

Workshop 12

Between Identity and Alterity: Engaging in Shared Experiences of Everyday Life

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In a world characterised by the dual and shifting forces of heterogeneity, homogenisation, increased violence, and forced migration, there is a need to stimulate forms of human understanding that promote mutuality and peaceful co-existence. Participants will address 'engaged' forms of communication and understanding in anthropological fieldwork. These are variously described as tacit knowledge, empathy, intuition, mutuality and/or intersubjectivity. Tacit knowledge as a form of understanding comes from face to face relations in the everyday realm of living. Shared experiences are not necessarily openly expressed or cognitively elaborated; instead, they rest in intuition as well as shared sensual, bodily, and heartfelt experiences that promote respect, compassion and empathy. The participants in this session are requested to present and reflect on the kinds of engagement or intersubjectivity that they have realised in their own fieldwork. Special attention will be paid to evaluating tacit knowledge and mutual embodied experiences. These provide sources of anthropological data as well as insight into forms of interpersonal communication that may lie beyond the realm of spoken words. The session will include anthropologists of different nationalities, theoretical and methodological orientations, who are at different stages of their careers.

Sharing Experiences with Tamil Refugees in Northern Norway: Body and Emotion as Methodological Tools

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Anthropological studies raise the urgent question of language and the dynamics of inter-cultural communication. Traditionally, anthropology tended to emphasise words and visual observations as main sources for data production and required that the fieldworker learned the natives' language. In our time of increasing globalisation, fieldwork tends to focus on the "borders" between

different cultural worlds, rather than seeing cultures as bounded entities. As anthropologist's field sites have a more permeable quality in today's globalised, transnational world, there is a need for new and more flexible methodologies. This paper is based on fieldwork conducted among Tamil refugees living on the arctic coast of northern Norway, thus representing a people living on the border between different cultural and linguistic worlds. Working "on the borders", I have searched beyond the words to explore an approach to fieldwork that focuses on empathy, engagement, sharing and embodying common experiences. Such an approach is not only a question of methodological tools, but calls for reassessment of different kinds of knowledge.

The Status of "Non-Existing" Knowledge

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This paper will examine the nature and status of data. The point of departure is my fieldwork experience among small-scale Malay fishermen on Tuba Island. During this period I used various approaches to obtain knowledge on the existence of their possible traditional spirit-world, so richly described in literature on Malay culture. Inquiries on these matters, however, did not lead to much result partly because this is a sensitive area of knowledge. As months went by, I nevertheless developed a distinct feeling that spirits were around, and that people were not indifferent to their presence. After a year in the field I could render a picture of how I envisaged the local cosmology, as the dispositions and locations of the most powerful spirits. Just before my departure some few fishermen finally enlightened me on this matter, and it turned out that their cosmology overwhelmingly coincided with mine. But in case nobody actually verbalised these matters, would my intuitions then carry the status of data? My contention is that my own tacit knowledge was closer to the experience, feelings and understandings of people than the more or less structured descriptions people gave when asked to do so.

Sharing Dreams: Involvement in the Other's Cosmology

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A subject rarely dealt with in anthropological literature but regularly admitted by anthropologists in conversation is the experience of involvement in the cosmological or religious representations of the society under research – an experience that often transcends the well-discussed question if belief is necessary to understanding. The example chosen is the oracular or meaningful dream. Occasionally, anthropologists have dreams that have no meaning for them, but perfectly fit the dream theory of informants. In the present case, from fieldwork among the Rmeet (Lamet) of Northern Laos, an unusual dream for the anthropologist was understood to predict a death that actually and

unexpectedly happened the following night. This paper explores the range of questions raised by such an incident. What kind of communication is established between researcher and informants as a consequence or even as a condition of these phenomena? How does the dreaming of dreams that are comprehensible to informants support communication in fieldwork? What are the problems raised for a scientific understanding of communication and reality?

Using Storytelling to Describe and Analyse Fieldwork Experiences of Knowledge Generation

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This paper draws on the experience of observing and writing about two scholars working on their own research projects over a two-year period. The study sought to understand the decision processes associated with their discovery, evaluation, use and generation of information and knowledge. Engaging with these interpretive processes from within the informants' worlds meant allowing them to drive the circumstances and the manner in which their practices were examined, observing what they did, and listening to their explanations of their actions. The paper discusses how the crafting of impressionist stories of the experiences of both the informants and the observer helped to not only draw on the diverse contextual factors surrounding knowledge production, but fostered a deeper engagement with the features represented in those contexts. This creative analytic practice contributes to a deeper understanding of the experiences being described and becomes a powerful device for exploring judgments of relevance. This approach led to a fuller understanding of how intuitive judgments take shape, and how such judgments are communicated. The paper suggests that using storytelling as an analytical tool contributes to a richer understanding of the interpretive processes associated with the discovery and production of knowledge.

I-We, Me-You, Us-Them: Navigating the Hyphens of Intersubjectivity Among Sets of Identical Twins

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Identical twins are variously depicted as clones, a single unit, a closed society of two, divided selves, self and almost self, and self inside the same physical package. They are described as having mutual or symbiotic identities, diffuse ego boundaries, and as an unsettling presence that undermines a sense of uniqueness or challenges constructions of selfhood in the wider (Western) society. In this study, two identical twin anthropologists reflect

on their own twinship as they converse with other sets of adult twins about their mutual and various experiences of being twins. The study reveals that the intersubjectivities of twin relationships are largely situated and context dependent. Analysis of narrative data demonstrates how twins construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct embodied identities over their life cycles. In contrast to the clone phobia that can characterise the outsiders' view, our argument is presented from an insider's perspective. We conclude that the everyday experience of being an identical twin or identical twins, although special, fails to challenge the range of cultural typologies of selfhood or individuality that are held to characterise Western societies and/or the singleton's (non-twin) world. The data for this study is based on interviews with 22 sets of identical twins and is part of the Twins Talk Project conducted in the summer of 2003 Twins Days Festival at Twinsberg, Ohio, USA.

Cultivating Knowledge: Exploring Gardeners' Spoken and Unspoken Worlds

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This paper's premise is that gardeners cultivate social networks and identities, as well as soil and plants. I speak both as a gardener and as an anthropologist. Based upon my own horticultural efforts as well as upon systematic participant-observation in several gardening associations, I explore the ways in which gardening is a deeply embodied as well as a profoundly social experience. To understand who gardens, what they grow and where they grow it, one must investigate aesthetic values, social class and the production of private and public space. That is, one must contextualise gardening as a social practice. To understand why people garden, however, one must also delve into subtler and often less accessible issues of emotion and sensory reception: to colour, form, texture, scent, sound, taste, perspective and design. Marketers understand very well how to manipulate gardeners' responses. They appeal to standards of beauty, ecological responsibility and competitiveness with other gardeners. Thus my research includes the study of garden writing and imagery in magazines and catalogues. Throughout the project I am finding objectivity a highly elusive goal. I frequently remind myself of my position as an ethnographer, as my gardening "self" threatens to take over.

Cultural Seascapes as Embodied Knowledge

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The culture and history of the seascape is imprinted in the bodies of its users. The seascape evokes the senses in various ways and the body responds to this particular environment through engaged forms of sensing. Shared sensual bodily experiences

and intuitive forms of knowledge are emerging as topics of interest in social anthropology. Few social science scholars have brought these topics to the study of the relationship between body and sea. This is an article about embodiment, culture and the sea. I focus on cultural seascapes created and maintained by small-scale shore-based traditional fisheries in North Norway. Presentation of data and analysis is based on longitudinal studies since the late 1980s and are woven around three central themes. The first juxtaposes fairly well established notions of cultural landscapes with the relatively underdeveloped notion of seascapes. The second theme draws on reflections of my own embodied experience of having been a commercial small-scale fisher for little more than a full year. Thirdly I want to investigate the more collective domains of fisher embodiment. Here I will focus on mutually shared embodied responses to being on the sea.

Getting Tamed to Silent Rules: Experiencing ‘the Other’ in Apiao, Southern Chile

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Doing anthropological fieldwork is a bit like having a tattoo: it provides permanent changes in our mentality, personality and experience. We set out for fieldwork armed with enthusiasm, patience and curiosity. Yet, at the very first stage of it, we are involved in the great effort of making sense of emotional universals expressed in a local mode. Fear, boredom, pain, desire, rage, humour are found everywhere but the way of expressing them vary dramatically. I was seriously puzzled by some shared patterns of behaviour, so different from what I had expected from people that otherwise did not appear to me as different from my own culture. Why would people attend to me with great amounts of food and drink if I went visiting them, and completely ignore me if they met me in a public space? Why would people go visiting each other and remain silent for a considerable amount of time during the visit? And why would people ignore each other if meeting at night in the public pathway? Drawing on my fieldwork among a small community in an island of Chiloe, southern Chile, this paper explores issues of ‘internal communication’ - the bits of culture that no informant will ever spell out for us. Eventually, we grow familiar with the taken-for-granted, tacit knowledge that makes up our hosts’ everyday life. We find ourselves actively involved in those patterns of behaviour, and absorbed in those silent rules that we have completely internalised - through regular sharing, familiarity, and love.