

## 4

# The 'proto-language' of anthropological practice

## *An exhibition of original field notes*

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Many anthropologists consider field notes to be a core element of ethnographic research. We are even taught by some that 'if you didn't write it down in your fieldnotes, then it didn't happen' (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002:141). Field notes play a crucial role in connecting ethnographers with their subjects, and we often spend an enormous amount of time writing them. For these and other reasons, the notes may take on a unique importance. Robert Sanjek even writes of their 'sacredness' (Sanjek 1990). Still, as Robert Whitemore (2005) notes, we can't tell by the way we teach our discipline that we attach this amount of value and authority to our field-note writing. Very little is taught about field notes; very few experiences are passed on.

In the Department of Anthropology at the University of Copenhagen, a small group of researchers and students conceived the idea of hosting an exhibition of original field notes, accompanied by a workshop in order to further our understanding of anthropological field-note practices and share our experiences. This chapter is based on the notes and questions I collected during the process of curating and participating in the exhibition, '*Skal vi ikke snakke om feltnoter?*' ('Let's talk about field notes'), which took place in April 2016, and was attended by approximately 30 people from anthropology and similar disciplines.

The primary aim of the exhibition was to demystify this somewhat hidden practice of anthropology and to use the collection of field notes as a starting point for a discussion about what they are, or can be, and how we might get better at writing them. We were interested in uncovering how fieldworkers actually write notes and whether it would be possible for us to identify specific

genres of writing, and maybe even create a new and more precise language for our own ways of writing and using notes.

For the French author, Leslie Kaplan, writing is a dialogical form always involved with the *Other* (Kaplan 2003). I believe the same can be said of field notes; they are many-voiced texts, filled as they are with different intentions and perspectives: our interlocutor's accounts of events or practices are scribbled down side by side with the anthropologist's own observations, her sensory impressions or thoughts on everyday utterances, practices or conflicts. According to Kaplan, writing has a dialogical nature because there is always an element of 'not knowing' in writing; there is always some kind of mystery involved in writing because we can never fully know how any given word, sentence, perspective or text comes about, or is read and understood. In her book, *Les Outils* (2003), Kaplan writes about the meeting between the text and the writer or reader, and how writing can become a tool to think with. To use the tool of writing, according to Kaplan, means to enable yourself to read a piece of writing – including your own – as if it were written by somebody else; opening up to the mystery of the text in order to see and explore it so that in turn it can move you or the text forward (Kaplan 2003).

We think with the tools we are given throughout our life and education. Field notes are one such anthropological tool, but like any other tool we need to learn how to use it, otherwise it can just get in the way. The anthropologist has a certain insight into how the perspectives and observations in her field notes came about – she might remember the places described, the people quoted; she might even have been aware of their intentions. A book read before the fieldwork might prompt one to notice a certain aspect of a practice – and the anthropologist might have had this in mind when writing the field note, or might recall it when rereading notes. But there is always also a mystery as to why and how we write something down; and there's a mystery to how a certain event, utterance or perspective is either amplified or dissolves over time in our minds, and how different perspectives recur or disappear, moving like waves, through our notes. And there's a mystery to the relationship between our memory and our notes: thoughts or observations from our field may haunt us, but when we find them in our notes the concrete wording might surprise us – how few words we actually wrote on the matter or the context in which we wrote it.

Basically, the dialogical form of writing does not end the moment we close our notebooks after our fieldwork – it continues when we read, re-read, remember or share our notes. Exhibiting field notes gave us the possibility to discuss how we use this tool; it gave us the opportunity to read each other's field notes and to engage in the dialogical form of the texts. It allowed us to follow the creation of these texts; how they seemingly move from some deep

conversation to dialogues, to notes on the sound or smell of a place, to some tentative conclusion or confusion. This chapter explores how a linguistic awareness of our noting practices came about when we began to rethink our own notes in the course of witnessing the noting practices of others.

### **The craft of anthropology**

During the colder months of 2016 we asked students and researchers alike to look through attics, drawers, folders and iPhones in the hope of finding old or new field notes that they would agree to share for scientific and educational purposes. Each was asked to scan the original note, if it was physical, or simply send us a pdf in the case of digital notes. And all fieldworkers were to note when and where the note was written, and why they had chosen this particular note to send. We got sixteen notes in total, which is not too impressive when you think about the amounts of field notes that must be in the drawers and folders of anthropologists and students at University of Copenhagen alone, where 500 students, 40 academic staff, and 30 PhD students make up the Department of Anthropology. We exhibited each of the field notes next to the comment sent by the writer, and alongside five very different statements on field notes from the anthropological literature, with which we aimed to highlight the diverse opinions on the role of field notes in anthropology. These included Kathleen and Billie Dewalt's (2002) statement, that if you didn't write it down, it didn't happen; sceptical quotes from Michael Agar (1980) on how overrated field notes are; Robert Whitemore's (2005) poetic perspective that writing field notes is a way of living in the present; and the more practical guidelines by Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater and Bonnie Stone Sunstein (1997) that sum up what should be included in all field notes and how one can structure them.

When collecting the notes, the amount of resistance we met in the process came as somewhat of a surprise. Although half jokingly, some people declined to participate in the exhibition due to 'wanting to get a job afterwards'. Others declined with expressions of fear that their field notes weren't written in 'the way they were supposed to be' or by dismissing them altogether as just notes on random pieces of paper written down too quickly for anybody else to understand. Participants also expressed some of the same feelings during the workshop. One stated that showing one's field notes was unnerving because of the fear that you might be exposed as not having sufficient anthropological craft. This comment seems to hit the core of several of the participants' reactions to the exhibition – especially the students' but also some of the more experienced researchers. Jean Jackson recounts similar experiences in an interview study of anthropologists' relation to their field notes: 'The topic of field notes sooner or later brings up strong feelings of guilt and inadequacy in

most of my interviewees.' (Jackson 1990:27). Our small study showed that field notes apparently still have this tendency to bring up all sorts of feelings about one's professional and personal worth. The comments of the participants confirmed the need to open up a discussion on our field-note practices in a more explorative setting, one that could perhaps allow the slight taboo on our notes to be lifted. Exhibiting field notes outside their normal context seemed to have this effect, because it allowed a different framework for conversations on the subject. It was in this way that possible bases for understanding the feelings of fear and inadequacy became apparent. At the exhibition workshop a very experienced fieldworker, looking back at an early example of her own field notes, reflected that she could tell she had attempted to write in a way that would legitimize her as a researcher. In other words, there is a certain performativity to writing field notes that can help us confirm our identity as anthropologists, even when the writing is not directed to an audience. Fieldwork, and with it the symbolic and physical evidence of us 'having been there', our notes, are to be considered aspects of a particular rite of passage as an anthropologist. As Nigel Rapport (1991) points out, writing field notes ties us to an anthropological self in academia, and at the same time allows us to immerse ourselves in the local surroundings and the 'fieldwriting self' we are becoming there (Rapport 1991:11). The recording of anything and everything serves to increase our local belonging, as these notes help us remember the new codes and knowledge needed in order to deepen our understanding of the people and places we study – while at the same time confirming our identity as professional anthropologists.

At the workshop we discussed how our notes serve many and different functions – in the field and at home. Some rightly argued that the most important function of our notes is in the field, when we're learning about the people with whom we study. But if we allow ourselves to think of field notes as a piece of writing in Kaplan's terms – as a dialogical form – we could also ask whether this fear of then showing our field notes is connected to our own ability (or lack thereof) to 'read' our own writings. Does the fear of not having anthropological craft stem from having forgotten that at the time of the notes composition we did not know in full what we were writing – and that this partial ignorance is part of any writing process? Or is the fear rather that others may read something in our notes that we did not see ourselves? Or, on the contrary, do we fear that there is no mystery to be explored in our field notes – that they were just plain 'nothings' (cf. Dickinson 2013)? Either way, it seemed that in trying to decipher a field note together, we opened a gap in time that could only be bridged by imagination. Maybe this was what we needed to accept? That the context of any given note is neither ensured and stable, nor fully controlled by its writer.

**Field-note pieces**

Out of the sixteen notes at the exhibition, I have chosen seven that I found especially interesting for the purpose of this chapter. They represent the different types of notes we received: some are clearly written up after the fact to show a particular experience or a specific conversation in the field, others are brief and raw, copied directly from the notebook, and one of them is written by an interlocutor rather than the fieldworker himself. The chosen notes are also some of those that resonated most with me when I read them in the exhibition. I thus follow the selection criteria that the fieldworkers often recounted themselves, when picking out a note to exhibit: gut feeling. Most of the people who participated in the exhibition, when asked to contribute, instantly recalled one or more notes that they thought might be useful. In the following pages the translations of the selected notes are shown next to the original, along with the author's text on why they chose it. Part of our experiment with the exhibition was to see where the notes could take us without the contextual work that anthropologists are known for. Can they convey something of importance about the people or places that we have visited, when they leave out much of the information that we normally find indispensable? Are they opportunities for us to get our subject matter to a wider audience of non-anthropologists, because our thoughts and experiences are not encrypted by our normal scientific language and references? Can they be worm-holes for people other than ourselves to understand the places and people we have visited – or are they just black holes devoid of meaning for the uninitiated? In the following pages, you can be the judge.

Magic Technology managing the  
energies

45 hectares

80 cows

70 people changed places because

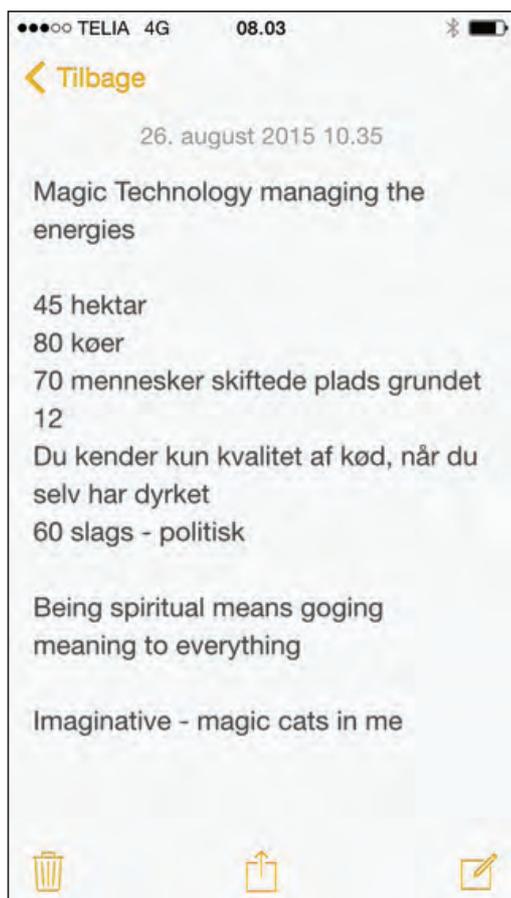
12

You only know the quality of meat, when you  
yourself have grown

60 kinds – politically

Being spiritual means goging  
meaning to everything

Imaginative – magic cats in me



The note actually dates back to a visit to Damanhur after the fieldwork – and as is evident, I desperately needed to get a handle on some figures (people, animals, plants, hectares) and definitions (magic, spirituality, imagination) that had been lost in an optimistic attempt to understand the hundreds of philosophical questions Damanhurians grapple with. The fieldwork was five months long and took place in Damanhur, an eco-village in northern Italy, where I was interested in how the Damanhurians grow vegetables and exchange them with people in the surrounding areas. In Damanhurian agricultural practices, the relationship between humans and plants were presented as a cornerstone in the vegetable's becoming and life energy. They were notably proud of their experiments in the field, which involved singing plants via a technology that detects tensions between leaves and roots and transforms this into music – a bridge between man [*sic*] and the plant, as the Damanhurians say – as well as assistance from other creatures in the universe. Vegetables grown in Damanhur were more than organic, they stressed. But when they sold their fruits and vegetables they downplayed the vegetables' special becoming and life energy and simply presented them as organic and grown in one of the Italian villages, where Damanhur is located, rather than in Damanhur itself.

*Ester Fritsch*

### **Memo 10.7.1997**

I came rushing across Thy, to the right then left left. Maja came out. Not that tall, pretty old and with her hair parted, amber around the neck and a blue shirt, white trousers. We saw the farm, the road, the garden, all the newly planted trees and the greenhouse with blown out glass windows. In a year our time here will probably be over. A grandchild moves in. A wall with photographs, farm and family, then and now. Coloured rosy cheeks, faded and brand new. Buns, cake and coffee. Talking about the project. At first she had thought no, but then her kids had said: 'If you can help, then why not?' And since then we talked on the phone twice. Yes, guess it would be okay. And why her? It's not something that is easy to talk about. I asked if I could take out the tape recorder, but couldn't we wait, yes, we could. And I changed time. Saw pictures and booklets from the local history association, the book from the film, *A Real Farm Life*, that Maja is in as well. Talked about this and that, mostly about old days, community in the country, family. An hour and a half later: 'Yes, it was okay now.' Then we talked three hours more. Then coffee, buns, cake. Good to calm down. It is still calm.

### **Excerpt of interview with Maja 6.7.1997**

Maja: There are probably some who think I am a weird person, that I'm here slaving away and doing all this, but I feel the best when I'm outside and doing work instead of sitting in here brooding over all the stuff I could be sad about. I'd rather get out and have something succeed out there and enjoy nature, because it is so magnificent. The sunset says all kinds of things. In my opinion, that's where we are as close to heaven as we can come, yes, I think it's beautiful, magnificent. Back then we often drove out to the sea and saw the sunset, but I'm cut off from that today, if it started from there with the sunset, no, I don't think so, we did that on many summer nights, and to see the sun going down there and then that line across the water, oh, it's beautiful, it is. Now I can see it going down up there, and it's weird because when Jørgen [Maja's deceased husband] was a young boy, it was his biggest wish to get up on Møllebakken, because that was where the sun went down, and that he wanted to experience, how it was like up there, where it set and see it, yes yes. He couldn't imagine anything more at that time, but he did make it to Møllebakken, he made it further too. It was his firm belief that something happened up there, where it set. I have to go to the road, otherwise I can't see it properly through the trees. I have to get down there and then I often go for a walk, and I seldom meet anybody and that suits me fine. A calm comes over the mind, that's how I would say it, it is a calm that comes over the mind. 'There is a castle in Vesterled', but there are many other songs that one can connect to the season and the sun.

**Memo 10.7.1997**

Jeg kom farende hen over Thy, til højre til venstre til venstre. Maja kom ud. Ikke ret høj, ret gammel og med sideskilning, rav om halsen og en blå skjorte, hvide bukser. Vi så gården, vejen og haven, alle de nyplantede træer og drivhuset med udblæste glasruder. Om et år er tiden dér nok forbi. Et barnebarn flytter ind. En væg med fotografier, gård og familie, tilbage og nu. Malede lyserøde kinder, falmende og splinternye. Boller, kage og kaffe. Fortælle om projektet. Først havde hun tænkt nej, men så havde hendes børn sagt: "Hvis du kan hjælpe, hvorfor så ikke?" Og siden talte vi to gange i telefonen. Jo, det var så i orden. Men havde også spurgt sig for i området, og nej, der var ikke andre. Og det var ikke godt. Og hvorfor hende? Det er ikke noget, der er nemt at tale om. Jeg spurgte, om jeg måtte tage båndoptageren frem, men kunne vi ikke vente, jo, det kunne vi. Og jeg skiftede tid. Så billeder og hæfter fra den lokalhistoriske forening, bogen fra filmen, "Et rigtigt bondeliv", hvor Maja også er med. Snakkede om løst og fast, mest gamle dage, fællesskabet på landet, familien. Halvanden time senere: "Jo, nu var det i orden." Så talte vi tre timer mere. Og så kaffe, boller, kage. Godt at falde ned. Der er stadig ro.

**Uddrag af interview med Maja 6.7.1997**

Maja: Der er nok nogen, der synes, jeg er et mærkeligt menneske, at jeg går her og pukler og laver en hel masse, men jeg er bedst tilpas, når jeg ude og lave et stykke arbejde i stedet for at sætte mig her inde og ruge over alt det, jeg kunne være ked af. Så hellere komme ud og få noget til at lykkes derude og nyde naturen, for den er så storslået. Solnedgangen siger alverdens ting. Der synes jeg, vi er så nær himlen, som vi kan komme, ja, jeg synes, det er smukt, det er storslået. Førhen kørte vi jo tit ud til havet og så solnedgangen, men det er jeg afskåret fra i dag, om det også er derfra, det startede med solnedgangen, nej, det tror jeg som ikke, det gjorde vi mange sommeraftener, og så se solen gå ned der og så en stribe hen over vandet, åh, det er smukt, det er det. Nu kan jeg så se, at den går ned deroppe, og det er mærkeligt, for da Jørgen [Majas afdøde mand] var en bette dreng, der var hans højeste ønske at komme op til Møllebakken, for der gik solen ned, og det ville han altså gerne opleve, hvordan det var deroppe, der hvor den gik ned og se det, ja, ja. Hans fantasi rakte ikke længere på den tid, men han kom op til Møllebakken, han kom også længere. Det var hans helt faste overbevisning, at der skete noget deroppe, hvor den gik ned. Jeg skal ned til vejen, for ellers kan jeg ikke se den ordentligt igennem træerne. Jeg skal derned, og så går jeg tit en tur, og jeg møder som regel ingen, og det passer mig udmærket. En ro falder over sindet, sådan vil jeg nærmest sige det, det er en ro, der falder over sindet. "Der står et slot i Vesterled", men der er også mange andre forskellige sange, man kan sætte i forbindelse med årstiden og med solen.

Notes from the PhD project 'The religious interest'. Most of the interview revolves around Maja's experience with the church through a long life, but as is perhaps clear in the note, Maja lived in the countryside and was strongly oriented in the surrounding landscape in her daily life. Today, almost 20 years later, I am developing a research project on experiences of transcendence in nature and that is why I chose this particular excerpt.

*Cecilie Rubow*

... When I finally get back to Leonard and the others at the playground Leonard asks me if he can take this shovel (blue), that is lying on the ground. It was Emil's, but he left it. I say that I think he can, 'we can talk with Emil if he comes back for his shovel'. Leonard: 'We can say, that he can have this one (a yellow shovel). It is because I love blue.' I ask what he is playing, he continues with the colours he loves: 'I love blue and green.' Me: 'I love red and green.' Leonard: 'I love blue and green and red. And black.' I repeat with black and he says: 'Do you love black as well?' with a big smile.

Leonard walks away from me and leaves both his boat and shovel with me. I go over to Sigurd and Cassius, who are playing with two trucks on the ground by the tree slide. They fill the trucks with dirt 'to make a dirt slide'. Then Sigurd puts the truck on the slide and some dirt falls onto the slide as it glides down. They say that I can join in. I say that I don't have any truck but can use the boat. Sigurd says I can use his truck (<3). We dig for some time, then Leonard returns and says: "'He" won't give me my bicycle back and "he" says that he will open my eye with a key.' I ask who, he repeats everything with 'he'. I say I understand, but that I would like to know who said it. 'Maks'. I can feel myself getting angry. I say we can go and talk to Maks, he says that I can do it while he waits for me. I ask him to hold my shovel and go looking for Maks. I run around the playground and right then I'm so angry I think I could hit him, but I can't find him, so I go back to Leonard. He says that he knows where to find him and walks with me. We find Maks in the 'goal tent' with somebody, he's sitting on Leonard's bicycle. Me: 'Maks, is that Leonard's bicycle?' 'Yes, and he said I could borrow it.' 'No, he didn't. Give it back right now.' 'He said I could borrow it, right Leonard?' Leonard: 'No'. Maks stands up to give it back, while I say 'and stop saying that you can get people's eyes open with a key, nobody wants to hear that. And it's not even true, you can't do that. You cannot get an eye open with a key.' He answers calmly: 'Yes, I can, with this key.'

I walk away with the bicycle in my hand and Leonard by my side. Leonard wants to park the bicycle, where the other bicycles are parked. We go over there and 'then we can go back to Sigurd and Cassius through the wood'. We go into the wood 'and you lead'. I do, and then I let him lead for a bit and afterwards I lead again.

Arken, 14th of November 2012

... Når jeg endelig kommer tilbage til Leonard og de andre på legepladsen spørger Leonard mig, om han må tage denne skovl (blå), der ligger på jorden. Den var Emils, men han gik fra den. Jeg siger, at jeg tror han må "vi kan snakke med Emil hvis han kommer efter sin skovl". Leonard: "så kan vi sige, at han må få denne her (en gul skovl). Det er fordi jeg elsker blå". Jeg spørger, hvad det er han leger, han fortsætter med de farver han elsker: "Jeg elsker blå og grøn". Mig: "Jeg elsker rød og grøn". Leonard: "Jeg elsker blå og grøn og rød. Og sort." Jeg gentager det også med sort og han siger "Elsker du også sort?" med et smil på munden.

Leonard går fra mig og forlader sin båd og sin skovl med mig. Jeg går hen til Sigurd og Cassius, som leger med to lastbiler på jorden ved den træ-rutschebane. De fylder lasbilerne med jord "for at lave en jordrutschebane". Så sætter Sigurd lastbilen på rutschebanen og nogen jord falder på banen mens den glider ned. De siger jeg må være med. Jeg siger, at jeg ikke har nogen lastbil men jeg kan bruge båden. Sigurd siger jeg gerne må bruge hans lastbil (<3). Vi graver i nogen tid, så kommer Leonard tilbage og siger: "'han' vil ikke give mig min cykel tilbage og 'han' siger han vil få mit øje op med en nøgle." Jeg spørger hvem, han gentager de hele med 'han'. Jeg siger, at jeg godt kan forstå det, men jeg vil gerne vide hvem sagde det til ham. "Maks." Jeg kan mærke jeg bliver sur. Jeg siger, at vi kan gå og snakke med Maks, han svarer at jeg skal gøre det mens han bliver og venter på mig. Jeg beder ham holde min skovl og går efter Maks. Jeg løber rundt på legepladsen og lige der er jeg så vred jeg tror, at jeg ville kunne slå ham, men jeg kan ikke finde ham, så går jeg hen til Leonard igen. Han siger, at han godt kan finde ham og går med mig.

Vi finder Maks i 'målteltet' med nogen, hvor han sidder på Leonards cykel. Mig: "Maks, er det Leonards cykel?" "ja, og han sagde jeg måtte låne den" "nej, det gjorde han ikke. Giv den tilbage nu." "han sagde jeg måtte låne den, ikke Leonard?" Leonard: "nej". Maks rejser sig for at give den tilbage, mens han gør det siger jeg "og lad være med at sige at du kan tage folks øjne op med en nøgle, det gider ingen at høre på. Og det er ikke engang rigtig, det kan du ikke. Du kan ikke få et øje op med en nøgle" Han svarer helt rolig: "Jo, det kan jeg godt med den her nøgle."

Jeg går derfra med cyklen i hånd og Leonard ved mig. Leonard vil parkere cyklen der, hvor de andre cykler holder. Vi går derhen og "så kan vi komme tilbage til Sigurd og Cassius gennem skoven". Vi går ind i skoven "og du fører". Jeg gør det, så giver jeg ham lov til at føre lidt, og bagefter fører jeg igen.

Arken, 14.november 2012.

I chose this piece of ethnography because it was one of those moments in which feelings, friendship and personal involvement took over. It is also a piece of a typical day in the field, with our movement around the playground, our conversations and our flowing, started, interrupted and never finished activities. The part with the boys making a dirt-slide was used in my thesis (with a follow-up that is not here), but all the rest was left out.

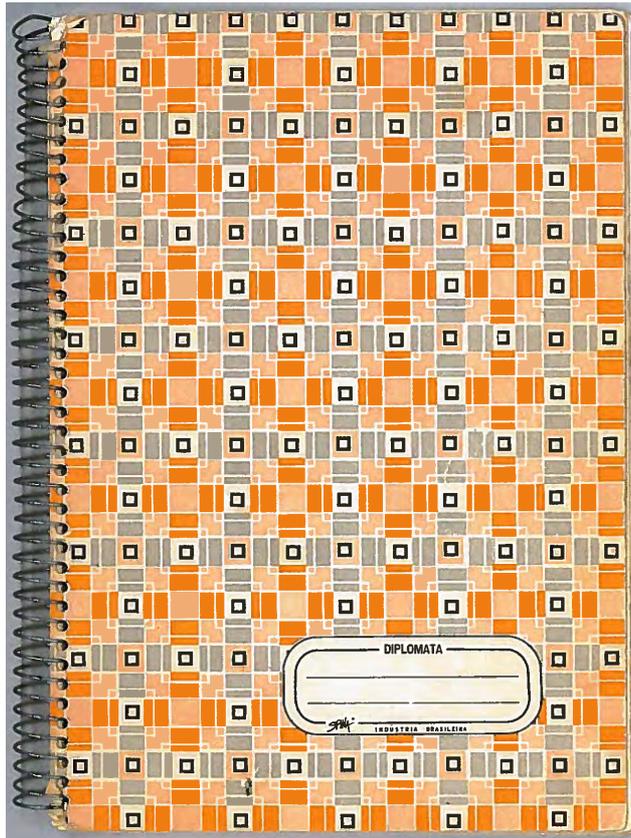
The fieldwork took place in a kindergarten in Valby and focused on play.

*Flora Botelho*

8.7. [1981] visited Felina. Iao Maria is sitting on the floor sewing with ekede Anita. The Iao still has 'kele'. A white cloth wrapped around the neck, and 'mocam' around the over arms, and the hair, that is growing out, covering. An iao with kelé always has to sit low. Preferably on the floor. One is not allowed to go behind her back, should always pass in front. And she is naturally not allowed to have sexual relations. 'Si ela se sujar, os mocam vão até o oso!' says Anita later, when the iao has left. If she breaks any of the rules, especially the one about not having sex, the straw bracelet will penetrate all the way to the bone! She can't walk by the graveyard, eat with a fork, only the fingers. Anita talks more about the thing with 'pureaza'. If a filha-de-santa isn't clean, i.e., if she has had sex before a party, or she is on her period, she can't receive santo. In that case it is not the orixa who comes, but an 'escravo'. It is actually dangerous, if you are receiving, to go to a candomblé if you are unclean, instead of shutting out the slaves when you drum for Exu, you let them in, if there's somebody attending who is unclean. The ekedé can't touch any of clothes of the santo, or have anything to do with the santo if you are on your period. Just as one cannot help with limpezas etc. But at the same time Anita says that by taking a normal shower one can clean oneself after intercourse. Also spiritually that is.

But first Anita tells two long stories.

About her mother, or rather, how she, Anita began in candomble. Her mother was filha-de-santo, and when she died, Anita had to make 'a axexe'. 'Axexe quer dizer bater no pote, tocar com abano.' She had no money to go through the entire ritual that is supposed to go on for 7 days, according to Anita. (She doesn't know anything about the thing Luisa talked about several times, if it is a mãe.) But she did it the best she could. Lit some candles, gathered her mother's santo's things and carried them out to the foot of a dendé tree. You can also immerse them in the water. That is in Anita's country, that is Angola. Luisa said that they never put anything in the water that has belonged to the dead, because they see the water as holy, in the gege country. The things that had belonged to the ekede at Luisa's were carried out to a place near the railroad bridge, where her country usually places the things. (And he wanted 2000 to carry it out, the bald guy.)



18.7

leedegle Felina. Dao Maria vidde ja° juleel J  
 rypj rannem mood etole Anita. Dao x  
 loo rochj "Neli". En leid idel muut  
 an hahon, q "mocam" an avaramus  
 rannit hieit, de e ved et vabre id, dadeit.  
 En tao mood dele. Dal elid aida laet.  
 Helit ja° juleel. Han mo° ite ja° loj  
 rypj af lund, dal elid rannu joan.  
 O° hem mo° mehujuia iDe haw rek-  
 sulle meltsam. "ei da e reija,  
 o mocam cao ate o oro!" rypj  
 Anita - rannu da tao en e gaet, hieit  
 hem auidueto maglo af rannu, isa  
 den an iDe et haw ree, hawp  
 hawcandlet helt ma bil leuit. Han  
 ran helte iDe ja° julee kirkjale,  
 iDe rypj mood jafel dan mood  
 fuigeme. Anita rypj maw an del mood  
 "juneza". Hieit en filto de rante, iDe  
 e rann, deo, hieit hem ke laft ra  
 ja en jole, etto hieit hem haw  
 mehujuian, ran hem haw mehujuian  
 rante. Dal e iDe eno en de rannu  
 ra° maw an rannu. Dal e juleel  
 juleel, hieit maw mehujuian, at ja° bil

En candantle hieit man e uen,  
 juleel det let ran hieitale eno eno,  
 De ran rypj ja° det, at man i  
 hieit ja° at hieit rannu id, w  
 man hawp ja° Eka, hieit den  
 id, hieit de e rannu hieitale de  
 e uen. Ede e ran iDe rypj  
 ved rypj af rannu rypj, etto  
 rypj ran hieit de haw mehu-  
 juian at ja° hieit de haw  
 mehujuian. Lijon man iDe en  
 hieit bil mood hieitale e. Lijon.  
 Han Anita rypj rannu, at maw  
 ved at haw et auidueto laet, ran  
 rannu rypj, etto et rannu. Rypj  
 rypj hieit, alpa.

Han etto juleel Anita haw laet  
 hieitale.

En hawp rannu, etto mehu,  
 hawp hieit, Anita hieitale, i  
 candantle. Hieit maw ja° filto de-  
 rante, q da hem deo, Anita Anita  
 hawp "a aketo". "Aketo que deo  
 hawp no jule, hawp can abawo".  
 Hieit hawp rypj ja° hieit at rannu-

3

Her hele nikkelen ram ble vann i 1 slag,  
 iflg. Anita. (Hun runder i de regner  
 at det Lura runde an flere ganger,  
 kun det i en runde). Men kun i runde  
 det var godt kun runde. (Vandte runde  
 lys, runde sin man runde, a king  
 g var dem ut med foden af et  
 dende-tre. Han ran ofte runde dem  
 i vandet. Der i Anita's malen, som er  
 Angala. Lura fortalte, at de aldrig  
 klyp reger i vandet, reger de kan  
 blyt afddet, fordi de kun vandet for  
 hellet, i reger-mal-anen. (Ingen  
 de runde runde, runde er Lura  
 blev bled ut til et runde i mal-  
 heden af jirbanen, kun hende, klyp  
 pleje af klyp klyp. (Og kan runde  
 kun 2000 af at var det ut, han  
 den runde mand).

Anita var berøvet fordi kun  
 i de runde gennem det nikkelen runde.  
 Men "pacia" a Der, da runde me  
 ucamodane. Og runde runde  
 runde, runde? Eten chagan de uava  
 e guem entar ande runde,

13000            12000

200 + 95  
 1000  
 1800  
 19000  
 14000  
 5000

udri:      2      870  
 kango: rlov      1000      200  
 Omiuki-dagf: 2600      670  
 baxara:      800      200  
 Wana-pala      600      470 + 95  
 Sa-Rosno: 1200      50  
 ruyhara: 1000      2350  
 7.200      30  
 8.100      31.650

7.150

28.7 Yemajo, iall      2.350  
 29.7 Bell, ruyhara      2.000  
 "      kungu, iall      1.050  
 28.7 Calvada      2.800  
 "      hillede + ruyhara      19750

When these notes were written, I had been doing fieldwork in the small town of Cachoeira in Brazil for half a year. In 1981, the laptop was only just invented. I bought my first one in 1989 for 25,000 DKK. It was the most expensive thing I had ever bought. You could get a car for the same money. In 1981 I was on a budget and could not afford a typewriter. I got that later, and my field notes from the late 80s are written on a small red Hermes, which I later gave to my closest friend and informant, Cacau. At age 63, he is today doing his PhD and is very active on Facebook. At that time, he did not know what anthropology was. I told him and gave him Clifford Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Since then he has been hooked, and has mapped the entire candomblé landscape in Cachoeiras hinterland.

Field notes from my first long fieldwork in 1981 are written in a notebook of the kind children use in school, and that you could buy everywhere. I had brought black-and-red Chinese writing books from home, but I had used them all.

You can see in the notes that I have written to someone other than myself. But I cannot say who I imagined would read them. I think it was a kind of conscientiousness towards being a researcher. I was extremely aware that I was doing research work and had received a grant – 107,000 DKK, for a year's fieldwork – from the Research Council. And I had of course read Evans-Pritchard and other classics. I think you can see that I have tried to imitate a style that I believed was ethnography. They had no thorough method courses at that time, and when I graduated as mag. scient. there was no guide. My 23 handwritten notebooks are characterized by the fact that I have tried to do what could legitimize me as a researcher. But they also bear the imprint of the fact that I always was in doubt about what that means.

The notes also show how much may be rewritten when working in another language and in a field that is full of alien concepts. *Iao, filha-de-santo, ekede, exu, Kele, axexe* – all these native terms that must be translated and explained before the text becomes meaningful.

*Inger Sjørsløv*

If you have another  
baby The mother  
did have one more  
no. 8 Darwin,  
seven years gap.

Birthing, caring,  
working mother

Her daughter tells  
her she's like a  
caribou. She tells  
her daughter  
to have just 1–2  
children.

She repeats what  
she has said  
before, that

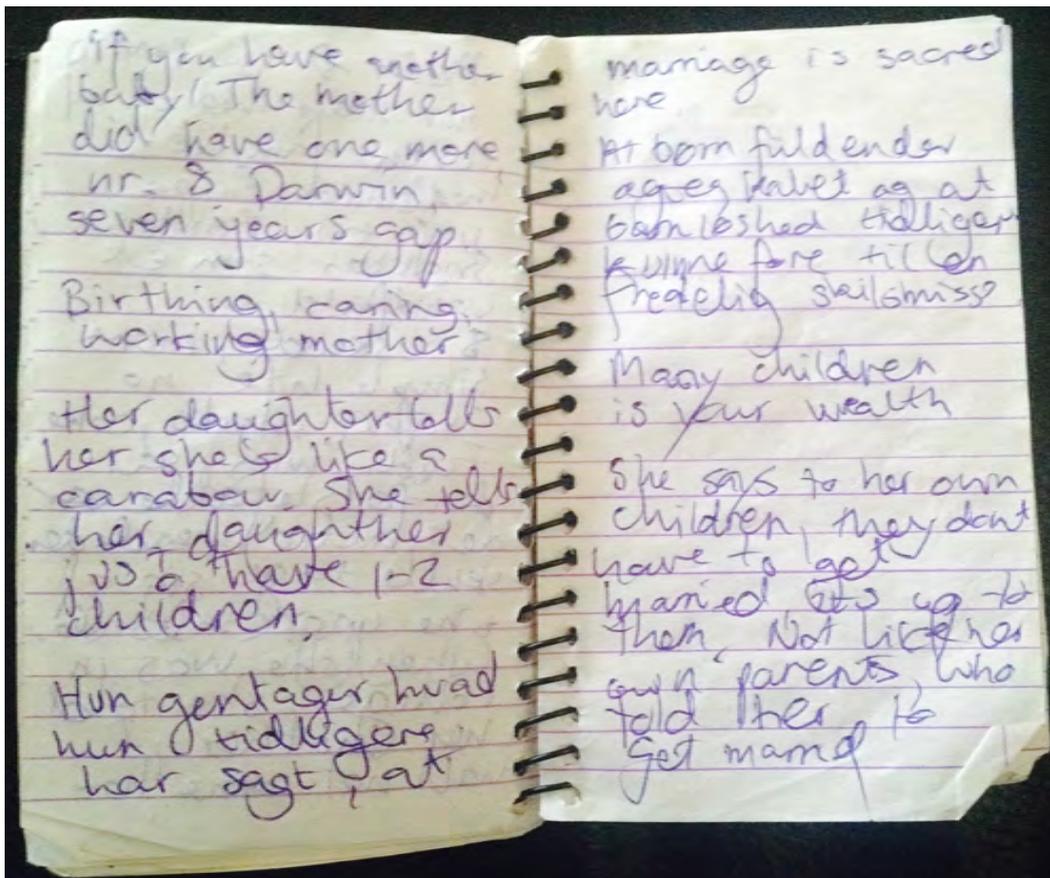
marriage is sacred  
here

That kids complete  
the marriage and that  
earlier, childlessness  
could lead to a  
peaceful divorce.

Many children  
is your wealth.

She says to her own  
children, they don't  
have to get  
married, it's up to  
them. Not like her  
own parents, who  
told her to

get married.



The field note is written in Sagada in the Philippines. I chose it because it is very typical of my notes, often trying to reproduce informal conversations I had in the field, this is quickly written down after a brief everyday conversation with one of my informants.

*Marianne Frederiksen*

L

(12)

LEE

LEE (Tswoun khaub)

LEE

Taj Ntxom

Ntoun

1

2

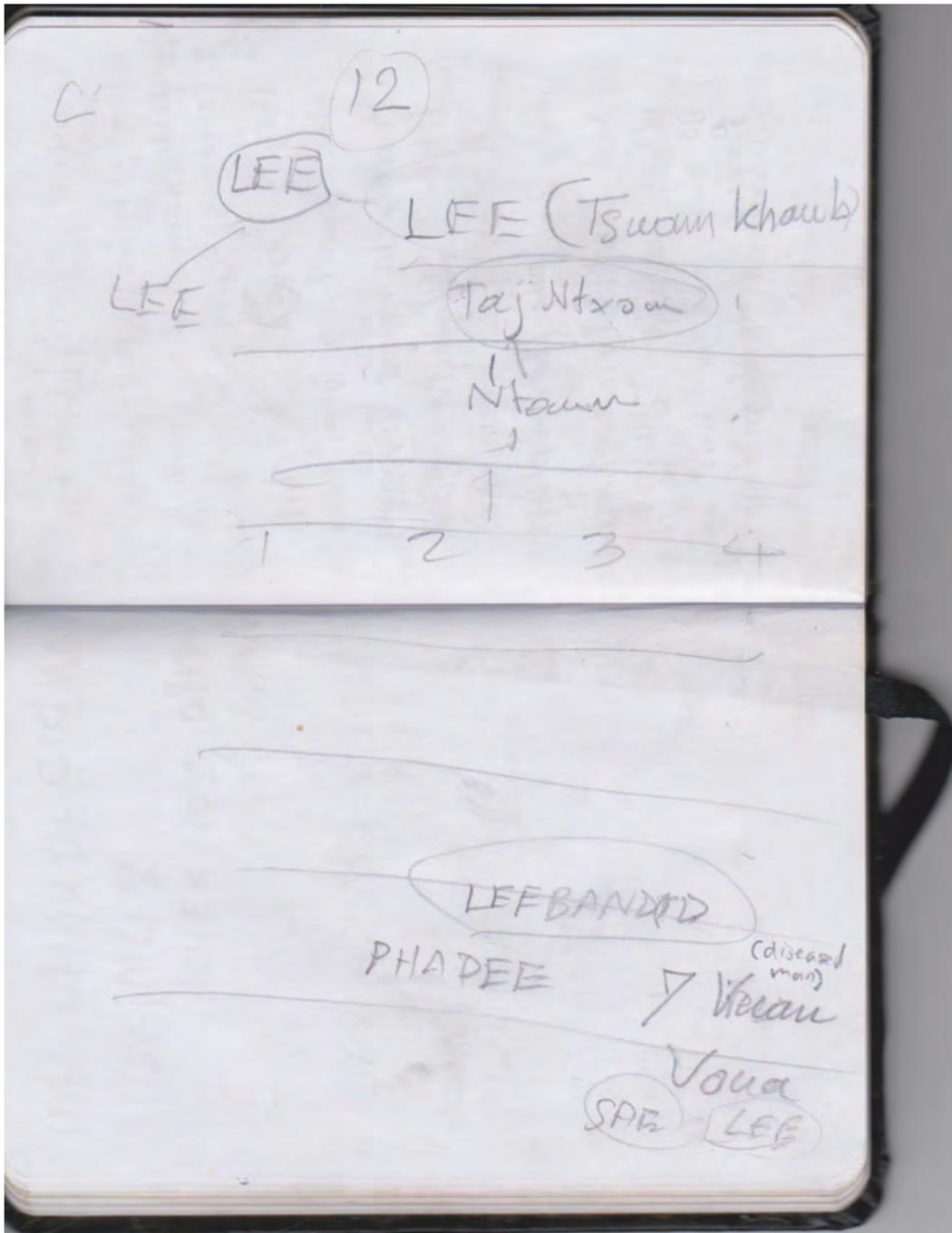
3

4

LEEBANDED

PHADEE

(deceased man)



This was written at a funeral in the village of Ban Huai Nam Khao in Petchabun, Thailand, the 7th of March 2016.

I think it's fun because it's a field note written by the informant and not the fieldworker. My informant spontaneously grabbed my notebook and began to draw his family tree in order to explain about his family, relatives and ancestors. (And for me it's filled with ethno-kitsch in the form of clans, classificatory kinship and ancestors-religion.)

*Christopher Richard Hansen*

Satisfying with the Potato  
Bed The soil: compost, fertilizer  
Brandfork or tractor

Blow nose in cloth  
System around cleaning  
Coughing in the rain  
Housing Bureau  
(Rising prices/ ½ can't  
buy house)

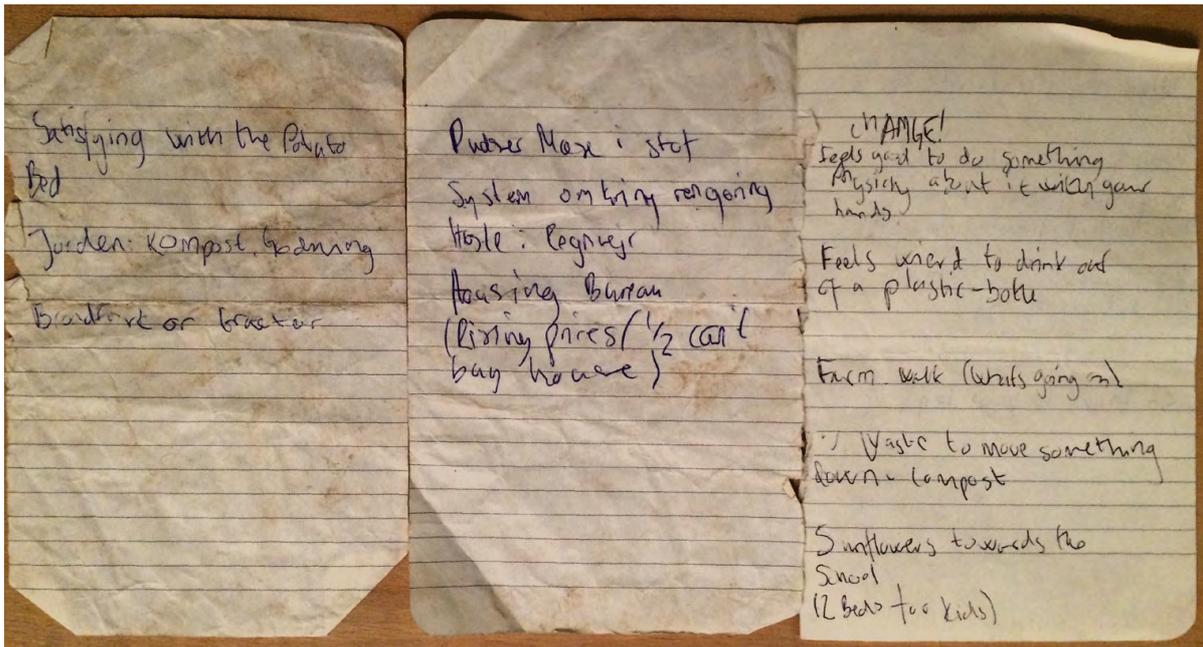
chANGE!  
Feels good to do something  
physical about it with your  
hands.

Feels weird to drink out  
of a plastic-bottle

Farm walk (what's going on)

Waste to move something  
down - compost

Sunflowers towards the  
school  
(2 beds for kids)



The notes were taken during fieldwork on urban agricultural in Portland, Oregon in the spring of 2015. To me, the notes represent not only the text they contain. They also elicit reflection on where and when they were written, since all three contain traces of the soil that I had on my hands while I took them. Furthermore, they are marked by a short stay in the pocket of a pair of worn-out Carhartt pants. These field notes thus recall a mood and setting as well as information about what happened exactly this day on the farm.

*Maia Ebsen*

### The 'proto-language' of field notes

When reading the notes above I'm left with a strange feeling of suspense. I am there with the fieldworker, who may not know the complete significance of her observations. One catches the fieldworker experiencing something for the first time and I, as a reader, experience it for the first time along with them. I don't know exactly where to focus or what to expect as a reader, because the fieldworker doesn't either. This allows something unexpected to happen – it opens a space for me, the reader. The small drama of the playground above seems intensified when it stands alone without the calming presence of a knowing anthropologist who tells us how to interpret the drama and gives us a proper context for understanding it. We are right there with little Leonard in the playground, who lost his bike to a bully. For this brief moment of his life, we are feeling the confused anger of his situation – nothing more than that, a raw, simple feeling of right and wrong. And in another note we can almost feel the harsh west wind on the heath in Thy, when Rubow writes that she came rushing across the land, to the right, then left, left. The wind seems to be there in the rhythm of her notes – right, then left, left. The field notes all lack the intellectual overview that we are accustomed to in anthropological writings. When they are at their best, there's a direct and curiously enticing feeling of vulnerability and presence, at times like reading a random page in a novel – or in the case of Fritsch's, Ebsen's and Frederiksen's field notes, a curious form of modern poetry.

For most anthropologists, field notes are pieces in a large research puzzle. But by allowing these pieces of writing to stand alone we see that they can simultaneously be 'nothing yet' and engaged in multiple, potentially concurrent readings of otherness. This multi-temporality and multi-voiced quality endows them with an ambiguity closer to dream images. Or as Rapport puts it: 'Field notes' other-worldliness appears out of place within the literary genre of waking reality.' (Rapport 1991:13). Field notes are not normally read by anyone other than their writer before they are made 'whole' and given a place in a 'coherent' text as Rapport writes (Rapport 1991:13). But they alone have this quality that could best be described as a sort of proto-language: not yet cultural description; not yet anthropological writing. They are not full thoughts; they do not give coherent pictures. They are in the process of becoming. For Ludwig Wittgenstein, for instance, notes were an essential part of working and thinking. He archived his notes in boxes, named the boxes, and later constructed his manuscripts by dictating from these unstructured boxes of notes. His writing and thinking was bounded by loose notes. With reference to this note-taking practice, Rapport reflects:

Field notes are a magical concept, magical in the dual conventionality of their composition and usage. What they deserve is an analysis 'with blurred edges,' in Wittgenstein's wording, producing a general picture whose lineaments are indistinct and do not prescribe one precise way of viewing or another.

(Rapport 1991:13)

We may then ask, what would such an analysis with blurred edges look like? I believe there is an untapped analytical potential in paying attention to the proto-language of our own field-note practice. Could we not, by observing how we write in the field, get better at analysing our own field notes as texts, as language, as tools, and from there draw our subsequent analytical conclusions? Surely, as Rapport writes, if we refrain from transfixing the field note, it is possible to preserve the ambiguity of its author's position and the multi-voiced and multi-temporal qualities inherent it (Rapport 1991:13). Perhaps an analysis with blurred edges is one in which we take our own intuitive sense of language more seriously and let the proto-language of our notes inspire our thinking. Is there a potential in exploring the gaps in meaning when an iPhone autocorrects our words (when 'magic acts in me' becomes 'magic cats in me') or to actively use dreams or an interlocutor's note-taking in our analysis?

I suggest that we could draw on literary studies of language in order to enhance our awareness of this linguistic potential of our notes, looking, for instance, to Mikhail Bakhtin, who writes:

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language, [...] but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own.

(Bakhtin 1981:293–4)

The field notes from the exhibition were caught in this in-between space that Bakhtin describes: still in part serving other people's intentions, other people's contexts. The notes were literally filled with other people's words when the fieldworker referred to what she had been told or when interlocutors were quoted. This is evident in Ebsen's notes, when she writes: 'Feels good to do something physical about it with your hands.' She wrote the phrase in English though most of the note is in Danish, and the wording thus indicates that she's quoting someone speaking English, but we can't be sure where the phrase is

coming from, in what context it is written or whose intention it's serving. The same was true of Frederiksen's note, when she writes: 'Many children is your wealth.' I expect that this too is a quote from an interlocutor, as she writes in her comment that the notes try to reproduce an informal conversation she had with an interlocutor, but we don't know who it was and the phrase was – like Ebsen's – not framed with quotation marks. In the context of each note, the associated remarks seem conclusive, though they probably aren't the fieldworkers' own conclusions. This is especially true of Hansen's field note, which was written by an interlocutor who had sketched out his family tree – the note was literally out of the fieldworker's hands and was entirely serving an interlocutor's context and intention. The act of analyzing our notes constructs and reorients this language, to align it entirely with the anthropologist's own intentions and chosen context. But even though the intentions and contexts of the words in the notes seemed dispersed, Bakhtin can help us understand how our notes are not 'nothings,' because the words are relics of complex interactions and negotiations of intentions. He writes: 'Within the arena of almost every utterance an intense interaction and struggle between one's own and another's word is being waged, a process in which they oppose or dialogically interanimate each other.' (Bakhtin 1981:354–5).

The utterances of the exhibited field notes are more complex and dynamic than they appear. Bakhtin's perspective on language allows us to understand them as a force constantly interacting with, shaping and reacting to both that which precedes and that which is still forming. He sees writing as an ongoing dialogue – many-voiced, playful, detailed, tentative, fleeting and always becoming. And so are the field notes: unfinished, relative, with many voices competing and intermingling; they shape the texture of the ideas being formed, but never fix them. In that way, they might even be wiser than we are.

We need tools to think with. We don't always know how our own writings and notes can become such a tool for us, but reading other people's writings might help us in this endeavour. Like speaking, writing is characterized by the fact that the one writing never has the full overview of what she has actually written. Surely, Freud has taught us this. There's more to our own writing than we know. But where Freud told us that a slip of tongue or pen reveals an unconsciously subdued wish or internal train of thought, this shared reading of field notes did not reveal an inner secret, but rather a professional secret, which, like the body of an ostrich hiding its head in the ground, has perhaps always been visible if we just dared to look. This public secret is that there is always more to a note than one can consciously grasp. Perhaps that is reason enough that we should dare to take our notes seriously – not only as a way to legitimize ourselves as anthropologists, not only as a tool for enhancing our

learning and remembering in the field, but also as texts, as language in its own right.

The blind spots and perceived, but not consciously registered, observations of our notes may speak when others cast their light upon them. These others may include the fieldworker's future self or may be a colleague who looks at the note as a text, that is, as words intentionally put on paper by someone, but who and why? Or it may be an outside reader. So perhaps we should allow more space in our articles and publications for field notes. Either as raw notes in their own right – allowing space for the reader to imagine and interpret. Or, when the material and context allows it, share the path from fieldwork event to written text: how an event has been re-written again and again, slowly but surely aligning the intentions of the text with our anthropological analysis and authority. Or could we imagine fieldwork in which we involved people in the notes that they had inspired, and then incorporated this dialogue in the analytical process presented in the final text, so that the fieldworker wasn't the only 'text-worker'? Perhaps a more open and inclusive analysis – one with blurred edges as Rapport says – might not only be what our field notes deserve, but would also help us qualify and understand the dialogical aspects of anthropological knowledge formation and critique.

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