

BETWEEN SCIENCE AND LIFE — MALINOWSKI'S AND HASTRUP'S FIELDWORK EXPERIENCES

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Resumo

O tema deste artigo é a experiência pessoal do antropólogo durante o trabalho de campo levado a cabo noutra cultura. É apresentada através de dois casos: o primeiro, a viagem de Bronislav Malinowski a Mailu e às ilhas Trobriand, e a segunda, a experiência de Kirsten Hastrup na Islândia. O meu material-base é o livro de Malinowski *Diary in the strict sense of the term* (utilizei o texto integral publicado em polaco em 2001). Utilizei o texto para analisar a experiência de interação com pessoas de outra cultura, bem como para ilustrar como o *Diário* influenciou a antropologia contemporânea. Fiz tal através da comparação entre as experiências de trabalho de campo de Malinowski e de Hastrup. Tentei apresentar o seu 'estar lá' não só como um fenómeno cultural, mudando de acordo com os discursos de cada época, mas também como uma parte do trabalho que ilumina dilemas epistemológicos e éticos cruciais na antropologia

Abstract

The subject of this article is the personal experience of anthropologists during fieldwork carried out in another culture. It is presented through two cases: the first is Bronisław Malinowski's journey to Mailu and the Trobriand Islands and the second Kirsten Hastrup's experience in Iceland. My basic material is Malinowski's *Diary in the strict sense of the term* (I used the whole text published in Polish in 2001). I have used the text to analyze his experience of interacting with people from another culture, as well as to show how *Diary* influenced contemporary anthropology. This I have done by comparing Malinowski's and Hastrup's experiences from their fieldwork. I have tried to present their 'being there' not only as a cultural phenomenon, changing in phase with discourses of the time, but also as the part of work which highlights crucial epistemological and ethical dilemmas of anthropology.

In this article, I will focus on the Western anthropologists' experience of 'being there', that is of traveling to, contacting with and somehow entering into another culture. I will use stories of two anthropologists who made their journeys in two different moments of the twentieth century. The first one is Bronisław Malinowski. His importance in this context is beyond question. Fieldwork research was the distinguishing feature and most significant achievement of his school. It transformed scientists shut away in libraries and museums, into explorers who had to travel and literally enter another culture. It tore them from books and threw them into life – an alteration, which not only gave birth to modern anthropology, but also had a very strong effect on the life of this group of scientists, shaping their experience and confronting them with a new kind of challenge. At the same time Malinowski is the author and main character of *Diary in the strict sense of the term*, an exceptional document, in which we find a record of the anthropologist's expeditions to Mailu and the Trobriand Islands in the period between 1914 and 1918, where he lived in native villages and conducted his famous studies. As such *Diary* will remain for me the basis for analysis of Malinowski's fieldwork experience. *Diary* is besides important as a text which, when published five decades after being written – two decades after its author's death – shattered the world of anthropology, provoking scandals, but also leading to a meaningful shift in the shape of this area and to its important auto-reflection.

The second anthropologist I will write about is Kirsten Hastrup, a Danish professor, whose anthropological experience found its reflection not only in her writings, but also in a theatrical play. As source material I will use her various anthropological texts, as well as her analysis of the work with the Odin Theatre. I will try to show how the main dilemmas of anthropology, revealed by *Diary*, are reflected in Hastrup's work and life. Her story will serve as a counterweight to that of Malinowski. The comparison of these two figures will help, I hope, to illustrate not only what has changed within anthropology, but at the same time highlight what is still problematic.

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Got up with a bad headache. Lay in euthanasian concentration on the ship. Loss of subjectivism and deprivation of the five senses and the body (through impressions) causes direct merging with surroundings. Had the feeling that the rattling of the ship's engine was myself; felt the motions of the ship as my own – it was I who was bumping against the waves and cutting through them.

[Diary, 2 November 1914]¹

From *Diary* we get to know that Malinowski looked forward to the oncoming journey with enthusiasm and excitement. When boarding the boat which was going to carry him along to Australia, he was well-prepared and eager to live an adventure. Already during breaks in the trip and short stops in ports he was offered the possibility of first contact with different cultures. Early impressions reached him from all sides, but at the same time they did not seem real to him. The exoticism, so tempting and attractive before the journey, in reality paled.

First contact with a completely new culture, from which god knows what one was expecting, first impressions of a completely new country, religion, landscape are always full of such disappointments. Sometimes only, very rarely, lucky coincidence: fresh, rested thought, well-disposed sensibility and lucky arrangement of the conditions in a given place make it possible to at once capture the content of a new world, the value of beauty in new surroundings. Then clairvoyance happens, a grasp, sudden and profound, of things unheard and beautiful, since true – one of the happiest kinds of experience. Unfortunately, during this journey I do not have this lucky coincidence, among other things because of a concern about the future, about the acclimatization in the tropics and the big tiredness from the heat.

[Diary, 4 July 1914, trans. M.K.]

The biggest problem seemed to be a certain dissonance between his expectations – that which had been imagined and looked forward to – and reality. Malinowski's interests had been stimulated a long time before he went to Asia and New Guinea. Books, not only scientific but

¹ All the quotations from Malinowski's diary are given with the date and not the page number in order to make it possible to find them in both Polish and English versions of the text. The fragments that had been edited in English are quoted in the Norbert Guterman's translation; those known only from the Polish edition are translated by me.

also novels were one of the principal sources of these images. The imaginary world appeared much more attractive than the actual surrounding exoticism. As a result the real being in contact with another culture and experiencing what he had thought would be an adventure, turned out to be unbearable. The clash between representation and reality made discovering the charm and authenticity of the world he visited difficult and rare.

Traveling to New Guinea meant moving to the tropics – living in different scenery. Nature, landscape and climate – all new and unknown – provided strong sensations. Sometimes attracted, other times repulsed, Malinowski could not stay indifferent to this environment. It influenced his perception, physical condition and frame of mind. Many times he felt displaced and alienated.

Marvelous. It was the first time I had seen this vegetation in the moonlight. Too strange and exotic. The exoticism breaks through lightly, through the veil of familiar things. Mood drawn from everydayness. An exoticism strong enough to spoil normal apperception, but too weak to create a new category of mood. Went to the bush. For a moment I was frightened. Had to compose myself.

[Diary, 30 October 1914]

The moments when Malinowski had a sensation of being in harmony and agreement with the surrounding world were not so common. The positive impressions were instantly romanticized and captured in a poetic description. The practice of transforming sensations into words facilitated their absorption. It is here that *Diary* played an important role. Many times one has the impression that real pleasure was felt only by this process of creating images. As if Malinowski were not able to be there and enjoy it in a direct way; as if he needed some kind of transformation of the surrounding world to make it possible to feel and immerse himself in reality. "I am going to the jungle; not very exotic; tiredness; I dream of how I will recall these strolls after the return." (Diary, 4 July 1914, trans. M.K.)

Of course we find moments of real satisfaction and well-being, when Malinowski felt that he was "*in the middle of things*" (Diary, 2 April 1918), had a "lovely, pleasant and amusing picnic" (Diary, 8 May 1918) and "*good fun*" (Diary, 6 January 1918) camping. Sometimes he apparently

experienced “the joy of being with real *Naturmenschen* (man of nature)” (Diary, 20 December 1917), lived “in harmony with reality, actively, without spells of dejection” (Diary, 1 November 1914) and had “such pleasure to explore, to make contact to the tropics” (Diary, 21 March 1918). These moments, though, were uncommon. In fact *Diary* is extremely somber and its author seems to go through a deep depression. Instead of harmony we find isolation and estrangement; instead of enthusiasm – apathy and resignation; instead of adaptation – nostalgia and homesickness; and instead of tranquility – irritation and rage. Most of the time Malinowski was “fairly depressed, afraid [he] might not feel equal to the task before [him]” (Diary, 20 September 1914), “the work did not interest [him]” and he “thought of civilization with *pang*” (Diary, 14 December 1917). He had “moments of frightful longing to get out of this rotten hole” (Diary, 11 February 1918).

The most important aspect of Malinowski's new situation was his contact with Natives. This was the central part of Malinowski's alienation, which shook the foundations of his cultural and social self and threw him into a new world, where all he was familiar with disappeared. Malinowski's first meetings with non-Europeans, during this trip, were made in Egypt and Ceylon. The only sensation noted was that of superiority. “Black monkeys imitating Europeans in the tram give me a feeling of superiority of the white race” (Diary, 4 July 1914, trans. M.K.) – he wrote in Ceylon. Later, already in New Guinea: “the crew of fuzzy-headed savages in government uniforms gave me very much a “Sahib” feeling” (Diary, 13 September 1914, trans. M.K.). He had this strong feeling of superiority, especially towards the Europeanized people. The sensation was somehow related to a kind of disregard towards mixed cultures. What he was looking for was ‘noble savages’; pure men of nature – as he called them. He was attracted by isolated tribes, where time did not leave its mark and intercultural changes had not reached in a higher degree.

During Malinowski's interaction with Natives, their usefulness to his work constituted the most evident criterion to evaluate them. And the main relation he established with them was that of informant–questioner. He liked or disliked people depending on the quality of information they gave and on the degree of difficulty in making them speak. “Collected information which here bubbled out as fast as I could take it in. [...] Very intelligent natives. They hid nothing from me, no lies.” (Diary, 1 November

1914) or “At 4 I began to work with Mataora – garden. They lied, concealed, and irritated me. I am always in a world of lies here.” (Diary, 25 March 1918)

In these cases it is difficult to talk about a personal relation between two human beings; it is rather a purely technical contact between scientist and object, an object which sometimes is difficult to dominate and thus irritating. Getting information did not seem to be an easy task. Normally Malinowski treated it in terms of exchange: when he wanted a Native to talk about familiar relations, taboos, magic or gardening, he paid with tobacco or other goods. He got furious each time somebody took his gifts and left him without any answers. He seemed conscious about the character of his investigation; he had the impression that it was similar to a battle, a hard process of getting something, of taking it away by force. “Then I went to Towakayse. There I had to do a lot of urging before they were willing to talk.”² (Diary, 13 December 1917)

Extracting information gave Malinowski a sensation of violation and it normally required a lot of patience and energy. It was as well his main, if not the only, form of participation in the life of the village. Observing, talking or any other kind of interaction with the Natives was motivated by the wish to pump information out of them. Of course, occasionally, such meetings had effects on Malinowski; he had to be in a way involved in the situations he was taking part in. Nevertheless, there is only one description in *Diary*, which shows Malinowski taking the initiative and in a very active way encouraging the Natives to act – the only moment, when he really participated.

In the evening I went to Tukwa’ukwa, were the Negroes refused to *mwasawa* (play). (...) To encourage them to play (there was no one on the *baku* (main square)), I began to *kasaysuya* (kind of dancing game) myself. I needed exercise, moreover I could learn more by taking part personally. Much more amusing than the *petits jeux* (little games) organized a few days ago in Nyora. Here at least there is movement, rhythm, and moonlight; also emulation, *playing of parts*, skill. I like naked human bodies in motion, and at moments, they also excited me.

[Diary, 24 May 1918]

² *Gwałcenie* in Polish means not only ‘urging’ but also ‘rape’, ‘violation’.

This fragment reveals a high intensity of personal involvement in the research process. The fact that Malinowski initiated the dance and that he took pleasure in performing it indicates that he was able to enter whole-heartedly into an alien culture. We can not state, though, that any sort of identification with the Trobrianders occurred during the stay on the islands. Most of the time, *Diary* was far from being a reflection of empathy. It was rather a vent to great distance, lack of interest, irritation and antipathy. Malinowski fell “into a rage” (Diary, 20 January 1915), “dislike[d]” Natives (Diary, 18 December 1917), had “general aversion for niggers, for the monotony” and felt “imprisoned” (Diary, 23 December 1917). In these moments the object of study seemed to him “utterly devoid of interest or importance, something as remote from [him] as the life of a dog” (Diary, 27 December.1917). At one point he developed an attitude towards the Natives which he termed “exterminate the brutes” (Diary, 21 January 1915). This literal quotation from *Heart of Darkness* shows that Malinowski, in a way, played with a cultural role so well presented in Conrad's story. He used the words of Kurtz to express his own desperation in the deep isolation, and – by identifying with this literary character – tried to find a way to act in this overwhelming situation. Of course, Malinowski did not repeat Kurtz's life story. But he discovered in this character a ready role to play: that of colonizer. And actually, *Diary* gives us dozens of examples of situations, where power relationship between Malinowski and his Natives corresponded to that of the colonial world.

First of all, it was completely natural for him to have his own ‘boys’. They pitched his tent (Diary, 20 March 1918) and served him all the time. But most of all they were getting on his nerves by eating too much betel-nut (Diary, 18 January 1918) or just by irritating him, like mosquitoes (Diary, 27 April 1918). Malinowski could recognize that he needed them, but he could not stand their presence. He even went to the extreme of beating Ginger, one of his boys (Diary, 15 April 1918). He used also other Natives: *Gwadi* (children) – not only helped in gathering information about the inhabitants of the village, they were also carrying around the chair on which Malinowski was sitting during this procedure (Diary, 15 December 1917).

The sense of power and the “delightful feeling that now [he] alone [was] the master of this village with [his] boy” (Diary, 25 March 1918)

gave Malinowski a lot of satisfaction. It offered him a sensation of enjoyment and corresponded to his ambitions. But it was not only this mere feeling of domination that Malinowski liked; being the lord meant for him much more. It was in fact related to a strong conviction of possessing this tropical village and its people by transferring them into his writing. "Joy: I hear the word 'Kiriwina'. I get ready; little grey, pinkish huts. Photos. Feeling of ownership: It is I who will describe them or create them." (Diary, 01 December 1917)

Anthropological description, that is the presentation of 'exotic' tribes to the European public, meant, in a way, bringing them to life. This attitude, so characteristic for early discoverers and explorers, continued in the activity of later scientists. The project of the enlargement of knowledge about the world met at this point with the project of its domination (Kieniewicz 1986). And it embedded a typical colonial split between the sense of superiority and the sense of responsibility. This gives us a sensation that the relationship between Europeans and Natives in general, and between anthropologists and their object in particular, bore at that time a resemblance to that of an adult with a child – an asymmetry typical for the world of colonial power (Asad, 1973:16-18).

This kind of power relation was thereby present not only during day-to-day life, but also during anthropological work. On many occasions, scientific interest remained completely detached from the human way of treating the Natives. They were above all 'specimens'. Malinowski would even go to the lengths of carrying out small experiments to collect his data.

I came back in the dark and once again frightened a little boy whom I call Monkey; he utters strange sounds when frightened; I persuaded him to come a stretch of the way with me, bribing him with tobacco, then I would suddenly disappear in the bushes, and he would begin to squeal.

[Diary, 13 January 1915]

Malinowski's attitude towards Native women had a distinct character. They were not only interesting as an anthropological object or irritating as disobedient informants or servants. A different feeling was related to them, a kind of attraction. Actually, the only moment, when Malinowski expressed in his diary a wish to be one of the Natives was in relation to a woman.

At 5 I went to Kaulaka. A pretty, finely built girl walked ahead of me. I watched the muscles of her back, her figure, her legs, and the beauty of the body so hidden to us, whites, fascinated me. Probably even with my own wife I'll never have the opportunity to observe the play of back muscles for as long as with this little animal. At moments I was sorry I was not a savage and could not possess this pretty girl.

[Diary, 19 April 1918]

Malinowski did not surrender completely to the nostalgia and frustration provoked by isolation; he did everything to emerge unharmed from the experience. But he had to fight hard to achieve this. *Diary* can be read as a record of his ups and downs. It shows so clearly how much he had to struggle to persevere against crisis and not to forget himself in the surrounding world. Sometimes, these ups and downs bore resemblance to a struggle between rational solutions – which would lead to an improvement of character and life – and irrational escapisms. The whole experience of 'being there' was like a hard battle to keep the head above water; to remain conscious in a situation where all that was known and usual became distant and substituted by a completely new environment; to secure his own cultural identity and his normal stream of thoughts in conditions that threatened to alter them. Solitude combined with freedom from control and restriction from his own culture offered unexpected liberty. And this freedom exposed the self in a dangerous way. Malinowski was, like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, passing through a test. Confrontation with the 'wilderness' was in fact a confrontation with oneself.

At the same time, Malinowski had to struggle to maintain his cultural integrity. It had much to do with not surrendering to a strange, unreasonable fear. And one could see it as a struggle between giving up to overwhelming cultural alienation and maintaining the interior order, which for him was a familiar, clear and logical grasp of reality. In these moments of crisis, Malinowski's belief in all that was related to the security of rationality offered by his own culture was used as a protective measure to drive away uncontrolled sensations. In fact, during these moments a battle was fought for his cultural integrity, a battle against new instincts and beliefs imposed in an invisible and unconscious way by the new environment – Malinowski was fighting to remain himself and

to not become a Native. "At night, a little tired, but not exhausted, I sang, to a Wagner melody, the words 'Kiss my ass' to chase away *mulukwausi*.³" (Diary, 19 December 1917)

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The publication of *Diary* should be seen in the context of both the immediate scandal it gave rise to and the later reflections and discussions it provoked. At first it led to great disappointment with Malinowski. The proclaimed father of modern anthropology turned out to be a racist full of disdain for and, on occasion, even hatred towards 'his' Natives. But the criticism *Diary* met with was significant, because it was not limited to the mere condemnation of Malinowski. What may have been much more important was that the text strongly undermined the credibility of anthropologists in general and thereby the science as a whole. With sometimes painful sincerity, the text clearly showed some of the most difficult, but crucial, problems that anthropology had to face. It exposed anthropologists during their fieldwork, showing the dangers and complexity of the situation they found themselves in. The criticism therefore had a more fundamental importance than the simple dethronement of Malinowski. It was obvious that personal experience inscribed into fieldwork should not merely be treated as such, since it is strongly connected to issues of methodology. *Diary* was a distorting mirror in which anthropology had to look at itself. The first and most obvious reflections the image provoked were of an ethical nature. The colonial context only strengthened the feeling of ambiguity related to the anthropologists' presence in the field. Moreover, the question of problematic inequality within power relationships was not restricted to the political question. It evoked deep discussions about the possibility of cognition of other cultures. *Diary* also showed the complexity of the fieldwork situation for researchers, bringing the problem of their identity into focus. The experience of 'being there' appeared as a walk on a tightrope, a situation in which the anthropologists' cultural self is threatened and in

³ *Mulukwausi* is the spiritual equivalent to the *yoyova*. Both names are used by the Trobrianders to describe the flying witches who inhabited the eastern islands and were famous for eating raw, human meat and bringing death to sailors. Hence dread among the Natives (Malinowski, 1922).

which each step could mean a fall into the surrounding reality. Thus *Diary* illustrated above all else a fundamental flaw in current anthropology and in the long term the text would be used as a starting point for discussion in search of better solutions for this branch of knowledge. One of the solutions has been offered by Kirsten Hastrup.

Hastrup's experience of 'being there' occupies a really special place in her texts. On many occasions she refers to episodes and events from her stay in Iceland. She not only recalls happenings but also reveals her fears and emotions during the fieldwork, trying to present herself unveiled – without a 'writer's mask'. Yet, it does not mean that we as readers are given access to all aspects of the experience. The episodes are carefully chosen and they serve a specific purpose.

We see Hastrup, for example, when she got letters from home in which her friends say they miss her and want to make preparations for her return; they try to arrange classes for the next semester and ask about her plans. We witness when she throws the letters away, not willing to read or answer them (Hastrup, 1995:15).

And we follow her in maybe the most significant story she tells us:

Staying for some months during the autumn on an Icelandic farm, I once took part in an expedition to collect stray sheep in a rather rough mountainous region. At a certain point in time I was left on a rock ledge to hold an ewe that had just been recovered from another ledge where it had been entrapped [...] I had a beautifully clear view down toward the flat coastal lands where 'my' farm was situated. [...] Suddenly, a dense fog came rolling down from the upper mountains and with an icy cold. In the subarctic area you know never to trust the sun, and I was prepared to meet the cold; but in the long run not even woolen clothes could prevent a degree of fear from creeping in. It was not so much a question of fearing to get lost, even though I knew that I could never descend alone. It was a kind of fear related to the place where I found myself. [...] In that particular place the fog was a very specific veil over the Icelandic landscape, of which I had become a part. And there, a nebulous human figure appeared in the mist. I knew instantly that it was a man of the 'hidden people' (*huldufólk*) who visited me in the small space of vision left to me and my ewe by the fog. Ever since the Middle Ages *huldumenn* have been known to seduce Icelandic womenfolk, and especially shepherdesses in misty mountains. Apparently

he did not touch me, but who knows if he did not seduce me in one way or other without my sensing it? When the fog lifted, and I was finally rejoined by my own people, the only thing that remained clear in my mind was the real experience of the materialization of the unreal.

(Hastrup, 1987:52)

From all the stories she tells us we get a clear message of what the fieldwork experience means to Hastrup as she helps us to interpret the episodes correctly, giving explicit clues how to decipher their meaning.

First of all, we notice that working in the field places her in an unusual position towards both her own culture and the other's. Hastrup felt that she did not want to belong to her own world. She rejected it abruptly and desired to maintain a double distance – on the one hand, real, physical absence, on the other, emotional detachment and a negation of the interior cultural affiliation. She wanted to cut ties that linked her to her country, her job and all that she usually was. Not only was she denying her own culture, but at the same time she was rejecting of her 'normal' self. She did not want to be Kirsten Hastrup – the Danish professor – any more. She wanted to become somebody else.

As we follow this transformation in other accounts, we see how she turned into Kirsten – an Icelandic shepherd girl or a peasant working among the fishermen. We see how she entered the 'other's' culture to such a degree that she herself grew to be a part of the world she was to describe. Her becoming Native was profound and multifaceted. It was closely related to her physical presence in the other world. She not only observed and learned about the other reality, she entered it; she learned how to act in it and how to be a member of it. One of the most important things was that Hastrup really participated. She worked in the fish factory and grazed her sheep. Turning Native had at the outset a lot to do with entering local routines and adapting to the local way of living. To fully understand how people saw their surroundings, how they related to the outside world and how it functioned, she first had to experience it in the same way. She decided to immerse herself completely in their world.

According to Hastrup, fieldwork does not only involve investigating and researching the other culture. It has to do with a radical experience of estrangement (Hastrup, 1995:14-15). Hastrup felt she was not herself

in Iceland. When afterwards she wrote about the things that had happened to her, the sensations or the fears she had had, she did it in the third person. This grammatical change in language reflects the shift in identity. The person doing the fieldwork was not the same as the one who wrote down her observations, analyzed them and tried to offer explanations. There were two different Kirstens (Hastrup, 1992:116-134).

If we juxtapose the fieldwork experiences of the Malinowski and Hastrup, some clear differences stand out. First of all, one can see that the personal experience was not given the same status. In Malinowski's case, the 'being there' was important as a condition of his credibility. The validity of his ethnographical writings was based largely on the fact that the author had been on the islands he described, and had lived among the people he wrote about (Geertz, 1988:1-24). Nevertheless, the personal experience itself remained in the shadows. Fears and frustrations felt in the field were only reflected upon in a hidden, intimate diary not intended for publication. In the same way the problematic relationship between Malinowski and the Natives remain behind curtains. There was never any question of anthropology's validity or ethics. Inequality was so strongly inscribed in the historical and political context that it did not provoke any particularly profound reflections. And actually, the context caused anthropologists to appear in a completely different light to other Westerners. They were the only ones deeply interested in the culture and society of the 'other', and the only ones eager to preserve them, proclaiming the equality of all humans. But it did not mean that in their work they did not practice violence.

In the case of Hastrup the issue of inequality and complexity of the anthropologist-informant relationship occupies the center stage. Anthropology was declared 'a child of Western imperialism' (Gough, 1968:403) and its validity questioned. The involvement of the anthropologist in the world of colonizers was discussed on two levels: one ethical and one epistemological. In the first case, the anthropologists were treated as representatives of the dominating world, individuals who considered the colonies their own personal possession, and worked on behalf of the oppressors. Their position in the field turned out to be ambiguous: they could never cease to represent their own culture, which for the Natives signified colonizing power (Asad, 1973:16-18). In the second case, the anthropological knowledge connected to the European scientific tradition

was accused of being based on an imaginative representation of other cultures created by the scientists (Said, 1978). Indeed the criticism highlighted the complex issue of the frontiers of cognition of other cultural realities.

Under these circumstances, analysis of the very relation between anthropologist and informant gained a particularly important position. The interest in and explanation of the issue by Hastrup should be seen as a part of this trend. From the sixties on, many texts were produced to create awareness and encourage analysis of the condition and the problems of anthropology. This self-reflection impelled many to include their autobiographies in the scientific discourse. We come across not only isolated episodes from the fieldwork, but also very private, almost confessional, accounts of the author's experience (see e.g. Ruby, 1982). In this context Hastrup's openness and sincerity when it comes to confessing her feelings during fieldwork, are not so out of the ordinary. They are deeply rooted in the discourse of the time, just as Malinowski's silence and secrecy were.

In the same way, the importance of the personal experience changed diametrically (Clifford, 1986:109). It became a central issue. Contemporary doubts and criticism concerning the methodological basis of anthropology put matters in a new light. The simple fact of anthropologists' 'being there' was no longer sufficient to give epistemological foundation to the presentation of an alien reality. The weakening of realism and positivism in the social sciences in the late twentieth century led to the return of such basic questions as: How can we describe reality? How do we learn to know it?

During the time Malinowski was active, the observation seemed to be a sufficient tool for the acquirement of knowledge about studied cultural reality. Vision therefore played a central role in the process of empirical cognition. The aim was to make scientific observation perfect. And that is why methodology and fieldwork techniques were so important – they were supposed to guarantee the most exact 'measurements' of cultural reality. Participation in the lives of 'others' was merely a way to obtain the best and most faithful data possible, by watching the Natives constantly in all possible moments of their daily life. To have all elements of the culture within eyesight was the main aspiration. (Clifford, 1986:11)

Hastrup has openly expressed her doubts about the possibility of getting to the essence of a culture solely by means of visual observation. She believes that Western people have a distorted capacity to see things. Cognition can, in her opinion, occur only by fully identifying with the object of study. Anthropologists must then consider themselves a tool in fieldwork. Both mind and body should be involved in the research process to the highest degree possible. Personal experience can not be eliminated from the scientific investigation; it is its base and foundation. Only by incorporating the other culture, feeling it from the inside and performing it like an actor performs a character, can anthropologists have real insight into it. And in this process of identification the border between object and subject is blurred; the border that Hastrup calls 'an artifact of modernism' (Hastrup, 1992:117). In this sense, Hastrup's feelings, her perception and understanding of the reality she lived in during the fieldwork, provided valuable and precious data.

The experience in both Malinowski's and Hastrup's cases was extremely powerful, especially as they themselves were tested in a very intense way. Both of them balanced dangerously on the edge: in a very definite way they were caught between two different worlds. What was culturally usual and normal suddenly disappeared. Even the aspects of life so deeply rooted in the self that they appeared to be an inherent and essential part of it, suddenly turned out to be acquired and relative to the culture one grew in. The examination of the 'other' thus led to a discovery that had important consequences for the self. In both cases, we get the impression that the journey to the 'exotic' place was not only motivated by science. Attraction to the 'other' was somehow provoked by a personal need to experiment with the self. 'Being there' is in the case of anthropologists always followed by going back home. It is like an adventure that is supposed to shed light on those sides of the self that are normally in the shadows. Playing in the world of the 'other' leads to the discovery and definition of the cultural self.

Malinowski's and Hastrup's experiences took different or even contrary shapes. Malinowski held on to his 'old' self like his life depended on it. His routines were basic for him and were supposed to guarantee not only success and persistence in work, but also the cohesion and survival of his identity. He stuck to his gymnastics, defined and redefined the rules of his interior discipline and formulated resolutions in his diary – all

this to keep a grip on his self. He escaped, sometimes to the company of other Westerners, other times to novels, a piece of his world that he brought with himself. His success in preserving identity was due to decisive confirmation of his own culture and brutal denial of that of the 'other'. Calling Natives 'niggers' and 'monkeys' meant in fact refusing to acknowledge them as humans. He had to kill them symbolically, deprive them of their humanity and reduce them to animals or slaves. Only in this way did his cultural self remain untouched and safe. Antipathy seemed to offer the only secure refuge.

Hastrup, in contrast, was brimming over not only with sympathy but also with real and profound empathy towards 'her people'. Her experience was one of deep identification with them. But in order to turn Native she had to deny her own culture. She sterilized herself from all she was used to. She had to forget and reject her past and her cultural being. If we venture to say that Malinowski had to symbolically kill the Natives in order to remain himself, we could, equally, recognize Hastrup's symbolical suicide. Her profound identification with the 'other', her almost complete immersion in the new world, could only be possible at the cost of killing the old Kirsten.

At the same time she was ready and willing to experience the fieldwork situation from the side of the informant. Her work with the Odin Theater gave her opportunity to do so. She was chosen by Eugenio Barba to be a prototype for the main character in *Talabot*. Hastrup's encounter with the Odin Theatre was a very tough experience, but at the same time it offered her a possibility to switch roles. Suddenly, and not completely intentionally, she found herself in the informant's skin. And, even though she had some kind of consciousness of the nature of fieldwork research, only now could she experience it from the other side. Only now could she fully understand how the anthropologists' presence, observation and questioning strongly influence or even disrupt the life of those being analyzed. She made herself vulnerable to a kind of experiment that would make her personal identification with the 'other' possible. Her empathy was total. She simply became an informant and experienced the fieldwork process: from the initial interest in her 'exotic' character, through the slow and painful process of tearing information out of her and forcing her to define her own self, to the final moment of

abandonment and confrontation with the dramatic Kirsten – her and at the same time not-her (Hastrup, 1995).

Hastrup's way of experiencing during her anthropological journey was not only shaped by the search for a more adequate tool of ethnographic methodology. It was also, in a way, a powerful response to the despair of her times. Hastrup's manifesto has indeed double significance. On the one hand, it tries to offer an alternative, to overcome the impasse created by criticisms that led scientists down a blind alley. She insists that cognition of the 'other' is possible, that one is not necessarily restricted by one's own culture to the point at which it renders a true dialogue impossible. She believes so strongly in the chance for an encounter of an open-minded nature that she reaches the point of participating in the 'other's' (un)reality. Her meeting with the man from *huldufólk* is thus the best confirmation of the capacity of Western scientists to rise above their own cultural determination.

On the other hand, though, the manifesto is an affirmation and a clear expression of the crisis of Western culture. After all, Hastrup has to abandon her own self to be able to embody her Icelandic alter-ego. The very experience of entering the reality of an 'other' is thus a metaphor for the European condition; a wish to obliterate one's own identity and a desire to immerse oneself in alternative ones are expressed here unequivocally.

The task of anthropologists is for Hastrup something more than a simple description and analysis of human culture in all its different variants. Their scientific work resembles a real mission which should help Western culture to find answers to its own failings and so revive 'true life' within it. They should become a bridge that joins together two separated worlds. Hastrup compares her profession, or maybe better, her condition to that of a prophet (Hastrup, 1995: 24-25). She claims that both figures represent somebody who has access to two different realities: belonging to the old they give voice to the new. The key to the prophetic condition of anthropologists is their ritual presence in the other world (Hastrup, 1995:25). Fieldwork is seen here as a *rite de passage* (Hastrup, 1995:20). It is a way to mark the anthropologists' place in the world 'in between'.

I will propose here another comparison: Hastrup could be associated with the image of a romantic poet. Similarities are visible in many different

features of the figure of the anthropologist created by Hastrup. Her experience of 'being there' is presented as an experience of 'becoming'. She enters a special state, abandons the rational part of her cultural identity. Her cognition of the other culture – the message of truth so needed by the Western civilization – occurs beyond her normal self. All she comes into contact with is absorbed by her senses and not by rationality.

Romantic poets are also mediators between two worlds. Their capacity to write poetry is attributed not to the mastery of the poetic techniques or the ability to use different metres and poetic images, but to their special condition. This permits them to get to a source of real inspiration and thereby to create a truly genial work of art (Young, 2001:16-18). Romantic poets reach a peak inaccessible to ordinary human beings. Their creation draws more from this ability to transcend realities than from the work of reason. Romanticism valued the irrational and supernatural highly.

The second feature of romantic poets that comes to mind here is their special status among the people they live with. Poets, just like prophets, are considered exceptional. They embody geniality. One cannot achieve this state without having been born with it; poets are the chosen ones, special figures that have access to another reality. This ability gives them the unique chance to touch the 'truth' and to see clearly – an ability others do not have. But at the same time it makes them suffer. Their existence 'in between' is exhausting and dangerous and the lack of a clear affiliation provokes anxiety. In a way their messianic condition is a sacrifice.

Similarly, Hastrup's anthropologist runs the danger of exposing herself to risky experimental states. Her mission is difficult; cognition of the other (un)reality requires a special condition. When describing herself to the Odin Theatre, Hastrup later wrote that she created an image of a 'lonely rider', which meant that in her stories she completely omitted her marriage and family. She explained it as a sort of lack of affiliation, which had always been her mark and still was (Hastrup, 1995:132). She had to fight for any, even temporary, feeling of belonging. Hastrup sees this feature of her personality as a central element of this special condition. The state of an 'internal exile', as she

calls it, is vital to be able to carry out fieldwork, but it also results in loneliness and isolation.

Finally, the last similarity: the mission of the anthropologist is accomplished only when the other reality is mediated. Experience must be transformed into writing. This part of the work is perceived by Hastrup as 'a state of art' (Hastrup, 1992:116-134). The description of the 'other' is more a creation than a 'mimetic' representation. It does not mean that the ethnographer writes fiction. On the contrary, there is a distinct border between fiction and creation. Hastrup underlines that the only way to get close to 'LIFE' is to escape from conventionality. Blind reproduction of ethnographical genre is the biggest enemy of the authenticity and of the real value of the text.

We hear again echoes from romantic ideology. The cult of originality and departure from the classical literary forms were the strongest features of the romantic condition. Creation had to be freed from these fossilized forms. The only way to express reality was by searching originality and breaking with the conventional. The use of imagination substituted traditional forms (Novalis, 2001:27-28).

The introduction of the romantic ideology is not accidental here. Hastrup herself referred to it in her writings. The mentioning of Romanticism appears in relation to criticism of the positivistic vision of science and the realistic representation of the cultural world. Thus it is deeply embedded in the project to reform anthropology as a science, both on a methodological and theoretical level. Romanticism is treated as a possible counterbalance for the dominant Western scientific vision of reality rooted in the Enlightenment.

Anthropology may not be a prototypical member of the category of scholarship, let alone of 'science', yet its import derives from its ability to discover and describe the reality just as much as linguistics and physics. Its potential stems from its power to question the givens of western culture rather than confirming them. As such anthropology continues the Romantic reaction against the Enlightenment reason, and against the sanctification of the natural sciences. The discovery of other worlds is explicitly creative.

(Hastrup, 1995:12)

Hastrup sees the very act of conducting anthropology, that is directing one's sight towards another world and a different way of

dealing with reality than the Western one, as aiming to undermine all that is usual and taken for granted by a process of estrangement from one's own culture. This allows regarding one's own identity and habitual way of thinking, feeling and experiencing, as a cultural product. The purpose of anthropology is then to criticize Western culture. Yet in the process it resembles the old struggle within the European tradition. In fact, all Hastrup does is to reject and criticize one part of the European tradition, and refer and rely on another one. She calls out the spirit which has haunted Europe for centuries. She fights for a right to describe and define reality beyond the Enlightenment's scientific model. She wants to experience reality instead of merely observing it – to use her intuition and feeling instead of her reason. She wants to give the anthropologist the status of prophet and messiah instead of that of transparent observer. She insists on creation on the part of the anthropologist instead of mimetic representation and imagination on the part of the reader instead of rational understanding.

Hastrup explores the most dangerous side of fieldwork. The side that was present in Malinowski's experience, but which he tried to cover or eliminate: that of irrational fears and of sensation that habitual ways of perceiving reality were collapsing. She exposes herself to experiments, but does not do it for mere adventure: the incorporation of the 'other' has scientifically defined aims. It is intended to give a perfect insight. She tries in this way to free herself from the determinism of her own culture and to access the true reality in a direct way: by experiencing it. My doubts here concern three basic problems.

The first: is it possible to switch from one identity to another? Although I agree that cultural affiliation is something malleable that can be shaped and formed according to one's own will, I cannot imagine a total and unquestioned conversion to another culture. The conscious project of transforming one's identity is in my opinion impossible to achieve. It is not only our consciousness that is involved, but also those parts of the self that are uncontrollable, and that are to the same degree influenced by the culture.

Secondly, we should ask if the choice of the 'other' by anthropologists is completely neutral, if it is equally easy to enter and embrace any 'culture' or maybe there are those that are just easier to overpower. In this sense, anthropologists will always establish some kind of hierarchy

between the worlds they participate in. This would be another place where unequal power relationships are articulated, since it is difficult to imagine one of the Icelandic fishermen playing in Hastrup's academic world with the same ease. And it is here, perhaps, that the most problematic impact of anthropology's colonial heritage lies. Another aspect of this point would be the possible existence of prior attraction to some cultures, a romanticized image, which renders their description even more questionable.

The third objection concerns the method Hastrup uses to embody the 'other'. My comparison of the anthropologist with the romantic poet was intended to show that simple rejection of positivistic rationality does not necessarily mean liberation from cultural determinism. What Hastrup does, is in fact to incorporate another discourse; one as strongly linked to Western culture as the positivistic one. The move she believed was from one culture to another can be seen merely as a switching of discourse. The romantic tradition is given voice. I would argue here that if we think of reason as shaped and determined by our culture, there is no reason not to think the same of intuition; it is probably just as deeply embedded in our cultural formation. We learn how to use it and where to apply it. We know when we are permitted to recall it and what to expect from it. It is a defined concept in our minds just like rationality is.

Hastrup responds to some crucial questions of anthropology revealed by Malinowski's *Diary*. She certainly succeeds in solving the ethical problem of anthropology. She transforms the oppressive anthropologist, embodied in the main character of Malinowski's *Diary*, into a compassionate one. She sacrifices her own self to expiate the sins of anthropology. Nevertheless, the epistemological problem was not so simple to solve. Hastrup takes a big step in the debate about possible dialogue with the 'other', but her proposal, even though it could be treated as an alternative way to achieve knowledge, is not the solution to the epistemological problems of anthropology.

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