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Grace and Correspondence in Ethnography and Psychotherapy

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Abstract

For all the ways in which anthropologists have addressed relations during the history of the discipline, from kinship to the contemporary focus on comparison, it is surprising that anthropologists rarely write about the pragmatics of the messy dynamics of relating between interlocutors themselves and between interlocutors and ethnographers. This is despite some anthropologists having highlighted the work of these relations and our approach to them as crucial for the discipline. In this paper I argue that the enquiry practiced in one particular psychotherapeutic approach, namely systemic psychotherapy, is relevant to this micro practice of anthropology. I will present a transcription of a piece of systemic psychotherapeutic work. I will make three points, inspired by work in systemic psychotherapy as well as anthropology. My first point concerns plurality, my second point refers to second-order observation or the use of reflexivity, and my third to the temporal dimension of the enquiry as a process. I suggest that considering these three points will enhance methods of enquiry in both disciplines.

Introduction

I have worked for many years as a Consultant Systemic Psychotherapist in a well-known London based psychoanalytic training institution in the UK National Health Service. Coming to this work as an anthropologist has been both frustrating and rewarding. It has been frustrating because generally in psychotherapy training the view has been, and still is, one of ''culture [as] something outside of therapy to be incorporated as an external object" (Martin 2019, 97) with differences in racial or ethnic background and outlooks in the patient population either being experienced as threatening and deskilling for the psychotherapist or dismissed as superficial, or as denial or projections, as some kind of pathology. It has been rewarding because I have been struck how much my inquiries as a psychotherapist resemble the work I had done previously as an anthropologist and an ethnographer. So, I have come to think of my psychotherapeutic work as ethnography. This experience, however, does not indicate that the disciplines of anthropology and psychotherapy are the same or that one can move seamlessly from one to the other. Both address the conundrum of the shifting ground between difference and sameness (Sykes 2008), but the practitioners in each approach these antonyms from a different side. While both anthropology and psychotherapy are in the business of relational practice, with von Foerster one can say that the anthropologist is in the 'difference writ large' trade while the psychotherapist or the psychoanalyst is in the 'difference as micro-practice' trade (von Foerster 2014). Further it is the relationship between anthropologists and psychotherapists and their respective participants or clients which is a condition of their work. It is *the* relation. Notwithstanding, then, the different intentions of practitioners in each discipline, what might the two disciplines have to say to each other and what does this mean for how they might collaborate? Apart from the anthropology *of* psychotherapy what else might psychotherapy contribute to anthropology and the other way around? In this paper I argue that the way in which psychotherapeutic practice has been

developed in one particular approach, namely systemic psychotherapy, is relevant to the

practice of anthropology, and in particularly to the micro practice of ethnography. I suggest

that concepts have been developed in anthropology which help to think and work with

relationships and relating, and I suggest that 'grace' (Bateson 1972) and 'correspondence'

(Ingold 2022) are two such concepts. I will present a transcription of a piece of systemic

psychotherapeutic work, and I argue that the enquiry is ethnographic. I will make three

points, inspired by work in systemic psychotherapy as well as anthropology. My first point

concerns plurality, by which I mean that anthropologists/ ethnographers and psychotherapists

work with selves which may be singular, but not individuals. My second point refers to

second-order observation or the use of reflexivity by the ethnographer/ psychotherapist, and

my third to the temporal dimension of the enquiry as a process. I shall suggest that

considering these three points can enhance methods of inquiry in both disciplines, but also

that in this regard there is more to anthropology and ethnography than is often recognized.

The anthropologist and the ethnography

I am not alone in drawing attention to the entanglement of the person of the

ethnographer with the person of the research participants. For example, Crapanzano through

the form and the style of his account of conversations with a Moroccan potter, illustrated the

probing intersubjectivity in the ethnographic relationship (Crapanzano 1980), Csordas noted

how the body is implicated in 'somatic modes of attention' (Csordas 1993), Pink focussed on

the sensory experiences (Pink 2009), Davies on emotions (Davies and Spencer 2010),

Stevenson cautioned the ethnographer to listen differently and to be alert to the 'presence'

which lies beyond words (Stevenson 2014), Pilbeam et al noted the ebb and flow of

attachment and detachment of the ethnographer in the field (Pilbeam et al. 2023) while

Meyers provided an account of the almost compulsive devotion and care, even love, to which

ethnographic fieldwork can give rise and which defies easy description or understanding. Desjarlais, in his fascinating and searching interrogation of photos taken of a would be blind research participant draws our attention to the implied voyeurism of anthropologists which tends to ignore the ethics and the politics of their observations. Desjarlais's account turns to his own imaginary uncertain associations. It is a spectral anthropology in which he along with others who catch his attention, become his own ethnographic subject. He is never quite sure what he is seeing. His exploration of ethics and reflexivity is a welcome reminder of how we are (also) researching ourselves (Desjarlais 2019). In his account Desjarlais is never faced with a direct or assertive response from his would be participant and as a consequence the relation is (mostly) from one side. Here, however, my focus is on how the relational aspects of such experiences find a place in what we actually do, how we work, how we respond and how we go on. The methods of fieldwork are not separable from the way we use them and, as in psychotherapy, awareness and engagement with method may enhance our work theoretically, existentially and practically. I begin by describing the work of some anthropologists who have documented their own reactions and dispositions as well as the reactions of their participants to these in their accounts. No anthropologist can be unaware of the centrality of their relationships to their interlocutors/participants, and I focus on this relation in each of my examples. I have chosen three pieces of work because each of them gives an account of situations which required a response, a conflict or a misunderstanding, and this selection is not, of course, exhaustive, rather each describes different aspects of the issues at stake.

In 1977 Paul Rabinow published his book *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Rabinow 2007)[i] much against the advice of his distinguished teachers and supervisors. It would, one of them maintained, ruin his career in anthropology. One wonders what exactly they thought might be the difficulty, a kind of parallel to the attitude that something pure will

be ruined or spoilt articulated so often in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy when faced with different conceptions of relationships. Rabinow was concerned with the experience of fieldwork and hence reported on his own experience already then considering this as an inevitable, even a methodological, ingredient of fieldwork and ethnography. He described a dramatic rupture in which he found himself at the end of his tether, feeling sick and fed up and somewhat petulant when on a journey home in an argument about whether they should have stayed at a wedding, the participant, his friend, got out of the anthropologist's car and refused to get back in. After some unsuccessful coaxing the anthropologist drove off home leaving his friend to walk the five miles back to the village. This precipitated an existential crisis for Rabinow in which he wondered whether he had chosen the right profession. Could he sustain a position of submissiveness, of being the smiling observer, a total persona (Rabinow 2007, 48) throughout the time of his fieldwork? It seemed that Moroccan values as well as American ones were being enacted. Perhaps not? From the friend's point of view, he, the friend, was the host and hence expected to be generous and with Rabinow's acceptance of generosity also should have come an implicit acknowledgement of the power of his host. Subsequently Rabinow apologised with the help of another participant and reported that after this episode 'we got along famously' (Rabinow 2007, 49) The explanation he offered was that as he asserted a personal limit, a breaking point, he was in fact in tune with a Moroccan cultural style of brinkmanship. I applaud Rabinow's honesty about his actions and feelings as well as his insistence on publishing this account, but I cannot help thinking that there was here also a lost opportunity to explore the two sides further. How did Rabinow intuitively manage the conflict in a way which avoided it becoming entrenched? What did Rabinow say to his friend? How did his friend respond? Was there a fortuitous congruence between the anthropologist's personal disposition and a Moroccan ethos or was this congruence *the outcome* of the events and of the relationship between them? Or was it a bit of both?

Peter Metcalf reported on an equally striking if not so openly expressed conflict from his fieldwork in central northern Borneo (Metcalf 2002). Metcalf described an established tradition of narration in which a particular literary form had an important social function. In particular his account focuses on one narrator, an old woman, Kasi, who always began her narration with an announcement in a firm voice: "they lie, we lie "(Metcalf 2002, 7). To the ethnographer this came across as a mix of skepticism and empowerment. Kasi was relaying the messages of the ancestors, but she was also questioning the truth of these messages. Metcalf continued in his account to describe his complex and somewhat ambivalent relationship to Kasi, who at one point used her authority to intervene and stop the preparations of a mystical barrier to ward off evil influences around the longhouse, an activity which had been prompted by the anthropologist's enquiries about shamanism. Metcalf was working on death songs, important in the rituals of mediation between the living and the dead, and these were difficult to obtain. People just did not want to talk about them and his efforts to obtain some information about these songs brought him into another unspoken conflict with Kasi. With the help of a renegade, but important personality, Metcalf was treated to a long session in which this person provided him with an extensive account of the death songs. Metcalf wrote it all down and at the end of the session he was marched off to see Kasi and encouraged to repeat everything he had learnt. Kasi 'smiled thinly' while listening, but Metcalf felt that she had been outmaneuvered, although not by him (Metcalf 2002, 42). The final puzzle about his relationship with Kasi came when Metcalf was told that when Kasi died, on her directions, a copy of his book was buried with her!

Metcalf made the point that if Kasi, the people he lived with and their ancestors 'lie', so do anthropologists and so do *their* ancestors suggesting that their theories are inadequate to capture reality too. For example, he noted how difficult it was for him to employ the concepts of 'ethnicity' or 'culture' in order to identify different groups in the area of Borneo where he

worked. He suggested that these are constantly in a process of formation and reformation, even distortion, according to political and economic processes as well as to the action of individual high profile and energetic persons.

> Fieldwork is an extraordinary mix between seeing plainly and being all at sea; that the result is more demanding than any mere text could be; and that the juxtaposition of piles of information and the gulf of incomprehension remains as compelling as ever (Metcalf 2002,16).

This is more than allegory (Clifford 1986). This seems to be the ethnographer not knowing what he is doing or rather not making use of what he does know when in the face of Kasi obstructing his access to knowledge and her thin frosty smile, he felt frustrated, misled and even panicked about his research project. As Desjarlais suggested might the ethnographer start there, being at sea, but at the same time go further and see or rather feel plainly?

My third example derives from Jean Briggs's fieldwork in the Canadian Northwest Territories with the Inuit, known as Qipisa, who lived northwest of Hudson Bay. Briggs made no secret of her feelings (Briggs 1970, 1998). This was difficult fieldwork, not only extreme temperatures and isolation but also in many other ways inhospitable and uncomfortable circumstances challenging Briggs's skills and her patience. Her ways of being different, 'wrong hair, skin color, and clothes, wrong language, laugh and ways of walking' (Briggs 1998, 150) was punctuated by her being considered to be a dangerously powerful and evil spirit. Briggs described how she often felt resentful, angry and oppressed, such as when one of her hosts, an Anglican preacher, ordered her and other people in the community to follow certain rules particularly strictly. Briggs acknowledged that this was perhaps her problem as she objected 'more powerfully to be told to say 'amen' than I do to being told to make tea' (Briggs 1970, 50). Even in the early phases of fieldwork Briggs found it difficult to disguise her irritation and seems to have used her awareness of herself as a methodological tool, and

this eventually led to her being ostracized as she could not, or did not, conceal her temper. We are left to read the pain and confusion about these episodes between the lines and I wonder whether the title of her first book *Never in Anger* was an ethnographic report as much as it was a comment on her own disposition to anger or perhaps an implicit acknowledgement of the method for research which she developed further in her second book *Inuit Morality Play*. This second book is a study of one three-year-old Qipisa girl, Chubby Maata, and the process of her development through her fourth year of life. Briggs provided detailed examples of sequences of interaction and communication both between Chubby Maata and her relatives, most often her mother, and between Chubby Maata and Briggs herself. These sequences involved games and play with Briggs herself taking a participant role mostly responding in what she considered a manner appropriate for the Qipisa context. In a chapter entitled 'I Like You, I Don't Like You': Anthropologist in the Oyster Shell, Briggs gave the following example when Chubby Maata was playing with a scrap of paper:

> She started to hand the scrap to me, perhaps inviting play, and I, picking up that possibly playful overture, drew my hand back suddenly and said: "Kuniat! (disgusting, tickly).". Chubby Maata beamed her baby beam and held out the scrap again. We repeated the sequence a number of times. Then she said , "Now you,' suggesting that we change roles. I held out the scrap to her and she drew back her hand, beaming. "Kuniat", she said. (Briggs 1998, 152-3).

Through such detailed examples of interaction and communication in games and play, Briggs discovered a tension between an emotion and its opposite. For example, she observed a tension between tenderness and aggression between adults and a pull between affection and hostility communicated by children in their play as well as by adults in their play with children. She described how the words for fear and respect or awe conveyed subtle attitudes to others and how these were used deliberately to reprimand and encourage children to

behave in acceptable ways. The navigation between these emotional states implicated a web of entanglements between participants and it was difficult to achieve equilibria: 'if children feel too much respect, they will not be able to feel safe and if they do not feel enough, they will get out of control (p.149). Statements and everyday interaction could not be taken at face value, but often pointed to the opposite. 'Your mother has hurt her finger' became 'your mother is going to die' and 'would you like to come and visit me' became 'would you like to come and live with me'. Here Briggs reached for the theories of the child psychoanalyst, Melanie Klein, considering this dialectic between different states of mind as vital processes for child development as well as depicting states of mind of adults generally (Klein 1975)[ii], and suggested that these theories accorded well with Qipisa emotional outlooks and child care. In her final chapter she described how she learnt to look beneath the surface of behaviors and interactions to understand how these phenomena are generated and experienced (p.208).

Briggs's ethnography seems to me to be unique in anthropology in being unusually transparent about her own feelings and aversions so early in the discipline. As she took this forward in her second book, I am occasionally left to wonder whether she considered herself to be therapist, ethnographer or mother. The presentation of small sequences of interaction, gestures, tones of voice and pattern and her use of herself in the interaction and in the play with Chubby Maata and other children leaves the reader in no doubt as to her role in the events observed and participated in. This combined with glimpses of self-reflection about the difference between Briggs's own expectation and for example those of Chubby Maata's mother constituted her method. To this she added the ideas of Melanie Klein to establish some certainty, or at least a hypothesis, about how she and her readers might understand what is going on. In the end Briggs suggested that detailed observation of what is going on between persons ought to be the nub of an anthropological approach (Briggs 1998, 209.)

However, could Briggs have widened her observation? We are offered meticulous detail about a particular dyadic relationship, between a child and a stranger, but we may well wonder how this relationship affected the relationships of others as well as that between Briggs herself and others. What did Chubby Maata's mother and other members of the household think and feel about the interference?

Grace and correspondence

Apart from the long association and mutual fascination at different times between psychoanalysis and anthropology, some anthropologists and ethnographers have, as we have seen, been concerned with their own relationship to their ethnography and their participants. This more direct interest in psychotherapeutic skills of asking is interest (Skinner 2012, Davies 2009, Martin 2019, Mosse et al. 2023) perhaps as an extension of a turn, which we are already in the process of making, to a double turn, namely a turn back towards the other as a methodological move (Das 2007, Ahmed 2004). The move from *aboutness* to *withness* has been well-documented in second order systemic psychotherapy[iii] and Ingold has commented on the way in which anthropologists using an *aboutness* approach tend to objectify that which they analyze (Ingold 2022). This is the anthropology *of* psychotherapy and this approach limits an engagement with the creative process in which the object, in this case psychotherapy, is conceptualized. In contrast a *withness* approach allows new ways of doing anthropology to come into being (Ingold and Lucas 2007). In other words, this is a focus directed on to the similarities between the relation between the anthropologists and their interlocutors or the psychotherapists and their clients and this relation is understood to be dynamic and shifting according to the dispositions, gestures, abilities, understandings, misunderstandings etc of both sides. Indeed, for all the ways in which anthropologists have addressed relations during the history of the discipline, from kinship to the contemporary

focus on comparison, it is surprising that anthropologists have not written more about the pragmatics of the messy dynamics of relating experienced in ethnographic work generally. I should point out that I am a systemic psychotherapist also sometimes referred to as a family therapist, and that systemic psychotherapy theory builds upon cybernetics and systems thinking and on Gregory Bateson's ethnographic work in New Guinea (Bateson 1958) This is an approach which is at pains to begin with relationships rather than with individuals, with the relation rather than the relata (Krause 2002, 2012).[iv] These notions have been taken up more or less effectively in systemic psychotherapy, some therapists addressing these as techniques, others as a stance or an approach (Burnham 1999). In contemporary second order practice this includes the relation between the psychotherapist and the clients, who as I said above, tend to be more than one person. The systemic psychotherapist, then is concerned with how she changes her work, how she may design her work, her approach and her questions when she no longer wants to uphold positivist premises and practices, when the aim is to *respond* to her clients, to practice *with* them rather than write reports *about* them (Escobar 2017). These aims and orientations are reflected in what I refer to as the micro-practices of our inquiries. By this I mean the details of gestures, attitudes and moves, questions and responses of anthropologist and systemic psychotherapist as well as their interlocutors and this implicates the complicated relationship between participation and observation, so often commented upon in textbooks about how to conduct fieldwork.

What our textbooks often do not make plain is the underlying assumption we make about how it is possible to carry out fieldwork and ethnographic enquiries in the first place. I assume that to live is to participate and that this is what we share with our interlocutors. With Ingold I like to refer to an understanding of the world as 'a source of growth and nourishment (Ingold 2018, 161) and as expressed by Pina-Cabral, 'to how the world comes to embrace us ……as a source' (Pina-Cabral 2017, 70) but also to what Escobar quoting the Zapatista to 'a

world where many worlds fit' (Escobar 2017, xvi, see also Kohn 2013, Viveiros de Castro 2014) and to 'Earth as a living whole that is always emerging out of the manifold biophysical, human, and spiritual elements and relations that make it up' (Escobar, quoted in Ingold 2018, 169). Note that this notion of world emphasizes growth, development and process, and, as both Ingold and Pina-Cabral point out, ontogeny rather than ontology, how to go on rather than what there is. This is predicated upon the idea that in order to communicate at all, we accept that we are in participation with others and for this have to be charitable (Pino-Cabral 2022, Davidson 2005). Participation in the most general sense implies and activates the assumption that we live in one world. How then can we tell if we have succeeded or even coming close to some kind of reciprocal understanding?

In a paper discussing amongst other things a Balinese painting in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind,* Bateson wrote about 'grace':

> …. If art is somehow expressive of something like grace or psychic integration, then the *success* of this expression might well be recognizable across cultural barriers. The physical grace of cats is profoundly different from the physical grace of horses, and yet a man who has the physical grace of neither can evaluate that of both (Bateson 1972, 129, emphasis in the original).

And later he expanded this by referring to what he called 'sacred':

> ....sacredness has something to do with [this] covering and uncovering deeper components (Bateson 1991, 303).

And when referring to fifteen century European wars between Roman Catholics and Protestants, and whether the bread (…………) *is* or *stands for* the body, he explained further what he meant by the concept 'sacred':

…….it is my suspicion that the richest use of the word 'sacred' is that use which will say that what matters is a *combination* of the two, getting the two together. And that the fracturing of the two is, shall we say, anti-sacred (Bateson 1991, 267).

From a different and more contemporary territorial ecological perspective calling for the most fundamental transitions in outlook in 1999, Thomas Berry, a cultural historian and environmental campaigner, wrote about 'grace':

….even as we make our transitions into this new century we must note that moments of grace are transient moments. The transformation must take place within a brief period. Otherwise, it is gone forever (Berry, quoted in Escobar 2017, 164)

'Grace' then refers to a temporary moment and event, an accomplishment when something has been intuitively understood and from which something new might emerge, while differences are preserved and uncompromised. It is a moment when we have things in common. Psychotherapists may refer to such a moment as a significant moment (Campbell et al. 2003), or a moment of meeting (Stern, 2004), a fleeting point in time when something changed after which things may not go back to the way they were. With this ephemeral quality, 'grace' is a moment in which we might, consciously or unconsciously, take a risk using parts of ourselves in order to bring forth a connection or integration. The risk taking is implied because 'grace' is seeped in difference, uncertainty and curiosity. From other perspectives, we may describe this as empathy (see Dowdy, this issue), dialogue or resonance although none of these convey the tentative reciprocal connection which characterizes 'grace' The concept which comes close to 'grace' I think has been suggested by Ingold. Ingold writes about correspondence and the way this idea of 'going along together' preserves difference:

…parts are not components that are added *to* one another but movements that carry on *alongside* one another, so too in the human family, lives lived in counterpoint are not

"and…..and" but 'with…..with" and in answering - or responding – to one another, they correspond. Thus, in place of the assemblage as a way of talking about the multiplicity of soul- life, as if it were an alliance of souls, I propose the term *correspondence* to connote their affiliation (Ingold 2018,160, emphasis in the original).

Ingold further offers the image of 'taking another by the hand', and Dewey's notion of "having things in common being not a prerequisite but an outcome of communication" (Dewey 1966, quoted in Ingold 2017, p.14). This then is what I take Bateson to mean by 'grace', a brief significant moment, being the outcome of having stayed beside or stuck with someone from which something new has emerged.

Case example

I turn now to a fragment of a dialogue from my systemic psychotherapeutic work. The meeting took place in a London Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service some years ago and the participants were two adolescent girls and their stepmother. Anna, who was 14, was the referred person, referred by her father's ex-wife. She had been truanting from school and her stepmother found her unmanageable. Anna, who is Brazilian had come to live with her father's ex-wife Isabella, in London, with her younger sister, Maria, who was 13, after their father was killed in a car crash on his way to visit their mother in hospital. Their mother herself died a few days later from cancer. This was two years previously to our meeting. The father and Isabella had a son, Pedro, who was also the legal guardian of the children, as they had no other family. Pedro brought the children to London and his mother agreed to care for them. Over some months I met with the two sisters and their step-mother regularly, and at first Anna was tearful, but the more pressing issue, especially for Isabella, was to be able to manage Anna and Maria. The following sequence emerged from an early session[v]:

Britt: You know that Isabella is often talking here about responsibility….And…I was

wondering …because you two have ..you two have an unusual background, don't

you? Not everyone has lost their parents the way you have. Not everyone has had to

come to a different country to live…..with new people in new circumstances…….So

how do you…how does it work? Do you call Isabella 'mummy'? …What do you call

her?

Anna: We call her auntie.

Britt: Who decided that you would call her auntie?

Maria: In fact in Brazil…she is my dad's ex-wife and we used to call her Auntie, so like it is

the same thing.

Isabella: I only saw them twice when they were little. I came to meet my ex-husband's wife.

He said , my wife would like to meet you…is that possible? Yes…come. We meet

and I meet the girls…..I never saw them…I saw them only twice. When my son went

there and he ask me if he can come with them I was frightened……like them

Britt: You were frightened….?

Isabella: Yeah, I think they did not know me, I did not know them

Britt: But I wanted to talk about it because you know….it is little bit different, I think, or

maybe it is different in Brazil, I don't know, but you know you are not looked after by

your natural parents……..you are being looked after by someone else who is

connected to you but not quite your natural parent, then sometimes there are issues

about……how about responsibility. You know Isabella has taken responsibility. She

is saying 'I am responsible…' But how does it work for you, because you know that

Isabella is not your…….your natural mum.

Maria: Hmm……

Britt: How does it work?

Maria: (*note it is not Anna answering*) I think…like…after a time…because it is two years

now…you kind of get used to it. So she looks after us as if she was our mum……so

like…it will never change…our mum was our mum…we still remember our

mum…….and…..things can't change. But those people they have babies and they

have their own mums and they have a step-parent or something like that, I think it's

the same thing, they treat them like their mum, but they know that they are actually

not their mum. So, I treat her like she was my mum, even though she is not my mum.

Britt: What do you think, Anna?

Anna: Yeah, the same…I consider her my mum….yeah the same

Britt: Hmm……….So what happens to the idea of your……….real mum?

Anna: Yeah……..?

Britt: Does it come up?

Anna: (*reluctantly*) No……

Isabella: (tuts loudly)…..

Britt: Do you think of her?

Anna: I used to

Britt: You used to……when did you used to think of her?

Anna: Oh….a year ago….

Britt: What time?...In the night….In the daytime?

Anna: All the time…like during the day….and the night and things….

Britt: You used to think of her all the time?

Anna: Yeah….

Britt: What did you used to think when you thought of her?

Anna: Hmm….When she was dying…yeah that is the only picture I can get….yeah

Britt: In your mind……so it is a sad picture?

Anna: Yeah….

Britt: How did it stop…..How did it stop that she was in your mind so much?

Anna: Well, I don't know, how it was…..I just started enjoying myself more. I started to

   listen to what people said …..I started to cooperate around the house more and so on

A little later

Britt: *(to Isabella)* Did you notice that change from when Anna stopped thinking so much

   about her mum?

Isabella: I think that she tried ….she tried to be something else…somebody else. Anna you

   try to forget, but you never forget. I lost my mum 51 years ago- she died on 22nd

   February 1949. I still remember the day she died….

Britt: You too were a child?

Isabella: I was four years old so I still remember the day she was in the coffin to go to the

   cemetery, you know…..that picture is here in my mind….so don't try to put her aside,

   Anna. You must remember, she is your mum, you understand. And don't remember

   only the bad things, remember the good things, the times when she was there for you

   when you went to school, when you come home from school, when she gives you a

   kiss. Don't forget your mum, it is your mum….

These words, which are a transcript of part of a video recording, do not by

themselves convey the feelings and atmosphere evoked in this meeting. Isabella had

been exasperated with Anna about her behavior in a previous session and Anna

had been responding with surly stubbornness. I was preoccupied with whether

Isabella could step into the place left by the dead parents, whether she was able to

contain and command obedience from her teenage stepdaughters and whether she

could find the authority in herself. As she said she was frightened. That was from her

side. But there was also the other side of whether the girls would allow Isabella into the place of a parent and how this would affect the process of grieving and their ongoing lives. The 'moment of grace', I think, was when I plucked up the courage to ask Anna about her 'real' mum and was marked when Isabella tutted. I remember feeling the tension, searching for the words and being hesitant when I used the words 'real or natural mother' which was followed by Anna's reluctance to enter into that conversation. At that moment it became clear that Isabella knew what it feels like to have lost a mother. This was something the girls did not know before. What they also did not and still do not know is that I too lost a parent when I was 14. Although there were differences between Isabella's loss, my loss and the loss the girls experienced, there was a coming together, a moment of grace between us. This was the beginning of the work, you might almost say the condition of the ongoing work which continued for several months after this. Anna began to enjoy going to school more and she and Isabella became more closely connected.

The relationship between the girls and their father became more central in our conversations and their stepbrother eventually took up the role of carer in their lives.

The ethnographer and the psychotherapist

Plurality

With this short example let me return to my three points outlined above. There remained a difference between myself and the two girls and their stepmother as well as a difference between the two girls and the stepmother themselves and I remained unsure what to ask, I was searching for more connections. I was tentative and this was part of this difference. Sitting in the session with two apprehensive young women and a carer who was at the end of

her patience but also full of worry, I wondered about how I could understand the present

unhappiness and about how they might move on with their lives. Despite the shocking

circumstances these were not outlandish emotions, but they could not be uttered openly

without a risk of pushing the relationships into more polarization. Saying something to one

side would affect the other side. My first point therefore is the recognition of plurality.

Neither anthropologist nor psychotherapists work with individuals in the sense of bounded

autonomous entities. We work with individuals who are themselves in relationships with and

to others and these relationships are always there whether the persons concerned are present

or not. Behind singularity there is therefore always plurality or we might say multiplicity[vi]

(Deleuze 1994). Indeed, a much quoted description of a system in systemic psychotherapy is

precisely, 'relationships and the relationships between relationships' (Watzlawick et al. 1967)

referring to an entanglement and indicating neither boundary nor individual autonomy, but

rather multiplicity in singularity and partial connections in the sense that ' 'partial' captures

the nature of the interlocution, for not only is there no totality, each part also defines a

partisan position' (Strathern 2004, 39). This was captured in Bateson's work in New Guinea

and his description of the *naven* ritual which inspired schismogenesis to become a

foundational idea in the discipline, the idea being that relationships are reproduced by their

own dynamic (Bateson 1958, Krause 2007). I think it also captures Foucault's notion of

desubjectification (Foucault 1991)[vii]. In every relationship dynamic there is something of the

one in the other and both sides, actually all sides, contribute to its continuous creation and

recreation, but importantly partibility is a recurring possibility because persons cannot remain

closed onto themselves (Pine-Cabral 2023, 129). In other words, anyone occupies shifting

positions and have partial connections in relation to anyone else, and therefore speaks with

multiple subjective voices (Viveiros de Castro 2014, Deleuze, 1994, Cavagnis and Krause

2022). We may prefer to refer to this as multiplicity rather than plurality as long as it is clear

that we are not talking about multiplication (Ingold 2022). Deleuze writes,

> multiplicity must not designate a combination of the many and the one, but rather an
> organization belonging to the many as such, which has no need whatsoever of unity in
> order to form a system (Deleuze 1994, 240),

Seen from the point of view of possibilities inherent in or emerging from a collection

of relationships, which stand or exist behind any particular relationship, persons do not take

up fixed positions even if they seem to do so to us. Rather they may be imbued with

ambiguities of different positions as these constitute dormant or emerging possibilities. For

example, Isabella is a mother and a stepmother but also a daughter who has lost her mother.

As Viveiros de Castro suggested, they belong to both sides in the sense that they glide over

the distance between them (Viveiros de Castro 2012). They have relations integral to them

(Strathern 1992, 230), and they are also partial as each person has many such relationships.

They are reciprocally presupposed according to the conventions of the context, but they are

not reciprocal by way of imitation or analogy. That is to say, one thing may distinguish itself

from another without the latter distinguishing itself from the former (Deleuze 1994). In other

words, they maintain the possibility of their differences and of generating a new way of being

emerging (Deleuze 1994, 52). Or In Viveiros de Castro's phrase 'the way is not the same in

both directions' (Viveiros de Castro 2012, 228).

To me this is a fitting description of where we were in our 'moment of grace' in the

sequence described above. We had come together, psychotherapists would describe it as a

significant moment in the work, which allowed me to find a way to move on to ask more

confidently about what Anna remembered about her mother and for Isabella to comment on

Anna's and Maria's situation. I felt that I, with their help, had managed to navigate into safe

territory and away from or perhaps even through the conflict and problems with which the

family had arrived, specifically the tension between the attachment to mothers and carers and

an acceptance of their authority. This characterizes concretely the predicament of the

systemic psychotherapist's way of working with relationships, a predicament which I daresay

is frequently encountered by the anthropologist as well. I was required to enter into the

middle of theirs and our relationships. I was not talking to one person, I was having a

conversation with all three of them, and on each side there were at times polarized views and

feelings, which I had to acknowledge, join and participate in from within. I could not be sure

about my choice of words or about my intonation and ambience, I felt the tension in the room

and was acutely aware of my tentativeness which could push us in the wrong direction in the

sense of increasing the conflict and shutting down opportunities. I was in-between and I was

trying to find a way for them too to find a place in between (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). In

the words of Ingold (Ingold 2022) and Karen Barad (Barad 2007) we were trying to find a

way of splitting apart *and* mingle together. It is true, I was asking the questions and in this

way punctuating the sequence, but in my tentativeness, I was aiming to offer a path to follow

without being able to predict where we were going. I was working with process rather than

with boundaries as a precondition for my questions and in order to move on.

Second Order Observation

The second point I want to make refers to second-order observation, that is

observing the observers (Rabinow 2008, Luhmann 2013) or what is often referred to as

reflexivity (Krause 2012). It has been said that participant observation is an oxymoronic term

which opposes participation to observation (Pina Cabral 2023; Skinner 2012). I think that this

depends on one's understanding of observation. Perhaps yes from a structural functionalist

point of view, but not if one understands participation as a full and sentient engagement. In this

sense participation is a condition of observation and there can be no observation without participation. The centrality of participation for life has not been lost on anthropologists from Levy-Bruhl and Evans Pritchard to Ingold and Pina-Cabral. Sahlins suggested that participation is fundamental to kinship (Sahlins 2011a, 20011b) echoing the views found in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis (see for example Winnicott 1971). While Tambiah's definition of participation as 'occurring when persons, groups, animals, places and natural phenomena are in relation of contiguity, and translate that relation into one of existential immediacy and contact and shared affinities' (Tambiah 1990, quoted in Pina-Cabral 2017) widens the definition to include not just persons related in kinship but to the psychotherapist and the physical environment as well. However, anthropologists and psychotherapists start from a fully populated world and arrive at observation with their own canon. So, in each approach the trade they are in and 'the building blocks that [are used] …to build something influence very strongly what is built' (von Foerster 1997, 10). This notion of 'feedback' and the idea of 'second order', are both ideas which originate from cybernetics and systems theory and are foundational to the training and approach of systemic psychotherapy. Being in between as I described above, therefore calls for an engagement with oneself as well as an engagement with others, who themselves engage with other selves. The anthropologist and the psychotherapist is *in* the situation she tries to understand, she 'shapes the situation, but in conversation with it, so that her own models and appreciations are also shaped by the situation' (Schon 1982, 151). This is what Schon calls reflection-in-action. She observes herself observing and participating. The observation of observation involves becoming attuned to one's own individual, idiosyncratic gestures, feelings and orientations as well as to general, traditional and professional canons by which one is influenced (Krause 2012). I have suggested how this process was acknowledged to varying degrees in the three ethnographic examples mentioned in the beginning of the paper. For myself during the process of the meeting with Isabella, Anna and Maria I deliberately made

use of this information. In the beginning of the meeting, I was observant of the effect the tension in the room had on me. It made me nervous. I could feel my heart beating. I took refuge in being curious about names rather than speak to what I thought was going on as I did not know how the tension would contribute to the emerging connections or disconnections. This curiosity (Checchin 1987), both about names but also about my own feelings and reactions helped me avoid taking sides or being understood as taking sides with anyone person. As I said above it helped me staying in-between.

Perhaps because I also lost a parent when I was a teenager, the family's story, resonated with me and this was why my work with them went relatively well. Wikan pointed out that anthropologists tend to rely too much on language and refrain from letting the concerns of others *resonate* with themselves (Wikan 2012). With the Balinese she suggested that resonance is feeling-thought, it is thinking with the heart and fosters empathy, compassion, understanding and appreciation (Wikan 2012, 55). Psychotherapists, who also rely on language, are nevertheless well-versed in 'feeling-thought'. Wikan also suggested that the concepts of 'resonance' and 'culture' lead anthropologists in different directions, and I think she meant opposite directions (Wikan 2012, 71), one in the direction of similarity and the other in the direction of difference. I would say that there were many resonances in the extract above apart from the loss of parents: the unhappy teenager, the responsible stepmother, the general stuckness of their everyday lives, Isabella wanting to do her best etc. and for me this is precisely where the idea of resonance loses its appeal. Where can I go from resonance? With resonance I will be caught in an endless play of a universality/difference dichotomy, in the way which is so characteristic of anthropology. Instead, I understand that the psychotherapist and the anthropologist work in the middle of the world of pluralities and partial connections, of relationships and relationships between relationships, a world of differences between others, between themselves and others, between moments and between places. Everything that

happens in the encounter, is in correlation with 'difference' in the sense of difference as a given in the world as I suggested above: difference in terms of level, temperature, tension, potential, pressure, feeling, what Deleuze refers to as *intensity* (Deleuze 1994, p.222), and it is through intensity in an encounter, he suggests, that thought comes to us and forces us to think and act (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, St Pierre 2016, 119, Pina-Cabral 2022). It was not only similarity or resonance, which inspired me to go on in my work with Isabella, Anna and Maria and which helped me with what to do next. Rather it was being in the midst of emerging difference and at the same time mutually engaged with Anna, Maria and Isabella and indeed with myself, it was a way of 'feeling them feeling me'[viii] (Harney and Moten 2013, quoted in Ingold 2017, p.23) signalled by Isabella's tut in the session. Again, this may be captured by the notion of correspondence'. Correspondence as a process 'in which things answer to one another' and 'enter into the formative process of differentiation *from within'* (Ingold 2022, 267). Ingold calls this interstitial differentiation, 'living together in difference' and 'going along side by side' all the while being and becoming different. It is a process which has no fixed points either at the beginning or at the end and no discernible boundary and from which something new emerges.

The temporal, co-presence and participation

My third point refers to the fact of the co-presence of myself and the family members in my example. We may call this the temporal dimension and it follows from my two previous points. If as I have suggested the therapist and the anthropologist both are addressing plurality or multiplicity and cannot stand outside the world in which they are engaged, it follows that we must turn our attention to the temporal dimension of our work, to the fact that we are there in a process with our participants. This is 'the contemporary' in that our work gives shape to the here and now (Rabinow and Marcus 2008) and therefore also to the future. The emphasis is on process, on the process of the dialogue in the session, on what

emerges or what might emerge, on what is generated or what might be generated, and on engagement at particular moments in time. In their ethnographies Rabinow, Metcalf and Briggs are all focused on moments in time when they were stopped in their tracks by a particular reaction from their participants, and when they were attentive to a particular sequence of interaction or relating. This is a legacy from Bateson's work. In studying the process of a ritual in New Guinea and the interaction between mothers and children in Bali (Bateson 1991), Bateson focused on processes rather than on the state of things or relationships. His genius was in shifting from 'social organization' to the study of a process of a ritual or an interaction. What seems to have received too little attention in anthropology, is Bateson's doubt (we could call it reflexivity) about whether what he thought was going on was understood in the same way by the people involved (Bateson 1958).[ix] The entire endeavor of psychotherapy is framed by process often about the past, but at the same time most psychotherapists and psychoanalysts are also skeptical about causes and diagnoses. Systemic psychotherapists, although paying attention to the past, are particularly interested in what happens in the present and what might happen in the future, focusing on the potential for change rather than on what might be conveyed by a state of mind or a state of existence. Both Ingold and Pina-Cabral make this point about anthropology too, when they call for a reorientation of anthropology towards ontogeny, development and process, and potentiality, and away from ontology, and from what we assume exists (Ingold 2022; Pina Cabral 2017). Ingold appreciatively acknowledges Simondon, who suggested that 'the term ontogenesis …..is enlarged in order to refer to the 'becoming of being' in general, and thus to individuation as the genesis of the individual *and its associated milieu*' (Barthelemy 2012, 219). This applies to all of us, psychotherapists and anthropologists and our participants, clients or patients and entails our engagement in situations and with our participants, which will in turn influence and shape our engagements in the future. We are *in relation* because we

and our participants exist in a joint world and far from standing outside the world imposing

our designs on it, we are designing it together because we are part of the world and what it

becomes (Barad 2007, Ingold 2022). I and Isabella and the two girls were a multiplicity from

which the in-betweenness of the inside generated ways of going on posing possibilities for

me to ask more and different questions. However, herein also lay my responsibility, a

responsibility which in this short sequence at times was palpably felt in my body. I could

have disengaged or shied away, but this too I would have noticed and would have had to

reflect upon. So, in this engagement from the inside also lies my responsibility for my

choices of how to do things, my responsibility for how to design my tools, my research

apparatus including my questions. This is a political issue and as Escobar observes calls for

an oscillation between pragmatism and a kind of utopianism. He writes,

> The politics of the real……redefines the politics of the possible, and vice versa; this is
> one of the strong arguments for neorealism. By adopting a perspective of radical
> relationality one not only multiplies the reals but redraws the map of what is possible
> (Escobar 2018, 226).

The practice

I want to return to my case material and use a more pragmatic lens to explain how

what I contributed to the session can be understood against the background of my musings

above. It will be clear that the multiplicity or plurality of the relations involved, my

participation and observation of my participants as well as of myself and the ontogenetic

frame are all intertwined and also that in combination these contributed to the in-

betweenness in which I, Isabella, Anna and Maria found ourselves and to the emergence of

new experiences and events detailed in the dialogue. This material also invokes several

debates visited and revisited in anthropology over the years. Take for example the

Ontological Turn and the debate between Viveiros de Castro and Graeber (Viverios de Castro

2014, Graeber 2015) also expressed in one of the quotes from Bateson with which I began this paper regarding whether the bread in the Holy Communion *is* or *stands in* for the body of Christ.

I was struck by a similar predicament in relation to whether Isabella could *stand in* for or *could be* the mother of Anna and Maria. This surfaced at the most intense point in the session, and I felt I took a risk by highlighting the distance between the two by speaking the words 'natural' and 'real mother' so hesitantly, asking what happens to her in Anna's thoughts and heart. To me this felt very tense and potentially dangerous. The tension was eventually resolved when we were able to talk about several mothers or motherhood, conveying no less feeling, affect and longing. We moved from the singularity of Anna/mother and Maria/mother to the multiplicity of mothers and the mothers of mothers and this generated a shared experience, in which we could both articulate the different meanings and significance for each of us but also join together. In the end I did not bother about the distinction between the 'real' mother and 'the other mothers' because that distinction was both there and not there. It was not important to decide one way or the other. What was important was that we could talk about it and that this possibility had emerged from the moment of grace and the correspondence between us. I believe the in-betweenness emerged and was facilitated through other questions which also oscillated between singularity and multiplicity. So to begin with I said: '*you two have ..you two have an unusual background, don't you? Not everyone has lost their parents the way you have. Not everyone has had to come to a different country to live…..with new people in new circumstances……..So how do you…how does it work?'* I am first alluding to multiplicity: 'everyone has backgrounds and everyone has relationships with parents', and 'there are parents in children's lives'. I then inquire about their experience of their Anna/parent and Maria/parent relationships, alluding to the event when they lost their parents. This opened up a space and I found myself repeating

the question later. There is another repetition when I am asking about what the girls call Isabella, I said '*do you call her mummy?*' Maria responded by referring to what happens in Brazil. Similarly, when I asked Anna whether she thinks about her mother, in the sense of generally thinking about her mother as children might do, and when I press her about *when* she thinks about her mother, 'in the day or in the night?' in an effort to arrive at the image of this thinking about her mother. She responded with the singularity, the event of herself and her dying mother. Finally in this sequence, I moved from talking to Anna to asking Isabelle whether she had noticed a change, in this way noting that not just Anna was engaging in the conversation and alluding to the multiplicity behind the experiences emerging in the room. I did not know about Isabella's story and did not anticipate her response. But the dead or dying mother emerged again as a kind of repetition. This *was* the 'moment of grace' and one of these special even *sacred* events which happen in psychotherapy from time to time.

Postscript

I believe that in their work anthropologists and systemic psychotherapists, by struggling with and promoting the in-betweenness of relationships and paying attention to their own micro-practices can contribute to the making of sustainable relationships and hence to a more sustainable world. For psychotherapists and psychoanalysts generally, this is a challenge. So, when the psychoanalytic and psychotherapy establishment are reluctant to question social categories they are on the one hand, at odds with their own developmental and transferential theoretical frameworks. On the other hand, they betray an understanding of the world as divided into a substratum of 'nature' over which is superimposed difference in the form of 'culture', as alluded to in the beginning of this paper. In this way psychotherapy tends to be caught up in the universality/difference dichotomy, sometimes with deeply politically disturbing effects. This is a paradox because psychotherapists are trained to be

sensitive to join, empathize and correspond with their clients and to consider their own reactions, feelings, gestures and responses as active ingredients of a process of change during which something new can emerge. We can refer to this as reflexivity, countertransference or schizogenesis and as the ethnographic examples referred to here suggest these processes also take place in the making of ethnography and can be available for comment if the ethnographer chooses to acknowledge them. What has not received enough attention in anthropology is how such comments and reflections can be made use of in further inquiries, how reflections can become reflexivity and inform ethnographers how to go on in their work.

I have provided a sequence of a dialogue from my own psychotherapeutic practice, which generally I think of as being ethnographic and I have attempted to show how in this particular case a process of inquiry developed in such a way that a 'moment of grace' touched all the participants. In an ethnography such a moment may reveal layers of experience unavailable before as well as other details and variations about the world, about bodies and gestures, about relationships and emotions. I have not referred to psychotherapeutic theory or to authors who are psychotherapists or psychoanalysts very much in my discussion of my case example. Most of my references and the authors who have influenced me in thinking or rather rethinking this piece of clinical work, are anthropologists. Although it is true that the manner in which I asked my questions, derive from my training as a systemic psychotherapist, the way I like to think that this style of questions has fallen into place in a wider framework of respect for difference has been inspired by anthropology. This may be a paradox, but I also like to think that anthropology can do more than offer the anthropology *of* psychotherapy, more than generally collaborate with psychotherapy and psychotherapists. I think that an anthropology engaged in the design of its work including an engagement in the design of its micro-practice of asking and being with others, an anthropology advocating talk

about ontogeny and about 'difference' rather than 'culture', can be at the forefront in the

development of ethical and political methods of inquiry in social science research.

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Notes

[i] The book was republished in 2007, demonstrating the shift in attitudes to self-reflection in anthropology.

[ii] In Melanie Klein's thinking (Klein 1957) the infant at first experiences a blissful idealized state of oneness with the primary care giver. As times goes on as feeding and nurturing cannot be constantly provided or with the introduction of a third party (another caregiver or the external reality), this state is disrupted. This disruption generates a state of mind in the infant in which the infant feels anxious, furious and attacked and reacts (the paranoid-schizoid position). Eventually the baby will learn to accept delay and to think and reflect on their situation (the depressive position). In Klein's view these two positions are states of mind which constitute the building blocks of all relationships, and they feature in our (infants' and adults') feelings and dispositions throughout our lives.

[iii] The move from first order cybernetics to second order cybernetics is a move in which the observer moves from being apart from that which they observe (first order) to the observer considering themselves to be part of what they observe (second order) (Luhman 2013, von Foerster 2014, and see also Rabinow and Marcus 2008)

iv Systemic psychotherapy or family therapy is a separate tradition of psychotherapy in which Bateson's ethnographic work amongst the Iatmul in New Guinea and in particular his work on schismogenesis provided initial inspiration (Bateson 1958, 1972). A family is considered to be a collection of relationships all of which have an influence on each dyadic relationship and on each person in the family. The metaphors were initially mechanical from first order cybernetics with systems considered to be more or less closed and in homeostasis. With the development of second order approaches systems in contemporary systemic psychotherapy are now considered to be open and the therapist to be an active participant in the system. While change in this psychotherapeutic approach has always been considered to be a result of pertubation, sometimes accidental, in contemporary approaches there is more emphasis on relationality, dialogue and reflexivity. It is important to emphasize that systemic psychotherapists work with families, that is to say with more than one person in the encounter, and the complexity this entails for both theory and practice.

v This is a segment of a longer transcript in a previous account in which I wrote about ethnographic questions in systemic psychotherapy inquiries (Krause 2002). In this version I develop my understanding of my encounter with this family in the light of more recent anthropological theory as well as of my own more recent thinking about the similarities between systemic psychotherapy and participant observation and anthropology. All names have been changed and the family gave consent for me to use this material. They also read and approved the initial 2002 account.

vi Here a psychoanalyst might refer to a group (Bion 1961). Bion's theory of Basic Assumption Groups is a way of understanding what is going on behind group behavior. With the notion of 'plurality', I wish to convey an emphasis on the internalized multiple experiences, relationships and positions each person has had or may have and has occupied or may occupy. With the notion of 'multiplicity' I take inspiration from Deleuze. This refers to the continual potential for difference, difference in itself, the temporal difference, the way that no gesture, no act, no thought are identical to themselves at a different time and in different circumstances, 'the multiplicity of fusion' (Deleuze 1994, 127).

vii Desjarlais notes that this process of desubjectification, a term he takes from Michel Foucault (Foucault 2002) takes place in the viewing of photographs in that photography disrupts things. He notes the parallel between eventualities of life and writes: 'through these encounters the subject might be transformed, the subject loses its identity, is no longer the same, and the presumed grounds of perception and relationality come into question' (Desjarlais 2029, 21). Foucault himself in more forceful language wrote '….experience has the function of wrenching the subject from itself' (Foucault 2002, 241). I think something similar takes place in systemic psychotherapy when the process uncovers the relationships held within the subject and through this opens up to possible avenues of relational change.

viii Peter Fonagy and colleagues (Fonegy et al. 1995) have developed a model which they refer to as 'mentalization', now widely used in child and family psychotherapy in the UK. This model revises Bowlby's attachment model (Bowlby 1969). The traditional model assumes that the image of the caregiver is internalized by the child and in this way provides internal control of affect. The revised is a dialectic model and assumes that it is the caregiver's image of the intentional, thinking and feeling infant which becomes internalized and henceforth constitutes the core of the child's mentalizing self. A similar dialectic is referred to here, although in this case I note a greater emphasis on affect and less on cognition.

ix Early notable exceptions to this statement are the work by Roy Wagner (1975) and Marilyn Strathern (1988).

Grace and Correspondence in Ethnography and Psychotherapy

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Abstract

For all the ways in which anthropologists have addressed relations during the history of the discipline, from kinship to the contemporary focus on comparison, it is surprising that anthropologists rarely write about the pragmatics of the messy dynamics of relating between interlocutors themselves and between interlocutors and ethnographers. This is despite some anthropologists having highlighted the work of these relations and our approach to them as crucial for the discipline. In this paper I argue that the enquiry practiced in one particular psychotherapeutic approach, namely systemic psychotherapy, is relevant to this micro practice of anthropology. I will present a transcription of a piece of systemic psychotherapeutic work. I will make three points, inspired by work in systemic psychotherapy as well as anthropology. My first point concerns plurality, my second point refers to second-order observation or the use of reflexivity, and my third to the temporal dimension of the enquiry as a process. I suggest that considering these three points will enhance methods of enquiry in both disciplines.

Keywords: Participant observation, systemic psychotherapy, grace, correspondence, micro-practice.

Introduction

I have worked for many years as a Consultant Systemic Psychotherapist in a well-known London based psychoanalytic training institution in the UK National Health Service. Coming to this work as an anthropologist has been both frustrating and rewarding. It has been frustrating because generally in psychotherapy training the view has been, and still is, one of ''culture [as] something outside of therapy to be incorporated as an external object" (Martin 2019, 97) with differences in racial or ethnic background and outlooks in the patient population either being experienced as threatening and deskilling for the psychotherapist or dismissed as superficial, or as denial or projections, as some kind of pathology. It has been rewarding because I have been struck how much my inquiries as a psychotherapist resemble the work I had done previously as an anthropologist and an ethnographer. So, I have come to think of my psychotherapeutic work as ethnography. This experience, however, does not indicate that the disciplines of anthropology and psychotherapy are the same or that one can move seamlessly from one to the other. Both address the conundrum of the shifting ground between difference and sameness (Sykes 2008), but the practitioners in each approach these antonyms from a different side. While both anthropology and psychotherapy are in the business of relational practice, with von Foerster one can say that the anthropologist is in the 'difference writ large' trade while the psychotherapist or the psychoanalyst is in the 'difference as micro-practice' trade (von Foerster 2014). Further it is the relationship between anthropologists and psychotherapists and their respective participants or clients which is a condition of their work. It is *the* relation. Notwithstanding, then, the different intentions of practitioners in each discipline, what might the two disciplines have to say to each other and what does this mean for how they might collaborate? Apart from the anthropology *of* psychotherapy what else might psychotherapy contribute to anthropology and the other way around? In this paper I argue that the way in which psychotherapeutic practice has been

developed in one particular approach, namely systemic psychotherapy, is relevant to the

practice of anthropology, and in particularly to the micro practice of ethnography. I suggest

that concepts have been developed in anthropology which help to think and work with

relationships and relating, and I suggest that 'grace' (Bateson 1972) and 'correspondence'

(Ingold 2022) are two such concepts. I will present a transcription of a piece of systemic

psychotherapeutic work, and I argue that the enquiry is ethnographic. I will make three

points, inspired by work in systemic psychotherapy as well as anthropology. My first point

concerns plurality, by which I mean that anthropologists/ ethnographers and psychotherapists

work with selves which may be singular, but not individuals. My second point refers to

second-order observation or the use of reflexivity by the ethnographer/ psychotherapist, and

my third to the temporal dimension of the enquiry as a process. I shall suggest that

considering these three points can enhance methods of inquiry in both disciplines, but also

that in this regard there is more to anthropology and ethnography than is often recognized.

The anthropologist and the ethnography

I am not alone in drawing attention to the entanglement of the person of the

ethnographer with the person of the research participants. For example, Crapanzano through

the form and the style of his account of conversations with a Moroccan potter, illustrated the

probing intersubjectivity in the ethnographic relationship (Crapanzano 1980), Csordas noted

how the body is implicated in 'somatic modes of attention' (Csordas 1993), Pink focussed on

the sensory experiences (Pink 2009), Davies on emotions (Davies and Spencer 2010),

Stevenson cautioned the ethnographer to listen differently and to be alert to the 'presence'

which lies beyond words (Stevenson 2014), Pilbeam et al noted the ebb and flow of

attachment and detachment of the ethnographer in the field (Pilbeam et al. 2023) while

Meyers provided an account of the almost compulsive devotion and care, even love, to which ethnographic fieldwork can give rise and which defies easy description or understanding (Meyers 2022). Desjarlais, in his fascinating and searching interrogation of photos taken of a would- be blind research participant draws our attention to the implied voyeurism of anthropologists which tends to ignore the ethics and the politics of their observations. Desjarlais's account turns to his own imaginary uncertain associations. It is a spectral anthropology in which he along with others who catch his attention, become his own ethnographic subject. He is never quite sure what he is seeing. His exploration of ethics and reflexivity is a welcome reminder of how we are (also) researching ourselves (Desjarlais 2019). In his account Desjarlais is never faced with a direct or assertive response from his would- be participant and as a consequence the relation is (mostly) from one side. Here, however, my focus is on how the relational aspects of such experiences find a place in what we actually do, how we work, how we respond and how we go on. The methods of fieldwork are not separable from the way we use them and, as in psychotherapy, awareness and engagement with method may enhance our work theoretically, existentially and practically. I begin by describing the work of some anthropologists who have documented their own reactions and dispositions as well as the reactions of their participants to these in their accounts. No anthropologist can be unaware of the centrality of their relationships to their interlocutors/participants, and I focus on this relation in each of my examples. I have chosen three pieces of work because each of them gives an account of situations which required a response, a conflict or a misunderstanding, and this selection is not, of course, exhaustive, rather each describes different aspects of the issues at stake.

In 1977 Paul Rabinow published his book *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Rabinow 2007)[i] much against the advice of his distinguished teachers and supervisors. It would, one of them maintained, ruin his career in anthropology. One wonders what exactly

they thought might be the difficulty, a kind of parallel to the attitude that something pure will be ruined or spoilt articulated so often in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy when faced with different conceptions of relationships. Rabinow was concerned with the experience of fieldwork and hence reported on his own experience already then considering this as an inevitable, even a methodological, ingredient of fieldwork and ethnography. He described a dramatic rupture in which he found himself at the end of his tether, feeling sick and fed up and somewhat petulant when on a journey home in an argument about whether they should have stayed at a wedding, the participant, his friend, got out of the anthropologist's car and refused to get back in. After some unsuccessful coaxing the anthropologist drove off home leaving his friend to walk the five miles back to the village. This precipitated an existential crisis for Rabinow in which he wondered whether he had chosen the right profession. Could he sustain a position of submissiveness, of being the smiling observer, a total persona (Rabinow 2007, 48) throughout the time of his fieldwork? It seemed that Moroccan values as well as American ones were being enacted. Perhaps not? From the friend's point of view, he, the friend, was the host and hence expected to be generous and with Rabinow's acceptance of generosity also should have come an implicit acknowledgement of the power of his host. Subsequently Rabinow apologised with the help of another participant and reported that after this episode 'we got along famously' (Rabinow 2007, 49). The explanation he offered was that as he asserted a personal limit, a breaking point, he was in fact in tune with a Moroccan cultural style of brinkmanship. I applaud Rabinow's honesty about his actions and feelings as well as his insistence on publishing this account, but I cannot help thinking that there was here also a lost opportunity to explore the two sides further. How did Rabinow intuitively manage the conflict in a way which avoided it becoming entrenched? What did Rabinow say to his friend? How did his friend respond? Was there a fortuitous congruence between the

anthropologist's personal disposition and a Moroccan ethos or was this congruence *the outcome* of the events and of the relationship between them? Or was it a bit of both?

Peter Metcalf reported on an equally striking if not so openly expressed conflict from his fieldwork in central northern Borneo (Metcalf 2002). Metcalf described an established tradition of narration in which a particular literary form had an important social function. In particular his account focuses on one narrator, an old woman, Kasi, who always began her narration with an announcement in a firm voice: "they lie, we lie "(Metcalf 2002, 7). To the ethnographer this came across as a mix of skepticism and empowerment. Kasi was relaying the messages of the ancestors, but she was also questioning the truth of these messages. Metcalf continued in his account to describe his complex and somewhat ambivalent relationship to Kasi, who at one point used her authority to intervene and stop the preparations of a mystical barrier to ward off evil influences around the longhouse, an activity which had been prompted by the anthropologist's enquiries about shamanism. Metcalf was working on death songs, important in the rituals of mediation between the living and the dead, and these were difficult to obtain. People just did not want to talk about them and his efforts to obtain some information about these songs brought him into another unspoken conflict with Kasi. With the help of a renegade, but important personality, Metcalf was treated to a long session in which this person provided him with an extensive account of the death songs. Metcalf wrote it all down and at the end of the session he was marched off to see Kasi and encouraged to repeat everything he had learnt. Kasi 'smiled thinly' while listening, but Metcalf felt that she had been outmaneuvered, although not by him (Metcalf 2002, 42). The final puzzle about his relationship with Kasi came when Metcalf was told that when Kasi died, on her directions, a copy of his book was buried with her!

Metcalf made the point that if Kasi, the people he lived with and their ancestors 'lie', so do anthropologists and so do *their* ancestors suggesting that their theories are inadequate to

capture reality too. For example, he noted how difficult it was for him to employ the concepts

of 'ethnicity' or 'culture' in order to identify different groups in the area of Borneo where he

worked. He suggested that these are constantly in a process of formation and reformation,

even distortion, according to political and economic processes as well as to the action of

individual high profile and energetic persons.

> Fieldwork is an extraordinary mix between seeing plainly and being all at sea; that the
> result is more demanding than any mere text could be; and that the juxtaposition of
> piles of information and the gulf of incomprehension remains as compelling as ever
> (Metcalf 2002,16).

This is more than allegory (Clifford 1986). This seems to be the ethnographer not

knowing what he is doing or rather not making use of what he does know when in the face of

Kasi obstructing his access to knowledge and her thin frosty smile, he felt frustrated, misled

and even panicked about his research project. As Desjarlais suggested might the ethnographer

start there, being at sea, but at the same time go further and see or rather feel plainly?

My third example derives from Jean Briggs's fieldwork in the Canadian Northwest

Territories with the Inuit, known as Qipisa, who lived northwest of Hudson Bay. Briggs made

no secret of her feelings (Briggs 1970, 1998). This was difficult fieldwork, not only extreme

temperatures and isolation but also in many other ways inhospitable and uncomfortable

circumstances challenging Briggs's skills and her patience. Her ways of being different,

'wrong hair, skin color, and clothes, wrong language, laugh and ways of walking' (Briggs

1998, 150) was punctuated by her being considered to be a dangerously powerful and evil

spirit. Briggs described how she often felt resentful, angry and oppressed, such as when one

of her hosts, an Anglican preacher, ordered her and other people in the community to follow

certain rules particularly strictly. Briggs acknowledged that this was perhaps her problem as

she objected 'more powerfully to be told to say 'amen' than I do to being told to make tea'

(Briggs 1970, 50). Even in the early phases of fieldwork Briggs found it difficult to disguise her irritation and seems to have used her awareness of herself as a methodological tool, and this eventually led to her being ostracized as she could not, or did not, conceal her temper. We are left to read the pain and confusion about these episodes between the lines and I wonder whether the title of her first book *Never in Anger* was an ethnographic report as much as it was a comment on her own disposition to anger or perhaps an implicit acknowledgement of the method for research which she developed further in her second book *Inuit Morality Play*. This second book is a study of one three-year-old Qipisa girl, Chubby Maata, and the process of her development through her fourth year of life. Briggs provided detailed examples of sequences of interaction and communication both between Chubby Maata and her relatives, most often her mother, and between Chubby Maata and Briggs herself. These sequences involved games and play with Briggs herself taking a participant role mostly responding in what she considered a manner appropriate for the Qipisa context. In a chapter entitled 'I Like You, I Don't Like You': Anthropologist in the Oyster Shell, Briggs gave the following example when Chubby Maata was playing with a scrap of paper:

> She started to hand the scrap to me, perhaps inviting play, and I, picking up that possibly playful overture, drew my hand back suddenly and said: "Kuniat! (disgusting, tickly).". Chubby Maata beamed her baby beam and held out the scrap again. We repeated the sequence a number of times. Then she said , "Now you,' suggesting that we change roles. I held out the scrap to her and she drew back her hand, beaming. "Kuniat", she said. (Briggs 1998, 152-3).

Through such detailed examples of interaction and communication in games and play, Briggs discovered a tension between an emotion and its opposite. For example, she observed a tension between tenderness and aggression between adults and a pull between affection and hostility communicated by children in their play as well as by adults in their play with

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children. She described how the words for fear and respect or awe conveyed subtle attitudes

to others and how these were used deliberately to reprimand and encourage children to

behave in acceptable ways. The navigation between these emotional states implicated a web

of entanglements between participants and it was difficult to achieve equilibria: 'if children

feel too much respect, they will not be able to feel safe and if they do not feel enough, they

will get out of control (p.149). Statements and everyday interaction could not be taken at face

value but often pointed to the opposite. 'Your mother has hurt her finger' became 'your

mother is going to die' and 'would you like to come and visit me' became 'would you like to

come and live with me'. Here Briggs reached for the theories of the child psychoanalyst,

Melanie Klein, considering this dialectic between different states of mind as vital processes

for child development as well as depicting states of mind of adults generally (Klein 1975)[ii],

and suggested that these theories accorded well with Qipisa emotional outlooks and child

care. In her final chapter she described how she learnt to look beneath the surface of

behaviors and interactions to understand how these phenomena are generated and

experienced (p.208).

Briggs's ethnography seems to me to be unique in anthropology in being unusually

transparent about her own feelings and aversions so early in the discipline. As she took this

forward in her second book, I am occasionally left to wonder whether she considered herself

to be therapist, ethnographer or mother. The presentation of small sequences of interaction,

gestures, tones of voice and pattern and her use of herself in the interaction and in the play

with Chubby Maata and other children leaves the reader in no doubt as to her role in the

events observed and participated in. This combined with glimpses of self-reflection about the

difference between Briggs's own expectation and for example those of Chubby Maata's

mother constituted her method. To this she added the ideas of Melanie Klein to establish

some certainty, or at least a hypothesis, about how she and her readers might understand what

is going on. In the end Briggs suggested that detailed observation of what is going on between persons ought to be the nub of an anthropological approach (Briggs 1998, 209.) However, could Briggs have widened her observation? We are offered meticulous detail about a particular dyadic relationship, between a child and a stranger, but we may well wonder how this relationship affected the relationships of others as well as that between Briggs herself and others. What did Chubby Maata's mother and other members of the household think and feel about the interference?

Grace and correspondence

Apart from the long association and mutual fascination at different times between psychoanalysis and anthropology, some anthropologists and ethnographers have, as we have seen, been concerned with their own relationship to their ethnography and their participants. This more direct interest in psychotherapeutic skills of asking (Skinner 2012, Davies 2009, Martin 2019, Mosse et al. 2023) is perhaps an extension of a turn, which we are already in the process of making, to a double turn, namely a turn back towards the other as a methodological move (Das 2007, Ahmed 2004). The move from *aboutness* to *withness* has been well-documented in second order systemic psychotherapy[iii] and Ingold has commented on the way in which anthropologists using an *aboutness* approach tend to objectify that which they analyze (Ingold 2022). This is the anthropology *of* psychotherapy and this approach limits an engagement with the creative process in which the object, in this case psychotherapy, is conceptualized. In contrast a *withness* approach allows new ways of doing anthropology to come into being (Ingold and Lucas 2007). In other words, this is a focus directed on to the similarities between the relation between the anthropologists and their interlocutors or the psychotherapists and their clients and this relation is understood to be dynamic and shifting according to the dispositions, gestures, abilities, understandings,

misunderstandings etc of both sides. Indeed, for all the ways in which anthropologists have addressed relations during the history of the discipline, from kinship to the contemporary focus on comparison, it is surprising that anthropologists have not written more about the pragmatics of the messy dynamics of relating experienced in ethnographic work generally. I should point out that I am a systemic psychotherapist also sometimes referred to as a family therapist, and that systemic psychotherapy theory builds upon cybernetics and systems thinking and on Gregory Bateson's ethnographic work in New Guinea (Bateson 1958) This is an approach which is at pains to begin with relationships rather than with individuals, with the relation rather than the relata (Krause 2002, 2012).[iv] These notions have been taken up more or less effectively in systemic psychotherapy, some therapists addressing these as techniques, others as a stance or an approach (Burnham 1999). In contemporary second order practice this includes the relation between the psychotherapist and the clients, who tend to be more than one person. The systemic psychotherapist, then is concerned with how she changes her work, how she may design her work, her approach and her questions when she no longer wants to uphold positivist premises and practices, when the aim is to *respond* to her clients, to practice *with* them rather than write reports *about* them (Escobar 2017). These aims and orientations are reflected in what I refer to as the micro-practices of our inquiries. By this I mean the details of gestures, attitudes and moves, questions and responses of anthropologist and systemic psychotherapist as well as their interlocutors and this implicates the complicated relationship between participation and observation, so often commented upon in textbooks about how to conduct fieldwork.

What our textbooks often do not make plain is the underlying assumption we make about how it is possible to carry out fieldwork and ethnographic enquiries in the first place. I assume that to live is to participate and that this is what we share with our interlocutors. With Ingold I like to refer to an understanding of the world as 'a source of growth and nourishment

(Ingold 2018, 161) and as expressed by Pina-Cabral, 'to how the world comes to embrace us ……as a source' (Pina-Cabral 2017, 70) but also to what Escobar quoting the Zapatista to 'a world where many worlds fit' (Escobar 2017, xvi, see also Kohn 2013, Viveiros de Castro 2014) and to 'Earth as a living whole that is always emerging out of the manifold biophysical, human, and spiritual elements and relations that make it up' (Escobar, quoted in Ingold 2018, 169). Note that this notion of world emphasizes growth, development and process, and, as both Ingold and Pina-Cabral point out, ontogeny rather than ontology, how to go on rather than what there is. This is predicated upon the idea that in order to communicate at all, we accept that we are in participation with others and for this have to be charitable (Pino-Cabral 2022, Davidson 2005). Participation in the most general sense implies and activates the assumption that we live in one world. How then can we tell if we have succeeded or even coming close to some kind of reciprocal understanding?

In a paper discussing amongst other things a Balinese painting in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind,* Bateson wrote about 'grace':

> …. If art is somehow expressive of something like grace or psychic integration, then the *success* of this expression might well be recognizable across cultural barriers. The physical grace of cats is profoundly different from the physical grace of horses, and yet a man who has the physical grace of neither can evaluate that of both (Bateson 1972, 129, emphasis in the original).

And later he expanded this by referring to what he called 'sacred':

> ....sacredness has something to do with [this] covering and uncovering deeper components (Bateson 1991, 303).

And when referring to fifteen century European wars between Roman Catholics and Protestants, and whether the bread (…………) *is* or *stands for* the body, he explained further what he meant by the concept 'sacred':

> …….it is my suspicion that the richest use of the word 'sacred' is that use which will say that what matters is a *combination* of the two, getting the two together. And that the fracturing of the two is, shall we say, anti-sacred (Bateson 1991, 267).

From a different and more contemporary territorial ecological perspective calling for the most fundamental transitions in outlook in 1999, Thomas Berry, a cultural historian and environmental campaigner, wrote about 'grace':

> ….even as we make our transitions into this new century we must note that moments of grace are transient moments. The transformation must take place within a brief period. Otherwise, it is gone forever (Berry, quoted in Escobar 2017, 164)

'Grace' then refers to a temporary moment and event, an accomplishment when something has been intuitively understood and from which something new might emerge, while differences are preserved and uncompromised. It is a moment when we have things in common. Psychotherapists may refer to such a moment as a significant moment (Campbell et al. 2003), or a moment of meeting (Stern, 2004), a fleeting point in time when something changed after which things may not go back to the way they were. With this ephemeral quality, 'grace' is a moment in which we might, consciously or unconsciously, take a risk using parts of ourselves in order to bring forth a connection or integration. The risk taking is implied because 'grace' is seeped in difference, uncertainty and curiosity. From other perspectives, we may describe this as empathy, dialogue or resonance although none of these convey the tentative reciprocal connection which characterizes 'grace' The concept which

comes close to 'grace' I think has been suggested by Ingold. Ingold writes about correspondence and the way this idea of 'going along together' preserves difference:

> …parts are not components that are added *to* one another but movements that carry on *alongside* one another, so too in the human family, lives lived in counterpoint are not "and…..and" but 'with…..with" and in answering - or responding – to one another, they correspond. Thus, in place of the assemblage as a way of talking about the multiplicity of soul- life, as if it were an alliance of souls, I propose the term *correspondence* to connote their affiliation (Ingold 2018,160, emphasis in the original).

Ingold further offers the image of 'taking another by the hand', and Dewey's notion of "having things in common being not a prerequisite but an outcome of communication" (Dewey 1966, quoted in Ingold 2017, p.14). This then is what I take Bateson to mean by 'grace', a brief significant moment, being the outcome of having stayed beside or stuck with someone from which something new has emerged.

Case example

I turn now to a fragment of a dialogue from my systemic psychotherapeutic work. The meeting took place in a London Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service some years ago and the participants were two adolescent girls and their stepmother. Anna, who was 14, was the referred person, referred by her father's ex-wife. She had been truanting from school and her stepmother found her unmanageable. Anna, who is Brazilian had come to live with her father's ex-wife Isabella, in London, with her younger sister, Maria, who was 13, after their father was killed in a car crash on his way to visit their mother in hospital. Their mother herself died a few days later from cancer. This was two years previously to our meeting. The father and Isabella had a son, Pedro, who was also the legal guardian of the children, as they had no other family. Pedro brought the children to London and his mother agreed to care for

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them. Over some months I met with the two sisters and their stepmother regularly, and at
first Anna was tearful, but the more pressing issue, especially for Isabella, was to be able to
manage Anna and Maria. The following sequence emerged from an early session[v]:

Britt: You know that Isabella is often talking here about responsibility….And…I was
wondering …because you two have ..you two have an unusual background, don't
you? Not everyone has lost their parents the way you have. Not everyone has had to
come to a different country to live…..with new people in new circumstances…….So
how do you…how does it work? Do you call Isabella 'mummy'? …What do you call
her?

Anna: We call her auntie.

Britt: Who decided that you would call her auntie?

Maria: In fact in Brazil…she is my dad's ex-wife and we used to call her Auntie, so like it is
the same thing.

Isabella: I only saw them twice when they were little. I came to meet my ex-husband's wife.
He said, my wife would like to meet you…is that possible? Yes…come. We meet and
I meet the girls…..I never saw them…I saw them only twice. When my son went
there and he ask me if he can come with them I was frightened……like them

Britt: You were frightened….?

Isabella: Yeah, I think they did not know me, I did not know them

Britt: But I wanted to talk about it because you know….it is little bit different, I think, or
maybe it is different in Brazil, I don't know, but you know you are not looked after by
your natural parents……..you are being looked after by someone else who is
connected to you but not quite your natural parent, then sometimes there are issues
about……how about responsibility. You know Isabella has taken responsibility. She

is saying 'I am responsible…' But how does it work for you, because you know that

Isabella is not your…….your natural mum.

Maria: Hmm……

Britt: How does it work?

Maria: (*note it is not Anna answering)* I think…like…after a time…because it is two years

now…you kind of get used to it. So she looks after us as if she was our mum……so

like…it will never change…our mum was our mum…we still remember our

mum…….and…..things can't change. But those people they have babies and they

have their own mums and they have a step-parent or something like that, I think it's

the same thing, they treat them like their mum, but they know that they are actually

not their mum. So, I treat her like she was my mum, even though she is not my mum.

Britt: What do you think, Anna?

Anna: Yeah, the same…I consider her my mum….yeah the same

Britt: Hmm……….So what happens to the idea of your……….real mum?

Anna: Yeah……..?

Britt: Does it come up?

Anna: (*reluctantly*) No……

Isabella: (tuts loudly).....

Britt: Do you think of her?

Anna: I used to

Britt: You used to……when did you used to think of her?

Anna: Oh….a year ago….

Britt: What time?...In the night….In the daytime?

Anna: All the time…like during the day….and the night and things….

Britt: You used to think of her all the time?

Anna: Yeah….

Britt: What did you used to think when you thought of her?

Anna: Hmm….When she was dying…yeah that is the only picture I can get….yeah

Britt: In your mind……so it is a sad picture?

Anna: Yeah….

Britt: How did it stop…..How did it stop that she was in your mind so much?

Anna: Well, I don't know, how it was…..I just started enjoying myself more. I started to listen to what people said …..I started to cooperate around the house more and so on

A little later

Britt: *(to Isabella)* Did you notice that change from when Anna stopped thinking so much about her mum?

Isabella: I think that she tried ….she tried to be something else…somebody else. Anna you try to forget, but you never forget. I lost my mum 51 years ago- she died on 22nd February 1949. I still remember the day she died….

Britt: You too were a child?

Isabella: I was four years old so I still remember the day she was in the coffin to go to the cemetery, you know…..that picture is here in my mind….so don't try to put her aside, Anna. You must remember, she is your mum, you understand. And don't remember only the bad things, remember the good things, the times when she was there for you when you went to school, when you come home from school, when she gives you a kiss. Don't forget your mum, it is your mum….

These words, which are a transcript of part of a video recording, do not by

themselves convey the feelings and atmosphere evoked in this meeting. Isabella had

been exasperated with Anna about her behavior in a previous session and Anna

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had been responding with surly stubbornness. I was preoccupied with whether Isabella could step into the place left by the dead parents, whether she was able to contain and command obedience from her teenage stepdaughters and whether she could find the authority in herself. As she said she was frightened. That was from her side. But there was also the other side of whether the girls would allow Isabella into the place of a parent and how this would affect the process of grieving and their ongoing lives. The 'moment of grace', I think, was when I plucked up the courage to ask Anna about her 'real' mum and was marked when Isabella tutted. I remember feeling the tension, searching for the words and being hesitant when I used the words 'real or natural mother' which was followed by Anna's reluctance to enter into that conversation. At that moment it became clear that Isabella knew what it feels like to have lost a mother. This was something the girls did not know before. What they also did not and still do not know is that I too lost a parent when I was 14. Although there were differences between Isabella's loss, my loss and the loss the girls experienced, there was a coming together, a moment of grace between us. This was the beginning of the work, you might almost say the condition of the ongoing work which continued for several months after this. Anna began to enjoy going to school more and she and Isabella became more closely connected.

The relationship between the girls and their father became more central

in our conversations and their stepbrother eventually took up the role of carer in

their lives.

The ethnographer and the psychotherapist

Plurality

With this short example let me return to my three points outlined above. There remained a difference between myself and the two girls and their stepmother as well as a difference between the two girls and the stepmother themselves and I remained unsure what to ask, I was searching for more connections. I was tentative and this was part of this difference. Sitting in the session with two apprehensive young women and a carer who was at the end of her patience but also full of worry, I wondered about how I could understand the present unhappiness and about how they might move on with their lives. Despite the shocking circumstances these were not outlandish emotions, but they could not be uttered openly without a risk of pushing the relationships into more polarization. Saying something to one side would affect the other side. My first point therefore is the recognition of plurality. Neither anthropologist nor psychotherapists work with individuals in the sense of bounded autonomous entities. We work with individuals who are themselves in relationships with and to others and these relationships are always there whether the persons concerned are present or not. Behind singularity there is therefore always plurality or we might say multiplicity[vi] (Deleuze 1994). Indeed, a much quoted description of a system in systemic psychotherapy is precisely, 'relationships and the relationships between relationships' (Watzlawick et al. 1967) referring to an entanglement and indicating neither boundary nor individual autonomy, but rather multiplicity in singularity and partial connections in the sense that ' 'partial' captures the nature of the interlocution, for not only is there no totality, each part also defines a partisan position' (Strathern 2004, 39). This was captured in Bateson's work in New Guinea and his description of the *naven* ritual which inspired schismogenesis to become a foundational idea in the discipline, the idea being that relationships are reproduced by their own dynamic (Bateson 1958, Krause 2007). I think it also captures Foucault's notion of desubjectification (Foucault 1991)[vii]. In every relationship dynamic there is something of the one in the other and both sides, actually all sides, contribute to its continuous creation and

recreation, but importantly partibility is a recurring possibility because persons cannot remain closed onto themselves (Pine-Cabral 2023, 129). In other words, anyone occupies shifting positions and have partial connections in relation to anyone else, and therefore speaks with multiple subjective voices (Viveiros de Castro 2014, Deleuze, 1994, Cavagnis and Krause 2022). We may prefer to refer to this as multiplicity rather than plurality as long as it is clear that we are not talking about multiplication (Ingold 2022). Deleuze writes,

> multiplicity must not designate a combination of the many and the one, but rather an organization belonging to the many as such, which has no need whatsoever of unity in order to form a system (Deleuze 1994, 240),

Seen from the point of view of possibilities inherent in or emerging from a collection of relationships, which stand or exist behind any particular relationship, persons do not take up fixed positions even if they seem to do so to us. Rather they may be imbued with ambiguities of different positions as these constitute dormant or emerging possibilities. For example, Isabella is a mother and a stepmother but also a daughter who has lost her mother. As Viveiros de Castro suggested, they belong to both sides in the sense that they glide over the distance between them (Viveiros de Castro 2012). They have relations integral to them (Strathern 1992, 230), and they are also partial as each person has many such relationships. They are reciprocally presupposed according to the conventions of the context, but they are not reciprocal by way of imitation or analogy. That is to say, one thing may distinguish itself from another without the latter distinguishing itself from the former (Deleuze 1994). In other words, they maintain the possibility of their differences and of generating a new way of being emerging (Deleuze 1994, 52). Or In Viveiros de Castro's phrase 'the way is not the same in both directions' (Viveiros de Castro 2012, 228).

To me this is a fitting description of where we were in our 'moment of grace' in the sequence described above. We had come together, psychotherapists would describe it as a significant moment in the work, which allowed me to find a way to move on to ask more confidently about what Anna remembered about her mother and for Isabella to comment on Anna's and Maria's situation. I felt that I, with their help, had managed to navigate into safe territory and away from or perhaps even through the conflict and problems with which the family had arrived, specifically the tension between the attachment to mothers and carers and an acceptance of their authority. This characterizes concretely the predicament of the systemic psychotherapist's way of working with relationships, a predicament which I daresay is frequently encountered by the anthropologist as well. I was required to enter into the middle of theirs and our relationships. I was not talking to one person, I was having a conversation with all three of them, and on each side there were at times polarized views and feelings, which I had to acknowledge, join and participate in from within. I could not be sure about my choice of words or about my intonation and ambience, I felt the tension in the room and was acutely aware of my tentativeness which could push us in the wrong direction in the sense of increasing the conflict and shutting down opportunities. I was in-between and I was trying to find a way for them too to find a place in between (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). In the words of Ingold (Ingold 2022) and Karen Barad (Barad 2007) we were trying to find a way of splitting apart *and* mingle together. It is true, I was asking the questions and in this way punctuating the sequence, but in my tentativeness, I was aiming to offer a path to follow without being able to predict where we were going. I was working with process rather than with boundaries as a precondition for my questions and in order to move on.

Second Order Observation

The second point I want to make refers to second-order observation, that is

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observing the observers (Rabinow 2008, Luhmann 2013) or what is often referred to as reflexivity (Krause 2012). It has been said that participant observation is an oxymoronic term which opposes participation to observation (Pina Cabral 2023; Skinner 2012). I think that this depends on one's understanding of observation. Perhaps yes from a structural functionalist point of view, but not if one understands participation as a full and sentient engagement. In this sense participation is a condition of observation and there can be no observation without participation. The centrality of participation for life has not been lost on anthropologists from Levy-Bruhl and Evans Pritchard to Ingold and Pina-Cabral. Sahlins suggested that participation is fundamental to kinship (Sahlins 2011a, 20011b) echoing the views found in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis (see for example Winnicott 1971). While Tambiah's definition of participation as 'occurring when persons, groups, animals, places and natural phenomena are in relation of contiguity, and translate that relation into one of existential immediacy and contact and shared affinities' (Tambiah 1990, quoted in Pina-Cabral 2017) widens the definition to include not just persons related in kinship but to the psychotherapist and the physical environment as well. However, anthropologists and psychotherapists start from a fully populated world and arrive at observation with their own canon. So, in each approach the trade they are in and 'the building blocks that [are used] …to build something influence very strongly what is built' (von Foerster 1997, 10). This notion of 'feedback' and the idea of 'second order', are both ideas which originate from cybernetics and systems theory and are foundational to the training and approach of systemic psychotherapy. Being in between as I described above, therefore calls for an engagement with oneself as well as an engagement with others, who themselves engage with other selves. The anthropologist and the psychotherapist is *in* the situation she tries to understand, she 'shapes the situation, but in conversation with it, so that her own models and appreciations are also shaped by the situation' (Schon 1982, 151). This is what Schon calls reflection-in-action. She observes herself observing and participating. The

observation of observation involves becoming attuned to one's own individual, idiosyncratic gestures, feelings and orientations as well as to general, traditional and professional canons by which one is influenced (Krause 2012). I have suggested how this process was acknowledged to varying degrees in the three ethnographic examples mentioned in the beginning of the paper. For myself during the process of the meeting with Isabella, Anna and Maria I deliberately made use of this information. In the beginning of the meeting, I was observant of the effect the tension in the room had on me. It made me nervous. I could feel my heart beating. I took refuge in being curious about names rather than speak to what I thought was going on as I did not know how the tension would contribute to the emerging connections or disconnections. This curiosity (Checchin 1987), both about names but also about my own feelings and reactions helped me avoid taking sides or being understood as taking sides with anyone person. As I said above it helped me staying in-between.

Perhaps because I also lost a parent when I was a teenager, the family's story, resonated with me and this was why my work with them went relatively well. Wikan pointed out that anthropologists tend to rely too much on language and refrain from letting the concerns of others *resonate* with themselves (Wikan 2012). With the Balinese she suggested that resonance is feeling-thought, it is thinking with the heart and fosters empathy, compassion, understanding and appreciation (Wikan 2012, 55). Psychotherapists, who also rely on language, are nevertheless well-versed in 'feeling-thought'. Wikan also suggested that the concepts of 'resonance' and 'culture' lead anthropologists in different directions, and I think she meant opposite directions (Wikan 2012, 71), one in the direction of similarity and the other in the direction of difference. I would say that there were many resonances in the extract above apart from the loss of parents: the unhappy teenager, the responsible stepmother, the general stuckness of their everyday lives, Isabella wanting to do her best etc. and for me this is precisely where the idea of resonance loses its appeal. Where can I go from resonance? With resonance

I will be caught in an endless play of a universality/difference dichotomy, in the way which is so characteristic of anthropology. Instead, I understand that the psychotherapist and the anthropologist work in the middle of the world of pluralities and partial connections, of relationships and relationships between relationships, a world of differences between others, between themselves and others, between moments and between places. Everything that happens in the encounter, is in correlation with 'difference' in the sense of difference as a given in the world as I suggested above: difference in terms of level, temperature, tension, potential, pressure, feeling, what Deleuze refers to as *intensity* (Deleuze 1994, p.222), and it is through intensity in an encounter, he suggests, that thought comes to us and forces us to think and act (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, St Pierre 2016, 119, Pina-Cabral 2022). It was not only similarity or resonance, which inspired me to go on in my work with Isabella, Anna and Maria and which helped me with what to do next. Rather it was being in the midst of emerging difference and at the same time mutually engaged with Anna, Maria and Isabella and indeed with myself, it was a way of 'feeling them feeling me'[viii] (Harney and Moten 2013, quoted in Ingold 2017, p.23) signalled by Isabella's tut in the session. Again, this may be captured by the notion of correspondence'. Correspondence as a process 'in which things answer to one another' and 'enter into the formative process of differentiation *from within'* (Ingold 2022, 267). Ingold calls this interstitial differentiation, 'living together in difference' and 'going along side by side' all the while being and becoming different. It is a process which has no fixed points either at the beginning or at the end and no discernible boundary and from which something new emerges.

The temporal, co-presence and participation

My third point refers to the fact of the co-presence of myself and the family members in my example. We may call this the temporal dimension and it follows from my two previous points. If as I have suggested the therapist and the anthropologist both are

addressing plurality or multiplicity and cannot stand outside the world in which they are

engaged, it follows that we must turn our attention to the temporal dimension of our work, to

the fact that we are there in a process with our participants. This is 'the contemporary' in that

our work gives shape to the here and now (Rabinow and Marcus 2008) and therefore also to

the future. The emphasis is on process, on the process of the dialogue in the session, on what

emerges or what might emerge, on what is generated or what might be generated, and on

engagement at particular moments in time. In their ethnographies Rabinow, Metcalf and

Briggs are all focused on moments in time when they were stopped in their tracks by a

particular reaction from their participants, and when they were attentive to a particular

sequence of interaction or relating. This is a legacy from Bateson's work. In studying the

process of a ritual in New Guinea and the interaction between mothers and children in Bali

(Bateson 1991), Bateson focused on processes rather than on the state of things or

relationships. His genius was in shifting from 'social organization' to the study of a process

of a ritual or an interaction. What seems to have received too little attention in anthropology,

is Bateson's doubt (we could call it reflexivity) about whether what he thought was going on

was understood in the same way by the people involved (Bateson 1958).[ix] The entire

endeavor of psychotherapy is framed by process often about the past, but at the same time

most psychotherapists and psychoanalysts are also skeptical about causes and diagnoses.

Systemic psychotherapists, although paying attention to the past, are particularly interested in

what happens in the present and what might happen in the future, focusing on the potential

for change rather than on what might be conveyed by a state of mind or a state of existence.

Both Ingold and Pina-Cabral make this point about anthropology too, when they call for a

reorientation of anthropology towards ontogeny, development and process, and potentiality,

and away from ontology, and from what we assume exists (Ingold 2022; Pina Cabral 2017).

Ingold appreciatively acknowledges Simondon, who suggested that 'the term ontogenesis

…..is enlarged in order to refer to the 'becoming of being' in general, and thus to

individuation as the genesis of the individual *and its associated milieu'* (Barthelemy 2012,

219). This applies to all of us, psychotherapists and anthropologists and our participants,

clients or patients and entails our engagement in situations and with our participants, which

will in turn influence and shape our engagements in the future. We are *in relation* because we

and our participants exist in a joint world and far from standing outside the world imposing

our designs on it, we are designing it together because we are part of the world and what it

becomes (Barad 2007, Ingold 2022). I and Isabella and the two girls were a multiplicity from

which the in-betweenness of the inside generated ways of going on posing possibilities for

me to ask more and different questions. However, herein also lay my responsibility, a

responsibility which in this short sequence at times was palpably felt in my body. I could

have disengaged or shied away, but this too I would have noticed and would have had to

reflect upon. So, in this engagement from the inside also lies my responsibility for my

choices of how to do things, my responsibility for how to design my tools, my research

apparatus including my questions. This is a political issue and as Escobar observes calls for

an oscillation between pragmatism and a kind of utopianism. He writes,

> The politics of the real……redefines the politics of the possible, and vice versa; this is
> one of the strong arguments for neorealism. By adopting a perspective of radical
> relationality one not only multiplies the reals but redraws the map of what is possible
> (Escobar 2018, 226).

The practice

I want to return to my case material and use a more pragmatic lens to explain how

what I contributed to the session can be understood against the background of my musings

above. It will be clear that the multiplicity or plurality of the relations involved, my

participation and observation of my participants as well as of myself and the ontogenetic

frame are all intertwined and also that in combination these contributed to the in-betweenness in which I, Isabella, Anna and Maria found ourselves and to the emergence of new experiences and events detailed in the dialogue. This material also invokes several debates visited and revisited in anthropology over the years. Take for example the Ontological Turn and the debate between Viveiros de Castro and Graeber (Viverios de Castro 2014, Graeber 2015) also expressed in one of the quotes from Bateson with which I began this paper regarding whether the bread in the Holy Communion *is* or *stands in* for the body of Christ.

I was struck by a similar predicament in relation to whether Isabella could *stand in* for or *could be* the mother of Anna and Maria. This surfaced at the most intense point in the session, and I felt I took a risk by highlighting the distance between the two by speaking the words 'natural' and 'real mother' so hesitantly, asking what happens to her in Anna's thoughts and heart. To me this felt very tense and potentially dangerous. The tension was eventually resolved when we were able to talk about several mothers or motherhood, conveying no less feeling, affect and longing. We moved from the singularity of Anna/mother and Maria/mother to the multiplicity of mothers and the mothers of mothers and this generated a shared experience, in which we could both articulate the different meanings and significance for each of us but also join together. In the end I did not bother about the distinction between the 'real' mother and 'the other mothers' because that distinction was both there and not there. It was not important to decide one way or the other. What was important was that we could talk about it and that this possibility had emerged from the moment of grace and the correspondence between us. I believe the in-betweenness emerged and was facilitated through other questions which also oscillated between singularity and multiplicity. So to begin with I said: '*you two have ..you two have an unusual background, don't you? Not everyone has lost their parents the way you have. Not everyone has had to*

come to a different country to live…..with new people in new circumstances….…..So how do you…how does it work?' I am first alluding to multiplicity: 'everyone has backgrounds and everyone has relationships with parents', and 'there are parents in children's lives'. I then inquire about their experience of their Anna/parent and Maria/parent relationships, alluding to the event when they lost their parents. This opened up a space and I found myself repeating the question later. There is another repetition when I am asking about what the girls call Isabella, I said '*do you call her mummy?'* Maria responded by referring to what happens in Brazil. Similarly, when I asked Anna whether she thinks about her mother, in the sense of generally thinking about her mother as children might do, and when I press her about *when* she thinks about her mother, 'in the day or in the night?' in an effort to arrive at the image of this thinking about her mother. She responded with the singularity, the event of herself and her dying mother. Finally in this sequence, I moved from talking to Anna to asking Isabelle whether she had noticed a change, in this way noting that not just Anna was engaging in the conversation and alluding to the multiplicity behind the experiences emerging in the room. I did not know about Isabella's story and did not anticipate her response. But the dead or dying mother emerged again as a kind of repetition. This *was* the 'moment of grace' and one of these special even *sacred* events which happen in psychotherapy from time to time.

Postscript

I believe that in their work anthropologists and systemic psychotherapists, by struggling with and promoting the in-betweenness of relationships and paying attention to their own micro-practices can contribute to the making of sustainable relationships and hence to a more sustainable world. For psychotherapists and psychoanalysts generally, this is a challenge. So, when the psychoanalytic and psychotherapy establishment are reluctant to question social categories they are on the one hand, at odds with their own developmental and

transferential theoretical frameworks. On the other hand, they betray an understanding of the world as divided into a substratum of 'nature' over which is superimposed difference in the form of 'culture', as alluded to in the beginning of this paper. In this way psychotherapy tends to be caught up in the universality/difference dichotomy, sometimes with deeply politically disturbing effects. This is a paradox because psychotherapists are trained to be sensitive to join, empathize and correspond with their clients and to consider their own reactions, feelings, gestures and responses as active ingredients of a process of change during which something new can emerge. We can refer to this as reflexivity, countertransference or schizogenesis and as the ethnographic examples referred to here suggest these processes also take place in the making of ethnography and can be available for comment if the ethnographer chooses to acknowledge them. What has not received enough attention in anthropology is how such comments and reflections can be made use of in further inquiries, how reflections can become reflexivity and inform ethnographers how to go on in their work.

I have provided a sequence of a dialogue from my own psychotherapeutic practice, which generally I think of as being ethnographic and I have attempted to show how in this particular case a process of inquiry developed in such a way that a 'moment of grace' touched all the participants. In an ethnography such a moment may reveal layers of experience unavailable before as well as other details and variations about the world, about bodies and gestures, about relationships and emotions. I have not referred to psychotherapeutic theory or to authors who are psychotherapists or psychoanalysts very much in my discussion of my case example. Most of my references and the authors who have influenced me in thinking or rather rethinking this piece of clinical work, are anthropologists. Although it is true that the manner in which I asked my questions, derive from my training as a systemic psychotherapist, the way I like to think that this style of questions has fallen into place in a wider framework of respect for difference has been inspired by anthropology. This may be a

paradox, but I also like to think that anthropology can do more than offer the anthropology *of* psychotherapy, more than generally collaborate with psychotherapy and psychotherapists. I think that an anthropology engaged in the design of its work including an engagement in the design of its micro-practice of asking and being with others, an anthropology advocating talk about ontogeny and about 'difference' rather than 'culture', can be at the forefront in the development of ethical and political methods of inquiry in social science research.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

[i] The book was republished in 2007, demonstrating the shift in attitudes to self-reflection in anthropology.

[ii] In Melanie Klein's thinking (Klein 1957) the infant at first experiences a blissful idealized state of oneness with the primary care giver. As times goes on as feeding and nurturing cannot be constantly provided or with the introduction of a third party (another caregiver or the external reality), this state is disrupted. This disruption generates a state of mind in the infant in which the infant feels anxious, furious and attacked and reacts (the paranoid-schizoid position). Eventually the baby will learn to accept delay and to think and reflect on their situation (the depressive position). In Klein's view these two positions are states of mind which constitute the building blocks of all relationships, and they feature in our (infants' and adults') feelings and dispositions throughout our lives.

[iii] The move from first order cybernetics to second order cybernetics is a move in which the observer moves from being apart from that which they observe (first order) to the observer considering themselves to be part of what they observe (second order) (Luhman 2013, von Foerster 2014, and see also Rabinow and Marcus 2008)

iv Systemic psychotherapy or family therapy is a separate tradition of psychotherapy in which Bateson's ethnographic work amongst the Iatmul in New Guinea and in particular his work on schismogenesis provided initial inspiration (Bateson 1958, 1972). A family is considered to be a collection of relationships all of which have an influence on each dyadic relationship and on each person in the family. The metaphors were initially mechanical from first order cybernetics with systems considered to be more or less closed and in homeostasis. With the development of second order approaches systems in contemporary systemic psychotherapy are now considered to be open and the therapist to be an active participant in the system. While change in this psychotherapeutic approach has always been considered to be a result of pertubation, sometimes accidental, in contemporary approaches there is more emphasis on relationality, dialogue and reflexivity. It is important to emphasize that systemic psychotherapists work with families, that is to say with more than one person in the encounter, and the complexity this entails for both theory and practice.

v This is a segment of a longer transcript in a previous account in which I wrote about ethnographic questions in systemic psychotherapy inquiries (Krause 2002). In this version I develop my understanding of my encounter with this family in the light of more recent anthropological theory as well as of my own more recent thinking about the similarities between systemic psychotherapy and participant observation and anthropology. All names have been changed and the family gave consent for me to use this material. They also read and approved the initial 2002 account.

vi Here a psychoanalyst might refer to a group (Bion 1961). Bion's theory of Basic Assumption Groups is a way of understanding what is going on behind group behavior. With the notion of 'plurality', I wish to convey an emphasis on the internalized multiple experiences, relationships and positions each person has had or may have and has occupied or may occupy. With the notion of 'multiplicity' I take inspiration from Deleuze. This refers to the continual potential for difference, difference in itself, the temporal difference, the way that no gesture, no act, no thought are identical to themselves at a different time and in different circumstances, 'the multiplicity of fusion' (Deleuze 1994, 127).

vii Desjarlais notes that this process of desubjectification, a term he takes from Michel Foucault (Foucault 2002) takes place in the viewing of photographs in that photography disrupts things. He notes the parallel between eventualities of life and writes: 'through these encounters the subject might be transformed, the subject loses its identity, is no longer the same, and the presumed grounds of perception and relationality come into question' (Desjarlais 2029, 21). Foucault himself in more forceful language wrote '….experience has the function of wrenching the subject from itself' (Foucault 2002, 241). I think something similar takes place in systemic psychotherapy when the process uncovers the relationships held within the subject and through this opens up to possible avenues of relational change.

viii Peter Fonagy and colleagues (Fonegy et al. 1995) have developed a model which they refer to as 'mentalization', now widely used in child and family psychotherapy in the UK. This model revises Bowlby's attachment model (Bowlby 1969). The traditional model assumes that the image of the caregiver is internalized by the child and in this way provides internal control of affect. The revised is a dialectic model and assumes that it is the caregiver's image of the intentional, thinking and feeling infant which becomes internalized and henceforth constitutes the core of the child's mentalizing self. A similar dialectic is referred to here, although in this case I note a greater emphasis on affect and less on cognition.

ix Early notable exceptions to this statement are the work by Roy Wagner (1975) and Marilyn Strathern (1988).