

In times of return of the pure forms:

Ethnography as the rescue of civility and cosmopolitanisms

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Ethics and morals – from the how to the why of research

A growing concern seems to be shared by ethnographers about the tightening requirements of research ethics, especially institutionally administrated norms and regulations about just how one is to reach the *informed consent* of participants, and when and how their *anonymity* is to be protected. In-trade gossip tells of horror cases where these rules have *de facto* been used to deny access to field and protect the integrity and reputation of institutions against critical inquiry, rather than individual participants.

Meanwhile, the ethics of ethnography is much more than informed consent or anonymity protection. In this paper, I tell about the struggle to steer the more encompassing moral and political process – that of the aims and uses of ethnography. The story in the field was about a transnational workplace (or a couple of places). It was about ethnicity, immigration and expert professionals. I made a close inspection of what has come to be known as *diversity management* (DM) – or, rather, its absence in this case.

In stead of telling you the whole of that story¹, however, I use this opportunity to reflect on the work done and try to articulate the questions of value, purpose, strategy and ownership of one ethnographic endeavour. As stake holders in this reflection I present, in addition to my informants and myself, also the organisation studied and the attempted readership of the published account, both academic and other.

The moral of any research project resides in the ultimate goods, the terminal values sought in a process that most often explicates only its middle range values, the strategic or political goals of theory choice, identification with suitable (and hopefully influential) academic partners, financial compromises and other positioning moves on the fields of research. People of our time apparently have some difficulties talking aloud about moral, often taken for a matter of individual choice or taste (see e.g. Calhoun 1991). A study of equality and inequality (ethnic diversity and the risk of discrimination) would, however, appear very naïve – close to ridiculous – without openness regarding the moral in it.

In the following, I attempt to be articulate by wrapping my moral choices in the concrete example of just how and why I got interested in the actual research topic and why I turned to ethnography to study it. This is also justified, I think, because part at least of the moral goods are *internal* to the practical activity of doing research – the art of doing it well (see MacIntyre 2007, 187-189). The ultimate good I seek is, however, external to research. It is the right of all workers and organisational members to be who they are demographically and to become what they want socially, at work and

¹ Interested readers find more detailed accounts in the earlier, partial reports (Trux 2000, 2005, 2008).

beyond, without fear or loss of opportunities, irrespective of class, immigration history, occupation, employer or country of settlement. Though the ultimate good may not invite many counterarguments, I expect goals in the middle range to do so. The questions of identity and culture in an interconnected world are not easy. They raise both theoretical and political controversy, and imply several distinct debates failing to connect to each other, as well as several kinds of stake holders. Goal transfer has also taken place, as I will demonstrate. This is the rough country into which I would invite you. But you know it already, we all do. It's our home planet, our home time. Welcome home.

Return of the pure forms

Against the postmodern emphasis on collage, fragments, transformation, movement, interconnectedness, contact and learning – all for a while celebrated in the social and cultural studies (see e.g. Clifford 1988, Appadurai 1996), a new wave has emerged. The recent decade or two have witnessed the initiative, this time taken by the economic and political elites aiming yet to ride the trends of global competition and demographic diversification. *Diversity* has become a watchword not only of social assistance and civil associations, but of the state machinery and corporations as well. Diversity pays, thus it must be managed – how else, under the economical mega-discourse? But what was never resolved within the multiculturalist movement (Turner 1993), but merely covered by its humanitarian and democratic ideals, now appears in sharp relief. The movement entails a return to pure forms: back to closed systems and ascribed identities of separate groups. Worse, it posits a panoptic overseer, a super manager governing and classifying 'Others' without being classified *himself* (Lorbiecki and Jack 2000). A new call for normality is evoked by the need to measure 'Others' against, and ascribe each of the animal species in their respective cage in the zoo. Concealing the identities of the managerial and political elites, these programs either avoid all mention of the classifier or have recourse to vague images of *global governance*. Arguments against them run the risk of absorption by the equally essentialist open attacks against immigration and pluralism. I beg my readers to resist this absorption. Deviations from diversity management discourse can be made without joining the extreme right.

On the level of the shifting floors of today's workplaces, the controversial effects of diversity campaigns have been recorded by organisational scholars (see e.g. Prasad et al. 1997; Wrench 2005; Prasad et al. 2006; Zanon and Janssens 2007). Far from official sunshine images of happy comradeship, growing distance between workmates (Litvin 1997) and intensified control (Foldy 2002) have been reported. Identities that subdivide the given categories are repressed, as well as interests uniting workers across them. Prospects of (ex)change dissolve. Within such an essentialist identity-cage,

the inmate is not expected to have any *voice* (c.f. Holland et al. 1998; Bakhtin 1981). Despite their seeming diversity, organisations remain monological. The combination of reversed Kantian ethics (turning people from ends into means) with top-down demographic classification raises very disturbing questions, concentrated in the words of an industrial leader, quoted by the organisational scholar Deborah Litvin: “*We must learn to burn all kinds of fuel*” (Litvin 2006).

Why ethnography? - The big picture

Critical literature on the sins of the diversity movement is now well available. Yet the machine seems to hurry on undeterred. Critical observers are easily dismissed as “*leftist critique*” (Eastman 1999) or *cynical academics*, so far as they have no alternative conceptualisations to offer. This is where ethnography may come to our rescue.

Ethnography is unique among social science methods, for a number of reasons. It takes a holistic view of the people, scenes and activities observed. It is thus well suited for grasping unknown or novel phenomena, the forms of which escape hitherto understanding. For the same reason, it is also suited for re-conceptualisation, building new vocabulary and escaping dominant cultural forms. Throughout its history in anthropology, ethnography has been used for two subversive purposes: to bring out the voices of the distant, the silenced and the marginal, and to *Verfremdung*, or distancing. Familiar, dominant and taken-for-granted ideas can be relativised, questioned and dwarfed by juxtaposing them to unexpected alternatives. The knowledge of the ‘Other’ is precious, not just for its own sake (also for that), but because of the freedom it gives me/us to step outside trodden paths and rethink established orders.

Georg Marcus in particular has called for such attempts at *cultural critique* as excavate the earth beneath the feet of dominant cultural forms, backed by massive political and economic power and immune to direct critique (Marcus, 1998). The economic megadiscourse carried by most of mainstream economists is such a form *par excellence*. Instead of making a direct attack, however, Marcus suggests looking for possible fissures and dissident strands within the camp of the enemy. These can be used to make the discursive borders permeable and seduce more people to open discussion. In principle, one might hope that during an economic recession, the borders might already be more permeable than before. But better not underestimate the might of economy and the position of power in which it has been residing for a couple of centuries at least.

Why ethnography? - My own uses

Returning to the case of diversity management, a wine growth of the economic megadiscourse as described above, I thought to make cultural

critique of it, by the help of a handful of ‘nerds’ – or ‘hackers’ or ‘geeks’ – as you please. I visited their workplace in order to make sense of their peculiar ways of living in a transnational social place, in their workplace.

I got acquainted with this workplace in 1999 and 2000, while I composed a preliminary study of multiethnic workplaces in Finland. At that time there weren’t many around, so I combined the present case with a cleaning company. Yes, the idea was to probe the two polarised ends of immigrant work force. Why I dropped the cleaning company? For reasons of practical compromise. It would have been too burdensome for me alone, spreading its activities in numerous client organisations. I had no team, no budget, no university department behind me. Just the small person of myself and the chance to do it as a dissertation. It was relatively easy to get grants for dissertations in Finland at that time.

But there was another reason why I got attracted by the ‘nerds’. As mentioned, they had peculiar ways of sharing their work and sociality across ethnic divides. I couldn’t make sense of their ideas, they were puzzling. While the cleaning workers were suffering from multiple inequalities, poverty, dehumanising conditions and racism, these were sort of known beforehand. Also, it is difficult to make the difference between racist or ethnic discrimination and just generally exploitative employer procedures. Not that those procedures wouldn’t merit to be more drastically laid bare before the eyes of this Nordic *welfare state* – they would. Maybe it’s my next endeavour, or hopefully somebody’s. But this study was about the IT-professionals at F-Secure². I still think they have something to tell us.

² At this point my dissertation manuscript says:

“ F-Secure Corporation provides protection for individuals and businesses against computer viruses and other threats spreading through the Internet and mobile networks. Its products include antivirus, network encryption, desktop firewall with intrusion prevention, anti-spam and parental control. A constant vigil is kept at the company headquarters in Helsinki against any new malware. Founded in 1988, F-Secure was listed on the (then) Helsinki Exchanges in 1999. In addition to Finland, the company has offices in the USA, Sweden, Norway, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, The United Kingdom, India, Singapore and Japan. F-Secure's retailers and distributors have expanded to more than 60 countries. In the Finnish context, F-Secure is a middle-sized organization. Its personnel doubled from 200 to 400 during the boom (1999–2000), and toward the end of this research (2004) had come down to an intermediate level of approximately 300. By the time of writing, the number of personnel has grown again and is now (in summer 2009) higher than at the first peak.

In Finland the company is well known as one of the flagships of turn-of-millennia technology. Today it has a more consolidated reputation, at times a quasi-official position as the favourite source for journalists wanting to ask anything related to Internet threats. According to the management, F-Secure is well known in the Nordic countries, somewhat in Europe, but scarcely in the United States.”

And further:

“I have published preliminary reports both in Finnish and in English using the company’s true name. Trying to cover its identity would have been hard and probably futile in a context like Finland. They have so far never protested. The findings of course are

They were not and didn't want to be participating in the diversity movement. They shunned all hints of talking about colleagues in terms of fixed categories and ascribed identities. Instead, they had other remedies against ethnic division. Professional subculture offered one bridge, an efficient one. The culture of the *digital clan* is the mother of the internet, holding inter-nationality at its heart. Other cultural forms (including participatory/democratic management style and local pragmatisms) were more ambivalent in this respect. They gave both room for tolerant moments and stimulus for ethnocentrism. I have reframed them as semiotic resources used by the people in their local efforts to build *civility* and *cosmopolitanisms*.

Discussing social relations in South and Southeast Asia, anthropologists Alberto Gomes, Timo Kaartinen and Timo Kortteinen (2007) draw attention to forms of spontaneous grassroots tolerance, even protection of ethnic and religious 'Others', and practices of negotiation beyond the support of governments or international organisations. The writers name these forms of tolerance *civility*. Embedded in the everyday understandings of the F-Securians there were tentative forms of civility: unheralded and uncelebrated ways of encountering the 'Other' as one's equal, to be worked with, learned from – and confronted – as both advance through (working)life and change.

As a remedy to the present crisis of multiculturalism, James Clifford (1998) and Bruce Robbins (1998) have suggested a reconceived version of the old term *cosmopolitanism*. Attempting to discard long-standing elitist flavours and generalizing utopian (or dystopian) projections, these writers set the new term in plural, as *cosmopolitanisms*, to describe the actuality of contact, contamination, conflict and negotiation as on-going processes in the present interconnected world, and as taking place between people of wildly varying positions, expectations and agendas. It is not only about *frequent flyers*, not even presupposing that people have moved, as global or regional influences will find a growing number of people where they are. *Cosmopolitanisms* are discrepant because people do not have an easy neutral zone to meet, but rather must tackle the encounters in uneven and insecure conditions, relying on contradictory perspectives and miscommunication. Kantian notions of world peace are in this view set behind the reality on the front scene, where both ethnocentric and tolerant contacts take place.

Instead of characterising themselves as *diverse*, my informants expressed *cosmopolitan* stances, but not in the elitist sense (for a more general sociological overview of the term, see Olofsson and Öhman 2007). Their *cosmopolitanisms* were multiple, discrepant and problematic. The value of

predominantly positive, but I have also seen the term "wretched" in press. Maybe tolerance is a measure of sincerity. In any case, all conclusions drawn here are my own, and the picture I draw dates from the time of fieldwork, only occasionally I have gathered some follow-up data. If no other indication is given, the present term refers to the year 2004 when I made the last interviews. Since then, many of the workers have changed, as have also the HR manager and the CEO."

the terms *civility* and *cosmopolitanisms* is in the way they allow for picturing the actual whereabouts of the people in the contact zones, their agency and the open-ended historical and social place where growth and learning is as possible as ethnicising and neo-nationalism. The top-down framework of diversity management is replaced by a realist approach that invites people to learn from each other in the everyday phenomenological triangle of self-‘Other’-world.

Though there’s no worker’s paradise, the immigrants at this workplace were happy enough to warrant the conclusion that tolerance exists beyond diversity management. The main reason seems to be the exceptionally *democratic* (their own term) management style. It may come as a surprise, but there are such organisations among the usual authoritarian and monologising ones. At least this was so while I was there. Also, I think I am now in the position to claim that forms of spontaneous civility are out there to be noticed and supported. Diversity consultants do not have the monopoly of tolerance. Certainly, people do not always show civility to each other, but when they do, it should not be overridden by top-down procedures.

The edge of my findings, against which I hope to grind the diversity machine, is that I can hereby present a gang of dissidents within the glorified field of global economy itself, even among its digital avant-garde. The avant-garde workers do not accept the clothes prepared for them by the serving army of consultants. They look at the fine new robes and note that they are straightjackets. *Well, well, my dear consultants ... What then would you say to your managerial audience? That the heroes are stupid? Perhaps not that. You might try the argument, that the ‘nerds’ have a privileged position. Yes, please, let’s discuss that. What about all those other people who work under less favourable conditions, the immigrant cleaners for instance? I have done some fieldwork with them too. Do you suggest that they need their diversity to be managed because – well, because they are different from the ‘nerds’? I agree. They are different, especially in one big and simple dimension. They are poor and powerless. Do you mean that democracy is not for them, only for the middle class? Let the experts enjoy their freedom to be who they are, but the lower classes need the master’s voice to tell them where they belong ... right?* The apparently benevolent face of diversity management is hopefully unmasked to as many as possible and as embarrassingly as possible.

I have elsewhere (Trux, forthcoming) discussed the above ideas in relation to the problem of discrimination. Obviously, there are moments when people can not be trusted to come along with each other spontaneously, and it is of course the local ruling authority that bears the responsibility for non-violent, non-harassing and non-discriminatory organisational life. Most nation-states have legislation against such abuses, and they charge organisations to comply by it and use their directive power for that purpose. That state of affairs is not problematic. Rather, it is problematic that the advancement of diversity management at the heels of global late capitalist economy has

suggested to outsource the vigilance to private organisations, thereby turning the political quest of equality into an economic quest of profit. This is where the goal transfer has taken place. It has consequences. Organisations are very different from one another. While some, even in the cutting-edge industry, might gladly comply with high ideals, others will seek to use the new discourse as a decoration, hiding behind it exploitation of cheap immigrant workforce, for instance. This is why I have suggested, as a political implication of my study, suspecting DM initiatives and sticking to the good old times equality work.

But the old times were also bad, because they tended to reinforce the discriminatory categories by shaping the equality campaigns according to the same rigid classifications as the discriminators. Here's one of the most vicious and enduring paradoxes of social identity. We can't keep silent about gender, 'race', ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability, because they are major obstacles in many people's lives (see Prasad et al. 2006). We must talk about the real issues that hurt. But so doing, we may allow them more reality than they deserve. Where is the way out of this dead end? My suggestion is that the political campaign for equality may be combined and compensated by a more fluid discursive process taking sides rather with democratic management than with managerialism. The two different discourses might apply different vocabulary. While the political campaign must remain engaged with the essentialising categorisation, the organisational and civilian discourse might use alternative images and terminology, such as *civility* and *cosmopolitanisms*, and connect them in the local forms already in circulation among the people – to talk to them *in their own language*.

In order not to end the inquiry with a condemnation of diversity management and a naïve celebration of Finnish ways, however, a further tacking move was needed: I had to turn the evaluative lens to the local forms of culture, cherished by many Finns, to see what in them may potentially impede cooperation and equality – and, by extension, how to reinterpret them for better fit with the present world. In order to do that, I used the grace of the holistic full-life approach of ethnography, and turned to the experiences of the foreigners at F-Secure.

Interpreting the foreigners' experiences in a further layer of cultural critique I identified needs of confrontation that call for the reflexivity of the people themselves. These were connected to dominant images such as Finnish narratives of national identity and unquestioned *normal pragmatism*. The linkage to national self-portrait suggests that the study has capacity to bespoken also larger Finnish audiences. There are problematic issues inadvertently hindering full participation of immigrant organisational members, possibly even pushing some to leave. Based on the research, I conclude that reflexive democracy (participatory management combined with a willingness to relativise assumptions of normality) might be a more

sustainable way to foster tolerance than the hegemonic divide, teach and control –approach marketised by the diversity industry.

This paper hopefully demonstrates the potential of ethnography to disturb the advancing of one of the dominant discourses of our time. I try to suggest more contextualised and dialogising alternatives to its desperate-repressive means. I have also distilled some tentative vocabulary for this. For example, when I have spoken to what organisational researchers call practitioners (managers, union representatives etc.) I have used the metaphor of vision vs. hearing: *“When you do DM, you look at the others with a unilateral classificatory gaze. When you take a more egalitarian approach, you admit that they have voices and you listen to them, even let them counter classify you.”*

The way it went, concretely

My sorrow and shame and constant worry has been the fact that I wasn't allowed to do any proper amount of participant observation at the headquarters (first in Espoo, then in Ruoholahti, Helsinki). I interviewed participants in the visitors' zone, in a few small meeting rooms, due to tight security regulations. A more visionary researcher would perhaps have anticipated such a plight with an organisation engaged in digital security business ... Well, couple of times a venturesome worker would invite me up to his office, against the rules. And of course there were the Christmas parties – I participated in two of them – and the seminar on diversity (!) held by the *Finnish Business and Society* and organised at F-Secure. Though I agree with Stephen Barley and Gideon Kunda (2001), that we should concentrate on those groups that have come to lead the occupational transformation in the richer part of the world – the technical, commercial and managerial occupations (I chose the 'nerds' also for the Marcusian edge they afforded me) – these are precisely the groups that close themselves from outside observers, within the confines of high position, expertise and confidentiality. I tried to counterbalance the resulting heavy discursive bias of my material by a number of moves.

Firstly, I made what has been called a *return to field* (see e.g. Burawoy 2003). Since the preliminary study in 1999-2000, two years went before the main bulk of interviews were collected, in 2002-2004. I interviewed altogether 30 people, six of them twice. Luckily to me (if not to them), the *IT bubble* had burst, and the sharp change of economic cycle brought many tensions better in view. Indeed, many of the accounts I listened to resembled closely the disillusioned voices conveyed in Richard Sennett's books. If I couldn't hang around, I at least spread the visits over a long period in the organisational life. I think I got to know about things that mattered to them, the meaningful things: the joys and the pains of their work, the organisational and business environment and the social space. (I could at least weigh these stories against each other.) The scarcity of observation is a weakness in my study, but it pushed me to do it otherwise as reflexively as I could. Though I admit

this, I can't agree with the puzzling suggestion by Barley and Kunda (2001) that simple etic *recordings* of organisational life would suffice. According to these established organisational ethnographers, too much of the present research is operating in the discursive dimension only. While that may be so, I still wonder. As a source of understanding, the humanistic epistemology of ethnography is probably under a greater pressure in the world of work and organisations, where economic and technocratic notions tend to set the agenda, then it ever was in studies of the more traditional subjects. Putting more stress on observation should not mean giving away with reflexivity. In the world of managers, productivity and streamlining, we must claim the right to be reflexive.

The second attempt at widening my window into the organisational reality was the trip I made to F-Secure's sales office in Silicon Valley, California. Following nowadays fashionable trends in mapping the interconnections of people, things and ideas (see Marcus 1995 and 1999; Hannerz 2003), I concluded that the business and professional model of that mythical *Mecca of the programmers* was to be seen everywhere, and the American site was the one most pointed at, admired and problematic to the people in Helsinki. So I made my suitcase and went there for the maximum possible, yet anthropologically ridiculous two weeks.

The two weeks turned out to be intellectually, experientially, emotionally and morally laden ... It was downturn, so the place little resembled the glorious descriptions I had read. Also, this was not a R&D department of any of the cutting edge organisations, but a simple sales office hiring local clerks, salesmen and helpdeskers to serve the American clientele of a small European anti-virus company. Nobody big. I was big here, however. Soon I realised that I was taken for a corporate spy, sneaking around and reporting to *Helsinki*. My lesson in questioning the routine national assumption that Finland is something close to antithesis to colonialism, had begun. If the people in Helsinki resisted ethnicising, the San Jose personnel did it full-hearted. There were only two categories in their taxonomy: the Finns and the others. The centre of their world was Helsinki, and they would come asking me "*more about Finnish culture*", "*how was Helsinki like*", "*what was salmiakki made of*" ... and telling me how much they "*would have wanted to travel there*". This was an overseas office of a late capitalist organisation, the headquarters of which happened to be in my remote little home town.

The reversing roles of centre and periphery were echoed in the reversing roles of observer and observed, though I was stupid enough not to make the full out of it. In Helsinki, one of the informants I interviewed at both rounds was Bharat (pseudonym), the Indian. As I studied him, he studied Finnishness. It was his profession, as a localiser (a new job in the global technology business), to study "*cultures and languages*" and prepare for translating technologies from some of them into others. It was he, not me, who was alone among *natives*, passing his lonely week-ends writing accounts

of Finland for Indian audiences. To him, I must be one of the *natives*. But were we on the same *field*? Academic ethnographers are indeed not the only people going places and asking questions.

I have worried so much for not getting *in*, but was there such a place? Thinking of the employees, I wonder. They were moved around by the employer or travelled by their own ambition, climbing the ever-changing “ladders” of late capitalist organisations. There is so much of ephemerality in those social spaces these days. Each time I returned to the company, people and things had changed. They talked about absent others to me, and I to them. Also, I found myself adjusting to an ever-changing minefield of power relations. Unlike in the cleaning company, here I can’t readily identify *bad guys* and *good guys*, but think that all have some responsibility relative to their power – in the triangular social relations of multiethnic organisation. (Management + newcomers/minority + locals/majority.)

Another idea by Marcus, that touched my experience, is that of *complicity* between the ethnographer and her subjects (Marcus 1999). I understand this “*marking moment of equivalence*” as the experience of being put to the same, of struggling with very much the same things, even joining the same social movements. Here I have described the experience of us educated, middle-class world citizens encountering one another and yet being baffled, unable to ask what really puzzles us, politely turning around expectedly sensitive issues, with a lot of guesswork and little results. Should one pay attention to differences or ignore them? What is sensitive or polite and what in turn is discriminative or intruding? Ironically, our *backgrounds* have become too multitudinous to permit a treatment fitting to our demands of equality. You should guess the other’s needs without asking, but how can they be guessed? Distrust and ephemeralisation prevent getting acquainted. We sit in what I call a *sensitivity trap*, and I am no better than my informants in finding ways out of it.

Looking for the *field* and the *audience*

It has been said many times over that today, the ethnographer can no longer simply *go there* to be *among the natives*, or that wouldn’t be convincing. Instead, we must explicate the processes by which *field* and *informants* are constructed from among mere people and places in our overall lives. Let’s see where and when that takes place.

If otherness is what one has set out to learn from, then we are never *at home*. Our job is to make distance, to reveal the subtle but persistent slippage between larger cultural formations and subcultures, and between collective representations and individual interpretations. There is no limit to how small a difference can make an ‘Other’, but the moment I identify such a significant, interesting difference I’m in the *field* and there’s my *informant*. It’s a cognitive move.

I took it as my job to show that unfamiliar forms could be found not just in San Jose (maybe not always there), but in just about anybody's thoughts and actions. Especially the most routine assumptions concerning Finnishness and work in Finland were the ones to unpack. I needed all the help of all the non-Finnish *dissidents* to see these, so much they were part of my own cognitive inheritance. Of course. That's half the joy of making ethnography. The other half is to be able, sometimes, to show how boringly (or alarmingly) familiar are some of the thoughts and deeds of the most remote and exotic, marginalised, even demonised people. The way I understand it, ethnographers trade with the strange and the familiar, but always try to go against the grain, in order to learn and let our readers learn, something new.

So far so good. But how to deal with the heterogeneous, fragmented and multidisciplinary readership to be expected? Some of my likely readers will be brought up within the positivist tradition (in psychology and mainstream management studies, for instance). Yet others, most likely, will have no academic position at all. There will be a couple of non-Finnish-speaking colleagues within Finland and outside (at least one careless colleague promised to act as opponent, if that counts as an audience). I must also count with Finns among business studies and in social movements furthering tolerance – and among civil servants. I don't expect to make a bestseller, but I do expect by previous publications to get a very heterogeneous readership. How shall I tell them all something new? The ideal of conveying something from the participants to the readers – making a translation – is in trouble. I find myself crafting a collection of intersecting translations, desperately trying to keep clear and structured. But it's really a series of more or less clumsy changes of position in a hopelessly complicated and messy field. And very foggy in respect to guessing what different readers might expect, assume or react to. The endeavour is not made any easier by the sensitiveness of the issues.

At the present I feel fairly confident about the work (a calm before a storm perhaps). I found a way to make some sort of person centred ethnography. It means, concretely, that I proceeded from analysing the material collected in Helsinki to relativising it and putting it in perspective with the help of the personal vignettes of first the foreigners in Helsinki and secondly, the people in San Jose (both Finns and others). Across-subjects analysis was made only among the Finns regarding certain topics I started with (like ethnicity and culture) and topics that emerged (like varieties of pragmatism). This part of data processing relied on usual qualitative analysis moves and on existing theoretical concepts.

When I moved to processing what the foreigners had to say, I started writing narratives. Maybe this is only when the processing became that of writing ethnography ... I couldn't tell of San Jose in the same way I had told about Helsinki. I don't have ethnographic experience full enough to write confidently about *the Americans* (or *the Indians* or *the Russians...*) I relied

exclusively on those few personal encounters. There I could, however, be as perceptive as possible. I developed a procedure of first analysing and then synthesising the ideas presented by them. I looked for any *favoured terms* or ideas the interviewee might keep returning to, their personal perspective and angle of approaching the themes. Also, I tried to make a merciless conversational analysis by looking at our interaction and identifying moments when I had missed or misunderstood them, and moments when they departed from and invalidated my frames. These are surprisingly easy to notice from written conversations, and very instructive. So, the clumsy fieldworker that in *the Southern seas* would have made a number of instructive behavioural mistakes was to be found in the conversations with the help-deskers and sales managers. Or so I hope.

Another reason why there was a discontinuity or juncture in the analysis/writing process between Helsinki and San Jose was that the later was such a densely tangled experiential cluster of interviews, accounts and highly personal memories, all crowded into a short period in my autobiography and also a short period in the organisational life of the unit visited. Very different from the easygoing Helsinki material, a mere dimension of my overall Helsinki life. Some of the memories from San Jose being also sensitive, I struggled to tell about them in a way at once honest and respectful. To give you an idea of what I mean, here's an excerpt from my manuscript:

In retrospect it is obvious that the picture I got of the unit in San Jose was heavily influenced by the particular moment I managed to witness. The workplace was in turmoil, to say the least, but so was the business. I heard stories much worse from academic Finns residing at Stanford. According to these eye witnesses another company had a sauna built in its premises, and a handwritten note on the thermostat: Finns only allowed to manipulate this. I don't think that the Finns at F-Secure were using a deliberately malevolent power on the locals, apart from a mistimed lay-off. It was rather my own moral as a researcher of diversity that suffered a blow.

I had a meeting with David, the technical support engineer appointed for 1.00 pm. The management rescheduled it earlier, but that was fine for me. I would spend the afternoon exploring the town instead. David was one of the more experienced help-deskers, with a true psychological strategy of calming down upset customers before he got to sort out their problems. No longer a young man, he was father of two children. But he felt he wasn't getting his loyalty back from the company.

David: Well, I'm very loyal. I'll stand by you until I can't stand anymore. Once I make you either part of my family or my friend. And that's my way for work, too. My last job... I worked both at this job and my last job full time for over a month, because I didn't want to leave, because I was so loyal to that company. ... Because I wanted to help them out and make sure that it was good to go. But they couldn't afford to pay me anymore, so of course I had to leave but... Then I don't feel that this company is overly loyal to me. I feel that... The reason I feel that way is other people who have been laid off because of the economic downturn – or at least it was said that was the reason they were laid off – they were all very loyal.

Researcher: Yeah.

David: And I feel that they were not... Their loyalty was not returned.

I don't know what he had been told about work costs in Finland, but he was also worried for his personal economy, if he was laid off.

David: So you could actually run support in Finland just 24 hours a day.

Researcher: Yeah, you need people who work at night.

David: Yeah, at nights in Finland. If it's cheap, you know, labour.

Researcher: Yeah, is it cheaper? Really?

David: That's what we have been... That's what we are told.

Researcher: Aha, aha.

David: I know that I'm currently below poverty level in the United States.

Researcher: You what... Sorry, poverty level?

David: So those, In the US we have levels, you know. - - You can be super-rich basically, you can be middle-class. And then you've got people who live in poverty, you know. - - And normally these are... I'm at pretty high level of poverty, but... So I can pay my bills, but I live from pay cheque to pay cheque kind of...

Researcher: Really.

D.: Being terminated I would have to move away in twelve days or so.

When I came back at the offices to read my mail, there was David's friend, the helpdesk worker telling me David had been laid off just after the interview. We called him with his friend's cell phone from the parking lot, out of company ears. I offered a second meeting, but he refused, though he didn't seem angry to me. I realized I had no way to actually prove I was independent from the company. The top of the irony for the research was that David was the only African American in the unit. Had the Finns learned to do it the American way, with the more grim tones included?

What would I like to discuss with organisers and participants in Liverpool

In this paper, I have attempted to be articulate about my moral and political choices in doing ethnography. I'm not sure how well I have succeeded in that. If you still have a somewhat messy picture about the overall scene, it may not be entirely a result of compressed narration, as usual in renderings of ethnography, but of the topics themselves. After a decade of involvement, I myself still struggle for a foothold in the rough ground of ethnicity, equality, discrimination, difference, culture, power, discourse, practice, pre-, post- and plain modernity, dominance and agency. I have cooked quite a soup of programmers, managers, sellers and helpdeskers with consultants, mainstreamers and critical scholars, social activists and government agents around the pot.

Let me still make one more trial to summarise the *why* and the *how* of this study. The *why* grows out of my disappointment in noticing that the already abandoned ideas of pure cultural forms and clearly delineated social groups to carry them have returned in the form of diversity management, distributed by business consultants and well-aiming activists. I fear that the proclaimed moral good of equality can not be attained by this road, taking a fatal short cut by the goal displacement, and ignoring the true complicity of the subject matters. I am frustrated watching how the detailed warnings by critical scholars go unheeded.

The *how* of the study thus grows out of the fear and the frustration, as a bold effort, probably overestimating my capacity, to unmask the false philanthropists and wrench the discursive initiative from their hands, setting an alternative agenda with an alternative vocabulary - with the idea of working with local agency and leaving room for bottom-up inventions. No doubt it is too much to ask from a mere dissertation, but I did what I could with the means I reached. Researchers are *bricoleurs* like the rest of human kind. Perhaps an emerging scholar with more to hope from the academia might have chosen a more secure disciplinary and theoretical position and might have been more careful in her wordings, but since in the present university outlook I have little academic prospects in front of myself, I did not. So, the political dimension of academic positioning diminished at the side of the political dimension of impact in the field.

Thinking of the symposium, I would be immensely comforted to hear of any similar struggles by others. Same or different moves. It's a bit late for this study to make any substantial changes, but perhaps in possible new endeavours I could benefit from your insights. Writing is still (slightly) in progress, so the questions of translation and other puzzles of writing culture might be discussed.

I have recently presented a similar paper for a Finnish gathering of ethnographers of mixed disciplinary origins. At that time, discussion revolved around the issues of anonymity (of the participants and the organisation) and possible reactions by American interviewees. I wonder if any of you might have similar suggestions, or experiences to share.

Maybe the one big thing I expect is, however, simply the basic idea of all conferences: to be able to put my own work in context with the others. I expect a collection of dissimilar but intriguing contributions. I want to know what is going on in ethnography beyond Finland and get to know you.

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