The Role of Fieldwork in the Construction of Anthropological Knowledge Today

Marit Melhuus
Department and Museum of Anthropology, Oslo

Introduction

At present, the discipline of anthropology is being challenged from various quarters - both within its own ranks and outside. Most importantly we are asked to reconstruct our very categories and hence our ways of perceiving reality. The aim is to develop a contemporary anthropology which in so far possible has rid itself of the ethnocenticism - and I would add - androcentrism - that has dominated the discipline and permeated earlier works. This entails not only constructing a different world view, but also, by implication a rethinking of what fieldwork might be, or a reconsidering of the very making of a "field". What is a place? Who is an "other"? What is history? Moreover, we are asked to reflect on the relationship between the carrying out of fieldwork and its final product, i.e. the knowledge that we as anthropologists eventually produce. In order to address this latter issue, which is the theme of this paper, I will have to go some roundabout ways, covering different turfs, in order to bridge these two poles which ultimately constitute the anthropological endeavour. [1]

[1] One stone, however, which I will have to leave unturned is the convention of writing fieldnotes this sacred and private institution which constitutes the transitional stage between fieldwork and the works we finally write. Space does not permit a closer scrutiny of this metamorphosis (but see Sanjek 1990 for some interesting observations).

In order to capture the flair of the so-called experimental moment[2] within the discipline today with respect to the role of fieldwork in the construction of anthropological knowledge, I have in the present context, limited my references to a few fairly recent texts in anthropology, from the late eighties to the present. Notwithstanding, this selfimposed limitation creates a problem: by referring to a "present", I am necessarily conjuring up a past, which will remain implicit, but which nevertheless informs my readings of these texts.

Anthropology has had different critical moments - and each one of them has called for a reinvention of anthropology. This seems to be a mark of our trade. The tendency in the prevailing criticisms is to subsume our past under one rubric - that of ethnographic realism (re Marcus and Cushman 1982[3]) or traditional empiricism (re Jackson 1989) although mention may also be made of "the interpretive turn" in anthropology as signaled by Geertz. Not only do the new critics ignore the importance of what was once termed "peasant studies" (which Fox hails as a landmark (Fox 1991))[4], they also ignore the very important challenges that have come out of feminist studies (re Howell and Melhuus 1993). This may be valid, for the sake of simplicity - but who says we always want the simple solutions? Judiciously Fox asks 'how well [does] this critique point us toward an anthropology of the present' and observes that though the

> critique may make us aware of the "fictions", or narratives, that the ethnographies represent .. its other message is that the production of anthro-

---

[2] 'The major characteristics shared by experimental ethnographies is that they integrate, within their interpretations, an explicit epistemological concern for how they have constructed such interpretations and how they are representing them textually as objective discourse about subjects among whom research was conducted' (Marcus and Cushman, 1982:25).

[3] Marcus and Cushman define ethnographic realism as 'a mode of writing that seeks to represent the reality of a whole world or form of life', the thrust being to allude to a whole - a cultural totality by means of parts or limited foci of analytical attention (1982:29). It is the first hand knowledge obtained through the experience of fieldwork which lends the ethnographic account its authority, thus forging an intimate link between fieldwork and writing.

[4] Fox is one of the few who explicity hails the works of Eric Wolf and Sidney Mintz as important landmarks, representing an anthropology that was taking issue with the challenges that working in modern complex societies represent. I share his view and think that much is still to be learned from the perspectives that they developed within the so-called "peasant studies" in present attempts to come to terms with working as anthropologists - doing ethnographies - in an ever increasing complexity of relationships as these unfold before us.

> pology still takes place through the same scholarly labor process by which our 'ancestors' authorized the hallowed "anthropology land" (Fox 1991:7).

Despite, then, the calls for new theories and reinventing anthropology - we still insist on 'the same procedure as last year', implying that of doing fieldwork.

Fieldwork and the Construction of Anthropological Knowledge

The relationship between fieldwork and anthropological knowledge is not an easy one to tease out, despite it being at the very core of the anthropological endeavour. But it is precisely because of its unquestioned centrality, that this relationship comes to appear as *selfevident* - representing perhaps the *doxa* of anthropology. Moreover, to juxtapose these two terms - fieldwork and knowledge - is to put on the same plane concepts that are of a different order. Without delving into the very complex issue of the ontological order of knowledge or what knowing is, I will hazard a few simple distinctions: Fieldwork is best visualized as something concrete - knowledge is something abstract.[5] Fieldwork is something you do - knowledge is something you either convey or assimilate. If fieldwork can best be described as a prolonged event and perhaps more importantly a learning process, anthropological knowledge is a representation (of among other things that event). However, the knowledge obtained through fieldwork is of a particular kind. Fieldwork is a unique form of acquiring knowledge and is particularily well suited for obtaining systematic and meaningful insights about other cultures. Through observation, participation and empathy knowledge is inscribed as a particular form of bodily experience, an embodied knowledge, and is something more and radically different from bookish learning. Hence, fieldwork gives rise to a specific constellation of knowledge. It is a knowledge based on lived experience - that of the people of the society under study as well as that of the anthropologist. It is shared knowledge and by definition intersubjective. Yet, anthropological knowledge can also be characterized as parasitic, its

[5] I realize that this view of knowledge is narrow and does not take into account more implicit forms of knowledge, e.g. embodied knowledge, tacit knowledge etc. Knowledge is also a process and more importantly, knowledge is cumulative.

very construction depending on access to the life experiences of men and women. What emerges as anthropological knowledge is gleaned from localized knowledges, culled from very particular contexts and in very specific ways. Nevertheless, it is precisely the transposition of the concrete experience of fieldwork to the recognized abstract canons of knowledge which marks the anthropological craft.[6] Anthropological knowledge is a prerequisite for fieldwork and the outcome of fieldwork is - hopefully the construction of anthropological knowledge, with all that this entails - from the presenting of detailed ethnography from a specific locality (or whatever might be determined as a "field") to the elaboration of social scientific theory.

Some might even say that without fieldwork, there is no anthropology, fieldwork then understood as participant observation in its broadest sense: an immersing of oneself in a place and over time among the people whom are the focus for the study. A few quotes culled from recent texts might serve to underscore the importance that anthropologists attach to fieldwork. Holy says:

> The reason for the continuation of fieldwork through participant observation ... derives to a great extent from the fact that fieldwork is seen as a distinguishing and defining feature of social anthropology: however else anthropology could be defined, to do anthropology meant to study a specific community through long - term participant observation. (Holy 1984:17)

Or in the words of Peacock:

> The field experience is said to be radically transforming; it is like psychoanalysis; like brainwashing ... [Fieldwork] is analogous to internship in medicine but perhaps even closer to combat in the military; the experience is partly training and certification but even more a rite of passage that ceremonially affirms one's fitness. (Peacock 1986:55/56)

[6] It is, of course, precisely this transposition which involves the very process of interpretation on which the anthropological endeavour hinges, and which is at the core of anthropological concern However, this paper will not address these complex issues.

Or to quote Boon:

> Fieldwork is a peculiar idea: a prolonged episode ideally ... during which a lone researcher visits a remote population. The experience ... must be hauntingly personal and richly particular; yet it becomes the basis for intercontinental comparison ... Fieldwork epitomizes what anthropologists do when they write. (Boon 1982: 5/8)

Marcus and Cushman have the following to say about fieldwork:

> ...we define an ethnography simply as an account resulting from having done fieldwork, a relatively undisciplined activity, the folklore of which has given identity to an academic discipline... [E]vidence of fieldwork...marks a work as ethnography. (Marcus and Cushman, 1982:27)

Although the tone of these quotes is different, and the stress also subtly so, whatever else they may convey, all hail fieldwork as the distinguishing mark of anthropology. It is therefore interesting to note that despite the intrinsic relationship between fieldwork and the construction of anthropological knowledge, these two themes are nearly always treated separately. Fieldwork is discussed in books on method - knowledge is couched in the very texts we call ethnographies. Typically, I have not found a similar string of definitions with respect to anthropological knowledge as those quoted above on fieldwork. In this light, the post-modern reminders are timely as they force us, once more, to reflect on the nature of the link between doing fieldwork and writing ethnographies.

The new critics lend their analytical thrust from literary criticism and the history of ideas. They are concerned with the deconstruction of "ethnographic realism" (re Marcus and Cushman 1982) - which is seen to start with Malinowski - in an effort to unmask the authority with which the anthropologist represents the "other". The focus is on the construction of texts and their persuasive power as this is established through various rhetorical devices, i.e. on the way the text establishes its authority and its assumptions as representative of the whole culture. Moreover, there is an argument which implies that the text reflects not the

reality as perceived by the "other" as it purportedly claims, but a reality as perceived by its author. Thus the thrust of the criticism, though built from and directed at the text, goes beyond it - not only to its author, but to the whole cultural heritage which permeates our scientific work with rampant dualisms separating and privileging object over subject, observation over participation, distance over nearness, detachment over attachment, reason over passion etc. Most notably, the critics seek to subvert the aura of scienticity that these text emanates. As an alternative they posit "modernist ethnography".[7] Whereas the

> realist ethnography contextualizes with reference to a totality in the form of a literal situated community and/or semiotic code as cultural structure ... the referent of contextualization for the modernist ethnography, which denies itself any conventional concept of totality, are fragments that are arranged and ordered textually by the design of the ethnographer. (Marcus 1992:325)

Moreover, the modernist ethnography seeks to overcome the dualisms by particularily emphasising dialogics. According to Marcus 'The great promise of such ethnography is indeed the possibility of changing the terms in which we think objectively and conventionally about power through exposure to cultural discourses'. (Marcus 1992:327)

Precisely because texts are the loci of anthropological knowledge, the way we write becomes an important source for understanding how this knowledge comes about. The (post)modernist criticism is seen to hinge their entire argument of authority on the question of representation, thus neglecting the very aspects of fieldwork which goes into the making of the text. The following quote from Fardon is perhaps representative of the attitude of many anthropologists towards the (post)modernists cum textualists:

> Paradoxically, this concern for ethnography is ethnographically unspecific. It invites us to sacrifice the specificity of research in particular places

[7] At this point I must admit that the anthropologists' classificatory schemes of different types of ethnographies - in particular that between modernist and post-modernist - are becoming somewhat elusive, although there seems to be a general agreement about the main characteristics of "realist ethnography".

> at certain times in order to treat all research as so many refractions of an ethnographic master process ... [The textualists] are producing texts by means of texts, rather than by means of fieldwork. (Fardon 1990:24/5)

In a similar vein Jackson also accuses the textualists.

> By fetishizing texts, [the postmodern trend] divides readers from authors, and separates both from the world ... The idea that there is 'nothing outside the text' may be congenial to someone whose life is confined to acadame, but it sounds absurd in the village worlds where anthropologists carry out their work ... Quite simply, people cannot be reduced to texts any more than they can be reduced to objects. (Jackson 1989:184)

Jackson's own position is that of a radical empiricist, which he contrasts to what he calls "traditional empiricism".

What can be gleaned from these brief quotes is a disdain for the armchair anthropologist, implying that anthropological knowledge springs out of doing fieldwork and that fieldwork is an encounter with people, and not with texts. It has also inevitably been tied to a notion of place. The credibility of our discipline still rests (for some) on this more traditional notion of fieldwork. However, this should not preclude the possibility of "doing" anthropology without doing fieldwork in its literal sense, but it does assume that there is an approach that is inherent to anthropology and moreover, that this approach is not only some deflected version of ourselves.

Nevertheless, it must be remembered: In many important ways anthropolgists are predisposed, before 'entering the field'. Most significantly we are influenced by the reading that we have done before fieldwork. As several anthropologist note (e.g. Fardon (1990), Appadurai (1986) and Limon (1991)) not only are we infused with certain regional expectations through the transmission of gatekeeping concepts pertinent for a particular cultural configuration (e.g. honour and shame in the Mediterranean), we are also strongly influenced by what our predecessors have formulated as salient aspects of a particular problematic. Moreover, our own interests will influence what we look for: Are we concerned with tradition - we will 'look' for and 'record' tradition and

perhaps willy nilly 'overlook' the presence of more "modern" or encompassing forces - be they commercial, religious or technological. The converse, of course, also holds true. Finally, a recognition of the implications of the colonial encounter for anthropological representations - past or present - is contributing towards more reflexive and nuanced attitudes towards "the other" .

I do not mean to imply that we only see what we want to see. On the contrary, being attentive to our own predilections makes us, hopefully, more sensitive and perhaps open to the fact that "things" are not always as we thought they would be. Whatever else we may learn from this, one thing is certain: there is no innocent anthropology - as there is no innocent anthropologist (if there ever was one). It is precisely this loss of innocence that articulates the experimental moment in anthropology and marks the point of no return - a point which is also one of creative departure.

Let me follow with a quote form Appadurai, which captures these movements:

> ...anthropological theory has always been based on the practice of going *somewhere*, preferably somewhere geographically, morally, and socially distant from the theoretical and cultural metropolis of the anthropologist. The science of the other has inescapably been tied to the journeys elsewhere. But the question of what kind of elsewhere is tied in complicated ways to the history of European expansion ... In turn ... changes in anthropological theorizing have themselves influenced fashions in anthropological travel. Places are the objects of anthropological study as well as the critical links between description and analysis in anthropological theory. (Appadurai 1986: 357)

This quote can be juxtaposed with one by Michael Jackson:

> The most critical event that bears upon the transformation in contemporary anthropology is the loss of our emprical field, a loss which is inextricably tied up with decolonization and the loss of empire. (Jackson 1989:183)

Leaving aside the implicit ethnocentrism - not to say anglocentrism in Jackson's quote about our mutual loss of empire, both authors stress the fact that anthropologists have - or at least have had - a field somewhere and that this field is linked to anthropological theory. What is communicated is a sense of bounded space - a place, an empirical field - and a notion of bounded time - a temporality which is tied to the place.

It is precisely theses notions of bounded time tied to a bounded space "an elsewhere" separate and different from the anthropologist's here and now - along with the focus on participation and observation, which can be traced as the core motifs for the new critics of anthropology.

Alternatives

As mentioned, anthropology is being challenged from very diverse corners of our field: From the textual/reflexive criticisms of Clifford, the radical empiricism as extolled by Jackson, the recapturing of anthropology by Fox, the hailing of evocation by Tyler, the regionalization as exposed by Fardon, to the call for a modernist ethnography from Marcus, or the use of autobiography as suggested by Okely, the focus on global ethnoscapes by Appadurai or the Comaroffs' suggested solution: treating modernity as a problem of historical ethnography.

These critics are by far all of one piece, although, inevitably certain themes do recur and points of intersection can be discerned. In fact, it is far from easy to identify the various positions, their points of concurrence and the points of dissent. Thus, I might, inadvertently lump together anthropologists who place themselves far apart. Nevertheless, there seems to be a common denominator: What they perhaps all share is an anxiety about the status of anthropological knowledge (Jackson 1986:182), a concern for the contested authority of the writing anthropologist, the recognition that there is no privileged position, and the "post-blur blur" of genres, to quote Appadurai (Appadurai 1991). The worry underlying it all seems to be one that has haunted anthropology since its inception as a social science: Is this art or is it science? The position one takes to this divide will have implications both for the status of fieldwork and for the texts that results from it. To oversimplify: If anthropology is art, then we are producing fictions. If anthropology is science, then how do we account for or

"verify" anthropolgoical knowledge.[8] Lurking above these turbulent waters is the troublesome concept of truth (and such concomittant notions as reality, objectivity etc). I cannot pursue this issue in the present context, but leave it in the phrasing of the following anthropologists. Jackson states:

> Construing anthropology as either science or art, fact or fiction, true or false, knowledge or opinion implies an absurd antimony between objectivity and subjectivity, and the idea that we must choose between one or the other. However, the discourse of anthropology is a curious blend of both sorcery and science... Ridding anthropology of the jargon of science will [not] necessarily make it any more capable of depciting things as they really are ... the adoption of a reflexive, first person, confessional idom ... creates little more than an a illusion of sincerity. (1989:182).

However, the Comaroffs, though not dismissing the anxiety, merely register matter of factly that

> It (anthropology that is) has continued to be, as Evans Pritchard insisted long ago, a humanist art, in spite of its sometime scientific pretensions. ... In this sense, the "problem" of anthropological knowledge is only a more tangible instance of something common to all *modernist* epistemologies ... For ethnography personifies, in its methods and its models, the inescapable dialectic of *fact value.* (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 8/9; my stress)

In other words, anthropology has always been situated on the threshold between these two discourses (between art and science, between fact and value) and will continue to be so. Moreover, in my opinion, it is precisely this ambiguous positioning of anthropology - this tension in the anthropological endeavour - which

[8] Worth mentioning in this context is the discussion which the publication of Oscar Lewis's life history books provoked, in particular *The Children of Sanchez* (Lewis 1961). See f.ex . the *Current Anthropology* book review (1967: 8 (5), 480 - 501). Many of the reviewers pivot their arguments around the nature of anthropology - as science or art.

articulates the creative points of departure, representing at one and the same time its weakness and its strength.

Contrary to what is rumoured, whatever else the critics may contest, they all uphold fieldwork as central to anthropology, though there may be some ambiguity as to its significance. Rather, it appears that the challenges to anthropology lie in reconceptualizing what the "sites" of fieldwork might be. In particular there is an emphasis on relinquishing the notion of bounded time-space wholes as the basis for our ethnography. The terms open-ended, fluid, ambiguous, paradox all permeate these recent anthropological texts. Moreover, several of the critics are more appreciative of the role "armchair" anthropolgists have to play (e.g. Fox), than what has earlier been the case, thus echoing a regret that Lienhardt already voiced in 1964.[9]

Whereas Appadurai calls for a reconfiguration of the notion of place, suggesting ethnoscapes - or landscapes of group identity - as a domain for study, he also invokes the imagination as a creative source and will include literature as constitutive of the field, as 'fiction, like myth, is part of the conceptual repertoire of contemporary society' (Appadurai, 1991:202; see also Appadurai 1986). The Comaroffs ask us to make archives, newspapers, texts and mentalities as fields for anthropological study in '[establishing] how collective identitites are constructed and take on their particular cultural context' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:42). They want to do an ethnography of the historical imagination (1992:31). Marcus (1992) in his call for a modernist anthropology asks that we reconsider our notion of situated identity to include or reflect what he calls "dispersed" identitites; moreover, he explicitly puts forth a plea for a dialogic ethnography. Not wishing to eliminate exegesis all together, he wants to

> ...frame it as fully dialogic - foregrounding the dual voices, rather than the lone interpreter. The purpose would be not so much to change the indigenous concepts but rather to alter the anthropolgist's own. (Marcus 1992:319)

Although there can be no doubt that an altering of the anthropologists' concepts (understood in its broadest sense as a conscious reflection both of the way our own knowledge is grounded

[9] Lienhardt (1964) regrets that there are not more armchair anthropologists 'to give direction to the separate labours of hosts of field anthropologists'.

and informs our interpretation of indigenous concepts as well as an awareness of the power relations embedded in this very grounding informing our "encounter" with the other), the question remains whether a truly dialogic ethnography is feasible - or even desirable - as the goal towards which anthropologists should at present strive. In fact, Hastrup contends that 'the informants' voices cannot penetrate the discursive speech of the ethnographer' (Hastrup 1992:121). Precisely because anthropology is 'writing a culture, which is not an empirical entity, but an analytic implication' Hastrup dismisses the utopia of a plural authorship, insisting that 'however much we replace the monologue with dialogue the discourse remains asymmetrical' (Hastrup 1992:122). Recognizing the "voice" and authority of the informants cannot subvert the responsibility of the anthropologist in creating an account, which necessarily implies a recontextualization, and hence, rests ultimately with the anthropologist. This position, however, does not preclude an acute sensitivity to what we are in fact doing and its implications for the rendering of the re-presentations we put forth.

At issue, then, is not so much the question of fieldwork - whether we should do it or not - but rather how to *overcome* the conventions of preparing, doing, and writing-up fieldwork as these have been passed down. The critics are concerned with the limits of our possibilities for really understanding the other and the restrictions that are inherent to the possibility of really (and truly) representing the other. Yet, rather than succumbing to the impossibility of anthropology, they are suggesting ways in which we can escape our most blatant ethnocentricities. I may be putting words in their mouths, but as I understand them, they argue that not only *can* we ground our knowledge empirically, without becoming idiosyncratic, but also that we should expand our grounds for empirical research. Moreover, they imply that to a certain extent, it is possible to overcome the innate dualisms that has plagued our discipline, by, on the one hand, reconceptualizing the way we envisage our fieldwork - that is in reordering our preunderstandings of the world *and*, on the other, in the way we write our texts. The hopes of the critics, captured in the following quote from Marcus and Cushman is that the reaction against ethnographic realism will

> ...mark a profound reshaping of the theoretical ambitions and research practices of a discipline which has increasingly depended on ethno-

> graphic texts for both data and the development of theoretical perspectives. (Marcus and Cushman 1982:25).

Nevertheless, the suggested alternatives, most significantly that of a co-existential world bridging the us and them, the here and there, the then and now by evoking notions of simultaneity, co-temporality or deterritorialization - or the positing of dialogics - smacks to me of another ethnocentrism: that of equality. Even though the critics are particularily sensitive to the issues of power and reification and insist on particularities, localities and histories - it appears that the notion of an encompassing global process somehow reduces differences to the same, placing us all on one plane. At one level this is an intriguing argument - who in this day and age is not for some kind of equality? Yet, a notion of sameness does not necessarily imply equality, of this anthropologists are well aware. Although we are all involved in the different forms of world trafficking - be it in people, goods, monies, signs or symbols - we are so in very different ways. These differences still have to be accounted for and that account will have implications for the construction of anthropological knowledge. Modernity may have spread its arms to all corners of the world, in one way or another, leaving no untouched enclave for traditional anthropology to pursue its noble aims, but we all know that modernity still means very different things in very different contexts. Therefore, it is perhaps the interstices - the discontinuous experience of the "same" processes of modernity - that remain important loci for investigation. Thus, it seems to me that an *implicit* notion of equality rather than enhance our possibilities of understanding and doing justice to the representation of "the other" may serve to deflect from it. With respect to dialogics, I can only underscore the Comaroffs' astute comment 'It makes anthropology into a global ethnocentric interview' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:10). Or to again draw on Hastrup:

> The fact that anthropologists and informants are equal on the autobiographical level does not detract from the fact that at the level of the anthropological discourse their relationship is hierarchical. (Hastrup 1992:122)

Establishing Trust: A Brief Outline of My Own Position

Despite these somewhat superficial comments, I nevertheless share with these critics not only their concern for a careful reconsideration of what an anthropology in the contemporary world could be, but also their approach. And, I think that we do well to heed their arguments, whether we accept the implications or not. In view of what as been said above, what are then the issues that I can appreciate and which ring an echo with respect to my own work?

First and foremost it is the insistence that fieldwork is possible and necessary, and it follows from this that I also think that we have ways of representing that experience which, although it cannot be tested directly, can be made plausible and recognizable for others. In other words, I do not believe that my work - or any other's - is a literal translation of what "happens" in the field, but nor do I concede that it is all fiction. It is also more than a mere evocation. We can agree that ethnographies are contrived products, but just like Magritte's famous painting of a pipe entitled 'This is not a pipe' does not negate the existence of pipes, so our contrived ethnographies do not negate that we are re-presenting a reality *other* than our own.

Second, there is a sensitivity to both the paradoxical and the open ended aspects of culture which I share. It follows from this that also I am weary of a view of cultures, communities, societies as bounded wholes mapped onto circumscribed places. Rather I see "cultures", if you permit the reification, as parts of different encompassing systems - global if you will, which may be an intersection of economic, political or religious processes, whose very interconnectedness is part of that which I wish to discern (viz Comaroff 1992:32). Thus, the identity cum locality, or place cum culture, as a trope loses its totalizing grasp (viz Marcus 1992:315).

Hence, thirdly, I appreciate the opening of the ethnographic field to include such phenomena as literary texts, archives, mentalities, the construction of master narratives. This is because, on the one hand, the problems *posed* locally - in the field - do not necessarily resolve themselves locally. They may pertain to a wider, more encompassing system. On the other hand, very different phenomena may speak to the same issue. Thus we need to be able to travel beyond our traditional stamping grounds - to domains far afield which may help to cast light over the puzzles that we are struggling to understand. In other words, a specific cultural

expression as relayed through a particular locality will not give us all we have - or need - to know. More data generated locally does not necessarily mean making more sense. On the contrary, it may be that the data needed to make sense of a cultural configuration can be gleaned from historical texts, worldwide religious creeds, or important events that have taken place - *are taking place* - elsewhere and at another - *or the same* - time. Thus, we must look for traces wherever they are to be found.

Fourth, I insist that we must be able to juggle two thoughts at the same time: we must be able to recognize and accept both difference and sameness, hierarchy and equality, chaos and coherence, contradictions and consensus. We must concede that people do not necessarily see their lives as coherent and moreover, that this does not necessarily present a problem to them, although it may to the anthropologist. Thus, we must also be able to live with ambivalence - theirs and ours and produce knowledge that reflects this ambivalence.

Fifth, having said that ambiguities and ambivalence are part of life, I do not mean to imply that there is no way or no need to search for coherence. In contrast to those who disdain the notion of underlying structure - or system - I think that our task is precisely to elicit the systematic interconnectedness of disparate social facts. In other words, I would argue that there is a subtext, that is not directly accessible, and that it is, among other things, this subtext we must aim at disclosing. Moreover, I accept that for those of us working in complex societies and interested in those very complexities, we can only hope to grasp fragments of a life world or a cultural field. These fragments also include silences, discontinuities and paradoxes - all that cultural stuff which belongs in one way or another to the 'very kitchen of meaning' (to borrow an expression from Rolandes Barthes).[10] The point is then to recover those fragments, relate them to each other and restore them 'to a world of meaningful interconnections' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:16). This task is a challenging one, not only because 'the system to which we relate them are systems of a complex sort' (Comaroff and Comarof 1992:31), but also because it imposes simultaneously processes of *decontextualisation* and *recontextualisation*, implying a form of violence in so far as this act is one of impostion. Nevertheless, it is this imposed effort - to create

[10] Thus, I might say with Boon: 'Cultures that become totally accessible, too clear, extraparadoxical - are doubtless not cultures at all. Paradoxes by their very nature must be entered into scrupulously, not solved' (Boon,1982:46).

a circuit of meaning - that I would call constructing anthropological knowledge.

Sixth, I share with Fox his position that we are not free to work up radically new texts or whatever else comes to mind, as the postmodernists seem to suggest. 'We must reenter a world not of our own making - one that more likely has made us' (Fox 1991: 9).

Seven, having said this, however, I nevertheless believe that change is possible - culture is *not* destiny: Neither for the anthropologist nor for the people under study. I am therefore concerned with developing analytical models which can capture - if not the transformations as enacted, as these are only rarely immediately accessible - but models, which minimally and even tentatively identify the *loci* of potential transformations. Thus, I am back to a concept of culture which allows for both flux and stasis, for ambiguity and coherency, for continutity and discontinuity - a concept of culture which although not seamless, allows for a certain order.[11]

Eight, a recurring problem in anthropology is the question of having the *right* data and having *enough* data, i.e. whether more data would have been able to account for the contradictions which inevitably surface. At one level, we can readily admit that we will never have enough, and that one year in the field - or even two - only yields enough to scratch the surface of a cultural configuration. At another level, however, it can be questioned whether more data per se would indeed provide that crucial piece of information which would prove enlightening. As I have stated above, I do not think that a "culture" necessarily provides all the information we need to know. Some things can perhaps *not* be explained within the terms set by the society under study, and if we happen to want to elucidate these "things", then more data might only produce more of the same.

Nevertheless, the issue of having enough data raises an interesting question which bears on the theme of this paper: Can an anthropologist know more than the people themselves? Or is it rather that our knowledge is (only) of a different kind? If we concede that our knowledge is another - what does this "otherness" consist of? To my mind, there is no doubt that our knowledge is - and should be? - of a different kind. The very process of fieldwork implies an intersubjective creation - talking across established differences and creating a world of betweenness (Hastrup 1992:118) - which has as its reference point the encounter and not

[11] See Smedal 1992 for a further discussion of the concept of culture.

the separate lifeworlds of anthropologist and informant. An anthropologist aims not merely to replicate what others say or do, but rather to wring from disparate understandings of disparate lifeworlds a certain coherency, which may be imbued with many and even contradictory meanings. Moreover, the anthropological endeavour implies accounting for what may not always be accountable in indigenous terms. It implies making sense of a lifeworld that does not necessarily make sense to the people concerned, at least not in the same way.[12] It implies creating an order which is not necessarily given or giving explanations which might be alternative to those produced locally (e.g. debt crisis). Thus, the construction of anthropological knowledge is an imposition by definition and as such invokes power, however close to the ground we choose to place ourselves.

Ultimately, it is knowledge that we want to produce and the work of an anthropologist must be judged by the knowledge it imparts - about the people, place or problem under study as well as about the anthropologist doing the study. As Manganaro says 'anthropological knowledge is only available through what anthropologists write' (Manganaro, 1990). Nevertheless, I have throughout this paper argued that intrinsic to the construction of anthropological knowledge is fieldwork. Fieldwork - in its narrower or broader sense - is the distinguishing mark of our craft. As we do deal with real people and in real cultures, a prerequisite for successful fieldwork is *trust*. And trust, to be operative, must be based on a *certain awareness* of the complex moral relationships which the grounding of anthropological knowledge on fieldwork involves.[13] Moreover, for this trust to gain significance it must be extended to the anthropological community and beyond. Because of the very nature of fieldwork and its direct bearing on the text, trust in that the narrative is a faithful rendering of that experience, meeting the strictest canons of our discipline, is essential if it is to be categorized as knowledge. I would like to suggest that at

[12] In other words, my answer to Crick's question: 'Can anthropological interpretations be valid if they imply meanings that actors do not know?' (Crick, 1982:299) would be yes, in so far as we are clear within what framework or context the meanings are to be evaluated.

[13] Marcus' discussion of modernist ethnography with respect to power and ethics runs in the same vein as my observations about trust. His point is that the ethical concerns, though never resolved in any one ethnography, expose the kinds of contradictions embedded in the doing of ethnographic research and writing (and hence I would add, the production of anthropological knowledge) that make the ethnographer vulnerable to a diverting critique of his or her own ethics and that the kind of ethical awareness he is espousing is a prerequisite for the modernist remaking of ethnography (Marcus 1992:328).

the heart of the construction of anthropological knowledge, then, lies not fieldwork, but *trust.* Trust is perhaps what constitutes the self evident in the relationship between fieldwork and anthropolgoical knowledge it goes without saying because we assume, perhaps wrongly, that it comes without saying.

References

Apaduarai, Arjun, 1986,"Theory in Anthropology: Center and Periphery" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* Volume 28 (2): 356 -361.

Apadurai, Arjun, 1991, "Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transitional Anthropology" in Richard Fox (ed) *Recapturing Anthropology. Working in the Present,* Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press.

Barthes, Roland, 1988, *The Semiotic Challenge,* New York: Hill and Wang.

Boon, James A., 1982, *Other Tribes, Other Scribes. Symbolic Anthropology in the Comparative Study of Cultures. Histories. Religions. and Texts,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Comaroff, John and Comaroff, Jean, 1992, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination,* Boulder: Westview Press.

Crick, Malcolm R., 1982, "Anthropology of knowledge" in *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 11: 287 -313.

Fardon, Richard, 1990, *Localising Strategies. Regional Traditions of Ethnographic Writings,* Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

Fox, Richard G., 1991, "Introduction: Working in the present" in Richard G. Fox (ed) *Recapturing Anthropology. Working in the Present.* Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press.

Hastrup, Kirsten, 1992, "Writing ethnography. State of the art" in Judith Okely and Helen Callaway (eds) *Anthropology and Autobiography,* ASA Monographs 29. London: Routledge.

Holy, Ladislav, 1984, "Theory, methodology and the research process" in R.F. Ellen (ed) *Ethnographic Research. A Guide to General Conduct,* London: Academic Press.

Howell, Signe and Melhuus, Marit, 1993, "The study of kinship; the study of person; a study of gender?" in Teresa del Valle (ed) *Gendered Anthropology*, London: Routledge.

Jackson, Michael, 1983, *Paths Toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographical Inquiry*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Lewis, Oscar, 1961, *The Children of Sanchez. Autobiography of a Mexican Family*, New York: Random House.

Lienhardt, Godfrey, 1964, *Social Anthropology*, London: Oxford University Press.

Limon, Jose, 1991, "Representation, Ethnicity, and the Precursory Ethnography: Notes of a Native Anthropologist" in Richard Fox (ed.) *Recapturing Anthropology. Working in the Present*, Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press.

Marcus, George E. and Cushman, Dick, 1982, "Ethnographies as Texts" in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Volume 11: 25 - 69.

Marcus, George, 1992, "Past, present and emergent identitities: requirements for ethnographies of late twentieth-century modernity worldwide" in Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman (eds) *Modernity and Identity*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Manganaro, Marc, 1990, "Textual Play, Power and Cultural Critique: An Orientation to Modernist Anthropology" in Marc Manganaro (ed) *Modernist Anthropology. From fieldwork to text*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Peacock, James, 1986, *The Anthropological Lens: Harsh Light, Soft Focus*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sanjek, Roger (ed), 1990, *Fieldnotes. The Makings of Anthropology*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Smedal, Olaf, 1992, "Social Anthropology, Radical Alterity and Culture" in *Canberra Anthropology, 15(1)*: 58 - 74.

Stoller, Paul, 1989, *The taste of ethnographic Things: the Senses in Anthropology*, Philadelphia, Penn.: University of Pennsylvania Press.