform. Here, they are a valuable work of art in a cultural institution shrouded in prestige.

Experience analysis and scenic comprehension under the auspices of cultural analysis

We make a paradigm shift. We will embrace the experiences of critical culture analysis, as formulated in the group surrounding Alfred Lorenzer in Frankfurt. A hermeneutic cultural analysis has been developed for empirical studies; one that makes use of orientation means such as scenic comprehension and experience analysis. In this context, we use scenic comprehension to identify the drama of life of which the citizens of Calais in Rodin’s sculpture are representatives. They symbolise a form of life that is directly related to an inner figure, i.e. a connection of life which, pars pro toto, is echoed in their existence in the world.

Scenic comprehension presupposes scenic engagement. When we employ scenic comprehension, it is not enough to regard the surrounding world as a scenic totality, which exists next to, and in spite of, the normative statement of words. Scenic comprehension is directed at life-practical conditions. It presupposes that a person directly engages in a sensuous relationship in order to comprehend others.
It involves utilising the potentials that can be connected to your own experiences in time, movement, body and space in relation to the life situations you try to be involved in. You cannot be like the onlooker in a theatre, who merely watches the play from a box; on the contrary, you must understand yourself as involved in the staging. That means you must play along with and leave yourself open to emotions, associations, functions and images that are evoked in the encounter with the surroundings. Scenic comprehension implicates a scenic totality, an exchange where we are actors in a shared drama. The most important point is that it is not comprehension that creates the interplay; the reality of the scenic interaction constitutes understanding. Through interpretive involvement in tangible settings, the body becomes a comprehending body. Thus, the surroundings become real, for things acquire their meaning through practical use. Through positioning and personification, we transcend the coincidence of individuality, because being able to do so equals a realisation of a social significance. Our purpose is not to mimic processes or to carry out performance. We make use of scenic comprehension to identify a drama of life through a symbolic form such as a sculpture, which does not have a representation in picture, text or other symbols. The interaction with the sculpture is neither a subjective narrative nor an objective registering; it is a subjective experience of an actual cultural dramatisation – a subjective balance.

The drama between the outer and inner countertransference is the methodological lever. Bodily organs are employed to observe mobility in a hermeneutics of body that encompasses another dimension than D.N. Stern’s vitalisation forms. This concerns the relationship between life story and experiencing figures – thought of as tentative play with language, language games, experienced and perceived impressions, and the emotions and sensations they generate.

According to Alfred Lorenzer, the uniqueness of the method is:

... that simultaneously one participates in and tries to understand one’s own participation in a sensuous act, in the figuration that as an interpreter one is involved in. The dual movement is not a procedure where you name what is happening from two sides, but on the contrary, you determine it as two inseparable and yet connected and convergent operations that are in progress on two levels and in two different media. Critical hermeneutic operation moves in the language medium. It cannot move on other levels, whereas the participation in the transference and countertransference takes place on a level which is characterised by the immediate sensuous interplay, the interplay that takes its starting point in the body, and not just opens to but also includes the whole repertoire of sensuous experiences and which extends beyond the existing linguistic order. The fact that, with scenic comprehension, a person embarks on a life-practical state of affairs
means that the experience margin and the interaction between the individual life design, the proto-symbols and the collective action indicating cultural symbols, can be interpreted both from a life-practical and a critical perspective. The elaborate connection remains imaginary until it, step by step, is realised in connection with a real interaction in a dialectic process. (Lorenzer, 1974, p. 135. Translation by Ella Campbell)

Experience analysis uses revitalised collective memory imprints. It connects instances of the mimetic with social processes that relate to somatic facts. They are rooted in a historical process in which forms of suffering and symbolic representations are passed on from one generation to the next. In time and space, the situated is brought into a civilisational dimension, where it transcends the horizon of the age.

In order to experience analytical interpretations, the students are asked to stand very close to ‘The Burghers of Calais’ in the sculpture hall of the Glyptotek. For 45 minutes, they all have to engage themselves in the drama that they here become involved in and leave themselves open to the feelings, emotions and images that it awakens. They are to let the thoughts and impressions activated by the sensuous matter merge with the recollections and fantasies that follow in the wake of the spontaneous experiences. In this flow of impressions, each individual is to feel and commit to what this drama is doing to them. In this process, it is legitimate to take notes and photos to keep the most significant impressions alive – as text, drawings, poetic statements and other forms of images. It is important that everyone applies him/herself to the process for the allocated 45 minutes. During this time, everyone must carry history on his/her own body.
Follow-up group session at the museum

After the 45 minutes have elapsed, we go to another room in the museum where we are free to tell each other what the encounter with the citizens of Calais has meant to us as individuals. Søren Nagbøl is the group moderator in accordance with the principles of the classic group analytical setting. He encourages the participants to speak their minds; he tries to ensure that momentum is not lost and to gather the threads of interpretation for the group. In this process, individuality is transcended, and the students work with the sensory conflicts and emotional problems that the sculpture has manifested as a drama. The group will correct the individual statements and fantasies that have arisen in the interactive confrontation with the artwork. The first part of the session lasts half an hour and is documented on tape. Here, spontaneous speech transforms immediate experience into verbal communication in the group.

The themes that are expressed in words are sorrow, suffering, death, and the experiences of physical manifestations of people suffering. These statements are formulated in concrete descriptions attributed to both the sculpture as a group and the particular expressions each person represents. Through the individual, theatrical experiences are recollections moving from personal life to a collective drama. These experiences are about suffering, desolation, despondency, bodily dignity, and sorrow, worn with pride and despair. All emotions, in all their diversity, are given a voice in the group. Not subjectively, but always related to the appearance that can be read from ‘The Burghers of Calais’ sculpture, where each character bears his suffering and grief and hopelessness. By putting into words the personal experience triggered when dealing with other people’s lives, we are entering into a historical drama in which that language is used to express feelings and emotions that others can recognise. This is clear to everyone when, after half an hour, the students go to the museum information desk and receive the folder in which the real story is described in text.

*The city was formally founded in the tenth century A.D. by the Counts of Flanders, and, along with the rest of the county, it belonged to the French crown from 1200 A.D. In 1347, Calais was captured by the English after being besieged for nearly a year. Edward III promised to save the city if six prominent citizens let themselves be executed voluntarily.*

*The monument shows the six citizens of Calais, who, in patriotic sacrifice, saved the starving city from destruction. The city’s most powerful and wealthiest men – with Eustache de Saint-Pierre in charge – rose to the occasion. Their lives were eventually spared by the Queen’s intervention.* (Glyptotek information sheet – own translation)
The day is coming to an end. We say goodbye to the Glyptotek. All participants are required to write a page about the day’s experiences to document in writing how each participant experienced the process.

Something about things

On 7 September at 17:48, the telephone rings: ‘What are you studying?’ my mother asks, for what feels like the umpteenth time. Today, for the first time, I feel I can give a qualified answer. ‘I’m studying “things”, Mother’, I answer. ‘Everything we surround ourselves with. I study them, analyse them and find out what they do to us and our daily lives, maybe even to our whole lives’.

Today, for the first time, I understand the depth as well as breadth of my studies. My mother may be more confused, but I feel that I’m finally on the right track.

The way the day is structured gives me a special form of contemplation I’ve rarely experienced before. Later I think this is because, for the first time, I really feel that my studies fit me, and we can truly use our theory and our different backgrounds in interaction with each other. Or maybe it is the many different approaches to our field that are new and interesting to me?

The first input of the day is the intense introduction to the history of the sculpture with Ingelise, where, in an unbelievably short time, we are enriched, surprised and impressed with new theories, storytelling and personal insight. Completely satisfied and captivated, we go on to our first active assignment, a tableau exercise in groups.

Equipped with a two-dimensional version of ‘The Burghers of Calais’ in the form of a photograph, we split up in different rooms to recreate the sculpture in a tableau using ourselves as actors. The two-dimensional manifestation only gives us the flat optical perspective, and we have to imagine the rest. As most of us are craftsmen to some extent, it is an enjoyable assignment to portray the sculpture and combine our different approaches. We supplement each other well because all of us have a different view of posture, weight, facial expression and details in the posture of the sculpture. We all interpret each character, and together we see different details in the two-dimensional pictures. It is wonderful to be allowed to use the academic halls and rooms of the university to let our bodies communicate instead of the polite and often unnecessary phrases that flow among new university students.

One snapshot later, we are taken out of the role we took on as larger than life, tired, desperate male bodies from Calais, back to our own small, foolish bodies. We are becoming students again. I am really excited to be partly brought back to the school art room with Ingelise as teacher. Under strong guidance, we all mould the figure we have just portrayed with our own bodies from a lump of red German clay. It is exciting and fun to mould and create the figures the way we understand
them on the basis of the two-dimensional pictures, and then to try to transfer the feeling of weight as interpreted in our own bodies into a lump of clay. We cannot possibly include all the little details we focused on, so it is no easy task. When we place our small clay men in the tableau to be photographed, we have to ignore the details of every figure and instead focus on the way each ‘lump of clay’ speaks to the others, the little signals and relationships that the position of a head, a body, have in relationship to one another. It is tremendously interesting to experiment with the different expressions that the tableau acquires if we turn one clay man, or move another. It gives us a great sense of the architecture of the whole, as well as the special importance in relation to the final expression and the way things can communicate.

After lunch and a windy bike ride through the city, we arrive at the Glyptotek, located in the buzz of downtown. Just stepping into the splendid, calm entrance hall of the Glyptotek is a special contrast to the pulse of the city. And just there, in the calm of that building, in the heart of the pulsating city, the burghers stand: black, huge and heavy. It is a wonderful experience to have more than ten minutes to observe, to immerse oneself in it and to feed on the sculpture. I know that in the incredibly long timeframe I am to focus on what feelings the sculpture evokes in me. It doesn’t take me long to identify a couple of direct, emotional keywords. Although I am a bit restless and several times think we should move on, it is a really good exercise in analysis and a really great way to force oneself into contemplation.

In our subsequent talk with you, Søren, I couldn’t help becoming rather provoked by your manner. The way you just casually ask, ‘What’s it about?’ or something to that effect makes my didactic, educational mind object. In my surprise and scepticism, I quickly distance myself from the very interpretative account of the experiences with the sculpture. I do not feel as if I’m quite on the same wavelength as the class or as you. As the discussion develops and, in my opinion, goes into overinterpretations without you stepping in, I slowly begin to see a possible didactic purpose in your manner. With my primary school background, I am quite impressed that you are able to provoke me. You give me food for thought about how restricted we teachers can be when we over-structuralise a learning situation and don’t allow the time and space to let thoughts flow. And maybe precisely because of your manner and the way in which you almost as an aside happen to mention that we are to write a standard page and give it to you, I have spent time on and returned to this very day and the absorbing experience with ‘The Burghers of Calais’.

The texts caught my interest before today because they involve architecture, spatiality and sculpture as a genre. Imagine that for one day one could immerse oneself analytically, using eyes, ears, hands and body. Beautiful. The tactile, the
optical and the haptic were all in play, and we were allowed immersion on several levels: collectively, individually, in groups, in body, in hands and in thought. A wonderful introduction to the core of our studies: cultural analysis. I now feel equipped and completely operational for two years of material culture studies.

Thank you!

Kind regards

(Translation by Ella Campbell)

Body Anthropology – experience analysis

In their book *Spiel-Ritual-Geste. Mimetisches Handeln in der sozialen Welt* (1998) [The Language of the Body: Games, Rituals, Gestures], Gebauer and Wulf advocate a certain understanding of society and the many social processes that concern the mimetic. They transform the meaning of the mimetic from a phenomenon that is denoted within aesthetics into the performance of people’s actions in a social context. Gebauer and Wulf regard the mimetic as an extremely important aspect of the social existence of human beings, as evidenced in said pedagogical practice. Here it becomes apparent how the mimetic emerges on several levels as essential forms of interaction that are externally manifested in all creative and independent production where an individual relates to other human beings. Each individual expresses a rough outline of his/her own life through such mimetic participation (Lorenzer, 1986; Nagbøl, 2002), while simultaneously responding to other people’s life worlds.

By using movement, the actor receives imprints from the world, so to speak, shapes them, and makes them a part of him/herself. Conversely, the subject is embraced by the world and formed by it. The basic principle in this reciprocal exchange and presentation of the world is movement; it utilises the plasticity of the body as well as the fact that the world is shapeable. In this perspective, it is a medium where both sides affect each other. This contributes to a reciprocal production of connections and changes – an interplay which demands participation and which does not leave the participant unchanged. It is in the medium of movement that human beings take part in other people’s worlds and thus become a part of their society (Gebauer & Wulf, 1998.). These processes play out on different levels: the personal, individual life on one level, and the organisation of social formations on another. To find the link between the two levels, one has to study the interaction between the acting individuals and their socially mutual dependence. These processes are expressions of people’s standard practice, and they reveal that they live in social contexts where they are dependent on one another (Elias, 1970).
In the above-depicted process, we have thematised and addressed the connection between unconscious sensory perception, individual socialisation, preconscious conceptions, specific experiences of reality, and conscious linguistic manifestation of different forms-of-life situations.

This approach was based on the assumption that both conscious and unconscious entities and dynamics are socially determined and physiologically inscribed; the conceptions of objects are rooted as embedded pictures and imprints of memory in the body of the individual, without being rendered into objectified entities and/or subjected to a static linguistic code (Lorenzer, 1986, 1992; Elias, 1970; Dietrich, Ehni, Eichberg, & Nagbøl, 2013).

We have attempted to show which qualitative differences are in play between the conscious and unconscious conceptions. In our one-day project we attempted to demonstrate how the interchanging relationship between the unconsciously perceived (as sensory, symbolic forms of interaction with clay and bodies) and language (narrative tales, where the individual in the group verbalises his/her own experiences) can be implemented. The students’ written accounts are varying and differentiated examples of a manifest linguistic rendition of the process.

If we go back to the students’ accounts and study them closely, we can establish that we are dealing with social interaction on several levels. Both the aesthetic material and the pedagogical initiative are transformed into social processes – created by the students’ experiences, their forms of interaction, and the thereby emergent social changes. They are realised in various unintended group formations as long-term social practice (Elias, 1970, 1991; Hansen & Nagbøl, 2008).

Notes

1 The performative turn: the performative turn is a response to the linguistic turn, which directs its attention not only to language in a strict sense, but to all cultural systems in which culture is seen and defined as a system of signs; individual cultural systems in the same way as certain cultures are considered, perceived and analysed as a structured context of character. The overall explanatory metaphor is ‘Culture as text’. ‘Analyse und Deutung von Kultur wurden entsprechend als “Textanalysen” bzw. als “Lektüren” durchgeführt’. The performative turn implies a change, which has transformed the intellectual and social sciences. In the 1990s the performative turn led the way towards a new research perspective. Attention was directed towards the manufacturer’s industriousness, the way operations were performed. It is in the exchange processes and the dynamic changes that existing structures are dissolved and new forms created. This allows for new or different descriptions of how each subject gets control of his/her overall life plans. This is the end of culture as text (static conditions). Now we open the materiality of media, theatre, staging, games, masquerade and performance, which takes possession of the whole city and global space (Erika Fischer-Lichte & Gertrud Lehnert (2000), ‘Der Sonderforschungsbereich “Kulturen des Performativen”’ in Paragraphe. Internationale Zeitschrift für Historische Anthropologie, volume 9, issue 2: Inszenierungen des Erinnerns).

2 See Christoph Wulf’s contribution in CURSIV, 16, 15-24.
The habitus in ‘habitualisation’ can be traced back to Aristotle. In the social and educational sciences, habitus denotes a concept of patterns of mental and physical disposition developed through regular, repeated activities and impacts, realised under names such as exercises, repetition, learning, discipline or simply socialising. The concept is given material forms and types of space that correspond with intellectual and aesthetic concepts, ways of thinking and senses of meaning. As such, they have their foundation in certain forms of existence (Lyhne, 2002, p. 140).

Stern (2004, p. 56) writes: ‘The concept of revitalising effect has existed in various forms for some time, but to my knowledge not taken seriously by the clinical behavioral psychology or neuroscience disciplines, although such notions help us go a long way to understanding of phenomenal experience, as it unfolds, as remembered and as it operates in the network. To be present has something to do with trips to engage in and indulge in the moment and be there as a person who is consumed by the decisive moment’.

For a description of the movements in and the expressions of the figures, see Rodin, 1984, pp. 37-38).

The Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek is one of Denmark’s finest cultural institutions. It has considerable economic and cultural capital at its disposal.

Reference list


Dansk abstract

Borgerne fra Calais – om performance og oplevelsesanalyse


Nøgleord: historisk antropologi, socialisation, civilisation, performance didaktik.
The Sailor Within Us All

- Skills Enhancement Courses for Children and Young People at the Maritime Museum of Denmark

By Trine Halle & Ingelise Flensborg

Abstract

Through dialogue-based education – including gestures, associations with objects, cultural references, symbolic play and performance of their own experiences – students in educational programmes at the Maritime Museum of Denmark developed knowledge and skills relating to maritime Denmark, a topic that plays an important role in our understanding of history and economics.

Gestures are of great importance to the human experience of vitality and motivation, as evidenced in observations during the test phase of the educational programmes at the museum. Video recordings allowed the teacher subsequently to analyse details of the observations and thereby offer a new perspective on (among other things) the students’ attention and focus during particular parts of the educational programmes. The observations documented the intensity of the course, and offered the teacher a valuable insight into the ways we communicate non-verbally with our bodies.

Cooperation between museum organisations and collaboration across educational institutions represents a way forward for museums. Based on the recent process at the Maritime Museum of Denmark, it is clear that interdisciplinary collaboration creates an opportunity for a range of creative processes.

A large-scale project at the Maritime Museum of Denmark, situated in Elsinore, has made it possible to design and create an educational department
in which dialogue-based education is paramount. Collaboration between the museum and the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University has resulted in four new educational programmes being offered at the museum. The programmes are tailored to intermediary levels and are suitable for primary, secondary and upper secondary students.

Keywords: maritime, museum, dialogue-based education, social constructivism, creative processes, sensory experiences, performance.

Introduction

In this article, we examine the theoretical and pedagogical basis of four new educational programmes at the Maritime Museum of Denmark by observing a pilot run.

The authors worked together to design, develop and implement these educational programmes. Later on in the process, Trine Halle taught and Ingelise Flensborg observed. Ingelise Flensborg took notes during the learning processes and supplemented these with photographs and videos, which were subsequently analysed (Rose, 2001).

In order to place the courses within a relevant framework, we will outline relevant policy requirements, previous research and theory, and our use of historical criticism. We will conclude the article with a summary of different perspectives.

The four educational programmes on offer at the Maritime Museum of Denmark were funded by the Cultural Agency dissemination funds during 2011 and 2012, and were developed over an 18-month period. This period was divided into two phases: the development of ideas (phase one), and the preparation of the courses (phase two). Phase one was marked by visits to Danish and international museums, seminars and workshops, whereas in phase two, we focused on didactics, pedagogy, historical research and a testing process. In phase one, the museum partnered with three international museums: the Vasa Museum, Stockholm; the Museum of London Docklands; and the International Slavery Museum, Liverpool. All three museums contributed to the development of the educational programmes.

Once the museum agreements were completed, the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University (henceforth DPU), joined the project to provide educational consultancy. Its role was to connect the ideas to relevant pedagogical theories. All ideas and tasks in the educational programmes have therefore been developed as didactically structured courses.
The initial working title of this article was “I felt seasick because the waves were so high.” These words are taken from a teaching situation in which a second-grade student got carried away. The museum educator swayed from side to side as she took the students through the exhibits, so as to reinforce the illusion that they were together on the deck of a ship. Suddenly, one of the students ran past the museum educator and appeared to vomit in the corner of the room. The museum educator rushed to the boy. Nothing was visible, and it emerged that the boy was simply caught up in the illusion: “I felt seasick because the waves were so high.” The student had accepted the museum educator’s imaginary ship premise, and had contributed to the scene by playing a seasick sailor. This is a small, yet insightful example of the full impact that thoughtful teaching can have on children and adolescents.

At the Maritime Museum of Denmark, visitors can listen to numerous stories about maritime Denmark: they can follow the sailors’ life and work on the quay, on the ship and in foreign ports; they can hear tales of trading voyages to the Far East in the 1700s (when Danish ships returned home with the hull full of tea and porcelain); they can learn about gyrocompasses and lightships and get a glimpse of life on board a modern container ship; they can read love letters written by sailors’ wives, letters which never reached the sailors; and they can examine maritime souvenirs, tattoos, articles, logbooks, navigation equipment, and scale models of the ships. Students are challenged and encouraged to develop their skills at the museum through creative teaching.

Once a phenomenon that was appreciated mostly in pedagogy and aesthetics, creativity has become a hotly debated topic in society, especially in an economic context: “The source of economic value is not only knowledge, but also the creation of new knowledge and application of knowledge in new ways” (Hammershøj, 2012b, p. 6, own translation). It is currently a widespread conviction that creativity combined with a familiarity with one’s own historical background strengthens student identity and prepares students for an increasingly demanding job market.

**Political demands and requirements**

In recent years, the notion of identity has become a central political and educational issue. National interests are increasingly seen as being at odds with individualisation, globalisation, Europeanisation and the multicultural society. This has not had a significant impact on the Folkeskole (Danish public school), but it does mean that the role of museums as facilitators of cultural heritage requires self-reflection, reorientation and value clarification. It thus becomes an
increasingly urgent issue to answer the following questions: Which communities, and which identities, do the school and the museum help to form and transform (Korsgaard, 2004)? And what kinds of stories and knowledge are Danish students to become a part of?

In Denmark, government regulations for schools, colleges and secondary schools are designed according to a particular educational objective: to prepare students for participation in democratic society. This objective is also formulated in the public schools’ mission statement on Danish culture, history and democratic education:

The school must cooperate with parents to provide students with knowledge and skills in order to: prepare them for further education and make them want to learn more, familiarise them with Danish culture and history (thus providing them with an understanding of other countries and cultures), contribute to their understanding of human interaction with nature, and promote their all-round development. (Folkeskolens formålsparagraf, 2009, own translation).

This statement influences the various learning processes in the four museum programmes, both implicitly in the very structure of courses through our embodied traditions, and, more explicitly, in the use of dialogue-based pedagogy, which presents the ideal opportunity for individual references to the subject, performance and self-creation. Consequently, language development is also part of the process of museum learning.

For several years, the Danish Agency for Culture has focused on the importance of well-considered teaching practices and the use of partnerships:

Museum education is a prerequisite for a museum’s professional and sustainable development. As a result, the development of museum didactics in partnerships and collaborations between museums and educational institutions creates the opportunity to think outside the box to develop the museum’s learning potential. Museum education is, in other words, central to the development of museums as democratic and educational institutions that contribute to cohesion and citizenship (Lundgaard, 2013, p. 25, own translation).

Museums are an important part of the democratic learning space, with obligations to educate citizens, and, for this reason, conceptions of citizenship were integrated into the dialogical pedagogy developed for museums. In this way, it seems logical that schools and museums should collaborate on subjects of national unity and identity.

Danish museums are governed by the Museum Act. The Act covers five main topics that form the framework of requirements that must be met by all museums:
collection, documentation, preservation, communication and research. Teaching is not a topic in its own right, but is a part of the requirement of communication. Museums are not required by the Act to teach schoolchildren, but it recommends that “[t]he museum should provide free access to schoolchildren who visit the museum as part of their education” (Museumsloven, 2006, kap. 6, § 14, stk. 12, own translation). In fact nearly all Danish museums have developed their own educational departments and school services, so that most Danish museums do offer educational programmes. Since 1970, an organisation called the School Service (Danish: Skoletjenesten) has served as an educational service institution that, among other things, supervises museum educators and develops museum training materials.

Danish museums are keen to develop educational programmes that schools can use as an integral and natural part of their teaching. In order to do this, museums draw on both the history canon for Danish schools and the common objectives for primary and secondary education in order to compile courses with the potential to bring students out of the classroom and into the museum. The history canon of 2006 identifies 29 key historical events, both national and international, which form a compulsory part of history teaching in Danish schools.

The four programmes at the Maritime Museum of Denmark are partly shaped by political concerns and demands. As researchers on the project, however, the authors of this article believed that the creative education of students was equally valuable in its own right. It was therefore important for DPU and the museum to collaborate effectively. Through creative work that involves each of the five senses, dressing up, solving mathematical problems through games, and boxes of objects and archival materials, students are placed in situations that spark dialogue and creative learning. In this way, they learn about the content of history books through their own actions and creative ideas. To be more specific, this means that, at the primary level, creative pedagogy is focused on play to develop ideas and imagination. At the lower secondary level, interdisciplinary courses provide opportunities for connections between fields, while at the upper secondary level, the connection between past and present is emphasised by focusing on the trade between countries. Secondary education is also intended to create an understanding of professional skills and knowledge; the students’ knowledge is challenged and placed within a broader perspective (Hammershøj, 2012b). In this respect, the educator at the Maritime Museum of Denmark is the facilitator who sets the framework for the student’s dealings with history. Rather than being obliged to follow a specific path, students are free to roam about within a context that is set, managed and guaranteed by the museum educator.
Repeated visits to museums as a basis for student group work or as part of daily lessons enhance the student’s creative education and create a natural relationship between museums and children and adolescents.

**Research and theory**

In the following section, we present the seven social constructivist approaches that influenced the design and development of the four educational programmes.

All four of the educational programmes were developed on the basis of dialogue-based teaching. Dialogue-based teaching has formed a solid theoretical basis for the School Service’s work for several years and, as such, it is not a new approach in museum education. It has also been used extensively by Norwegian scholar Olga Dysthe, who, since 1980, has worked with teaching and learning in relation to “polyphonic” classrooms in which each student represents a voice, and it is the dialogue between these voices that sparks learning. Through the use of authentic questions and high-level valuation, the teacher can ensure that dialogue takes place (Dysthe, Bernhardt, & Esbjørn, 2013).

An authentic question has no pre-specified “correct” answer but is genuinely open to the student’s response. For example, rather than focusing on a specific item in a display case and asking the students what it is, in dialogue-based teaching, the museum educator focuses on the whole display case and asks students what they think is the most exciting object. In this way, the museum educator meets the students on their terms and allows their opinions to expand the dialogue. During an observed teaching situation at the museum, one student singled out an ivory model ship, which she suggested belonged to a rich captain (because of the ivory). The museum educator repeated the student’s comment about wealth and praised her for the observation. She then passed the question on to another student. In this situation, learning takes place through the museum educator’s repetition of the student’s response, and evaluation takes place when the question is passed along. Further development will depend on the next student’s response and the subsequent uptake – that is the educator’s incorporation of this response in the ongoing dialogue – which, in turn, is dependent upon the educator’s evaluation of the student’s contribution. Dialogue-based teaching can also be conducted through written assignments. The shift that occurs between students writing down their own thoughts and sharing them with the rest of the class provides the individual student with both focus and an opportunity to learn from peers in the subsequent dialogue. In this regard, Olga Dysthe follows Vygotsky’s theory of the central role of language in thinking and learning processes. This theory claims that learning takes place in the community, where we share thoughts and speech
with one another. This is consistent with John Dewey’s approach to knowledge as constructed through practical activities (Dewey, 1978).

Another important part of educational programmes is the theory of our movements and their constructive functions, as demonstrated by the German professors Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf (Gebauer & Wulf, 2001). In our research project, we analysed video recordings of the teaching sessions and examined how students moved in connection with the suggested performative situations. Were they involved bodily, or merely answering questions in a verbal mode? Our focus was on the performative processes, creative formation potentials and aesthetic learning processes. Physical movements are constructive in a dual sense, in that, in addition to producing the body and the surrounding material world, they also work inside a person. Human understanding of objects and tools is related to those practices that involve the object or tool. In this way, knowledge of the skill, a tacit knowledge, is developed through the handling of the object. This tacit knowledge is linked to the body. Through imitation and role-play, students can internalise practices connected to different types of seamanship and shipbuilding. This is possible because the museum’s exhibition space provides a range of information, opportunities and options for creative imagination which differs somewhat from that offered in the traditional classroom. In general, physical movements are of great importance to the human experience of vitality (see Stern, 2010); this became clear during observations in the test phase of the educational programmes.

Movement, sensory information and experiences occur in everyday life in the form of mimesis. The term “mimesis” is also used by Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf to describe the process by which experience becomes creative re-creation of models and rituals in everyday life. Mimetic relationships are also essential to an inner self, to self-consciousness and for the development of those emotions that can be verbally expressed. Perceptual orientation and experience thus provide opportunities for individuals to relate to others and their dispositions in shared situations and across time and space, through sensory experiences and the experience of activities, products, and work (among other things). As Gebauer and Wulf claim, “The Mimesis concept always requires a practical action. Mimetic or assimilating identification mediates, unites and gives visibility to the physical (bodily) world through the social world” (Gebauer & Wulf, 2001, p. 67, own translation).

Applying an experiential approach first outlined by the Danish professor Bjarne Wahlgren, we claim that the educational programmes at the museum focus on the shift from knowledge to experience (Wahlgren, 2010). Thus the experience facilitated by the museum is more than just words. Through concrete action (an
exercise or task), students gain experience, which becomes (new) knowledge. The students’ work on assignments at the museum thus provides them with new knowledge that transforms into concrete actions, which in turn generate new knowledge. This is an ongoing process, and one that, in practice, carries over into learning activities outside school.

The creative process triggered by sensory involvement and symbolic role-play affects the individual’s ability to relate to others. This is a field examined by pedagogical researcher Lars Geer Hammershøj. According to Hammershøj (2012a), symbolic play opens up a new world and new possibilities. When students are allowed to “be” another person, their world opens to new meanings. Symbolic play is a creative process that produces a creative product: to pretend to be a sailor standing precariously on the deck, to be an Indian princess wrapped in cotton cloth, or just to purchase souvenirs to take home for Mum and Dad.

We must also mention Professor George Hein and his constructivist approach to museums and education in museums (Hein, 2005). Hein identifies eleven requirements that must be met in order to create an effective museum experience: general accessibility, the use of scents, the use of sounds, the opportunity to touch forms and surfaces, experiences of sight, the use of drama, ample time, good seating facilities, the use of cooperative learning in teaching, frequent use of user surveys, and a clear objective for the audience. The ultimate goal is to ensure that the visitor can reach the zone of proximal learning in which the museum can pass on its knowledge.

Finally, the museum space itself often inspires different forms of behaviour than other public spaces. Most people change their behaviour as soon as they step inside a museum; they move more slowly and their voice drops to a whisper. This is embedded in most of us: in a museum you have to be quiet and you may not touch anything. The same is largely true for students (despite occasional loud outbursts). The Maritime Museum of Denmark attempts to change this. Here, the focus is on dynamic courses and structures that inspire both mental and physical movement. The structure of the exhibition provides an opportunity to move and interact with the artefacts. As they move through the exhibition and its new spatial conceptions, students have the opportunity to develop repertoires of new constructions of reality. As a result, the spaces and exhibitions adhere to previously mentioned experience-oriented pedagogical approaches that encourage creativity and the generation of knowledge. Therefore, a visit to the Maritime Museum of Denmark has more to offer a school class than the mere acquisition of historical facts.
Video observation and participant observation

Observations during test phases were recorded both in writing and on video. The videos were recorded with a hand-held camera, so that the observer could follow students discreetly when they were most active and thereby document their speech, gestures and actions. It was only during the secondary education test phase that individual students performed for the benefit of the camera. The numerous recordings allowed the museum educator to retrospectively examine details of the observations, and thus provided insight into (among other things) the students’ attention and focus during different parts of the educational programmes. The observations documented the varying intensity of the programmes, and provided us with valuable insights about how we communicate non-verbally.

The Maritime Museum of Denmark’s educational profile

Based on the above theoretical considerations, we will now present the educational profile of the Maritime Museum of Denmark.

The teaching at the Maritime Museum of Denmark endorses dialogue, is inclusive, and allows for a close encounter with our maritime history. At the museum, it is possible to experience the past through reconstructions of events and authentic objects from the material side of maritime culture. The museum creates a learning environment in which thoughts and ideas can be tested immediately in the encounter between the students, the exhibition, and the museum educator.

Each educational programme is based on the museum’s permanent exhibition. Students are introduced to Danish maritime history while becoming familiar with objects, people and events that are part of this narrative. These are learning environments that take into account different ways of learning, so that students can alternate between sensory studies, dialogue, reflective processes, and different forms of expression.

The aim is to facilitate a problem-solving learning process through situated learning which operates with the “learning by doing” approach. This refers to knowledge acquired through practical activity within a cultural community. This approach is based on the notion that it is important to know something about a specific period in history, but that it is also important to know about practical and educational work, hence to learn. This provides a basis for applying teaching practices that can later be used for reflection in another context.

Form: The teaching is dialogue-based. This means that the teaching is based on a dialogue between students and educator regarding the students’ own experiences and their encounters with the maritime past, and that this dialogue places such experiences and encounters within an historical narrative.
**Foundation:** The educational profile is based on the stages of human development: i.e. physical, emotional and cognitive. The difficulty of the educational programmes has been designed to suit the students’ age-dependent learning potential and ability to reflect.

**Frame:** The learning centre at the museum has been specially constructed to reflect that people learn in different ways and in different contexts. Parts of the installation may encourage touching, others may offer visual or aural stimulation, while others require direct physical interaction. Teaching alternates between speech, movement and problem-solving, both individually and in groups.

The four educational programmes at the Maritime Museum of Denmark all come with a guide for the teacher appropriate to the students’ age. The educational profile, the four teachers’ guides and training materials are all available on the museum’s website and can be freely used by teachers and other interested parties.

### The museum’s collection as the foundation for student learning

Historians divide historical objects and finds into sources, artefacts and written reports. This allows them to classify and evaluate sources and select those they consider most telling and reliable about the past. This work is the basis for all four educational programmes developed for the Maritime Museum of Denmark.

In the fourth educational programme, “Find the right sailor”, the students must organise both the content and the dialogue. This is an information-critical programme that consists of ten “source boxes” used by students in groups. The contents of the boxes are designed to enable students to discover which seaman is “hiding” in the box and in which period or decade he/she lived and worked. The students’ opinions about the content and organisation are of great importance to the process, and the students are keen to be taken seriously. The premise for this approach is the museum educator’s request for help with the challenge. This makes the educational programme a relevant task for the students: they become historians and, using the historian’s tools, dive into the past. It is part of youth education that students learn to critically evaluate sources, so it makes sense to place them in the historian’s role and let them draw on the historical material.

The dialogue-based approach ensures that the students select their own focus. However, it is the museum educator’s job to ensure that, irrespective of the direction of the dialogue, certain points and historical facts are presented to the students. Precisely which facts, however, depends on the specific development of the dialogue.
The four courses

One of the challenges for this educational project was to create space for situated learning, whereby not only could the students learn something simply by visiting the museum and conducting themselves appropriately for a public museum; they could also “play” their way through the exhibits. Therefore it was decided that three of the four educational programmes should take place within the exhibitions. In this way, students occupy the exhibition spaces and adhere to the code of silence. Students are asked to solve problems that require dialogue between the venues, and they must therefore engage with the exhibition and its objects.

The educational material for three of the four educational programmes consists of a folded A3 sheet. This allows for up to four pages of combined text and student comments. For the first three educational programmes, all pupils are provided with their own cloth bag containing educational materials and additional equipment they will need during the course. The fourth and final educational programme is conducted in the museum’s classroom, with the ten source boxes.

The four educational programmes were tested in phase two by four classes from schools in the local district of Elsinore: class 1.A from the Northwest School, class 5.B from Borupgård School, class 8.A from Elsinore City School, and class 2.M from Espergærde Gymnasium. In the following, we will present our observations from the pilot phase at the museum’s former premises in Kronborg Castle.

Course 1: Life on Board

Description

The course “Life on Board” is designed for primary level students and focuses on the subjects Danish and History. It lasts for one hour. Students follow a young boy, Jens, who embarks on his first trip on board the ship HOLTHE in 1900. Jens and the crew are setting out for Peru in South America. Students follow Jens’s voyage and they experience what he experiences along the way. At the beginning of the programme, students help Jens pack for the trip by completing minor tasks outlined in the teaching material, and later they help him locate the ship HOLTHE in the harbour.

At this point the course changes, as the museum educator’s role shifts from “class teacher” to “class captain.” When Jens boards the HOLTHE, the students follow him and have to imagine that they are the crew aboard the ship. Before the students can begin the long journey, they must prove their worth as sailors to the captain/teacher. Each student ties a reef knot and, when the task is completed satisfactorily, they get to wear a cravat, which marks them as crew. Although the
cravat may appear trivial, its impact is highly significant. From the moment the students tie the cloth around their necks, they are sailors with heads held high, and they can face each other with pride. Then the journey begins, and the museum educator keeps the students in the mindset of life at sea. The class stumbles and wobbles between display cases, simulating life on the high seas. Furthermore, as the museum educator addresses the students, she can subtly sway from side to side – an action that challenges the imagination, but, as mentioned in the introduction, may also trigger imaginary seasickness!

After a brief review of life on board the ship, the next class challenge is the arrival in Peru, where each student must collect a souvenir to take home as a memento of their trip. At this point, through imagination and storytelling, the students are completely immersed in the idea of months away from home, visiting foreign lands while their loved ones wait for them at home in Denmark. They select souvenirs for their mother, father and siblings. The course concludes with the students and their cargo of goods heading back towards Copenhagen. Upon arrival, the captain/teacher grants leave, and the students return their cloth bags and cravats. By agreement with the teacher, a group photo of the class and the captain is sent via e-mail.
One important part of teaching “Life on Board” is the use of clothing and costumes for the students. The museum has procured two captain’s coats and three sets of sailor suits to fit the average twelve-year-old. This clothing was made in collaboration with students following the professional bachelor’s degree programme in textile and handicraft design. During the course, some of the students get to dress and act as Jens. Since the students are wearing a costume and thereby participating in a performance, their movement influences the way they relate to objects, and their inventive play functions as a creative catalyst for an imaginary situation in a type of symbolic role-play. Finally, the use of costumes is a “safe” way to teach in a new and more immersive way than the students are used to at school. The museum plans to expand the costume range to accommodate all students.

Analysis

The “Life on Board” course includes aesthetic experiences that challenge the way students relate to the subject. It is important to remember that young children’s learning is created through the opportunity for relating and dramatisation. The simulated boat trip through the exhibition, which moved the class from one display case to the next, is a good example of this practice: “The observations and experiences we make in these aesthetic situations create sensory-based knowledge” (Flensborg, 1992, p. 6, own translation).

Identity is relationally constituted. It is only through the relations which we create that we develop an identity. When the students use mimetic actions to materialise and portray culturally recognisable types, such as the young sailor Jens, they enter into a recognisable relationship with the figure. Students perform some of the movements from the sailor’s life on deck. They are connected to their own experience of sailing, water and the sea. Students embody and enact a sailor. As such, knot tying is a skill and practice that, in turn, produces further opportunities for relating. Through this process, they can comprehend life on board a ship. Therefore, similar processes may also be relevant in educational programmes designed to further inclusion or citizenship.

By wearing costumes and cravats and dramatising the lurching walk across deck, students can play with their new identity as sailors and get it “under their skin.” Their actions give them an identity as a sailor, and they enact their impression through verbal and bodily actions. Through performance or action, students learn what this act contains and what role it plays within shipping (Illeris, 2009). Emotions and sensuality are embedded in the performance, and thus a self-presentation through reflection is also created.
The staging therefore comprises the aesthetic learning process in this session, which in itself is also a reflective process: “Performance is the form which is activated, staged, made bodily, copied, experimented with, transformed, documented…” (ibid., p. 127, own translation). These processes are transformative processes, and it is in the dramatisation that emotion, intuition and sensuality are invoked, thereby involving and changing the participant.

The story is part of this process. It allows the students to create fantastic narratives: “It is through our own narratives that we principally construct a version of ourselves in the world, and it is through its narrative that a culture provides models of identity and agency to its members” (Bruner, 1996, p. xiv). For Bruner, a story is both a way of thinking and a carrier of meaning. We present ourselves through stories and narrative. We are captivated not only by the content of the stories, but also by the stories’ narrative structure. The students’ own stories will allow them to integrate language into their performances. Their constructions of stories give rise to both self-esteem and a demonstration of competence, and allow them to create a version of the world in which they can find a place.

In the test phase, the students’ identity and preferences became clear in the conversation and selection of souvenirs. The objects’ inherent social practice was expanded by the students’ own narratives. This context imbued the objects with a significance which resulted in an authentic relation to the fictional journey.

Course 2: The Course is Set!

Description

The educational programme “The Course is Set!” is designed for the upper primary level and focuses on the subjects Danish, history, mathematics and science/technology. The course lasts for two hours and deals with the art of navigation at sea. It involves six tasks, all of which require mathematical skills and the ability to cooperate. In this educational programme, the museum educator organises the game and acts as an informative storyteller. The educational programme begins with a short introduction, which includes stories of early sea explorers and their accomplishments. At this point, the students are together with the teacher in the museum’s exhibitions. They stand in a circle and the teacher starts the story and dialogue by throwing a beach ball (depicting the globe) among the students. Every time the ball is thrown to a student, it is accompanied by a question: Where is the equator? Where is South America? Where is the Atlantic Ocean? The purpose of the questions is not to test students’ prior knowledge, but to engage and motivate them for the upcoming game.
The students are then split into six teams. Each team is given a box containing teaching materials and equipment. It is up to each group to decide which student will act as team captain. The chosen student wears the captain’s cap, and the rest of the group wear scarves (these too are in the box). This allows the museum educator to communicate with the team captains throughout the rest of the process, during which all questions are directed at the captain.

The game allows the teams to compete against each other in the exhibition, where students can stand next to a display case that describes navigation at sea. They can (and must) use the objects around them to complete the tasks. The museum educator reads the task aloud, and the students can study the teaching materials that each group has been given. Every group has the same materials, but their responses to the tasks and the ways in which they solve them will determine which group wins. The museum educator observes how each group collaborates, since a strong team spirit can triumph over correct answers from a non-cooperating group. The importance of cooperation during the game is designed to highlight the importance of cooperation on board a ship.

The museum educator keeps track of time and ensures that the game progresses. There is only a limited amount of time and the museum educator only
allows the groups to work for a few minutes on each question. The museum educator then asks the next question, and the teams are forced to move on. The last three questions must be answered through three computer games, in which the students have to calculate latitude and longitude (and use a compass) with no horizon or natural magnetic fields to go by. The students are then given a break, while the museum educator scores the answers and identifies the winning team. The class re-assembles and the winning team is announced. The museum educator hands out diplomas for all the students to take home.

Analysis

The course begins with an exercise in which the museum educator and the students throw a beach ball among them. Through this exercise the museum educator achieves authority in the group, and the students become engaged in the topic. The students all try to catch the ball, but only the person who catches it gets to answer a question. This is a well-known social practice that makes it easy to control the interaction. The students subsequently move on to the course’s main objective: the navigation game.

The tasks in this game all contain multiple subjects, providing opportunities for group collaboration and knowledge-sharing among the students. Their teacher may help out, and students may achieve the “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky in: Dysthe, Bernhardt, & Esbjørn, 2013, p. 49). This zone refers to the distance between what the student can learn and what the student learns with the help of people in the surrounding world. The sharing of knowledge among the students is established through play and group formation, and this creates a social and competitive community. The role-play we observed was also a success, because the use of different coloured scarves provided the students with both a group and a sailor identity.

The navigation game includes three minor tasks which allow students to familiarise themselves with the exhibition and discover different objects, such as a depth gauge, a log and a gyroscope. The development of these new technologies both allows and requires new work processes and workflows. It also provides information about navigation which differs from the use of a sextant and the mathematical calculation of the route with ruler and compass. By focusing on vision and line of sight, the students are invited to increase their awareness and focus. Perception, ways of seeing, can be developed throughout an individual’s lifespan, but ways of perceiving are different, since they develop alongside historical changes in technological, social and cultural practices. The ways in which we look at things are influenced by the culture in which we live (Buhl & Flensborg, 2011).
Course 3: A World of Goods

Description

"A World of Goods" is designed for secondary level students and addresses the subjects Danish, History and Social Studies. The course concerns Danish trade in the 1700s. During this period, Denmark/Norway had colonies in the North Atlantic, in Tranquebar, on the Gold Coast, in the Caribbean, and also a trading post in China. Together, these regions represented a sea traffic trading system in which the king, merchants, captains, and even some ordinary sailors became extremely wealthy.

The framework for this course is the five senses. In the role of traders, the students have to make the imaginary journey from Denmark/Norway to the five destinations mentioned above. Once arrived at each destination, the students must solve a problem, either individually or in groups. The journey takes place within the exhibition, where the history of trade in the 1700s is told. At each new destination, the teacher and the class stand beside the appropriate display case to complete the task.

Students are first given a brief introduction to the museum and the educational programme, which takes place in front of a painting depicting a tea party. Following this, the students (still in Denmark/Norway) have to use their mind’s eye: they must visualise Copenhagen’s lavish mansions, the city’s elaborate statues, the ladies’ beautiful silk dresses, and the ornate tea and coffee services. The task is for the students to give their views on what a memorial to their life and work would look like. The museum educator then evaluates these presentations with the class.

In the North Atlantic, the students have to put themselves in the place of missionary priest Hans Egede and discuss what a mission to Greenland would be like today. Students have time to write down their suggestions for the following discussion. The students’ proposals are written on a large piece of cardboard for later use; they will be shown to the next class to complete “A World of Goods”, and thus information flows from class to class. On the North Atlantic stop on the journey, the task is not tied to a sense, but instead gives rise to reflection.

In the Tranquebar section, the students have to use their tactile perception. One of the main imported goods from Tranquebar was cotton, which was shipped to Denmark and either sold or transhipped for sale on the Gold Coast. The students are divided into small groups and have to drape one of their classmates in fabric made of cotton to create an outfit or a look. The museum educator selects the best look.
In China, the students have to use their sense of smell. In the 1700s, Danish merchant ships filled their hulls with tea, porcelain and silk to satisfy the high demand for these luxury goods. The students are presented with three cans containing different varieties of tea. Their task is to identify the non-original variety.

On the Gold Coast, the native population was viewed as a tradable commodity. In the 1700s, Danish merchant ships docked at the Gold Coast to buy slaves for use on the Caribbean sugar plantations. Cotton and guns were exchanged for slaves. The students have to listen to themselves sing the first and last verses of the hymn “Amazing Grace.” This hymn was written by a former captain who, in his youth, had sailed with slaves.

The Caribbean is the last stop on the voyage. Here, the students must use their sense of taste. The students are placed in a circle on the floor and have the opportunity to first discuss and then taste the sugar products. Sugar cane syrup and sugar cubes are passed from hand to hand and initiate dialogue on the historical and current use of sugar; for example, the advantages, disadvantages and social framework of sugar consumption.

Analysis

The inclusion of the five senses is central to this course. The sense of touch (ignored in most museums) comes into focus when students produce substitutes
for the objects in the display cases with the same sensory qualities. Students are encouraged to feel cotton, teacups, and mounds of sugar. Touch has the potential to correct visual assumptions and create an intimacy with the object that can transcend time and space for the student. Touching an object creates a contact that vision cannot. The very act of touching an object can go beyond physical sensation and also create an emotion: the object moves us. Therefore, in touch, the inner movement and the outer bodily practice converge in one single action.

The perception of objects is founded on earlier experiences and is corrected by current sensory input, so that more and more aspects are added to the perception and thereby to the form schemata. A sense-based orientation is an orientation towards visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, haptic and tactile qualities in the world. A sensory-based study can involve sight, touch, movement relative to sounds, and attention to the distances between people (Hall, 1973). In all contexts, orientation and experience through the senses are essential to human experiences, understandings and actions. How does one hoist a sail? How does the body move when hoisting a sail? The sensory-based orientation is expressed via sensory-based phenomena that appeal to all the senses simultaneously, or to selected senses indicating multimodal contexts. There is often a transfer from one sense to another. Information can be transformed from vision to hearing in a synaesthetic process, thus giving the totality of sensory experience a greater weight and quality than the individual parts.

The senses of taste and smell are also present when, at various points during the course, the students can taste sugar products and smell different types of tea. The sense of smell in particular allowed students who had not previously distinguished themselves to do so. They knew tea, and dared to have an opinion. This assignment led to an interesting discussion about additives, natural versus artificial, and the students we observed drew many interesting parallels to contemporary consumption and production.

**Course 4: Find Your Sailor**

**Description**

The course “Find Your Sailor” is designed for upper secondary education and focuses on the use of historical criticism.

The educational programme takes place in the museum’s classroom, where students are divided into ten groups. Each group is given a box of items to work with. Each box contains source records and items that depict a particular sailor, his profession, and a specific time period. The students are tasked with using the
box’s contents to discover these facts. After a brief introduction from the museum educator on the critical evaluation of sources and historical research, students are given a specified amount of time to go through the box and to write their answer on a card. The museum educator emphasises the fact that the boxes contain original objects and that the students have to figure out which box belongs to which sailor. This gives the assignment a sense of urgency and seriousness.

After a short break, it was time for the groups to present their thoughts on which sailor belonged to their box. Each group was asked to support their proposals with a presentation of the person or sources on which they had based their answer. The museum educator then offered suggestions which were almost always consistent with those of the students. Rather than undermining the students’ work, this made it more relevant, since the museum educator used the students’ suggestions to confirm her own conclusions.

Analysis

Letting the students work with source material on their own creates a space in which the students’ actions and decisions enjoy top priority. The students must
both organise the training material and present the contents of the boxes. This leads to new forms of socialisation and, in turn, new knowledge.

In this course, students share their knowledge of history, combined with their own observations of the object and of what they see. Students learn from each other as tacit knowledge is articulated through dialogue and reflection. The students’ experience and knowledge from their own lives and from history lessons can be shared with others, and individual knowledge thus becomes shared knowledge. Tacit knowledge is the knowledge that we have collected through various practical experiences. It is also called “knowledge through action.”

Learning can thus be seen as “the process that develops the learner’s competence – the potential to perform” (Wahlgren, 2010, p. 44, own translation, emphasis in the original). In this course the museum educator draws on all the students’ knowledge and, since it is related to actual people, the learning is thereby systematised. Learning takes place and new knowledge is created. This happens simultaneously at the individual, group and organisational level.

During the test phase, students were generally highly attentive and committed to the task. The students were originally supposed to spend 30 minutes on the task, but they were granted more time upon request. It was obvious that the students accepted the premise that this was a “real” job; the museum educator required their help in solving a task, and they took the challenge seriously.

Finally, we would like to point out that the history teacher of the class that was observed expressed great satisfaction with the course, as it resembled the upper secondary history exam and was thus ideal for the target group. At the museum the students had received training in historical criticism, which was helpful and reassuring for their future history exam.

Perspectives

The four educational programmes described above are just the beginning of the educational department’s work at the Maritime Museum of Denmark. These courses now constitute the backbone of what will eventually be a large catalogue of courses, and there will also be an option to purchase various additional packages. The following list is a selection of ideas that will hopefully come to fruition in the future:

- Teaching for day-care.
- Teaching for maritime training.
- Orienteering stages in and around the museum using navigation.
• Establishment of workshop activities in the museum classroom as an extension of courses, focusing on various sailor crafts, including splicing rope, constructing a ship in a bottle, and repairing sails.
• Theme Sundays at the museum, where children and young people take part in workshops with maritime content.
• Courses for teachers who wish to incorporate the museum and maritime history into the curriculum at their school.
• A children’s club, based on maritime history, to generate a sense of belonging for children and parents at the museum. This will also provide a venue for children’s birthday parties and other seasonal events.
• The construction of an outdoor sensory-based maritime playground.

Conclusion
In many ways, the organisation of the educational department at the Maritime Museum of Denmark and the development of the four educational programmes were exemplary. There was enough time and opportunity to work with the tasks in depth, and the courses were developed in parallel with the exhibitions at the museum. The museum sought creative input from national and international museums, and subsequently it entered into an educational and creative collaboration with DPU. This collaboration was paramount to the work processes and to the final outcome. In addition, the dialogue with the participating school classes was of great importance: by ensuring that the end-users played an active part in the development, we ensured that the courses would be genuinely beneficial for the target groups.

Our view is that cooperation between museum organisations and collaboration across educational institutions has great potential. We have learned that interdisciplinary collaboration creates possibilities for new creative processes, and for learning styles based on a new school with “outdoor” activities. However, we must emphasise that, for processes that involve multiple partners, it is important that museums continue to rely on their core competency: the collection and dissemination of knowledge. As long as this remains in focus, thoughtful collaborations will always enrich the museum and the educational practices located there, and ensure that both students and their teachers continue to prioritise time at the museums.
References


**Note**

1. Kulturstyrelsens formidlingspuljer.

**Dansk abstract**

**Sømanden i os alle**

*Kompetenceudviklende undervisningsforløb for børn og unge på Museet for Søfart*

Danmarks maritime historie spiller en vigtig rolle i vores selvførsættelse og påvirker produktionsprocesser, industri og det daglige liv.


I processer, der involverer flere parter, er det vigtigt, at museerne konstant stoler på deres kernekompetence: den historiske indsamling og formidling. Så længe dette er i fokus, vil tankevækkende samarbejder altid berige museet og den pædagogiske praksis i skolen.

**Nøgleord:** maritime, museum, dialogbaseret undervisning, socialkonstruktionisme, kreative processer, sansemæssige erfaringer, performance.
Learning the City
- On the Ethnography of Everyday Skills

By Orvar Löfgren

Abstract
How do people learn to handle everyday situations in the city? This paper explores the learning of skills and competences which rest in the body rather than in the consciousness. Copenhagen Central Station is used as an example of an urban arena, in which people are trained to deal with strangers, move in crowds and stand in line. How does one study behavior that often is taken for granted and may even be difficult to verbalize? I combine a historical perspective with some ethnographic experiments, and discuss how all the senses are brought into these learning processes. The aim is to capture the ‘throwntogetherness’ of buildings, objects, bodies, soundscapes, emotions and moods that shape station life.

Keywords: skills, learning processes, ethnography, urban life, railway stations, materiality, affect.

Introduction
What is it like to enter a strange city for the first time? In a Danish film from 1944, Elly Petersen, a country girl comes to the big city in search of work. As she prepares to step ashore in Copenhagen from the ferry, an elderly man warns her of the dangers of this urban setting. She disembarks, with her face reflecting mixed feelings of anticipation and anxiety.
For the majority of visitors to Copenhagen, however, the central railway station (Copenhagen Central Station) has long provided their first encounter with city life. “Did you arrive on the 4 o’clock train?” is a well-known Copenhagen saying, labelling you as a country bumpkin without urban competences. When the station first opened in 1911, it contained a branch of the welfare organization *Les amies de la jeune fille*, ready to help young girls who were lost in this new urban world.

“Learning the city” is my theme here and my ethnographic site is Copenhagen Central Station and its one hundred years of history as an urban training ground, both for newcomers and locals. What kinds of learning processes occur here and how have they changed over time? Watching the film about a young girl arriving in Copenhagen in the 1940s made me think about the clichés of “the urban jungle”; an old, but still popular, way of looking at the city. Stanton Newman and Susan Lonsdale use such clichés as headings in their book, *Human Jungle. An Intriguing Look at How We Have Adapted to Cope with City Life* (1996): ‘Life at Speed’, ‘Fear’, ‘Risk and Excitement’, ‘Tempo’, ‘Time Pressure’, ‘Movement in Crowds’, ‘Mixing in the City’, ‘Freedom and Flexibility’, ‘Taking Risks’, ‘Stress’, ‘Rat Running’, ‘Pressure’, ‘Rescheduling’, ‘Eye Contact’, ‘Road Rage’... The authors set out to define a global species they call *Homo urbanus*, and two themes are interwoven in their discussion: the intensity of city life, and its steady acceleration. But this linking together has a long and winding history and cannot be written into a unilinear, global narrative. In many cases, learning the city means domesticating and routinizing risks and uncertainties, or starting to feel at home with strangers. The stressful city can become familiar and comfortable; a potentially dangerous neighborhood is transformed into a comfort zone as people slowly learn how to handle the setting. Issues of urban ethnography have been studied for a long time in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and European ethnology (for an overview of, mainly, the strong American tradition, see Duneier, Kasinitz, & Murphy, 2014).

So what kinds of learning processes am I interested in? Watching people at Copenhagen Central Station, all kinds of skills are demonstrated: synchronizing your body with the swiftly moving crowds, handling a ticket machine under duress, deciphering a blaring loudspeaker message, standing patiently in line, interacting with or avoiding strangers. We are in the field of behavior in public places, pioneered in the many studies by the sociologist Erving Goffman (for an overview, see Smith, 2006). Skills like these are elusive and mundane practices often taken for granted. It is an acquired knowledge which gradually becomes invisible, working on reflexes rather than conscious actions. It is these characteristics, of course, that make such skills a difficult topic to study.
I became very aware of this challenge as I began the pilot fieldwork at the station. I entered with camera and notebook, ready to take in all the social life. But my first ethnographic attempts were not very successful. I returned to my office with trivial field notes, or sometimes just blank pages and photos that I kept staring at. I felt stuck and slightly silly. How do you observe practices and skills that, even when they are consciously noticed, are hard to verbalize? My background is in European ethnology, a discipline for which this question is central (see, for example, O’Dell & Willim, 2011; Arvastson & Ehn, 2009). What kinds of analytical tools, combinations of theory, methods and materials are needed to meet this ethnographic challenge in order to capture the elusive materialities and sensibilities of learning processes?

The kind of urban skills that interest me have not been learnt through formal educational processes. Above all, they represent a situated learning of trial and error and imitation, although, as Christoph Wulf (2008) has pointed out, “imitation” is too crude a label; it is, rather, a case of what he has called “mimetic processes”. Learning to handle the city is mainly situated learning, appropriating city life, absorbing it into body and mind, as a constant reworking rather than simple copying. Writers of fiction and autobiography often succeed in capturing such situations. Wulf refers to one such classic example, Walter Benjamin’s (1950/1991) childhood memories of Berlin in which the author describes and reflects upon the ways in which he gradually appropriates the city with its winding streets, busy markets and hiding places, taking the train or visiting the zoo. It is very much a magical interpretation of the surrounding world, not only “reading the city” but creating it at the same time, as Wulf points out.

The discussions on mimetic learning are connected to another analytical tradition: the debate on “tacit and explicit knowledge” and the ways many skills are learnt unconsciously through the body (see the discussion in Collins, 2010). Linked to this theme is the rich field on “learning bodies” and especially the phenomenological tradition emerging out of Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the acquisition of bodily skills. I am thinking in particular of what he called the dimension of “I can”, people constantly refining their skills (see the discussion in Duesund, 2008).

The diverse traditions of phenomenology focusing on pre-discursive or non-discursive aspects of everyday life are helpful here, not least the more recent post-phenomenological interest in mundane activities (Verbeek, 2005). There is also the eclectic tradition of non-representational theory, or, more precisely, “more-than-representational theory” (Vannini, 2014). Both traditions share an interest in what people do rather than what they say, and also emphasize the need for understanding the interaction with the material world. They also share an
interest in the ethnography of the everyday, often with a focus on the dimensions of affect and sensibilities. How do routines come to rest more in the body rather than in the mind? This is not a question of disregarding the discursive aspects of everyday life, which are, of course, constantly at play, but rather of a shift of focus.

The challenge is to look for the details; to capture the ways in which routines are made, challenged or ritualized, which calls for an experimental ethnography with an eye for tiny details, body movements, micro-rituals and a constant interaction with the surroundings. The result is a strong interweaving of theory and methodological experimentation, finding new ways of doing ethnography and often learning from approaches outside academia, like artists experimenting with destabilizing or provoking everyday life (see, for example, the discussion in Thrift, 2008).

In trying to verbalize mundane learning processes and find out how the body and senses take in the surroundings, various approaches of auto-ethnography come into play (see Ehn, 2011; Larsen, 2014). It is hard to avoid using yourself as a methodological tool in trying to understand the workings of the senses, as I will discuss later.

The uses of history

I have outlined the theoretical and methodological traditions supporting my ethnography, but there is another very important dimension: historical analysis. This is a dimension I often find lacking in the theoretical traditions discussed above. A historical perspective is useful for destabilizing the frequently taken-for-granted nature of mundane routines. I am thinking here of three different approaches. First of all, there is a life history perspective, used to capture gradual learning processes, such as those Walter Benjamin was reflecting on when he looked back on his life. A life history approach can map the short or long history of acquiring a skill, and the gradual routinization of a new practice into an effortless activity: my life as a railway traveler, an urban pedestrian or car driver.

Secondly, there is the use of history as a contrasting tool to destabilize the present. Comparing different periods of life at Copenhagen Central Station shows how the same setting can become the site of very different learning processes, as well as conflicts between different actors. In trying to analyze routinized skills, it is analytically rewarding to look for situations in which mundane practices are brought to the surface and problematized. This is a strategy that I have used previously; for example, in a study of waiting that was carried out with Billy Ehn (Ehn & Löfgren, 2010, p. 79ff.).
Thirdly, this contrastive technique is also connected to what has been called the genealogical approach in the Foucauldian tradition of exploring mundane phenomena that are often seen as “without a history” (see Foucault, 1977). This is not a search for origins, but an examination of the open and messy situations in which new elements take shape. When a new technology or practice emerges, it is often the focus of much experimentation and debate: there is a high degree of visibility that later fades away. By going back to formative situations when new routines or technologies are still open and moving in contradictory directions, or are seen as having very different potentials, a teleological analysis can be avoided. Later, such turbulent pioneer periods are often tidied up into a narrative of unilinear development (cf. the discussion in Damsholt, 2010).

As research on routines has illustrated, once skills and competences are mastered they often cease to be seen as skills or knowledge and become invisible activities (see, for example, Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012; Wilk, 2009). What, for example, is a railway passenger? How do you deal with being surrounded by strangers (cf. Adey, Bissell, McCormack, & Merriman, 2012)? I found a study by Christian Wolmar (2007, p. 43ff.) of the first passenger railway that opened in 1830 between Liverpool and Manchester useful. It discusses the problems the railway company had in teaching passengers, who previously had only travelled by stagecoach, proper railway manners. People had to learn that it was a bad idea to try to travel on the roof, stick their heads through the windows, or jump from a moving train. Much policing of behavior was necessary.

Other helpful materials included early handbooks on railway travel. These tomes contained instructions on how to survive a train journey with total strangers; how to organize the new-fangled phenomenon of queueing; or how to behave properly as a passenger waiting for a train so as not to be classified as one of the illegitimate inhabitants of 19th century stations such as the homeless, loiterers, con men and prostitutes.

With such historical background material in mind, it was easier for me to return to the station and reflect on how the crowd behavior that I observed is based upon skills that come naturally to most urbanites, but which were once new and challenging.

When it came to combining theory, methods and materials, I used a bricolage approach (see Ehn & Löfgren, 2012, p. 9ff.), which involves a constant search for very different kinds of materials that may supplement or provoke each other. As the aim is to try to capture elusive micro-processes, reactions and activities, it is important to search not only for relevant academic research but to look also at fiction and autobiography, where authors are sometimes able to put mundane activities and mindsets into words in ways that make an ethnographer envious.
The same goes for contemporary artists who experiment with problematizing everyday life by looking at it from surprising angles.

Visual materials are important. Just by surfing YouTube one can find scores of video clips and photos from a place like Copenhagen Central Station: tourists’ videos, old newsreels, or photos from all periods of the station’s history. Of course, the internet also provides a wealth of other materials, such as the home pages of railway enthusiasts, tourists’ blogs and Facebook discussions, for example. In a bricolage approach, potential material can surface almost anywhere – a newspaper advertisement, photo snapshots, passing remarks in a conversation, a scene from a soap opera, a line from a song, or images and sounds photographed or recorded on the cell phone.

Using such a research strategy, the fieldwork at Copenhagen Central Station turned out to be a continuous movement back and forth between the field and the search for inspiration elsewhere. My first detour was to travel back into history.

Training grounds for modernity

With his carpet bag in one hand and umbrella in the other hand, he followed the stream up the stairs and into the hall, where the white sea of light made him open his eyes wide. Shyly he contemplated the sumptuously decorated room, thinking by himself that it was probably larger and costlier than any church in the country. (quoted in Madsen & Plunz, 2001, p. 305)

In this scene from a novel by the Danish author Henrik Pontoppidan, a country vicar is arriving by train for his first visit to Copenhagen since his student days. The story is set in 1912, and the huge station is brand new. At the station’s opening a year before, there were many similar awestruck comments. The station was so impressively large and modern it almost felt like being in London or Paris. Modernity was felt in the body as the visitor became part of a journey into the future – with the help of the vast spaces, the light cascading down from above, the fast crowds, the interaction with newfangled technologies and gadgets, the exciting sounds and sights. “For people of our times, railway stations are true dream factories” was one of Walter Benjamin’s (1999, p. 334) favorite quotes from a Frenchman in the 1920s. In the era of the grand station buildings, from the mid-19th to the early 20th centuries, the new stations, with their impressive scale and monumental style, were seen as icons of modernity or symbols of national cohesion (Richards & MacKenzie, 1996), but above all the station had to function as a machine for transit. There was a strong pedagogical dimension in this; the station should work as a training ground for life in a new mass society. Here, people should learn to
handle the demands of large-scale movement, to find their way, acquire correct information.

The railway station was a new zone nerveuse and the architect who designed Copenhagen Central Station knew that. His project had two objectives: designing a machine for mass transit, but also attempting an architecture of reassurance. He stated that one of his aims in organizing this transit space was to minimize “travel nervousness”, but that was a difficult task. One could feel very small in this new cathedral, richly decorated with elements communicating that one was now in the absolute center of the nation. Rows of Danish flags hung from the ceiling of the arrival hall and along the outside walls there was a parade of statues depicting peasants in folk costumes, representing the periphery of the nation (Bøgelund-Hansen, Darger, & Ovesen, 2001; Ovesen, 1999).

The ambition of turning the station into a training ground for modernity called for constant updating. In the 1930s, new elements were brought into the setting. In 1935, a modern cinema called Den vide Verden (“The Wide World”) opened, where visitors could watch newsreels and documentaries from all over the world. The aim was to stimulate dreams of international travel, as was stated in the opening speech (Flindt Larsen, 1994, p. 23). On the walls there were panoramas featuring New York skyscrapers and Parisian scenes.

Other icons of modernity were found in the craze for automat – supermodern machines. You could weigh yourself and at the same time observe yourself in a mirror. In 1934, a typewriting machine was installed, for typing one’s documents (“not to be used by children”); later, there were vending machines for nylon stockings, rolls of film, coffee, and a gadget that sprinkled perfume when you inserted a coin. Other innovations were a vibrating machine that could cure travel fatigue, and as late as the 1980s there was a machine that measured the traveler’s bio rhythm.

Interacting with these gadgets signaled contact with the future, but the problem was that the station kept ageing and such machines were no longer exciting. High-tech modernity was found elsewhere, and, after the Second World War, Copenhagen Central Station was often criticized for being a rundown and uninviting place. Loitering was a constant problem for the management. Groups of people had learnt to use the territory in the wrong way: the homeless or out-of-work, teenagers looking for excitement, senior citizens just passing the time, male and female prostitutes, drug users. In the early 1970s, Copenhagen Central Station became a gathering point for young Turkish labor migrants who didn’t have a place to meet. They assembled there in their hundreds, socializing and swapping news, and there were complaints that these young men were taking over the place.
In the constant battle to keep “undesirables” out, the setting was redesigned, with new forms of policing and surveillance. Benches were removed and lights were dimmed in the lavatories to make it harder for heroin users to inject. In the early 2000s, loud classical music was used to keep out the down-and-outs who gathered in certain spaces.

Historically, the design of railway station buildings has been one of the techniques for trying to keep certain people and activities out; many railway stations thereby constitute good examples of what Frers (2006) has called “pacification by design”. In this regard, it is interesting to compare the attempts at monitoring behavior at Copenhagen Central Station over the course of the last century with the new Copenhagen metro system. Ole B. Jensen (2012) has looked at this design for travel and points to the ways in which the whole system has been built for friction-free commuter flow. Minimalistic design, and even special color schemes, stress mobility, and there are no benches. This is not a space for dawdling or sightseeing. It is a good example of an educational materiality.

Moving in a sea of strangers

Arriving at the new Copenhagen Central Station for the first time was a powerful experience. You could recognize the newly arrived by their clumsy body movements, their gawping gazes, and their barely concealed amazement. Stepping off the train in Copenhagen, they experienced the sensual shocks of new sounds, smells, smoke and bustling crowds. They also knew that they had to look out for the new types of con men who had made the station their hunting ground: the bondefangere, as they were called (lit. “peasant-catchers”) using a term imported from the German Bauernfanger.

Some of these early impressions share a general theme found in many classic descriptions of metropolitan railway stations – a theme of sensual overexposure and emotional stress. Disembarking from the confinement (or security) of the train compartment, travelers were thrown into the chaos of the station. All their senses were on alert; bodies were pushed and jostled in the crowds, surrounded by hissing steam and belching smoke, loud and incomprehensible sounds from shouting porters, strange smells and darting glances from strangers everywhere. It was simply too much.

At the turn of the 20th century, around 1900, there was a lot of discussion of the skills and competences needed to handle big city life. When Georg Simmel tried to capture the new city mentality, he focused on the flood of impressions:

...the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the
psychological conditions which the metropolis creates. (In: Frisby & Featherstone, 1997, p. 175)

To survive in the city, you had to learn both to select and to ignore, but above all to judge strangers.

In his dissertation on fin-de-siècle urban life surrounding the nearby Copenhagen City Hall Square, Mikkel Thelle (2013) discusses the new social competences that had to be acquired by Copenhageners. One had to learn to identify people, to recognize them from afar, make social distinctions in relation to strangers – in short, to develop social navigation skills. People learnt to read even small class differences in clothing, as well as body language. There were specialists who acquired advanced observational skills in this, especially the new kinds of policemen, both uniformed and undercover. Being on the constant lookout for pickpockets, vagabonds, prostitutes or potential troublemakers, they were trained to read the social landscape of public places (Thelle, 2013, p. 181ff.). Such skills of quickly judging and classifying strangers were picked up by the railway travelers, who found themselves sharing platforms and train compartments with total strangers. People sharpened their observational skills and became accustomed to glancing rather than staring, to hiding behind a newspaper, to mastering unproblematic small talk – social competences that are often taken for granted today.

The railway system also developed new infrastructures to facilitate the classification and sorting of people, above all through a formalized class system: are you a first, second or third class passenger? In Copenhagen Central Station, you can still read the inscriptions 1. and 2. Class Waiting Room above the entrance to O’Leary’s Sportsbar. There were constant attempts at segregating people and providing shelters for upper class travelers who did not want to mingle with everyone else (see the discussion in Löfgren, 2008).

The station as a sensorium

What happens when such historical learning processes are put into a dialogue with contemporary fieldwork? Returning to the station, it was much easier to see people’s movements and activities as historically learnt and conditioned skills. The next step was to try out different ethnographic strategies for studying the station as a sensorium, a place where moods and modes of movement could be captured in different sensual dimensions.

The visual had, of course, been my ethnographic starting point. I went to stations with my camera, looking, staring, glancing – my eyes perhaps too wide open. In the beginning, the other sensual impressions were just background disturbances. I couldn’t help thinking about the kind of light-hearted advice often
given to students on how to do sensual ethnographies: “Don’t fall into the trap of giving the visual any primacy: close your eyes, use a recorder for sounds, try to ‘feel’ the atmosphere.” Easier said than done; but I returned to Copenhagen Central Station again, wanting to explore other sensual inputs.

I went back on an August Sunday in the middle of the holiday season and set out to record the soundscape with my cell phone. The first thing that struck me was the diffuseness of the background noise; it was as if all kinds of sounds were blended into a constant murmur. I tried to identify the various ingredients of that mixture: voices, steps, luggage being dragged along, the faint humming from the escalators. Some sounds stood out from this constant murmur: the clickety-clack of wheels of bags and suitcases hauled along the stone floor; bits and pieces of conversations drifting past; the sudden ding-a-dong signaling loudspeaker announcements booming messages into the air; and a repetitive, rather stressful and angry flow of signals from some invisible machine, beep-beep-beep.

If sound was difficult to document, smell was even harder. On the internet, I found a cry for help. “How does a station smell?” someone asked, trying to write an essay. The first answer she received was: “Do stations smell? I’ll have to find out next time.”

Terms such as “smellscapes” have been coined to try to capture olfactory scenes, but smell is one of the least recorded or discussed senses. In this field, the terminology often seems even vaguer or less developed than for sound. Certain fields are highly evolved, as in the poetics of perfume and wine tasting (see Hemme, 2010), but on the whole it is a fairly limited vocabulary, often focusing on the unpleasant smells – acid, musty, stale – and drifting over into the universe of taste. In this sensory realm, the polarity between pleasant and unpleasant seems more marked than for many other senses. Even words such as ‘odor’, ‘aroma’, ‘smelly’ and ‘bouquet’ are loaded with positive or negative connotations.

I went back to the station ready to explore smells, lacking an olfactory recorder but relying on paper and pen. Does Copenhagen Central Station smell? My first impression was, no. It seemed hard to capture the smells of the station, although I slowly began to identify some. My olfactory searches made me unfocused. It was time to go back to the internet again. Surfing among ethnographies of smell, I found other discussions of station smells. A German company had worked hard to produce a perfume that captured the special burnt smell of trains braking on entering the station. This, they felt, was a scent people could identify. At Copenhagen Central Station, I kept wondering: what kinds of smells are present when we describe something as odorless? Does boredom, stress or irritation have an aroma? There is a rich field waiting to be explored here.
After soundscapes and smellscapes, it was time to explore the registers of touch and the haptic. It has been argued that the skin is not only our largest sensory organ, but that it is also extremely important in the ways we register and are influenced by local atmospheres (Brennan, 2004). The haptic dimension is present, of course, in the ways people handle the material world of the station. When you are in a state of anxious travel fever, holding on to objects becomes important. There can be comfort in clutching a handbag, fidgeting with your ticket, feeling the warmth of a cup of coffee, or taking refuge in your own temporary home on a bench, sheltered by your piled-up luggage.

To conduct an ethnography of this sensual register, it is good to start with details: what kinds of micro-movements can be registered, for example, by spending an hour observing only how people handle handbags or cellphones? I found it helpful to take the time to watch five people on a bench and observe their continuous interaction with their travel items as they rummaged through their wallets, rearranged their baggage, fidgeted with or clutched their stuff. By freezing or slow-motioning video clips from my cell phone and scenes from YouTube, it was possible to see new aspects of movement.

It was also possible to observe how people handled physical contact with others. I watched both irritated elbows and helping hands. People get pushed, trip over luggage, squeeze past others. They observe an acceptable distance while standing in line or sitting down on a bench next to others. I felt like getting out a mental measuring rod and trying to compare how close people sit to each other on a shared bench.

Many of these ethnographic attempts raised more questions rather than producing any results. The first thing I was reminded of in my attempts to capture sense after sense was that senses are intensely entangled with one another. Just as scholars have been busy categorizing and labelling emotions, talk of the five senses can be rather unproductive in ethnography. I was reminded of all the ways in which smell and sound work together, or how the hand works with the eye. When I heard the stressful sound signals, I immediately conjured up an image of angry red flashes from a warning light. Back home, listening to my recording from the station was also a very one-dimensional experience. Instead of thinking in terms of the five senses, it would be more fruitful to think about five or more concepts that bridge them and show how they work together, or block each other. There are concepts that bring that interaction more into focus – “atmosphere”, for example (see Böhme, 2006; Bissell, 2010 and Löfgren, 2014).
Learning to move

I also became aware of the ways in which my own bodily experiences told me about the skills of the commuters moving swiftly through the station. Weaving among the rush hour crowds, confidently hurrying through the station complex, I can feel in my own body what it is to be out of synch. I have been living in a provincial town for too long and have lost some of my old city skills of maneuvering in fast crowds. I can’t read the signals, my body movements are hesitant, I am often about to bump into people – I’m not part of the flow. Sometimes I can register a slight irritation in the eyes of the efficient commuters. My failure at least gave me some auto-ethnographic insights into what it feels like to be out of sync in a setting, and a chance to reflect on the skills I lacked.

The morning rush hour gave Copenhagen Central Station a very special atmosphere. There was a feeling of expectancy in the air – the start of a fresh working day, a kind of positive stress. Later in the day, the tempo slowed down, the soundscape and the mood were different, with the echoes of solitary travelers moving along the hall. As the tired commuters returned on their way to go home, the station had a different feel. Compare this to the festive mood of the station on a Friday or Saturday evening, when groups of people are leaving or arriving in search of a fun night out and a party feeling starts to pervade the place.

Trying to record these rhythms and intensities I felt the need for more inspiration and turned to a classic site, so often depicted in films: the bustling crowds at New York’s Grand Central Terminal. In a study of space, Tony Hiss watches the crowds here and reflects on the social skills you need to learn to handle this setting. He observes:

...the swirling, living motion of five hundred people walking, two and three abreast, from and toward the fourteen entrances and exits of the concourse. Moving silently, as it seemed, within that sound, I noticed again that no one was bumping into anyone else – that every time I thought I myself might be about to bump into people near me, both I and they were already accelerating slightly, or decelerating, or making a little side step, so that nobody ever collided. On top of this, the weightless sensation in my head gave me the feeling that I could look down on all this movement, in addition to looking out at it. I had a sense that the cooperation I was part of kept repeating itself throughout the vast room around me and the vaster city beyond it. (Hiss, 1991, p. 8)

How is this collective choreography made possible, with its coordination of hundreds of different styles of walking and moving? Here, there is a competence of quick glances, body signals and swift movements. Searching on YouTube for
Grand Central scenes, I found a flash mob project where two hundred actors at a given signal froze their movements in the crowd of commuters. The hidden camera records how the flow all of a sudden stops and amazed fellow passengers look around trying to understand what is happening. It is as if the whole arrival hall holds its breath for a moment. By provoking and sabotaging the routine, normality all of a sudden becomes visible. (Later on I found similar flash mob projects, one actually from Copenhagen Central Station.)

Turning to the literature on body movements, the classic is Erving Goffman’s (1967) study of people moving in crowds on urban pavements. In a later comment on this study, Tim Ingold (2011) points out that, although it is an inspiring pioneer attempt to capture urban choreographies, Goffman’s study has very few bodies, limbs and feet in it and too many eyes. To read the ways these two authors present different ethnographic strategies for studying the same scene was quite illuminating, and made me reflect on the choices of words and perspectives in my own field notes.

In trying to capture the changing flows and moods of Copenhagen Central Station, I also began to look for fiction writers who have used the station as a scene. Reading them made me envious; they were often happy irregular ethnographers, playfully experimenting and inventing, but they just seem to be able to hit the right note in the end. In one novel from the 1930s, trying to capture the urban mentality of Copenhagen, the author follows his main character in and out of Copenhagen Central Station and describes the changing moods. One winter day, the hero walks into the station at noon and finds it almost deserted apart from a few bored jobless men hanging about. The writer describes the cold and damp draft from the platforms and the sound of a solitary suitcase at the other end of the hall:

*One’s own steps sound unintentionally energetic against the tiles – the whipping sound of sharp heels – and the air above carries a faint hum like the one coming from a shell. And all of a sudden something comes over you – there is something important you are missing. A sudden urge to just jump on the train and get out of this depressing city.* (my translation; Sønderby, 1931, p. 124)

The next time the hero returns, the mood is different; he is full of happy anticipation. He is about to go to Sweden on a skiing holiday with a bunch of other young people and they are all excitedly waiting for the night train:

*It smelled nauseatingly of beefsteak in the waiting area but he was too preoccupied to notice, he was standing with vigilant eyes and ears and felt an undercurrent of the excitement of travel fever. Two weeks of holidays with new companions. What*
might not happen during such a journey... (my translation; Sønderby, 1931, p. 125)

A collective mood evolves as people begin to become a group of travelers, sharing the feeling of happy anticipation and beginning to size up their travel companions-to-be.

Writing about her impressions of Copenhagen Central Station in 2010, while waiting for the midnight train back to Sweden, the commuter Julia Svensson captured the mood of frustration and depression that can take over the station at night. The train is, as always, late. The cafeterias close, and after that there is only the chill of the platforms and the arrival hall:

On platform 5, I found the Swedish commuter who became my first real Copenhagen friend. We shared being cold and also feeling frozen out. We had been evicted from McDonald's. We had tired of looking at the model train by the railway café... We were tired of the fact that our time seemed worthless to the Danish State Railways. Most days you don't want to meet new friends, most days you just want to get home... (Svensson, 2010, p. 1)

“Everything is closed” – all the closed shutters and locked doors help to produce an atmosphere of being left out. The passengers become a group of losers, marginalized, outside society. The mood becomes slightly depressive, gone is all the morning energy of early travel. The environment no longer seems welcoming; the station is transformed into a hostile place.

**Conclusion**

*The whole time the city was consuming me, as image, as language, as sound and smell, movement, mood and music – as topography, labyrinth, condition, home ground, way of life...*

This is the Danish author Søren Ulrik Thomsen (1996, p. 27) remembering his first teenage confrontation with Copenhagen in 1972. As in Benjamin’s memoirs, both the city and the senses are opening up, ready to take in everything.

I began with arrivals as a situation where the city is discovered and impressions are new and fresh, always a good point of departure for developing an ethnography of “learning the city”. Copenhagen Central Station taught me about the informal learning processes going on here, from handling unwritten norms to the skills of moving your body or interacting with strangers. There are official rules of behavior in urban spaces like the station, and different forms of monitoring, from security guards to surveillance cameras, but perhaps the most important
monitoring comes from the gaze of others and the sensation of being welcome or not. There is a strong and indirect governance by sociability here, which makes it important to study who is allowed to make (or break) rules of behavior, and the, often veiled, ways in which normative behavior is communicated or challenged. To gain access to these processes, four methodological approaches were especially important:

First of all, it was helpful to alternate between academic writings, fiction and art, auto ethnography and some irregular ethnography experiments – they brought different tools to the task. So much ethnographic work is based on this kind of alchemy and bricolage, dynamics that are hard to pin down and even remember when the study is finished.

Secondly, the three historical perspectives were important for looking at contemporary behavior with new eyes. Commuters move swiftly through the station, hardly noticing it anymore; while the homeless try to pass the time and constantly have to learn new tactics for avoiding the policing efforts of the management. Tourists employ both the tourist gaze and the tourist stride in exploring the setting, using skills with a long history. Many of these visitors would not think of their movements as skills, but they all have a history and are constantly being updated.

Thirdly, I learnt to stop “just looking” and instead to alternate between different ethnographic micro-projects in exploring all the senses.

Fourthly, I found a concept developed by the cultural geographer Doreen Massey (2005) helpful. She talks about the ways in which places are created by the throwntogetherness of people, matter, tasks and affects, resulting in an arena of unpredictability. The station may seem like a very stable brick-and-mortar monument, but it is really constituted of all the comings and goings, as well as the very diverse tasks, motives and mental luggage dragged into it. Tim Ingold (2011) uses the word entanglements to capture similar processes, a messiness created by the constant interweaving of the ebb and flow of people, heavy luggage or malfunctioning ticket machines, shiny floors, grimy corners, too loud music, old memories and all kinds of other sensory inputs. The ethnographic task is to explore how this mess works together – reinforcing, blocking, uniting, separating.

Finally, during the many hours I have spent observing life at Copenhagen Central Station, I have become extremely self-conscious of my own body language and loitering as I roam around the building, seemingly without any purpose. I am aware of the glances of others as they try to find out what kind of person I am, surely not a regular traveler. This feeling was strengthened when I visited other stations with powerful electronic surveillance systems. Waiting for a train at a London station, I keep encountering messages asking me and other travelers
to report “any suspicious behavior” and I know that the surveillance cameras around me are programmed to detect activities and movements that are suspiciously different. Suddenly I became obsessed with “behaving normally”, again being conscious of my own body language and that of fellow travelers; learning to be the perfect station visitor…

References


**Dansk abstract**

**Byliv: En etnografisk undersøgelse af hverdagskompetencer**


**Nøgleord:** evner, læringsprocesser, etnografi, byliv, togstationer, materialitet, affekt.
Makers not Users

- The Material Shaping of Technology Through Use

By Jamie Wallace

Abstract

Although humans appear to be natural makers of things, when referring to our interrelation with technologies, we refer to ourselves as ‘users’. The term user implies that technologies are prescripted, finished artefacts and consigns us to the detached role of learning how to adopt them as the designer intended. This reductive conception prevents any view of how technological-human relations rely upon moments of material interaction and it says little about the creative aspect of such interactions necessary for any technology to successfully contribute to human practice. In this chapter, I wish to consider the separation of use and design together with what is perhaps a fading understanding of making; in doing so, I aim to gain a better understanding of how we engage with technologies as changeable and material things.

Stressing the transformative actions of our everyday practice provides an inclination towards ideas of production and making not found within notions of use. Similarly, by conceiving of users of technology as equally makers of technology, we can dissolve the distinction between users and makers and adopt an analytical stance related to direct engagement and change. Central to this approach is Gibson’s notion of affordance (1979), which describes the mutual relationality between humans and technology that constitutes the foundation for perception and action. Relating affordances to actions of making rather than use reveals them, not as predetermined through processes of design, but as disruptive,
changeable, elusive, capricious, inarticulate, and enacted during situations of practice. On the one hand, this reveals users as actively reconfiguring technologies as they become part of practice, and more importantly, it identifies the extent to which this reconfiguration is an exploration, not of a finished artefact, but of the possibilities for material engagement.

*Keywords: makers, things, materiality, users, technology, engagement, affordance.*

Before examining the ways in which we materially engage with technologies by considering humans as essentially ‘makers’ rather than ‘users’, I will outline a recent experience involving three technologies of drawing.
Three technologies of drawing

Following the purchase of my first digital tablet, I was attracted by the idea of being able to use it for drawing and sketching. It seemed so convenient; with no more need for paper or sketchbooks, as well as having an endless supply of different colours and not to mention the opportunities for digital editing and the advantage of being able to send drawings directly via e-mail. However, from the outset the experience was very different from drawing and sketching on paper. It wasn’t so much the difference between the tablet’s touch sensitive screen and qualities of paper or the illuminated surface that struck me; instead, it was the implement – or lack of implement – used to draw with. Until having to use my forefinger to make contact with the screen, I hadn’t realised how much of my drawing practice had relied on holding an implement between my thumb and forefinger. What I imagined would be an insignificant change – with almost no difference in the orientation or positioning of my fingers (merely the absence of a thin wooden object with a core of graphite) – actually altered my whole drawing experience. To compensate, I tried a series of hand positions and techniques to reproduce the natural feel I had when holding a pen or pencil. I tried holding my hand stiff as though my forefinger were an inanimate object and I also allowed my finger(s) to dance and flow uncontrollably; however, both the experience and the effects of the drawing remained alien.

Luckily, all was not lost, because I became aware of a range of styli specifically ‘designed’ for drawing or handwriting on tablet devices. It appeared there was a solution at hand. After making a careful selection based on online reviews, I was soon using what appeared to be an ergonomically designed stylus that even boasted a design award. Although the rubber tip created a disconcerting level of drag on the screen, my hand was able to assume its customary grip and my sketches began to acquire something of the distinction I liked when using paper. This was, after all, a process mediated by digital algorithms rather than the subtle variations of graphite or crayon on paper, so I couldn’t expect it to be as good as the ‘real thing’. After several weeks of drawing practice and settling in to using the stylus, I was surprised when the rubber tip suddenly sheared off, rendering it useless. Realising it would be some days before I could replace the stylus, I began to search for possible ways to mend it. After cutting up bicycle inner-tubes and wrapping a film of rubber over the end or attaching small pieces of household sponge, it became possible to generate intermittent lines on the tablet; however, I was unable to recreate its earlier effect.

This failed attempt at a proper repair made me curious as to how a stylus works and whether it would be possible to create a home-made version. A search on the Internet provided a handful of solutions and, after watching an informative
video made by a nine-year-old boy, I had made a new stylus using a cotton ear bud and a piece of aluminium kitchen foil. This had none of the elegant lines of my purchased award winning stylus and no protective leather pouch for storage. Moreover, it certainly wouldn’t have passed any uniformity or quality control tests, and it would be difficult to brand, market and sell with a reasonable profit margin. However, it did resemble – in both sensation and effect – the use of charcoal on paper. The cotton ear bud glided across my tablet screen without noticeable drag and holding such a small implement brought the movement of my wrist much more into play allowing a form of mark making that resembled the use of paper. But, above all, it was the changeable quality of the cotton ear bud stylus that began to offer my drawing something authentic. A pencil, crayon or piece of charcoal is never static. Throughout the drawing process it wears a little, responds differently depending on how it is cut or worn and provides very different strokes in different directions, pressures and even rotations. These aren’t qualities I consciously bring into play, but they become active through my hand movements and leave their influence on the drawn line. As the cotton ear bud wore down or became matted and compressed, I needed to pull small hairs of cotton to encourage a line to appear or I needed to increase the rapidity or pressure of handling. As a result, I felt as though I was working with a real drawing tool again; a tool that required me to learn how its scope of variation felt in the actions and bodily sensibility of practice. Further it allowed a slight degree of unpredictability, which enabled me to maintain a reflective approach to the emerging drawing process and fostered what could be called an ‘embedded creativity’. This was a technology being ‘made’ through material engagement in concurrence with my practice.

The separation of design and use

These reflections bring forth a discrepancy between imaginings of what technologies are, and the learning process that unfolds from the initial experiences of their use. It is only once technology is materially engaged within a context of human practice that claims and expectations about the promises of technology become explicit. Without this human element, any understanding of technology remains a prescribed technical specification constructed during the design process. In light of this human aspect and our continual engagement with technology, questions of what it means to be human are never far from questions concerning our use of technology. As technologies are seen to radically influence the ways in which we interact, they become entangled with issues of anthropology; however, thus far, anthropology has struggled to fully conceptualise the way in which this occurs
(Ingold, 1997; Suchman, 2001). Steve Keirl argues that, although anthropology offers us perspectives, these perspectives “fail to locate (rather they dislocate) potential for real understandings of technology” (Keirl, 2006, p. 89). Regardless of which discipline we appeal to, it is essential that we deepen our understanding of the effects that changing technological use has upon body, culture and society.

Conceptions of technology and use are kept manifestly separate by structures of design, production and consumption. Designed and manufactured products are made available to consumers who are then seen to adopt them as artefacts for the uses for which they were intended. From the individual’s point of view, these processes of production are typically far removed from their processes of use. How many of us can fully imagine the complexities of the design and manufacturing processes that have led to the computers we adopt every day? Discourses of adoption and diffusion (Rogers, 1995; Straub, 2009) consider the routes through which technologies enter into use, whereas those of technological literacy (Dugger, 2001; Garmire & Pearson, 2006; Ingerman & Collier-Reed, 2011; Wallace & Hasse, 2014) consider the learning that occurs as a result, allowing us to “engage intelligently and conscientiously” (Yawson, 2010, p. 301) with situations of technology use.

By acknowledging this separation of design and use, we can use it to question the reasonableness of use and the ways in which those involved with processes of design are able to influence technologies once they are adopted and situated in practice (Wallace & Hasse, 2014). Several authors have appealed to the notion of a “designer fallacy” (Ihde, 2006, p. 124; Stewart & Williams, 2005, p. 195), which is intended to expunge the idea that designers can successfully design or embed explicit purposes, values and uses into a technology. While Ackerman (2000) terms this the “social technical gap”, Dourish describes it as the discrepancy “between our technological ‘reach’ in the design process and the realities of technologies-in-practice” (Dourish, 2006, p. 346). For example, the design of the digital tablet stylus may support certain ways of holding the stylus and allow predictable effects to appear on the touchscreen; nevertheless, it cannot provide a surrogate for the many different ways that variations of implements such as pencils, brushes, and pens have facilitated idiosyncratic approaches to mark-making by their particular users. It can only provide a basis for new ways of mark-making as users discover the particular means that suit them best in differing contexts.

Irrespective of the potential consequences for designers or users, it remains an undeniable fact that processes of design and processes of use have become firmly dislocated from one another. It follows from this split that notions of creativity and improvisation are largely associated with processes of making and design and that processes of use are rendered passive and predictable.
Daniel Charny takes up this historical view and associates it with an increasing loss of understanding that relates the making of things with the substances from which they are formed:

... despite all the value that exists in making, fewer and fewer people know how to make the things they use, need or want; or even how these things are made. This is one of the unfortunate legacies of the Industrial Revolution that has shaped the world we live in. The distance between the maker and the user is growing and, with it, knowledge, understanding and appreciation are diminishing (Charny, 2011, p. 7)

In this way the developing gap between practices of use and making can be seen to stem from the late modern period. Having been studied from a number of perspectives, including that of ethnology, there is a movement from ‘folk’ traditions to those dominated by cultures of functionality. This can lead to questions of whether ‘folk’ making traditions are obsolete, or are merely hidden amid the complexities of contemporary life. As pointed out by Orvar Löfgren (1997), views of the materiality of family life, such as Annette Rosengren’s (1985) study of working-class Swedish households, show practices of repair and making to be alive and well. Not in ways we might immediately recognise as part of a tradition, but rather through attention to the home as “a family project, where love, solidarity and care are materialized in the continuous ambitions of home improvements” (Löfgren, 1997, p. 100).

Viewing the user as a maker aligns with notions such as the domestication of technology, which has emerged from Science and Technology studies and ideas related to the ‘social shaping of technology’ (Silverstone & Mansell, 1995; Haddon, 2006). Taking this view, design and use are coupled from the viewpoint of practice, allowing an analysis of processes of technology’s acceptance, rejection and use seen through the consideration of individual situations. Of central interest here is the adoption of a mutual ontology in which the technology setting and the user setting influence each other. As Ihde argues, “all technologies display ambiguous, multi-stable possibilities” (Ihde, 2002, p. 106); in this way, the technology and its context are, as witnessed in processes of making, in a constant state of interplay and mutual influence. Had my tablet stylus been constructed in a different way and not broken, I would not have pursued a course to find an alternative. Questions of how such relationships are formed reside as much within the domain of learning and our processes of becoming as they do within the complexities of our sensibilities of engagement.
A discourse of making

In its simplest sense, ‘the maker’ is usually viewed as somebody who forms raw materials into new objects. This is typified through activities such as metalworking, woodworking, and traditional arts and crafts, though it could equally apply to complex processes of industrialised production. Metalworking and woodworking may not be as prevalent as they once were, having been displaced by computerisation (Crawford, 2009); nevertheless, in present times, the centrality of making processes to human activity is reflected in the extent to which the Internet and digital media have fostered an explosion of the production, processing and sharing of digital artefacts.

Several authors have turned their attention to the importance of the maker in an attempt to understand technology (see Schiffer, 2001). However, by and large, this only sheds light on the “significance of the perspective of the producer” (Keller, 2001, p. 36) and does not facilitate a deeper understanding of how technologies ultimately become significant, and thereby ‘complete’, when situated in practice.

Discourses of making emphasise the emergent nature of the process as new things are discovered through various attempts, explorations, and wonderings. Above all it is the maker existing within his/her practice of enquiry in tacit and explicit forms of dialogue, linked with the changing nature and transformative aspects of their materials. This is what Donald Schön coined the maker’s “reflective conversation with his materials” (Schön, 1983, p. 44). These materials do not exist in an open attitude to all possibilities but are rather a play within a ceaseless critical evaluation amid “situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict” (Schön, 1983, p. 49). This is reflected in the incongruity of adopting a cotton ear bud and aluminium kitchen foil to augment the use of computer hardware. In contrast to my makeshift stylus, digital hardware materialities are carefully finished and only alterable, if at all, with specialist tools in the hands of experts, often in carefully controlled environments (not often at the kitchen table with things ready to hand).

Related to these ideas of enquiry are discourses of experiential knowledge (Dewey, 1938; Rheinberger, 1992). Aligned to these are conceptualisations such as ‘material thinking’ (Carter, 2005) and ‘materializing pedagogies’ (Bolt, 2006) in which materiality provides a catalyst for a particular kind of knowledge. However, viewing making as a form of knowledge is not without difficulty, since it remains tied to situations of material engagement where its codification relies upon individual experiences. This leads to a type of exclusive knowledge, such as the example given at the beginning of the chapter, where its relevance is bound to an understanding of the situation itself. Cameron Tonkinwise writes:
Making might therefore be a type of localised knowing, but as non-abstractable, it must be kept distinct from the knowing that lies at the foundation of the university. (Tonkinwise, 2008, p. 3)

The discourse of making takes ideas of the user beyond instrumentalism and the notion of technologies beyond objects or artefacts. Technology is no longer treated as a discipline with a distinct kind of knowledge (Mitcham, 1994); instead, it becomes related to human values and traits and to being an intrinsic part of culture. The central dislocation here is to view technology as the raw material for human practice. This allows technology, prior to the point of use, to be devoid of its final shape or understanding. It also allows the disclosure of a reciprocal relation between user and technology to take place in a transformative rather than static framework. This highlights technology’s mutable character, not in the semiotic sense projected through approaches such as Actor Network Theory (Latour, 1987; Callon & Law, 1997), but in ways founded on material and bodily engagement within situated action. It is this middle view between the social and material worlds that Tonkinwise makes explicit as a different form of knowing. This form of knowing, whilst still problematic, escapes what is considered by Jackson, Poole, and Kuhn (2002) as the tendency for researchers to “tilt” their arguments in the direction of either material or social influence and, hence, to fail to reveal the extent and diversity of situated socio material interactions. This is not to deny that technology is an entangled cultural phenomenon comprising complex dimensions formed around strategic social action and human agency (Dobres & Hoffman, 1994); it is simply to explore the foundation of these aspects as being intrinsically tied to the exploration of the transient materiality of things. Technology is only revealed once the learning process it demands of its user, and its user demands of it, begins to unfold.

**Makers as explorers**

By viewing users of technology as makers, users become involved with the exploration of uncertain situations, which will inevitably lead to both intended and unintended consequences (Ihde, 2006). Such consequences reflect back on the technologies themselves and reveal them as not having any predestined or ascribed or appointed authority, but, instead, as being the indeterminate raw materials of human practice. The authority with which technologies are embedded through processes of design and marketing subverts their unforeseeable nature and presents tools as reliable, stable and predictable in the face of all eventualities. In the hands of mere users, and not shapers, technologies become “deterministic” preventing any exploration of their possible in-practice relations that may reveal
them as materially unsuitable, flawed, or corrupting for the applications for which they are promoted. With no previous experience of drawing, I may have been perfectly satisfied with the purchase of my digital stylus. As it was, the stylus became part of an existing and emergent practice that disrupted any idealised claims of its capabilities and any expectations of how it might enhance my drawing activity.

Looked upon as makers, users are present in the moment they explore technologies and, by reciprocation, become constituted in the ‘here and now’. Turning attention to the dynamics of human action in such situations Ingold refutes the idea of automatic actions but rather demonstrates the rhythmically responsive (Ingold, 2006, p. 77) nature with which we are coupled to our changing environment. He also reveals the extent of skilled makers’ engagement with the ebb and flow of situated action demanding a mutual reconfiguration in an unfolding system of technology and practice. Like Ingold, Strati identifies particular sensibilities at work that are able to accumulate the multiple experiences of material engagement. He demonstrates that these are not elevated or special negotiations but are rather integrated within everyday norms and practices that don’t “separate the mental from the corporeal, routine from improvisation, tradition from creativity” (Strati, 2007, p. 65). It is through these reconfigurations (Wallace, 2012a) that skills and experiences develop together with technologies and, as Michael claims, it is “not simply technologies and humans that are emergent, but the combination of these” (Michael, 2006, p. 49). Michael uses the terms hybrids and co(a)gents to shift focus onto the co-emergence of this duality. In the example I provided above, the use of a homemade stylus allowed new possibilities for digital mark-making and similarly referred back and uncovered aspects of previous practice that were previously not rendered explicit. The intimate relationship between drawing and the temporality and variegated aspect of pencils as they are manipulated, worn and sharpened were only disclosed during the handling of their digital counterpart.

In opposition to a kind of material craft, the evolution of technological skill relations is viewed by Sigaut as part of ever-decreasing cycles, which he calls the “law of the irreducibility of skills” (Sigaut, 1994, p. 446), in which the development of new skills around changing technologies is chasing, in Ingold’s terms, an “ever-receding goal” (Ingold, 2006, p. 78). As users are engaged in processes of making, they remain a constantly moving target and prevent any sense of fit being established with design. Certain design approaches, such as distributed participatory design, aspire to overcome this disparity. They wish to do this through:

… the creative use of technology to improve working practices in such a way that it does not destroy the workers’ skills, does not take away their autonomy, and enhances their quality of life (Beynon & Chan, 2006, p. 1)
A related and emerging field is that of Design Anthropology, which seeks to develop anthropology to build closer relations between “using and producing, designing and using, people and things” (Gunn & Donovan, 2012, p. 1). If we acknowledge these as human activities, the designing for skills of use becomes reliant upon skills of designing. Both activities are bound to the interplay between different forms of engagement patterned through unique environments and the opportunities they offer (Wallace, 2012b).

**Affordances and the perception of making**

Reconceptualising users as makers democratises ideas of technology and allows us to take a broader historical view of technology than those associated with innovation and technological advance (Feenberg, 2006). The popular tendency to equate technologies with “high-tech” artefacts, such as computers, information and communication technologies (ICTs), and other electronic media, overlooks the vast array of cultural and indigenous objects that have all emerged as innovations or inventions at some point in the past, such as books, hand tools, or even clothing (Kahn & Kellner, 2006). Ideas of making are more easily associated with these types of established, or what may be seen as out-dated, technologies in which the materials and methods of production are more familiar and understandable. Just like cotton ear buds and aluminium kitchen foil, these are everyday artefacts that are continually being ‘remade’ through well-practiced skills that allow us to trust our direct perceptions and engagements as tacit and bodily.

According to Heidegger, we remain bound to technology and, in the worst case, we view technology as something ‘neutral’ and are therefore blinded to its essence (Heidegger, 1977, p. 4). In contrast, viewing technology as a raw material provides an active standpoint from which to award it shape and significance. It also highlights the opportunities and possibilities technologies provide not as reductive properties of matter but through what Ingold describes as “an emphasis on materiality that prioritizes finished artefacts over the properties of materials” (Ingold, 2012, p. 427). This doesn’t describe a symbolic or semiotic consequence of materiality but one liberated by the processes of making and expressed through the notion of ‘affordance’ (Gibson, 1979).

Gibson coined the term affordance as a part of the theory of direct perception, or the ecological approach, in which there exists a direct relationship between animals and their environment through the ways in which organisms, including humans, detect relevant information in the ambient array. The ambient array refers to the ambient light emitted from a structure or arrangement, such as a pattern, a texture, or a configuration. This theory differs from previous conceptions
of the relation between an organism and the environment, such as cognitivism or behaviourism (Albrechtsen, Andersen, Bødker, & Pejtersen, 2001). In Gibson’s terms, it is the mutual relationality between an organism and its environment that constitutes the foundation for perception and action:

An affordance cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behaviour. It is both physical and psychical, yet neither. An affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the observer. (Gibson, 1979, p. 129)

For the maker, as for the user, an affordance is an opportunity for action through a perceived ability to act on what is sensed. It isn’t simply seeing a feature, but a future way of making use of that feature (Tonkinwise, 2008). This opportunity for change is precisely the non-neutral presence that provides the maker with their transformative medium linked to their skills and ways of engaging. Affordances aren’t simply linked to attitudes of bodily engagement but to change and to, in Gibson’s terms, the change of the environment itself. A cyclic relationship becomes established between maker and environment (or technology) in which the making process both relies upon and changes the affordances constituted at any time. As relational opportunities, affordances become changeable and possibly elusive or capricious, defying any explicit articulation, and they become enacted through the context of practice.

In his influential work The Psychology of Everyday Things (1988), Donald Norman presents an unfortunate interpretation of the term affordances. He considers our ability to conceive of and use thousands of artefacts and devices encountered every day, often without any prior experience of those particular objects. However, Norman doesn’t interpret affordances as relations between the environment and the organism in broad terms of opportunity; instead, he conceives of them specifically as “those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used” (Norman, 1988, p. 9). Subsequently, the term affordances has often been used to denote factors of a designed object that hint to the user how it should be used. This idea of affordances as fixed entities unlinked to the skilled and creative engagements of users not only does injustice to users but also prevents an open attitude towards designing that allows for (among other things) multiple and changeable situations. Despite Norman’s repeated attempts to clarify his misuse of the term, the confusion within design communities remains largely present (see Norman, 1999; 2008).
Making and the incomplete environment

In a broad sense, as we continually produce technologies, we make our environment and adapt the natural environment to satisfy our interests and purposes (Yawson, 2010; Dugger, 2000). The shear extent of this making discloses an extensive view of technology:

… comprising the entire system of people and organizations, knowledge, processes, and devices that go into creating and operating technological artefacts, as well as the artefacts themselves (Pearson & Young, 2002, p. 3).

This higher order of making goes beyond the satisfaction of our needs for survival to layers of aspirations that become inextricably linked to our ability to continually make newer technologies, thereby paving way for newer aspirations and their consequences. Referring to Huxley’s novel a Brave New World, in which humans are portrayed as an integrated part of machinery, Feenberg writes, “Once unleashed technology becomes more and more imperialistic, taking over one domain of social life after another” (Feenberg, 2006, p. 12). In these terms, our making process is subverted by the seduction we feel for this ever-changing raw material and inevitably leads to a determinist account of technology.

By defining users as makers, we can highlight the incomplete and embryonic nature of the design process and the limitations it exerts on the ways technologies are enacted through practice. For Krippendorff, the idea of the user is a myth that “blinds against unintended uses and users” (2006, p. 64) and neglects the fact that users:

… tend to be not only well-informed but also creative in their own terms; and far from the predictable and simple minded caricature that the concept of THE user makes them out to be (Krippendorff, 2006, p. 65).

To take this one step further, even the concept of ‘a’ user remains an oversimplification, since even a detailed description of an intended user and his/her practice can’t determine in-practice relations before they become realised in context. However, this isn’t to say that design approaches that actively seek to include the ‘user’ (such as participatory design) aren’t able to constructively inform design outcomes. This can be seen, for example, by replacing product-centric views with more inclusive perspectives that acknowledge human involvement. From a design process perspective, redefining users as makers accords not only with notions of co-creation but extends co-creation into the post-design period, which, in turn, establishes successful procedures and practices to provide feedback and inform successive cycles of design activity.
An attitude of making

Finally, it could be argued that the pervasive use of the term user within design discourses negates the influence of technologies upon “non-users” (Wyatt, 2003) and compounds normative ideas of use. Therefore, we could call for a revision of the term user. Such a revision would need to account for “much more complex relations between designers, technologies, and the ultimate uses of technologies in variable social and cultural situations” (Ihde, 2006, p. 124). The thesis presented here is that a discourse of making presents the idea of the user as troublesome by calling forward an active and transformative engagement that goes beyond the routine, the automatic, and the unresponsive.

Even though our technological engagements may not directly ‘make’ anything new (in the sense of a material substance or artefact), they are employed to mediate the making of things and effects. The spirit of making allows a view of these effects through the learning that accompanies bodily actions and skills. It presents our human attitude and reinforces the idea that we are not simply cogs in a machine. In the above example, my willingness to accept the digital stylus’ poorer performance as an inevitable consequence of its use may have resulted in my viewing it as a bad purchase; something I tried once and then relegated to the back of the drawer. An attitude of making demands a questioning of the current state of affairs. It recalls invention and a cunning or canniness to reveal what is absent in the material makeup. It requires curiosity, a rejection of the authority of industrial production and a willingness to approach things in different ways; ways that take us away from the consumer and towards more archaic occupations such as the artisan, the craftsman, the inventor and the mender.

References


Dansk abstract

Skabere, ikke brugere: Materialitetens tildannelse af teknologi gennem anvendelse

Selvom det er naturligt for os mennesker at skabe ting i vores omverden, omtaler vi ofte os selv som 'brugere' i forhold til vores samspil med teknologier. Med begrebet 'bruger' antyder vi, at teknologier er fuldendte artefakter, og at vores rolle som 'bruger' er begrænset til at lære at bruge en given genstand, som designeren havde tænkt det. Denne simplificerede opfattelse forhindrer enhver forståelse af, hvordan relationen mellem menneske og teknologi er uløseligt forbundet med momenter af materiel interaktion, og siger derudover meget lidt om det kreative aspekt ved sådanne interaktioner, som er nødvendigt for, at en teknologi kan bidrage succesfuldt til menneskets praksisser.

For bedre at kunne forstå hvordan vi tilgår teknologier som foranderlige og materielle objekter, vil jeg bl.a. kigge nærmere på adskillelsen mellem anvendelse og design kombineret med en måske aftagende forståelse af fremstillingsprocessen. Ved at fokusere på de transformative handlinger i vores hverdagsliv skabes der en åbenhed over for idéen om produktion og skabelse, som ikke findes inden for begrebet 'anvendelse'.
At betragte brugere af teknologi som værende i lige så høj grad skabere af teknologi ophæver adskillelsen mellem design og anvendelse og muliggør et analyticisk ståsted, som åbner for direkte engagement og transformation. Her er Gibsons begreb *affordance* (1979) helt centrale, idet det beskriver den gensidige relationalitet mellem menneske og teknologi, som udgør grundlaget for perception og handling. Ved at betragte *affordances* (de handlingspotentialer, som en genstand giver den sansende) som noget, der skabes, snarere end som noget, der er defineret af genstandens tiltænkte anvendelse, afsløres disse handlinger som noget, der ikke forudbestemmes i designprocessen, men som noget, der forstyrres, er foranderligt, flygtigt, impulsivt, uartikuleret, og som formes i situeret praksis. På den måde bliver det klart, at brugere aktivt omkonfigurerer teknologier, efterhånden som de bliver en integreret del af praksis, og det bliver tydeligt, i hvor høj grad denne skabelsesproces er en udforskning, ikke af færdige artefakter, men af muligheden for interaktion med materialiteten.

**Nøgleord:** skabere, genstande, artefakter, brugere, materialitet, teknologi, engagement, affordans.
Academic Strangeness as Uncomfortable Reflexivity and Academic Reflexivity as Uncomfortable Strangeness in Higher Education

By Tine Fristrup, Charlotte Tulinius & Bibi Hølge-Hazelton
And this is where my story starts. When I was a young researcher, doctoral student, in my first year I had a research professor who said to us, “Here’s the thing, if you cannot measure it, it does not exist.” And I thought he was just sweet-talking me. I was like, “Really?” and he was like, “Absolutely.” And so you have to understand that I have a bachelor’s in social work, a master’s in social work, and I was getting my PhD in social work, so my entire academic career was surrounded by people who kind of believed in the “life’s messy, love it.” And I’m more of the “life’s messy, clean it up, organize it and put it into a bento box.” (Laughter) And so to think that I had found my way, to found a career that takes me -- really, one of the big sayings in social work is, “Lean into the discomfort of the work.” And I’m like, knock discomfort upside the head and move it over and get all A’s. That was my mantra. So I was very excited about this. And so I thought, you know what; this is the career for me, because I am interested in some messy topics. But I want to be able to make them not messy. I want to understand them. I want to hack into these things I know are important and lay the code out for everyone to see. (Brown 2010)

Abstract

This paper builds on experiences gained in relation to a PhD-course, which dealt with researchers’ reflexivity and understanding of their own contribution to the research process by focusing on the vulnerability of the subjects involved: the subject researched and the researcher.

The paper briefly describes the strategies used to plan, deliver and evaluate the course, but the main emphasis is on the learning that took place as a consequence of working within this area and using these strategies in the educational setting.

Keywords: uncomfortable reflexivity, academic discomfort, academic strangeness, vulnerability and higher education.

Background

Having participated in and studied academic and peer supervision for many years, we had a growing concern for young empirical researchers studying vulnerable subjects without any kind of attention, supervision, or education to improve their skills in handling issues of vulnerability among their researched subjects as well as within themselves.
All three authors knew of young researchers, who were clearly uncomfortable when they prepared fieldwork or conducted interviews among, for instance, cancer patients, people with disabilities or traumatised refugees. We could not find any academic training courses that addressed the issue of how to develop good strategies to handle this vulnerability. Young researchers seemed predominantly to be left on their own with their insecurity and uncertainty, emotional responses that in our own experiences as researchers of vulnerability call for good strategies to develop some kind of reflexivity. Consequently, we decided to develop a five-day course, focusing on vulnerable research subjects, research participants and researchers.

All five teachers and facilitators knew each other, the three authors through research collaborations and because they had been part of the same academic supervision groups for a decade. One of our aims for the course as teachers, was to create ‘an academic zone of comfort’ at the course, something we had lacked as young researchers. We therefore insisted on continuous reflexivity regarding the uncomfortable in order to develop academic reflexivity among the students throughout the course. This however created an uncomfortable academic strangeness among several of the students, but also among ourselves as teachers and facilitators.

In writing this article we have been inspired by the work done by Ruth Behar (1996) on becoming a vulnerable observer, and by the work done by Pranee Liamputtong (2006) on researching the vulnerable. Both approaches involve a critique of conventional objectivity, and a search for alternatives to the distanced, impersonal mode of presentation, with the aim to produce texts with more passionate individual voices. In order to develop a reflexive framework for academic learning processes during qualitative research that involves vulnerable subjects, we follow Pillow’s notion of the relationship between qualitative research and reflexivity (2003, p. 179):

If traditional measures of validity are not useful to qualitative researchers, then what are we left with to discuss and determine whether our data and analyses are “accurate?” Thus, reflexivity becomes important to demonstrate one’s awareness of the research problematics and is often used to potentially validate and legitimize the research precisely by raising questions about the research process.

Our aim in this paper is to explore the processes and dynamics that unfolded during the course in order to develop an approach to reflexivity that will embrace the juxtapositions in the educational setting as a balance between comfortable and uncomfortable reflexivity. In this sense “resistance” becomes a productive condition in the educational juxtapositioning by unfolding the discomfort as uncomfortable reflexivity.
Based on our experiences before, during and after the course, this paper will present an analysis of the appearance of academic strangeness as uncomfortable reflexivity and academic reflexivity as uncomfortable strangeness in higher education.

The theoretical framework

Reflexivity has its limits with regard to leaving the unfamiliar to continue to be unfamiliar while creating uncomfortable reflexivity (Pillow 2003, p. 193):

Uncomfortable reflexivity, then, is not about better methods, or about whether we can represent people better but, as Visweswaran states, “whether we can be accountable to people’s struggles for self-representation and self-determination” (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 32) – including our own selves. This is not easy or comfortable work and thus should not be situated as such. The qualitative research arena would benefit from more “messy” examples, examples that may not always be successful, examples that do not seek a comfortable, transcendent end-point but leave us in the uncomfortable realities of doing engaged qualitative research.

Our approach to strangeness is an elaboration of Pillow’s (2003) concept of uncomfortable reflexivity. When the unfamiliar becomes uncomfortable in the academic setting, the participants become strangers in strange lands (McCarthy 1987). The unfamiliar is not yet structured as familiar, and it is this lack of order that produces strangeness. Even the so-called familiar may well be an illusion that is constructed culturally in order to make us feel more or less at home (Tuan 1986, p. 18):

Suppose we are in a comfortable study, reading a book on space travel, with our pet dog by our side, wagging his tail. What is strange in this scene? Is it the world of outer space described in the book, or is it, God forbid!, the mind of our canine friend, a presence that is as familiar to us as an old pair of slippers? When God wished to shake Job out of his complacency, he pointed to the Bands of Orion and the Pleiades, the crocodile and the behemoth. These phenomena are recognizably magnificent or bizarre; they lie well beyond the normal compass of human experience. But what I wish to suggest is the existence of the strange and the ungraspable right in the midst of our familiar world. The familiarity may well be an illusion which culture creates so that we can feel more or less at home. Culture schools us to recognize forms and patterns in our corner of the earth; the longer we stay at a place the firmer these images of order become; and they give us the reassuring feeling that we understand. But what is it that we understand?
The unfamiliar unfolds in the uncomfortable, and we would argue that this discomfort produces strangeness in academia and results in the unbearable messiness that Brown so desperately wanted to ‘clean up, organize and put into a bento box’ in order to ‘knock discomfort upside the head and move it over and get all A’s’. But if students are not allowed to do this in safe learning environments, at a PhD-course like the one we set up, they risk becoming strangers in the reflexivity-demanding land of academia. Acknowledging this risk, we consider it necessary to maintain an on-going reflexivity and constructive critique of our academic work, in teaching as well as researching. Our argument regarding strangeness is based on Pillow’s (2003) tragic approach to uncomfortable reflexivity because you cannot undo the discomfort – you can make it less uncomfortable but you cannot turn it upside down – you have to live with it as a premise in academic life. By doing so you can learn to live with the messy stuff as uncomfortable reflexivity:

Thus a reflexivity that pushes toward an unfamiliar, towards the uncomfortable, cannot be a simple story of subjects, subjectivity, and transcendence or self-indulgent tellings. A tracing of the problematics of reflexivity calls for a positioning of reflexivity not as clarity, honesty, or humility, but as practices of confounding disruptions – at times even a failure of our language and practices. However, a reflexivity of discomfort is not simply a call for practices of proliferation for proliferation’s sake for, as St. Pierre (1997) reminds us, “neither a deliberate obfuscation nor the desire for clarity and accessibility is innocent” (p. 186). In the same way, writing up our data as a failure is not to be read as a simplistic tale whose storyline concludes with a “success-in-failure” interpretation – a form of “sanctioned ignorance” (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 98). Nor should the opposite of failure be assumed in a “successful” interview. What I am advocating is the necessity of an ongoing critique of all of our research attempts, a recognition that none of our attempts can claim the innocence of success (even in failure) – with the realization that many of us do engage in research where there is real work to be done even in the face of the impossibility of such a task. This is a move to use reflexivity in a way that would continue to challenge the representations we come to while at the same time acknowledging the political need to represent and find meaning. (Pillow 2003, p. 192)

This paper illustrates how we as teachers handled uncomfortable reflexivity in the attempt to stay academically reflexive when dealing with our own academic strangeness as a way of taking responsibility for our struggles of self-(re)presentation in academia; and all this in the encounter with students’ struggle for their self-(re)presentation in academia.
We were on the same mission as the students in dealing with academic strangeness as uncomfortable reflexivity and academic reflexivity as uncomfortable strangeness, but not on common ground. This paper is therefore presented as a ‘messy text’, and includes “a tale of (dis)comfort” and our reflections at various stages in the process of planning, delivering and writing about the course. The paper shows our ‘failures’ rather than our success as teachers in a specific higher education course – not as a tale of confession (Van Maanen 1989), but as a tale of discomfort (Pillow 2003, p. 187). Failures are rarely reported, but when they are, the scale of recognition among other researchers is overwhelming (Tulinius & Hølge-Hazelton 2011).

Using the discomforting tale, we demonstrate how we all live academic lives with a reflexivity of discomfort that also enabled us to make a PhD-course as a setting for providing multiple answers (Pillow 2003, p. 192):

The above examples forefront the challenge of continuing to ask how reflexivity can act not as a tool of methodological power but a methodological tool interruptive of practices of gathering data as “truths” into existing “folds of the known” to practices which “interrogate the truthfulness of the tale and provide multiple answers” (Trinh, 1991, p. 12), and to what I suggest are unfamiliar – and likely uncomfortable tellings.

The construction of the uncomfortable tale

Inviting you, as the reader of this paper, into the educational setting with a tale of (dis)comfort is a way to elaborate Pillow’s approach to a methodology that provides multiple answers. The aim is to illustrate the reflections and strategies we used to plan, deliver and evaluate the course, and the consequences of these strategies.

In this tale, we show how the reflexivity of discomfort can develop when the professional and personal spheres overlap in learning and teaching. We argue that, by relating to yourself as well as engaging with other human beings, you also engage in the way the other person relates to him/herself. Using our own engagement with other researchers who are aware of vulnerability in the research process, we also questioned and observed the ways the students related to vulnerability in their learning processes. To understand this part of the learning process leads us to the exploration of the concept of reflexivity.

In medical anthropology, the concept of reflexivity has been described as “the researcher having a self-conscious account of the production of knowledge as it is being produced” (Baarts, Tulinius & Reventlow 2000).
This is in line with the distinction between reflexivity and reflection that Pillow unfolds in relation to her concept of uncomfortable reflexivity (2003, p. 177):

_I rely on Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater’s (1996) distinction between reflexivity and reflection: “to be reflective does not demand an ‘other,’ while to be reflexive demands both an other and some self-conscious awareness of the process of self-scrutiny” (p. 130)._

However, the focus on reflection and reflexivity in qualitative research might mislead the researcher into what Pillow (2003, p. 186) describes as “a modernist seduction: A release from our discomfort, freeing oneself, through transcendent clarity”:

_Prominent in much qualitative research is the idea that the researcher, through reflexivity, can transcend her own subjectivity and own cultural context in a way that releases her/him from the weight of (mis)representations. Self-reflexivity can perform a modernist seduction – promising release from your tension, voyeurism, ethnocentrism – a release from your discomfort with representation through a transcendent clarity. As Cixous (1994) notes, “Telling you is the most minor attempt at loyalty, it is the most elementary form of candor. But can I not suspect in confession a hope for absolution” (p. 97). Reflexivity as a form of “confession” and “absolution” situates it firmly within the Enlightenment ideals of “truth and understanding” which require “the transcendence of one’s web of situated positionality” – to “free oneself” (Ilter, 1994, p. 63)._

Encountering immense resistance from some of the students, were we persuaded or tempted to attempt “a modernist seduction”, which in fact gave the students something to react against? As teachers we asked the students to relate to the sometimes bodily sensed discomfort of having to explore your own vulnerability as a researcher. We even asked them to make their vulnerability explicit during the course, in all its unbearable expressions and demands of something you have to learn to live with as irresolvable. The reflexivity of discomfort is to be understood as a knowledge production that is never beyond the researcher’s own interpretation: it is always formed by the researcher’s own contribution to the knowledge production. We as teachers held the students to the need for a painful awareness that you can never represent “the other’s perspective” as a pure concentrate, and we held them to the responsibility that followed this insight. It is almost unbearable, and indeed understandable that this side of a researcher’s life produces resistance, until it has been accepted as a necessary premise for conducting research (Hølge-Hazelton 2011; Tulinius & Hølge-Hazelton 2011).
The PhD-course included a teaching session with peer supervision. This was meant as a comfort zone in the learning environment, where the students could work with their discomfort. Peer supervision is intended to provide such an opportunity, and it acknowledges the fact that handling academic discomfort is a never-ending process (Tulinius & Hølge-Hazelton 2010).

Some of the students had never thought about the discomfort in their own comfort zone of research, and bringing them into the discomfort zone naturally led to resistance. Because we as the teachers brought this discomfort into the educational setting, it was lined up as a conflict between “them” and “us”, a double-bound conflict of comfort for us as teachers; in the discomfort of our work and to the discomfort for them as learners of our ‘comfort in discomfort’. In fact, only one of the students gave us permission to use her learning diary for evaluation and the publication of our experiences. We have called her “Sarah”. With the course framed as a (dis)comfort zone, and based on the reflections from her daily learning diaries and our reflexive thoughts expressed as epilogues, we were able to produce this ‘messy text’ (Marcus 1998) as a tale of (dis)comfort.

A tale of (dis)comfort
Sarah was one of the PhD-students who participated in the course. Even before the course started, she introduced herself as potentially different from the other PhD-students in attendance. She had conducted research projects before, but she was in doubt whether she would be welcomed to the course with her current quantitative study. When the participants introduced themselves on the first day of the course, she repeated this position of being different. She was one of the few participants to consistently keep a reflective learning diary (as we encouraged them to do), and at the end of the course she gave us permission to use it for publications like this.

The tale is told in three parts, reflecting different perspectives and positions taken:

- Part one: The omniscient narrator
- Part two: Sarah as the narrator
- Part three: The teachers’ omniscient narrator

Parts one and two were written together by Sarah as one text. It is presented in the same order as the text Sarah submitted as her learning diary after day four, February 2013, and divided into two parts only to underline the change of position that Sarah takes approximately half way through her reflections, going from talking about herself in the third person to doing so in the first person. The text
was written in Danish, so we have translated it into English, taking great care to translate the meanings of the words she chose as accurately as possible.

Part three consists of two epilogues produced by the first two authors in September 2013 and a post-epilogue by all the authors written in December 2013, to document our reflections and positions taken as the work with this paper progressed. Comments on these epilogues also illustrate how the researchers’ part of the tale developed with the theoretical interpretation and the many hours of reflective discussions we have had to produce for this paper as an example of ‘academic strangeness as uncomfortable reflexivity’ and ‘academic reflexivity as uncomfortable strangeness in higher education’.

Part one: Sarah as the omniscient narrator

Day 4, February 2013, after day four of the course

Once upon a time, there were three energetic and creative researchers, who decided to do a PhD-course in which they would teach new researchers about the elements of vulnerability that you can meet in life as a researcher. The three researchers had known each other for several years, and together they had developed thoughts and ideas that had given them a very special common understanding of life as a researcher and the derived challenges. In their careers, the three researchers had missed fora that “dared” to articulate and debate vulnerability in research. They looked forward enormously to introducing the new researchers to all the thoughts, ideas and reflections that they had developed over the years. In the weeks leading up to the course they had been busy planning how the course should be structured. How could they best convey their important messages?

Finally, the day came when the course began. The three researchers/teachers arrived early to make sure that everything was ready for the 9 o’clock start. The first day of the course went well; the young researchers were positive and tried to empathise with the exercises that they were introduced to. There was a good atmosphere in the room and a good chemistry between students and teachers.

Already during the second day of the course the teachers sensed that some of the participants had taken a somewhat negative stance. As the energetic and committed teachers that they were, they therefore started the third day of the course with a small “evaluation” of how the young researchers had experienced the first days of training. This evaluation proved to be a pivotal event in the course. Following the evaluation, the three teachers were baffled and surprised by a strange feeling in their bodies. It turned out that several of the young researchers did not feel that the course was about what they expected: They could not see that the course was about vulnerability, and they felt that the methods that were used in the course had crossed the line and that they were strange. The young researchers said that they wanted more follow-up on the exercises and lectures, and that they would
like the presentations to be explained or interpreted. Some of the young researchers even felt that the course was not a “real” course, but rather a process of data collection which was primarily for the benefit of the teachers themselves. The fierce reactions surprised the teachers, who felt abused and misunderstood. They found it hard to understand the criticism. Why could the young researchers not see that the course was about vulnerability? What had their expectations regarding the course content been? And were they not accustomed, as academics, to interpreting and applying the lessons they were presented with?

During the following days, the three teachers tried to make explicit how the teaching elements could be applied to and understood in relation to vulnerability. They were still energetic and eager to convey their messages, but they could not help being affected by the somewhat negative attitude and the lack of engagement among the young researchers. And as the days went by, the teachers became increasingly disappointed, frustrated and upset that the young researchers did not understand the course’s importance, timeliness and general usefulness.

Part two: Sarah as the narrator

Sarah was a PhD-student at a hospital, and was working with quantitative research at the time of the course. She had previously worked with qualitative research – mostly among the homeless and with young people at risk. She missed qualitative research, and often thought back on some of the challenges she had faced in her encounters with vulnerable groups in the first years after she had graduated from university. She had often felt powerless when faced with these issues, and she missed being able to discuss those issues with someone competent. It was therefore a very pleasant surprise when Sarah, one boring Monday morning, discovered that the university offered a course that was about qualitative research on vulnerable groups. In the course description, there was a case involving a researcher interviewing a woman who had been diagnosed with cancer, and who broke down in tears during the interview. The case described how the researcher subsequently felt like a failure and lost the motivation to continue to interview the woman. Sarah hurried to sign up for the course, convinced that she would learn how to conduct interviews with vulnerable individuals as well as how to handle the (sometimes strange) data resulting from interviews with vulnerable groups, e.g. schizophrenic patients.

The day came when the course started, and it started really well. The teachers seemed energetic and hugely committed, and this had a knock-on effect on Sarah. During the first day of the course, the participants were presented with the case of the woman suffering from cancer – the case that Sarah had read about in the course description. The participants were asked in groups of three to find elements of vulnerability in this case – vulnerability in relation to both the researcher and the woman suffering from cancer. The participants were also asked to figure out how they would communicate their group
work to the other participants – a task that Sarah did not understand the meaning of until the third day of the course. From Sarah’s point of view, it was about how to TELL the other participants what they had discussed in the group – in other words, a question of producing a few key words for an outline. The groups all did an oral presentation of the vulnerable elements that they could see in the case, and Sarah noted that she was not the only one who was surprised that there was talk about the vulnerability of the researcher. Sarah had not previously thought of the discomfort she had experienced in interview situations with vulnerable groups as her own vulnerability.

During the second day of the course, Sarah became increasingly confused. The teachers were so dedicated, creative and skilled in their field, and the participants were presented with one exciting and creative presentation after another, but Sarah could not find the elements of the course that she had expected. When would they get to the core of the question? When would she be presented with the methods and tools that she was so keen to learn about?

The third training day started very uncomfortably! It turned out that almost all the participants had the same thoughts as Sarah: What was the relation between the course content and vulnerability? When will we arrive to what it is really all about? There was also one girl who was very upset that the participants were being video filmed. She felt that she was part of a process of data collection. This thought had not occurred to Sarah! Sarah could see that the criticism obviously surprised the teachers, who went into something resembling defence mode, but at the same time they were open and explained how the teaching elements represented vulnerability – and that vulnerability demanded that you worked with yourself as a scientist: you had to have an awareness about yourself, your feelings and reactions. Sarah found the discussion genuinely unpleasant. It felt difficult to take part in the critique of the teachers, because they wanted this course so much! At the same time the accumulated frustration of the participants just had to be released.

Sarah quickly noticed that the discussion resulted in two types of reactions among the participants. While approximately half of the participants chose to “accept” that the course included other elements than what they had initially expected, the other half of the participants were so frustrated and disappointed that they could not motivate themselves to attend the rest of the course with any enthusiasm at all. This trend became clearer and clearer as the days went by, and slowly resulted in frustration and irritation among the teachers. The group of students who chose to participate positively in the course agreed that the course offered many exciting, creative and inspiring approaches that could be used in their future research. However, the increasingly negative atmosphere on the course meant that Sarah found it increasingly unpleasant to be there. On the fourth day, she went home from the course with a very strange feeling in her body: a feeling that a group of dedicated teachers and a group of aspiring young scientists had gotten each other completely wrong. That what was so obvious and self-evident in one group simply did not
make sense in another. That night she asked herself how so much positive energy and so many aspiring intentions could end up in negativity and frustration...

Part three: The teachers’ omniscient narrator

EPILOGUE written by two of the teachers, the first and second author, September 2013

After the teachers had read Sarah’s story they were in no doubt that they had to talk with the young researchers about the resistance they had experienced as teachers. They began the last day of the course with a final evaluation in which they described resistance in a learning perspective. They revealed the vulnerability they had felt, but also said that they saw it as part of the resistance that often occurs when learning is about something that is difficult to relate to. The teachers asked the students to tell them what they could have done better as teachers at each step of the learning ladder: motivation, methods, environment, content, learning and teaching styles, assessments and evaluation.

The rest of the last day of the course had just as nice an atmosphere as they had experienced on the first day. Sarah and all the other young researchers talked together and with the teachers, and in the final evaluation Sarah said that she had never been on a course before on which complete strangers had turned into friends after only one week. She was just as sorry to say goodbye to them now as she had been when leaving her beloved boarding school. It was annoying that they had spent so much time and energy being frustrated; just think how much they could have talked about instead.

POST-EPILOGUE written by three of the teachers, all the authors, December 2013

It would not be honest of us (with regard to ourselves and our readers) if we failed to add another epilogue, or a “post-epilogue”.

Our reflections have been many: varying from one researcher/author to the other, and to some extent even disagreeing in our different kinds of reflexivity. Through questions and suggestions we can communicate some of our doubts, the questions arising, the more or less heavy-hearted perceptions that landed on our shoulders when developing this paper. But the reflexive development will have to continue beyond this paper, not just between us, but also in relation to you as a reader.

Ten months after the course, we learned that Sarah was no longer a PhD-student. After she had taken the course she started feeling like an academic stranger to her supervisor, or perhaps the supervisor had become a land of strangeness for Sarah. At first she found another supervisor, but the academic strangeness she had sensed on the PhD-course
had become too uncomfortable. Not manageable: an uncomfortable strangeness due to the academic reflexivity she was forced to perform in order to stay in academia.

Sarah’s reflexivity and ability to analyse different zones of (dis)comfort and strangeness during the course was eminent. So how did she end up with such a strong sense of strangeness that she left the world of academia altogether?

Was she faced with an overwhelming academic zone of discomfort, and was she not experienced enough to live comfortably with the discomfort? Was she not supported by anyone after the course to continue her work, and was that why she gave up her position as a PhD-student? Did Sarah expect too much from her supervisors? Were the supervisors ‘guarding the tower’, were they unable to ‘dive into’ Sarah’s discomfort? (For an explanation of these two terms, see below.)

An uncomfortable, but perhaps not so strange, feeling has crept in. As researchers in general and as teachers of this specific PhD-course, we have a responsibility to supply our learners with better tools to survive and grow as researchers within their uncomfortable academic reflexivity, to help them learn to live with the inescapable production of academic strangeness and how to grow into it and within it.

The entire course focused on tools to manage reflexivity in relation to vulnerability. However, we have to ask ourselves if we were indirectly to blame for Sarah’s decision. And then again, life as an academic can be extremely competitive, even paranoid (Bloch 2012). From our own experiences, and, as described by others, academia can be a culture of harassment, bullying and negative relationships.

Sarah positioned herself as “possibly different” from the beginning, and we noticed that she was a very reflective student from the first day. Is it an exaggeration to say that her decision to leave academia was our responsibility? Did her participation in the course support her decision? Did it help to set her free from a world that she did not regard as hers?

As senior researchers, is it our task to get the students through their degree programme at any price? Some students only “survive” the work without any reflection on the conditions of academia. From this platform they often decide to leave. If reflexivity as a research tool is taught but not practised outside the specific course setting, could a course like ours result in awareness of uncomfortable reflexivity, or even destructive strangeness with regard to the part of academia that constitutes the praxis of the students’ projects and the academic environments, including their relations with supervisors?
Uncomfortable reflexivity between ‘guarding the tower’ and ‘diving in’

Yi-Fu Tuan (1986) describes outsiders as lower orders. For us the developing of academic strangeness was perceived and directed towards us as outsiders, clearly marking us out as ‘lower-order teachers’. The outsider/lower-order perception challenged our attempt to document the development and (re)actions of teachers and learners. This gave us the feeling of being perceived as academic outcasts by some of the students. In order to deal with this positioning, we turned the situation into a theoretical problem, as Neuleib does in an article from 1992 entitled “The friendly stranger”. In other words, we tried to make the discomfort less uncomfortable by transforming the academic strangeness that we felt during the course into a friendlier strangeness, and attempted to become the friendly academic strangers that turned the situation into a theoretical problem (Neuleib 1992, p. 233):

One day an African-American student with an ACT English score of eight looked at me patiently after I had explained some concept to him for the fifth or sixth time. He left my office and returned with a button showing an exhausted looking lion lying on a branch. The caption read “hang in there.” It was my first psychological and intellectual contact with an “other,” my first realization that I had to change my perspective, my values, and my teaching agenda. The button is still in the middle of my office bulletin board. But change did not come quickly. History repeated itself as I soon began teaching advanced undergraduate classes in tutoring and graduate courses in composition theory and pedagogy, so the “others” became a theoretical problem rather than a practical one.

During the course we were trying to “hang on” and “hang in”, confronted with the emerging discomfort in what we thought was a comfort zone. According to Neuleib (1992), we faced the academic strangeness by turning the practical problems into theoretical problems in order to ‘guard the academic tower’ through the construction of a theoretically framed educational problem. According to Shaughnessy (1976), this way of dealing with ‘academic strangeness’ is just one out of four ways to approach the relation between the teacher and the student. At the end of the course, we were guarding the academic tower on the basis of our sense of discomfort in what we thought was a comfort zone, and we did not just dive into our discomfort to confront ourselves with the students’ discomfort in the educational setting. It has only been possible to dive into our discomfort in this analytical setting by drawing on the concept of uncomfortable reflexivity as presented by Pillow (2003).
Shaughnessy (1976, pp. 235-238) describes a developmental scale with four stages:

Thus I have chosen to name the first stage of my developmental scale GUARDING THE TOWER, because during this stage the teacher is in one way or another concentrating on protecting the academy (including himself) from the outsiders, those who do not seem to belong in the community of learners. The grounds for exclusion are various. (p. 235)

Examined at a closer range, the class now appears to have at least some members in it who might, with hard work, eventually “catch up.” And it is the intent of reaching these students that moves the teacher into the second stage of development which I will name CONVERTING THE NATIVES. As the image suggests, the teacher has now admitted at least some to the community of the educable. These learners are perceived, however, as empty vessels, ready to be filled with new knowledge. Learning is thought of not so much as a constant and often troubling reformulation of the world so as to encompass new knowledge, but as a steady flow of truth into a void. (p. 235)

The insight leads our teacher to the third stage of his development, which I will name SOUNDING THE DEPTHS, for he turns now to the careful observation not only of his students and their writing but of himself as writer and teacher, seeking a deeper understanding of the behavior called writing and of the special difficulties his students have in mastering the skill. (p. 236)

But I have created a fourth stage in my developmental scheme, which I am calling DIVING IN in order to suggest that the teacher who has come this far must now make a decision that demands professional courage – the decision to remediate himself, to become a student of new disciplines and of his students themselves in order to perceive both their difficulties and their incipient excellence. “Always assume,” wrote Leo Strauss to the teacher, “that there is one silent student in your class who is by far superior to you in head and in heart.” This assumption, as I have been trying to suggest, does not come easily or naturally when the teacher is a college teacher and the young men and women in his class are labeled remedial. But as we come to know these students better, we begin to see that the greatest barrier to our work with them is our ignorance of them and of the very subject we have contracted to teach. (p. 238)

Guarding the academic tower: Constructing a theoretical problem

According to Shaughnessy (1976), the first stage of the educational developmental scale is where the teacher concentrates on protecting the academy (including herself) from outsiders: those who do not seem to belong in the community of learners. Again: The grounds for exclusion are varied. In the educational setting it
seems odd that we as teachers protect ourselves from the students – and consider them to be ‘outsiders’ and not belonging to the community of learners. They are, after all, students, and should be included in the academic community, which is what we try to do in the framing of the theoretical problem as a learning problem. But what seems to be an inclusive act becomes an exclusive act, or you might say that the inclusion excludes and the exclusion includes – as a double act in the first stage of the developmental scale (guarding the academic tower).

In the last part of the paper, we will present how the guarding process was perceived by us before and during the course. These perceptions form the basis of this paper’s concept of ‘uncomfortable reflexivity’, which brought us to the fourth stage of the developmental scale. Diving in – to the discomfort of both the teachers (ourselves) and the students – calls for professional courage (Shaughnessy 1976). This paper is our attempt to demonstrate such a professional courage by letting you into our uncomfortable reflexivity about how and why we constructed a theoretical problem as a way to guard our academic towers.

The advert for the five-day course “Researching vulnerable subjects in qualitative research” can be seen in figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researching vulnerable subjects in qualitative research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ann</strong> is studying perceptions of health among women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer. Her first encounter is with <strong>Vivian</strong>, a recently diagnosed woman of her own age. When <strong>Ann</strong> asks the first question on her interview guide Vivian starts to cry, and she continues crying throughout the entire interview, making Ann more and more uncomfortable. After the interview Ann feels a total failure as a researcher and is uncertain about how she will handle her next interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with interviews and observations in health care and allied studies requires the consideration and documentation of the pre-understanding and subjectivity of the researcher involved. In order to handle this professionally, the researcher needs to work with these aspects throughout the research process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This course will enable students to work with research subjectivity and data production. Different theories of empirical research practice will be presented, and the students will have the opportunity to work with a range of concrete tools in workshops where the theoretical and concrete tools will be demonstrated and practised. After the course the students will be familiar with models of feedback and supervision including processes of individual and team reflection with a view to becoming a professional researcher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish or English – depending on the participants. If English-speaking students are present, the course will be held in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five days during spring 2013. Lectures, group work, practical exercises, student preparation, feedback and evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dates:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 February to 8 February 2013, all days at 09.00 to 16.00.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: (From the 2012/13 catalogue of optional courses for PhD students at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark)

In the description of the course, it was emphasised that participants were expected to work collaboratively and in an enthusiastic manner. The course was evaluated on a daily basis, adjusted on the basis of the teachers’/facilitators’ experiences,
and on the reflective learning diaries that the students were encouraged to submit at the end of each day. It also gave the students a place to vent their frustrations directly to us. Thirteen students attended the course.

The second and third authors organized and were responsible for the course. However, the development of sessions, themes and supporting material was done collectively, and drew on the specific areas of expertise of all five teachers involved. All the teachers met twice: first to discuss possible themes, and again to develop the learning objectives for each of the themes, deciding on the specific teaching strategies, timing and connections with other parts of the course. Abstracts for all the teaching sessions were described in a worksheet, which became the manual for the delivery of the course. All five teachers were invited to participate on all days to inspire and ensure coherence between the elements of the course. Daily catch-up meetings between teachers were allowed for in the schedule.

To tailor the programme, before the course started, students were asked to send in a short description of their studies, their perceived main challenges, and a bit about themselves. Throughout the course, all the students were encouraged to email us a reflective diary, describing their main gain of the day, and other reflections.

The room for teaching was carefully selected to enable the students to gradually take over the room with posters, drawings, poetry and other representations of their reflections and work produced during the course. Three of the five teachers (the three authors of this paper) were present every day of the course.

The course had been advertised once six months before as “Becoming a professional researcher”. Less than five researchers signed up, so we had to cancel. We then changed the title from the overall aim to a more content-specific title ("Researching vulnerable subjects in qualitative studies"), and the format from a five-day residential course to a course conducted in the daytime only: This worked, in that thirteen people signed up.

During the course, however, the main impression from the teachers’ perspective was that there was immense resistance from the students from the end of day one. When the programme and course content were adjusted, this resistance eased.

The resistance from the students varied:

- Some of the students felt that they were being involved in a research process, and that this resembled some kind of therapy in which they had not agreed to participate.
• When they were told that we wanted to use the course for an educational purpose, including their feedback and learning diaries as documentation, some students felt that this constituted “teachers doing research on their students to support their own careers”. Some of the students even referred to an animal experiment and felt they were being used as guinea pigs. On day two some of the students demanded the use of a consent form, including the right NOT to sign it.

• The learning diaries that were intended to help the students’ reflexivity training and our adjustments and evaluation of the course were only used on a daily basis by half of the students. Only one of the students allowed us to use her reflections for publications like this.

• The encouragement of self-directed learning was re-framed by some of the students as poor teaching craftsmanship. They requested a more rigorous theoretical platform; and their questions even became personal, referring to our gender, age and (assumed lack of) success in our professional lives.

Every day, the teachers discussed possible and necessary changes. In relation to data gathering, we discussed whether to produce a consent form, but decided instead to stop the video data collection of the students’ conversations, and only video record the teachers’ and facilitators’ presentations to help our memory with a view to making possible changes in future courses and publications like this.

It was emotionally challenging for the teachers as well as for some of the students. From a teachers’ perspective we believe that we only got to the point of resolution at the end of the course for most of the students due to our constant focus on education. Our anchor was a continuous awareness and use of pedagogics based on theories and practices used in adult learning and self-directed learning. Allowing an open debate about the sensations and conclusions from ourselves as well as from the learning diaries, we presented our own vulnerability to the students. This strategy also required students to assume responsibility in the engagement of learning in the particular educational setting.

In medical education, the concepts of comfort and discomfort very often refer to the work of Vygotsky (1978), particularly his description of “the zone of proximal development”. He describes this educational work as steps into the unknown and onto uncertain grounds where the learner needs to go. This means taking steps to develop beyond already achieved skills and knowledge (Vygotsky 1978). We shared this theory with the students at the beginning of the course to encourage them to engage in active learning beyond the comfortable.
As often happens in higher education, most of the students constantly called for spoon-feeding from a teacher/expert, tick-box knowledge and “true facts” they could gain as reproducible knowledge. We were aware of this pull away from reflective learning, away from the students’ own creative production of knowledge, and challenged this need for comfort on a daily basis. Using the pedagogical strategy of starting at a less challenging level, going with the learner for some of the way, we framed some of the presentations within models, or theoretical frameworks, e.g. “the VCR model” (Bryne 2009) to describe reflexivity in relation to analysis and awareness of multiple voices in the data material, or we used “the ladder of learning” (see figure 2) to frame the challenges we were experiencing in the learning environment of the educational setting.

The learning that took place in the educational setting during this course could be theorised as fluctuating, but emotionally rough waves of orientation, confusion, anger/anxiety, (re-)action, negotiation, and back to (re-)orientation, sometimes leading to circles of retention at unchanged levels of learning, but also sometimes leading to acceptance and new levels of learning and understanding. This was not just the case for the students, but also for us as teachers in this turbulent sea of educational reflexivity. This theoretical approach to the developing learning processes of the PhD-course is graphically described in figure 3.

Figure 2: (“The ladder of learning”, with permission from Arthur Hibble)
Diving into the uncomfortable reflexivity

As we wrote this paper, we became able to recognize and elaborate actions and mechanisms not known to us before. In order to perform the uncomfortable reflexivity, we had to become “students” ourselves (to dive in), and we had to step down from the academic hierarchy (guarding the academic tower) and partly dissolve our authority, our superiority as teachers who knew better than the students (confronting our ignorance of them (Shaughnessy 1976)).

At the end of the course, we had to deal with the paradox that what we thought was an academic comfort zone was indeed an academic zone of discomfort for many of the students. By approaching the discomfort as uncomfortable reflexivity, we have managed to make the discomfort tolerable to live with and be seen by students, as more friendly academic strangers: Ready to confront our guarding of the academic tower in order to dive into the self-evident modes of ignorance in academia.

Academic strangeness as uncomfortable reflexivity and academic reflexivity as uncomfortable strangeness in higher education seem to be two sides of the coin named ‘academia’. In this paper, we have demonstrated that this calls for several ways of living with a reflexivity of discomfort (Pillow, 2003, p. 192). Were
we to plan a new PhD-course on “Researching vulnerable subjects in qualitative research” to support professionalism in research, we would include our new understanding of generic challenges in engaging ourselves and the next generation of researchers in uncomfortable reflexivity.

When we delivered the reported course, we also attempted to interest the students in arrangement of regular peer supervision, peer controlled safe zones in which your peers support you to learn and grow through reflections on uncertainty, uncomfortable situations and feelings, feelings of strangeness and feelings of inadequacy. In a future course we would make this the educational ethos: not to produce another theoretical construct, but to invite the students into the setting of theorising the inevitable uncertainty of research and practice in peer supervision (Sommers & Launer 2014). This ethos would give the students insight into the possibility of making uncomfortable reflexivity a unique learning setting for higher education. The possibilities, challenges and implications of this will be published elsewhere.

References


http://www.personneltoday.com/hr/stress-in-the-world-of-academia/
Dansk abstract

Akademisk fremmedhed som ubehagelig refleksivitet samt akademisk refleksivitet som ubehagelig fremmedhed i forskeruddannelsen

Som forskere tager vi i artiklen afsæt i underviseres og studerendes erfaringer i tilknytning til et gennemført ph.d.-kursus i foråret 2013 for forskere inden for det sundhedsvidenskabelige felt. Refleksiviteten i og omkring de studerendes eget bidrag til forskningsprocessen diskuteres i artiklen som forholdet mellem refleksion og refleksivitet og udholder en fokusering på sårbarhed imellem den udforskede og forskeren som “uncomfortable reflexivity”.

Artiklen beskriver kort de strategier, der anvendes til at planlægge, udføre og evaluere ph.d.-kurset, men hovedvægten ligger igennem hele artiklen på den læring, der finder sted som en konsekvens af at arbejde inden for dette område og bruge de beskrevne strategier i undervisningen.

Pointen i artiklen er, at arbejdet med den ubehagelige refleksivitet producerer en akademisk fremmedhed, man hele tiden må arbejde på at gøre levelig ved at acceptere det tragiske vilkår: at fremmedheden er et grundvilkår i det akademiske arbejde, der producerer en “academic zone of discomfort”, hvor arbejdet på at gøre det ukendte mindre ukendt og det ubehagelige mindre ubehageligt løbende udløser sig.

Nøgleord: ubehagelig refleksivitet, akademisk ubehag, akademisk fremmedhed, sårbarhed og forskeruddannelse.
The Stranger in Yourself
- A Minor Distraction

By Lars-Henrik Schmidt

Abstract

Many academic disciplines turn ‘the other’ into a subject, whereby the other becomes conceptualised as a theoretical object. The conceptualisation is interdisciplinary, and the attempt therefore influenced by the particular disciplines that are brought into play, and by the theoretical beacons in the different fields. Popular theoretical approaches gang up, and the topic appears to be threatened by implosion when the second person perspective (philosophy) dissolves into a first person perspective (ideology) or a third person perspective (science). The ensuing textual bricolage excludes the other by being specific concerning the alienating difference. In this article, the author argues that the concept of ‘the other’ (the object) should be replaced by the category ‘the stranger’ – another conceptual tool – in order to preserve an ethical standpoint. The article comprises a narrative of animosity and (class) warfare.

Keywords: social-analytic studies, self-estrangement, ambivalence, the state of war, alienation, homeliness, the social condition.
The American icon Billy Joel completes the lyrics of his song ‘The Stranger’ by saying:

You’ll give in to your desire
When the stranger comes along.¹

A proverb says that ‘A stranger is a friend you haven’t met’.² Most of the people you meet look quite unremarkable and do not disturb your peace of mind; many of them, in due course, bring joy and good company. We would not consider them strangers if they were not presented to us from a distance or if, on closer examination, we did not discover a certain strangeness about them that makes us not so sure. Indifference towards strangers is your own indifference since their differences are not insignificant and your conduct vis-à-vis their strangeness is significant. However, it is difficult to overlook that ‘stranger’ rhymes with
‘danger’. The excitement seems ambiguous. How come a visit tends to evoke hostility rather than hospitality? Strangeness is not a quality belonging to the unknown visitor: it is the situation that determines the conditions. Why does the strangeness of the stranger become a problem?

The proposed thesis to be explored in what follows: the strangeness of the stranger is ‘a state of mind’ – i.e. a disposition. Three paths will be outlined: (1) the path that leads to Freud’s ambivalent compulsion; (2) the path that runs through the classical reflection of ‘the state of war’; and (3) the path that scales the peak of alienation. The guide on this tour de force is the invitation to a social-analytic show.

I: Freud’s disposition

One of the questions that Sigmund Freud had to give up on still haunts us. It is a simple question that, for him, was related to the horrors of the Great War: the evident breakdown of the civilised world (‘Kulturgemeinschaft’, ‘Kulturgeschichte’). The horrors of the war and the total anonymity of the sheer number of victims in the trenches became suppressed between the wars, but the repressed later returned from social oblivion. The question presented itself anew for the subsequent generation which witnessed the faceless numbers of the concentration camps. The hopes of the children of the next war were expressed in the slogans of peace, love and understanding, and they may have found a tiny new hope in the breakdown of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. That hope was drowned in tears by the Washington Vietnam memorial, hidden behind the fences of Guantanamo that stripped human bodies of individual rights, obscured by the shipwrecked fugitives of Lampedusa who were met with hostility and ‘Keep out’, ‘No trespassing’ signs. It seems that social suppression shares a destiny with individual repression: it returns. It returns from oblivion indicating that nothing is forgotten.

If, as has been claimed, it became problematic to write poetry after Auschwitz, it is less pompous and not untrue to claim that, since Auschwitz, the contingency of survival has become difficult to face. For the generation that survived the Second World War against all the odds, the mere contingency of randomness - that you survived while the next person did not - might turn you into a stranger to the world. Nonetheless a new generation trusted the hope in ‘peace, love and understanding’ – for a while believing that enthusiasm could teach indifference a lesson; trusting that the world was new and that some things could never happen again; and certain that some behaviours had been left behind. That hope has expired. Mourners at more recent events must express the fear that there can be
no trust, no confidence after Rwanda, after Kosovo: it is tragic. It feels uncanny when a familiar face suddenly reveals strange features: it undermines the value of the mask. In the disclosure of secrets, certainty is sacrificed. Therefore different questions must be asked: is it not just lack of expectation speaking, rather than disillusion, so that you are in for a surprise? How come ‘fremd’ (strange) signifies ‘feindlich’ (hostile)? Why do stranger and enemy melt into one conception? These were the questions Freud faced when he realised that the civilising influence of ‘Kultur’ was an illusion and that the ‘Bildung’ of culture had to deal with the tragedy of ‘Das Unbehagen in der Kultur’ (which the English translated as ‘Civilisation and its Discontents’). All the efforts of the Enlightenment – regardless of the forms they have taken in the many cultural settings in the history of mankind – cannot but hold the distance for now; a distraction from the inevitable outcome against which they have so valiantly struggled. Destruction reveals to us the death drive. To quote Schopenhauer’s deadly serious remark, ‘Death is suspended in every breath you take’. What this rather tragic outlook presents us with is a perspective that situates our concerns with the whereabouts of the stranger and his strangeness as different from the basic anthropological condition of relation to the stranger: the strangeness.

We cannot close our eyes to the fact that this belongs to a much graver problématique than the mere appearance of someone looking ‘outlandish’. Someone beside us, someone surprisingly like us and yet (again) unusual. He must have his home elsewhere; he must have his ease and peace somewhere else. We have to recognise that we have lost trust, and maybe recognise that our confidence in others is shaken and our own self-confidence undermined because we cannot even trust ourselves. Philosophy may be shaken by the realisation that we cannot reach ourselves by the path of self-consciousness, but it is even more disturbed if we cannot trust ourselves; if social-analytic studies whispers in our ear that the suppressed returns, just as psychoanalytic studies demonstrated the return of ‘the repressed’ and argued that major efforts were called for to stop it talking back.

It is a recurring theme that it is irrational to equate strangeness with danger; the habitus represents behaviour as uncivilised or taste as bad although, if rationality is not idolised per se, then there is nothing wrong in irrationality per se. We distinguish, we even try to found distinctions in simple differences that in themselves are dubious and ambivalent, but distinctions draw on other distinctions, and the family of distinctions comprises a genealogy. We classify differences and establish categories that suppress ambiguity, and we idealise a clear identity by determination. It is not just that pain is different from happiness: if you feel pain – if you suffer – you are not happy, and if you are not happy, you must feel some sort of pain. The opposite of feeling pain is happiness. Now we know it is
good to be happy, and therefore it must be bad to feel pain; it does one wrong. The problem is certainty and (de)termination. For the knights of the Aristotelian heritage ambivalence cannot be an answer, but for mankind balance has been a worthy goal. Yet the question remains: is perfect balance still a sort of identity? You only notice balance when it is lost; you may claim that the native language game is about preferences. Balances are weighed, distinctions make differentiations; on the other hand, distinctions will not be found prior to difference, and therefore you end up weighing different aspects of the subject matter. Assumptions are made nonetheless. Prerequisites are required to state a position. Nothing is insignificant. It means ‘Unergründlichkeit’ (contingency, perhaps) rather than ‘Unbegründlichkeit’. It is the sense of reasoning that provides reasons (grounds, premises). Justification implies abductive inference, but we must renounce and reserve a category called ‘articulation’ for the discursive invitation. Logically dubious as it may be, this category is an absolute necessity. The most elementary is the preference; it is as inevitable as it is ‘Unergründlich’. The action is the disturbance articulated in the effects – and presumed ‘Nachträglich’.

Now what is wrong with pain? We are witnessing a consequence of a disturbance to someone, to a supposed somewhat recognising it is not one: A body out of order, as in not indifferent, and not indifferent in acknowledging that somebody is indifferent and thereby feels a difference, or simply observes a preference. Following such a line of reasoning, there is nothing phobic in the psychopathological sense about xenophobic attitudes. They are a normal sense of situation; an awareness called into attention. The strangeness of a stranger is not strange to me, but I witness it as a stranger. If the stranger makes me feel uneasy, it is not because necessity provokes an irrational emotion, but because I am uncertain how to react. If the stranger holds a gun to my head, it might be very rational to interpret his intentions as hostile and fear his actions accordingly. If I project his intentions as something I can relate to, they become a part of me; if I cannot project intentions like mine, the fear dissolves my ego into anxiety (Angst) – towards the stranger, a spider, wide open spaces, dust, closed rooms, open rooms or whatever. One might call this situation phobic because it is not identifiable, just as with contingency and indifference. There is no reason for it; it is not a subject. It is the return of the suppressed that is harmful to my egocentrism. And what has been suppressed is the social condition of impotence – the sense of helplessness, powerlessness, homelessness, hopelessness – all aspects of the human condition to be born, to be born into social conditions, to change social conditions and to reconcile oneself with destructing the course of time. These are the tragic conditions and the sadly vain faiths – be they socially suppressed or individually repressed. Given the repetition of experience, one might have
expected this to make no difference since the difference would be embedded in and caused by an experience, but this is not the case: instead it is presented as an occurrence anew and, rather than being represented, it is ‘Erfahrung’, with memory being deferred action rather than recollection; i.e. ‘Nachträglich’ in the Freudian sense. It reminds the ego that it is an illusion. If the *principium individuationis* is demolished, there is just nothing there. To be individual is to be social, and acquaintance with the stranger represents neither a social nor an individual problem. The uneasiness is a conditional fact; however, in our modern horizon we have entered into a new form of problematisation of the human condition. Ours is not the era of ‘Menschsein’, not even ‘Menschwerden’, but of ‘Menschlernen’. Our problem is to learn how to become humans who might learn to live together in a world where civilisation is mistaken for culture; where we are forced together because our actions are ‘glocalised’, with local actions having global effects and vice versa. If we think this is just another version of private vices being public virtues, we are in for a surprise.

On meeting someone, it would be rational (i.e. reasonable) to think of him as reasonable. He inherits a ‘cognizance of the rational faculty’, but it is sufficient to assume that he is reasonable – if not social by nature, then by having learned to be human under circumstances not unlike your own. He has been taken care of when born, included in a reproductive unit of some sort, belongs to a habitat somewhere, instinctively hoping that someone or something takes care of him. Strange as he may be, he must have been taken care of somewhere. In other words, you trust he has been taken care of, and you relate to his *trustworthiness*. You don’t know if you can trust him, but you may trust his trustworthiness – i.e. that he is credible by someone else’s authority somewhat accounts for him – albeit under modern circumstances his own authority (authenticity) is sufficient.

Someone recognises him as ‘a stand-up guy’, and when you relate to ‘him’ as a stranger you really relate to him in his relation to others’ relation to ‘him’ – though in so doing you are facing a social relation (‘Verhältnisse’, ‘Vorgänge’, ‘Vorbehalt’), and in realising this ‘you’ consider yourself as participating in a sort of Thou (a generalised ‘somebody’ [more of us]). If the stranger is outlandish, you must regard yourself to be at home.

To put it boldly: maybe his mother did not love him, but at least ‘Jesus loves him’ (in the words of Protestant theology). This is not just a Christian confidence; it is a reference to the fact that anybody is someone’s son, born by Mother Nature since natality and mortality are the definition of Nature and not restricted to the human condition. By definition nothing escapes Nature. What matters, of course, is that the occurrence of a stranger is a social coincidence.
As such, the hope is not embedded in the trust, but in the trustworthiness. The next person is reasonable and might be trusted, just as we ‘hope the Russians love their children too’ – as Sting so eloquently pinpointed the philosophical problématique. Someone else, somewhere else is vouching for him: he carries his credentials. So the stranger is ‘a friend you haven’t yet met’, and you should treat him accordingly. The stranger is entitled to your hospitality as long as he has come under your protection as a friend, a soulmate, your guest. Your hospitality is his asylum. When he leaves the premises he loses asylum, and he may be attacked if he does not wear a sign of protection, carrying guarantees by someone’s seal (his citizenship for example), documenting to another community that he is not a stranger, not exiled.

Most of the so-called cultures constructed by anthropological discourse give evidence of care (cura) and its extension of guest-friendship (hospitality). But a problem arises when this friendship is extended beyond a definite habitat and is generalised into charity. This is a gift without protection (like a seal), or an idealisation of the habitat through confession.

Looking at the biblical texts, the human condition is all about caring and sharing ‘the fruits’ (the apple in Eden, the plate of lentils, the last loaf made with infinite bountifulness, the loaves and fishes multiplied on the mountain, the merciful invitation by the Good Samaritan [himself a stranger], the water transformed to wine, the Last Supper, the communion). The banquet serves as the icon and is idealised as the re-lation, the social bond par excellence: hospitality is idolised as love. In the end, there are no enemies: exclusion is marginalised, inclusion normalised. However, the outcome is that the exclusiveness of the not-included is characterised as hostile and excluded in order to secure the includedness. To be included one has to swear the oath that makes one ‘one of us’. And, since the ritual in its idealised form is an open invitation, the reluctance to join is a hostile action producing estrangedness and identifying animosity. The arcane praxis excludes an inner exclusiveness to the light-knights of truth that separates exclusiveness from the excluded and transforms them into outlaws, their rights suspended and now serving as objects of evil identificational projections in the darkness. My weakness is caused by them – or their presence in me is caused by my weakness. In either case, this strange shadow must be erased.

II: Conflictuality as the perpetual state of war

In other words, the strangeness must be dealt with. We must come to terms with it either (1) by learning to live with it (disinfection), (2) by becoming strong enough to withstand it (vaccination) or (3) by exterminating it (undermining its
existence). This vital warfare indicates that we foresee bad things happening out of the unknown (the uncertainty, the randomness, the abruptness) and that we underestimate the joy, happiness and surprise that can come from the unexpected. This attitude, this habitus, this mood is not to be generalised; but when the reflection is led by the experience of ‘fremd’ and ‘feindlich’ melting into one conception, and when we consider this a ‘normal’ reaction to the disappointment awoken in generational ‘Trauerarbeit’ or mourning, the question may be reformulated in other terms: do we really have to learn to live with it? Why not try to get rid of the strangeness of strangers? If it is unacceptable to get rid of the strangers, why not just get rid of their strangeness? The reason is simple: their strangeness is not theirs to claim. You are the stranger to yourself.

The learning process that has to be taken into consideration here is the establishment of the political body, its legitimation by sovereignty, and its government. The assumption goes that, at some point in the hypothetical past, man was separated from his natural reproduction in the original habitats by a mystical coincidence of a sort ('catastrophe' in Rousseau, ‘Trennung’ in Marx) which established a lack in human existence. The humanity of humans dwells in this abyss, and this existence is marked by the absence of completeness. The break is repeated in the form of splits throughout the social lifespan – be it in its individual, cultural or historical aspect, depending on the perspective of education – in the form of ananke, need, compulsive forces, distraction in order to keep destruction at a distance. Humans have to be needed in order not to vanish. You need someone to take care of your helplessness; you need someone to protect your vulnerability (powerlessness, homelessness, hopelessness). You desire someone, you require somewhat: you require to be desired, you desire to be required alike. Need is articulated as ‘Begierde’ and ‘Bedürfnis’ alike (to use the Hegelian distinction that was carried over into both Marxism and psychoanalysis).

Rousseau, however, has already expressed the crucial distinction of interdependence between the tendentious forces that bring humans together and those that set them apart. Rousseau gave up looking for a more profound explanation for the sociality of humankind. He concluded that it was in the disposition of men (‘leur sociabilité’) to become social. Basically, it is not their nature as such, but Nature that provides Man with the ability to become social, and his ‘naturel’ pushes him without being a means to an end. The ‘perfectibilité’ of the human faculties in the speculations of the French Enlightenment is endless – quite unlike the German teleology of ‘Ewige Frieden’ and ‘Absolute Wissen’.

Political philosophy boils down to the simple question: how is peace possible? How is bellum omnium contra omnes mastered? This is a different question than Georg Simmel later came to ask: how is society possible? Society is possible,
peace is suppressed war, and society as processes of socialisation is a form of suppression due to repression. To founders of political philosophy such as Hobbes and Locke, the issue was to stop civil war. They solved ‘the problem’ by claiming that the republic, the body politic, the constitution was made possible by a covenant, a pact, a contract, and that that constitution itself constituted the subjects that made up the body politic. The problem was to force the ‘subjects’ to recognise the sovereign and to lay down their weapons so as to end civil war. Civil war is by nature a state of war, and only by its capability to enforce peace may a civic state be upheld; it was in the interest of both body and property to transfer power. There was no interest before private property, and property is a privation. Now what is lost through privation? Freedom! Sold for what? Liberty! In the interest of whom? The owners! Two hundred years later, owners were individualised and granted the right to try to sell their property; i.e. the labour force.

The devil is always in the detail – the transformation in the discourse from freedom to liberty in both Hobbes and Locke; both within a same few pages in their texts. Now the point is that a new discourse is born with rights as the key concept. Rousseau’s political philosophy on sovereignty and freedom had no impact until it was transformed into the discourse of rights of the American and French Revolutions. Right became natural, as in human, and the protection of property became the right to the pursuit of happiness.23

The point to be observed in relation to the strangeness of the stranger is that, once the stranger is identified in terms of rights, he remains a stranger only if no one authorises and acknowledges his rights. In the light of rights, civil society, government and the market find their regulations for dealing with the strangers in the law. The strangers are outlaws even if not identified as such, whether or not they break the law. Their behaviour may exclude them, but order determines whether it is a law of justice or a social covenant excluding a behaviour as unbecoming that applies. The stranger is odd in not synchronising his behaviour to the social order. The estrangement may be overlooked, considered provocative, surreal, harmless, or it may be deemed harmful when it transgresses others’ accepted (righteous) pursuit of happiness. In other words, society has learned to live with and preys on self-ascribed avant-gardism, but this is a problem when no translation is possible. As long as the language is comprehensible as a ‘language’, there is no problem with questionable pronunciations and spooky signs. There is no problem as long as the stranger behaves as such. And what does that earn him? He is entitled to visit, to be treated as a guest, to be protected as long as he moves along again, does not extend his visa and lives a dream of returning to his outlandish, hallucinated home.
In his cosmopolitan view, Kant granted visitors a special ‘Besuchsrecht’ – which, in view of his claim to ‘Weltbürgerschaft’, is surprising. This has nothing to do with philanthropy; he just insisted that it is the right of a stranger not to be treated like an enemy by someone when he arrives in his country. He cannot claim hospitality, but he has the right to visit without meeting hostility. The point is simple: Kant did not imagine that visitors would settle in a state without assimilating, and he was assuming – as Locke had done 100 years before him with even greater right – that there was enough open space available in the Americas or in Catalonia for disputes to be avoided. Political means should be able to control conflictuality by negotiation; and negotiation would suppress warfare so long as all decisions and permissions could risk public exposure (‘Öffentlichkeit’). Secrecy was the enemy of security, in Kant’s opinion. In spite of the rhetoric of cosmopolitanism, Kant’s claim was harmless because populations were not mobile. Few people circulated, and the individualisation of property rights, loyalty and responsibility succeeded the rule of obedience and guilt. The stranger was conspicuous, unmistakable: either spotted as authority (presenting the law) or as drifters (outside it). The transformation from owing to owning is not a simple one. Protection implies violence and war: the constitution of different bodies, the necessity of drawing borderlines between bodies. The bodies are not entities before borders show up between wills, when will coincides with will, pursuing to overcome, to break down defences. This is the definition of war in Clausewitz’s sense since the 1820s. War is an act of violence with the purpose of forcing the opponent to follow your will, Clausewitz claims. It follows from this that war is a mere continuation of politics by other means. War is violation in a non-violent interaction called politics. In this respect, politics is prior to war; and the existence of political bodies is therefore assumed. However, in classical political philosophy (I refer here to Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau) a state of war is assumed to have priority. Bearing that in mind, the more Nietzschean perspective from the 1880s is more to the point – it is the other way round: Politics is the continuation of war employing other means.

Taking this thesis as a point of departure, it cannot be the sociological determination of ‘the stranger’ that calls for comment.

In sociology Georg Simmel has provided the discourse on the stranger with its most famous definition. He became one of the founding fathers of modern sociology and wrote one of his famous ‘Exkurs’ on the stranger in 1908. According to Simmel’s sociological framework, grounded in the unity of closeness and distance in all human relations, distance in the relation means that the closeness is distant, but, as far as the stranger is concerned, the distant strangeness is near. To Simmel, the stranger is a part of the group in the same manner as the poor and
numerous versions of ‘internal enemies’. The thing is that the stranger should not be here, but we need strangers to determine who we are. If he becomes one of us, he is no stranger; then we can do without his close strangeness. Being a stranger, he is included and excluded at the same time. He has never totally left the outside to become an insider as long as he is regarded as stranger. He is a stranger, and we could get rid of his strangeness if we so desired. But what if the stranger is a prerequisite to us – an entity that proclaims a sort of identity – and we need both an inclusive exclusion and an exclusive inclusion? What if the stranger is just an outsider on the inside? Will this become a problématique of the established and the outsiders?28

The problem to be discussed is not so much the simultaneity of inclusive exclusion and exclusive inclusion, since both of these concern strategies to be adopted towards floating, or rather sampled, identities – be this for groups or for individuals. The possibility exists that there might arise an agreeable peace – assimilating integration or Cold War. But this does not explain the question we took from Freud: how come ‘fremd’ and ‘feindlich’ become the same problématique as we mourn the breakdown of civilised human conduct? This becomes relevant again in the light of war having priority over politics. We are, presumably, not at peace with ourselves, and we are obviously not at peace with others or with our habitat. Rousseau in his time found peace in Nature – i.e. in a proclaimed naturality of Nature, in the balance between will and ability, in the harmonic balance in the formation of man and the legend of the naturality of Nature through a threefold mirror: Nature is what has been (not what was) once upon a time in history, Nature is still ‘anthropologically’ observable out there in the countryside or in the barbarian colonies, and Nature has yet to be educated in the formation of the child (and is still pure in the sense of the heart and visible in one’s tears). Rousseau’s ideal is not peace as such, but is close to (as in, not too distant from) Nature. The state of the arts is bad enough, why make things even worse by setting Nature aside? Transformation is inevitable, but it is not identical with progress since progress seems to be identified with the domestication of Nature.29

Insofar that Nature turns out to be otherness, we stand by (in Rousseau) like a strange negativity that bears our hopes. Let us give a name to the natural order: it is ‘good’!

Nevertheless, Freudian metapsychology leaves no hope. The Great War demonstrated that hopes for the civilising influence of ‘Kulturweltbürger’ and ‘Kulturmenschheit’ can give in to ‘blinder Wut’.30 The various states, nations and peoples show an even greater brutality than individuals do. We have to admit that there is no hope to be had in relying on human nature. The deepest essence of humans consists of compulsions related to the satisfaction of some kind
of primal needs, but these compulsions are in themselves neither good nor bad. They are beyond our classification and appear to us in ambivalent modes. Being ambivalent, they may be affected – dispositions are capable of being transformed by cultural influence, and individuals may be adapted to appreciate culture – but it seems like the outcome is that humans are made obedient to culture. No doubt there are more ‘Kulturheuchlern’ than ‘wirklich kulturelle Menschen’.31 People are always ready to revert to the primary processes. Many have become obedient to a culture that does not follow their nature. And moreover, all the earlier developmental stages continue to exist, and the plasticity of human psychic development does not reach a point of no return. On the contrary, the most primitive psychic condition is indestructible, and it returns to be repeated through regression. The stages coexist. This is well diagnosed in dreams and psychopathology, but it is a normal plasticity. Repetition is a forced condition. People obey their compulsions even to the extent that it goes against their interests. They take interests into account for just so long as that helps to rationalise the compulsions in order to fulfil them and defend them.32 It cannot be neglected that people loathe, debase, hate each other, but why this is the case remains an enigma – even to Freud in 1915. The aggressive disposition may be described by the plasticity of the psychic apparatus, the ambivalence of the compulsions, the drive for fulfilment – in short by our nature of primitive dispositions (‘Leidenschaften’). We use different terms and categories for compulsions. Com-passion-s – like com-pulsion-s – are social dispositions and cannot be singled out. Much to the disillusion of Freudian inspiration, social-analytic studies demonstrate that the singularity of objects is a part of the illusive ‘principium individuationis’ (Schopenhauer). We need to understand that ‘it’ rules and that the ego only masters its own government between the wars. No education, no coming into consciousness (‘Bewusstheit’), no conscious process (‘Bewusstsein’, Bw-System) – and there is an important difference, even to Freud – will ever forget the primal process and set awareness free of attention. As a truly cultivated human being, Freud kept up the hope that re-education in the psychoanalytic setting, the talking cure in the clinic, might at least cure the hypocrisy of illusion and replace the ‘it’ (Id) with the ego (‘Wo Es war soll Ich werden’).33 Letting go of the ego did not cross his mind.

Freud’s demon told him, as a late pupil of Socrates, to cure himself of the demon by knowing it. He learned that he might get rid of himself, but not of the constitutive demon. He hoped that knowing oneself would control the demons, but they kept their strangeness. Knowledge does not cover awareness.

Nothing good is to be expected from the dark side. The ego is a war zone. It has its history, its anthropology and its development, but the legitimised government by the ego is fragile, to say the least: forces can be renewed, and catheisis drawn
back, condensed and replaced. The conquered tribes are only exiled, and their representative is not to be trusted since their loyalty is counterfeit. Their show is a masquerade of strangers. Politics shows itself to be war. No real victory, no termination, only ceasefire, detente, a regrouping of forces on the lookout for new battlefields. Nothing is forgotten – only suppressed or repressed. Termination does not even enter the question because strangeness is part of the constituency.

We shall never arrive at peace with ourselves because of the Cross we are carrying, a Cross of strangeness that splits us and reminds us of the great lack that made us human. The tragic battle of the human condition can never be concluded.

This is not news to philosophy; what is news is that, with psychoanalysis as lingo, this becomes the knowledge of everyday life, and everybody sides against psychoanalysis because its major claims are just too obvious these days and because the thinking of everyday life is excluded from the glories of science. We cannot exclude the strange effects of our minds without excluding ourselves. Something odd is going on within us, to us, by us. And since nobody knows what consciousness is – other than a piece of mind – we name strangeness of behaviours and affects ‘the unconscious’ and, since we cannot agree on the name of this obvious unknown system (Ubw), we refer to it as ‘it’. We are aware of the effects and assume that there is a subject to it. We take the name to be of substance.

Experience testifies to a lack and a split that will not heal. We become as strangers to ourselves. The stranger comes along – even when invited. We know of him but couldn’t say who he is; however, we can ask for his name and signature. We are victims of the illusion that the stranger shows himself ‘in the face we hide forever’; but this turns out to be the stranger in ourselves – i.e. the romantic demon, shadow or double is an insider that we project to be an outsider with whom we might even reconcile.

Freud never came to terms with the ambivalence of the compulsions. He insisted that there was a war going on. He insisted that there were objects of preoccupation (subject to ‘Besätzung’ or, losing its martial significance in English, cathexis), and that this preoccupation was of sexual origin: erotic when the goal was displaced. He insisted on the dual condition, but his obsession with the ambiguity, the ‘Gegensinn der Urworte’ studied by the linguists of his time, indicates uncertainty as to whether this experience belonged to reality or to language, and as to what it meant that this was indifferent to the primal processes. He never understood the releasing of the ego into the oceanic feeling; he insisted that this was a regression to the primary narcissism describable as cathexis. He might have understood that identification is projection. But, ultimately, the indispensable death instinct pointed beyond the pleasure principle and had to be acknowledged. Unsatisfied with the human condition, Freud adopted a cosmological framework
that was related to repetitions of earlier conditions and reserved the warfare of the compulsion – i.e. aggressive hatred of the neighbour, since the outlandish intruder was always already identified by Freud as the Father (‘Urvater’, the primal object). Accordingly, the stranger is dangerous because he represents impotence; he might reveal one’s own helplessness, powerlessness, homelessness, hopelessness – in short, that you are a stranger to yourself. He might demonstrate that our defences are down and violate the fragile superficiality we hold as a mask. It is not his potentiality that is a risk to security, but the revelation of impotence, ‘le manqué’, the lack, the split, his mere existence is proof of our own non-sovereignty.

There is another legend of the state of war creating the difference and the stranger in yourselves and his trustworthiness is at stake. You are sure that he is a threat to your belongings, if he does not belong here with yours. In certain situations, under certain conditions, you may be sure that he – being marked by the (utilitarian) mark of rationality – intends to rob you of your belongings and make them his. This is the civilised war that Adam Smith called the ‘market’ and the ‘commercial republic’. The stranger will not just reveal your impotence as helplessness, but also exploit your homeliness since you are – with reference to ‘Trennung’ as mentioned by Marx (the original ‘expropriation’) – at his mercy. You are forced to deliver because of your fate and historical fact; namely because the conditions of your subsistence and reproduction are determined by the reproduction of the relations of production in the capitalist mode of production. You need to give your life – i.e. to sell your birthright, to dispose of your labour, turned into an exchangeable commodity, labour force – in order to survive (to be able to subsist).

III: Alienation and annihilation alike

For Rousseau, man is a dual creature. His social mask cannot come off, and he regards himself through the eyes of the stranger. Given the human condition, you are identified as existing in the act of withdrawal by the stranger. You only exist as alienated – as alien to yourself, seen by aliens. So be it: this is the human condition. However, in the modern world, the general condition takes on a specific form. Existence is witnessed, in so far as it is valued in a foreign currency of exchangeability. This special estrangement was characterised by Marx as reification. The essence of your life assumes the mask of a thing among things when you give it away, out of your way, to be witnessed by strangers. The ‘Entäußerung’ becomes ‘Verdinglichung’ through ‘die Warenform’ (commodification), and exchangeability seems to take on a life of its own: the product and you as a product are estranged from one another and you feel strange (‘Verfremdet’). When the
living work has turned to dead work, it turns against the originator; it becomes hostile in commanding you, imposing its will on you, just as in Clausewitz’s definition of war. The fragile layer of civilisation of the righteous market melts down when you are forced to sell your only true possession (your own labour force) for subsistence; when you have only your chains (the wage form) to lose since you are always already sold ‘to the company store’ because of what you already owed. Your *subsistence* is indebted to yourself in the estranged form of equivalent things that seem to *emanate* themselves an alien life form that need not sleep, a fetish form out of this world, a foreign principle of emanatory process called capital, idealised as *creator* since more comes out of than went into the black box of ‘die Zwickmühle’. The emanated surplus goes to the owner of the mill. Whatever move you chose in the fight, you lose; a social *destiny* has fulfilled itself. This social duality coincides (since the process of production is also a process of valorisation), and so does the state of war when it continues in the form of class struggle – exploitation being the *determining* conflictuality of the capitalist mode of production.

Not only are the usual – the socially, culturally, historically esteemed things (use value) – dominated by their face values (exchange value); the faces in question are masks covering nothing in reality (market prices) which they exchange creatively among themselves. Not only is the labourer’s living force reduced to a masked ‘thing’ (exchangeable relation); his creativity is replaced by technology that dictates his movements and his behaviour, thereby reducing him to an appendix (‘Anhang’) to the process of production. The living worker trying to subsist is in reality not only taken, but *subsumed* as a total alien, pouring his life away (‘Lebensausgabe’). This is so because of the reproduction of the conditions of production – and he does so gladly and willingly because, in the contemporary form of capitalism, this apparently fulfils his life aspirations.

The labourer considers himself a ‘free man’ since he chooses his destruction; he considers his *liberty* to be *freedom* of choice, and he chooses fulfilment – overcoming the renewed split – if he makes his *life-ability* his *work-ability*. This is the case when his workability is identified as *employability* and granted the ideologically esteemed homeliness of *self-subsistence* under the illusion of equal opportunity. The more he needs authorisation, the less sovereignty he is doomed to find.

The legend of alienation is the genealogy of *annihilation*. The self really is no-thing without the strangeness of the stranger. You cannot do without it, and perhaps we must join Freud in giving up on the subject. The argument for this is not, as hinted in my introduction above, that for Freud ambivalence is not an acceptable explanation. His preference for the specific object of identification (here ‘the founder’, ‘the specific cause’, the whole ‘Ur’-legend) may be analysed as one
of his more significant obstacles épistémologiques. There must be a reason, if not the reason: but perhaps it should not be sought in the light, but in the darkness of light; not in primary process, or even in processes of identification, but in the projection. You don’t take the idealised object from the outside – be it good or bad – into your imaginary as an ‘imago’. You simply do not acknowledge the difference (of the difference); in this indifference you take it to be insignificant. Then ‘the stranger’ becomes the projected impotence.

And why is this not a simple return to primary narcissism? The answer is right there – because you do not take yourself to be the desired object. Narcissists could not be analysed in Freudian psychoanalysis because they were untouched by the disposition to transfer (‘die Neigung für Übertragung’). They did not relate to the idea of ‘Zielgehemmte Regungen’ and could not comply with the setting of the negative transfer: the advanced repetition cure in the clinic. They could not identify with the situation. But you do not take yourself to be the beloved one; you just respect the difference from the stranger in deference – you are in a special mode called ‘Verliebtheit’ (not in preparation for peace, but en route to termination). In the preference you reconcile with the state of war. You need to postpone the destruction of the strangeness of the stranger.

What you project is not an object. What is ‘identified’ through projection is the difference – and it is not an objectification. It is the deference, rather than difference, that makes the difference. You ‘identify’ our strangeness with the strangeness of the stranger in the projection. The projection exercises a mood; it is a state of mind. Your gateway to the stranger is your own strangeness to yourself. And yes, it is ambivalent; but we cannot escape the preference. It has its moods, as being has its modes in Spinoza.

What we set out to explore was not the dynamics or the economics of the psychic apparatus; not the affective drives or their destiny represented in the clinic. In the outdoors, we found the stranger to be a prism spreading a bit of light on the social compulsions and the coincidences effected. The grip in pathfinding may point out landmarks; but let The Doors show the way:

People are strange when you’re a stranger
Faces look ugly when you’re alone
Women seem wicked when you’re unwanted
Streets are uneven when you’re down
When you’re strange.
Notes

1 Billy Joel, ‘The Stranger’ on The Stranger; 1977 Joelsong.

2 The proverb was used in a Danish campaign against xenophobia and for multiculturalism in the late 1980s promoted not least by the rock band Gnags – and the public took to it. It recalls William Butler Yeats saying: ‘There are no strangers here; only friends you haven’t met’.

3 And it is also problematic to attribute this statement to Theodor W. Adorno (Cf. Negative Dialektik; Frankfurt am Main 1966, p. 355f.).

4 Albert Camus’ famous absurdist novel L’Étranger (1942) is a reaction to the indifference to destiny and insensibility of the heart reduced to witnessing as pure observation in an estranged world. You don’t stand a chance: that is for sure. Camus’ main character takes his indifference to be insignificant, but under certain conditions – in Algeria at the time of French occupation – it was so mortally significant that he ended up being executed.

5 Sigmund Freud expresses his deep-felt – theoretical and personal – disillusion in ‘Zeitgemäesses über Krieg und Tod’ in Gesammelte Werke: Band X, Frankfurt am Main 1946, p. 324ff. The text was published in 1915. It is worth mentioning since his later renowned ideas on illusion, the death drive and discontent are already present in his reflection on war.

6 Cf. Sigmund Freud: ‘Das Unbehagen in der Kultur’ in Gesammelte Werke: Band XIV, Frankfurt am Main 1946, p. 27ff. As an authoritative German writer, Freud analyses ‘Kultur’ and leaves ‘civilisation’ to the French and the British. To a German author of his generation ‘civilisation’ is pejorative, and he cannot help preferring his own culture, but to Freud this was not the problem it has since become to the multiculturalist ideology.


8 Cf. Lars-Henrik Schmidt: Immediacy Lost; Copenhagen 1987; Der Wille zur Ordnung; Aarhus 1989; Tragik der Aufklärung; Aarhus 1989; On Respect; Aarhus 2008; Der Lear-Komplex; Copenhagen 2014; Jeux de mots, jeux sociaux – Invitation au social; Copenhagen 2014. (The author apologises for immoderate reference to his own work, but the social analytic perspective (SAP) is still an unfamiliar theoretical framework to most potential readers. References are solely to available translations.)

9 This is a poetic explanation of the theoretical strategy in social-analytic studies: It diagnoses chiasmic configurations alluding to the arch-chiasm of ‘Sowohl-als’: Commune conflictuality and conflictual communality alike (not ‘both–and’; not ‘neither–nor’). It is elementary, it is simple, and the genealogy of different chiasms forms an immetaphysic configuration. In the social-analytic perspective there is always more than one aspect. (Cf. Lars-Henrik Schmidt: Jeux de mots, jeux sociaux – Invitation au social op. cit.). ‘Either–or’ is out of the question. The conclusion has been settled – and not by decision; it rests with preference now as a settlement of dispositions.

10 Cf. Lars-Henrik Schmidt: Immediacy Lost, op. cit.


12 Social-analytic studies uses the category of the ‘learning syndrome’ to problematise a phenomenon which is difficult to disregard these days. It has provided educational philosophy with a new phrase [or concept] in the market of academic discourses.

13 This alludes to Bernard Mandeville (The Fable of the Bees, cf. The Fable of The Bees: or, Private Vices, Public Benefits. With an essay on charity and charity-schools. And a search into the nature of society (6th ed.); London 1932). The symptom of this is the growing interest in cosmopolitanism. Commentators seem to have forgotten the difference between Immanuel Kant’s ‘Weltbürger’ and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s ‘l’homme du monde’.

The Stranger in Yourself
14 Cf. John Stuart Mill: *Utilitarianism*, New York 1962, p. 255. This anti-Kantian has since been a bridge in Jürgen Habermas’s universal pragmatics. The philosophical traditions touch on communication, and in this respect I allude to Plato’s dialogue *Philebus*: if you accept the conditions of the communication, the outcome is determined beforehand.

15 ‘The social relation’ is difficult to come to terms with. A relation in English and French may be between things (identified objects and subjects for instance), but a ‘Verhaltung’ is human and thereby social in German and Danish; a relation may in this respect be dissolved into form of conduct and behaviour that emanates objects such as subjects, such as instances. Rather than a science of relation (behavioural science), social-analytic studies are therefore perhaps to be identified as a philosophical perspective on social coincidences. Cf. Lars-Henrik Schmidt: *Jeux des mots, jeux sociaux – invitation au social*, op. cit. Relations bind existing objects; conditions are *effectives*.

16 This might seem trivial, but it can also be seen at the core of Nietzschean reflection on ‘the innocence of becoming’ and Adorno’s reflection on ‘the non-identical’.


18 This is the kind of ‘Umlügung’, ‘principiellen Fälschung’ (Cf. ‘Aus dem Nachlass der Achtzigerjahre’, *Gesammelte Werke*: BD. III, München 1962, p. 726) that Nietzsche would have diagnosed as the revolt of the weak (Menschliches, Allzumenschliches) – a revolt that invites anyone to join in to avoid being stigmatised as strong (Vornehm); outsider, forerunner, special. If the opponent is strong, well off, calls himself good and pities our poor not so well-offness, then we are – in our weakness – strong enough in togetherness to denounce him as bad. (Cf. Lars-Henrik Schmidt: *Immediacy Lost*, op. cit.).

19 In social-analytic studies this distinction is configured and correlated with another distinction between lust and power. This double figuration, comprising four instances, accounts also for the Kantian distinctions between ‘Neigung’ and ‘Plicht’, ‘Lust’ and ‘Unlust’, ‘Freiheit’ and ‘Notwendigkeit’ (Cf. Lars-Henrik Schmidt: *Der Lear-Komplex*, op. cit.). The dual distinction of four figures (instances) stemming from different sources (forces) coincide in a genealogy of conflictuality between the effective distributer of interdependence. This conceptual scheme allows one to figure a map that reaches back to Rousseau’s myth about the dual descent of the social in the articulation respectively of the south (around the well, water) and in the north (around the bonfire). (Jean-Jacques Rousseau: ‘Essai sur l’origine des langues’; *Oeuvres complètes*: T. V. Paris 1995, p. 115. ‘Essai sur l’origine des langues’ was first published in 1781 (posthumously)).


21 Hobbes in *De cive* from 1642 repeated this in *Leviathan* in 1651 as ‘The war of all against all’; also ‘Lupus est homo homini (Man is wolf to man)’. ‘How is peace possible?’ is a political question to government (governance). ‘For among masterless men, there is perpetual war, of every man against his neighbour’ (*Leviathan*, London 1997, p. 266 (Part II chap. 22)). One hundred years later, Rousseau is still asking the question, but his concern is to legitimise government, and the answer is his principle of sovereignty. Both Marx and Nietzsche quote the Latin verse. As indicated above Freud in 1929 returns to ‘homo homini lupus’ and asks rhetorically, who can contest this sentence? The existence of the disposition to cruel aggression reveals man as a wild beast. As a consequence of the primary hostility of man, Culture (‘die Kultur Gesellschaft’) is in a perpetual threat of decay. Being aggressive by nature, and carrying the indestructible disposition of primal man from the earliest times (‘Urzeiten’), it is not easy for mankind to restrain its innate hostility and give away a piece of happiness for a piece of security (Cf. ‘Das Unbehagen in der Kultur’; *Gesammelte Werke*: BD. XIV, Frankfurt am Main 1946, p. 471ff).

23 Cf. Lars-Henrik Schmidt: Configuration; Copenhagen (in press).
25 Carl von Clausewitz: Vom Kriege; Frankfurt am Main 1980, p. 34.
29 Cf. Lars-Henrik Schmidt: Immediacy Lost op. cit.
31 Ibid. p. 336.
32 Ibid. p. 346.
33 Sigmund Freud: Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse; Gesammelte Werke: BD. XV, Frankfurt am Main 1946, p. 56.
35 Cf. ‘Über den Traum’ in Gesammelte Werke: BD. II-III, Frankfurt am Main 1946, p. 574 (just to refer one example).
39 Émile op. cit. p. 221.
43 The Doors, ‘People are Strange’; Strange Days 1967.

References


**Dansk abstract**

Selvets fremmedhed

Nøgleord: socialanalytik, selvfremmedhed, ambivalens, den fortsatte krigstilstand, fremmedgørelsen, det sociale vilkår.
The Stranger is Present

By Amareswar Galla

Abstract

The tyranny of binary oppositions continues to determine the discourse of self and the other in Europe. Former non-Western studies departments are renaming themselves as cross-cultural centers. Ethnology museums are rebranding themselves as museums of world cultures. Major colonial museums are legitimising themselves as so-called universal museums. Can such chameleon-like transformations be possible without the psychological decolonization of respective institutional legacies? What is the role of the agency of source and diaspora community groups that may have a primary stake in the collections? The past continues through institutional power. Hegemonic discourse can reauthorize, often co-opting subaltern voices. Can Europe minimize the anxiety of losing its whiteness and address xenophobia by rethinking the raison d’être of the Stranger, bringing together diverse stakeholders and their heritage into an inclusive fabric? Do museums have a role to play? This paper is a brief interrogation of that existentialist dilemma and of understanding the Stranger.

Keywords: inclusion, museum, faith, diversity, relevance, significance, globalization.

Prologue

The sense of self and the sense of place are dynamic and changing concepts. One nurtures the other in a ‘non-duality’. Atma and paramatma, self and the universal
self in Indian philosophy, are a non-duality. Binary oppositions dissolve within the self, but persist in society. Both the self and sense are experiential. Materiality mediates. Tangibility is perceived. Constructed. Multiple interpretations are possible. Intangibility is that which is often forgotten. Memories and mementos are the cultural baggage. Hegemonic and subaltern discourses form the dialectic. Processes are integration, inclusion, reimagining and revalorization. Who interprets whose sense of self? An irony in itself. Where is the authority? Can it be delegated? Shared? Or even handed over? Do museums and academies have the capacity to do this? Hence letting go of their control of the Stranger? Often embodied in the object or the person in the institution.

**The Host and the Stranger**

In recent years, particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the Charlie Hebdo massacre and fall out, the ambivalence of the Stranger has become a complex challenge. Muslims continue to remain Strangers in Western societies, even in France with the largest Muslim faith population in Europe. Governments across the world reflexively are focusing on the issue of religion, more precisely, certain radicalized iterations of religion, for its association with catastrophic social dislocation and harm. The 9/11 attacks were organized by an Islamist terrorist organization, the views of which are generally understood by the vast majority of Muslims across the world to be schismatic and extremist interpretations of Islam. It was also recognized that there are many motives for these and other acts of extremist violence and that terrorism has cultural, social, economic and political roots, as well as other influences (such as personal or psychological), but that religion, fused to political ideology and informed by cultural variables, was nonetheless causally associated (Aslan, 2010). The Stranger, in religion, is an infidel. At its extremes, religion can be a constructive motive for self-sacrifice to charity, compassion, peace-building and understanding; or, at the opposite extreme, a destructive motive for hatred, intolerance and violence. This has been described as the ambivalence of the sacred – it is religion’s great dichotomy and paradox.¹

In late 2001, government responses in the Western world reflected both the recognition of religion’s potential to inspire harm, but also its neglected potential as a counter-balance to foster good. At the same time, what is generally seen as the multicultural project was being questioned in Australia, as it was in many other Western democracies.² European reaction to these issues, in particular an increasing fear of presence of the ‘other’, has resulted in wide-ranging and draconian responses, which are described in a book by Fekete who uses the term xeno-racism to describe a form of discrimination aimed at the cultural/religious/ethnic-other.³
The situation in the Netherlands was particularly difficult and was aggravated by two murders. The first of these took place in May 2002, the killing of Pim Fortuyn, an academic who established his own political party which included a strongly anti-Muslim bias in its platform. The second was Theo van Gogh who was killed in November 2004 by a young Muslim man. Van Gogh was a controversial filmmaker and supporter of Fortuyn. He released a short film about Islam and the treatment of women which motivated the assassination. The script of this film, *Submission*, was written by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali, who had gained political asylum in the Netherlands in 1992. Subsequently Hirsi released a memoir, the book *Infidel*, which also angered many Muslims. While all three were linked to the Dutch political right, the reactions to the murders – encouraged by the media – generally pushed all politics, particularly relating to immigration, citizenship and cultural diversity, away from the progressive norm of Dutch social policy.

A similar distancing occurred in Australia, alienating citizens based on faith. Governments at all levels reacted by attempting to engage with Australia’s relatively nascent inter-faith movement to see if this could be leveraged to promote social cohesion and harmony. The concurrent processes were disengaging from multiculturalism and at the same time encouraging inter-faithism. Redefining cultural identity and pluralism, social cohesion and the promoting of ‘Australian values’ constituted the new agenda. These can now be viewed with the benefit of more than a decade’s hindsight benefitting from subsequent analysis and research. There are lessons to be learned in the current search for French and British values in Europe.

Amongst the lessons learned from this period of (understandable) panic is the fact that multicultural principles and the process of inter-faith dialogue, and inter-cultural dialogue generally, are relationally connected and have important areas of overlap. But they are also separate, distinct, and equally necessary to maintain a civil society. This was acknowledged in the Australian Government’s 2010 white paper on counter-terrorism. The post-9/11 response thus illustrates the complex and vexed web of differences and inter-connections between religion and culture, the cultural dimensions of religions, the religious influence on culture, and religion as an aspect of cultural identity.

In Europe, 2014 EU elections and 2015 terrorist attacks, and the consequent apprehensions and reservations about immigration and cultural differences, are evidence of the need for urgent action to address the rhetoric and reality of inclusion. No country or region is monocultural. Europe has a colonial past. It envisions the multicultural future. But informed by its global imperialist legacies. The historically diverse countries and the emerging multicultural nations have to address four fundamental pillars of their diverse citizenship: cultural identity,
social justice, productive diversity and civic engagement. In today’s Europe, populations have a web of transported, transformed and transplanted cultural values. Immigrants and their descendants are often disaggregated as a mosaic of individual groups. Their identities are subject to essentialist constructs or perceptions within the frame of the ‘other’ as Strangers. They are the woof and warp of the fabric of a dynamic Europe informed by a complexity of porous cultural borders and intersections of race, ethnicity, color, faith, language, age, gender, class, regionalism, and sexuality.

The practice of active citizenship is becoming popular to shift the paradigm of hegemonic and assimilationist dominant cultural policies to inclusive ones. Imagined. Aspirational. Agencies of participatory democracy in this process, such as museums, are at the crossroads of social transformations, reconciliation between peoples and sustainable development goals. Heritage carries high stakes – for the identity and belonging of peoples, for the sustainable economic and social development of communities. Cultural experiences are no longer limited to the recreational spectrum. They are becoming a capital investment in the future. Building blocks for civic institutions. Connecting museums – hosts and objects as well as community groups – with strangers is the nexus for cultural institutions. It calls for new modalities of participation that are yet to be scoped and demonstrated.

**Museum and Community**

The Museum, an aspirational civic space. It embodies the tensions between the discourses of power and authority that shadowbox in liminal spaces for control. The Stranger has multiple incarnations in the museum: An object. A work of art. A worker. A trustee. A user. A visitor. An invisible source community from where the object or collection has been secured. Or a local stakeholder community group member or museum, oblivious to one another. Ideas of shared authority and active citizenship are waiting to be embraced.

The host, the institution, has come under increasing scrutiny for its lack of relevance beyond those that valorize the hegemonic master discourse of the museums. The stranger… is within, a prisoner of limited socialization and ability to engage beyond the known. The preferred future for any civil society is envisioning the inclusive museum and inclusive societies in which we learn to negotiate a plurality of cultural borders in search of livable communities. Multiple meanings, interpretations and voices are to be mediated. The schemata endure. (Eco, 1979; West Jr., 2015)
The inclusive museum is created and recreated based on the context and relevance to multiple publics and stakeholders. It can liberate communities from legacies, enable a first voice, and empower people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with multiple identities. The challenge is to address intersectionality across cultural borders, which requires appropriate capacity building at all levels of engaged partners, including directors and trustees. Connecting collections and communities is critical where the collections themselves are diversifying and evolving in reflection of the multicultural populations beyond the binary of self and the other. The inclusive museum is a project without an end, building on the lessons learned and ongoing discursive crossings to promote for posterity the museum as a stomping ground for diverse peoples, irrespective of their backgrounds. The inclusive museum is the human face of globalization. It attempts to bridge the gaping fault lines between institutionalized objects and claimant stakeholders, both sets of strangers, the location and dislocation of object; decontextualization and recontextualization; impermeable and permeable borders of engagement; monoculturalism and pluriculturalism.

**Made Strangers**

The Stranger is a construct. It thrives on ignorance, prejudice, bigotry and the ethnocentrism of those framing. The most glaring illustration is the situation of indigenous peoples who have become strangers in their own lands since their displacement and dispossession. This is particularly poignant in countries such as Canada, USA, Australia and New Zealand where the original inhabitants have been reduced to numerical minorities. They have no, or at best minimal, parliamentary representation in these democratic societies that are busy injecting their ideas of democracy in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

In India, despite the constitutional guarantees for the Adivasi or aboriginal populations, the reality on the ground is far from one of empowerment in everyday lives. In China and Vietnam, indigenous populations struggle under socialist regimes that have created carefully managed empowering relationships to integrate them. The counter-terrorism strategies on borderlands since 9/11 and the insatiable hunger for resources and their extraction from indigenous lands have aggravated the struggles of indigenous people and minorities.

The 2007 UN Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples endeavors to establish a framework for centering the voices of indigenous populations. Only Bolivia has so far enacted national legislation compatible with the UN Declaration and thereby established a multinational state.
The decolonization of the mind about indigeneity is a challenge for the dominant groups. One of the constructs is the nature and culture binary. It is derived from the universalized nineteenth century knowledge, an androcentric Judeo-Christian discourse where man was created first. Imperialism is the agency for the transfer and imposition of this world view. In many parts of the world, it overwhelmed the non-duality of nature and culture cosmological and worldview systems. Despite reclamation of their first voice in many parts of the world, indigenous groups struggle to validate their holistic cosmos within the legacy of an enduring dominant colonial paradigm, reinvented as imagined people living in harmony with nature, the colonial other, the ‘noble savage in the garden of Eden’.

This colonial binary is challenged by an increasing number of indigenous responses. In 1991, as part of negotiations for Aboriginal regional agreements by the then Western Australian Government, the Kimberley Aboriginal Land Council convened a historic meeting of Aboriginal elders at the Crocodile Hole on the Ruguna community lands near Turkey Creek. It was chaired by Patrick Dodson, a preeminent leader and knowledge bearer of Aboriginal Reconciliation in Australia. Over 800 people from nearly 200 communities converged on the sand banks of a billabong. Peter Yu and Darryl Kickett, along with myself, were the facilitators. The meeting stated that culture is a map. It is written in the land. The dichotomy of nature and culture was dismissed as superfluous or, more respectfully, as the Gadiya way or white man’s view (Yu, 1991).

One of the significant outcomes of the meeting was the advocacy for the recognition of culture in human development in indigenous affairs. At the time of the Crocodile Hole meeting, the Western Australian Government was conducting a review of museums and galleries in the state. This was also the time of the hearings and deliberations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. As resource people of the Aboriginal Interests Working Group chaired by Peter Yu, we asked members attending the Crocodile Hole meeting about their view of the role of cultural institutions such as museums, galleries and site management agencies within their worldview. (Stannage, 1991). In particular, we asked what role (if any) these cultural institutions have in preventing or minimizing the increasing rate of incarceration of young Aboriginal people in prisons and what are referred to as black deaths in custody. Carol Martin, a member of the current Western Australian parliament and Kimberley Aboriginal woman who thereby stood with one foot in white fellows’ world and another firmly anchored in black fellows’ law, helped to draw the responses of the Aboriginal elders in sand. The diagram in English is reproduced below:
As the result of colonial incursions, Aboriginal people have become strangers in their own lands and, until now, have largely remained so; for example, still awaiting official recognition in the Australian Constitution. In this context, the erosion of cultural self-esteem was identified as the critical factor for preventing black deaths in custody. Recognition and respect could make them Strangers no more in their own country.

Australian museums have significant collections of material culture of Aboriginal people. In understanding the journeys of these objects, the challenge is to locate the ‘historical moment of exchange’ or acquisition (Jones, 2007). Most collections are made by people who have rarely experienced the lives of the source communities. Even when fieldwork is the basis for such collections, the researchers mediate the meanings between the source and the host institution. Research documentation does help to understand the contextual significance of the source to a certain extent. Its selection, and interpretation through exhibitions and educational programming, brings the curatorial and educational lenses into play, providing different perspectives - not necessarily through the first voice of the creator communities. However, the reanimation of the objects may be possible, depending on the access and the enabling of active citizenship of the subject/stranger. Often this is not possible where the large European collections were assembled from distant lands. Even the Nordic museums with major collections of the Sami or the Inuit are far from addressing the first voice of the indigenous
peoples. Curatorial voices dominate. Objects and their primary stakeholders remain *strangers* in their host institutions. Indeed, objects have come on long journeys and stayed, waiting to be liberated.

**Universalizing the Stranger**

Objects and art are mediators, travelers and keys to cultural windows. Art and the basis of aesthetics have a transcendental meaning in traditional cultures (Holsbeke, 1996). Their location in different contexts through the act of collecting, both colonial and post-colonial, must be addressed. They now have meanings with a shared or layered spirit of place in multiple locations and with respective contextual identities. An illustration is the representation of Krishna (Galla, 2005b).

Krishna is a globalized entity, understood across cultural borders. Or perhaps waiting to be understood, if this is possible for such a deep transcendental personality. He is here, there and everywhere. In Brahmanical knowledge systems, Krishna is described as omnipresent. An indigenous cowherd deified in the processes of acculturation and the layers of significance in the history of India. The *Stranger*, like Krishna, is a networked entity, a spiritual essence beyond borders and situated in culturally mediated spaces. Krishna is perceived differently in the collecting institutions – anthropological, archeological and historical, or the fine art museums. The complexity of categorizing the ‘other’ in museums built on the tyranny of binary oppositions continues as a legacy from colonial pasts into the 21st century. Krishna and the way (religious) art and artefacts are displayed in museums could exemplify and embody a change in perception and understanding, a movement from the colonial hegemony to a post-colonial holistic view of culture and society, which creates a new space for, and interpretation of, the *Stranger*, the personified object.

Krishna is a dark-skinned cowherd, loved as an indigenous personality in India. He is symbolic of the fusion of the so-called great tradition informed by Brahmanical ideology and the small traditions of local communities in India. Sanskritization, or more aptly acculturation as the agency of the former, is the globalizing element, while indigenous traditions are the localizing centripetal forces. In this process of acculturation and integration, Krishna is the reconciliatory personality that transcends all barriers of caste, class, race, ethnicity, language and regionalism. Often such transcendentalism is evident in contemporary India when pilgrims of the upper caste, ascetics and Dalits take the cleansing holy immersion in the Ganges during the *Kumba Mela* every twelve years, at the confluence of the Rivers Ganga and Jamuna near Allahabad.
Representations of Krishna abound with all the sensuousness and playfulness that have come to be seen as characteristic of him as both god and human. Krishna’s discourse on duty in *Karma Yoga* to Arjuna in the classic text the *Bhagavad Gita* has become celebrated among people in many different places and at many different times, from the followers of Einstein to Amartya Sen. However, it was the counter-culture movements of the 1960s, cultural democracy discussions of the 1970s and the rethinking of objects and art works in the 1980s that provided a stage for Krishna to dance across, out of conventional museum collections or even temples and into the world of contemporary cultural spaces.

Krishna has transcended the confinement of material culture collections. He is now in popular displays in galleries, enjoying the same sort of popularity that he has historically been accustomed to in India. Krishna is personified in sculptures. Works of art and miniatures abound in public museums and private collections around the world. His significance in the Mahabharata in its dozens of recensions and local adaptations in South and South-East Asia continues, embellished and enhanced even in the digital domain. Wayang, the Indonesian art form, on the Representative List of UNESCO’s 2003 Intangible Heritage Convention, exemplifies his continuation as an integral part of local knowledge systems beyond India.

To someone brought up in rural India and introduced to museums and galleries through formal education and professional practice, Krishna remains a benchmark for post-coloniality. Confronting the out-of-cultural-context museum displays on India in North America and Europe for the first time in the 1980s appealed to, and at the same time confounded, memories of my socialization. Statues of gods and goddesses, including Krishna, provided cross-cultural comfort in alien environments. Often categorized as works of art, they were shown with minimal captions within a Western aesthetic discourse. It often left me wondering how the visitors could ever understand anything at all about the spiritual significance of Krishna. Where was the performance and ritual, the story and significance, the intangible heritage without which the tangible was only stone or metal? It was playing hide-and-seek behind comparable sculptures set in lime and concrete in the local site museums in South India that formed the earliest impressions of the heritage field (Galla, 2005a). I never dreamt that Krishna could travel all over the world, even when expositions in local temples on Krishna gave him credence for flying all over the world on his mythical *vahanas*, or vehicles.

In the 1960s and 70s, the missionaries of Krishna consciousness, or Hare Krishna devotees, became the unintended interpreters of Krishna from London to New York and even in Mathura, the historically attributed place of origin of Krishna. The different stories of Krishna are not simply mythologies. Visitor responses show that in the face of minimal text, visitors go away amused by Krishna’s
playfulness and his 18,000 maidens. His devotees distributing the Bhagavat Gita and other Krishna consciousness literature offer free pure vegetarian meals. The power of the singular Text, in the Christian or Islamic tradition, is imposed on the new age consciousness, further distancing Krishna from his homeland: where in Hinduism there is no one definitive text.

In a global sense, depending on where and when it occurs, religious observance will be performed in a great variety of ways. Religious ritual and liturgy may be conducted in vernacular languages; festivals or ceremonies may be accompanied with song, music, dance and the consumption of food and drink; places of worship can be constructed in a range of architectural styles and sizes. This reflects near limitless opportunity for diverse interpretations and practices of religious observance, and necessarily results in distinct cultural identities, which may be based on location and often occur within the same religion. Religion and culture, in this sense, intertwine and become an inseparable whole which, in turn, help identify a community, a place, and the people who comprise it. Historically, this has been ‘spatially’ true. In the contemporary, technologically integrated world this may now be ‘virtually’ true.

Deep research into the representation of Krishna and appropriate interpretative tools could lead to an understanding of the context to provide meaningful experiences. But Krishna remains largely a stranger. Strangers could be educators with impacts beyond borders. Cross-cultural mediators in multicultural societies. Community actors in development. The challenge is to reconcile the absences and presence. Addressing the dichotomies embedded in the museum discourse and what I have referred to as Krishna’s dilemma challenges curators to locate their signification in the diverse source and diaspora community contexts from which their past and present collections originate.

Among the embedded binary oppositions in museological discourse, self and the other stand out for scrutiny (Yoshida, 2008). The journeys of objects as signifiers of multiple meanings remain least interrogated. The power of the rhetoric in affluent places and ivory towers perpetuates misunderstandings and misinformation. The rapid growth of Asian Galleries in Western museums and art museums is heartening. But this is also characterized by the alienation of the art and objects from their contextual meanings. Strangers, objects and meanings, remain to be emancipated.

**Potential of Mediational Spaces**

How do museums embrace human rights and faith in a security neurosis that has become not only Western, but global? This addresses the unintentional shadows
cast by imagined *strangers* or emerging from the ignorance of the ‘other’ by the so-called mainstream. This has become particularly contentious in the discourse of human rights (Galla & Gershevitch, 2011). It is in the areas of culture and faith that battles over ethics and domination are fought, with words and with violence. In the global environment of insecurity, understanding faith in interfaith dialogue and defining the museum as a secular civic space echoes Stephen Weil’s dictum that museums are safe places for unsafe ideas (Weil, 1989). The potential of culture, whether museum or heritage-based, religiously inspired, or emerging through other forms of artistic expression, to remediate social conflict could be better explored.

An illustration is the Islamic Art Gallery at the Louvre, which provides a splendid space of the Western aesthetic of the other, Islamic Art. The stranger is present through the absence of community engagement. The casual international visitor may be lulled into a belief that France is an inclusive society. This society has the potential to engage with France’s Muslim population, the largest in Europe. The museum provides a valuable opportunity to make this iconic institution deal with inclusion for all the people who experience it. It is a financially thriving institution with increasing visitation, right through the global financial crisis, and substantial partnerships with oil-rich Arab countries. In connecting communities and collections, its significant role as a cultural institution could be realized in community building. It could become a vehicle to minimize the backlash against immigration, multiculturalism and the targeted violence against Muslims, Jews and other numerically minority communities. Can the Louvre become a means for presenting the past and present, as a site for intercultural dialogue and cross-cultural understanding, for the future in France and beyond in Europe? This could be an iconic project of inclusion after the violence of the first fortnight of 2015 in a country that prides itself on its revolutionary and democratic principles.

The Aga Khan museum and the Ismaili Centre in Toronto, Canada, that opened on 18 September 2014, provides another illustration. The founder, His Highness the Aga Khan, the 49th hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, said at the opening of the facility that the museum aims to provide a deeper understanding of Islamic civilizations. He hopes that, through educational programs and interpretative projects, the institution will promote cross-cultural understanding based on histories of interaction and engagement that bring us all together in multicultural societies. Multiple meanings are embedded in the new center in its making. It is designed by Japanese architect Fumihiko Maki. The Indian architect Charles Correa designed the Ismaili Center. Vladimir Djurovic of Lebanon designed the park.
The center aspires to be an experiential civic space for collections and exhibitions focusing on the world of Islam; an evolving discourse. Its complexity has been presented in a global cacophony of misinformed voices, sensationalist media, and the colonial legacies of stereotypes of ‘clash of civilizations’, and so-called Islamophobia. At the opening, the Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper underlined his hope that the new facility will “...help to promote spirituality and deepen religious and cultural understanding and respect in Canada” (Harper, n.d., last para.). Just as the descendants of Babur, the first Mughal Emperor, created the enduring landscapes of gardens, waterworks and monuments in the South Asian sub-continent, the Ismaili leadership has created a critical cultural space with the ideals of fostering inclusion in the barren landscapes of suburban Toronto and the fertile communities in one of the few countries committed to multiculturalism through an act of Parliament. The significance of the Ismaili Centre and Aga Khan Museum needs to be understood within the context of war and terrorism, and growing intolerance widening the fault lines between cultures into ominous cracks.

Conclusion: The Stranger Remains

Who interprets whose heritage and who owns whose heritage have remained critical questions. Framers and facilitators of museum and heritage discourse may often, consciously or unconsciously, perpetuate the power relations and the hegemonic master narratives. Essentialism of the perceived other remains embedded in the English language, the language of globalization, and thus predominant. Intellectual consideration needs to be given to the comparative and diverse scholarship from various culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

A final example is provided through the recent inscriptions on the World Heritage List of UNESCO that continue to challenge us to address the liberation of the Stranger as an ongoing project. Barbados had recently celebrated its first World Heritage site, The Garrison Fort (Galla, 2012). The key question is how does one celebrate as World Heritage the built environment of colonialism, and locate the voices of the descendants of slaves who continue to bear the brunt of historical legacies? This question was posed by the residents of Nelson Street in the heart of the Garrison Fort in Bridgetown, Barbados, in a seminar on ancient towns designated as World Heritage sites for their outstanding universal value.

The concern from Nelson Street is universal. Evidence-based benefit to local communities in heritage conservation has become part of the sustainable development discourse - economic, social, spiritual and environmental (Galla, 2012). The argument is that contextual intelligence is critical for a genuinely inclusive
discourse - whether museums or heritage sites - with multiple voices, multiple intersections and a complex nexus of cultural and stakeholder communities (Khanna, 2014). Defining or seeking consensus may not be the best approach. The key is the relational and processual aspects of the cultural and museological discourse, and acting on the symbolism towards a dynamic equilibrium to bring together people and their heritage.

One of the pathways into a responsible and relevant future of conservation and museology is the understanding and practicing of shared authority, in an open-ended project that is delineated and re-delineated by the primary, secondary and tertiary knowledge communities. It bridges the emic and etic perspectives through mutual respect. It promotes understanding of histories with both diachronic and synchronic perspectives, through digital and face-to-face participation. Several themes or pathways inform the inclusive processes that embrace the Stranger and liberate the objects, sites and community groups, both historical and contemporary.

In this context, museums that were derived from colonial times and those that were founded in post-colonial political environments have started reinventing themselves by taking different and often challenging pathways. The 21st century demands relevance, participation, First Voice, multivocality and negotiated community engagement as indicators for the appraisal of the transformations of the institution of the museum. Meaningful partnerships or collaborations can be relevant and sustainable in the contextual realities if they address psychological decolonization of the museum and heritage legacies and discourses. Situating the stranger in all manifestations – tangible or intangible – becomes the new museological discourse (Galla, 2008).

Museums in Denmark are powerful enough to perpetuate legacy discourses, but have the potential and ability to address inclusiveness. Transformation of museums could address several issues that strike the critical museologist. Potential examples abound. Accessible collections or displays in museums about the role of the country in slave trade are almost absent. Yet it is one of the biggest beneficiaries from the trans-Atlantic ‘transactions’, and many heritage listed buildings in the center of Copenhagen stand testimony to this layer of history writ large on the urban landscapes. Inuit are still represented frozen in anthropological time as Greenlander Strangers. One searches in vain for their contemporary representation, even in museums with collections of the rich and diverse heritage of the Inuit. There is a total disconnect between the annual Anatolian Festival in Copenhagen, Danish immigrant communities and their descendants, and the quest of museum curators and educators using catchy phrases such as cultural democracy, active citizenship, multivocality and inclusiveness. Gender
mainstreaming and gender equity are poorly understood with the predominance of men in decision-making management and governance structures. Twenty-first century cultural policies are yet to be scoped and strategies developed to facilitate genuine transformations. Monoculturalism predominates in the workplace with the occasional artist of color ‘allowed’ to perform. The poverty of academic discourse in addressing inclusion has also precluded potential for change. A small country with a small population, maybe. But it is a major player on the world scene with the world’s largest shipping enterprise that crosses all cultural barriers and boundaries. The private sector seems to lead the way. The public sector, including museums, could learn from it. The reality is that the Stranger is present in museums in Denmark.

Krishna represents quintessentially the Stranger, the symbol, the code and reality. A point of reference in addressing both collections and people in this article. Not he

… who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the person who comes today and stays tomorrow. … he has not quite overcome the freedom of coming and going. … his position in this group is determined, essentially, by the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning, that he imports qualities into it, which do not and cannot stem from the group itself. (Simmel, 1950, p. 402)

Notes
1 see Scott Appleby’s book of that name (Appleby, 2000) in which he outlines the dual nature, and response to, the religious experience which tends to peace-building on the one hand or aggression on the other.

2 as discussed in T. Modood, Multiculturalism (2007). Modood mounts a defense arguing that, contrary to the views of “the multicultural blamers”, engagement with and support for cultural and religious communities is the best means to secure communities from the threat of terrorism, (Modood, 2007, p. 138).

3 L. Fekete, A Suitable Enemy (2009), 19ff.


5 For example, the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs (when one still existed) commissioned the report Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia (Cahill, Bouma, Della, & Leahy, 2004), as well as a resource on establishing a local multi-faith network (see: the homepage of the Australian Multicultural Foundation http://amf.net.au/research/religion-cultural-diversity-and-safeguarding-australia/ (accessed 15 May 2015)), and the Federation of the Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia launched a new body APRO (the Australian Partnership of Religious Organizations) with the strong encouragement of the federal department and its ministers.


The Inclusive Museum Knowledge Community was founded in 2008. A number of articles exploring this theme are published in the Community’s International Journal on the Inclusive Museum (http://onmuseums.com/publications/journal).

References


Dansk abstract

*Den Fremmede er her*


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