

**Transgressions of  
Fieldwork/Filed Works:  
Method in the Madness**

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- 1.1 The idea that anthropology is about one culture understanding another, in some sort of binary exchange mechanism, seems absurd. There are no distinct cultures, understandings are multiple. Balance sheets are false documents. But these absurdities are the ethic of anthropology, as a trickster discipline, conjuring its way to a faulty comprehension (Köpping 1989). Ethnographers might lie. They might be brilliant. They might be government spies, or worse, revolutionaries. In an anxious history, the drive to rethink culture must engage with diversity, media, commerce and yet is nothing if it does not encourage the opening of minds that only transgressive quest(ion)ing can ensure.
- 1.2 Reinventing anthropology could be imagined as a project of recognising differences so as to work an overcoming in equality that preserves them. In Gayatri Spivak's reading of Marx we hear of a 'system that will remove difference after taking it into account' (Spivak 1999: 79). This might even be something like the structure of anthropological reportage in a Malinowskian world, where difference is revealed as not so different – the point might be to radicalise this towards its revolutionary implications. The move from reportage to intervention is a not so unusual ambition. If the structure of ethnographic motivation was to say 'look how these strange people are not all that strange after all', then the political task of ensuring equity despite acknowledged differences is only the next step. Here there would not be talk of rights to difference, but of rights to (and the responsibilities of) equality.
- 1.3 The archive of ethnography shifts and grows exponentially, but only sometimes escapes the impulse to itemise, even as we try to theorise the innovations of the system. If anything, perhaps it is the grand expositions, such as that in 1851 at the Crystal Palace, which are the precursors of the anthropological collection and display, and which still regulate the discipline.

We can possibly imagine Marx wandering around the exhibits, astonished. Walter Benjamin, so many years later, obviously wished he'd been there – he noted that visitors were not allowed to touch the goods on show. The produce of the world, today, the fact that cultural curios are often replicated in miniature indicates that the aura of authentic commodification, once prominently displayed in the industrial products of the expositions, is now rendered less significantly, or even ironically diminished, as kitsch. A kind of reductive ambition and loss of grandeur, the convenience store and the tourist flea market become the scenes of culture. The souvenir collected by the anthropologist is more akin to the snapshot or postcard than ever before. Should we see this as a loss? If so, of what?

- 1.4 The curriculum that demands a critical rethink might claim many avatars. We should not be surprised to find anthropologists that do not fit the canon. Other ways of writing the trajectory of the discipline have been offered. Alternative versions ask urgent political, conceptual, dialectical questions and evoke names not usually present, texts scavenged and refashioned through critique. Popular interdisciplinarity recasts everything afresh. This is in part learned from Peter Köpping's lectures on Anthropology and Method, here and there updated over the years in a file seasoned with engagement, teaching, reading, activism.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.5 Most important of all, the critique of mediocrity – the gilt-edged mediocrity of those in positions of privilege incapable of anything other than marching in place with that privilege, incapable of challenging even themselves or the perseverance that put them here in the first place. Who do I have in mind? Certain professors of culture at work in the bureaucratic teaching machine, dull operatives of self-promotion and resignation, luxuriant in egoistic privilege, imagining conference attendance and canteen dinners amount to a jet-set lifestyle – these people thrive on a capitulation to the administrative job that makes the capacity for critical thought a mere line on a curriculum vitae.
- 2.1 Instead of a litany of names that founded schools, which constrict and contrive, how about those who enact openings to thought? With Louis Aragon, in *The Adventures of Telemachus*, the disenchanting of the gods proceeds apace as Mentor opens a bottle the gods had failed to uncork by simply smashing it on a rock (Aragon 1988: 87). Fieldwork is over. Malinowski is dead (shock!)
- 2.2 With William Burroughs at Harvard in 1936: 'I had done some graduate work in anthropology. I got a glimpse of academic life and I didn't like it at all. It looked like there was too much faculty intrigue, faculty lies, cultivating the head of department, so on and so forth' (Burroughs 2001: 76).
- 2.3 Burroughs 'defines paranoia as "having all the facts"' (Burroughs in Lotringer 2001: 476) but also thinks 'we are all black centipedes at heart' (in Lotringer 2001: 168). Did he learn any more anthropology on his 'fieldwork' trips to South America in search of Yagé? From where does that critical countenance come? He says: 'if a large number of people defy the whole question of boundaries, thousands of people walking across borders without passports, that sort of thing seems to me a useful form of demonstration'

- (Burroughs in 1968, in Lotringer 2001: 106). And reflects: ‘I would love to see ... in England “they must” get rid of the idea of this bloody Queen. That bitch. Sitting there soaking up the energy of forty million people. People say “The Queen isn’t important. She’s just a figurehead.” A Figurehead of subservience. A figurehead of kissing her ass. Worthless wench. She should be sweeping floors’ (Burroughs in 1968 in Lotringer 2001: 102). Burroughs’ routines expand the field.
- 2.4 Complicity – it is never a matter of automatic accusations of complicity over against assertions of purity or righteousness; even if all encounters were complicit this would not be grounds for invalidation. What is more important is debate and discussion, even with wrong ideas and false gods.
  - 2.5 Anthropological paranoia. To treat paranoia as a productive value makes sense where the paranoid distrusts codifications and established routines as the very traps that must be avoided by a non-paranoid consciousness. Salvador Dali? would be the patron of this impossible anthropology then, that would validate disruptions and deviations to the codes of common sense and conventionality. The paranoid-critical method might be useful. Teaching Dali? as proto-ethnographer to students in the 1980s did more for experimental ethnography than anything else I could imagine.
  - 2.6 Writing culture vultures – the shock of calls for experiments, poetics, collage and montage, etc., best exemplified in Clifford’s readings of Malinowski, soon wore off. A few weeks was all it took for some. Domesticated, the insistence on experimentalism in anthropology now seems clumsy and club-footed (see Köpping 1989). Clifford’s bibliography is not replete with those he mentored through the system – is there to be no second generation? And few experiments were read, and fewer still published (for discussion see Hutnyk 2004). Perhaps a more dexterous writing need not tarry with this limited self-consciousness but would aim for a more radical critique of the conventions and constraints of publishing as industry.
  - 2.7 The presumption that the crisis of representation is exhausted excuses a return to the ‘business as usual’ of old anthropology, and it warrants as much the failure of the critique of representation to extend thought as it does the commercial impulse in anthropology to produce new versions of the same for the book market. Why otherwise this urgency to move on?
  - 2.8 Experiments with writing, in Aragon’s *Telemachus*, let us see the author rewriting the characters of an epic, progressively updating the action for contemporary resonance as the story unfolds. The context is surrealist – automatic writing – psychoanalysis – later, we can observe similar experiments with the lettrist international and Raymond Roussel’s triangles, as described by Foucault. The situationist detournment of cartoons and streets rates high (beneath the paving stones, the beach – now the Paris administration blocks off a road by the Seine each year and imports sand, palm trees and deckchairs). But shuffling into Paris come Burroughs and Gysin, making cut-ups – exporting them to the states for Lauri Anderson and Kathy Acker – substituting words in text by computer search and replace. There is much more that could be included here, such as pop art, graffiti,

adbusters, fax art, zines and weblogs, but the point is to explore the compulsion to find mechanisms to undo the opacity of the world through writing. Why this belief? Why this compulsion? Anthropologists write. But the experiments went on without the necessary sustained abandonment.

- 3.1 The writing-culture text debates were displaced, for economic reasons (?), by technology-driven new courses that tend to focus upon visual media. The ring of the cash register in the restructuring of thought echoes where creativity might flourish. Dedication to criticism must be fought for, must be won over from convention. The anthropology racket in drag becomes a service sector for corporate expansion. The new kit for anthropology displaces the old 'handmaiden of colonialism' routine. Waiting for a new mission, at the beck and call of globalisation, will not offer a pretty epithet, but 'if the dress fits ...'
- 3.2 The reformulation of ethnography as uncritical and micro-specific 'fellow-traveller of globalization' looks set to dominate teaching provision and vocationalisation of anthropology – the inquiry into the local coincides with attention to the market niche. This is colonialism by other means. The retreat from theory into hyper-empiricism is the metaphysical equivalent of removing all trade restrictions in the interests of 'free competition' (a misnomer). Open markets and the ethnographic merge with product placement and the global intellect (impoverished, bourgeoisified). In this era the market state allows interest only in commercial 'practicalities'. Funding priorities follow hard on those heels.
- 3.3 Expecting email to change everything, a philosopher overplays his hand. We can hope the university will be 'destabilised' by world-wide-isation via technologies of the web (Derrida 2002: 210). But it is unlikely. The corporate makeover of education proceeds apace. Only dreamers recall that the university could be a place for radical thinking. If it is to be again a place where critique can be active, then academics themselves must institute events in the interest of blanket immunity for the ruthless critique of everything. It is – in this sense – a place for critical criticism that must be defended, not the digressions of practical (field) work.
- 3.4 Migrating to the ether does not make us whole, nor desiccate the world. The interactivity of the internet is insufficiently elaborated to exempt sociality via computer screens from the set of criticisms directed at screen culture in general. There are specific differences, but for the multiple reasons of differential access, gendered use, privatised and commercial development, broadcast or one-way content, precocious self-congratulation, and ideological complicity of practitioners with development, the fabled utopia of open code has not delivered. The screen is still an illusion – no longer only shadows on the wall, but fog nonetheless. Sitting at a terminal, perhaps even in the sociality of a café, is not yet an alternative to alienation.
- 3.5 By decree of the worldwide information service and the pact of willing nations, knowledge programme related activity charter, any tribal or subcultural group desirous of rights and recognition within the service and under the terms of the charter, must submit a minimum of fourteen hours a week of live auto-ethnographic documentation – webcams, uplink and site

- maintenance being the responsibility of the provider. Thus it was that Malinowski-type fieldwork was finally fully privatised, with a gesture towards participatory inclusion, and guaranteed corporate technology servicing agreements. But there were always critics who claimed the scripts were already written. Perhaps they were.
- 3.6 Preparing students for duty and function is our main academic task today – training alpha+ and beta creative drones at BA levels for a conceptual First World (not just geo-west) export education and Research and Development – hidden or silent service sector with polite mute youth cohort in food etc. Those unfit for high-level corporate service can be deployed to hidden manual labour where the older/aged drones are wearing down (roads, cleaning, porters). Postgraduates here become the new equivalent of the old degree elite, with education provision a middle-class expectation. The Ph.D. then is reworked not as intellectual goal, but as expert certificate, and only Ivy League possibilities of postdoctoral research through innovation allow the worker to be channelled, if inventive, into private development pay-offs, or U.S. brain-drain (a virulent class and race vector still applies).
  - 3.7 Whenever social scientists do not understand something, they start talking about method. The security this brings is deceptive (Adorno 2000: 69).
  - 3.8 Burroughs works as proto-ethnographer despite his rejection of method. He searches for a self in the other, wants to escape and unlearn his privilege (limited trust-fund scion of the house of an adding machine company, a forerunner of IBM), he wants to escape ‘control’. Add to this his drug experiences and search on the streets of New York, in the South American jungle, or in Morocco or Paris; his cut-up literary experiments, his ‘routines’ as literary style (a routine was a riff on an imaginary theme and made up the bulk of his early novel *The Naked Lunch*; perhaps routines serve as a kind of ethnographic example). Burroughs’ work could usefully displace the safe platitudes of much conventional anthropological fieldwork method – remembering, of course, that fieldwork, like his attempts to rub out the word, to escape control, was doomed to fail. Aragon rails stylistically against style, Derrida in translation tells us that idiom cannot be translated. The quixotic rules here and Burroughs drew the early maps.
  - 4.1 Despite predetermined failures, there can always be some sort of translation. To think that it is impossible is to cling to the idea that there is a pure and true that is understood uniquely and in toto. No understanding is complete, and all translations are partial. So what? It is fine to recognise this, and to make do, with translations more or less effective, more or less according to an agenda, purpose, context ... then to struggle over the meanings ... the struggle is to communicate with others ...
  - 4.2 The innovations of the communications and new media industries should be seen as the innovations of labour (albeit nerds shackled to Nintendo half the time), only this creative productivity was rapidly integrated into corporate capitalism and pacified. Are the continued irruptions of email-organised ‘anti-globalisation’ and text-message-coordinated anti-war demonstrations further examples of ‘proletarian’ labour in action, not yet colonised? Where

productive labour becomes blocked or stagnant, when frustrations and headaches born of always feeling the path is already well worn, when complicity and cooptation – and ideological platitudes – incorporate and accommodate; then fireworks! Or else we live passively before the TV.

- 4.3 Television allows collective experience over multiple sites. The event is viewed from afar and through a particular lens, but by many.
- 4.4 The assertions of knowing that take visual and geographic form might be called territorial in Deleuze and Guattari's sense. Inscription is the vehicle of knowledge, it encodes and fixes, reduces and binds. What decodes, then? What tries to escape this graphic territory if not the aural, which sounds out across and beyond territorial markers? Sound is always escaping the system, and always being ascribed and systematised. It exceeds notation, yet the tendency is to capture, to reduce to script, to stave off the unpredictability of noise, to notate so as to profit from the otherwise ethereal and elusive notes that are not yet money.
- 4.5 What if we thought about fieldwork in terms of rhythm and sound? The aural and temporal registers of knowledge production often seem neglected in favour of a visual approach to space and place. Geographism and its metaphors would here be secondary to sounds and vibration – a different and more subtle mode of perception. Here it would not be a surprise to lend an ear to dialogue, interpretation, intonation. The soundtrack of the past thirty years would offer the basic requirements, but these are not the astonishing advances their authors claim. Still, something might be said.
- 4.6 As a critique of the optical prejudice that 'sees' the world only in the dimension of space through vision, sound might be thought of as movement through time. Sequencing is key to the perception of vibration and rhythm. In this dimension, change and variation mean more than shape and substance ('a tiger in space is the sexual act in time' – Bataille in *The Accursed Share*). It must be self-evident that the visual-spatial prejudice is privileged, but the boom of sound explodes this if we can hear. In *Echographies of Television*, Derrida speaks of a different rhythm that might 'reduce intellectuals to silence' through not accommodating those 'who require a bit more time for the necessary analysis, and who refuse to adapt the complexity of things to the conditions imposed on their discussion' by television (Derrida and Stiegler 2002: 7).
- 5.1 Fieldwork could be a delirium, a contemplative insane activity in a mediatised world. And the fieldworker as activist is in a difficult position – who is to say what contribution such a double motivation can make; the dual paymasters of the desire for activist credibility and scholarly outcome of credential and publication are not obviously complementary. The fieldworker may become a burden on the time and energies of otherwise busy organisers (see Hutnyk 2000: 236–37 for more on why conferences and weblogs are not necessarily an unmitigated boon for indigenous struggles; see Frost 2003 and Alleyne 2003 for discussion of anthropology and activism).
- 5.2 Tricksters offer a rethinking of fieldwork as a productive transgression (Köpping 1989). Or, as one latter-day wit says to justify the stream of words: 'take joy in your digressions' (Massumi 2002: 18).

- 5.3 Massumi offers a credo that tries ‘to take seriously the idea that writing in the humanities can be affirmative and inventive. Invention requires experimentation. The wager is that there are methods of writing from an institutional base in the humanities disciplines that can be considered experimental practices. What they would invent (or reinvent) would be concepts and connections between concepts’ (Massumi 2002: 17).
- 6.1 The importance of Vietnam – we have to acknowledge the legacy of a special television-news-in-the-U.S.-living-room-at-dinner-time version of Vietnam, then reworked by Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket* and the Stallone films, perhaps also *Good Morning Vietnam* and *M\*A\*S\*H*. The militarised and mediatised formation is often ignored when evaluating the cohort that now make up the professorial staff of contemporary universities – a group of swots, haphazardly radicalised on campus, but committed to books, perhaps finding expressive outlet for rebellious tendencies more in the films of Jean-Luc Godard than in organisational work; now found teaching Gulf War (I and II) to mediatised students who watch on cable.
- 6.2 The desire for an experimental anthropology was less a project of political redress or intellectual reparation than it was the ambition of a new generation of anthropologists to displace and replace the old in the positions and with the privileges of establishment. The call for experiments was an ambit claim. It cannot be passed on in class.
- 6.3. Why worry about this state of affairs? So what if fieldwork is reified? The simple answer is that the reification of a certain version of fieldwork means other, possibly more critical methods, and the students who want to pursue these methods are excluded, dissuaded, ruled out of court – this, and the perpetration, if not perpetuation, of a closed exoticist anthropology in circumstances that make such closure complicit with polarisation, exploitation and plunder.
- 6.4 The advocate of participant observation is far too serious to be capable of understanding, or even of noticing, the myriad things of life that occur under that pompous nose. This deaf fieldwork is for priggish types without recourse to human qualities and foibles – which together amount to more of life than any methodology can codify, calculate, conjure into formulae. The attitude of the methodologically calculating social scientist is too often devoid of exactly what is interesting in the hubbub of lived experience. That, at least, would be the attitude of the spontaneous critic of fieldwork method, the one who insisted on going to have a look for him or herself, and actually goes to look, at what happens – not at what one expects to happen, although expectations are always already there, and in vast intimidating quantity and in varied quality.
- 6.5 How could it be said that fieldwork is over? The circumstances have changed, if they ever were such – anthropology is far more diverse, electronic and new media, and old work against any codification. There is no coherence to the discipline of anthropology and this might just save it. Fieldwork is revived from the culture industry, for the always mobile, diffuse, syncretic, convoluted realities of the day; encounters are events and the circumstances in which we find ourselves required to act are given but not fixed.

- 6.6. Observation is governed by imagination, not by rules. The way in which fieldwork (or Malinowski) is conjured in any given period gives the clue to the ideological presuppositions of that time in general, if one can be bothered to read it so. There is a 1950, a 1960 and 1980 and an early twenty-first century Malinowski – the latter with fieldwork glossed in a comic-book version, globalised and in process of systematic commercialisation.
- 7.1 If fieldwork in the traditional sense is ‘over’, in British Anthropology it has a half life because it is something to sell to funding model types, ESRC, accountabilities etc. It becomes a mantra that can somehow seem to be measured, but fieldwork works best as open-ended and creative (Köpping 2002).
- 7.2 The trouble with fieldwork as taught in the credentialising system of the new teaching factory is that it relies primarily upon the assemblage of anecdote-trinkets. Theoretical gestation and contemplation – slow-moving as they are – is not well suited to the imperatives of pass rates and research assessment calculation. Trinketisation of culture here assigns the politics of interpretation to a place of fast and loose generalities – ritualised reflexive moves that surprise no one.
- 7.3 Not only is fieldwork not so neat, we should rescind the tacit requirement that all new doctoral successes participate in the post hoc reconstruction (lie) of fieldwork as a time of deep insight, with full language capability, and no transgressive human foibles – though of course it may sometimes happen like that. Honesty would not be compromised if it were admitted that a language cannot be learned with sufficient fluency for significant insight in less than two, and usually five, years. The stressful effects of having to pass off hesitant and halting speculation as description and conclusion might be abandoned. The complicity with the founding father myth and mystique of single-site fieldwork might be usefully left behind. This of course does not mean the end of detailed and serious work – the packaging of how to fieldwork in export education itemisation trinketisation mode is an athenic alternative.
- 7.4 Commercialisation and corporatisation of the university and the depoliticisation and administerisation of intellectual work goes hand in hand with a calculated demobilisation of participation – mass movement – though there are ‘days of exception to the rule’ – limited and controlled inversions like May Day and the anti-war protest that greeted the invasion(s) of Iraq.
- 7.5 For a moratorium on the kind of fieldwork, that Malinowski did *not* practice.
- 8.1 How does anthropology continue to find excuses for talking? All methodological anxieties, like this, are symptomatic. Going to see for yourself is OK, but how are you going to convince anyone of what you have seen if you cannot convince yourself? This is personal, it takes time.
- 8.2 The always already collective collaborative chaotic project called ‘fieldwork’ might be more appropriately thought of as activist engagement, though such a rethinking has been unsurprisingly little noticed in the conventions and colloquia of anthropology in Britain, and Europe more generally. Why? Does an experimentalism that flirts with potentially mischievous theatrics like peril and paranoia preclude serious academic engagement? Patently not. The scholarship is still sound (a valid requirement). Perhaps it is that Old Europe is wise to this



- scam? It is unlikely that the connections are made in that way that suits regulators and regulations, but calls for another anthropology can be heard (perhaps they should be considered serious). Yet it is more likely that the premium for '[British] Social Anthropology' be jealously protected as a saleable commodity in the teaching factory conditions of higher education for as long as job security remains tight. As such, any challenge to the marketable and codified methodological formulas of Malinowskian-style fieldwork is ruled inadmissible on economic grounds, even if this proceeds largely in unacknowledged ways. Professorial and bureaucratised committee control of the Anthropology curriculum, grant application requirements, report-writing formats and authorised (Government audit oversight committee) assessment procedures and expectations all militate against any innovation that might displace the local purchase of established Social Anthropology™ and what that entails.
- 8.3 Aragon's *Paris Peasant* is a great ethnography, detailing the political, social and aesthetic dimensions of the soon-to-be demolished Passage de l'Opera. Even if, as Benjamin reports in his *Arcades Project* notes, Aragon disavowed this work as a failure, he was, he says, 'partial to failures' (Aragon 1994: 464). Benjamin's critique of Aragon is that he is 'lulled, through exhaustion, into "dream" or "mythology"' and he counter-poses his own effort 'to work through all this by way of the dialectics of awakening' (Benjamin 1999: 908). Hashish on the one side (Benjamin), cocaine on the other (Aragon 1994: 64) makes this a non contest. Yet both can be held up as examples of an aberrant anthropology, and of a fieldwork method superior to the isolation fantasy of the Malinowskian ideology.
- 8.4 Even as Gayatri Spivak attempts to 'narrate the displacement' of entry into the academy, any like-minded mobilisation does not follow her efforts. The activist intellectual is at best granted an earthy 'informant status', and what status is that in the eyes of the state? It remains only to ask if the idea of the informant is ever redeemable? If it is the state witness for the prosecution, or the one who betrays the movement to the secret police, there seems little good to be said. If it is the 'native informant' facilitating voyeuristic and extractive anthropology (or displaced by the postcolonial subject, Spivak 1999), or the respondent of opinion polls, surveys, tests and the like, these informants only ever produce the manipulated commodity information. They are pawns in a larger game called knowledge, never neutral; what the informant says is always already submitted to the censors. The rehearsals only appear in court or in interviews – nothing can be left to the chance of spontaneity. The radical informant has already been scripted, already heard and dismissed. Even where the informant is oneself, dear diary, the script is staged (Imogen Bunting suggests reading Malinowski in this way – even the founding father of fieldwork staged his 'dialogues' with himself and with Elsie in his letters; for discussion see Hutnyk 2004).
- 9.1 The search for cultural studies origins 'is tempting, but illusory' (Hall 1980: 16).
- 9.2 Armchair anthropology is the grounds for a critique of armchair cultural studies – the seemingly radical tech of new media such as Internet and interactive audio-visual devices are curiously well-suited to training users in skills appropriate for future multi-platform weaponry.

- 9.3 It is inconvenient, challenging, but not without a great deal of common sense that Spivak writes: ‘learn the pertinent languages ... As you go towards the already available resources of Area Studies, learn the language with literary depth rather than only social scientific fluency’ (Spivak 2003: 106). That this means damn hard work is ‘correct, but irrelevant’ (Spivak 2003: 9).
- 9.4 Spivak argues, against the militarist use of area studies, for a linguistically informed, qualified cultural studies that would neither take the languages and cultures of the South as mere objects of study nor be conservationist, anti-hybrid or ‘parochial’ (Spivak 2003: 9).
- 9.5 The only way I can imagine cultural studies in the South not being recruited to metropole-based surveillance work is if it actively takes on an older model of internationalist solidarity. Activism that draws on the old ‘workers unite’ slogan of Marx might still be a viable path, for all the problems sloganeering entails, and among the problems not least is the it’s-out-of-date-looks of colleagues, and the difficult access to funding grants all too readily available for more compliant types. This is very different to the NGO–UN continuum of collaboration and conference attending, which recruits the metropolitan migrant and the upwardly mobile Southern postcolonial subject, alongside white liberals with a burden, to the global ecumene. Task: learn/teach the protocols of the disciplines ‘turning them around, laboriously, not only by building institutional bridges but also by persistent curricular interventions’ (Spivak 2003: 11).
- 10.1 What is to be done? Is it an ethical requirement that we withdraw from participation in any communications capacity that assists the imperialist war? Is there an anthropological version of the long bragged-about capacity of programmers and hackers to cripple the information infrastructure? We must now deliver a freeze on all technologies of war, inclusive of organs or war propaganda and with defence and dissemination of anti-imperialist politics. Slogans: ‘No’ to service-sector anthropology, ‘no’ to the facilitation of corporate power. It seems as good a time as ever to deliver an anthropological democracy, an intellectual democracy – for a democratic regime change in fieldwork. Collaborative publication, enthusiasms shared.
- 10.2 What is important? Building capacity in students to challenge, to think? Or to collaborate with the anti-capitalist project? Why do this? What really makes it worth while? Are we building a critical movement-based politics capable of winning, or just clever delusions that we know what is going on? The texts we taught in school – the Frankfurt School, the Manchester School, the Writing/Culture school – are not the be all and end all of training. Method in the madness here?
- 10.3 The later gunshot paintings of William Burroughs are contiguous with his early experimental literature – the shooting of canvas only the commercially available manifestation of the written routine in *The Naked Lunch*, where Louvre rioters throw sulphuric acid into the face of the Mona Lisa. This says much about Burroughs as artist and as self-identified outcast: seduced by the scandalous and the proscribed, his destructive impulse is then made over into product. Then this is thought through as word virus, as commentary on its

- predicament. Thus the complicity of the outrageous makes a slogan: Nothing is true, nothing is forbidden (Hassan i Sabah, old man of the mountain, lifted from or by Dostoevsky, beloved of Bataille and Leiris; see Hutnyk 2004). This slogan can then be deployed as a kind of branding, as an iconic hinge-opening, a potential rupture.
- 10.4 The fascination the figure of the Marquis de Sade holds over theory and popular culture has the same coordinates, which of course do not exhaust interest in, or the importance of, the artists of extracurricular anthropology. At the same time, let us recognise what the proper names of popular counter-cultural figures are made to do: they work as the leading edge at which the transgressive is subsumed under the contemporary social formation that happily finds ways to equate and commodify all differences. Nothing Burroughs writes is unavailable, nothing he says is so far beyond the pale it cannot be retrieved, precisely as reified ‘transgressions’. Even the death of his wife Joan becomes commerce alongside addiction, homosexuality and a penchant for Fedora hats (the Scientological interest is less readily assimilated). Centipedes and Nova cops have marked their man well. The Marquis appears on screen as Jeffrey Rush (*Quills*).
- 10.5 Yet Burroughs’ gunshot paintings still express economically something of the spirit of resistance to this rampant complicity. They sure enough show a certain violence and aggression – comportment in line with the National Rifle Association, no doubt – but this can be thought more generously as somewhat on the way to a resistive critique of the very complicity that absorbs all. It might be suggested that the violence, however, is more a cry of anguish than systematic critique. Critique of everything? But Burroughs’ entire oeuvre is, in consistent and evident fact, a working out of a system. To a great, and largely unresolved, extent this system must deploy the shot-instant rather than a formal and programme-sustained critical consciousness to work its effects. So, yes, it cannot be accepted that Joan simply dies. The Mona Lisa dissolves. The canvas must be blasted away. Perhaps the instant satori of the gunshot is anyway the most appropriate response to art in America, but if Nothing is Forbidden, the possibility of sustained critique is Burroughs’ legacy too.
- 10.6 Burroughs as the addled priest in *Drugstore Cowboy*, or as the immaculate fixer in *Junky Christmas* (recorded with the Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy) or as Lauri Anderson’s sidekick, was the medium of both commercialisation of that instant satori, as well as the possibility of its wider dissemination. The question of how far this complicity intervenes in the word virus world in a way that offers any escape, or how far this word virus is already the structure of complicity and commerce – where all words can be exchanged, cut-up, blown away – remains an open question suitable for a new curriculum.
- 10.7 Only an inadequate anthropology would rest with abstract theoretical questions. They have implications for what we do. Ethics is not just a theoretical nicety (Köpping 2002). Practice, although it somehow also has acquired some mysterious reputation for being non-metaphysical, is ‘an eminently theoretical concept’ (Adorno 1973: 144). There is no need to be afraid of theory, or to resist abstraction where it serves to clarify – even in the

gallery – nor to put it off because practice cannot wait, which it cannot; and to sit around theorising when tasks remain undone is all the more irresponsible. Nevertheless, Adorno notes that ‘paradoxically, it is the desperate fact that the practice that would matter is barred which grants to thought a breathing spell it would be practically criminal not to utilize’ (Adorno 1973: 245). Hence we must attend the universities, but imagine their destruction/liberation.

- 10.8 Missing words from the English edition of Georges Bataille’s *The Accursed Share* might serve well as a conclusion. It is worth while examining the elided passage that follows the words: ‘It is a guarantee against the risk of servitude, not a will to assume those risks without which there is no freedom’. There should then appear the following sentences: ‘The feeling of a *curse* is bound to this double distortion<sup>2</sup> of movement, which the consumption of wealth demands of us. Refusal of war under the monstrous form that it assumes, refusal of the luxurious squandering whose traditional form would from now on, signify injustice. At the moment where the excess of wealth is at its greatest ever, one ends up with the sense that the accursed share has somehow always existed’ (Bataille 1976). Why was this left out of the English text? And what else are we missing, what else has been left out? Is it a curse to insist on a transgressive thought where everywhere war seems to prevail? Is it a curse to continue with anthropology, with the slow, dangerous work that ‘shatters frames’ through venturing into the field, through the celebration of transgression, in and for itself? A ruthless critique of everything might be shared too. If this is a curse, it is our responsibility to extend it, rectified only by worrying at the meanings, forever ...

## Notes

1. In no way is this a documentation of Peter Köpping’s teaching, but rather an accounting with influences that, through teaching, at least one graduate student was directed astray in useful ways. An aberrant tribute perhaps, but tribute nonetheless, and one offered in the interests of finding a wider anthropology, a more open curriculum.
2. The French word ‘alteration’ means debasement, deterioration, falsification, changing towards the worse. I am grateful to Theresa Mikuriya for this translation, which comes from Bataille (1976).

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