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Strategy and ritual in institutional encounters
**A linguistic ethnography of weekly meetings in the British
Embassy in Brussels**

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Preface

Soms schreeuwt de stem in mijn hoofd zo hard dat ik er bang van word. Ik heb geen knop waarmee ik het geluid zachter kan zetten. Als kind al niet. Als kind kwam ik mijn bed uit en vroeg ik: 'Papa, waarom kan je niet niet denken?' Dat probeerde ik elke avond. Heel serieus en geconcentreerd probeerde ik niet te denken. Maar dan dacht ik toch.

De stem was toen nog niet zo schel als nu.

Ik noem de stem 'Maria'.

Maria eist onverbiddelijke aandacht. Om de zoveel weken is het raak, er is geen patroon in te ontdekken. De enige manier om haar te ontlopen is afleiding zoeken. Zelf praten, tegen wie dan ook, of een rustgevende tablet nemen. Ik houd niet van rustgevende tabletten, maar ze helpen wel. Je wordt er loom van. Je bewegingen worden trager. Maria's stem wordt geleidelijk zachter en wat ze zegt, is minder belangrijk. De dingen die Maria me toeschreeuwt, zijn namelijk Van Groot Belang en Heel Erg Interessant. Als ik alles wat ze zegt gelijk zou opschrijven, zou ik een oeuvre hebben waarmee je het Centraal Boekhuis compleet kan afvullen. Geniale teksten, echt waar. Gevat, compact en met een brille...ik weet nooit precies wat een brille is, maar ik weet wel dat menig gesubsidieerd schrijver in zijn linkerpink zou willen hebben wat ik op dit moment dank zij Maria aan brille in huis heb.

Na de geniale teksten komen de verwijten. 'Je deugt niet,' verkondigt Maria, 'Ik heb medelijden met jouw man, je bent een ontaarde moeder en een vriendin van niks. Wanneer zorg je er nou eens voor dat je beter wordt?'

Beter=aardiger. Meer betrokken.

'Je bent veel te druk met je eigen dingen. Met je werk, je computer, je digitale camera. Alles draait om jou, je bent een ras-egoïst.'

Ik bijt op mijn lip.

'Hou op met schrijven,' dicteert ze. 'Hou toch op met al die ijdelheid, met de interviews, de fotosessies, de onzin. Ga wat nuttigs doen. Lees je kinderen vaker voor. Neem een parttime baan in de thuiszorg.'

Ik probeer Maria uit te leggen dat ik dat de bejaarden niet kan aandoen. En dat mijn talent, voor zover aanwezig, nu eenmaal bij het schrijven ligt.

'O ja?' schampert ze. 'En wat doe je dan in bad? Wat denk je daar te bereiken? Waar blijft dat tweede boek van je? Je kunt je publiek niet eeuwig aan het lijntje houden, mevrouw de schrijfster.'

Ik word boos. Zo boos dat ik uit bad stap.

Ik droog me haastig af, knoop een handdoek om, ga naar beneden, loop naar mijn werkkamer en neem met een halfnatte rug plaats achter mijn bureau.

Maria vindt dat ik er bespottelijk uitzie.

'Sinds wanneer kan jou dat wat schelen?' vraag ik.

Ik begin te typen.

Fragment from Heleen van Royen's column 'Maria roept'¹

¹The column appeared in the Dutch newspaper *Het Parool* and was published in *Je zal er maar mee getrouwd zijn* (van Royen, 2003: 41-43). I owe many thanks to Bernard De Clerck for

Sometimes the voice in my head screams so loud it terrifies me. There's no knob I can twist to lower the volume. Not even when I was a child. When I was a child, I once got out of bed and asked my father 'Daddy, why can't you not think?' Every evening I tried. I concentrated very hard and tried not to think. But I ended up thinking anyway.

The voice wasn't as shrill then as it is now.

I call the voice 'Maria'.

Maria demands my undivided attention. Every couple of weeks she's back again and I've found no way of predicting when. The only way of avoiding her is to seek diversion. Speak to myself, or to anyone at all, or take a tablet to calm down. I don't like those sedatives but they do help. They make you all drowsy. They slow you down. Slowly but surely, they make Maria's voice softer and then what she says isn't all that important anymore. The things Maria shouts at me are Highly Important and Very, Very Interesting. If I were to write down everything she says I'd have a collection large enough to fill the Central Library. Ingenious texts, honestly. Sharp-witted, terse and full of verve. I've never really known what verve means, but I do know that many a subsidised writer would give anything to have as much of it in his little finger as I do - all thanks to Maria. And after I've penned all those genial pieces, that's when the reproaches start. 'You're useless', Maria would declare. 'I really feel sorry for your husband; you're a degenerate mother and useless as a friend. When are you ever going to better yourself?'

Better = nicer. More concerned.

'You're too busy with your own things. Your work, your computer, your digital camera. You think the whole world turns around you, you're a total egotist.'

I bite my lip.

'Stop all that writing,' she dictates. 'Drop all that vanity, those interviews and photo shoots, all that nonsense. Do something useful for a change. How about reading your children stories more often or getting yourself a part time job in home care?' I try to explain to Maria that I couldn't possibly do that to those poor old folks. That my talent, as far as I have any, is in writing. 'O yeah?' she sneers. 'So what are you doing in the bath? Where do you think that will get you? What about that second book of yours? You can't keep your readers waiting forever, missus writer.'

That really gets my goat up. I'm so furious I jump up out of the bath.

I dry off in a hurry, wrap a towel around me, rush downstairs to my room and sit down at the desk, my back still half-wet.

Maria thinks I look ludicrous.

'Since when did you start caring?' I ask.

I start typing.

Fragment from Heleen van Royen's column 'Maria's calling', translated by Peter Flynn.

introducing me to van Royen's inspiring, humorous and hilarious writings. I am much indebted to Peter Flynn for an expert translation.

Celebrating diversity

I often tried to stop it, wanted to stop it and was haunted by it at nights but I could not bring it to a standstill. So at some point I decided to write it down, hoping the permanence of print would suppress it.

Trying to come to grips with the disorder of thought has been a most challenging, disturbing, confrontational, conflicting and tumultuous endeavour. I have swayed uncertainly between seemingly conflicting demands and struggled with turmoil and chaos. I listened doubtfully to a demanding voice telling me to be scientific and objective but was ever so often halted by an awareness of not always knowing the 'right' answer. Personal expectations and prejudices clashed with local meanings and perceptions from the field. I oscillated between a need to be critically analytical and an urge to be creative. I was confronted with the chaos and uncontrollability of the creative process. Days of euphoria and self-confidence were painfully disturbed by frustration and self-destructive thinking. Sometimes words and ideas would flow unhindered from my mind, at other times they would simply refuse and resist. I was bestowed with the gift of two uncontrollably flowing and flowering wonderful children. Sometimes lively, sprightly and nerve-wrackingly rebellious, at other times inconsolably needing comfort. I swung back and forth between the egotistic desire to complete my study and the compelling drive to be a caring mother.

But gradually the pendulum motion dampened. It came to a standstill at the point where I realized that I would have to abandon control and surrender safely to the diversity and uncontrollability of life in all its facets. I learned how to deal with expanding and changing perceptions and to look at reality from many different angles. I learned the value of play, curiosity and not always knowing the 'right' answer. I learned the importance of self-nurturing and that failures can be the catalyst for success. I learned to break through the fears and blocks that inhibit creativity, gain belief in my ideas, get over the thresholds which made me afraid to say the wrong things, paint a bad picture, write a foggy paragraph. I learned to go with the flow.

And so a transformation was triggered. The flaws of fieldwork and wandering writing turned me not only into an ethnographer discovering and celebrating the dynamics of diversity, but also into a stronger and more flexible person. I learned to see, assimilate and use different perspectives and viewpoints; to change viewpoint, change perspective and allow difficulties without complaint; to replace one-dimensionality by multi-dimensionality; to be flexible and to flow.

Not unrelatedly and yet almost ironically this dissertation documents a community's craving for stability, predictability and status quo. It portrays a group's ritual celebration of conformity and order over deviance and difference. It illustrates how unique and individual perspectives are streamlined into one single shared perspective; how multidimensionality is narrowed down to one-dimensionality for the sake of the community as a whole, for the sake of safeguarding the stability of the social order.

Uncovering this complex and often covert process of control has been the central driving force of this dissertation and a trigger for whirling thoughts and compelling questions. Which norms, values and sanctions are collectively imposed? How are participants persuaded into accepting their own statuses and the official rules? How are they mobilized into compliance with the current regime? How do they perform allegiance to the organization? To what extent does conformity hide diversity? To which degree does compliance hide contestation?

I tackled the heavy downpour of questions by using an amalgam of methods. I tried to provide answers while taking into account multiple perspectives. I fused theoretical claims with empirical observations, alternated an insider's with an outsider's perspective, addressed aspects of both verbal and non-verbal communication, investigated aspects of text and context.

Finally, I transfigured the cascade of perspectives into a steady stream of words. I sincerely hope its depth and diversity will draw you in.

Acknowledgements

A word of thanks

To be honest, thanking somebody slightly troubles me. Somehow it seems to spoil the infinite pleasure that comes from a joint venture based on mutual liking. It creates inevitable distance, a separation that is disconcerting. And yet, almost contradictorily, I derive much joy from thanking someone. As a simple and sincere expression that I like what is going on. Direct, forthright and forceful.

So in what follows I want to extend a word of thanks and express my heartfelt gratitude to a number of people. Without them this work could never have been accomplished. I want to thank them for giving me the most of themselves, helping to get the best out of me and getting me through the worst.

Stef Slembrouck has promoted my work with undaunted problem-solving skills and proficiency. His contribution to the progress and development of this study has been central. Meetings with him were dazzling experiences. He conjures with concepts, theories and views, confronting me time and again with what I did not know and urging me into wanting to know more. Nothing stokes the creative engine like positive or negative feedback and his critical commentary most certainly fanned the flames.

I have been privileged in having Annemarie Vandenberg not only as a co-promoter but also as a most sensible, intelligent and open-minded leader steering her team with matchless grace. She is encouraging and helpful without being insistent, leading to lots of freedom to explore, imagine and create.

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necessary mental and real-time space to finish my project. I am also much indebted to Luc De Bie for waving his organizational wand at many crucial points, proving himself a wizard amid the details and restrictions of teaching timetables.

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A most respectful word of thanks goes to Patrick Vergauwen. He has guided me through moments of doubt and distress with ever-lasting positive, affirmative, constructive, clear and accurate advice.

Numerous friends and colleagues have read and reacted to parts or all of the manuscript in its many forms, including Jeroen De Keyser, Bart Delen, Peter Flynn, Bernard De Clerck and Stef Slembrouck. I owe thanks to several people who offered useful correctives in the closing stages of the project, including Marc Wauters and Tim Byrne. I also want to thank Peter Van Den Abeele for his young and inspiring ideas on layout and Daniël Mortier for giving shape to the cover of this work. A special thank you and a token of appreciation goes to Jeroen De Keyser. He is not only an exceptionally good friend, he has also been tremendously helpful in finding mistakes and inconsistencies. Whether it is a missing paragraph, an illogical argument, a typo or a grammatical mistake, Jeroen sees all and tells all.

I want to finish with a final forte section for my family. I owe much to my mother. She is one of the few who have the power to affect me passionately and profoundly. She has often infuriated me when telling me to hold on and yet, I am most grateful to her. For my father it has always been undisputable, unquestionable and self-evident that I should write a PhD. I never dared challenge his steadfast and firm belief in me. Without the inexhaustible help and contribution of my parents-in-law I would never have been able to complete this project within the expected time limit and I am deeply grateful to them for taking care of Linde and Wolf while I was immersed in my study.

A special little winking thank you goes to Linde and Wolf. They have helped me put things into perspective, focussing on what is absolutely essential. Their sparkling eyes would always overrule all worry.

That there is a dissertation at all is to the credit of the persistent and intense support of Bart. His uncomplicated and unconditional love and friendship have guided this work to completion. To bring that intensity back to a simple thank you somehow diminishes the strain and rapture that we shared.

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Dramatis Personae

Dramatis Personae²

- The Ambassador, alias '**A**'
- The Personal Assistant to the Ambassador, alias '**P**'
- The Deputy Head of Mission, alias '**S**'
- The Personal Assistant to the Deputy Head of Mission, alias '**V**'
- The Defence and Military Attaché, alias '**H**'
- The Deputy of the Defence and Military Attaché, alias '**G**'
- The First Secretaries Political Section, alias '**B**' and '**J**'
- The Third Secretary Political Section, alias '**E**'
- The Head of the Press & Public Affairs Section, alias '**L**'
- The Press Officer, alias '**O**'
- The Head of the Commercial Section, alias '**C**'
- The Head of the Consular Section, alias '**D**'
- The Head of the Joint Management Office, alias '**N**'
- The Director of the British Council, alias '**R**'
- The Fiscal Liaison Officers, alias '**M**' and '**T**'
- The Drugs Liaison Officers, alias '**W**' and '**F**'
- The Newcomer, alias '**X**'
- The Interviewer and Researcher, alias '**I**'
- Scene: British Embassy, Rue d' Arlon 85, Brussels (Belgium)

²See Appendix 3 for a formal organisation chart.

Introduction

Introduction

"[...] it is sometimes necessary to go backwards in order to move forwards. It is this process that allows us to see the familiar from a novel perspective."

Helen B. Schwartzman³

Throughout this dissertation I invite the reader to walk into a social system backwards in order to see it in a new way. When walking barefoot along a long stretch of gravel, we eventually stop feeling the stones at all. In the same way, we often become accustomed to seeing certain things in life, so much so that we no longer really see them. Bauman summarizes this brilliantly:

"When repeated often enough, things tend to become familiar, and familiar things are self-explanatory; they present no problems and arouse no curiosity [...]. Familiarity is the staunchest enemy of inquisitiveness and criticism – and thus also of innovation and the courage to change." (Bauman, 1990:15)

In this study, I ask questions, consider alternative perspectives and reflect on attitudes previously thought of as common sense. As a "meddlesome and irritating stranger", I disturb the comfort of "reciprocally reasserting beliefs". I "defamiliarize the familiar", "make evident things into puzzles", provoke fresh perceptions and prompt a more reflective approach to the taken-for-granted (Bauman, 1990:15).

An anthropological perspective

There is an intensely anthropological motive and concern behind this intention. Anthropologists' efforts at cultural description or cultural critique traditionally aim at revealing the constructed nature of the social by disrupting "common sense, doing the unexpected, placing familiar subjects in unfamiliar contexts" (Marcus & Fisher, 1986:137).⁴ Ever since Boas introduced the concept of *cultural relativism*, anthropologists have

³See Schwartzman, 1989:12.

⁴A number of anthropologists (Clifford, 1981; Marcus & Fisher, 1986:111-164; Holston, 1989:6-16) have written about techniques of 'defamiliarization' as core to the discipline of anthropology.

juxtaposed the culturally remote with the culturally familiar and have forced us to reflect self-critically on our own, usually taken-for-granted ways.⁵

A closed community

This study does not target the culturally remote, alien or exotic. It enters a community which is fundamentally Western and familiar, technologically advanced and literate. Still, to some extent, I treat it as if it were exotic and attempt to view it as Malinowski saw the Trobrianders.⁶ I re-examine and put aside preconceptions and received wisdom and force myself to start from scratch, as if I had just landed on a far-off island.

But then, to some extent I did embark on an island, entering a community cut off from its homeland in peninsular isolation; a community of expatriates in foreign surroundings, standing on the margin of another culture. What's more, there was a peculiarly exotic if not mystic flavour to it, insistent as they were on the unattainability and exclusivity of their world.

In the months of April, May and June 2000, I entered the closed and secluded community of the British Embassy in Brussels. I entered a cultural milieu, a setting where a group of self-identifying people with certain shared beliefs engage in a set of distinctive and mutually intelligible practices and tried to gain a more complete understanding of its norms, values and expectations. I observed its weekly gatherings of Heads of Section, I interviewed the people who attended the meetings and tried to develop an understanding of the meeting's role in shaping, structuring and restructuring, forming and transforming, stabilizing and destabilizing the community's cultural system.

⁵"In using portraits of other cultural patterns to reflect self-critically on our own ways, anthropology disrupts common sense and makes us re-examine our taken-for-granted assumptions". (Marcus & Fisher, 1986:1)

⁶Malinowski was forced, with the outbreak of the First World War, to remain in close proximity with the natives of the Trobriand Islands of New Guinea. While living literally in the middle of the village of Omarakana next to the chief's compound for two years, he kept very detailed daily notebooks. The enforced immersion in the daily life of the islanders led to the seminal work *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and to his famous advice on ethnographic method in the opening chapter (1922:1-25): "The final goal of which an anthropologist should never lose sight is to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of this world." (Malinowski, 1922:25) (See chapter 1 below for an in-depth discussion of Malinowski's views).

Tension and contrast

In the tradition of anthropology this study sheds light on contrast and difference. It puts one view forward and then contrasts it with another. It explores the tension between assumptions about a task-focused, instrumental purpose of meetings and their symbolic, implicit meaning as organizational ritual and symbol of collective experience. It portrays the conflict between normative, collective, managerial control and individual experience. It demonstrates how the leader of a community promulgates what it claims is a non-authoritarian, democratic, egalitarian regime and reveals how these efforts mask an elaborative and subtle form of normative control. It juxtaposes the propagated role of meetings as the place for achieving democratic ideals (community participation, status equality) with evidence of participants manoeuvring for position, exploring the boundaries of territory and face and skilfully acting upon institutional and interactional norms. It studies the contrast between frontstage and backstage behaviour and examines forms of role embracement. Placing these opposing perspectives side by side it creates a dynamic dialectic which "defamiliarizes", replaces one-dimensionality with multidimensionality so as to ultimately provide a newer, richer perspective.

A linguistic perspective

If this study is essentially anthropologically-informed and inspired, it is at the same time guided by a profound interest in and concern for language and communication. It starts from "the theoretical assumption that words matter and from the empirical finding that linguistic signs as representations of the world and connections to the world are never neutral; they are constantly used for the construction of cultural affinities and cultural differentiations" (Duranti, 1997:5).

An interdisciplinary perspective

Apart from linguistics and anthropology, this study relies on and expands upon existing methods and views in a variety of other independently established disciplines. It draws on the sociological writings of Goffman, the philosophical work of Durkheim and Turner, the political ideas of Marx and Weber and many others. Although these fields are widely divergent, this study shows that they have much to contribute to each other, both theoretically and empirically.

Mapping the multitude of perspectives

Although I very much insist on “defamiliarizing”, I definitely want to avoid disorientation. The multitude of interconnecting perspectives and methods make getting lost all too easy. So here is a concise attempt at mapping the multitude of dimensions and perspectives.

By and large, this dissertation is composed of two major parts. The first part mainly covers issues of epistemology, theory and methodology. The second part attempts at establishing an understanding of what the meeting means and signifies to community members. It does so by drawing on continually updated accounts of observations on multiple levels and a triangulation of methods.

Chapter 1 explores the contours of ethnography as a paradigm in its own right, with a distinct epistemological and ontological identity, firmly rooted in philosophical ideas of what constitutes reality and what constitutes knowledge. What knowledge does it privilege? Which are its principles of inquiry to acquire knowledge? Which theories, values, cultural protocols and ethics inform its methodology? To answer these questions, it traces the history of ethnography from 19th century positivism down to 20th century post-modernism, it disentangles its historical connections to other related traditions and filters out a number of core ethnographic assumptions.

Chapter 2 changes the focus from in-depth literature review and theoretical claims to observations from the field. This chapter covers a key stage in the research process. It details the crystallizing of research aims, research questions and methodology. The process of conducting fieldwork in a closed community such as the British Embassy is described here. The process of recognizing the symbolic function of the meeting and making it the topic of my research is also detailed here. I unpack the research interests and methodological assumptions that I brought to the encounter and assess how they were modified in the light of new notions presented by the field. In short, I present a “reconstructed logic of enquiry” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995:21), a reflexive account of the evolution of my ideas, of why particular methodological decisions were made and why certain research questions were abandoned in favour of others.

For this critical reflection on issues of methodology, research design and research aims, **Chapter 2** partly relies on a detailed account and systematic

enquiry of local culture and meanings. In this way it serves as a transition to the second part of the dissertation, which fully enters the community's web of meanings, rules and ritual. The second part adopts three different perspectives, each taking up a single chapter, which ultimately converge to provide a multidimensional, multifaceted view:

Chapter 3 approaches the meeting from a socio-cultural perspective. It explores its role as organizational ritual, establishes an understanding of its symbolic purposes and investigates its role and importance in producing and reproducing the community's norms, expectations and interpretations.

Chapter 4 adopts a political perspective and examines issues of power, domination, subordination and contestation. This chapter aims at getting deeper insight into the political and ideological processes which underlie the ritual event of the weekly staff meeting. It examines how the political leader of the community, i.e. the Ambassador, propagates a shared doctrine. It investigates how he describes and justifies the ritual procedure of a weekly meeting; how he perceives and rationalizes the event. Which are the norms and values he imposes? And most importantly, what are the ways in which he skilfully shapes his argument and presents himself in a credible way so as to encourage people to accept the imposed norms and values? Furthermore, it examines to which extent participants' perceptions accord with the central, salient ideology. Do they validate the norms that are set? What kinds of contestation are there around the values that the ritual of a weekly meeting is due to enshrine?

Finally, a dramaturgical dimension completes the equilibrium of the three perspectives. Whereas the preceding chapters almost exclusively focus on ethnographic interviews with participants, **Chapter 5** deals with interaction at the meetings and investigates more closely how a *team performance* (Goffman, 1959) is staged. In the manner of Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown, and inspired by Goffman's dramaturgical approach to interaction, it investigates the elaborate set-up of a ritual ceremony and celebration – "as an expressive rejuvenation and reaffirmation of the moral values of the community" (Goffman, 1959:45). It examines the explicit and implicit articulation of shared values and the ways in which participants are stimulated and encouraged into accepting, producing and reproducing these values to create and foster an emergent and convincing impression of a team "possessing a united front" (Goffman, 1959:94).

A concluding chapter brings together the two parts. **Chapter 6** summarizes the main messages proliferating from this study. It distils the most important findings and results from what is not only a journey into a particular site and its culture but also an exploration of methodological and epistemological possibilities.

Chapter 1

1. What is ethnography?

"The first step to wisdom is getting things by their right name."

Chinese proverb⁷

Ethnography derives from the Greek word *ethnos*, people, nation, foreign people, and *grafein*, which means to write, to describe. In its most basic and narrow sense, ethnography may be defined as the description of a culture, of a society's customary behaviours, beliefs and attitudes. A narrow demarcation in terms of etymology leaves unsaid its broad and all-encompassing diversity. Ethnography occupies a central and complex place in human sciences. As a method of enquiry it is currently used in a wide range of fields, such as anthropology, sociology, linguistics, history, marketing, etc. Ethnography crosses disciplinary boundaries, different definitions, interpretations and applications add different perspectives and enhance its richness and complexity. Unrivalled in its breadth and scope, it is a challenge, then, to attempt to capture the discipline of ethnography in only a limited set of key notions and ideas. In what follows, I will trace the history of ethnography and its intellectual origins so as to filter out a number of core fundamental ethnographic assumptions. To get down to its essentials, I will disentangle ethnography's historical connections to other related traditions and approaches, notably anthropology, constructivism and phenomenology. Each of these supplies supplementary threads of thought, which, twisted together, form a tight theoretical and methodological rope. In line with Blommaert's argument (2001:2), I intend to prove that ethnography involves "a perspective on language and communication", a "programmatic view", "a 'full' intellectual programme" with a firm theoretical if not ideological ground. I will put forward ethnography as a paradigm in its own right, with theoretical assumptions and beliefs which extend far beyond the mere methodological concern of producing an accurate description of cultural practices. I will argue that ethnography has a distinct epistemological and ontological identity, that it is firmly rooted in philosophical ideas of what constitutes reality and what constitutes knowledge.

Summaries carry the risk of simplification. Nevertheless, the following overview insists on paying tribute to the intricacy of ethnographic thinking,

⁷Cited in Wilson, 1998.

the diversity of its roots, the amalgam of intersecting and interrelating concepts and ideas. In fact, one of its main conclusions will be that complexity is at the heart of the ethnographic paradigm, that its epistemological and ontological thinking centres precisely around the recognition of complex and diverse realities and multiple ways of knowing. This aspect of its epistemology not only gives it firm ground but has also allowed for cross-fertilization over a wide spectrum of disciplines, other than the one in which it has its roots, i.e. anthropology. I opened this chapter with the observation that ethnography occupies a central and complex place in human sciences. I intend to end by showing that it has achieved centrality and has become pervasive across a wide range of disciplines, precisely on account of its awareness and acknowledgement of complexity.

1.1 What is a paradigm?

*"Scientific knowledge, like language, is intrinsically the common property of a group or else nothing at all. To understand it we shall need to know the special characteristics of the groups that create and use it."*⁸

Thomas S. Kuhn⁹

The aim and ambition of this chapter is to explore ethnography as a *paradigm* in its own right. But then, what are *paradigms*? Although critics have reproached¹⁰ him invariably for inaccurate use of the term, Kuhn (1962) and most notably his mind-boggling and widely renowned book on *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*,¹¹ may be held accountable for

⁸I am greatly indebted to Peter Flynn, who suggested that I should read Kuhn's work.

⁹See Kuhn, 1962:210.

¹⁰Margaret Masterman (1970) signals Kuhn's imprecise use of the term. She counts 21 different senses of the term in Kuhn's work and demonstrates that he was working with at least three quite different kinds of paradigm. She called them metaphysical, sociological, and construct paradigms. In Masterman's terminology, metaphysical paradigms refer to issues of ontology, epistemology and ethics. Sociological paradigms picture scientific achievements, institutional structures and political systems. Construct paradigms refer to models, tools, language and rules of scientific enquiry.

¹¹The notion and concept of Scientific Revolution refers to a deep and enduring shift in Western epistemological and ontological thinking. Customarily, the Scientific Revolution refers to historical changes in thought and belief that spread over Europe between approximately 1550 and 1700, starting with Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543), who asserted a heliocentric cosmos and ending with Isaac Newton (1642-1727), who proposed universal laws and a Mechanical Universe. This shift from Cosmos to Universe marked a redefining of the nature and categories of human knowledge and significant transformations in what came to be held as real (ontology) and how Europeans have justified their claims to knowledge (epistemology).

popularising the notion and concept of *paradigm*. Kuhn's cyclic theory of the history of science has generated extensive controversy, and many of his ideas have been forcefully challenged.¹² *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* has had a wider influence than any other book on the history of science and in particular, it is Kuhn's reinvention of the word *paradigm* that has been most useful or most objectionable to followers and critics alike.

Kuhn's argument is that the typical development pattern of science is cyclical, i.e. the successive transition from one *paradigm* to another through a process of revolution. Kuhn's cyclical conception of the history of science is based on the principle of a dynamic and forceful movement between opposite poles of consensus and crisis. In his view, *paradigms* are basically a "constellation of group commitments" (Kuhn, 1962:181), a collection of beliefs, values and ideas shared by scientists and, by common consent, accepted and affirmed. *Paradigms* help scientific communities to bind their discipline in that they allow the scientist to define areas of relevance, create avenues of inquiry, formulate questions, select methods with which to examine questions, and establish or create meaning. Periods in which scientists tend to agree about what phenomena are relevant and what constitutes an explanation of these phenomena are followed by periods of revolution and crisis with destructive changes in existing values and beliefs. Kuhn firmly asserts that this crisis is "the essential tension"¹³ implicit in scientific research, that there is no such thing as research without "counterinstances".¹⁴

1.1.1 Kuhn's notion of paradigm: pros and cons

Aside from the fact that Kuhn's theory is highly controversial as well as influential, the reason why I insist on rendering his views is fivefold. Almost ironically, these motives are driven by opposite poles of consensus and crisis, partly pushed by attraction, similarity, agreement, and partly by repulsion, contrast, difference and disagreement with his views.

¹²See for example Weinberg, 1998.

¹³*The Essential Tension* (1977) follows the famous *The Structure of Revolutions* and consists of a reflective commentary in which Kuhn looks back on the success of the earlier book, accepts some criticisms and provides a more profound theoretical discussion of some of the important concepts, such as paradigms.

¹⁴The term is taken from Kuhn (1962). A counterinstance is the moment when new shared beliefs replace old beliefs.

On the whole, the pattern of growth of the ethnographic paradigm echoes Kuhn's view of crisis as the essential tension in science. Ethnographic ideas have developed and grown under the influence of a paradigm shift, a *revolution* from modernism to post-modernism. Ethnographic thinking unfolds and develops with firm roots in a positivist tradition of anthropological research and has accumulated in strength and in number of advocates under the wings of anti-positivism/post-modernism.¹⁵

Next, Kuhn's perspective on science advances much of the current controversy over value-bound inquiry in post-modern ethnographic writing and thinking. Kuhn's emphatic claim that the philosophical presuppositions of science are values that scientists may choose to affirm and defend raises the highly contested issue of value-free science which pervades post-modernist ethnographic discussions.

Finally, almost paradoxically, Kuhn's conceptualisation of a *paradigm* has the effect of revealing my quest for fundamental ethnographic concerns and epistemological viewpoints, as fundamentally ethnographic in its aspiration. Kuhn's perception of a *paradigm* as a community construct of values has a touch of ethnography. From Kuhn's standpoint, the issue of defining and capturing the essence of a *paradigm* addresses questions such as:

"How does one elect and how is one elected to membership in a particular community, scientific or not? What is the process and what are the stages of socialization to the group? What does the group collectively see as its goals; what deviations, individual or collective, will it tolerate; and how does it control the impermissible aberration?" (Kuhn, 1962:209)

These questions are by nature ethnographic and tie in with the ethnographic aspiration to provide a description of the "practices characteristic of a particular group of people" (Duranti, 1997:85).

If, to a great extent, my reasons for presenting Kuhn's views are based on similarity, agreement and attraction, they are also in part based on disparity and disagreement. Overall, the specific evolution of ethnography as a

¹⁵In a postscript on *Revolutions and Relativism*, Kuhn describes himself as a convinced believer in scientific progress. The history and evolution of ethnography supports Kuhn's argument that successive stages in the developmental process of science are marked by an increase in articulation and specialization; that revolution acts as a catalyst for evolution; that protest pushes progress.

paradigm contradicts and rejects Kuhn's understanding of paradigms as separate, self-contained, incompatible, oppositional models.

Highly questionable is Kuhn's view that a paradigm is "incommensurable with that which has gone before" (1962:103), that is, a scientific community is defined by its allegiance to a single paradigm and a paradigm shift means complete abandonment of an earlier paradigm. It is in this respect that he draws an analogy between scientific and political revolutions. Like the choice between competing political institutions, that between competing paradigms proves to be a choice between fundamentally incompatible modes of community life.

The historical trajectory of ethnography contradicts and resists this view. It is highly questionable whether there ever were "monolithically positivist and modernist phases" (Atkinson et al., 2001:3) of development. The recent *Handbook of Ethnography* (Atkinson et al., 2001) opens with the editorial statement that "it would be as wrong to assume that all ethnography in past generations was conducted under the auspices of a positivistic and totalising gaze, as it is to imply that we are all post-modern now".¹⁶ The trajectory of ethnographic enquiry this century reconciles elements and concepts from either research tradition in which it has been embedded. Having outgrown its positivist aspirations, and thriving under the approach of the post-modernist era, ethnography has never abandoned a yearning for 'positive' data. Instead, it has achieved in joining first-hand observation and interpretation in a unique methodological constellation.

A second aspect of Kuhn's theory which clashes with the evolution of the ethnographic paradigm as such is the understanding of *paradigms* as inherently conservative. According to Kuhn, it is typical for adherents of a paradigm not to seek novelty and generally not to challenge accepted belief. When anomalies pop up they are usually discarded or ignored:

"[...] cumulative acquisition of novelty is not only rare in fact but improbable in principle. Normal research, which is cumulative, owes its success to the ability of scientists regularly to select problems that can be solved with

¹⁶I will therefore refrain from a dichotomous representation and avoid a sharp contrast between previous positivist, modernist and self-confident (but narrow) perspectives, and the contemporary "carnavalesque diversity of standpoints, methods and representations" (Atkinson et al., 2001:3).

conceptual and instrumental techniques close to those already in existence.” (Kuhn, 1962:96)

As mentioned before, Kuhn’s conceptualization of the notion of paradigm is based on the understanding that truth is relative and that science is value-bound. Almost paradoxically, Kuhn claims that contenders of a paradigm consider the values they accept not as relative but as absolute: beliefs are generally not challenged. The question now is to what extent this claim will affect paradigms which are bound by the very belief that beliefs are relative and challengeable? That is, does Kuhn’s definition and, more importantly, its conservative aspect, affect relativist paradigms such as ethnography?

When applied to ethnography, there are several arguments on the basis of which Kuhn’s conservative claim may be refuted.

Contrary to Kuhn’s claim that adherents of a paradigm generally do not seek novelty, contemporary ethnographic theorizing voices a need for openness and restraint from categorically discarding criticism and opposing views. In their *Manifesto for Ethnography* (2000:5) Paul Willis and Mats Trondman set the tone for much of contemporary ethnographic writing and thinking. The opening paragraph of the article explicitly urges for “an open manifesto” and expresses the hope for it to encourage the production of a wide range of ethnographies, “thereby being developed, refined and criticized without ever being locked up as a given system of thought”.

Next, ethnography is characterized by a dialectic epistemology and methodology¹⁷ whereby ideas, values and perspectives are constantly criticized and scrutinized. Ethnography is the representation of a culture clash, a “collision between two worlds and two cultures” (Scheper-Hughes, 2000:132). That conflict of interpretations constitutes the essence of “a dialectic of surprise”,¹⁸ the dynamic of which is that “opposites are in an

¹⁷The publication of Clifford and Marcus’ *Writing Cultures* (1986), gave rise to “increasingly complex relationships between ethnographers’ selves, the selves of others and the texts they both engage in” (Atkinson et al., 2001:3). The established distinction between self and other, observer and observed fades and the dialectic dimension of ethnographic enquiry expands. Although the publication of *Writing Cultures* (1986) and the *reflexive turn* of the seventies have shed new light on the dynamic and dialectic process of data collection and interpretation, until this day, the dynamic interplay between perspectives remains a key characteristic of the ethnographic approach.

¹⁸The term is taken from Willis & Trondman’s *Manifesto*, which emphatically argues for a “dialectic of surprise” (2000:12). It firmly stresses the need for a dialectic relation between

active relationship of mutual contradiction" (Murphy, 1972:121). Agar (1996) uses the term "rich points":

"When a rich point occurs, an ethnographer learns that his or her assumptions about how the world works, usually implicit and out of awareness, are inadequate to understand something that had happened." (Agar, 1996:31)

Rich points are unexpected problems in understanding, the surprise acts of the field. They are rich because they "challenge our preconceptions" (Burawoy, 1991:294).

The "dialectic of surprise",¹⁹ then, strongly resists a definition and description of the paradigm in terms of self-containment and lack of surprise. And this brings us back to Kuhn's definition. And to the question whether his conservative view applies to ethnography? Whether it holds true for a relativist paradigm that its beliefs are generally not challenged? In my view, the answer to that question basically consists in a modification of Kuhn's definition. Paradigms are by definition value-bound. And by definition a community of scientists will accept and defend its own ideas. Any paradigm strives for self-justification, for affirmation of its values, in other words, for validity. So in that sense, yes, the ethnographic paradigm may be termed self-justifying. Contrary to Kuhn's view, however, this is not by definition by way of excluding opposing views, by way of reduction. This view is narrow and excludes relativist paradigms such as ethnography. Validity may well be achieved by means of exactly the opposite, by including a multiplicity of perspectives. A paradigm of enquiry which recognizes and legitimizes the

theory and data to allow for surprise that each can bring to the other, "a two-way stretch, a continuous process of shifting back and forth [...] between induction and deduction [...] so escaping the usual banishment of 'theory' to the ghetto-ized 'Theory Section' devoid of 'Ah-ha' effects" (2000:12). Formulating the need for a dialectic of surprise strictly in terms of a correlation between data and theory, Willis & Trondman reduce its impact to the realm of method and procedure. However, the importance of a dialectic of surprise may be stretched further and viewed in a broader perspective. It may be argued that the dialectic of surprise is a fundamental principle and an attitude which affects not only ethnographic methodology, but its very epistemology.

¹⁹In a summary and critique of Willis & Trondman's *Manifesto*, Dave Harris states that one could argue that most empirical research may generate surprise in this way and that it does not require ethnography. He also expresses the cynical comment that clever and involving writing may be the technique to deliver surprise, rather than meticulous and self-conscious data recording and processing. In questioning the extent in which surprise may be simulated, stage-managed discovery as a writing effect, he echoes post-modern critiques of ethnography. See: <http://www.arasite.org/kcethman.html>

subjective, such as ethnography, requires different sorts of evidence to support its assertions than a paradigm which aims to arrive at universal principles.

1.1.2 Kuhn, Foucault and post-modernism

Although considerably broader,²⁰ Foucault's concept of *episteme* (1972:191)²¹ is closely related to Kuhn's notion of *paradigm*. Similar to Kuhn's claim that scientists work under paradigms, whereby only certain theories and methodologies are allowed by the accepted scientific authorities of the era, Foucault states that "epistemes define what can and cannot be said at a particular time" (Griseri, 2002:155). Foucault shares Kuhn's view of knowledge as contingent on the epistemology and ontology by which one chooses to approach reality. For Foucault, "there is no basis for identifying an independent reality which persists from one time to another" (Griseri, 2002:156); there are no objective facts, only "subjectivities", interpretations or perceptions of reality created and sanctioned by the ruling *episteme*.

Kuhn and Foucault's philosophical ideas mirror changing perceptions of reality, from nineteenth century positivist views of reality as uniform, stable and existing independently of the knower, to contemporary anti-positivist beliefs that "reality cannot be separated from our knowledge of it; knowledge cannot be separated from the knower; the knower cannot be separated from a community. Facts do not exist independently, waiting to be found and collected and systematized" (Miller, 1979:615, cited in Bellah, 1998:chapter 2).

The clash and contrast between modernism and post-modernism is fundamental for a thorough understanding of ethnographic epistemology and ontology. In what follows, I will explore the ontological and

²⁰Foucault's vision is considerably more grandiose than Kuhn's. Kuhn restricts himself to the domain of scientific theories, and only to those fields of science that are relatively well developed. Foucault, on the other hand, wants to cover all knowledge in any human culture. The broader field in which knowledge is formed, Foucault calls 'the discursive formation'. For Foucault an 'episteme' is not tied to a community but to a 'discursive formation'. After 1970 he modifies this view.

²¹"By episteme, we mean [...] the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possible formulated systems [...]" (Foucault, 1972:191). Foucault later replaced 'episteme' with the term 'discursive formation'.

epistemological assumptions that have informed ethnographic research throughout the past century in the light of this paradigm shift.

1.2 Perspectives on the nature of reality, knowledge and human action

"Anthropology [...] that dark corner of the sciences where the loose ends of the knowledge project are sent to be tied up."

John Maxwell²²

1.2.1 Introduction

How do we see what we see? How do we know, and know in common, what we are knowing? What can we know? How much can we know and what justification is there for what is known? What kinds of knowledge can we have of the external world of objects, of minds other than our own? And what is the exact relation between the one who knows and the object known?

These fundamental questions have been pursued by philosophers for centuries: issues of perception and cognition and the relationship between them – if any relation there is – time and again prove to be central in any attempt to account for the nature of social organization and social order. Questions such as, 'what distinguishes true, adequate knowledge from false inadequate knowledge' and, 'what is truth?' expand the philosophical debate on human cognition and society to questions concerning truth in science, and claims over objectivity versus subjectivity.

It is not until recently that, aside from methodological aspects, epistemological dimensions have been incorporated in attempts to define ethnography and account for what it truly encompasses. In the *Handbook of Pragmatics*, (Agar, 1995:583) defines ethnography as "a term that refers to an epistemology, a kind of representation, and a research method". Blommaert (2001) emphatically attributes ontological and epistemological

²²See Maxwell, 2002:6.

status to ethnography. Slembrouck (2005b)²³ suggests that "ethnography is perhaps best thought of as an epistemology".

Nonetheless, epistemological discussions have always pervaded anthropological and ethnographic writing. Aijmer, for instance, claims that ethnography "always has been [...] linked with epistemological problems" (1988:424, cited in Comaroff, 1992:7).

1.2.2 From modernism to post-modernism

Different philosophies of research, divergent beliefs about the nature of reality, the creation of knowledge and meanings, and the relationship of objectivity and subjectivity have determined the range and variation of ethnographic practice in the past century. Over time these epistemological debates reflect a shift away from modern (more positivist) to post-modern (more constructivist, post-positivist, anti-positivist) thinking.²⁴

In its earliest beginnings, in the writings of Boas, Malinowski and others, ethnography was laden with claims and aspirations of objectivity and positive science. Positivism bases all knowledge on perceptual experience, not on intuition or revelation: the only reality is that which is perceived by the senses. The only truth is that which may be empirically verified. Only those objects or events that can be experienced directly, that are graspable and which can be observed should be the object of scientific enquiry. Science is measurement.

The objectivist view of ethnography's founding fathers²⁵ is in sharp contrast with views of its current practitioners. The crux of post-modernism is subjectivity. Post-modern views of ethnography are based on the belief that there is no true objectivity. Scientific method is not possible. Nancy Scheper-Hughes, a prominent advocate of the post-modern perspective in anthropology, emphatically states that ethnography, as she understands it,

²³See <http://bank.ugent.be/da/da.htm> for course notes and an overview of what is meant by discourse analysis.

²⁴Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln (1994) have published a very useful chapter on the distinction between modern and post-modern ethnography *Competing paradigms in qualitative research* in *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* by Denzin and Lincoln. For a detailed overview of the pioneering efforts of women and minority anthropologists who have struggled to gain a place at the center of the discipline, see Lamphere 2004.

²⁵For a detailed overview of the pioneering efforts of women and minority anthropologists who have struggled to gain a place at the center of the discipline, see Lamphere 2004.

"is not a science" (Scheper-Hughes, 2000:132). Scheper-Hughes does away with the question of objectivity as besides the point, and terms the ethnographer's task and requirement one of "highly disciplined subjectivity" (Scheper-Hughes, 2000:132). She denies the existence of objective anthropological facts, data and interpretation and formulates the dilemma and contradiction inherent to ethnography as follows: "How can we know what we know other than by filtering experience through the highly subjective categories of thinking and feeling that represent our own ways of being" (2000:127). "The kind of 'truth' that an ethnography produces is necessarily deeply subjective, resulting from the collision between two worlds and two cultures" (2000:132).

1.2.3 From realism to idealism

Michael Crotty (1998) locates ontological perspectives in classical and contemporary fieldwork and ethnography at various points along a continuum ranging from *realism* to *idealism*. "Scholars at the realism end of the continuum work from an assumption that social life has a concrete reality, one that is uniform and that exists beyond the mind of researchers. This reality can be studied using empirical, or sensory evidence" (Preisler & Grant, 2002:7). At the other end of the continuum, the idealist tradition²⁶ views reality as an unstable, variable creation of the human mind. Reality is subject to multiple interpretations. Idealist researchers do not assume that there is a common reality 'out there', to be studied, but rather that all accounts are inventions of a human mind. Van Maanen wonderfully captures the essence of the idealist perspective as:

"A view of the world as potentially devoid of meaning [...] It is vital that the objects, facts, events and relationships seemingly present in the everyday world have no meaning apart from what an observer chooses to give them." (Van Maanen, 1995, cited in Pfeffer, 1982:212)

The idealist stance emphasizes the impossibility to reach purely objective representations of things in themselves, and that "all things in their knowable state are partially the creations of the observer" (Harris 1964a:169, cited in Pike, 1990:35), that "any phenomenon is partly created,

²⁶Preisler & Grant (2002:8) note that the idealist tradition has most recently been elaborated by women and minority scholars, among others, as a challenge to dominant understandings of reality that subordinate the experiences and perspectives of less powerful people.

co-constructed by the person (i.e. subject) who 'discovers' it or simply describes it" (Duranti, 1997:68).

1.2.4 From objectivism to subjectivism

Closely linked to philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality are researchers' stances on the making of meaning: how objective or subjective are meanings?; what is the role of the self in meaning making?; how much is the self (versus the other) foregrounded in the research process and especially in the ultimate account (Preissle & Grant, 2002)? Building on the philosophical work of Crotty (1998), epistemological stances in ethnographic research may be broken down into three stances: objectivism, constructivism and subjectivism.

The assumption of a single, stable reality, lends itself well to an objectivist stance in ethnographic fieldwork. **Objectivism** posits that objects have "intrinsic meaning" that exists "apart from the operation of any consciousness" (Crotty, 1998:8). The meaning of an object is independent of its being perceived. Much early fieldwork is influenced by assumptions of detachment and objectivity. Processes of introspection and self-reflection are banned from the final account because they would render it biased and hence less credible. Malinowski's recently published²⁷ personal diary, in which he recounts his experiences with the Trobriand Islanders, illustrates how meticulous attempts to render an objective representation of 'the other' lead to the exclusion of the Self from the final *scientific* account and the banishment of the personal to the secret realm of a diary. Where Malinowski's work is almost unanimously considered a masterpiece, revelations of his innermost feelings – fears, anxieties, guilt, loneliness, anger, love, sexual frustrations and dreams – caused great indignation. Hardly reconcilable with "the sensitive Malinowski, who talked of the magic moment when, just for a few seconds, you saw the world like the natives" (Agar, 1996:101), the diary contains cruel and hostile remarks and calls the Trobrianders *niggers* :

"I made one or two coarse jokes, and the bloody niggers made a disapproving remark, whereupon I cursed them and was highly irritated [...]"

²⁷Malinowski's diary was found among his papers after his death. No one had previously known of its existence and his private thoughts and intimate fantasies were never written down to be published (Powdermaker, 1967).

I was terribly vexed by the fact that this nigger had dared to speak to me in such a manner.”(Malinowski, 1967:272)

In a review of the diary, Geertz (1967) concludes that Malinowski was a distant observer, a “disagreeable man, a crabbed, self-pre-occupied, hypochondriacal narcissist, whose fellow-feelings for the people he lived with were limited in the extreme” and that the diary “destroyed one final idol, and one he did much to create: that of the fieldworker with extraordinary empathy for the natives”.²⁸

The contrast and discrepancy between Malinowski’s final account and representation of fieldwork and revelations of his innermost feelings is illustrative and representative of the objectivist stance in much early fieldwork and ethnography, which foregrounds the research participants, backgrounds the self as researcher and prevents emotions from intruding in the research process.

According to Crotty (1998), most current ethnographic work is done from the position of **constructivism**. Constructivism opposes the realist (or Platonist) view that mathematical objects or truth exist independently of human procedures. The central idea of constructivism is that there is no passive way to obtain knowledge: people actively construct knowledge, the observer is always an active participant. The understanding is that we incorporate new information into what we already know, building on our own prior experiences, combined with reflection and social interaction, and creating our own understanding of ideas and concepts.

Constructivist theories about knowledge and learning recognize subjectivity and incorporate it in any knowledge-seeking activity. The degree to which subjectivity is drawn on, varies across approaches.²⁹ Nevertheless, they

²⁸Powdermaker (1967) critically nuances Geertz’ accusations and remarks that Malinowski used similar violent language about the “bloody English” and about many other people in his own society. Moreover, she refutes Geertz’ allegations on the ground that the word *nigger* in the translated diary simply does not exist in Polish; that the word in the original text means *blacks*. Agar (1996:101), who claims not to be surprised by the contents of Malinowski’s diary, sympathises with Malinowski and blames his violent outbursts on the strain of detached involvement. In his view, Malinowski was “distancing” – taking a psychic vacation from the intense involvement of living like a Trobriander. If he sometimes dipped a bit heavily into the involvement side, his secret revelations were a way of balancing the scale with some detachment.

²⁹Crotty (1998) regards constructionism as a broad umbrella for many forms of ethnography, including symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology and grounded theory approaches.

share the view that the process and the product of research depend on interaction between the researcher and the outside world. Constructivism sees subject and object as “partners in the generation of meaning” (Crotty, 1998:9). From a constructivist perspective, research is viewed as a collaboration between the researcher and his informants.

In other words, the assumption is that knowledge takes place exactly where Cartesian science and positivism do not recognize it: in the very relationship between object and subject, in the inter-subjective relationship.

Treating the observed as active and dynamic participants in the research process implies accepting that they may interfere and resist the investigation that is applied. In turn, it is recognized that the observer, the ethnographer’s self, is a consequential presence and thus an appropriate object of study (Emmerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). Or, put in Hymes’ words: “there is no way to avoid that the ethnographer [...] is a factor in the enquiry” (1996:13). Whereas claims of independence of the researcher in relation to knowledge pervaded early ethnographic research, the researcher’s view is now treated as an integral part of the meaning-making activity. The ethnographer is not merely viewed as an instrument of data collection, his active role in interpretation is recognized. Producing a credible account now requires greater revelation of Self: the constructionist stance allows for and promotes a self-conscious and critical study of the researcher’s own standpoints and assumptions. Research is becoming increasingly reflexive.

The emphasis on inter-subjective understanding, the recognition of the researcher’s and respondent’s interpretations interacting to create multiple forms of meaning, owes much to the philosophical ideas of phenomenology.

Phenomenology,³⁰ as a philosophical underpinning and a method of investigation has inspired and influenced ethnographic research to a vast degree. From the phenomenological come the idea of reflexivity and the

³⁰The above provides a very brief account of phenomenology with minimal recourse to its highly technical lexicon. The only aim is to illustrate the theoretical and methodological impact of phenomenological thinking on the discipline of ethnography. For in depth study of the origins and method of the phenomenological movement, I refer to Phenomenology’s seminal works, namely Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* (1995), and *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1970), Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1962), and Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962). An explicit and systematic account and synthesis of the phenomenological method, its key concepts, phases and successive steps is provided by Herbert Spiegelberg (1959) in *The Phenomenological Movement - A Historical Introduction*.

experience of inter-subjectivity. Phenomenology has changed and set the course for ethnography from a research method with empirical and positivist aspirations toward an , reflective and experience-based approach to human practices and behaviour. Like positivism, phenomenology has profound respect for what can be perceived and observed. The fundamental contribution of phenomenology to post-modern scientific research, however, is that it moves beyond the realm of sensory experience³¹ and emphasizes, incorporates and accepts the role of human consciousness in the process of knowledge gathering. Phenomenology seeks rigorous knowledge not of things-in-themselves but rather of the structures of consciousness and of things as they appear to consciousness, or, as Husserl says, "there is a distinction between the object itself and its appearance, its being-for-me" (Zahavi, 2001:38).

The fundamental phenomenological question is 'how is it possible to experience an external object as the external object that it is?' And it situates the very possibility of experiencing external objects as such and such an object in the active, directed life of consciousness. This reflective attentiveness to the intentional structure of human experience summarizes the phenomenological attitude. In the phenomenological view, humans interpret and experience the world in terms of meanings and actively construct³² an individual social reality. In short, central emphasis is on "the importance of primary subjectivity" (Verschuere, 1995-2002:404).

In spite of its primary emphasis on subjectivity, phenomenological thinking does not consider the experienced world as "a private world" but "one accessible to everyone". Phenomenology basically views the world as a world in common for all subjects:³³

³¹In fact, phenomenology was developed to question the assumptions of empiricism. An empirically based science – such as positivism – starts with a world of objects already there before us and then poses the question 'how can we know these objects?' Empiricism sees knowledge as the product of sensory perception; knowledge results from a kind of mapping or reflection of external objects, through our sensory organs, possibly aided by different observation instruments onto our brain, our mind. In the empirical view external objects are out there, always and already constituted, we perceive them and therefore we know them.

³²Maso (2001:144) asserts that phenomenological ethnography occupies a middle position between naturalism and constructivism, and states that unlike naturalists, phenomenologists do not assume finding an underlying, shared, cognitive order (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997:144) but rather, adopt the constructivist view that individuals differ in the way they see and perceive reality and that these differences lead to different constructions of reality.

³³This is especially apparent in Schutz' social phenomenology.

"It is, as Husserl says, experientially obvious that I and the other perceive the same thing, although my perceptions belong to me and the other's perceptions belong to the other. The world is immediately experienced as one and the same, although it appears to each experiencer in a particular way." (Zahavi, 2001:25)

From this flows the idea of the inter-subjective, or the awareness of *other conscious objects*.

Although constructivism and phenomenology call for a greater appreciation of subjectivity, most ethnographic research working from the "constructivist" (Crotty, 1998) stance still emphasizes participant and setting more than self. Researchers working from a stance of **subjectivism** (Crotty, 1998), on the other hand, foreground the Self.³⁴ Subjectivist scholars regard Self as central to knowledge generation, they believe that all knowledge is grounded in subjective experience and try to convey as much as possible about themselves. Subjectivists maintain that meaning is "imposed on the object by the subject" (Crotty, 1998:9). Like a blank motion picture screen, elements of the external world merely reflect back the meanings that individuals project onto them without altering them in any way.

1.2.5 From macro to micro, from structure to agency

A third philosophical/theoretical dimension has formed and informed the ethnographic approach. Alongside concerns over the nature of reality and knowledge, assumptions about the relationship between human beings and their environment have steered and directed ethnographic thinking and writing. Questions over whether human beings and their experiences are products of their environment, mechanistically/deterministically responsive to situations encountered in their external world, or whether they can be regarded as the creators of their environment, constitute another critical dimension in characterizing the ethnographic approach. Van de Ven and Astley (1981) distinguish between deterministic and voluntaristic assumptions about human nature, between the position that human action and institutions are "determined by exogenous forces or autonomously chosen and created by human beings" (Van de Ven & Astley, 1981:429).

³⁴The prototypical form of subjectivist research is auto-ethnography, in which researchers themselves become the focal point of study.

Opposing views of determinism and voluntarism are reflected in an almost ritualized tension between *structure* and *agency*. *Structure*, meaning a pre-programmed order or pattern, and *agency* standing for the ability of human individuals to take action. Much current debate³⁵ in anthropological/ethnographic theory³⁶ centres on competing paradigms of structure and agency and the question whether culture and human behaviour should be approached from a macrolevel or a microlevel of analysis. The agency/structure debate and the dichotomy between global and local levels of analysis has animated the recent works of a considerable range of ethnographers (Wilmsen, 1989; Farmer, 1992; Lave, 1988).

The macrolevel of concern is with social structure, rather than social conduct. Emphasis is on *Big Structures, Large Processes and Huge Comparisons* (Tilly, 1984), on the importance of the collective versus the individual, the global versus the local. Conventionally, much of sociology and the other social sciences view human interaction as a product of social forces. Microlevel approaches (Ethnomethodology, Symbolic Interactionism, Conversation Analysis) zoom in on the fine structure of situated actions of individual actors and argue that in moment-to-moment human action, larger processes and structures are revealed. Emphasis is on human agency and the view that, through action, the individual brings about social structure.³⁷

In the past century, anthropology/ethnography has increasingly turned macro.³⁸ Whereas "participant observation was being increasingly identified with microsociology in the United States, the opposite move was occurring within anthropology" (Burawoy, 1991:277). Expanding anticolonial struggles and increasing globalization forced anthropologists to come to terms with macro forces: "anthropologists could no longer pretend that their villages were isolated and timeless. The problem became even more acute when they left their villages and ventured into urban areas, where it was

³⁵Key theorists which have made a significant contribution to the debate are Karl Marx, Max Weber, James Coleman, Pierre Bourdieu, Clifford Geertz, Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault.

³⁶Theoretical conceptualizations of the structure/agency relationship have been central to the discipline of sociology. The structure/agency dualism constitutes a key sociological debate.

³⁷The distinction between macrolevel and microlevel studies can be reduced to opposing views on the constraining quality and the enabling quality of society.

³⁸In discussions over global and local levels of analysis, the ethnographic technique of participant observation has conventionally been criticized for being inherently particular and incapable of generalization as well as intrinsically micro and ahistorical. Burawoy (1991) describes how different ethnographic traditions have dealt with this critique in variable ways.

impossible to impose boundaries on face-to-face interaction" (Burawoy, 1991:277).

New ethnographic objects replaced the study of the exotic. Urban areas substituted for out-of-the-way places of the pioneers of the discipline. These new ethnographic objects, as well as the shifting terrain on which they emerged, pushed efforts to rework and retool the theoretical paradigms within which the understanding of social relations had been placed. In doing so, they raised a host of issues that cast traditional debates on structure and agency in a new light.

Recent ethnographic writings are characterized by increasing attempts at uncoupling the distinction between structure and agency, local and global, micro and macro. Burawoy's study of power and resistance in the metropolis (1991), which demonstrates the varied interplay between system and lifeworld, proves an excellent example. His description of the *Extended Case Method* argues for an understanding of the way people experience the deep structures of their society and advocates a rich, in-depth empirical account of how macro forces are practised and negotiated in a circumscribed highly context-specific site.

1.2.6 Conclusion

To conclude, traditions of ethnographic research are grounded in varying ontological assumptions about the nature of reality and epistemological beliefs concerning the creation of knowledge and meaning as well as differing perspectives on human action. They have steered and shaped the ethnographic paradigm as a unique "set of propositions that explain how the world is perceived; ... a world view, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world, telling researchers ... what is important, what is legitimate, what is reasonable" (Sarantakos, 1998:31).

The development of the ethnographic paradigm has been characterized by ongoing ontological and epistemological debates, between *realism* and *idealism*, *postivism* and *anti-postivism*, *structure* and *agency*. Ethnographers of the past decade have been confronted with ontological questions concerning whether the reality to be investigated is objective and external to the individual, imposing itself on individual consciousness from without or whether it is the product of individual cognition. Epistemological concerns over whether it is possible to identify and communicate knowledge as being

hard, real and tangible or whether it is subjective, based on experience and insight of a unique and essentially personal nature, are an important backdrop to theoretical and methodological discussions. Concerns over determinism versus voluntarism and dichotomies between global and local levels of analysis have permeated ethnographies of the past century.

Overall, it may be observed that the ontological movement of the ethnographic paradigm is away from *realism* and towards *idealism*. From an epistemological perspective, a similar tendency and evolution occurs: generally speaking, classical ethnography has nourished the objectivist end, whereas contemporary research tends to favour the subjectivist end.³⁹ Finally, attempts to fuse micro and macro levels of analysis have steered recent ethnographic writings away from the traditional structure/agency dualism.

1.3 To the core of ethnography

"Is there a core of ethnographic research that any approach, in spite of all the changes, has to have?"

Michael Agar⁴⁰

1.3.1 Introduction

Ethnography has changed and developed drastically with the (r)evolution from modern to post-modern theories of knowledge and reality, and its shifting focus from a quest for certainty, objectivity and universal truths to a profound acknowledgement of uncertainty and subjectivity.

In addition, ethnography has outgrown its original arena of practice in anthropology. An ever-widening range of researchers in various fields of human sciences have discovered and adapted ethnography to their own needs and concerns.

³⁹Preissle & Grant (2002:14) note that, in practice, many ethnographic and fieldwork studies are blends of objectivist, constructionist, and subjectivist approaches, and few researchers lie at the extremes of Crotty's continuum. Moreover, they add that a perspective is rarely static and that researchers tend to move back and forth along the continuum in each direction, either during a single study or over a career as a researcher.

⁴⁰See Agar, *The Professional Stranger* (1996).

Ethnography, then, appears remarkably adaptable but also “maddeningly ambiguous” (Wolcott, 1995:83) and complex.

Hence the need to turn to the core of ethnography and define the discipline in a way that extends beyond offhand and loose definitions or restricted methodological recommendations in terms of observer-present research or other ethnographic techniques.

What, then, are the ideas that constitute the basis of ethnographic thinking? Which are the key ideas and concepts that have informed the ethnographic tradition, in spite of radical changes from modern to post-modern views and in spite of its manifest diversity?

1.3.2 Tracing the historical roots of ethnography

“A crucial element in any discussion of ethnography should be its history, for inscribed in its techniques and patterns of operation are numerous traces of its intellectual origins and background. Ethnography has its origin in anthropology, not in linguistics or psychology. That means that the basic architecture of ethnography is one that already contains ontologies, methodologies and epistemologies that need to be situated within the larger tradition of anthropology and that do not necessarily fit the frameworks of other traditions.”

Jan Blommaert⁴¹

Ethnography began with the awareness of the existence of more than one culture. From as far back as the Greek myths, historians have documented the differences encountered among the people of different lands. They are the ancestors of modern ethnography. Under the wings of anthropology, ethnography developed as a way of gaining insight into the life experiences of people whose everyday reality was different from those living in Western developed societies. In a playfully patronizing tone, Agar speaks about “old-fashioned anthropology, which we know now means that an ethnographer – usually from America or Europe – lived in an isolated ‘third world’ community with the goal of learning how people talk, what they believe, and what they do all day” (Agar, 1996:30). Contemporary ethnography has long departed from the classic traditional anthropological “trip into an alien

⁴¹See Blommaert, 2001:3.

culture and an account of the ethnographer's struggle to make sense of it all" (Maxwell, 2002:10). "The conventions used to assess ethnographies are changing, even as ethnographies and ethnographers change" (Wolcott, 1995:264). New traditions and trends emerge and have revealed different framings, assumptions and research agendas.

Yet, a "basic architecture" (Blommaert, 2001:3) survives, exceeds and transcends the hustle and bustle of change. It is Franz Boas (1858-1942) and the Polish-English anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) who laid its foundation, and the ethnographic tradition as we know it today actually derives from them.⁴² Malinowski introduced the idea of involved fieldwork and formalized the method of *participant observation*. Although various anthropologists have contributed to the development of the method, the issue of participation and involvement as it was introduced by Malinowski and the tension and merger between outsider's and insider's perspectives remains a central feature of the ethnographic enterprise. Boas established *cultural relativism* as a key notion in anthropology. The emphasis on situatedness is a core characteristic of ethnography and owes much to Boasian thinking.

In short, involvement and relativism may be considered building blocks of the ethnographic approach. They are fundamentals which steer the dynamics of the discipline, engender questions, issues and debates, which, together, determine the shades and nuances of the ethnographic tradition and give shape to ethnography as a particular mode of constructing knowledge, as an epistemology.

In what follows, I will explore involvement and relativism as key concepts of the ethnographic paradigm. I will trace how they were established by the founding fathers of the discipline and how they developed and metamorphosed under the influence of post-modernism.

⁴²In fact, we talk about two different schools of thought/traditions. Boas represents the American school (American Cultural Anthropology), while Malinowski represents what has hitherto been called British Social Anthropology. This differentiation continued for several decades. For a detailed picture and history of anthropology and an exploration of the complicated trajectories of American Cultural Anthropology and British Social Anthropology, and how these schools of thought developed in relation or opposition to each other, see Macdonald, 2001.

1.3.3 Involvement

"- *To seek contact is to run the risk of getting involved.*
- *Who **risks** getting involved? I **want** to get involved."*

Leo Buscaglia⁴³

Involvement is the act of sharing in the activities of a group; involvement is participation and engagement; connection and inclusion.⁴⁴ Major epistemological and methodological debates evolve around precisely this aspect of the ethnographic enterprise. Pelto & Pelto state that much of the essence of the ethnographic profession "is based on the assumption that we must enter into close social interaction with the people in our research communities if we are to succeed in gathering significant information on their culture and social organization" (1973:269). The cultivation of personal relationships with local informants as a way of learning about a culture is a unique feature and principal characteristic of the ethnographic approach. Being "directly involved in community life, observing and talking with people as you learn from their view of reality" (Agar, 1996:163) constitutes the essence of ethnographic enquiry. Duranti (1997) aptly calls it "a building stone of anthropology's contribution to our understanding of human cultures" (1997:89).

The major principle and understanding that describing a culture involves establishing "relationships with people, participating with them in what they do, and observe what is going on" (Duranti, 1997:89) owes major credit to the work of Bronislaw Malinowski. Malinowski is often honoured as the founder, or at least the major developer of a style of fieldwork that involves intensive and close contact with the research population.⁴⁵

Malinowski was forced, with the outbreak of the First World War, to remain in close proximity with the natives of the Trobriand Islands of New Guinea.

⁴³Leo Buscaglia is author of books such as *Living, Loving and Learning* (1982) and professor at the University of Southern California.

⁴⁴<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/involvement>

⁴⁵The emphasis on the importance of studying cultures within the context of their social systems and of living among them and identifying with them is by no means Malinowski's sole prerogative. Pelto & Pelto (1973) mention Joseph-Marie Degérando's *Considerations on the Various Methods to Follow in the Observation of Savage Peoples* (1800) as the first field guide for ethnographers. The young French philosopher argues that the first means to the proper knowledge of the Savages, is to become after a fashion like one of them (1800/1969:70).

While living literally in the middle of the village of Omarakana next to the chief's compound for two years, he kept very detailed daily notebooks. The enforced immersion in the daily life of the islanders led to the seminal work *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and to his famous advice on ethnographic method in the opening chapter (1922:1-25):

"The final goal of which an anthropologist should never lose sight is to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of this world." (Malinowski, 1922:25)

The idea of going out among the *natives* to do fieldwork was a truly revolutionary idea at the time. With the exception of Morgan's⁴⁶ study of the Iroquois, not a single anthropologist conducted field studies till the end of the nineteenth century. Instead of carrying out fieldwork, anthropologists used to study cultures from the comfort of their offices, relying upon missionaries and other travelers to send them details of what was happening all around the world. Malinowski took the process away from what has been commonly called *armchair anthropology* one step further. As aptly reflected in the title of the film *Bronislaw Malinowski: Off the Verandah*,⁴⁷ Malinowski advised fieldworkers to get out of their verandah chairs, thus developing the idea of the *participant observer* who would live among the people he was studying:⁴⁸

"The anthropologist must relinquish his comfortable position in the long chair on the verandah of the missionary compound, Government station, or planter's bungalow, where, armed with pencil and notebook and at times with a whisky and soda, he has been accustomed to collect statements from informants, write down stories, and fill out sheets of paper with savage texts. He must go out into the villages, and see the natives at work in gardens, on the beach, in the jungle; he must sail with them to distant sandbanks and to foreign tribes, and observe them in fishing, trading, and ceremonial overseas expeditions. Information must come to him full-flavored

⁴⁶Lewis Henry Morgan was a lawyer living in Rochester, New York, who, from about 1840 to 1850, did fieldwork among the Tonawanda Seneca. In 1851 Morgan published his famous two-volume ethnography *League of the Iroquois*, perhaps the first scientific account of an Indian society, emphasizing the similarity of their democratic principles with those of the U.S.

⁴⁷Booker, Sheriden (1985). Bronislaw Malinowski: *Off the Verandah*. 52 minutes, colour film. Fourth in the series, *Strangers Abroad: Pioneers of Social Anthropology*. Written and presented by Bruce Dakowski. Produced and directed by Andre Singer.

⁴⁸Although he was certainly not the first to use the method, Malinowski formalized participant observation as a basis for writing ethnography.

from his own observations of native life, and not be squeezed out of reluctant informants as a trickle of talk [...] Open-air anthropology, as opposed to hearsay note-taking, is hard work, but it is also great fun." (Malinowski, 1926, 1954:146–147)

From its inception, *participant observation* was laden with critical epistemological issues.

First, the Malinowskian "cult of fieldwork as the gate to truth" (Jarvie, 1967:vi) reveals an essentially positivist conviction to take seriously only that which can be observed. The move away from speculative theories to intensive, thorough and accurate fieldwork fundamentally resides in a positivist belief and attempt at presenting the truth without distortion. In addition, living the natives' way of life consists of a gesture of human respect and interest in the diversities of man's attempts to organize his social life. Participant observation is based on the underlying belief that natives are human beings, not merely specimens, and must be treated properly as such. To Malinowski, there is no difference, only diversity:

"Malinowski said, 'All men are equal but diverse and all diversities are equal.' And this is the striking feature of Malinowski's theory that led to his programme of fieldwork: the programme to collect and catalogue the diversity." (Jarvie, 1967:12)

The method of participant observation challenged traditional anthropological research methods and drew British Anthropology out of "sterile antiquarianism" (Goldschmidt, 1967). Malinowskian fieldwork introduced the beginning of the abolition of the "gap between library and life" (Grimshaw & Hart, 1993:15).

The new standard of participant observation signalled the beginning of the modern era in anthropological research. "Whether it was fully innovatory or not, participant observation, like the use, say, of concrete and steel in architecture, was regarded as opening up dramatic new possibilities in ways of relating to its subject matter" (Macdonald, 2001:72).⁴⁹ Malinowski's "field

⁴⁹Macdonald quotes Ardener's (1989:200) observation that the beginning of modern approaches "in most areas of thought is marked by a perceived change of technique, however trivial". See also Gluckman (1967), who states that "a new technique of observation may virtually create a new discipline, as Leeuwenhoek's improvements of the microscope, and later creation of radio-telescopes did" (Gluckman, 1967:xii, cited in Pelto & Pelto, 1973:243).

methodology of extensive immersion in the daily lives of native communities produces a new level of information, much more elaborated and complex than had been typical of earlier ethnographic work" (Pelto & Pelto, 1973:243).

Jarvie (1967) describes how the idea of fieldwork or direct observation caused a revolution in the history of anthropology and designates Malinowski as the *prime mover* of the revolution. With colourful allusions to a Freudian father-killing Jarvie depicts how Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown reacted against institutionalized academic social anthropology and against Frazer, who is considered to be its founding father.

"B. Malinowski and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown tried to overthrow the influence of clever dons like Frazer, who spent their time concocting theories in comfortable armchairs in studies in Oxford and Cambridge. The weapon the sons used for the assassination was the accusation that their father had never directly observed all the savage customs he wrote so much about. They borrowed this weapon from other sons who had pioneered it [...] and utilized it in their palace revolution. And a very successful palace revolution it was; for quite a long time now the Presidents of the Royal Anthropological Institute and most of the Professors of Anthropology in Great Britain have been social (rather than physical anthropologists). This success was attributed to the weapon, the demand for direct observation, which weapon Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown treated with religious awe, rapidly raising it into a totem, worship of which was a rite de passage for entry to the club of social anthropology." (Jarvie, 1967: 2-3)

So, in fact, "Malinowski's was the first to make anthropology an observational science" (Powdermaker, 1967).

With the establishment of a paradigm of objective participant observation, of *scientific ethnography*, as he has called it, Malinowski seems to reconcile the irreconcilable. Merging the subjective/experiential and the objective/observational, the method of participant observation, as it was introduced by Malinowski during his long-term stay among the Trobriand Islanders, fuses two distinct, apparently contradictory modes of knowing. In so doing, Malinowski set a double standard which in fact contains an inherent dilemma, an intrinsic duality and tension. In the conventional research paradigm – what Kuhn has called *normal science* – the stance of the investigator is that of a separate, distanced, objective observer who

attempts to be as uninvolved as possible with the research participants and with what is being studied, in an effort to eliminate partiality and bias. Subject matter, evidence and conclusions are limited to what can be observed *from the outside*.

The methodological norm of fieldwork, as advocated by Malinowski insists on and allows for the researcher to move *inside*, grasp the research subjects' view of reality and become intimately involved in the research effort. At the same time, however, a stance of objective detachment is craved for.

Duranti (1997) lists the following two apparently contradictory qualities of ethnography:

"(i) an ability to step back and distance oneself from one's own immediate, culturally biased reactions so as to achieve an acceptable degree of 'objectivity' and (ii) the propensity to achieve sufficient identification with or empathy for the members of the group in order to provide an insider's perspective." (Duranti, 1997:85)

James Clifford speaks of "the discipline's impossible attempt to fuse objective and subjective practices" (1986:109). Pelto & Pelto point to a dynamic conflict which "involves the seeming contradictions between the necessity for humanistic, empathic 'understanding' of the way of life of a people, which is generated in part through the fieldwork process itself, and the equally important matter of developing scientifically objective, verifiable modes of observation" (1973:245). Mary Louis Pratt states that the norm of participant observation introduces a contradiction within the discipline between personal and scientific authority:

"Fieldwork produces a kind of authority that is anchored to a large extent in subjective, sensuous experience. One experiences the indigenous environment and lifeways for oneself, sees with one's own eyes, even plays some roles, albeit contrived ones, in the daily life of the community. But the professional text to result from such an encounter is supposed to conform to the norms of a scientific discourse whose authority resides in the absolute effacement of the speaking and experiencing subject." (Pratt, 1986:32)

This inherent dilemma has been "a source of unending debate for anthropologists and their critics" (Pelto & Pelto, 1973:245). Much of

ethnographic writing deals with the perceived problematic link between personal experience and scientific representation and, linked to that, the difficulty of finding the delicate balance and blending of the role of participant and insider, learning the experiential world from within and the role of observer and outsider, analysing it from without.^{50 51}

In the autobiographical work *Stranger and Friend* (1966), for instance, Hortense Powdermaker comments on the dual role of the fieldworker:

"I enjoyed those brief moments of feeling at one with the woman dancers at the initiation rites and although I was fairly involved in this Stone-Age society, I never fooled myself that I had 'gone-native', I participated rather freely, but remained an anthropologist." (Powdermaker, 1966:115, cited in Pelto & Pelto, 1973:248)

Although revolutionary and critical during the first half of the twentieth century, supposedly objective Malinowskian *scientific ethnography* suffers

⁵⁰The contrast between the two conflicting poles of participant and observer, of insider and outsider, the dual role of the ethnographer as a friend or stranger, stepping in and out of society (Powdermaker, 1966) is traditionally rendered in terms of the contrast between the emic perspective, Malinowski's native's point of view, and the etic perspective, the outsider's stance. Conventionally, methodological guidelines follow the Malinowskian advice and argue for a fusion of both perspectives. Keesing emphasizes that an anthropologist should have both "inside" and "outside" views (Keesing, 1991:143). Lett (1990:131) states that the goal of anthropological research is to obtain both emic and etic knowledge.

⁵¹The nature and extent of participation vary and kinds of participation have been classified in different ways. Gold (1958) set up a typology of levels of involvement in observation. He identified four modes, four participant observation roles: complete participant, the participant-as-observer, the observer-as-participant, and the complete observer. Researchers who take a complete participant role attempt at engaging fully in the activities of the group or organization under investigation. Researchers employing this role do not reveal their research intentions to those they study (e.g. a researcher investigating a racist or fascist organization). At the other extreme, the role of complete observer requires no participation in social events: the researcher is uninvolved and detached, and merely, passively records behaviour at a distance (e.g. a researcher sitting in a classroom, making observations of pupils and their teacher). The researcher eavesdrops from some position where he is unnoticed by his informants. Most fieldworkers find themselves along a continuum of roles, primarily between the middle two, only occasionally slipping into one of the complete role positions (Preissle & Grant, 2002). Gold's second position, participant as observer characterizes an overt (open) role, whereby researchers make their presence and intentions known to the group. The researcher often becomes a *fan* or supporter, though this does not mean attempting to act as one of the group – for instance, in studying prostitution, it does not entail being a prostitute. In the role of observer as participant, the researcher moves away from the idea of participation. This usually involves one-visit interviews, and calls for relatively more formal observation (e.g. ownership and structure of a firm, rather than its internal practices and norms) than either informal observation or participation. Here, there is a possibility of misunderstanding as it is more of an encounter between strangers that does not utilize the strengths of time in the field, thus unable to understand the rules, roles and relationships.

severe challenges from post-modern critique. Concerns over post-colonial hegemony⁵² alongside worries about assuming authority in representing the voice of others trigger a crisis in ethnographic thinking and shed new light on the concept of *participant observation*.⁵³ The methodological apparatus of the *golden age* suffered severe challenges and particularly in the United States, the late 1960s called for reform of the discipline. Ethnographic writing of the following decade repeatedly accused anthropology of imperialism (Gough, 1968; Asad, 1973), of its active role in sustaining, even formulating British colonial policy.⁵⁴ "General critical consensus had it that anthropologists would thus have to pursue a fourfold 'examen de conscience'. Politically, they needed to interrogate the role which anthropology had played and continued to play, in sustaining and reinforcing domination, whether by providing 'useful information' to colonizing powers, lending legitimacy to inherently conservative and hierarchical models of social and cultural life" (Faubian, 2001:46).

Ethnographic writing of this period voices a collective worry over the role of the researcher in visiting foreign places and making claims of authority. The scientific observers' objectification, as it had been advocated by Malinowski, was criticized as placing the actors in a framework not of their own making but one produced by the observer (Levinson & Ember, 1996). Critical voices asked whether what we know of the 'other', i.e. the host culture, is really a

⁵²Part of the success of the fledgling discipline in becoming institutionally established was a continuing popular and academic thirst for accounts of *others*, which were, among other things, grist to the mill of both triumphant and nostalgic renditions of the allegory of 'Western' or 'European' 'civilization' (MacDonald, 2001; MacClancy, 1996). In spite of its egalitarian inspirations, the new anthropology reproduced the conventional distinction between The West and The Rest, between 'primitive' and 'civilized' societies.

⁵³Faubian (2001:39) distinguishes between three distinct methodological phases in the development of cultural anthropology, three currents of methodological formation and reformation. The first of these he calls the constitutive current. It begins with the work of Franz Boas and his students and culminates with Lévi-Strauss and the work of American cognitivists such as Charles Frake, Harold Conklin, Ward Goodenough and Stephen Tyler. The second critical current starts more or less with the publication of *Reinventing Anthropology* (Hymes, 1972) and gathers strength with the publications of *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (Asad, 1973), *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (Reiter, 1975), *Orientalism* (Said, 1978), *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus, 1986) and *Women Writing Culture* (Behar & Gordon, 1995). The experimental current, then, commences with the reflexive turn in the 1970s and includes the works of Rabinow (1977), Stocking (1983) and Marcus & Fisher (1986).

⁵⁴Bob Scholte (1974) lists the following references that support this claim: Talal Asad (ed.), *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (1973); Jaius Banaji, *The Crisis of British Anthropology* (1970); Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow (eds.), *The Africa That Never Was* (1970); Gerhard Leclerc, *Anthropologie et Colonialisme* (1972); and finally Jack Stauder, *The 'Relevance' of Anthropology Under Imperialism* (1972).

statement of our own subjective position (Said, 1978). They accused traditional ethnographic methodology and epistemology of setting up a bipolar construction between insiderness and outsidersness with a privileged outsider looking in. The view of the researcher as a larger-than-life subject that is able to absorb and transmit the richness of a whole culture, as a *deus ex machina*, an outsider who intervenes and solves mysteries and problems that would otherwise have remained unsolved, was refuted.

Contributors of the programmatic *Reinventing Anthropology* (1972) accused their predecessors of treating informants and interlocutors *as specimens or cases, scientific objects*. Bob Scholte, for instance, poses a positive methodological reform and urges for an anthropology which no longer presents fieldwork as an encounter between subject and object, but instead presents it as an encounter between one inter-subjective order and another. This perspective has changed the object of anthropological study dramatically, from the investigation and description of a *culture* to an understanding of the dynamic encounter between divergent intersubjectivities. The construction of knowledge now resides in the interrelationship between the subjectivities of both researcher and participants.

The implication of this epistemological and methodological innovation is the conviction that full anthropological understanding needs to be grounded as much in self-analysis as in the analysis of the other. This signals the beginning of the reflexive turn in ethnography and a shift away from treating ethnography and participant observation as an instrument, a method, a tool, a data-collection technique, to treating it as a continuous process of reflection and alteration of the focus of observations in accordance with analytical developments.

Increasing disciplinary critique gave way to further experiments in renovation and a confluence of methodological innovations. Within the "experimental current" (Faubian, 2001), participant observation has a thoroughgoing translation into hermeneutical enquiry. From a Hegelian perspective, the process is defined by a continual play of part and whole whereby parts inform and challenge the whole and vice versa. Fieldwork is presented as a series of encounters between subjectivities in contest, the transcendence of which demands the researcher's continuous reassessment

of place, of self, of other, and of the structural background which frames and at least in part, determines them.⁵⁵

To conclude, Malinowski's ideas have been central to ethnography's methodological tradition and have been of major influence to the development of ethnography as "a program of scientific description and interpretation" (Blommaert, 2001:2). First and foremost, Malinowski's "was the first to make anthropology an observational science" (Powdermaker, 1967). The idea of going out amongst 'the natives' to do fieldwork challenged traditional anthropological research methods and constitutes a revolutionary innovation within the discipline. Next, Malinowski's advice to *grasp the native's point of view* set the norm for a field of enquiry which fundamentally relies on the assumption that immersion, intimate familiarity and empathic participation in the human action that one studies are a necessary requirement for grasping, understanding and eventually portraying the seeings, feelings and actings of social actors. In setting this double standard, Malinowski has created firm ground for participant observation, not merely as a methodological move, but as an epistemological requirement, a particular way of knowing and understanding human conduct, relying on a fusion of experiential and observational modes of knowing.

Malinowski's methodological advice was seriously questioned by post-modernist critique. The epistemological and ontological frame of reference to which it was inextricably linked suffered severe challenges. Critical voices cast new light on the method of participant observation and paved the way for a new methodology highlighting a shared subjective experience with one's subjects and the construction of knowledge through mutual participation. The clear delineation between subject and object of modernist theories made way for a post-modernist emphasis on the relational quality and the dynamic interconnectedness of object and subject. Participant observation became a key to an understanding not only of the Other, but also of the Self, and of the Self through the Other and the Other through the Self.

⁵⁵Paul Rabinow's *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (1977) may be considered one of the pioneer texts of the experimental current. Contrary to Hegel, Rabinow envisions no final synthesis. Fieldwork cannot overcome inter-subjective difference. Fieldwork can only consist of the reflexive recognition of a partial fusion of horizons (see Faubian, 2001).

1.3.4 Relativism

"Each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice."

Montaigne⁵⁶

All humans and their societies are to some extent ethnocentric and have the tendency to view their own culture as the best and to judge the behaviour and beliefs of people in other societies by their own standards (Kottak, 1991). The idea that one should try to evaluate and understand another culture on its own terms and relative to its own values and beliefs is fundamental to the understanding of the anthropological/ethnographic frame of mind. Anthropology has forced the world to be more relativistic in how it looks at cultural differences and *cultural relativism* may well be called the hallmark of the discipline. It was Franz Boas who established *cultural relativism*⁵⁷ as a key methodological concept in anthropology. His article *The limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology* (1896) was the first exposition of *cultural relativism*, which, at the time, was highly controversial, opposing ethnocentrism and racial determinism.

The reasoning behind the idea of *cultural relativism* comes from two distinct sources. First, Boas revolted against the comparative method and ideas of social evolutionism, which state that human societies have evolved from small and simple affairs to large and complex ones. In reaction to this, Boas argued that each culture should be evaluated and understood on its own terms, not in relation to some universal standard. The main thrust of his argument is that, although different from one another, all cultures are of equal value. There are no inherently superior social cultures. Each society/culture is a unique constellation of cultural practices. Second, the idea of *cultural relativism* rejected value judgements and resulted from a desire to study culture from an objective value perspective, i.e. non-judgemental and without evaluative considerations.

Boas' student Alfred Kroeber described the rise and impact of the relativist perspective as follows:

⁵⁶See Montaigne, 1580,1943:85-86 cited in Geertz, 2000:45.

⁵⁷Boas himself did not use the term *cultural relativism*. The term became common among anthropologists after Boas' death in 1942.

"Now while some of the interest in anthropology in its earlier stages was in the exotic and the out-of-the-way, yet even this antiquarian motivation ultimately contributed to a broader result. Anthropologists became aware of the diversity of culture. They began to see the tremendous range of its variations. From that, they commenced to envisage it as a totality, as no historian of one period or of a single people was likely to do, nor any analyst of his own type of civilization alone. They became aware of culture as a 'universe', or vast field in which we of today and our own civilization occupy only one place of many. The result was a widening of a fundamental point of view, a departure from unconscious ethnocentricity toward relativity. This shift from naive self-centeredness in one's own time and spot to a broader view based on objective comparison, is somewhat like the change from the original geocentric assumption of astronomy to the Copernican interpretation of the solar system and the subsequent still greater widening to a universe of galaxies." (Kroeber, 1923:11)

Summarizing, *cultural relativism* undermines the notion of a common human nature. Moreover, it reveals the limitations and cultural conditioning of the Western mentality, thereby destabilizing assumptions that its observations are natural and its concepts universal. It refuses to accept the "conventional perception of homogenization toward a dominant Western model" and salvages "distinct cultural forms of life from a process of apparent global Westernization" (Marcus & Fisher, 1986:1).⁵⁸

To escape the unconscious bonds of their own culture and the pitfalls of ethnocentrism, Boas and his students, like Malinowski and his followers, advocated living with people of another culture for an extended period of time, so that they could learn the local language, acquire the categories and standards of the indigenous people and become 'enculturated'.

As a method and concept, *cultural relativism* became a widely popular and central tool for cultural understanding in American cultural anthropology. In the post-World War II era, however, the validity and utility of the notion was increasingly challenged and criticized. *Cultural relativism* came under attack, from opposing sides and for opposing reasons.

⁵⁸ Twentieth-century social and cultural anthropology has promised its still largely Western readership enlightenment on two fronts. The one has been the salvaging of distinct cultural forms of life from a process of apparent global Westernization. With both its romantic appeal and its scientific intentions, anthropology has stood for the refusal to accept this conventional perception of homogenization toward a dominant Western model." (Marcus & Fisher, 1986:1)

Strongly influenced by the process of decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s and the break-up of the British and French colonial empires, anthropologists became especially attentive to relations of domination and subjugation that link Western and non-Western societies and began to criticize the paradoxical confirmation of Western hegemony enacted under the aegis of *cultural relativism*.

More recently, post-modern ethnographic writing is critiqued for its tendency towards radical relativism and the despair of knowledge itself. A common charge against post-modernism is that they fall into an abyss of relativism or nihilism (Jarvie, 1983).⁵⁹ Geertz' famous lecture before the American Anthropological Association in 1984 aptly illustrates and summarizes contemporary polemics between *relativists* and *anti-relativists*: *Anti Anti-Relativism*⁶⁰ is a spirited defence of cultural relativism in which he ridicules and mocks the critique of relativism advanced by fellow anthropologists:

"What the relativists, so-called, want us to worry about is provincialism - the danger that our perceptions will be dulled, our intellects constricted, and our sympathies narrowed by the overlearned and overvalued acceptances of our own society. What the anti-relativists, self-declared, want us to worry about, and worry about and worry about, as though our very souls depended on it, is a kind of spiritual entropy, a heat death of the mind, in which everything is as significant, thus as insignificant, as everything else: anything goes, to each his own, you pays your money and you takes your choice, I know what

⁵⁹I.C. Jarvie remarks "Relativism has these objectionable consequences: namely, that by limiting critical assessment of human works it disarms us, dehumanises us, leaves us unable to enter into communicative interaction; that is to say, unable to criticize cross-culturally, cross-subculturally; ultimately, relativism leaves no room for criticism at all...[B]ehind relativism nihilism looms." (Jarvie, 1983: 45-46, cited in Geertz, 2000:48)

⁶⁰The essay, entitled *Anti Anti-relativism*, originally written in 1983, was reprinted in Geertz' latest collection of essays *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics*. See Geertz, 2000:42-67. Geertz uses the title *Anti Anti-Relativism* because he claims he does not want to give the topic a positive endorsement. He says that the double negative is not the equivalent of a positive in this case. He illustrates this with the example of those liberals who were opposed to McCarthyism in the 1950s. They were "anti anti-Communists" but were not necessarily Communists themselves. While this is a plausible point in the politics of the Cold War, Geertz' preference for the double negative is irrelevant since the conclusion of his essay endorses the central position to which relativism is committed: that principles of morality and knowledge are always tied to particular cultures, and that there can never be any morality or knowledge that is trans-cultural or beyond culture." (Windschuttle, 2002:10)

I like, not in the south, *tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner.*" (Geertz, 2000:46)

Criticized and celebrated at different turns, *cultural relativism* has never vanished from ethnographic thinking. Relativism as a mode of inquiry about communication in and between cultures remains the essence of contemporary ethnographic research. Regardless of the fact that his objectivist aspirations are in sharp contrast with the sometimes extreme relativism of post-modern ethnographies, the core of Boas' ideas has survived in much of contemporary ethnographic research, where it is translated in an eagerness to embrace the legitimacy of multiple interpretations and a willingness to accept that there are culturally and socially situated limits to what one can assert.

1.3.5 Conclusion

In the wake of the adoption early in the twentieth century of ethnographic fieldwork and *participant observation* as a methodological standard, came an implicit recognition of the cultural relativity of knowledge, that what counts as *known* varies from culture to culture. Anthropologists would advocate the idea that "knowledge is among the most culturally relative phenomena, created, communicated and reproduced locally and with a character heavily influenced by local practice" (Hakken, 2001:6). Under "the particularist doctrine" of *cultural relativism* it was deemed inappropriate "to judge a knowledge claim generated in one culture by justificatory criteria from another. Knowledge claims could be legitimately redeemed only in their own cultural context" (Hakken, 2001:7).

Virtually all anthropologists today subscribe to the epistemological and methodological principles of Malinowski and Boas and his students in their research. "Twentieth century anthropology [...] has taken the contextualization of knowledge as one of its epistemological foundations" (Strathern 1999, cited in Hakken, 2001:6). Ideas of humanism and relativism, respect for the diversity and complexity of human life, tolerance and concern for the concrete particular and local aspects of living are a key characteristic of the ethnographic approach and guide the work of ethnographers until this day.

1.4 Conclusion

Ethnography has a long-standing history and tradition. It is informed by decades of experience and critical thought. Ethnographic thinking of the present day is the fruit of a continuous history of ethnographic reports which goes back centuries, in fact, to the ancient Mediterranean world. Surely, "ethnography is not new to the world" (Hymes, 1996:3).

The challenges of a changing society and the influence of post-modern theories have induced alternative research questions. New traditions and trends have emerged and have revealed different framings, assumptions and research agendas.

Contemporary ethnography has far outgrown its traditional arena of practice in anthropology. It has achieved centrality and has become pervasive across a wide spectrum of disciplines. An ever-expanding range of researchers in various fields of the human sciences have discovered ethnography.⁶¹

Ethnography, then, seems remarkably adaptable. It has grown and developed under a great variety of conditions and thrives in many fields of human science. Still, it would be wrong to consider it "something already complete, ready to be inserted as a packaged unit" (Hymes, 1996:4) in the practices and purposes of research traditions whose conceptions of knowledge and reality are widely different. Ethnography has distinct epistemological, ontological and methodological identity of its own. It is entitled to the status of paradigm, a unique "set of propositions that explain how the world is perceived; [...] a world view, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world, telling researchers [...] what is important, what is legitimate, what is reasonable" (Sarantakos, 1998:31).

Along its historical trajectory, ethnography has absorbed and integrated a multiplicity of theoretical and philosophical perspectives which have informed its epistemological and ontological underpinnings. Ethnography of this day is the outcome of passionate debates of generations of ethnographers about the nature of reality, the creation of knowledge and

⁶¹An extract from *Manifesto for Ethnography* may serve to illustrate this point: "The aim of Ethnography is to be(come) of interest across the board of the social sciences and the humanities, especially to: sociology in all of its branches, anthropology, history and human geography, linguistics, education and pedagogy, the arts, health studies, media and cultural studies." (Willis & Trondman, 2000:7)

meaning as well as differing perspectives on human action. The tense and tangled relationship between the positivist and the interpretivist, between the objective and the subjective, between fact and value, reality and belief, the universal and the particular has kept its epistemology in motion and has endowed it with a peculiar and unique dynamic: the history and development of ethnography is one of tension; and this is where it ties in with Kuhn's perspective on science.

In the tradition of its founders, to commit oneself to ethnography basically meant two things.

First, there was the notion of systematic fieldwork, which separated followers of Malinowski and Boas from the armchair speculators they despised. The introduction of fieldwork was more than a methodological move, it was an epistemological requirement. Participant observation, as it was introduced by Malinowski, is essentially a mode of knowing. Malinowskian fieldwork was driven by the urge to acquire "accurate knowledge of the meanings of behaviours and institutions to those who participate in them" (Hymes, 1996:8). Culture should be understood and evaluated according to the view of life or mental outlook of the people belonging to that particular culture. If people learn their cultures in large part through observation, imitation and participation, ethnographers should do likewise. It is at the heart of ethnographic epistemology and methodology to learn cultural practices in the same manner as members of a culture acquire them. Knowledge comes from participation and observation. Ever since Malinowski and Boas, ethnography has joined experiential (both of the researcher and the researched) and observational modes of knowing in a unique methodological constellation.

Second, the notion of fieldwork is rooted in ideas of humanism and relativism. Respect for the diversity and complexity of human life, tolerance and concern for the concrete, particular and local aspects of living guided the work of early ethnographers. According to the principles of cultural relativism, each culture was examined on its own terms. Each cultural entity was seen as an integrated whole with its own conceptual paradigm. Each culture and society had its own integrity, its own system of values, and its own web of customs.

In the era of post-modernism and its emphasis on the subjective and the reflexive, the key principles of ethnographic research have become

increasingly subject to re-interpretation and re-creation. The awareness and critique that the observed are placed in a framework not of their own making but one produced by the observer, have altered and expanded the core project of its pioneers. Contemporary ethnography insists on cultural analysis and interpretation from the perspective of those who participate in it, including the researcher. The researcher's view is treated as an integral part of the meaning-making activity. Emphasis is on "the always already relationship" between observer and observed, and a closing of the distance between them through "the foregrounded practice of reflexivity" (Marcus, 1993:8).

An awareness that "life is always more complex than any explanation of meaning can reveal" (Van Manen, 1990:19, cited in Maso, 2001:141) pervades contemporary ethnographic thinking and writing and endows it with a unique dynamic, which is one of flexibility and open-endedness. Initial questions may change in the course of the research, perceptions of the observer, observed and the reader are systematically integrated and reflected upon.

The complexity and openness of its research design, then, resonates the challenges of post-modern society: ethnography "responds to the emergent, fragile and reflexive character of modern life" (Manning, 1995:247). If ethnography has become pervasive across a wide range of disciplines, it is precisely on account of its ability to give an adequate and satisfying response to the "peculiarly dynamic" and "reflexive character of modern social life" (Giddens, 1991:16).

To conclude, contemporary epistemological and ontological thinking centres around the recognition of complex and diverse realities and multiple ways of knowing. This aspect of its epistemology not only gives it firm theoretical and ideological ground, it also responds to the challenges of an increasingly complex and reflexive society and allows for cross-fertilization over a wide spectrum of disciplines, other than the one in which it has its roots, i.e. anthropology.

Chapter 2

2. Entering the field

"This is not the pre-play before the real act."

Michael Burawoy⁶²

2.1 Introduction

In an inspiring paper on an unusual student seminar, Michael Burawoy states that the most difficult part of the ethnographic enterprise is to make the data sound abnormal, sound surprising. "One has to make the reader say, 'Wow! That's interesting, I wonder why?'" (Burawoy, 1991:294).

In the months of April, May and June 2000, I observed 9 weekly gatherings of Heads of Section at the British Embassy in Brussels and I interviewed the people who attended the meetings during the period of observation. The length of the interviews varied between a minimum of 14 minutes and a maximum of 36 minutes. Each participant was interviewed once and, in all, 17 ethnographic interviews were recorded and transcribed.

These are the data. They hardly sound surprising. They sound like standard, conventional ethnographic procedure. Maybe I should drag in some suspense?

Memento, a film by Christopher Nolan, tells the complex and intriguing story of Leonard, a man struck with amnesia, who, in the opening scene, kills a man. From then on the film advances backwards from scene to scene, retracing the steps that have led to the crucial climax. The backward narrative, with two storylines being told in opposite directions, is not only brilliant, the suspense is excruciating. Every new scene obliges the viewer to inspect his own memory and logic in to understand what is happening on-screen and the viewer is just as in the dark as poor Leonard, who relies on Polaroids, a notepad and cryptic clues he has tattooed all over his body.

Suppose I told my story end-first. Imagine I unveiled the outcome of three months of fieldwork in an embassy community right at the beginning and started with the conclusion that meetings are ritual performances where institutional norms are acted and enacted upon. Would you be intrigued?

⁶²See Burawoy, 1994:3.

Maybe. Maybe not. I suppose there is more mystery to a murder than to a meeting.

But then, the key to *Memento's* mystery lies not so much in the revelation of its crucial climax, but in the meticulous, step-by-step reconstruction and retrieval of the past in the light of the present.

And that is what I intend to do. Between my ideals and expectations at the moment of initial entry and writing stage of this ethnographic enterprise lies a labyrinth of disconnection. This thesis maps my struggle to make sense of it, carefully deconstructing and reconstructing past and present realities and hoping to fascinate the reader in terms of where the mystery is going.

Not wishing to disrupt the conventional laws of narrative, I will simply begin at the beginning, sometimes tracking backward, sometimes forward. This chapter presents an account of the early phase⁶³ of fieldwork. Experiences around entry provide materials of the utmost importance.⁶⁴ As Goffman said, "the first day you'll see more than you'll ever see again" (1989:130).

The meaning of these experiences around entry has become apparent only later in the field research. It was not until long after I had finished fieldwork, when I was back in my office transcribing and analysing data, that the weight and impact of the initial moments of entry gradually dawned on me. What follows is a scrupulous deconstruction and reconstruction of these first *momento's*. Like Leonard, I merely rely on loosely connected sources: field notes which were hastily scribbled on the train back from Brussels, a copy of an e-mail, a yellowed fax paper with names and ranks of staff members, a tentative sketch of the meeting room, a range of documents traced on the Internet.

Which values were at work at the moment of entry? What were the preconceptions that I brought to the encounter? What were the assumptions and the interests of those that I was about to study? What is the relationship between them? These are the questions this chapter addresses, questions driven by a fundamental ethnographic urge to uncover taken-for-granted practices.

⁶³Goffman (1989:16) talks about two major phases in conducting fieldwork: that of getting into place and that of exploiting place once you get into it.

⁶⁴See also Burawoy, 1994.

Part of the challenge of deconstruction resides in the untangling of entwined perspectives. This chapter seeks to understand participants' views as well as closely monitor and evaluate my personal perspective and uncover the interconnectedness between them.

The first part of this chapter will examine the participants' perspectives toward the event of my coming. It will weigh their perceptions of my presence and attempt at understanding the expectations, anxiety and resistance surrounding my arrival. Relying both on significant cues in an e-mail message announcing my coming and on detailed analysis of the opening minutes of the first Tuesday meeting, it will empirically identify the frames that were both unconsciously adopted and consciously constructed⁶⁵ in the course of initial instances of interaction. The participants' frames will be explored as unconsciously used conceptual scaffolds reflecting hidden and taken-for-granted practices of diplomatic culture. Taking into account that my informants are diplomats, professional symbol handlers with a high degree of self-reflexivity (König, 2000), it will be investigated how frames were consciously adopted and manufactured in order to enable participants to enact the role expected from them within the social reality of their community. Analysis will furthermore uncover to what extent perceptions have been reliant on the scenario I had scripted for them, that is, to what extent frames were generated and triggered by criteria and values imposed on them from without rather than within.

The second part of this chapter will explore my preconceptions prior to entry and evaluate how they were affected by community cultural understandings and values. It will critically review the research interests and methodological assumptions that I brought to the encounter and assess how they were modified in the light of new notions presented by the field.

The ultimate goal of this chapter, then, is to present a reconstructed logic of enquiry (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995:21), a reflexive account of the evolution of my ideas, of why particular methodological decisions were made and why certain research questions were abandoned in favour of others.

⁶⁵In the original Goffmanian sense, frames consist of tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters (Gitlin, 1980:6 cited in König, 2000). Gradually, theoretical emphasis has shifted towards a conceptualization of frames as being more actively adopted and manufactured. Particularly in media studies, it has become commonplace to suggest that framing always implies an active, deliberate, conscious process.

2.2 From the perspective of the participants

"How participants regard the observer reveals more than how the observer regards the participant."

Michael Burawoy⁶⁶

2.2.1 Frame analysis: introduction

Following a first encounter, in which it was decided that I could come and sit in on Tuesday meetings, the Deputy Head of Mission sent out the following e-mail to weekly meeting participants:

Subject: MIND YOUR LANGUAGE: WEEKLY MEETING 11 APRIL

Importance: High

To Weekly Meeting Participants:

1. A linguistic researcher from Gent University - Ellen Van Praet - has asked to come to the Embassy to record internal staff meetings in order to analyse the language native speakers use in such situations. This is for a British Council-supported research project. The Ambassador has agreed in principle that she may do this.
2. **Ellen Van Praet will be present with her microphone for the first time at Tuesday's (11/4) weekly meeting.** The ground rules are that she will not record/not use/erase any confidential information we ask her to. She is interested in language not substance. She can be asked to leave the room at any time. Later in the process she may ask to record other smaller eg Section meetings; to use a video camera to analyse gesture, facial expression etc; and to interview meeting participants briefly eg on why they said what they said.
3. If anyone can offer any other meetings for recording, she would be delighted.

Figure 1: E-mail to the participants

The mail was intended for participants' eyes only. It was neither sent nor forwarded to me. The Deputy Head of Mission's secretary had welcomed me on the day of the first meeting, waving a print-out version of the electronic message, which is how I managed to lay hands on it - accidentally on purpose.

Like a spyhole, the message allows unique and exceptional insight into the anxiety, resistance and expectations surrounding my entry into this closed community. It is a crucial instrument and an invaluable tool for the reconstruction of the scenario staff members used to deal with change and

⁶⁶See Burawoy, 1991:295.

anticipate what might happen. It displays and reveals their frame for coping with uncertainty and what ifs about the future, questions and assumptions about driving forces and key relationships, plausibility and probability, opportunities and threats.

In his initial and widely quoted definition, Goffman (1974)⁶⁷ characterizes frames as follows:

"I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events [...] and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify." (Goffman, 1974:10)

Gitlin (1980) provides the following definition:

"Frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters." (Gitlin, 1980:6, cited in König, 2000)

In other words, frames are basic cognitive structures that structure and guide the perception of reality, "the prototypical images and scenarios we use to organize our experience and draw inferences about what to expect and how to act" (Norricks, 1994:18).

Thomas König (2000) illustrates the concept of *frame* with the help of the following example:

"For example, a group of persons lined up in an orderly fashion at the side of a road might evoke the frame 'bus queue' in a passer-by. This particular frame structures perception in the way that attention is paid to the orderly arrangement of people in a line, which is one indicator of the 'bus queue frame' and might have actually triggered it. The frame also directs attention to other latent frame elements, such as a bus stop sign. At the same time, it

⁶⁷Goffman's seminal work has sparked an avalanche of frame analytic approaches over the last three decades. In fact, a wide range of disparate approaches have been subsumed under the heading of frame analysis, some of which are even incompatible with each other. For an overview, see Benford and Snow, 2000; D'Angelo, 2002; Scheufele, 1999. The website of the Department of Social Sciences of the University of Loughborough offers a basic overview of the debates and problems in Frame Analysis.
<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/mmethods/resources/links/frames.html>

deflects attention from clothing style, body shape, or communications among the presumed prospective bus passengers.” (König, 2000)

In what follows I will lay bare the frame which structured participants’ perception of my presence. I will sketch the complex and colourful “mosaic of their proliferating imaginations” (Burawoy, 2000) and attempt to see how they see me, examine their definition of reality, what they think, what they understand. It will be investigated how participants’ definition of reality was generated, and what “triggered” the frame, its “indicators” (König, 2000).

2.2.2 Frame analysis: the e-mail message

2.2.2.1 Mind your language

“If it is with outer humor, it must be with inner seriousness.”

Robert Frost⁶⁸

The tone of the e-mail message is double-layered, jokingly reassuring while at the same time firm and factual. The subject heading uses the admonition *MIND YOUR LANGUAGE*. In fact, this caveat proves a crucial cue in identifying and measuring participants’ frame. *MIND YOUR LANGUAGE* very much sets the tone for a play frame, jokingly trivializing and downsizing the potential threat caused by my presence. The warning playfully alludes to the old-fashioned caution not to use swear-words, as in *Mind your language, young lady!*⁶⁹ *Mind Your Language* was also a well-known BBC sitcom in the 1970ies⁷⁰, deriving laughter from misunderstandings in an English evening class for foreign students. Teasingly, then, *MIND YOUR LANGUAGE* outlines a script in which participants are being judged by the quality of their English. In jest, they are cast in the role of pupils, with me in the role of the teacher correcting and reprimanding them for using strong language or making language mistakes. In short, *MIND YOUR LANGUAGE* jokingly provides reassurance for a scenario picturing me as recording, observing, examining, controlling, monitoring, supervising and possibly or even probably, assessing participants’ language.

⁶⁸American poet (1874 - 1963).

⁶⁹Example taken from Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary.

⁷⁰The show aired from 1977 to 1979, then came back in 1986 for one season. Starring Barry Evans, Zara Nutley and Dino Shafeek.

The play frame set by the subject heading is juxtaposed to the factual seriousness of the body of the text. The initial script is elaborated and refined, casting me as the *linguistic researcher* with participants in the role of *native speakers* (notice emphatic underlining).

2.2.2.2 Native speaker

"Native: adj. (not gradable) relating to the country or place where you were born."

Cambridge International English Dictionary

"A native speaker is speaker of a particular language who has spoken that language since earliest childhood."

Wordnet⁷¹

"Patriotism is your conviction that this country is superior to all other countries because you were born in it."

George Bernard Shaw

To a large extent, these framing cues build on the scenario which I had scripted for them.⁷² My initial virtual contact with the Embassy and request for data explicitly and emphatically (notice the double mentioning) attributes to Embassy members the status of *native speakers of English*:

⁷¹WordNet is an online lexical reference system whose design is inspired by current psycholinguistic theories of human lexical memory. English nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs are organized into synonym sets, each representing one underlying lexical concept. Different relations link the synonym sets. WordNet was developed by the Cognitive Science Laboratory at Princeton University under the direction of Professor George A. Miller (Principal Investigator). See <http://www.cogsci.princeton.edu/~wn/>

⁷²The frame which I had created was narrowed down considerably. In spite of detailed and substantial briefing on my part, the scope of the research project was drastically reduced to native language concerns only.

██████████@bruss, 15:30 14-3-2000 +, data quest

To: ██████████@brussels.mail.fco.gov.uk
From: Ellen Van Praet <ellen.vanpraet@rug.ac.be>
Subject: data quest
CC:
Bcc:
Attached:

Dear Mr ██████████

I am a researcher at Ghent University, Belgium, reading for a PhD degree in English Linguistics.

The data on which my research is based are mainly taken from meetings attended by native speakers of English. To extend my corpus of data I am looking for native speakers of English who would be willing to have some of their meetings recorded for research purposes. Would the British Embassy be willing to co-operate in this respect? I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely

Ellen Van Praet
Universiteit Gent-Engelse Taalkunde
Rozier 44
9000 Gent
09 264 36 47

Figure 2: E-mail to the Deputy Head of Mission

The opening paragraph of my official letter requesting permission⁷³ continues along the same line:

*It was a real pleasure for me to read that the British Embassy would be willing to co-operate in providing **native English data** for research purposes.*

The prominence given to *native speaker* in these initial instances of correspondence reflects the significance and value of the conceptual category to me as a linguist and researcher. The extent to which the category I impose is echoed by the community shows that this was where our values matched from the very start. Apparently, the classification *native speaker* was as crucial to me as it was to them. If this was how I perceived them, they wanted to be recognized as such.

If, then, *native speaker* proves value-laden as such, what are the contours of its connotations? What are the defining characteristics of *native speaker* from the perspective of a linguist? Which criteria and components assume

⁷³See Appendix 1.

prominence in the particular context of a diplomatic community? And finally, where do perspectives merge? Have they actually merged?

In *The Presentation of Self* (1959), Goffman indicates that each self cries out for response. Look at my presentation, my role, how do you like it? Do you believe it? I am a lady-killer, I am handsome, I am clever, I am wicked. Substantiate my image of myself.

The extent to which the category *native speaker* is echoed by the community indicates that it responds to the role they envisage for themselves. It allows them to enact the role expected from them within the social reality of their community.

What role requirements, then, does *native speaker* live up to?

In an interview that took place against the background of the political power circus of the Euro 2000 football cup,⁷⁴ the Deputy Head of Mission stated the following:



CD 1 Track 1

[BE:09.05.00:1] 0.41 min.

S: Certainly f-from what I heard at the meeting you know I think the conclusion that we reached for example that the Home Office would co-ordinate but everybody would fit in to [that =

I: [mmm

S: = eh well I think was a sensible one and and shouldn't mean that there would be a certain coherence at least on the British side

I: mmmm

S: (1.1) it would be much harder to eh to achieve that on the the the y- know on the the Belgian side because (1.2) () the Belgians would be dealing with their own (1.7) their own problems and their own media and (1.0) the instinct (1.1) won't necessarily always be: (0.5) eh **to: keep the British in the picture.**

⁷⁴The interview took place a few days after a media meeting at the Embassy for the Euro 2000 football cup. The purpose of the one-off meeting at the Embassy was to decide on the media and press strategy for Euro 2000. (Originally, the meeting would have taken place in London, involving all ministries and organizations in the UK with an interest in Euro 2000. When the meeting was relocated to Brussels, a number of organizations such as the British Police, NCIS and the Football Association decided not to attend the meeting. The meeting, then, was a gathering of government representatives only: Home Office and Foreign Office Representatives.)

The extract pertinently demonstrates the extent to which defending national interests is deeply ingrained in diplomatic culture: the basic *instinct* of a British diplomat is *to keep the British in the picture*.⁷⁵ Similarly, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website⁷⁶ explicitly states that “it is the role of the Diplomatic Service to protect and promote British interests abroad”.

Viewed from this perspective, the label and categorization *native speakers of English*, substantiates participants’ projected role and identity as members of the Diplomatic Service, prepared to promote and defend the interests of Britain and the British people at all times.⁷⁷

The interview with the Deputy Head of Mission furthermore shows how perceptions of identity in diplomatic thinking subtly carry meanings of difference. Emphasizing an opposition between *the Belgian side* and *the British side*, the extract is illustrative of the extent to which manifestations of diplomatic identity are rendered in terms of contrast and difference between the community whose interests the diplomat defends and promotes, and the community he resides in.

The category *native speaker* contains similar connotations of contrast and dichotomy. *Native speaker* sets members of a linguistic community apart from *non-native speakers*. If *native speaker* is what one is, non-native speaker is what one is not. *Native speaker* carries connotations of being distinct, separate and different from another language community.

⁷⁵The complex and sometimes conflicting concern of a diplomat to defend national and collective interests is a widely debated issue. Reflecting on the qualifications of an ambassador, Francis de Laboulaye, former French Ambassador to Brazil, Japan and the United States writes the following: “Today, therefore, one has to take account both of national and of collective interests, which means that an ambassador must be alert to the effects that the policies of his government may have on others. Unless he is able to encompass both the national and the collective dimension, he is not doing his job properly. [...] There can never be a stable equilibrium. What is essential is that the two concerns, the national and the collective one, be clearly understood and recognized at all times.” (<http://www.ediplomat.com/laboulaye.htm>)

In his book *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?* Henry Kissinger, former secretary of state, Nobel Laureate and a prominent diplomat, expresses contempt for figures who recoiled from the concept of national interest and distrusted the use of power unless it could be presented as being the service of some ‘unselfish cause’ – that is reflecting no specific American national interest. (Kissinger, 2001).

⁷⁶See www.fco.gov.uk

⁷⁷The above rejects the notion that a single international diplomatic culture has developed, which makes diplomats’ native cultures largely irrelevant. It supports Cohen’s (1991) observation that seasoned diplomats report that cultural differences have a significant impact and that the constitutive impact of cultures cannot be erased by mere exposure to other cultures.

Native speaker, then, substantiates participants' perception and presentation of themselves as members of a community with a distinct national, linguistic identity in the midst of a community with a different identity. It appeals to participants' role as expatriates in foreign-language surroundings.

Meanings of difference lie very close to understandings of deficit. From the perspective of a linguist, *native speaker* provokes ideas of language proficiency and competence. A native speaker provides a wealth of insights and intuitions, unconscious and perhaps unexamined understandings about language and what it can and should do. The idea that linguistic perfection solely stems from native speakers and that acquiring this perfection is ideal, is pervasive in a language learning and research context. *Native speaker* is laden with meanings of a superior, ideal and prestigious standard: a native speaker of English is someone who speaks the right variety of English.

Viewed from this stance, *native speaker* bestows Embassy staff members the privilege of being a native speaker.

To which extent may connotations of linguistic elitism have appealed to participants? To which extent may diplomats have wished to be recognized as an elite?

Elitism is not something any diplomat would openly advocate, since it runs counter to the democratic ideal. A BBC online news article⁷⁸ tells of Robin Cook, Foreign Secretary at the time,⁷⁹ criticising Whitehall recruitment, including appointments in his own department. With a slogansque "We want to have a government for the many not the few – run by the people who represent the many", Cook highlighted "the large Oxbridge presence among senior officials at the Treasury, and within his own Foreign Office, where last year 44% of those recruited to the 'policy entry'⁸⁰ – the fast-track high-fliers⁸¹ destined to advise ministers – were Oxbridge graduates".⁸²

⁷⁸Cook attacks Whitehall 'elitism', Saturday, 27 May 2000. (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/76608.stm)

⁷⁹Robin Cook served as a Foreign Secretary under Tony Blair from 1997-2001, which covers the period in which fieldwork took place. On 8 June 2001, Jack Straw was appointed Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

⁸⁰New recruits join the Diplomatic Service as either policy (fast stream) or operational officers. Policy officers help to formulate policy on political, commercial and economic matters. This means anything from writing a progress report on complex arms negotiations in Geneva to briefing a minister on the latest plans to expand the European Union. Operational entrants

Nevertheless, there is a distinct feeling of *elitism* within the profession. In an ethnographic study of the Danish Foreign Service, Mette Boritz (1998) notes that it is highly significant for diplomats to stand out as an elite.

Boritz rejects elitist characterizations of the diplomatic community in terms of power and wealth. "If it were only power and economy that constituted an elite [...] it is doubtful whether diplomats could be reckoned as such" (1998:51). "Diplomats are, and have always been, subject to the whims and control of princes, governments, or ministers" (1998:52). Diplomats hardly have direct power, she argues. They execute power, participate in power. Moreover, from an economic perspective, diplomats are "merely a group of officials in the great mass of civil servants, the only difference being that they are obliged to serve abroad and to work with foreign policy". Although "they receive special supplements when posted abroad", they "are paid in accordance with state salary scales, like all other civil servants" (1998:52).

Boritz argues that what constitutes the diplomatic community as an elite, should not be sought in the power, money, qualities or privileges they possess, but in their relation to society, the position they establish in interaction with other groups. Boritz' findings are that the diplomatic community manifests and demarcates an elitist position in society. Relying on fieldwork and interviews with Danish diplomats, she demonstrates how

specialize in the practical side of Diplomatic Service work. This means assessing visa applications in Moscow or checking and double-checking the itinerary for a royal visit. The work also encompasses commercial, consular and immigration, management and, in some cases, policy areas. Managing staff is also part of the job.

⁸¹The Fast Stream is a graduate entry route for senior Civil Service careers. Those who join the Fast Stream are guaranteed a series of intensive job placements designed to prepare them for senior managerial positions. It is the Civil Service's accelerated development programme (<http://www.faststream.gov.uk/>).

⁸²The webpage announcing current vacancies at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office emphasizes equal opportunities: "The Foreign & Commonwealth Office is an equal opportunities employer and aims to reflect the diversity of British society. We welcome applications from suitably qualified individuals, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or disability. All applications are treated on merit." The Frequently Asked Questions section dismisses any doubts that may arise about it: "Do you only recruit from Oxbridge? No! We take the best candidates, wherever they studied. In 1999, 17 per cent of successful policy and operational candidates were Oxbridge, so the vast majority came from universities across the country. Are you serious about Equal Opportunities? Absolutely. We are working hard to ensure that the FCO represents the diverse society that the UK is today. We encourage applications from all groups, but particularly welcome those from women, members of minority ethnic communities and people with disabilities, as they are currently under-represented. All applications are treated strictly on merit. We recruit on the basis of ability, not background." (See <http://www.fco.gov.uk>)

diplomats themselves insist on the unattainability and exclusivity of their world. She notes for instance that diplomats themselves “fondly underline that admission to their world is not granted to everyone. Most of them do not fail to tell outsiders that there are 1,500 applications each year for eight vacant positions.” Moreover, although anyone can apply for a post at the Foreign Office, diplomats “stress that the exclusive world of diplomacy is only for those with special qualifications” (1998:52). “If diplomats themselves define the qualities needed to do their work in the best possible way, they tend to produce a long list of properties.” (1998:50) “A diplomat is expected to show nothing less than this multitude of skills and characteristics ... When they expound on this, the qualities seem to have an eternal nature, and there is an almost mystical character in the way that the qualities are naturalized and collectively confirmed.” (1998:51)

Boritz furthermore shows how notions of a superior standard pervade the picture that diplomats paint of themselves. The idea that diplomatic practice is something that other groups in society strive to emulate is persistent: the way diplomats do things is the right way. Boritz illustrates her argument with a fragment from a book about etiquette by the diplomat Preben Eider (1990).

“Diplomacy is only a small, limited group in the international community. Yet, the rules of etiquette, also called ‘protocol’, which have developed within this circle through the centuries, have proved to set the standards, with an infectious influence on the rules of behaviour in the rest of society.” (Eider, 1990:170, cited in Boritz: 1998:53)

Boritz’ revelations of a covert, hidden and elitist attitude and culture among diplomats provide ample evidence for claiming that participants may have readily accepted the role of *native speaker*, partly because it responds to a community-bound tendency to manifest a superior position vis-à-vis other groups in society.

To summarize, the preceding analysis has identified *native speaker of English* as a significant indicator and trigger of interpretative frames. Relying on extracts from interviews with participants, information from the FCO website and Mette Boritz’ ethnographic study of diplomatic culture (1998), analysis has explored how the *reality of native speaker of English* may be conceived from the perspective of participants, thereby taking into account

the extent to which interpretations of *native speaker* are inextricably bound to my own experiential structure as a linguist and researcher.

Findings were that the role of *native speaker* allows participants to display a distinct cultural, national and linguistic identity. Accepting this role corresponds to their diplomatic duty and role to defend and promote the interests of the community into which they were born. It reflects their different and secluded position as *native speakers* in a foreign language community and appeals to a hidden cultural attitude and need to manifest and demarcate a special, exclusive, superior position in relation to other groups in society.

To conclude, the scenario with which staff members gathered round the meeting table the following day was complex and multi-layered. Playful yet firm and factual, the impact of my presence was jokingly trivialized while at the same time overtly recognized. The image created of me was multi-dimensional, merging scenarios of an arbiter of grammaticality and acceptability of language, of an expert, a linguistic researcher, of a non-native speaker drawing on the expertise of native speakers.

In what follows I will examine how the initial scenario was refined, changed and adjusted in the course of interaction. Detailed analysis of the opening minutes of the first weekly meeting will demonstrate how participants' interpretative frame was attuned and expanded.

2.2.3 Frame analysis: an initial instance of interaction

"When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed. They will be interested in his general socio-economic status, his conception of self, his attitude towards them, his competence, his trustworthiness, etc. [...] Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him."

Erving Goffman⁸³

⁸³See Goffman, 1959:13.



[BE:11.04.00:1-2] 2.04 min.⁸⁴

- 1 S: Ellen Van Praet who is going to record our every wo:rd for =
2 A: [oh dear
3 T: [heh he he
4 C: [ahumhum ((coughs))
5 S: =purposes of (0.6) [linguistic posterity
6 A: [how very-
7 B: [hehehehe
8 A: how very inhibiting
9 T: [he
10 E: [hehhehe
11 I: pleased to meet you
12 C: haha
13 B: heehhe
14 A: nice to see you >what are you going to do with this
15 [information?<
16 B: [hahhahaha
17 I: well nothing really hhe
18 S: nothing [hehhe
19 B: [hhhhhehe
20 C: [hhhh
21 I: no just eh hhh try and do some research on negotiating
22 mechanisms (0.9) among native speakers of English (0.9)
23 A: ah so you're examining our English (0.7)
24 I: eh eh hehhe more or less [(0.8) the [strategies they use
25 C: [oh dear
26 S: [f-for for a paper in the
27 autumn is that right (0.4) or in August
28 C: [mmm
29 I: yes it's a paper that I'm giving in at an international conference in
30 Ghent (0.6) in August. I'm doing my PhD on this. (1.5)
31 A: Right. (1.0) What other (1.0) ehm (0.5) samples are you taking?
32 I: eh (0.4) I will be attending a meeting at Scotland house this
33 afternoon and for [the rest of this month as well (0.6) eh so
34 A: [Right
35 I: [taking

⁸⁴For transcription conventions see Appendix 2.

36 A: [not in UKRep?⁸⁵
 37 I: pardon?
 38 A: not in the UK representation to the
 39 I: no no
 40 A: That's where relevant negotiation takes place.
 41 I: Yes, I've I've asked but (1.0)
 42 A: It has not been given
 43 all: hhahahahaahhah
 44 I: [they were quite reluctant
 45 T: [hahah hah
 46 A: Right ehm (1.0) well welcome anyway and eh
 47 I: Thank you
 48 A: I hope you can make something of what is said here (1.8) ehm
 49 we start off by just reviewing what's happened in the last week
 50 (1.3) ehm since we last met (1.7) ehm Mo Molan decided not to
 51 (0.9) come at the last minute for the (1.4) launch of Insight
 52 Europe (1.3) ehm which is an exchange program to try and (1.0)
 53 tackle the: cultural differences between civil servants in the
 54 European Union (1.2) and the fact that such are the cultural
 55 differences that when you use (1.2) what you think clear
 56 language other people understand quite different this is actually
 57 not (0.9) unrelated to [what you're studying
 58 C: [hehehe

The opening minutes of that day's meeting flow naturally from the initial frame set and presented in the e-mail. The scenario of the language expert monitoring and recording their *every word* is re-established. The Deputy Head of Mission introduces me to other participants of the meeting with a verbose and laboured joke (1.1 and 1.5), playfully alluding to the fact that participants' words, in fact *every word*, will be inescapably, permanently recorded for *purposes of linguistic posterity*. From the outset, a play frame is firmly in place. The opening dialogue between the Ambassador and the Deputy Head of Mission is finely attuned and orchestrated towards pretended anxiety and nervousness⁸⁶ caused by the prospect of being

⁸⁵UKRep represents the UK's interests in the EU. Civil servants drawn from a wide range of British Government Departments spend their time negotiating and lobbying on behalf of the UK.

⁸⁶The Ambassador's backchanneling *oh dear* (1.2) jokingly invokes and pretends concern and anxiety of having to face the inhibiting presence of a microphone. The irony involved in his remark is all the more apparent when one considers it coming from a spokesperson, a public

recorded. Similar to *mind your language* in the subject heading of the e-mail, mocking seriousness serves to diffuse the bomb, alleviate and remove the potential threat and danger of my presence. Overall, the fragment is peppered with laughter,⁸⁷ and humour determines the dynamics and direction of the interaction to a great extent. In what follows, then, I will provide a close investigation of laughter and joking in the excerpt to allow for a window on participants' frames.

2.2.3.1 Humor and incongruity

"Laughter is an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing."

Immanuel Kant⁸⁸

A large portion of the comic effect of humour involves the audience taking a set of frames for granted and then being surprised when the actor shows their assumptions being unwarranted. Theories of humour commonly refer to this unexpected switch from one frame (schema/script) to another initially incompatible one as *incongruity*⁸⁹ (Johnson, 1976; Wilson, 1979; Raskin, 1985; Norrick, 1986).

2.2.3.2 Pleased to meet you

*"Pleased to meet you, hope you guess my name.
But what keeps puzzling you, is the nature of my game."*

The Rolling Stones⁹⁰

The polite *Pleased to meet you* with which I enter the conversation (l.11) triggers laughter from two participants whereupon it is being recycled and

figure who is used to get up the stand, perform in front of an audience and face the inhibiting presence of a microphone.

⁸⁷In successive papers on laughter, Jefferson (1979; 1985; Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff, 1987) shows that laughter, as it occurs in talk-in-interaction, is a finely coordinated interactional phenomenon. The implication of this observation was that laughter, which may previously have been represented descriptively by the transcriber simply writing '(laughs)', now should be transcribed as literally as possible in the form of onomatopoeic renditions of laugh particles: 'ha ha', 'heh heh', 'hih hih' and so on (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998:83).

⁸⁸See Kant, 1892, cited in Ritchie, 2004:46.

⁸⁹See Ritchie (2004) for an overview of definitions of incongruity in the literature about humour.

⁹⁰From *Sympathy For the Devil*.

reformulated by the Ambassador into a slightly amused *nice to see you* (l.14).

Clearly,⁹¹ the Ambassador's reply signals that he finds foregoing talk funny. But then, what was so funny about it? It has taken countless listenings to the extract as well as brainstorming sessions with colleagues⁹² to pin down the *incongruity* of my greeting.⁹³

Had I broken the rules of etiquette? In the world of diplomacy, its political intrigues, global networking and multi-cultural trade relationships, proper decorum is critical. Understanding and tolerance of people's behaviours can influence world peace. The Ambassador's *nice to see you* may have served as a cynical signal that I had broken the rule of decorum, which states that *you must not say you are delighted unless you have reason to be sure that she also is delighted to meet you* (Post, 1922):

"As explained in the foregoing chapter, the correct formal greeting is: 'How do you do?' If Mrs. Younger is presented to Mrs. Worldly, Mrs. Worldly says 'How do you do?' If the Ambassador of France is presented to her, she says 'How do you do?' Mrs. Younger and the Ambassador likewise say 'How do you do?' or merely bow. There are a few expressions possible under other circumstances and upon other occasions. If you have, through friends in common, long heard of a certain lady, or gentleman, and you know that she, or he, also has heard much of you, you may say when you are introduced to her: 'I am very glad to meet you,' or 'I am delighted to meet you at last!' **Do not use the expression 'pleased to meet you' then or on any occasion. And you must not say you are delighted unless you have reason to be sure that she also is delighted to meet you.**"

⁹¹To the degree that joking comments on form, it counts as metalinguistic in the sense of Jakobson (1960): "It allows conversationalists to point to and agree on what is a funny (in both senses) construction or word choice – and hence, it helps them to negotiate the sort of grammar and meaning appropriate to their particular interaction." (Norricks, 1994:17)

⁹²I owe many thanks to Jim O' Driscoll and Peter Flynn for sharing their interpretations and thoughts on the extract with me. Their perspective has been invaluable for fine-tuning the analysis of this excerpt.

⁹³If the analysis of the opening passage serves to shed light on participants' frame, it also exposes my trouble at following the process of the creation of humour. "Humour, of all forms of communicative acts, is one of the most heavily dependent on equal co-operative participation of actor and audience. The audience, in order to enjoy humour, must 'get' the joke. This means they must be capable of analyzing the cognitive frames presented by the actor and following the process of the creation of the humor" (Beeman, 1999). My analytic struggle to 'get' the jokes emphasizes my inability and shortcomings to participate on an equal basis. It emphasizes my perspective and position as an outsider.

Was *Pleased to meet you* (l.11) setting up a frame of informal politeness, which *nice to see you* (l.14) jokingly disapproved and dissolved? Was participants' laughter a signal that I had been making a *faux-pas*?

Considering that I had been addressed by my first name (l.1) and taking into account the play frame that had been set, it may well be argued that I was given ample ground for presenting myself in that manner.

Instead, I want to argue that the comic effect of my greeting was caused by an incompatibility of frames. In the line of the set scenario and expectation of a researcher coming to judge the quality of their English, picturing me as controlling, monitoring, supervising and possibly or even probably, assessing their language, *pleased to meet you* (l.11) must have come across simply as a sarcastic expression of pleasure, as incompatible and out of place as a police officer entering the interrogation room saying 'Pleased to meet you'.

2.2.3.3 Well, nothing really

A second instance of incongruity is caused by my reply to the Ambassador's straightforward question: *What are you going to do with this information?* (l.14, 15) Like a chameleon trying to match its surroundings, I attempt to play along with the game rules that are set. Copying, imitating the set pattern of trivializing and pretending nothing much will happen, I reply with *Well, nothing really* (l.17), jokingly downsizing the possible threat of abuse or misuse of confidential information. The Deputy Head of Mission's (S) joking repeat of *nothing* (l.18), however, identifies my answer as problematic and in need of correction. The nervous laughter (l.18, 19, 20) accompanying it signals the absurdity and incongruity of my reply and reveals that my coming had raised expectations which a blunt *nothing really* (l.17) did not live up to.

I deal with the challenge of discovering and resolving the problem, producing a clarification in *no just eh hhh try and do some research on negotiating mechanisms* (0.9) among native speakers of English (l.21, 22).

From that moment on the initial play frame is abandoned. Playfulness and humour make way for a perfunctory question and answer session. If at first I was playfully cast into the role of examiner, I was now being examined. The Ambassador switches roles and takes control of the conversation, questioning and probing for my intentions. The boundaries of the set frame

are pushed and player positions are checked and adjusted. Successive questions and answers further delineate my role as researcher and linguist and at the same time script community members' role.

Ah so you're examining our English (l.23) picks up on the initial restricted frame of the researcher examining, controlling, monitoring, supervising and possibly or even probably, assessing their language. *What other samples are you taking?* (l.31), however, adds to the set frame the dimension of the researcher taking samples from a population for examination whereby *sample-taking* functions as a tangible tool and indicator, a status-symbol associated with and characterizing my position as researcher. Probing for juxtaposition and contrast, for *other samples* (l.31), the question furthermore serves to demarcate the position of the embassy community within the larger population of native speakers of English.

Similarly, the question about my presence at UKRep (l.36), where civil servants negotiate and lobby on behalf of the UK, that is, *where relevant negotiation takes place* (l.40), contains both an attempt at positioning me and a further outline of community members' role. The question picks up on my explanatory mentioning of *negotiating mechanisms* in a prior turn (l.21, 22) and signals awareness and recognition of that aspect of my role as researcher. The original frame is slightly adjusted: Ellen Van Praet is not only *examining our English*, her research also involves *negotiations*. Besides, the question helps to refine and adjust the role of the Embassy community, positioning it within the broader context of UK missions and representatives. A slightly double, twisted, interactive move becomes apparent, then. While the original frame is partly expanded with the added dimension of *negotiations* (see above), it is at the same time narrowed down: *That's where relevant negotiation takes place* (l.40) contains an implied suggestion that negotiations at the British Embassy are less *relevant* and do not have a similar weight and impact compared to UKRep. Through this implied meaning, the role of relevant decision-makers and negotiators is questioned and refuted.

Although the Ambassador's questions build to a large extent on the information I provided earlier, his interpretation of the framing cues I offered (l.21, 22) is very much bound to the particularities and experiences of his own context. The short digression on UKRep explicitly and directly

relates my research to the particular context of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. *That's where relevant*⁹⁴ *negotiation takes place* (1.40) positions my research interests in terms of relevance criteria which hold within the diplomatic community. At the same time, however, the question and answer session is a careful balancing act and an attempt at constructing a shared perspective, showing a willingness, on the part of the Ambassador, to construct a mutually acceptable meaning and a masterly example of diplomatic negotiation.⁹⁵ This becomes all the more manifest when, after the ice-breaking preamble, the short solicitation and a word of welcome (1.48), the Ambassador begins the meeting with an explicit formulation of its customary pattern that it starts off with him recounting his visits and activities of the previous week: *We start off by just reviewing what's been happening in the last week (1.3) ehm since we last met* (1.49-50) is oncoming and approaching, directly and solely addressed to me and revealing inside information to the outsider. Similarly, *this is actually not (0.9) unrelated to what you're studying* (1.56, 57) cautiously⁹⁶ seeks for an issue of shared concern by relating the first item on the agenda to my research.

Summarizing, analysis of laughter and incongruity in the opening minutes of the first Tuesday meeting has revealed a scenario and expectation of a researcher controlling, monitoring, supervising and possibly or even probably assessing participants' language. Similar to *mind your language* in the subject heading of the e-mail, the mocking seriousness of the scenario alleviates and removes the potential threat and danger of my presence.

Analysis has furthermore shown how, in the course of interaction, the playfulness of the initial scenario makes way for a perfunctory question and answer session in which the boundaries of the set interpretative frame are pushed and player positions are checked and adjusted. Successive attempts on the part of the Ambassador both at positioning me and at further outlining community members' role have been examined in detail. It has been demonstrated how *sample-taking* and *negotiating* expand the original interpretative frame with an added awareness and recognition of my role as

⁹⁴Something relevant is connected with the subject or issue at hand. Relevance is always relative to the requirements and demands of a particular context.

⁹⁵"Diplomatic negotiation consists of a process of communication between states to arrive at a mutually acceptable outcome on some issue of shared concern" (Cohen, 1991:7).

⁹⁶Cautious because using a double negative as a deliberate understatement and a form of modest assertion.

researcher and the scope of my research project. In addition, it has been explained how the Ambassador, in a complex array of interactive moves, further demarcates the position of the embassy community within the larger population of native speakers and refutes a role of relevant decision-makers and negotiators. Throughout, analysis has revealed not only the extent to which participants' frames are bound by the particularities and experiences of the context of the diplomatic community, but also the degree to which they are generated by an attempt and willingness to construct a shared perspective.

2.2.4 Conclusion

The foregoing section has presented a reconstruction of the scenario staff members used to deal with change and anticipate what might happen. Analysis has identified the interpretative frames which were adopted in the course of initial instances of written and spoken interaction. Relying both on significant cues in an e-mail message announcing my coming and on a close investigation of laughter and incongruity in the opening minutes of the first Tuesday meeting, it was demonstrated how a scenario of a language expert monitoring and recording *every word* was generated and how playfulness and humour served to alleviate and remove the potential threat caused by this scenario. Analysis has furthermore revealed how participants were rolcased as *native speakers* and how they accepted this role because it was in compliance with community expectations and role requirements. Analysis has verified how the boundaries of the set interpretative frame were pushed in the course of interaction, how player positions were checked and adjusted. To conclude, empirical identification of interpretative frames has laid bare the following (un)consciously projected community values:

- A willingness to promote and defend national interests at all times
- A self-perception of otherness, of being different
- A need to manifest a special, superior, exclusive position in relation to other groups in society
- A willingness to construct a mutually acceptable outcome on an issue of shared concern

2.3 From the perspective of the researcher

"From the very beginning the field challenges our preconceptions, forcing us to reconstruct our images, our theories, and even what constitutes our questions."

Michael Burawoy⁹⁷

2.3.1 Introduction

"One begins fieldwork not with a tabula rasa but with a foreshadowed problem in mind" (Wilcox, 1982:459). In other words, there is "a context [...] to the context one is studying" (Massey, 1998). I entered the field equipped with research questions and methodological assumptions. Like a lens, these theoretical and methodological frameworks have been a way of viewing the domain, focusing on some aspects, while relegating other aspects to the periphery. Because, as Dey puts it, "the danger lies not in having assumptions but in not being aware of them" (Dey, 1993:63-4, cited in Massey, 1998), the following section critically reflects on the preconceptions⁹⁸ that I brought to the encounter and evaluates how they were modified in the light of new notions presented by the field.

2.3.2 Preconceptions about participation

"Even the heroes, remote on the heights of Olympus, are sometimes remarkably friendly and accessible."

Michael Burawoy⁹⁹

Usually, when telling people that I was doing research at the British Embassy, their first reaction would be 'Waaw, they let you in!?' Yes, they did. Still, the conditions of entry were overwhelming and the safety measures were intimidating.

⁹⁷See Burawoy, 1991:294.

⁹⁸*Preconceptions* is meant to have the particular sense Hans-Georg Gadamer gives to *prejudice* as a necessary preliminary to a subsequent, more adequate judgment, though perhaps *preconception* is a less heavily weighted term. See Gadamer (1989) for an exposition of the etymology and the development of negative connotation of the term *prejudice*.

⁹⁹See Burawoy, 1991:82.

In the e-mail announcing my presence (see above), my arrival was considered highly important. Explicit attention was drawn to my presence and, most of all, to my microphone.¹⁰⁰ Community boundaries were drawn sharply. Intrusion and intervention in the protected surroundings of the embassy community should not go by unnoticed. Caution, awareness and protectiveness were called for.

Every Tuesday morning, I would wait outside the Embassy building for the security guard to open the electronic doors. The guard would sit behind bullet-proof glass and we would talk over microphones. I would deposit my passport in the safety hatch. The guard would call the person with whom I had an appointment. I would wait for him or her to come down. We would smile tentatively at each other through the glass of the electronic door, waiting for the guard to push the button. I would squeeze myself through a metal detector. We would take the elevator to the sixth floor - elevators are excellent and comfortable places to create a good rapport with informants. I would take a seat in the meeting room. If I was early, I would wait outside the room in a chair opposite the office of the Ambassador's Personal Assistant. Office doors would be kept shut.

A week after my initial entry, I happened to be in Brussels on a Thursday. I had some spare time that day, because someone I had arranged to meet hadn't turned up. I walked up to the British Embassy, thinking I could perhaps interview the Deputy Head of Mission. Why not? I did not get to see him that day. And to be honest, at the time I was convinced I would never see him again. Instead, his secretary came down to the ground floor. She held the electronic door ajar and kindly informed me that the Deputy Head of Mission had asked her to remind me that I had been invited to Tuesday staff meetings and that Mr. S. would grant me an interview by appointment.

¹⁰⁰From the start, there was no escape whatsoever from the much discussed *observer's paradox* and I had to accept and deal with the awareness of its unavoidability (Duranti, 1997:118). The notion of *observer's paradox* was coined by Labov (1972). He claims that observation, including the use of audio and video equipment, contaminates the data, that is, the observer always influences the object he/she is observing. Duranti describes the participant-observer paradox as follows: "to collect information, we need to observe interaction, but to observe interaction (in ethically acceptable ways), we need to be in the scene; therefore, any time we observe, we affect what we see because others monitor our presence and act accordingly" (Duranti, 1997:118). The ethnographer is confronted with the paradoxical situation of having to seek membership in the community he studies while at the same time acknowledging the limits of his practice.

I had trespassed territory. I had come too close. I was paralysed, rendered to a state of *mystification*¹⁰¹ (Goffman, 1959:74).

With hindsight, these moments of initial entry have been critical in making me move away from the idea of participation. I counteracted to signals of protectiveness by trying to be the least intrusive as possible. Along Gold's continuum of levels of involvement in observation, I stayed put with the role of *observer as participant* (Gold, 1958).¹⁰² During meetings I would record from the least harmful and intrusive position, uninvolved, detached, passive (although actively noting down). I accepted my visits being restricted to Tuesdays only and interviews being formally scheduled and arranged beforehand.

Long after finishing fieldwork, I have struggled with the frustration of not having been able to conduct a *proper* ethnography. For long I have thought restricted participation would prevent me from understanding the internal practices and norms of the embassy, its rules, roles and relationships. I was indoctrinated by the common view in much anthropological literature, of the ethnographer as someone who eats with the group, works with them, relaxes with them. But we are always "at the mercy of those who agree to take us in" (Scheper-Hughes, 2000:133). We enter their world, their territory. "Ethnography is really quite an arrogant enterprise" (Agar, 1996:91). At a later stage in the field research, I realized the extent to which barriers to entry were a reflection of the values and assumptions of those I was about to study; that restricted conditions of access and contact, protectiveness and secrecy were a significant indicator of cultural values and norms. If in part, they were a perceived obstacle to ethnographic research, they also constituted a core research subject: there is challenge and tension in every contradiction.

2.3.3 Confronting context

I entered the field with the intention of investigating the decision-making mechanisms that speakers rely upon at meetings and examining the role of power in the decision-making process.

¹⁰¹In *The Presentation of Self*, Goffman (1959:74) writes: "It is a widely held notion that restrictions placed upon contact, the maintenance of social distance, provide a way in which awe can be generated and sustained in the audience – a way, [...] in which the audience can be held in a state of mystification in regard to the performer".

¹⁰²Following Goffman's participation categories, the label would be participant as observer.

Although he had *agreed in principle* to my presence, I had not met Her Majesty's Ambassador until my very first day of recording. People were trickling into the meeting room, taking their seats, chit-chatting about this and that, some of them shaking hands with me, when all of a sudden the meeting room fell silent. The Ambassador's grand entrance was a most direct expression of power. Participants' response could be understood only as political compliance. Stopping talking reaffirmed for themselves and the Ambassador that he was in charge of the community gathered around the table. He exerted control by simply reminding people of his presence and thus of their common political culture. He acted to preserve decorum and order and he succeeded impressively.

My interest for power was echoed.

I entered the field as a conversation analyst, believing the entire world is mirrored in interaction; that interaction is the end to it all. Ethnomethodologists and Conversation Analysts (CA) tend to adhere to the view that power is negotiated through conversation (Tannen, 1987; Ainsworth-Vaughn, 1998; Diamond, 1996). They claim that power is "constructed moment-to-moment during interaction, with all participants involved" (Ainsworth-Vaughn, 1998:42)." Conversation Analysis insists on interpreting power not as a property interlocutors have, but as something they do, accomplish, achieve and maintain through the details of language use (Schegloff, 1997). Their approach is situated in the wider microsociological argument that larger processes and structures are revealed in moment-to-moment human action and that through action the individual brings about social structure. The analytic framework of Conversation Analysis refrains from viewing power as "a fixed set of expectations and responsibilities associated with a particular social position" (Hall, Sarangi, and Slembrouck, 1999:293).

In a seminar,¹⁰³ shortly after I had finished my fieldwork, in which I had explained my research interests and first tentative findings to a group of renowned ethnographers, Aaron Cicourel hilariously commented that it was an illusion to think that power is merely negotiated through conversation; that hierarchy, status, position and other external variables play a role too.

¹⁰³Open seminar on 'Event and structure' of the Language, Power and Identity Research Group FSR Flanders, including Jan Blommaert (Ghent), Jim Collins (Albany), Monica Heller (Toronto), Ben Rampton (London), Stef Slembrouck (Ghent), Jef Verschueren (Antwerp), with Aaron Cicourel (San Diego) and Jean Widmer (Fribourg) as invited speakers.

At the time, I was astonished, almost to the point of being angry. Now, three years later, I cannot but admit that there was an awful lot of truth in what he said.

The "flux of fieldwork" (Burawoy, 1991) forced me to qualify the restricted CA view of power as a feature of the sequential unfolding of the talk and bring context into vision. The ethnographic methods of participant observation and interviewing guided my interpretation and analysis beyond the local boundaries of the interaction to demonstrate the subtle interplay between power *in* discourse and power *behind* discourse (Fairclough, 1989:43).

2.3.4 The decisiveness of the field

The force of the field did not stop there. It made me change perspective in yet another critical way. I had set out to investigate decision-making processes in meetings. However, in the weekly meetings which I was allowed to attend, not a single decision was made. My expectations collapsed like a house of cards. If no decisions were made, what was there to investigate?

To a large extent, my initial research question had been informed and instructed by dominant theories and views in the research literature. The standard and prevailing view in academic literature is that meetings exist as a facilitating form, an instrument for introducing, discussing, updating, correcting and transmitting organizational information, making decisions, formulating policies, resolving crises and problems (Schwartzman, 1989). The widespread and established view is that the work of meetings is instrumental, palpable and explicit: meetings "are there to make decisions, engage in deliberation, to conciliate about content in conflicts" (Peck, Perri & Gulliver, 2002:1). This image suggests that organizational participants use meetings "as a tool to facilitate culturally defined 'business' or 'work' " (Schwartzman, 1989:38).

The task-focussed, instrumental assumption that information, decisions, crises and conflicts are what meetings are about, is not only widespread in academic literature, it was also a common view among organizational participants:

[BE:23.05.00:19] 0.39 min.



CD 1 Track 3

G: I think (0.8) I'm in a particular task job here that (0.7) ehm (0.7) we get through a lot of work there's a lot of events for instance every week we have a new event to go to (0.6) o:r commemoration o:r (0.6) ehm **we get tasks with all sorts of things from the Belmont (0.6) ehm which I think people (0.4) should be aware of**

I: mmm

G: ehm (1.8)

I: So for you personally it would be wrong you think

G: [I think so

I: [Not talking [()

G: [What's the point of being at a meeting if you're not going to say anything

I: [yeah

G: I think that's an important part of going to a meeting is to to to as you say inform people and if necessary ask them to do a job for you.

However, interviews with participants revealed a second, opposed view. The following fragment from an interview with the Head of Commercial Section not only displays an explicit awareness of the meeting as a facilitating form, an instrument for transmitting organizational information, but also a recognition of its symbolic, implicit meaning:

[BE:20.06.00:3] 1.49 min.



CD 1 Track 4

C: Ostensibly the idea of (0.2) an office meeting is to ehm inform one's colleagues and with particular reference ehm to the Ambassador [about =

I: [mmm

C: = a) what he's doing and b) what you've been doing in support of the eh overall objectives which we're all supposed to be working towards ehm (0.7) whether that's true in practice it is >obviously it is true< in that people say what they've been up to ehm but eh in practice I think the reality of it is in cer- to a certain extent it depends how seriously you regard it as as a forum ehm if you do take it seriously then **I think eh there's quite a deal of eh**

(0.5) look, aren't I clever I'm I'm I'm doing something to impress the Am- the boss, or perhaps, more importantly, the Deputy Head of Mission who's the guy who usually writes the report rather than the boss ehm (1.2) or there's those who think the whole damned thing is a complete waste of time and when you have to go to a press meeting every day in addition to the weekly meeting it (0.4) it is getting a little bit oppressive a:nd a lot of people say >well the hell with it, I've got nothing to say, move on to the next person, I really don't want to know< ehm (1.5) it's very much a personal way of looking at it. Obviously there are office politics there are in any organization ehm there has to be:: besides looking after your own individual interest there has to be the interests of your particular section >which you are obviously closely connected < **and so you want to be able to project to the others the importance of what your section is doing** ehm I suppose (0.9) ehm (2.6) that I think basically is it ehm (0.2) it really is as I say a question of attitude towards the worth of of the meeting at all.

The Head of Commercial Section contrasts the idea of an office meeting, that is, the projected view of its instrumental purpose and function, with his personal perception of what the meeting achieves in practice, that is, its symbolic function as a "primary context for proclaiming and reinforcing one's social status and position in the community" (Schwartzman, 1989:41). In his view, the weekly meeting is supposed to be doing one thing, while accomplishing something completely different. The meeting creates and generates "the appearance of a forum in which organizational information may be introduced, discussed, updated, corrected and, through representative membership, interdepartmentally transmitted" (Boden, 1994:86) whereas in fact it allows participants to negotiate and/or comment on social relationships.

The participant's statement supports an anthropological perspective on meetings in the research literature, which views the work of meetings as social, symbolic and implicit (Schwartzman, 1989; Huff, 1988; Weick, 1995; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). This approach stresses that "meetings are for doing something organizationally important but which is unspoken, does not appear on the agenda [...] Meetings are places where participants tell narratives about who they collectively are, sustain culture, organize shared emotions, sustain loyalty and conciliate over social relations in conflict"

(Peck, Perri & Gulliver, 2002). Meetings are where groups celebrate and challenge institutionally important values, where social relations and cultural conventions are produced and reproduced. Helen Schwartzman notes that "a meeting is a powerful and ongoing social symbol because it assembles a variety of individuals and groups together and labels the assembly as organizational or community action" (1989:39). March & Olsen suggest that meetings provide "an occasion for a number of things, including fulfilling role expectations, defining virtue and truth, interpreting what is happening, challenging or re-affirming friendships, power, and status, socialization of members, and having a good time" (1976:11-12, cited in Schwartzman, 1989:42).

Interview data were examined closely to determine to which extent instrumental and symbolic values of the meetings were consciously or expressively present and to decide whether and where the meeting moves from an instrumental to a symbolic act. Informants' reports, that weekly meetings did not merely do what they were supposed to do, opened up the potential for examining the meeting as a setting where central processes in the organizational life of the embassy community took place; processes other than organizational decision-making. Informants' off-the-record revelations provided a challenge to adjust from a task-oriented, instrumental perspective of meetings towards an interpretation and appreciation of their symbolic function. Research goals were reset accordingly. The focus of the research was adjusted to an investigation of the role of the weekly meeting as organizational ritual and symbol of collective experience. Gradually, the research project evolved into an investigation of the meeting as a symbolic expression of the group's doctrine, helping to preserve its values.

The primary research question was reformulated as follows: *Which ritual, symbolic purpose does the weekly meeting serve? What is its role and importance in the production and reproduction of the community's norms, expectations and interpretations? What is its significance as organizational ritual?*

The socio-cultural perspective of the initial research question was linked to a political perspective. A second research question aimed at understanding how the symbolic enters into politics. Kessler notes that "the symbolic is real politics, articulated in a special and often most powerful way" (1978:244-45, cited in Kertzer, 1988:5). "Creating a symbol or, more commonly, identifying oneself with a popular symbol can be a potent means of gaining and

keeping power" (Kertzer, 1988:5). A substantial part of this study investigates the ideological and political processes which underlie the ritual event of the weekly meeting staff meeting: *How are organizational participants persuaded into accepting their own statuses and the official rules? How are they mobilized into compliance with the current regime? What kinds of contestation are there around the values that the ritual of the meeting is due to enshrine?*

Third, the socio-cultural and the political perspective intersect with an essentially dramaturgical perspective, exploring performance aspects of the weekly meeting: *How are participants stimulated and encouraged into accepting, producing and reproducing shared community values to create and foster an emergent and convincing impression of a team "possessing a united front" (Goffman, 1959:94)? What is the role and importance of the weekly meeting as a stage for the performance of an organizational participant's allegiance to the organization?*

Returning now to the moments of entry, two instances shed light on the ritual role of the weekly meeting in sustaining social solidarity, displaying the group definitions of role and status (Goody, 1972) and reinforcing the hierarchical relations between people.

First, at the outset of the first weekly meeting on April 11th 2000, the Deputy Head of Mission slipped a piece of paper into my hand with a sketch of the meeting room. Participants of the meeting were denoted with the following cryptic terms: 2nd sec (Econom); 1st Sec (Comm); Fiscal Liaison; Drugs Liaison; 1st Sec (Pol.); Management; DHM; Amb; DA's assistant; PA/Amb. Hardly less puzzling than Leonard's left chest tattoo.

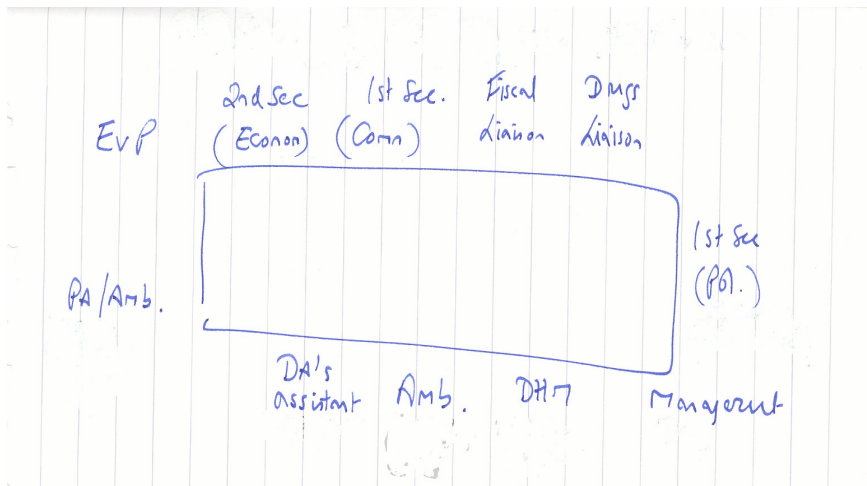


Figure 3: Sketch of the meeting table

Remarkably, the drawing was completely void of personal reference. In fact, all terms either referred to functions or grades. My initials were the only exception. Inconspicuously, the sketch betrays a taken-for-granted orientation to a community classification of relationships in terms of function, rank or grade. Moreover, it is a manifestation of how the weekly meeting is used to calibrate degrees of power within the embassy community, as an “arena where a group’s status is played and displayed” (Schwartzman, 1986). From early on in the fieldwork, hierarchy disclosed itself as a prevailing norm and principle for ordering and connectedness with the weekly meeting as a forum for the reproduction of dependency and domination relationships. This observation is confirmed by one of the participants:

[BE:20.06.00:6] 0.20 min.



CD 1 Track 5

- C: And there again (0.9) having something like an office meeting ehm is in a certain sense the ehm (1.6) the concrete expression of of the clan. **It's it's it's a meeting of its members ehm (1.1) displayed in their hierarchy.**

Second, the Deputy Head of Mission's e-mail in fact provided a first significant indicator of the extent to which the weekly meeting functions as a binding mechanism to sustain organizational cohesion.

The mail explicitly mentions that *this is for a British-council-supported project*. Although The British Council¹⁰⁴ is an independent, non-political organization, it works closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). The FCO sponsors nine so called non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) and The British Council is one of them.

During the period of my presence, it was standard custom for weekly Embassy meetings to be attended by the Director for Belgium of the British Council. His presence and contribution to the meeting are the direct outcome of a performance measure, stated in the *Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office*.¹⁰⁵

*Objectives and target audiences within individual countries will be discussed between the Council's Director and the FCO's Head of Mission. Country plans setting out the Council's aims, policies and operational objectives for each country for the coming four years, together with a report on the previous year, will be provided annually to the FCO. **Heads of Mission will each year assess and report to the FCO on the contribution of the Council to the Mission's overall objectives. Country Directors will also be asked to report annually on the support they have received from the Mission. Both reports will be shared between the FCO and the Council.***

¹⁰⁴The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organization for educational opportunities and cultural relations. It was founded as a voluntary association in 1934 with the name of the 'British Committee for Relations with other Countries'. 'Committee' was soon changed to 'Council' and in 1936 the whole title was shortened to the 'British Council'. It has stayed that way ever since. It was formally incorporated by royal charter in 1940 and granted a supplemental charter in 1993. The British Council appointed its first overseas representatives (in Egypt, Poland and Portugal) in 1938 and now operates in 227 cities in 109 countries around the world (adapted from www.britishcouncil.org).

¹⁰⁵The Memorandum of Understanding with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office summarizes the terms of reference for the partnership with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and lists the Council's purpose and objectives as determined by its board and agreed by the FCO. It is included in the Council's Publication Scheme. The British Council Publication Scheme is a response to the UK Government's Freedom of Information Act, the first phase of which came into force in November 2002 and which obliges public bodies to draw up a Publication Scheme of information material they will make publicly available. The publication Scheme contains information about how the Council is funded, its policies and how results are measured. (see <http://foi.britishcouncil.org>).

Taking into account that my letter requesting official permission had explicitly mentioned The British Council's financial support for a preliminary research project,¹⁰⁶ my presence may be considered a symbolic expression of the above-mentioned agreement of mutual support, with an explicit mentioning in the e-mail emphasizing and reminding people of it. In other words, the decision to allow me to record meetings for research purposes may well have been taken in terms of a deliberate negotiation and confirmation of the intricate network of relationships that the weekly meeting was due to sustain.

2.3.5 Conclusion

The preceding section has presented a reflexive account of the evolution of my ideas, of why particular methodological decisions were made and why certain research questions were abandoned in favour of others. Restricted conditions of access and contact clashed with prior preconceptions about the ethnographic method of participation and forced me to adapt accordingly and adopt a role of "observer as participant" (Gold, 1958). A restricted CA view and preconception of power as a feature of the sequential unfolding of the talk was modified. Preliminary research interests in decision-making processes and a task-focussed, instrumental view on meetings were abandoned in favour of an interpretation and appreciation of their symbolic function. The focus of the research was adjusted to an investigation of the role of the weekly meeting as organizational ritual and symbol of collective experience, conveying cultural norms, interpretations and expectations. Adopting an anthropological perspective, weekly meetings will be viewed as a "vehicle for reading as well as validation of social relations within a cultural system" (Schwartzman, 1989:41). Research questions have been reformulated accordingly and are an integration of a sociocultural, political and dramaturgical perspective. They may be summarized as follows:

- Socio-cultural perspective:
 1. Which ritual, symbolic purpose does the weekly meeting serve? What is its role and importance in the production and reproduction of the community's norms, expectations and interpretations? What is its significance as organizational ritual?

¹⁰⁶See Appendix 1.

- Political perspective:
 2. The politics of power: how are organizational participants persuaded into accepting their own statuses and the official rules?; how are they mobilized into compliance with the current regime?
 3. The politics of contestation: what kinds of contestation are there around the values that the ritual of the weekly meeting seeks to enshrine? To which degree do participants express identification with the imposed norms and values?

- Dramaturgical perspective
 4. How are participants stimulated and encouraged into accepting, producing and reproducing shared community values to create and foster an emergent and convincing impression of a team "possessing a united front" (Goffman, 1959:94)? What is the role and importance of the weekly meeting as a stage for the performance of an organizational participant's allegiance to the organization?

Chapter 3

3. The ritual role of the meeting

"In seeking to understand ritual we are, in effect, trying to discover the rules of grammar and syntax of an unknown language, and this is bound to be a very complicated business."

"Ritual acts are to be interpreted in the context of belief: they mean what the actors say they mean."

Edmund R. Leach¹⁰⁷

3.1 A two-dimensional perspective

In this chapter I will explore the weekly meeting's role as organizational ritual and establish an understanding of its symbolic purposes. To achieve a well-documented interpretation of the complex fabric of symbolic meanings that the ritual construct of the weekly meeting weaves, the theme will be approached from two directions, "from two different standpoints, which lead to results which shade into one another" (Pike, 1967:37). Inspired by the fundamental ethnographic belief that differential perspectives are inherent to human perception, analysis will correlate and integrate an emic and an etic perspective, an insider's and an outsider's perspective.

Insiders' meanings will form the pivot on which this chapter revolves. Kertzner (1988:8) notes that there is "no right or wrong definition¹⁰⁸ of ritual, but only one that is more or less useful in helping us understand the world in which we live". Analysis departs from concepts and categories that are useful, relevant and meaningful to organizational participants and which were discovered and determined during fieldwork.

To allow for a deeper and more exciting appreciation of the insider's perspective, I will examine to what extent local meanings are echoed in the categorizations and classifications of ritual theory. Participants' accounts of ritual aspects of the meeting will provide a starting-point for an exploration

¹⁰⁷See Leach, 1968:524-525.

¹⁰⁸Nagendra (1971, cited in Grund, 1993) notes that "a definition of ritual such as might be applicable to the term in all its acceptations is difficult, [...] not because the term is widely used, but because it is not possible to determine the true nature of what constitutes the irreducible basis of the myriad human practices it represents".

of the “transdisciplinary morass of divergent interpretations¹⁰⁹ of the term” ritual (Stanfield Tetreault & Kleine, 1990:31). Interview data and observational evidence will be examined in the light of the literature on ritual, in particular the work of the neo-Durkheimian tradition flowing from Douglas and the writings of Goffman and Turner.¹¹⁰

Blending and merging an emic and an etic view will open “a stereoscopic window” (Pike, 1962),¹¹¹ it will allow to look at the ritual aspects of the weekly meeting as if through a stereoscope,¹¹² through two lenses focussed on two pictures of the same scene to give a new three-dimensional image:

“Two pictures taken at a distance of few inches apart have no interesting differences when viewed one at a time, but when seen simultaneously through a stereoscope produce a three-dimensional experience.” (Pike, 1962: chapter 7)

¹⁰⁹Goody (1961) analyses the various approaches to the definition of religious and ritual phenomena, from the nineteenth-century contributions of Tylor and others, who followed the same general direction and interests, to the views of Durkheim, Malinowski and later writers such as Talcott Parsons.

¹¹⁰Although relying on an extensive corpus of ritual literature, it is by no means the intent of this chapter to provide a clear-cut definition of the notion, nor to give a complete overview of the multitude of interpretations of the term in the literature. Instead, the etic, theoretical perspective is used to get closer to the emics. This methodological choice accounts for the apparently incoherent and random selection of definitions and interpretations from the extensive corpus of ritual literature.

¹¹¹See Chapter 7, *A Stereoscopic Window On the World from With Heart and Mind* (1962), a non-technical work in which Kenneth Pike outlines his view of life as a cohesive whole (reproduced on <http://www.gentleye.com/research/cb/acr/acr1990.html>).

¹¹²Stereoscopes were items used for amusement by thousands of families from the 1850s to the early 1900s. A stereoscope was used to view pictures similar to our present-day slide projector but on a smaller scale and, only one person could use it at a time. A stereoscope had two lenses in an oval-type box, through which the viewer could look to see the cards that were placed in two wire guards on a sliding bar thus focussing the cards for a clear picture. A handle that was under the lens box held the instrument. The earliest stereoscope was developed around the 1850s from the knowledge or principle of the early binoculars that had been developed by the Greeks hundreds of years earlier. The two lenses, focussed on two pictures of the same scene, were focussed to give the viewer a new image similar to a three-dimensional one that had not been available before.

3.2 Ritual regularity

"The unique characteristic of every ritual is its repetitiveness and stereotypical nature."

Cardinal Godfried Danneels¹¹³

"Ritual is predictable: its regularity is what gives it its power. It is meant to be repeated."

Rev. Frederick Emerson Small¹¹⁴

One of the organizational participants describes the weekly staff meeting at the British Embassy as follows:



[BE:20.06.00:13] 0.10 min.

C: It is a meeting which (0.4) ehm follows e:h a set pattern (coughs) >shall we say< and actually takes place at a recognized time at a recognized interval.

Meetings take place on Tuesday mornings and start at 10.30. As a rule, they are chaired by the Ambassador. In his absence, the Deputy Head of Mission will take on the role of chair. Customarily, the Ambassador starts off with a lengthy monologue, going through his diary and recounting his activities of the past week in vivid and great detail. Following this introduction, it is standard procedure for the Ambassador to go round the table clockwise and prompt participants into reporting relevant or important actions, events or performances which concern their respective section. As turns revolve round the room, "participants take turns as narrators and audience". As one member reports on its actions and activities of the past week, the others "await their turn to give their own performance and, while expressing appreciation for a previous performance, do not treat it as a contribution upon which they are building" (Malone, 1997:56).

¹¹³Danneels speaking to Canadian bishops at their annual assembly, October 17-22, 2000 in Cornwall. (<http://www.wcr.ab.ca/news/2002/1028/rituals102802.shtml>)

¹¹⁴Frederick Small (born 1952) is the pastor at the First Unitarian Church, Littleton, Massachusetts.

Weekly staff meetings, then, are patterned, structured by a fairly formal procedure for the allocation of turns and turn order, follow a relatively fixed agenda and occur at a regular time interval and at a regular preset time in the week.¹¹⁵

The very fixity and regularity of the meeting gives it ritual dimension. In the literature, ritual is generally defined as standardized and repetitive activity. Nadel (1954:9) was one of the earlier anthropologists to focus on the formalized, repetitive nature of ritual rather than limiting the term to action involving religious phenomena (Kertzer, 1988:30). He defines rituals as "actions exhibiting striking or incongruous rigidity, that is, some conspicuous regularity not accounted for by the professed aims of actions" (Nadel, 1954, cited in Grund, 1993). Durkheim calls rituals "determined modes of action" (1995). Goody (1961) defines ritual as "standardized behaviour". For Partridge (1977, cited in Grund, 1993), the "defining feature of ritual is that of a repetitive, reassertive form. Ritual as an ordered statement of pattern against randomness, order against idiosyncrasy".

A number of authors furthermore observe how regularity and pattern carry meanings of continuity and permanence. Myerhoff, for instance, states that "ritual connects past, present, and future abrogating history and time" (1984:152, cited in Kertzer, 1988:10). Kertzer notes the following:

"Ritual helps give meaning to our world by linking the past to the present and the present to the future. This helps us cope with two human problems: building confidence in our sense of self by providing us with a sense of continuity – I am the same person today as I was twenty years ago and as I will be ten years from now – and giving us confidence that the world in which we live today is the same world we lived in before and the same world we have to cope with in the future" (Kertzer, 1988:9-10).

¹¹⁵The features outlined above respond to Schwartzman's definition and typology of "scheduled meetings", that is, "those events in which a group's gathering has been scheduled in advance and also often recurs over time" (Schwartzman, 1989:63). The characteristics listed furthermore echo Boden's description and definition of "formal meetings" which "may be convened by written summonses or fixed arrangements, have an organizationally defined composition of members, follow a prepublished or relatively fixed agenda, and are chaired by a designated official [...] often occur at regular time intervals, and at regular preset times in the day and week [...] may meet daily, weekly, monthly, annually, and so forth, and may also be convened in special sessions, also subject to special arrangements" (Boden, 1994:84).

Meanings of continuity and permanence are overtly present in the following informant's account of how the procedure whereby speaking turns revolve around the meeting table is *inherited from the previous Ambassador*, in other words, has survived successive Ambassadors:



CD 1 Track 7

[BE:30.05.00:9a] 0.15 min.

- I: there's also this standard routine of going round the [table
T: [yeah
I: mmm [ehm
T: [which has been inherited from (0.9) certainly **the previous Ambassador (0.4) used to do exactly the same** (0.5) the previous Ambassador would start [off
I: [mmm
T: and say what he'd done (0.5) and then it would go all the way around the table



CD 1 Track 8

[BE:30.05.00:9b] 0.21 min.

- T: I mean **it's always been that circle** (0.7) and it's always been and interestingly enough (0.7) ehm the Ambassador when he arrived specifically said (0.6) that when we have these meetings they're not necessarily () exactly the same as you had before and **they are now exactly the same as they were before** >I don't know how< I don't know how you would (0.7) you would change it particularly



CD 1 Track 9

[BE:30.05.00:11] 0.17 min.

- T: No:w the agenda has been set (0.6) and the method of of of of the delivery of the agenda has been set from from previous (0.4) Ambassadors you know (0.3) you can do it you however you like **but the previous Ambassador did it this way so in th- what happens is that (0.4) it carries on**

A pattern, a repeated part, connecting past, present and future, the weekly meeting serves as a familiar signpost which tames frightening variations. This comes to the surface in the interview with the Ambassador. Describing

the workings of the weekly meeting, the Ambassador explicitly relates regularity to predictability:

[BE:20.06.00:02] 0.23 min.



CD 1 Track 10

- A: but we try to stick to them **regularly** and have it as a **regular fi-function** (0.9) so that the thing works (0.9) properly (0.4)
- I: mmm
- A: and ehm
- I: mmm
- A: even when I'm not here >which is very frequent time< and the meetings go ahead with my Deputy (0.4)
- I: mmm
- A: so we do have a (0.5) you know there's some (0.6) **regularity and predictability** for the life of the people working here

The Ambassador's account highlights the weekly meeting as a repetitive recurrence which makes experience familiar and predictable. Happening in a way which organizational members know about before it happens, it is a *recognized*¹¹⁶ as well as an instantly recognizable hallmark of the institution.

Many authors mention the function of ritual to offer predictability and stability, safety and security. Orenstein (1994) notes how, "through rituals, we create structures that provide an element of predictability and, therefore, safety, around times of insecurity, transition, and/or loss". Kertzer observes how "the very fixity and timelessness of ritual are reassuring" parts of an attempt to cope with the "frustrating indeterminacy of the world" (Kertzer, 1988:10). Rampton adheres a similar view:

"Ritual can be performed in a huge variety of ways, in a wide range of arenas, but it is fundamentally oriented to moments and periods when, for one reason or another, there are actual or potential changes or problems in the flow of ordinary life. Ritual is a form of action that is typically (though not invariably) intended to help people get past such difficulties and on with normal life, albeit often in a new state; to do this, it draws on symbolic material that holds special significance above and beyond the practical requirements of the here-and-now". (Rampton, 2002:492)

¹¹⁶See fragment 6 [BE:20.06.00:13].

Allowing “no uncertainty, no choice” (Wallace, 1966, cited in Grund, 1993), the weekly meeting proffers a counterbalance to the indeterminacy of the diplomatic service:



CD 1 Track 11

[BE:20.06.00:10a] 0.08 min.

A: the trouble is with (1.1) this diplomatic service and >perhaps with any job but particular diplomatic service is that **people keep changing**<



CD 1 Track 12

[BE:20.06.00:10b] 0.05 min.

A: and (0.5) the movement of people is (1.3) is almost permanent.



CD 1 Track 13

[BE:16.05.00:16a] 0.08 min.

B: I mean **the essence in the diplomatic service is mobility** (.) so you do two years in London you then you on a posting you then come back to London and so on and so: forth

“Members of the Diplomatic Service must be prepared to serve anywhere in the world”.¹¹⁷ Diplomatic Service recruits initially work in offices in London, Croydon and Milton Keynes for two to three years before being posted to an Embassy, High Commission or Consulate overseas. After a few years in London, it is apt to spend two postings overseas, which normally last three to four years each. On average, approximately 70% of a diplomat’s career will be overseas. The *regularity and predictability* of the weekly meeting, then, may be viewed as part of an attempt to “fix a single, known reality” (Kertzer, 1988:10) in order to cope with the uncertainty of the diplomatic service, its ever-changing relations, its continuous movement of personnel.¹¹⁸ The recognizable pattern and regular occurrence of a weekly staff meeting helps diplomats past the difficulty of changing environments and changing people.

¹¹⁷See www.fco.gov.uk

¹¹⁸Counteracting the danger of affective ties, the practice of constant movement itself may be viewed as a ritual means of maintaining in-group solidarity and loyalty to the diplomatic community and the Nation.

3.3 Standards of seating

"When dinner is announced, the mistress of the house requests the lady first in rank to show the way to the rest, and walk first into the room where the table is served. She then asks the second in rank to follow ... bringing up the rear herself. The master of the house does the same with the gentlemen. When they enter the dining room, each takes his place in the same order. The mistress sits at the upper end, those of superior rank next to her, right and left, those next in rank following, then the gentlemen and the master at the lower end. Nothing is considered a greater mark of ill breeding than for a person to interrupt this order or seat himself higher than he ought."

John Trusler, Honours of the Table, 1778

3.3.1 Introduction

Organizational members' ritualistic orientation towards recognizable patterns is also manifest in the seating arrangements at the meeting. Although not openly and publicly manifested as such, the positioning of participants at the meeting is rigid and fixed. When entering the meeting room for the first time, I carefully inquired whether I could go and sit just anywhere. Numerous people reassured me saying that the meetings were actually very informal and that seats were not fixed. However, observation revealed that when participants entered the room they occupied it in structured ways and that a pre-established seating order governed their whereabouts. Moreover, contrary to initial denials, participants validated a set seating order in interviews with me:

[BE:30.05.00:8a] 0.19 min.



CD 1 Track 14

T: But if you notice (0.5) and you will have done () **everyone sits in the same place** on the same time everyone has their location the Ambassador always sits in the same chair (0.5) everybody sits in equal positions (0.7) they're almost always (0.5) very rarely (0.5) do you (0.6) do you find a person out of place ehm



CD 1 Track 15

[BE:06.06.00:3] 0.09 min.

- I: It occurred to me when I started coming here (0.5) I was told there were no fixed seats but then (0.7) you [do have a
 S: [But everybody sits
 in the [same place
 I: [Yes (0.2) yes



CD 1 Track 16

[BE:30.05.00:28] 0.15 min.

- E: Ehm (0.7) you'll notice that when you go into the room (1.1) ehm (1.1) although people will say >oh sit anywhere<
 I: [Yeah
 E: [You got to sit down and people say (0.7) oh (0.5) D. always sits there (0.8) yeah?
 I: I noticed that yes

Two informants recount how they attended a staff meeting for the first time and were reprimanded for taking the wrong seat:



CD 1 Track 17

[BE:30.05.00:8b] 0.27 min.

- T: Not here¹¹⁹ I remember going to one of these meetings years ago (0.3) when I was the the (0.8) ehm the deputy to the DLO¹²⁰ in Holland (0.7) and when I went to the meeting it was I sat (0.5) I sat down and they said >you can't sit there< (0.6) >so and so sits there< (0.8) so I've moved and they said >you can't sit there so and so sits there< (0.6) I said well where can I sit? > sit where you like< (0.5) they said (0.4) >so and so I went no you can't sit there so and so sits there< (0.5) and eventually I moved round until I actually got the seat that my colleague sits in and then I was all right to sit

¹¹⁹The fragment describes the informant's experiences when serving at the British Embassy in Amsterdam. Nonetheless, the information provided may be extended to staff meetings at the British Embassy in Brussels, which, according to that same informant, are highly similar, if not identical.

¹²⁰DLO is the abbreviation for Drugs Liaison Officer. The informant attended the meeting for the first time in replacement of (as *the deputy to*) his superior.

[BE:30.05.00:7] 0.17 min.



CD 1 Track 18

M: One of the very first meetings I w-I was introduced (0.3) in one of the first meetings in the first meeting I attended on my o:wn (0.9) I'd I wasn't aware of the seating plan (0.8) [and

I: [mmm

M: It didn't upset (0.6) somebody but the comment was made (0.5) what are you doing over there? (0.4) You normally sit your lot normally sat over there

3.3.2 Ritual initiation

The foregoing reports demonstrate that when a new party enters the common space of the meeting room, seating instructions operate as a corrective mechanism for adapting the individual to the group's doctrine. Individual claims and expectations of space are confronted with and overruled by collective seating norms. In his study of formal religious rituals, Durkheim (1995) asserts that rituals "strengthen the bonds attaching the individual to the society of which he is a member". This is precisely what seating directives do: they ritually initiate the newcomer into the group; they teach and instruct him/her about collective seating norms, and guide him/her through the process of becoming a member of the group.

In contrast with newly-arrived staff members, I was never led or invited to a particular place nor was I corrected for taking the wrong seat.¹²¹ The fact that this standard procedure was never performed when I was introduced to the weekly gathering all the more emphasizes its ritual significance as an initiation. Without seating instructions, the process of transformation from outsider to insider, of gradual inclusion in the community was never started. Although I was allowed to attend the weekly meeting as a "ratified" "overhearer" (Goffman, 1981),¹²² I was due to remain an outsider.

¹²¹Up till now it remains a mystery whether I unknowingly laid claim to another person's seat. For seven weeks on end I occupied the corner seat at the far end of the table. Situated at the longest distance possible from the centre of the table and at the longest distance possible from the only entrance, the seat marks a marginal position at the outer edge of the meeting room. Although to a large extent inspired by practical considerations – this seat was the nearest to the only socket available in the room – the choice of this position reflects outsider's status. This may explain why I was never reprimanded.

¹²²In *Footing*, Erving Goffman (1981) provides a model of talk that attempts to decompose "global folk categories" such as speaker and hearer into "smaller analytically coherent elements"

The following interaction further illustrates the ritual role of seating instructions as an initiation. The conversation takes place a few minutes before the actual start of a weekly meeting. While participants enter the room and chit-chat about this and that, the Deputy Head of Mission (S) informally introduces a newcomer (X) to the meeting:



CD 1 Track 19

[BE:27.06.00:a]¹²³ 0.45 min.

- N: Are you X?
 X: (0.6) Yes=
 N: =Must be. I'm N.
 X: Hello. I don't think I've met
 S: D.'s not coming so this seat is free
 N: We did. Never mind (whispering)
 S: you'll have to evolve into a place but you might take that (1.0) is this indeed yeah (2.10) anymore chairs? This gentleman over there is spreading
 N: What do you mean I go to the gym twice a [week
 S: [hahahaha it is not why how come there are only five of you on that side there? (2.19)
 C: [mmm
 N: [the trouble is
 T: We could squeeze

(Goffman, 1981:129). Goffman distinguishes between different roles which hearers can take on: "The point of all this, of course, is that an utterance does not carve up the world beyond the speaker into precisely two parts, recipients and non-recipients, but rather opens up an array of structurally differentiated possibilities, establishing the participation framework in which the speaker will be guiding his format" (1981:137). Goffman deconstructs the hearer into "ratified participants" (which are further divided into "addressed" and "unaddressed" recipients) as opposed to "unratified participants" ("overhearers" and "eavesdroppers"). To some extent I enjoyed "official status as a ratified participant in the encounter" (1981:131). After all, the Ambassador had *agreed in principle* that I could attend, observe and record the meetings. To some extent, however, my status also bears traits of what Goffman has called an "unratified overhearer": I never acted as a full member of the conversation, I was merely co-present and my presence was tolerated. At the same time, there are instances where my position shifted to that of an "addressed recipient". For instance, in the final meeting which I attended, I was included in the ritual round around the table and specifically addressed by the Ambassador. Since Goffman himself has always emphasized the importance of local enactment more than the systematic, prototypical properties of the categories he described and in order to grasp the complexity and duality of my role I have opted to adapt and blend Goffman's original distinction between ratified and unratified participants and have called myself a "ratified overhearer".

¹²³In the passage multiple interactions take place simultaneously. For clarity's sake, the transcription renders only those turns which are relevant to the issue at hand.

N: If this is if this is really important hahahaha

As a new colleague and staff member, X. has separated from a former social and professional role and is on the threshold of a new professional experience. She is in the middle of a process of "transformation from one state of existence to another, one status in society to another" (Macary, 2003).

The moment of introduction to the ritual practice of the weekly meeting marks a significant step in that process of transformation.

Van Gennep (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1968:576-577; 1977; Deflem, 1991) identified a threefold progression of successive ritual stages:¹²⁴ "separation from the old life, margin or liminality [...] and aggregation or reintegration into society" (Macary, 2003). During the marginal or *liminal* (after *limen*, Latin for threshold)¹²⁵ phase, the state of the ritual subject is ambiguous; he is no longer in the old state and has not yet reached a new one. A first attendance at the weekly gathering of Heads of Section marks the intermediate, *liminal* phase in a process of transformation to a new professional role in which the newcomer is "neither here nor there" (Turner, 1969:95) and has "no longer/not yet status". He/she is no longer an outsider and not yet an insider. In this "chaotic state of change" (Macary, 2003), seating instructions proffer crucial guidelines and directions. Unveiling a secret and hidden insider's practice and demanding acceptance of its legitimacy, seating directives give newcomers "ultimate standards of reference" (Turner 1970:368-369). Similar to Turner's (1977) description of the communication of the *sacra*,¹²⁶ the most sacred things, they instruct a newcomer in the secret symbolic of the new social and cultural milieu.

¹²⁴The underlying structure of ritual has been documented by the works of anthropologists Arnold Van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner (1969, 1970).

¹²⁵Having adopted the processual view on ritual from Van Gennep, Turner throughout his work repeatedly discussed the importance of the liminal, intermediate phase in ritual. See Deflem (1991) for an overview.

¹²⁶Guides in the form of elders, representing the absolute values of society, communicate these sacred things. Turner explains that the communication of *sacra* both teaches the neophytes how to think with some degree of abstraction about their cultural milieu and gives them ultimate standards of reference. At the same time, it is believed to change their nature, transform them from one kind of human being into another (Turner 1970:368-369). According to Turner (1977:99-108), the presentation of *sacra* may be done in three (often interwoven) ways: secret symbols may be communicated to the ritual subjects in the form of exhibitions of sacred articles (relics, masks, instruments, what is shown), actions (dancing, what is done) or instructions (mythical history, what is said).

Once the *sacra* is presented and accepted, a final phase of *aggregation* and integration in the community begins. Having been taught its secrets, the newcomer will now *have to evolve into a place* (1.7): with time, he/she will have to assume his/her new role in the community.

3.3.3 Status contest

"A pet food manufacturer keeps 30 cats as a consumer panel. At the time of feeding, the cats cue up in a definite order, always the same. Only when a new cat enters is there some disorder: it tries to take a place in the queue and is bitten by every neighbour until it has found a place where henceforth it is tolerated."

Geert Hofstede¹²⁷

Seating instructions give newcomers a place in the community order but, by the same token, they deny access to positions. The message conveyed to a neophyte is not merely one of acceptance and admittance but also of territoriality and dominance.

In the excerpt discussed earlier, territorial behaviour, domination and power vis-à-vis a newcomer were amply noticeable:



CD 1 Track 19

[BE:27.06.00:a] 0.45 min.

- 1 S: indeed yeah (2.10) anymore chairs? This gentleman over there is
- 2 spreading
- 3 N: What do you mean I go to the gym twice a [week
- 4 S: [hahahaha it is not
- 5 why how come there are only five of you on that side there?
- 6 (2.19)
- 7 C: [mmm
- 8 N: [the trouble is
- 9 T: We could squeeze
- 10 N: If this is if this is really important hahahaha

The fragment is a manifest display of integrated members claiming and defending territorial space. In search for a suitable seat for the newcomer,

¹²⁷See Hofstede, 1980:66 cited in Owens, 2000:58.

the DHM (S) playfully alludes to one of the participants covering, occupying an all too vast area of space. *This gentleman over there is spreading* (l.1-2) is a joking attempt at negotiating/claiming space on behalf of the newcomer. The long silence (l.6) which follows the DHM's subsequent *how come there are only five of you on that side there?* (l.5) is hesitant, reluctant and challenging and signals that a difficult and delicate issue has been tackled. With the question, the DHM has in fact intruded on participants' territory. *If this is if this is really important* (l.10) takes the protest and resistance of the long pause further by laying down a condition: we move only *if* you can convince us that this is *really important*.

Making clear to the newcomer that the present order will only be changed on certain conditions is making a powerful dominance move. *If this is if this is really important* (l.10) cynically bites and communicates a power message. Camouflaged and covered up by laughter (*hahahaha* l.10) are hidden meanings of *status contest* (Owens, 2000:55) and competition. The remark demonstrates to the newcomer that there is a dominance hierarchy (pecking order) in the organization on account of which some are considered more *important* than others and claims a right not only to a seating position but essentially to a position of *importance* in the hierarchy.

In other words, the process of integration in the community, of *evolving into a place* is not without competition and contest. Integrated members treat a seat as achieved territory, a symbol of *importance* and success, which they will defend tooth and nail.

The foregoing reveals the weekly meeting as an arena where the group's status order is "played and displayed" (Schwartzman, 1986, cited in Owens, 2000:58). Seating positions mark *areas of importance* and are a strategic instrument for affirming and reaffirming, negotiating and contesting one's position in the community's hierarchical order:

[BE:30.05.00:17a] 0.06 min.

T: You can tell by looking round the table (1.3) **the area of so called importance** comes out

This is where some of the ritual dimensions of the weekly meeting are further revealed. Goody (1972) observes that ritual displays the group definitions of role and status. Leach (1968) asserts that ritual reinforces the



CD 1 Track 20

hierarchical relations between people: "Our day-to-day relationships depend upon a mutual knowledge and mutual acceptance of the fact that at any particular time any two individuals occupy different positions in a highly complex network of status relationships; ritual serves to reaffirm what these status differences are" (Leach, 1968:524). Kertzer states that "ritual is employed to communicate power relations" (1988:31) and "used to calibrate degrees of power" (1988:30).

Just as the ritual regularity of a weekly meeting offers participants a sense of security and creates a sense of belonging to a group that does not change radically (see foregoing section), the dependable routine of a fixed seating arrangement provides comfort and reassurance¹²⁸ telling participants *where they fit in the organization, where they fit in the structure.*



CD 1 Track 21

[BE:30.05.00:17e] 0.38 min.

T: That that even that seating plan (0.7) that seat the method of where people sit (0.7) actually shows (0.5) where you sit- where you fit in the organ- if you like in the hierarchy (0.5) and (0.3) but it's very often I think people find comfortable (0.8) and (.) there's nothing more amusing actually I find than that than getting somebody to to sit in all the wrong seats and see how everyone becomes very **uncomfortable** (0.7) eh you know you can you can see people feel (0.3) I ought to be sitting over there (0.7) I'm now sitting here (0.6) and I don't actually wanna sit here I wanna cause I'm my **comfort zone** is over there and it's been moved and I have no say in it



CD 1 Track 22

[BE:06.06.00:16a] 0.08 min.

D: Some people are (0.8) are (0.6) >what's the word I'm looking for< (1.0) are more **comfortable** (0.8) in gravitating to the same seat all the time

¹²⁸Ritual serves to remind the congregation just where each member stands in relation to every other and in relation to a larger system. It is necessary for our day-to-day affairs that we should have these occasional reminders, but it is also reassuring." (Leach, 1968:524)

The dependable routine of a fixed seating arrangement is a potent means of keeping power. The symbolic of the seating arrangement allows the powerful to “reinforce their authority” (Kertzer, 1988:5) and “assert their right to rule”. (Kertzer, 1988:1). It allows integrated, highly ranked, *senior* members to maintain the existing order in a stable state and reinforce its status quo mainly to safeguard and protect their own position in the dominance hierarchy. The stability and predictability of a pre-established seating arrangement is an intricate aspect of the way senior members dominate the junior generation:

[BE:06.06.00:17] 0.12 min.

- D: because people don't want to sit (1.2) where **the senior people** sit (0.5)
- I: mmm
- D: and not in my case but in the Ambassador's and S's (1.2) and the DA¹²⁹ (0.8) **they they probably see that as their seats** so we don't sit there
- I: mmm



CD 1 Track 23

The seating arrangement allows *senior people* to define and maintain their possession of areas and “achieve and exert control over a segment of space” (Prohansky et al, 1970, cited in Nova, 2003:16). Through control over space, they “exert control over the process through which status is earned or lost” (Berger & Morris Zelditch, 1985). The strictness and predictability of the seating arrangement enables them to *decide upon*, plan and control the status-organizing process of the group:

¹²⁹DA is the abbreviation for Defence Attaché. The Embassy's Defence Section comprises a Defence Attaché (an Army Lieutenant Colonel), a Deputy Defence Attaché and a Personal Assistant to the Defence Attaché. Broadly speaking, the principal role of an attaché is to further the UK's defence Diplomacy aims in his host country (House Of Commons Hansard, written answers for 14 October 2003). In practice, the Defence Section's task is to facilitate the co-operation between the British and the Belgian Ministries of Defence. It promotes links between the staff of the two Ministries of Defence across a wide range of activities, such as training, operations and personnel issues. The section helps out with the purchase and sale of defence equipment and the coordination of commemorations and ceremonies in Belgium. It also deals with enquiries from the public about British defence matters (From the British Embassy, Brussels website: <http://www.britishembassy.gov.uk/Belgium>)



CD 1 Track 24

[BE:30.05.00:17b] 0.11 min.

T: even even at that table (0.5) there's a significant structure and that structure is almost ehm (0.8) decided upon about where you fit in the organization

Summarizing, evidence from interaction and ethnographic interviews reveals the ritual role of the weekly meeting as a forum where the group's status order is "played and displayed" (Schwartzman, 1986, cited in Owens, 2000:58). The seating arrangement symbolically represents and communicates participants' place in the dominance hierarchy. Seating positions mark *areas of importance* and are a strategic instrument for mediating status distinctions and controlling the status-organizing process of the group. Through the symbolic of the seating arrangement, participants recognize who is powerful and who is weak and they deliberately, consciously and strategically plan and select their location accordingly:



CD 1 Track 25

[BE:30.05.00:29a] 0.16 min.

E: There is this there are certain people who think (0.7) > who are very concerned about their position<
I: mmm
E: and they ehm (0.7) are conscious of where they sit and the (0.3) knock-on effect of where they sit (0.6)

In what follows, I will recover the seating strategies participants use. I will unravel the methodical and ordered ways in which they seek to define their status in the seating plan. To allow for a broad and encompassing view on participants' seating behaviour, the analysis will also incorporate a close examination of the spatial arrangement of offices vis-à-vis the meeting room as well as a description of the physical setting of the meeting room. At all times, analysis will be driven by an attempt to understand spatial arrangements through the lens of local meanings given to it. To allow for etic abstraction, however, the following brief introduction aims at putting local meanings and interpretations in a wider, cross-cultural perspective and provides a diverse range of examples of ways of organizing space to produce and reproduce status differences.

Systematic analysis of the spatial organization of interaction is lacking and undervalued in the field of Discourse Analysis. Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992; Duranti, 1984; Lebaron & Streeck, 1997 are among the few examples who incorporate the analysis of spatial arrangements as a factor in their study of verbal interaction. Although of marginal interest to the majority of researchers, the following illustrates and underlines the impact of the spatial arrangement as a fundamentally important mechanism which plays an integral part in verbal interaction.

3.3.4 Cross-cultural perspective

Across time and cultures, spatial arrangements play and have played a significant role in articulating and expressing whatever the important divisions are in society.¹³⁰ Sommer (1959) concluded, after much research into spatial arrangements and status influences, that a society compensates for blurred social distinctions by clear spatial ones. Thirumalai (1983) describes the location of an elitist Hindu temple in a small town in Tamilnadu. The temple is located in the centre of the original town. The distance of the settlements from the temple serves as an indicator of Hindu caste ranking, proximity indicating higher rank. The Brahmin¹³¹ hamlet is closest to the temple and is located on the river bank or near the water source. The non-Brahmin caste Hindu streets surround the temple in an order of progressive reduction in closeness to the temple, corresponding to reduction in ranking. The lowest of the social strata occupy the periphery or may occupy space outside the periphery. Bomgardner (2000:11-14) describes seating arrangements at the amphitheatre reflecting the stratification of Roman society. On a large podium the emperor had a special box and senators sat on marble seating divided into fourteen sections. Next came the members of the equestrian order, who sat in the lowest tier (*ima cavea*) of the amphitheatre, consisting of twelve rows of marble seating divided into sixteen sections. Roman citizens affluent enough to afford to

¹³⁰One of the most important contributions to the study of the design and use of space has been in what is called *Proxemics*, a term coined by the anthropologist Edward Hall, who defines it as "the interrelated observations and theories of man's use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture" (1966:1). Proxemics is "the study of the ways in which individuals use physical space in their interactions with others and how this use of physical space influences behaviour of all concerned" (Thirumalai, 2003). A further significant contribution to the study of the use of space is found in recent research in geosemiotics (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) and its systematic analysis of the ways people interpret language as it is located in a physical setting and surroundings.

¹³¹The highest of the four castes in Hinduism, the members of which are by tradition priests and scholars.

wear a toga occupied nineteen rows of marble seats in sixteen sections in the middle of the seating area (*media cavea*).¹³² Above them, in the *summa cavea*, sat poorer citizens clad in dark garments, slaves, freemen, and foreigners residing in Rome. Women from these groups probably also sat among the men. This tier consisted of seven rows of limestone seating divided into sixteen sections. Finally, at the very top of the amphitheatre was a gallery with wooden seats (*summum maenianum in ligneis*) on which sat wives of senators and equestrians, protected from sun and rain by a colonnade. In *Gendered Spaces*, Spain (1992) introduces layouts of domestic structures in pre-industrial societies that reflect and reinforce women's subordinate status. According to Spain, houses are "spatial contexts within which the social order is reproduced" (1992:140). Her observation is that "dwellings reflect ideals and realities about relationships between women and men within the family and in society" (1992:7) and that architectural space plays a role in maintaining status distinctions by gender. Duranti (1984) describes the seating arrangement of *matai* (title holders) for a Samoan *fono*:

"The way people seat themselves in the house [...] is done according to an ideal plan structured on the basis of statuses (chiefs vs. orators), ranks (high vs. low-ranking titles), and extent of active participation in the event [...] Very roughly, the two senior orators of the village and the orators who are going to speak sit in what is considered the 'front' of the house. High-ranking chiefs sit in either one of the shorter sides (*tala*); other chiefs and those orators who are in charge of the kava ceremony sit in the 'back'." (Duranti, 1984:220, cited in Schwartzman, 1989:282).

In a contemporary Western setting, Laurier, Whyte & Buckner's ethnography of a neighbourhood café (2001) proffers a detailed account of how tables, chairs and other paraphernalia are used in methodical, ordered ways to assess, define and negotiate a customer's social status and maintain distinctions between *regulars*, *irregulars* and *unknowns*.

¹³²The *podium*, *ima cavea* and *media cavea* consisted of reserved seating. In these three tiers, the status of an individual in Roman society and within his own class was clear at a glance. The status of a senator determined in what section he sat on the *podium*, as did that of an equestrian in the *ima cavea*. For example, in the *ima cavea*, there was a section reserved for those equestrians who had been assigned the honour of 'with public horse', and who served on special jury panels. There even seems to have been a section reserved for bankrupt equestrians. In the *media cavea*, soldiers were separated from civilians, married men from bachelors; boys and their tutors sat together, etc.

The foregoing examples provide a cross-cultural overview of ways of organizing space to present and represent differences in power and privilege. Although concise and far from exhaustive, they allow for etic abstraction of how "social relations are constructed over space" (Massey, 1985:12) and hence add a general, universal dimension to the particular, local, insider's perspective, which I will now describe.¹³³

3.3.5 Spatial arrangement of offices

"There are no philosophical answers to philosophical questions that arise over the nature of space – the answers lie in human practice. The question 'what is space?' is therefore replaced by the question 'how is it that different human practices create and make use of distinctive conceptualisations of space?'"

David Harvey¹³⁴

Similar to the example of temple organization described above, the distance of the offices from the meeting room serves as an indicator for ranking, proximity indicating higher rank. Super-ordinate positions in the community's dominance hierarchy enjoy spatial privileges¹³⁵ of proximity and facilitated access to the central forum of the community. Whereas other staff members need to take an elevator to get to the meeting room, senior management positions have immediate and easy access to what is commonly considered the *focus*¹³⁶ and centre of community life. Clustered around the meeting

¹³³It is by no means the intention to make absolute, universal claims or to present a prototypical model for ways of organizing space to produce and reproduce status differences. At all times, analysis has been driven by an attempt to understand spatial arrangements through the lens of local meanings given to it. To some extent, the descriptive parameters which I use may well reach beyond the local context and apply to other meetings (board meetings, faculty meetings). Nonetheless their legitimacy (and value) as an analytic device is bound by the local practices and meanings of participants.

¹³⁴See Harvey, 1973:13-14, cited in Harvey, 2004.

¹³⁵Fisher (1993:221) notes that "persons of higher status have [...] better territory". He summarizes three basic principles relating the concept of territory to organizational status:

1. Persons of higher status will have more and better territory. 2. The territory of higher-status people is better protected than that of lower-status people. 3. The higher a person's status, the easier it is for him or her to invade the territory of lower-status people. Sommer (1969:25) notes that "higher ups have more and better space, as well as greater freedom to move about. This becomes institutionalized in the design and layout of buildings".

¹³⁶[BE:20.06.00:10] 0.26 min.

C: that's what the office meeting is meant to be; it is the one forum for the whole embassy to to chew over the events of the past week and before (0.8) so (.) you know it it is useful in a sense and I do see it actually as eh (0.7) as (0.4) in the original sense of (0.4) ehm the word



room are the offices of the Ambassador, the Deputy Head of Mission, staff members of the Political Section¹³⁷ and the Defence section. What's more, the line-up of offices parallels the community's ranking order, with the Ambassador's office adjacent to the meeting room, the DHM's office next in line and the offices of the First Secretary Political Section and the Defence Section following:

perhaps eh (0.4) **focus** >if you remember your latin< focus of course is is the fire hearth (0.6) it's perhaps a better word than a forum.

¹³⁷Every diplomatic mission is different. Their size and priorities depend on the country or the organization concerned. Usually they are divided into five sections: 1. The Political section monitors political, economic and social developments in the host country and reports them to London. They also advise the host country on decisions taken in London. 2. The Commercial section promotes British business interests abroad and assists exporters and investors. 3. Press and Public Affairs promotes Britain and British policy abroad, briefs the local media and other opinion-formers and responds to general queries about the United Kingdom. 4. The Consular Section helps or advises UK nationals abroad; Immigration deals with visa applications and queries from people wanting to visit the UK. 5. The Management section is responsible for the mission's budgets and the day-to-day running of the offices, but also for staff housing and other facilities which contribute to the smooth operation of the Diplomatic Service (Adapted from <http://www.fco.gov.uk>). If visually displayed in the format of an organization chart, the Political section would be placed on equal footing with, for instance, the Commercial section of the Embassy. Nonetheless, the Political section has higher impact and importance than other sections. Besides the location and clustering of offices around the meeting room, other evidence supports this argument. For instance, four staff members represent the Political section at weekly gatherings, whereas for every other section only one representative attends the meeting. Further evidence for its significance and impact is that the Deputy Head of Mission, whom informants refer to as the number two, has been appointed Head of this Section.

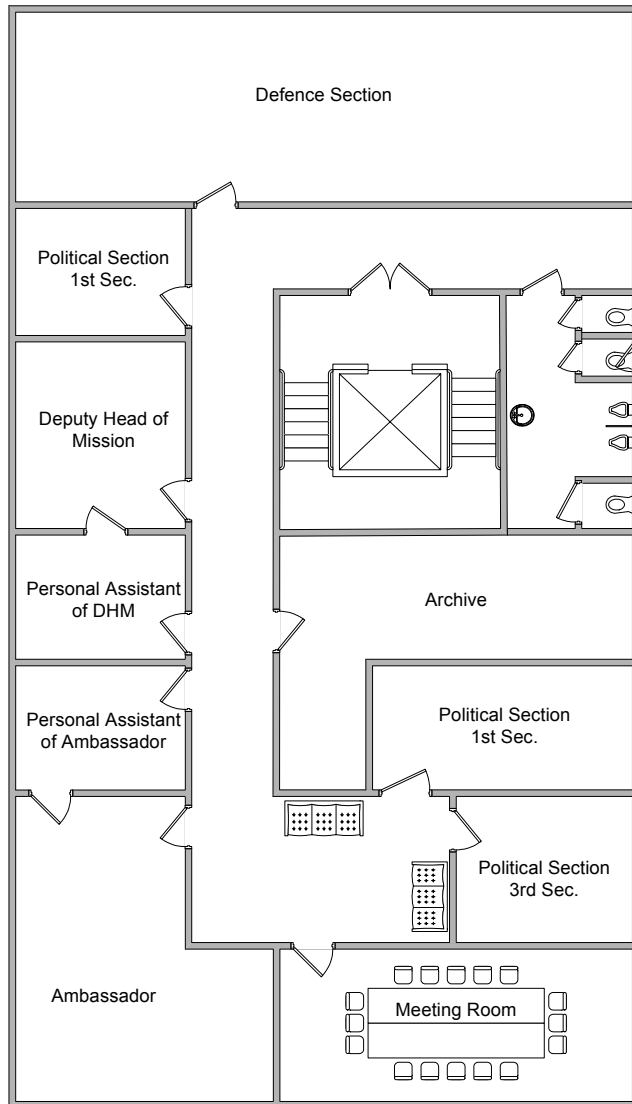


Figure 4: Sketch of the 6th floor

The spatial arrangement of offices/rooms, then, creates a centre beyond which lies the excluded periphery. It sets up a dichotomous division between the privileged and the non-privileged, between positions of importance and marginality.

Similar to the stratified structure of ancient cities, where the Court or a temple is located in the centre, residencies of bureaucrats or noblemen in the semi-periphery and merchants, craftsmen or farmers in the periphery, the design and layout of the embassy building produces and reproduces a community order based on asymmetry, inequality and an uneven distribution of power.

3.3.6 The meeting table

"[...] the paramount importance of the seating plan applies to [...] meetings round a table such as occur at a Round Table Conference. A moment's thought will convince us that a Square Table Conference would be something totally different and a Long Table Conference would be different again."

C. Northcote Parkinson¹³⁸

The centre/periphery dynamic is further induced by the shape and form of the meeting table. Allowing varying distances from its centre, the table is a significant factor supporting and stimulating a stratified and hierarchical community structure.¹³⁹

Unlike a round table, where every "part of the circumference is equidistant from the centre" (Lebaron & Streeck, 1997:5), the staff meeting table

¹³⁸See Parkinson, 1957:15-17, cited in Schwartzman, 1989:73-74.

¹³⁹Unconventionally but convincingly, artist and photographer Hassink (1996) raises awareness of the extent to which "a simple piece of furniture" (Hassink 1996, cited in Cohen, 1996:47) may be value-laden. As "a reminder of how decisions are made in this society, and who makes them" (Ford, 2004), *The Table of Power* (1996) features photographs of 21 empty corporate boardrooms. Hassink approached Europe's top forty companies using the Fortune 500 list with the request to take a photograph of the conference table of the board of directors. The 19 out of 40 corporations that refused to allow photography within their boardrooms are included in the book as black photographs. The way the photographs nestle between black pages, as though intentionally hidden, gives the work a voyeuristic touch, prompting the reader to pose the question: "what is concealed within these rooms that we aren't allowed to see" (Ford, 2004). In an interview, Hassink comments as follows: "Want het is veelzeggend dat ik van de helft van de bedrijven een eenvoudig meubelstuk als een tafel niet mocht fotograferen. Dat laat zien hoe zwaar de symboliek ervan weegt, ook voor de bedrijven zelf" (Cohen, 1996:47).

conjuges up a notion of participant disparity. It is rectangular, twice as long as it is wide, with five chairs lining the lengths and three chairs the widths. There is a head, there are corners to mark territory, the sides are unequal in dimensions and some positions are closer to the centre of the table than others:

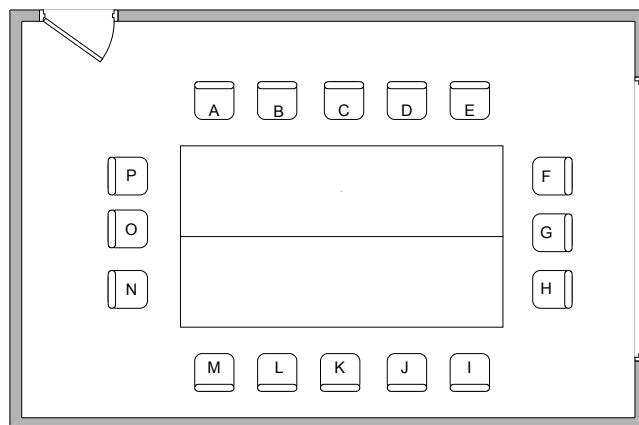


Figure 5: Meeting table

3.3.7 Seating strategies

" [...] this is precisely the distinctive feature of human life, namely, that there is a potentially infinite number of layers of meaning in what we do. [...] and therefore our science is just as infinite as the object of our study. The issue is not how to avoid getting into the potentially infinite layers, but how to find order in them, sometimes an order that is similar to the one proposed by the participants themselves, some other times a different order, that would be alien or even appalling to them."

Alessandro Duranti¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰See Duranti, 1997:153.

Which places/spaces in the setting described above, then, are conceived and perceived as either centrally important or only marginally influential? And which criteria are used for differentiation between central and marginal positions?

While waiting for a weekly meeting to start, I managed to catch a glimpse of the Ambassador chairing a preceding press meeting, in which he is briefed by staff members about published press articles relating to the workings of the different sections of the Embassy. At those daily staff meetings, the Ambassador sits at the head of the table, that is, the middle seat at the short end of the table, on the side closest to the entrance (seat O). At weekly staff meetings, however, the Ambassador claims central status by selecting the seat closest to the middle point of the table, that is, the middle seat on the long end of the table, on the side closest to the entrance (seat C).

The Ambassador's seating behaviour lays bare three criteria which have an important bearing on centrality.¹⁴¹ Seats O and C are more advantageously placed and have more status for three reasons. First, seats O and C are close to the only entrance to the room, that is, they are better accessible and hence more privileged. Second, seat C is physically the most central seat. From this seat, the distance between the leader and the other participants is reduced to a minimum. However, this seat is more disadvantageously placed with regard to vision since it is more difficult to simultaneously see the other members of the group. Seat O, in contrast, is the most central seat in terms of visual accessibility to and from the

¹⁴¹Positional centrality – whether physical or visual – and leadership are commonly perceived as closely connected and researchers have frequently attempted to prove or contradict the correlation between the two. Bass & Klubeck (1952), for instance, studied leadership emergence in groups of varying sizes which were arranged into two different seating patterns. Their arrangements were 'V' and rectangular shaped. Their conclusion was that seating arrangement had little or no influence on the leadership scores earned by the subjects. By contrast, experiments by Bavelas (1950) and Leavitt (1951) report the opposite conclusion. By means of controlled laboratory experiments, Bavelas and Leavitt investigated different communication structures (circle, chain, Y and star) and their effect on task performance. Their experiments had 5 people play a game in which they had to solve a puzzle. At the start of the game, each person was given a bit of key information. In order to solve the puzzle, everyone's bit of information had to be pooled. One of the outcomes/results of their research is that the probability of opining that the group had a leader went up in the order: circle, chain, Y, and star. In addition, agreement as to who was the leader increased in the same order (it was 100% in the case of the star). In other words, in a communication structure in which one node was visibly and clearly more central than all the other nodes, this position was unanimously recognized as a position of leadership.

occupied seats, allowing visual contact with as many members of the group as possible.

Summarizing, observational evidence reveals the three following criteria for differentiation between a central position of leadership and other peripheral positions (not necessarily in this order of importance):

1. accessibility to the location
2. physical proximity to and from the other participants
3. visual accessibility to and from the other participants

Recapitulating, at weekly meetings the Ambassador *enacts*¹⁴² a central position in the dominance hierarchy, in other words, claims central status, by selecting a seat which is physically central and enjoys privileges of facilitated access. With this act, which he repeats again and again, week after week, this seat is defined and determined as the most central seat for this occasion.

The choice for a physically central seat is not only the spatial expression and manifestation of a position of leadership, it is also the expression of a symbolic norm of solidarity. Whereas in daily press meetings the choice of seat O reflects a group dealing only through its leader rather than through a mutual exchange process, the choice of seat C during weekly meetings indicates an attempt to build and facilitate shared leadership, to distribute the sense of ownership and responsibility for leadership throughout the whole group.¹⁴³

¹⁴²Although partly inscribed in the physical setting of the meeting room, partly dictated and constrained by material conditions, the *centre* is the continual creation and achievement of participants, a "contingent, ongoing accomplishment, a kind of work or doing" (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972). The analysis outlined above adopts the "ethnomethodological stance" (Garfinkel, 1967) that "the properties of social life which seem objective, factual and transsituational, are actually managed accomplishments or achievements of local processes [...] The aim of ethnomethodological enquiry is to analyze the situated conduct of societal members in order to see how 'objective' properties of social life are achieved" (Wenst & Fenstermaker, 1993:152).

¹⁴³Huisman (2000, chapter 5) demonstrates how setting structures participation. By means of a comparative study of the setting of meetings of three management teams in Dutch organisations she demonstrates the extent to which the organisation of the furniture and the seating positions may reflect different orientations to a participation framework, ranging from expectations of full participation of all participants to dialogical participation.

Mohanty (1988) notes that it is “the periphery that, in its boundedness, determines the centre”. The Ambassador, then, can only *enact*¹⁴⁴ and appropriate a central position on account of the support and co-operation of the periphery. For instance, although the Ambassador always enters last, *his* seat will be kept open. Moreover, ethnographic interviews reveal how participants consciously adjust their seating positions to his position. The Ambassador is a central, focal reference point which steers and guides their seating behaviour:



CD 1 Track 27

[BE:06.06.00:16b] 0.04 min.

D: And of course some people would shy away from sitting close to **the Ambassador** as well.



CD 1 Track 28

[BE:30.05.00:29b] 0.11 min.

E: And then there's sort of prime positions (0.7) like nobody wants to be directly opposite **the Ambassador** (1.6)

I: mmm

E: Because (0.5) hhhh he can see you



CD 1 Track 29

[BE:20.06.00:8] 0.11 min.

C: It's quite funny how people shake ehm their distance from **the Ambassador** as their their their pecking order in the Embassy

The foregoing fragments highlight the Ambassador as a pivot around which the dynamic of *status contest* revolves. The centre-periphery dynamic which underpins participants' seating behaviour is aptly formulated by an informant:

¹⁴⁴Position, social place is not a material thing to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well articulated. Performed with ease or clumsiness, awareness or not, guile or good faith, it is nonetheless something that must be enacted and portrayed, something that must be realized" (Goffman, 1959:75).

[BE:30.05.00:17c] 0.13 min.



CD 1 Track 30

T: You can tell by looking round the table (1.3) the area of so called importance comes out and [eh

I: [being?

T: you know if you like the **the man in the middle (0.6) and then gradually it devolves out** ehm

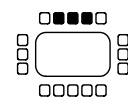
The above-mentioned fragments also confirm visual accessibility and physical proximity as prime principles of differentiation. Sitting close to the Ambassador and/or seeing and being seen by him are crucial criteria for selecting a position at the meeting table and measuring and maintaining one's position in the dominance hierarchy. In what follows I will further explore the correlation between participant's position in the dominance hierarchy and physical proximity/visual accessibility to and from the centre. I will demonstrate how the seating arrangement at the meeting regulates and mediates status distinctions on account of the variations it produces in physical distance and visual accessibility to and from the Ambassador.

3.3.8 Areas of central importance

" [...] therefore the Father has never been without the Son, nor the Son without the Spirit: and this same Trinity is immutable and unalterable forever."

St. Gregory of Neocaesarea¹⁴⁵

When asked to comment on the seating plan, nearly all participants mentioned the *unalterable* trinity of seating positions formed by the Ambassador (seat C), the Head of Political Section (DHM) flanking the Ambassador to his right (seat B), and the Head of Defence Section flanking him to his left (seat D).



¹⁴⁵Known as THAUMATURGUS, (ho Thaumaturgos, the miracle-worker). Born at Neocaesarea in Pontus (Asia Minor) about 213; died there 270-275. Among those who built up the Christian Church, extended its influence, and strengthened its institutions, the bishops of Asia Minor occupied a senior position. Among them Gregory of Neocaesarea held a very prominent place (adapted from the Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07015a.htm>)



CD 1 Track 31

[BE:30.05.00:28b] 0.10 min.

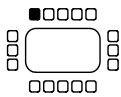
E: The Ambassador sits and makes a point of not sitting at the top of the table (0.9) but he sits **and then there's S. to one side of him and the DA to the other side of him**



CD 1 Track 32

[BE:06.06.00:17a] 0.12 min.

I: Who sits always close to the Ambassador (0.4) that is?
D: The number two on his right (1.3) the DA on his left (1.0) and me
I: Is that always so?
D: That line is always (0.7) virtually exactly the same.



A majority of informants furthermore notes the unchangeable and fixed position of the First Secretary Political Section, next to the DHM (seat A):



CD 1 Track 33

[BE:20.06.00:8b] 0.12 min.

C: S. sits next to the Ambassador almost ex officio 'cause he's he's the number two (0.8) but you'll find that B. for example always ensures she's sitting next door to the number two hehehehe.

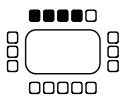


CD 1 Track 34

[BE:30.05.00:28c] 0.03 min.

E: B. always makes sure she sits besides S.

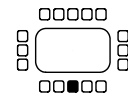
In other words, the spatial pattern of clustering of sections/functions outside the meeting room is continued in the form of a side-by-side arrangement of positions around the meeting table.



Positioned side-by-side, participants communicate a message of unison and coalition. Close and clustered, they convey to other community members that they form an alliance, working together in a co-ordinated fashion and geared toward a common goal. Lined-up in a side-by-side arrangement, participants bundle their forces and secure a strong and unbreakable position of authority and power. Schefflen notes that "the members of a

coalition who share a task or a point of view are likely to use congruent or parallel positions in addition to taking seats next to one another [...] Meeting rooms and living rooms have prepared side-by-side arrangements of chairs or seats on a sofa or bench that are often reserved for combinations that are expected to act in concert.” (Scheflen, 1973:57, cited in Lebaron & Streeck, 1997:5)

Like satellites, the DHM and the DA are drawn into the orbit of the Ambassador, their motion primarily and permanently determined by his force of attraction and pulled into a curve as they attempt to fly off in a straight line. The Head of Commercial Section, in contrast, distances himself from *the powers that be* (seat K). Rather than being usurped and potentially paralysed by the central force of power, he looks power in the eye. He confronts the central power structure rather than allying with it. Selecting a position directly opposite the Ambassador signals opposition, competition and contest. Nonetheless, his position may be considered central and influential because both physically central and with utmost visual accessibility to and from the Ambassador.

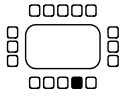


The foregoing demonstrates a positive correlation between dominant positions in the community’s hierarchical structure, on the one hand, and physical proximity to the leader, on the other. High-ranking positions are seen to be occupying the centre, displacing lower ranked positions to the periphery.

3.3.9 Semi-peripheral positions

The more removed from the centre and towards the corners of the table or the shorter sides of the table, the more participants’ positions become peripheral.

Positions with low accessibility, low physical proximity but high visual accessibility to and from the centre have semi-peripheral status. Participants seated at a distance from the central authority but nonetheless keeping visual contact, have relatively high status. In contrast with satellite positions, however, they are less bound by restrictions and control of central authority and less dependent on the central power structure.



For instance, next to the Head of Commercial Section, sits the Head of Management Section (seat J). The Embassy's Management Section is the section that operates behind the scenes to ensure that the Embassy is run as efficiently as possible. It is responsible for such things as the Embassy budget, the recruitment of locally employed staff and the maintenance of office facilities. The Management Section is not solely and strictly bound to the British Embassy: it also provides service to the other two Foreign Office Missions in Brussels, UKRep and UKdel.¹⁴⁶ In contrast with other members of the Foreign Office present at the staff meeting, the Head of Management Section does not work under the supervision of the Ambassador:



CD 1 Track 35

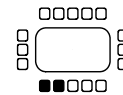
[BE:16.05.00:6] 0.48 min.

- N: Well curiously he's not really my manager.
I: Is he not no?
N: Ehhum (.) no I'm (0.4) I've got a sort of slightly curious status here in that I am head of this office and a little bit apart from (0.4) the Embassy and (0.4) UKRep and UKDel so (0.8) on a day to day basis certainly he doesn't (0.5) manage me I manage myself. I d- I do the managing here if you like (0.4) ehm I'm answerable to him and the other three (.) sorry the other two ambassadors to the extent that if things go wrong they're gonna know w- they might they might (1.2) need to (.) question me about it but (0.5) or if something goes wrong for them they w- might c- get on to me and say (0.3) ehm what the hell is going on but eh (0.6) basically I'm not I'm not managed on a day to day basis.

This explains why, although highly ranked in the community's hierarchical structure (he has the same grade as the Deputy Head of Mission), the Head of Management Section slightly withdraws from the ruling authority. The selection of a seat which distances itself from the central authority while maintaining high visual access to it, combines the power and potential of a medium-ranked position with the autonomy and independence of an outsider.

¹⁴⁶There are a small number of cities (mainly New York, Geneva, Paris, Vienna and Brussels) where the FCO have more than one office. For example, in Brussels there is a delegation to NATO, a mission to the EU and an Embassy. UKRep is an acronym for UK Permanent Representation to the European Union; UKdel is an acronym for UK Delegation to NATO.

The other positions on this side of the table, facing the central forces of power, have comparable semiperipheral status. Seats L and M are the standard seating positions for the Drugs Liaison Officer and the Fiscal Liaison Officer. They too, have outsider's status and work relatively independently and autonomously. In contrast to the other participants at the meeting, they are not members of the Foreign Office, but police officers or customs officers serving overseas:



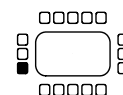
[BE:30.05.00:2] 0.40 min.



CD 1 Track 36

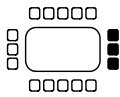
- M: although we're working in (0.4) the Embassy (0.3) with a lot of foreign staff here (0.4) we're not actually under the umbrella of the Foreign [Office].
- I: [mmm
- M: I'm a customs officer T. is a police officer (0.9) the two guys next door are both customs officers we've got specific roles (.) but don't impact on the Commercial section or the Consular section or the Political section here (0.5) but we operate from this building (0.7)
- I: You're a bit of an outsider then
- M: **a bit of an outsider yeah** we're not linked to for example the:: (0.8) Foreign Office computer system (0.6) so the internal ehm e-mails that go around we don't generally see unless somebody thinks oh that's rather pertinent to our office and they'll print a copy of it and put it in an envelope and send it down to us.

The corner position at the meeting table (seat N) is reserved for the Director of the British Council, which is an emanation of the British Embassy. Again, his position is that of an outsider, not directly related to and involved in the daily operations of the Embassy but still accountable to it.



Summarizing, seating positions which distance themselves from the central power while maintaining visual contact may be considered semi-peripheral. Participants occupying these seats occupy a high or middle rank in the community hierarchy, yet they are forced to the sidelines of the seating plan, because of their status as outsider, their relative independence and autonomy.

3.3.10 Peripheral positions



At the far end of the table, with low accessibility, low physical proximity and low visual accessibility, are the seats of the Ambassador's personal assistant (seat F), the third secretary political section (seat G) and, occasionally, the press and public relations officer (seat H). Their status has some of the characteristics Goffman ascribes to a "non-person" (Goffman, 1959:151). The non-person's role is that of a person who is present for practical purposes, but who has no role to play in the interaction. Servants, for instance, often fill this role, they are there for the purposes of serving, but are treated as absent in the interaction. Unlike participants with semi-peripheral status, who consider themselves as having a *specific role* (see the interview above), *non-persons* almost pretend not to be there and refrain from manifesting themselves as a significant social other. When going round the table, and being asked for a contribution to make, the Ambassador's PA always refrained from contributing. Similarly, the third secretary Political Section regularly claimed she had nothing to say. For the same reason, the Ambassador's PA was hard if not impossible to interview. She insisted that she only attends the meeting for practical purposes and that any other matter doesn't *affect* her:



CD 1 Track 37

[BE:16.05.00:16] 0.37 min.

- I: Eh what I'm doing research (0.4) ehm after is (0.7) ehm generally speaking negotiating mechanisms (1.3) at meetings
- P: I don't [think
- I [so
- P: that really affects me
- I: eh yeah but hhha in the sense that
- P: but I mean my
- I: The reason why I want to talk to you is because you attend the weekly meetings (0.7) and I tend to interview I am planning of interviewing everybody who (.) takes part in the meetings just to get just to get their views.
- P: Yeah because it doesn't the thing is **it doesn't really affect me cause I'm only there because of my (0.5)**
- I: yeah
- P: **Ambassador's diary**
- I: mmm

Her non-person status is recognized and confirmed by other participants:

[BE:06.06.00:13] 0.16 min.



CD 1 Track 38

D: I mean there's not a lot she can say cause she's not actively involved in policy work she's the personal assistant to the Ambassador I mean she knows what's going on (.) but **she doesn't have a role in it** therefore she's got (0.9) apart from () (1.0) management (0.4) issues she's got nothing really to add (0.6) to the meeting

In a nutshell, *the bottom end of the table*¹⁴⁷ is reserved for marginal positions which have the status of non-person. They occupy a low rank in the status order and have no intention of/potential for claiming a higher position in the dominance hierarchy.

Recapitulating, the Ambassador is the pivotal point around which the dynamic of *status contest* revolves. Some manifest a position of power by selecting a location close to the central authority. Observational evidence has shown a positive correlation between a dominant position in the community's hierarchical order and physical proximity to the centre. It has been demonstrated how the spatial pattern of clustering of top-ranking positions outside the meeting room is continued in the form of side-by-side arrangements at the meeting table. One participant manifests a position of power by selecting a position directly opposite the central authority. His position is full of aspiration for power because it is physically central and with utmost visual accessibility to and from the leader. Other participants maintain distance and move from the centre. They dwell on the semi-periphery. With low physical proximity but nonetheless high visual accessibility to and from the centre, their location is influential and significant. However, they are forced to the sidelines of the seating plan because of their status as outsiders in the community. Finally, some participants are displaced to the periphery. Because of their status as *non-persons* they are banned to *the bottom end of the table*, to a position characterized by low physical proximity and visual accessibility to and from the centre, as well as low accessibility.

¹⁴⁷The phrase is used by the Third Secretary Political Section, who comments that she always tends to sit at *the bottom end of the table*. The use of spatial metaphor aptly displays a perception of space in terms of top-bottom and centre-periphery.

To conclude, the foregoing section has revealed the ritual function of the seating arrangement as a corrective mechanism and a cohesive device for connecting the individual to the group. Analysis has demonstrated how newcomers are ritually instructed in the collective norm of the seating plan and how subscribing to the seating norms as a rule of conduct constitutes the beginning of a process of *aggregation* and integration into the pre-existing group.

Analysis has furthermore indicated the ritual role of the seating arrangement as a symbolic representation¹⁴⁸ of the community's social order, reinforcing and confirming the hierarchical relations between participants. Seating positions publicly display participants' place in the centre or at the margin of the socially categorized space of the meeting room, reflecting their position at the centre or the periphery, the top or the bottom of the dominance hierarchy.

3.4 Connectedness and cohesion

"Membership is connectedness."

Ephesians 4:1-7

Consider the following fragment:



CD 1 Track 39

[BE:20.06.00:11] 1.09 min.

C: ehm (1.5) I mean it's not easy for the Ambassador just go wandering around the Embassy sitting on people's desks and saying hi how are you (.) people don't like it for a start they much more prefer Ambassadors who (.) sit in their little dens upstairs and don't bother them I (.) the Ambassador comes in about once a fortnight in my office and I dislike it intensely because you know this is my patch (0.6) a:nd there again it's very similar to (0.3) being in ehm in the armed forces and I've been in the armed forces ehm you know **you respect people's areas as very much theirs you do not even if you are the big chief**

¹⁴⁸In a study of Samoan ceremonial greetings, Duranti defines "the local conceptualization of the space [...] as a symbolic representation of the social organization" (Duranti, 1992, cited in Duranti, 1997:323-324).

(0.4) you do not go into somebody's area without good reason (0.7) and good excuse and you ask and you apologize so you know if the captain is going to look at the engine room he goes to see the ehm the chief engineer first and asks his permission he just doesn't do it (0.4) he's got every right to do it as far as the book is concerned but in the interests of (0.5) people's feelings ehm he does that so there's very much (.) again a reason why you have eh **a meeting which is neutral ground** where you're not sort of going into somebody else's territory and eh (0.6) starting to wrap them up the wrong way necessarily.

The extract emphasizes and confirms aspects of territoriality which have been described earlier. The account renders a local perception of emphatic control over physical space, with community members defending and claiming possession of areas (*you respect people's areas as very much theirs*). In the context of these perceived territorial claims, the informant uses a remarkable spatial metaphor, describing the meeting as *neutral ground*. This description may be linked to Colebrook's (1998) study of aboriginal culture. He remarks that "territoriality was a vital element in the social structure of the tribe. Loes/Laws dictated respect for all tribal traditional lands, and this acknowledged neighbouring area as well. To pass through neighbouring tribal land, permission needed to be sought. There were corridors lying between each territory and these were neutral ground" (Colebrook, 1998). Correspondingly, the staff meeting area is put forward by the informant as no-man's land, where members of the community meet on neutral ground, avoiding the danger of trespassing territory. It is juxtaposed to the *private* protected territory of a community member's office and conceptualized as *public, communal* space. It is contrasted with the *closed* space of the office and its restricted conditions of access and defined and perceived as *open* space.

The informant's dichotomous representation of space highlights the intricate relation between space and "processes of inclusion/exclusion" (Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouck, 2005).¹⁴⁹ His view of the meeting area as *open space* suggests an inclusion effect. In contrast with the more sensitive private area of an office, the meeting room provides neutral, non-threatening ground

¹⁴⁹Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouck (2005) note that "spaces come with preliminary restrictions on participation". In line with Goffman's observations, they emphasize that spatial structuring and partitioning essentially results in inclusion or exclusion of participants from a focus of activity.

with unlimited opportunities for dialogue, cooperation and active participation in the societal structure.

The informant's perception of the weekly gathering as *neutral ground* and its associated values of equality and harmony, co-operation and cohesion, draws attention to the ritual role of the meeting in reinforcing social harmony and fostering unity.

Durkheim was among the first in a long line of social scientists to posit a relationship between ritual performance and group solidarity (Sosis & Ruffe, 2004). He formulated what has become the most influential theory of social cohesion, emphasizing the key role played by ritual in producing and maintaining solidarity:

"There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality. Now, this moral remaking cannot be achieved except by means of reunions, assemblies and meetings where the individuals, being closely united to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments." (Durkheim, 1915:418, cited in Kertzer, 1988:62)

For Durkheim, collective rituals are the means by which individuals bond with one another in the community. Through participation in rituals, people's dependence on their social group is continually brought to their mind. Participating in ritual with others helps people achieve a sense of unity. Aspects of connectedness and unity are frequently mentioned in ethnographic interviews. Participants recount how the weekly meeting brings all the people together, sanctifying their unity:



CD 1 Track 40

[BE:06.06.00:9] 0.03 min.

D: It's the only time in the week where we all sit together.

Informants confirm the symbolic role of the meeting in counteracting the divisive tendencies that plague community members' daily social life:

[BE:20.06.00:6a] 0.50 min.



CD 1 Track 41

- C: I think there has to be some forum for (0.6) what is by definition a s-somewhat split organization because I mean we're covering here we're covering political interests (0.7) ehm consular interests (0.6) eh information interests (1.0) the police (0.8) the customs (0.9) eh the armed forces (0.6) ehm a whole range of British institutions ehm and interests which (0.3) are very very much overlapping (0.7) and yet we are working in different sections in our own little way and the only way in fact we can work together is by some system of exchange of information and so (0.3) the actual institution of (0.6) eh a meeting be it weekly or whatever (0.4) is ehm (0.7) I would say a vital one.

Participants stress the ritual function of the weekly gathering in enhancing community membership:

[BE:06.06.00:3] 0.13 min.



CD 1 Track 42

- J: but there is (1.6) a certain rationale behind it (0.5) and a sense of (1.5) belonging community spirit I think (.) that again there's a certain purpose (1.1) eh behind it.

[BE:20.06.00:6b] 1.00 min.



CD 1 Track 43

- C: there is a degree of eh clannishness which derives from that as you get from any group of people (0.5) ehm which is stronger in the Foreign Office than I think it would be in most (0.4) ehm public service departments for the obvious reasons that (0.5) unlike them we actually live together overseas and not so much in a place like Brussels but if you're stuck in some of the more (0.3) ehm (0.7) neck of the world's places which I've been to (0.4) ehm then you know your membership of that little community is very very important to you and so we have a much stronger feeling of of ehm belonging to something than shall we say someone who works for the department of environment aahum ehm (1.3) and there again (0.9) having something like an office meeting ehm is in a certain sense the ehm (1.6) the

concrete expression of of the clan. **It's it's it's a meeting of its members ehm (1.1) displayed in their hierarchy.**

The foregoing accounts, however, lay bare an intriguing contradiction. They challenge prior perceptions of the meeting area, not as *neutral ground*, but as a battle zone and an arena for *status contests*, not as a forum for symmetry, equality and harmony, but as a reinforcement of inequality and status differences. This contradiction, then, triggers the main research question for the following chapter: to what extent do perceptions of the meeting area as *neutral ground* reflect an ideology, rather than a reality? And to what extent is this ideology of connectedness and equality in fact a tactic for "inducing general acquiescence in power arrangements" (Edelman, 1977:161, cited in Kertzer, 1988:42), that is, for reinforcing inequality?

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the role of the weekly meeting as organizational ritual. It has reformulated the local rationalizations and interpretations of ritual aspects of the weekly gathering, thereby merging local meanings from the field with theoretical observations from the research literature.

Analysis has pointed at the significance of the weekly meeting as a compensatory ritual counterbalancing the instability and insecurity of the diplomatic community. The formal, standardized, repetitive nature of a weekly gathering offers community members ritual reassurance and compensates for the uncertainty of the diplomatic service, its ever-changing relations and its continuous turnover of personnel. It offers predictability to individuals whose social position, relationships with others and experiences are subject to constant change.

In addition, close examination of the seating arrangement has revealed the weekly meeting's ritual role in cultural and social transformation. Symbolic seating patterns of behaviour initiate participants into the community's meanings, norms, values and sanctions.

Detailed inspection of the seating plan and investigation of participants' seating strategies has furthermore unveiled the meeting's symbolic purpose

of consolidating hierarchical relations between participants and validating the current social structure.

Finally, this chapter has pointed at the commonly claimed inclusion effect of the meeting. The public communal nature of the weekly gathering is said to promote participation in the community's social structure, enhance connectedness and a sense of belonging to the community. However, symbolic values of neutrality, equality and symmetry were found to be in sharp contrast with observational evidence of inequality and status contest. This contrast forms the stepping stone to the next chapter, which will investigate how symbolic values of solidarity, involvement and group cohesion are manipulated in the interest of power.

Chapter 4

4. Legitimizing power through ritual

" [...] it is important for the powerful to lend what legitimacy they can to the system and, thereby, their own privileged position in that system. One of the ways they do this is through ritual."

David Kertzer¹⁵⁰

4.1 Introduction: controlling the social system through ritual

The foregoing chapter has sketched the contours of the weekly meeting as a symbolic system of communication, propagating multiple meanings through a complex symbolic performance. Analysis has demonstrated that the meeting has an important socialization function, stimulating and regulating the process by which organizational members become integrated into the community. The ritual of a weekly staff gathering regulates and controls the process of adaptation and acclimatization to the rules and norms of the community. Participation in the common ritual of a weekly meeting enhances attachment of staff members to the community's norms, values and sanctions. They are forced to align their personal identities, expectations and values with collectively accepted social norms, roles and statuses. This is where the essentially political/ideological function of the weekly meeting becomes apparent. Instructing, directing, programming individuals into collectively accepted norms and values, the ritual of a weekly meeting controls in a conservative way the behaviour and values of the group for the sake of the community as a whole. The collective ritual of a meeting "inhibits individual search for cues" (Edelman, 1971:177) and fosters conformity to a shared doctrine. Ritual is a "societal control system" that links "the individual to a community of significant others through the symbolic mobilization of shared life meanings" (Munn, 1973:705, cited in Kertzer, 1988:63).

This chapter aims at getting deeper insight in the political and ideological processes that underlie the ritual event of the weekly staff meeting. The questions it addresses are, *how are organizational participants persuaded into accepting their own statuses and the official rules?; how are they mobilized into compliance with the current regime?; what kinds of*

¹⁵⁰See Kertzer, 1988:39.

contestation are there around the values that the ritual of the meeting is due to enshrine?

A first section focuses on the process of **enacting power**. It examines how the political leader of the community, that is, the Ambassador, propagates a shared doctrine. It investigates how he describes and justifies the ritual procedure of a weekly meeting; how he perceives and rationalizes the event. Which are the norms and values he imposes? And most importantly, what are the ways in which he skilfully shapes his argument and presents himself in a credible way so as to encourage people to accept the imposed norms and values? Close examination of the interview with him investigates how he clothes the political/ideological "in effective means of displaying it" (Goffman, 1959:234) and focus is on dismantling the strategic scaffolds that he uses for constructing a communal value system.

Limiting the investigation of ideological processes that shape and underlie the ritual event of the meeting to an examination of the Ambassador's discourse would be severely restricting the perspective of this study. If not only because it puts great weight on the analyst making claims and hypotheses about intended political and rhetoric effects. The second part of this chapter, then, is fundamentally other-oriented and aims at documenting the real rhetorical effect of the Ambassador's discourse. It renders and represents the multiple and differential interpretations of the values he proclaims and tries to describe and explain the actual impact of persuasive strategies on organizational participants. This section will focus on **degrees of acting upon power**. It will examine to what extent participants' perceptions accord with the central, salient ideology.

4.2 Enacting power: constructing and legitimizing a position of authority

Which values and beliefs does the Ambassador project and propagate? And how are they dressed up in acceptable ways? In a nutshell, these are the main questions this first section addresses. In order to provide an answer to these queries it exploits the synergy between a holistic, humanistic, ethnographic perspective and a text-oriented, linguistic-descriptive analysis drawing on Appraisal Theory (Iedema et al., 1994; Christie & Martin, 1997;

Martin, 2000; White, 1998), located within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics.¹⁵¹

4.2.1 Anthropology and Appraisal allied: a two-pronged approach to power and political performance

"Because ideologies are essentially sets of values - what counts as good or bad, what should or should not happen, what counts as true or untrue - evaluation is a key linguistic concept in their study."

Geoff Thompson and Susan Hunston¹⁵²

In order to identify the ideological assumptions that are at work, the interview with the Ambassador will be analysed from the point of view of evaluative lexis and the foregrounding of certain interpersonal resources. What does the Ambassador think or feel about the meeting? How does every act of evaluation go towards building up, supporting and legitimizing a communal value system? How does he express, negotiate and naturalize a particular inter-subjective and ultimately ideological position? In other words, which stance does he take towards real and potential addressees? And, how does he situate his viewpoint in "the larger world of available social viewpoints" (Lemke, 1998a:33)?

To answer these questions, my analysis draws on Appraisal Theory (Iedema et al. 1994; Christie & Martin, 1997; Martin, 2000; White, 1998) and its highly elaborate and unequalled apparatus for diagramming and charting evaluative meaning distinctions.

However, the investigation of evaluative meanings, based on the Appraisal framework, is but one analytic strategy that informs the research. Throughout, findings from the linguistic-descriptive stage are linked to insights from different traditions of power research, ranging from the philosophical writings of Marx and Weber to the Critical Discourse Analytic approach of Fairclough (1989),¹⁵³ the political anthropological ideas

¹⁵¹See Taverniers (2002) for a substantial theoretical study of the systemic-functional model of language.

¹⁵²See Thompson and Hunston, 2000:8.

¹⁵³There is a close association between SFL, Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis. Haig (2004:11), for instance, notes that "the connection here is an intimate one, with a shared intellectual heritage traceable all the way back to Marx and, today, the involvement of many key workers such as Gunther Kress and Jim Martin, who succeed in straddling the two camps

advocated by Kertzer (1988) and many others. Most importantly, however, linguistic analysis will be complemented with an ethnographic reading and interpretation of the values, beliefs and assumptions which the Ambassador explicitly and implicitly proclaims.

Instances of research¹⁵⁴ combining a systemic functional analysis of language data in terms of Appraisal with an ethnographic interpretation of these data are rare. Nonetheless, there are several arguments pleading in favour of a synthesis of the two approaches.

The first argument is grounded in historical fact. There is a close, long-standing affiliation between functional linguistics and anthropology. Their trajectories¹⁵⁵ have crossed and mutually influenced each other. Functional approaches to language have always been closely entwined with anthropological concerns for the cultural meaning of actions, events, objects and their functioning within the immediate and the larger cultural context (see also section 4.2.2 below). A methodological synthesis of the Appraisal

comfortably". Slembrouck (2003) states "they have a history in common of mutual comment which stresses complementarity and a preferred partnership in the domain of language, discourse and critique". Critical Linguistics was developed in the late 1970s by a group of linguists and theorists at the University of East Anglia (Fowler et.al., 1979; Kress, 1979). CL practitioners such as Trew (1979:155) aimed at "isolating ideology in discourse" and showing how ideology and ideological processes are manifested as systems of linguistic characteristics and processes. They pursued this aim by developing analytical tools based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). For a more thorough discussion of the aims and methods of critical language study, see Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Fowler, et al., 1979; Kress, 1979; van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 1989; Sheyholislami, 2001 and Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000.

¹⁵⁴Rick Iedema's research on clinical and managerial work draws on Appraisal "strategically, pragmatically and cursorily" (as he explained in an e-mail to me). The following publications draw in their analyses on its principles, if not naming it explicitly: Iedema et al. 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2005.

¹⁵⁵Describing and explaining the historical trajectory and mutual influencing of functional traditions in more detail is not an easy task. Lemke (1998b) provides the following "simplified story": "Traditions of functional linguistics [...] originated in Eastern Europe, where Russian formalism was always more concrete and sociologically aware of context than was the West European variety. From this eastern formalism came the Moscow school functionalism (Propp, Voloshinov, Bakhtin, R. Jakobson), and the Prague School functionalists (V. Mathesius, J. Mukarovskiy, F. Danes), which then migrated by way of B. Malinowski to England, where it developed into British functionalism (J.R. Firth, M.A.K. Halliday, J. McH. Sinclair), and also via Germany to the U.S. (E. Sapir, B.L. Whorf, M. Silverstein, J. Gumperz), where it flourished more in anthropology than in linguistics itself. The English branch came via Halliday and his partner R. Hasan to Australia, and with M. Gregory to Canada. J.R. Martin studied with Gregory and Halliday and also emigrated to Australia. [...] Other branches of functionalism are Danish (L. Hjelmslev), French (A. Martinet, C. Hagege), Dutch (T. van Dijk), and German-Austrian (W. Dressler)".

model and ethnography, then, draws on, revives and tightens the historical bond, affiliation between functional linguistics and anthropology.

A second argument forms part of a larger plea for accepting a participant-oriented approach in social discourse analysis. The joint use of the essentially text-oriented framework of Appraisal Theory and Ethnographic tools for analysis is an appeal for adopting a research perspective which relies not only on textual messages for decoding, describing and interpreting discourse processes but integrates the multiple and diverse interpretations of initiators and recipients of those messages into the analysis.

In spite of its distinct theoretical and epistemological claims of a commitment to the study of language use as situated practice,¹⁵⁶ some of the arguments that have been made by ethnographers against Systemic Functional Linguistic approaches concern a narrow treatment of context and a one-sidedly text-oriented approach to meaning. Slembrouck (2005a), for instance, argues that both on a theoretical and a practical level, within SFL, the analysis of social practice is narrowed down to textual practice:

"[...] on a theoretical plane, context is read triadically through the functions of language. Also in the practical terms of doing research, we do not find any traces of a stated need to engage with context separate from textual analysis, or before one begins to collect textual material, or independently of its immediate bearing on the textual instances which are the primary object of inquiry. In short, context is what can be gleaned from the text (for some, this is where the job of language analysts ends) and one major risk is indeed that the social is brought home to exhaustive textual analysis." (2005a)

In other words, the critique that is being formulated against Systemic Functional approaches is that, despite an inbuilt theoretical focus on the

¹⁵⁶Functionalist approaches such as Appraisal Theory are concerned with language use in social contexts, with the interrelationship between language and society. Martin and Rose (2003), for instance, state that "since each text is produced interactively between speakers, and between writers and (potential) readers, we can use it to interpret the interaction it manifests. And since the interaction is an instance of the speakers' culture, we can also use the text to interpret aspects of the culture it manifests" (Martin & Rose, 2003:1, cited in Slembrouck, 2003). This view reaches an extreme in the work of critical language scholarship. Fairclough, for instance, advocates a dialogical conception of language and society, with language and society partly constituting one another: "My view is that there is not an external relationship 'between' language and society, but an internal and dialectical relationship. Language is a part of society; linguistic phenomena are social phenomena of a special sort, and social phenomena are (in part) linguistic phenomena" (Fairclough, 1989:23).

contextual dimension of language, aspects of context are filtered through the one-sided perspective of textual analysis with the danger of leading to a distorted view. Slembrouck supports his argument with an excerpt from an interview in which a lone mother with a small infant explains to the interviewer how a leaflet promising *help [...] by having someone in during the day to lessen the burden* made her eventually decide to ring social services for help. Contrary to the mother's expectations and intentions, however, the child was taken into custody the following morning:

Interviewer: did you have any idea . what they might be able to do
did did you have any particular

Mother: no I didn't think they would whisk [no] my child off the
next morning .

Interviewer: no . what did you think they might

Mother: I thought they might help because I've got a booklet over
there actually which I've put picked up in their place
which says that they can help you by having someone in
during the day to . lessen . the burden .

Interviewer: what sort of thing were you thinking of there

Mother: erm . to tell you the truth I didn't really know exactly
what I was thinking . I was thinking they might help me in
a more in a different way than they would . no way did I
think they would whisk my child off me

Interviewer: no

Mother: it says in that book . that they're supposed to send . in
someone to help beforehand before they take the child
away from you

Interviewer: hm . so you thought they'd offer some sort of help .
during the day

(Slembrouck, 2005a)

Slembrouck then raises the question to which extent an exclusive text analysis of the leaflet would have revealed or predicted the real effect which its "insertion into social action had in this particular case". Following from that he formulates the critique that Systemic Functional Linguistic approaches neglect "real language user's orientations":

"The bigger charge may be that of a textual appropriation of the contextual groundedness of specific moments of language use and, with it, a neglect of real language users' orientations in these events as an empirical question in

its own right which is difficult to answer if the language user remains only an agency implied 'in the text' and if the language user's voice remains unacknowledged, unaccounted for and absent from the analysis." (Slembrouck, 2005a)

In short, if the aim of discourse analysis is to understand language as situated practice, how much of that situatedness can be gleaned from a study of just the text itself? According to Slembrouck, this is precisely where the relevance and added value of an ethnographic approach comes into the picture. In contrast with the highly text-dependent model of functionalist linguistics, ethnographic approaches to discourse assign a much more active role to the language user. Ethnographers consider an exclusive focus on the text to be problematic because it leaves out of the communicative process, the active work done by participants. Rather than an "agency implied in the text", language users come into focus as real people with actual identities and with an active impact on the production and interpretation process of discourse.

Summarizing, the synthesis of methodologies in this chapter carries an explicit epistemological statement. In line with Slembrouck's argument, it insists on the necessity of drawing the language user into the analysis of social discourse processes and shows that "the participant perspective [...] as a resource of knowledge and as an interpretative perspective [...] cannot be explained away" (Slembrouck, 2005a).

A third and final argument in favour of a synthesis of methodological approaches is also in keeping with ethnographic epistemology. Its opening up to a multiplicity of research perspectives characterizes the ethnographic position. It forms part of an overall effort to render and represent the complex variety, dynamic and volatility of reality.

To conclude, three arguments plead in favour of a synthesis of the Appraisal framework and Ethnography as a method, a tool and an attitude within the discipline of Linguistic Anthropology (Duranti, 1997). First and foremost, the two disciplines of which they form an intricate part, that is, Systemic Functional Linguistics and Anthropology, are historically related. By way of merging the two models into one single study, an all-time historical bond is refreshed, revived and tightened. Second, supplementing a highly text-dependent analysis of meaning with ethnographic interpretation draws the language user into the analysis and helps gain analytic leverage to arrive at

a more nuanced understanding of discourse processes. Third, synthesizing two disciplines that share a commitment to studying language in context, but diverge in their ways of theorizing, interpreting and analysing the contextual dimension only enriches the analysis of social processes by allowing for multiple, differential perspectives.

In what follows, then, fine-grained analysis of the *text*, of the myriad of lexico-grammatical means for expressing evaluative and/or ideological meanings, will be given the full cultural *context* of ethnographic interpretation. When applied together, the two frameworks may provide greater insights than each one does individually, ultimately allowing for a more refined view on the subtle nuances and complexities of political relations.

But before embarking on the analysis of interview data, the following section briefly explores the historical affiliation and cross-fertilization between SFL and anthropology. In addition, a short outline of the Appraisal framework is provided (section 4.2.3).

4.2.2 Tracing the anthropological roots of SFL

In *Language as social semiotic* (1978) Halliday explains how the functional approach of SFL and its recognition of a fundamental relationship between language and social reality, draws on, originates in “the ethnographic-descriptive tradition in linguistics”, a comprising term which covers a range of scholars driven by an interest and fascination for cultural aspects of language functioning:

“The present perspective is one which derives from the ethnographic-descriptive tradition in linguistics: from Saussure and Hjelmslev, from Mathesius and the Prague school, from Malinowski and Firth, from Boas, Sapir and Whorf” (Halliday, 1978:5).

One person who strongly influenced Halliday as well as his teacher and predecessor J.R. Firth, was the Polish-English anthropologist and ethnographer Bronislaw Malinowski. For Malinowski, use of language is closely, irrevocably, tied to human beings’ motivated interactions with one another and with their natural environment. It was Malinowski who first introduced the idea of language and interaction being embedded in a situation of context. In his discussion of primitive language, Malinowski

describes a party of fishermen in the Trobriand Islands whose functional speech occurs in a "context of situation":

"The canoes glide slowly and noiselessly, punted by men especially good at this task and always used for it. Other experts who know the bottom of the lagoon [...] are on the look-out for fish. [...] Customary signs, or sounds or words are uttered. Sometimes a sentence full of technical references to the channels or patches on the lagoon has to be spoken; sometimes [...] a conventional cry is uttered [...]. Again, a word of command is passed here and there, a technical expression or explanation which serves to harmonize their behavior towards other men [...]. An animated scene, full of movement, follows, and now that the fish are in their power the fishermen speak loudly, and give vent to their feelings. Short, telling exclamations fly about, which might be rendered by such words as: 'Pull in', 'Let go', 'Shift further', 'Lift the net'." (Malinowski, 1949)

Later on, Malinowski goes on to say the following:

"All the language used during such a pursuit is full of technical terms, short references to surroundings, rapid indications of change - all based on customary types of behaviour, well-known to the participants from personal experience. **Each utterance is essentially bound up with the context of situation and with the aim of the pursuit**, whether it be the short indications about the movements of the quarry, or references to statements about the surroundings, or the expression of feeling and passion inexorably bound up with behaviour, or words of command, or correlation of action. **The structure of all this linguistic material is inextricably mixed up with, and dependent upon, the course of the activity in which the utterances are embedded.**" (Malinowski, 1949, cited¹⁵⁷ in Ogden & Richards, 1972:312-313)

¹⁵⁷Malinowski's essay *The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages* appeared as an appendix in the Ogden and Richards volume (1972).

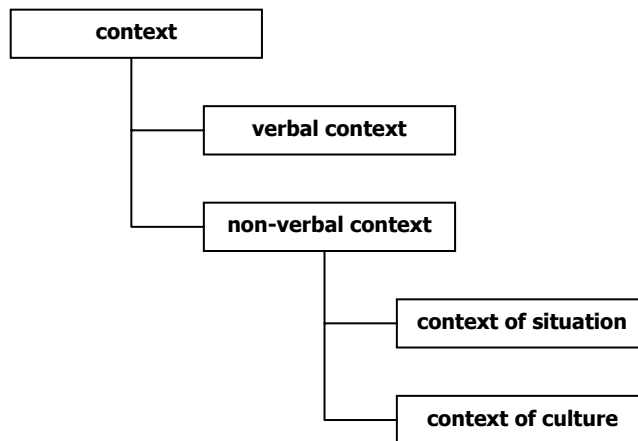


Figure 6: Malinowski's analysis of context (Steiner, 1983)

Malinowski's emphasis on a social and functional approach to language has greatly determined and influenced the development of SFL epistemology, theory and methodology. His views were inherited by Firth and Halliday. Firth continued Malinowski's emphasis on a social and functional approach to language; Malinowski's analysis of different types of context, summarized in Figure 6, was the forerunner of Halliday's division of the functional areas of language into three general metafunctions, with the ideational metafunction relating to the context of culture, the interpersonal metafunction relating to the context of situation, and the textual metafunction relating to the verbal context:

4.2.3 Appraisal: a brief outline

4.2.3.1 Introduction

Appraisal Theory is a fairly recent development within Systemic Functional Linguistics. It has emerged over a period of almost 15 years as a result of work conducted by a group of researchers led by Jim Martin of the Linguistics Department at the University of Sydney. The theory is still very much an on-going research project that does not easily lend itself to comprehensive treatment. This section provides a brief outline of its main

principles since it is an indispensable preamble to the analysis presented. The basic reference for the notions presented is the website maintained by Peter White (2004), along with the Appraisal model as it has been presented by Jim Martin (2000). All examples provided are taken from my own corpus of interview data.

Systemic Functional theory views language as a social semiotic, as a resource people use to accomplish their purposes by expressing meaning in context. Broadly speaking, the term *appraisal* is used for "the semantic resources used to negotiate emotions, judgements, and valuations, alongside resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations" (Martin, 2000:145). The appraisal framework explores, describes and explains "the way language is used to evaluate, to adopt stances, to construct textual personas and to manage interpersonal positionings and relationships [...] It explores how speakers and writers pass judgements on people generally, other writers/speakers and their utterances, material objects, happenings and states of affairs and thereby form alliances with those who share these views and distance themselves from those who don't" (White, 2004).

Appraisal theory identifies two primary modes of evaluative positioning – the attitudinal and the dialogistic.

4.2.3.2 Attitudinal positioning

Basically, attitudinal positioning is concerned with meanings by which speakers and writers indicate "either a positive or negative assessment of people, places, things, happenings and states of affairs" (White, 2004).

Attitudinal meanings are subdivided into three categories: AFFECT (emotion) is the resource used for construing emotional responses (happiness, sadness, fear, hatred etc.); JUDGEMENT (ethics) is deployed for construing moral evaluations of human behaviour (eccentric, deceptive, brave etc.); and APPRECIATION (aesthetics) construes the aesthetic quality of human artefacts, natural objects and human individuals (but not of human behaviour) (remarkable, desirable, harmonious, elegant, innovative, etc.). Consider for example:

It is extremely frustrating for me sitting and my office is here and I can sit next door and hear my telephone ringing or see people coming to my door [affect]

Junior people in an Embassy eh often have the most crazy ideas about what is happening higher up [judgement]

We try to stick to them regularly and have it as a regular f-function so that the thing works properly [positive appreciation]

These examples present relatively straightforward cases of attitudinal positioning, with the use of individual words or phrases overtly indicating the attitudinal position being taken towards the meeting by the speaker. In the following extract from the interview with the Ambassador, however, the situation is rather more complex, because the indication of attitudinal position is conveyed not by single words but by phrases and by the interaction of multiple elements of the utterance.

[BE:20.06.00:1] 1.35 min.



CD 1 Track 44

I: so ehm what I wanted to ask as for these weekly meetings I just wanted to know (0.4) from your part what are these meetings to you?

A: well (0.5) these meetings are (2.1) an attempt to (1.5) eh make sure (0.3) that anybody who's (0.3) involved in the work of (1.2) the Embassy or the ehm British Council which is an emanation of the Embassy in in some extent (0.9) eh is aware of what is going on (1.2) ehm (0.8) so that they are in the picture that they know what (0.4) the Ambassador is doing and what other people are doing which may be of relevance to their work (0.8) and to give them a chance to ehm (0.4) raise any matter which they think is of (.) general interest (1.4) eh it's really to involve them in the work of the Embassy and in a wider sense (0.9) ehm (1.3) so that everybody's (0.3) know knows everybody else

I: mmm

A: and regularly has a chance to (1.3) to (0.1) >interact as it were<

I: mmm

A: I mean it's (2.0) it's **difficult to understand** maybe well I have worked (0.3) in Embassies over many years

I: mmm

- A: starting from the bottom ehm one does **appreciate** enormously to know something of what is going on at the top
- I: mmm
- A: even if anything to know that what isn't going on
- I: mmm
- A: 'cause (0.3) junior people in an Embassy eh often have the most **crazy** ideas about what is happening higher up
- I: mmm
- A: ehm and it's often **useful** I remember it was **useful** to me very **useful** to know what was going on (0.5) and also to feel involved
- I: mmm
- A: and have the chance to contribute
- I: mmm

In the fragment explicit attitudinal values (see items in bold) are suppressed. The excerpt hardly contains direct indications of attitude. In the opening lines of the fragment no individual word or combination of words can be said to overtly indicate a positive or negative assessment of the weekly meetings. Still, the listener/interlocutor is guided to some attitudinal interpretation. Evaluation is by implication, the implied evaluation being that involvement, regular interaction etc. are positive values. The personal assertion that he, as a junior, recalls it being *useful* to feel involved and have the chance to contribute provokes involvement as a positive value. Summarizing, an additional, related complication is the fact that Attitude can be implicit or invoked, rather than explicitly indicated.

4.2.3.3 Dialogical positioning

Alongside the three evaluative resources of affect, judgement and appreciation, speakers and writers may use a diverse range of resources to adjust and negotiate the arguability of their utterances. By means of ENGAGEMENT resources, speakers and writers adjust and vary the *dialogistic* terms or status of their utterances. The notion of dialogic positioning in Appraisal essentially draws on the work of Bakhtin (1982) and Voloshinov (1995). The following excerpts evoke Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia (1973, 1982, 1986) and his insistence upon the intertextual nature of all texts:

"The desire to make one's speech understood is only an abstract aspect of the speaker's concrete and total speech plan. Moreover, any speaker is

himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe. And he presupposes not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances – his own and others’ – with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation or another (builds on them, polemicizes with them, or simply presumes that they are already known to the listener). **Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances.**” (Bakhtin 1986:69, cited in White, 2004, my emphasis)

“Dialogue, in the narrow sense of the word, is of course only one of the forms – a very important form, to be sure – of verbal interaction. But dialogue can also be understood in a broader sense, meaning not only direct, face-to-face, vocalized verbal communication between persons, but also verbal communication of any type whatsoever. A book, i.e. a verbal performance in print, is also an element of verbal communication. [It] inevitably orients itself with respect to previous performances in the same sphere [...] **Thus the printed verbal performance engages, as it were, in ideological colloquy of a large scale: it responds to something, affirms something, anticipates possible responses and objections, seeks support, and so on.**” (Voloshinov, 1995:139, cited in White, 2004, my emphasis)

From this follows the argument that by means of the resources of ENGAGEMENT, speakers/writers represent themselves as engaging in a dialogue: “they present themselves as taking up, acknowledging, responding to, challenging or rejecting actual or imagined prior utterances from other speakers/writers or as anticipating likely or possible responses from other speakers/writers” (White, 2004).

Two different parameters determine the varying heteroglossic/dialogic status of an utterance:

1. expansion vs. contraction

This first parameter relates to whether a particular utterance opens up or closes down to alternative viewpoints. A basic distinction under engagement is that between meanings acknowledging in some way the heteroglossic diversity associated with all utterances (the heteroglossic), and those ignoring or suppressing that diversity (the monoglossic):

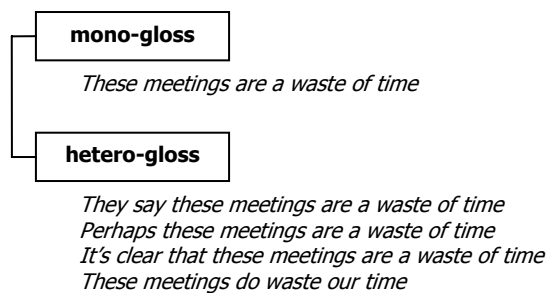


Figure 7: Adapted from White, 2004

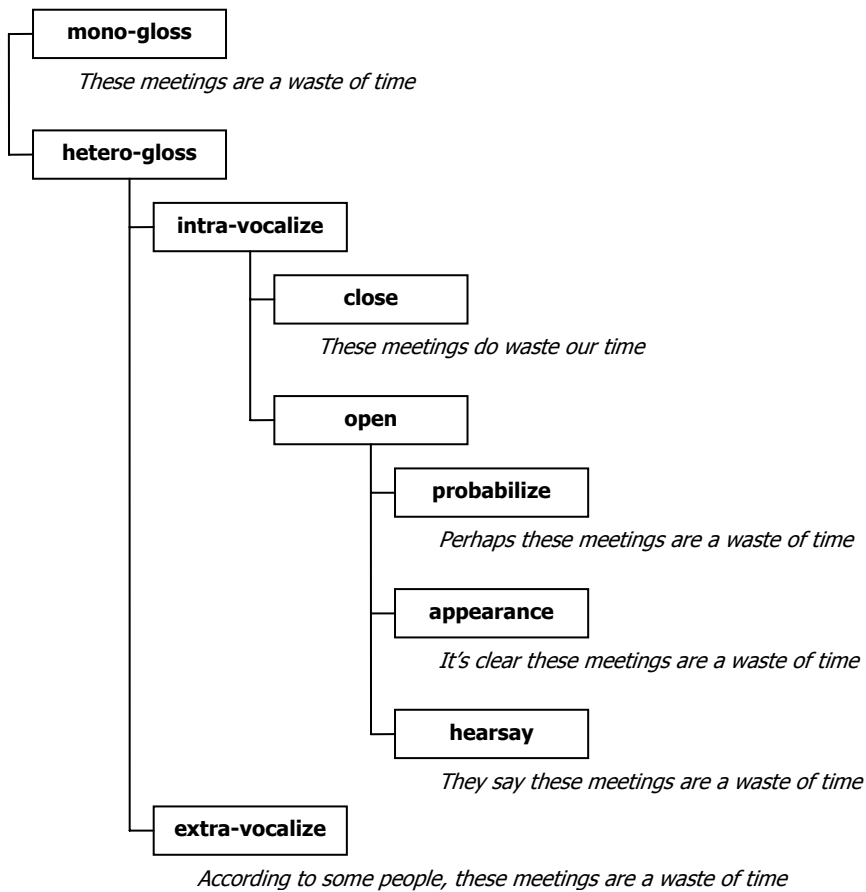
2. extra-vocalization vs. intra-vocalization

This second parameter relates to whether the voice of the current proposition/proposal is represented as external or internal to the text. Both intra-vocalizing resources and extra-vocalizing resources act to multiply the voices of the text and to cast it as heteroglossic in Bakhtin's sense. They both share this functionality of multiplying the voices in the text and thereby establishing each voice as representing but a number of possible heteroglossic positions. Under extra-vocalization, responsibility for the arguability of the proposition is assigned to some external voice, typically some attributed source. This contrasts with internalizing options (intra-vocalization), where responsibility for arguability is text internal.

Intra-vocalizing resources cast the voice of the author as just one of a number of possible voices by explicitly subjectivizing it. Intra-vocalization includes expressions such as:

I think, he may perhaps, it's likely [probability]
 It seems to me, he seems, apparently, it's clear that [appearance]
 Reportedly, I hear that ... [hearsay]
 It is my contention that, I declare, I contend that [proclamation]

Intra-vocalizing resources are further subdivided into *open* and *close*. The resources included under *open*, open up the heteroglossic dialogue and extend the text's potential for construing heteroglossic diversity. Although remaining fundamentally heteroglossic, those options under *close* act in some way to limit the range or possibility of interaction with the diversity:



Fout!Figure 8: Adapted from White, 2004

4.2.3.4 Graduation

Finally, appraisal resources also include a dimension for grading evaluations, that is, GRADUATION. These resources locate other meanings on a scale from low to high intensity (force) or from core to marginal membership of a category. In the framework, scaling with respect to intensity is labelled FORCE. Meanings of force are often carried by those adverbials which are typically labelled *intensifiers*, *amplifiers* and *emphatics*. Examples include *quite*, *rather*, *really*, *very* and *extremely*. In the following example, *very* upgrades the explicit evaluative meaning *useful* and *most* intensifies the moral judgement *crazy* :

Ehm and it's often useful I remember it was useful to me very [graduation] useful [judgement] to know what was going on and also to feel involved

Junior people in an embassy eh often have the most [graduation] crazy [judgement] ideas about what is happening higher up

Values of force contrast with those of FOCUS. Values at the *sharp* end of the focus scale indicate that the item in question has core or prototypical status in the category, whereas values at the *soft* end of the focus scale indicate that it has marginal status:

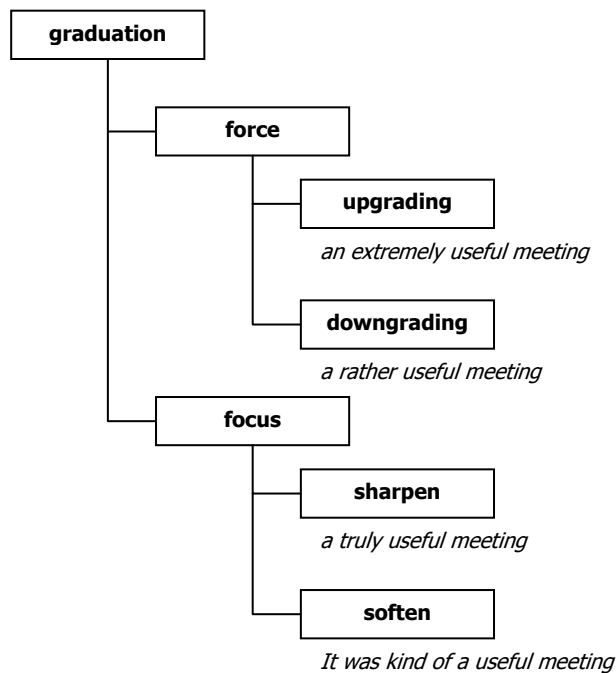


Figure 9: Adapted from White, 2004

4.2.4 Linguistic-descriptive analysis of the interview

"Don't let it occur again." This concluded my first contretemps with a British ambassador, on the morning after my first dinner in his residence in my capacity as his newest first secretary. "Continental don't like being nudged towards the lavatory after dinner; it is a purely English custom; why didn't you know?" Clearly my upbringing had been neglected, but I tried to fight back. "But Sir, what about me?" "Well you mustn't and that's all there is to it." The reaction carried me continent through thirty years of diplomatic dinners.

He was an excellent ambassador and did not confine himself to such trivia, but the anecdote illustrates one side of an ambassador's life: whether his embassy is large or small, he is the head of a family consisting of his staff,

and he and its senior members must train, drill, direct, rebuke and encourage them so as to make the embassy a smooth-running machine that can be relied on to handle efficiently any situation, however important or however trivial. Consequently a good ambassador must have personality and be a leader, be someone whom it is natural for his staff to look up to, and someone also for whom looking down at his staff in friendship and in collaboration is natural.

This brings out another aspect of a good ambassador. He must make his staff feel part of a team in which each knows what is expected of him; and to get the best out of the team, he must not only lead it but be part of it himself and not above and remote from it. There is great satisfaction in being part of such a team, knowing that it is equipped to deal with anything that comes."

Lord MacLehose of Beoch, British Ambassador to Vietnam and Denmark, and British Governor and Commander-in-Chief at Hong Kong¹⁵⁸

4.2.4.1 Introduction

The ensuing analysis¹⁵⁹ focuses on the Ambassador's varied lexicogrammatical choices within the system of Appraisal. Analysis will explain and describe explicit and implicit emotional, ethic and aesthetic evaluations in relation to the meeting, alongside ways of engaging with these evaluations. In addition, it will be explored how the expression of attitudes, judgements and appreciations is carefully managed so as to take into account the all-pervasive possibility of challenge or contradiction from those who hold an alternative view: to what extent does the Ambassador represent his viewpoints as uncontested or contestable, that is, to what extent does he acknowledge the actual presence of alternative meanings?

The main questions, then, which steer the analysis may be summarized as follows:

1. To what degree does the Ambassador reveal emotions, judgements, appreciations? Are his assessments explicit or implicit?

¹⁵⁸From *A short list of key qualities*: <http://www.ediplomat.com/maclehose.htm>

¹⁵⁹I owe many thanks to Annemarie Vandenberg for brainstorming and exchanging ideas with me on this passage. I am also indebted to Kristoffel Demoen. The analysis of the Ambassador's sometimes winding rhetorical moves has benefited greatly from their inspiring comments.

2. Does he present his views as uncontested (mono-glossic) or contested/contestable (hetero-glossic)? Does he open up to alternative viewpoints? And if so, is he willing to entertain these alternatives or does he close down to alternative positions, that is, wanting to challenge or suppress them?

In short, how does he build up his argument? Which evidence does he provide to support his claims? Which logical, emotional or ethical grounds or reasons does he provide to substantiate his claims and persuade his audience? How does he argue his claim against a possible resistant audience that might refute his argument?

The following presents an analysis of the opening minutes of the interview in terms of these questions:

- Explicit attitudinal values
- represented as uncontested
- *represented as contested/contestable*
- closing down to alternative views
- opening up to alternative views

[BE:20.06.00:1] 2.28 min.



CD 1 Track 45

- 1 I: so ehm what I wanted to ask as for these weekly meetings I just
2 wanted to know (0.4) from your part what are these meetings to
3 you?
4 A: well (0.5) these meetings are (2.1) an attempt to (1.5) eh make
5 sure (0.3) that anybody who's (0.3) involved in the work of (1.2)
6 the Embassy or the ehm British Council which is an emanation of
7 the Embassy in in some extent (0.9) eh is aware of what is going
8 on (1.2) ehm so that they are in the picture that they know what
9 (0.4) the Ambassador is doing and what other people are doing
10 which may be of relevance to their work (0.8) and to give them a
11 chance to ehm raise any matter which they think is of (.) general
12 interest (1.4) eh it's really to involve them in the work of the
13 Embassy and in a wider sense (0.9) ehm so that everybody's
14 (0.3) know knows everybody else
15 I: mmm

16 A: and regularly has a chance to (1.3) to (0.1) >interact as it were<
17 I: mmm
18 A: I mean it's (2.0) *it's difficult to understand maybe* well I have
19 worked (0.3) in Embassies over many years
20 I: mmm
21 A: starting from the bottom ehm *one does appreciate enormously to*
22 *know something of what is going on at the top.*
23 I: mmm
24 A: even if anything to know that what *isn't* going on
25 I: mmm
26 A: 'cause (0.3) junior people in an Embassy eh often have the most
27 *crazy* ideas about what is happening higher up
28 I: mmm
29 A: *ehm and it's often useful I remember it was useful to me very*
30 *useful to know what was going (0.5) on and also to feel involved*
31 I: mmm
32 A: *and have the chance to contribute*
33 I: mmm
34 A: so *it's all of those things* I mean *maybe the meetings (0.6) should*
35 *be more frequent I don't know* it's that *people are so busy*
36 I: mmm
37 A: and then in fact *I don't know whether you observed* over the
38 (1.3) over the meetings you've attended but *sometimes () they*
39 *should be less frequent* because *people seem to know a lot of*
40 *things anyway* and ehm we can get through the business quickly
41 and *there doesn't seem to be any particular obvious*
42 I: mmm
43 A: *reason for the meeting* but we try to stick to them regularly and
44 *have it as a regular fi-function (0.9) so that the thing works (0.9)*
45 *properly (0.9)*
46 I: mmm
47 A: and ehm
48 I: mmm
49 A: even when I'm not here >*which is very frequent time*< and the
50 meetings go ahead with my Deputy (0.4)
51 I: mmm
52 A: *so we do have a (0.5) you know there's some (0.6) regularity and*
53 *predictability for the life of the people working here*
54 I: mmm mmm

55 A: so that's the answer a rather long answer I'm afraid but that's the
56 reason
57 I: no no that's alright ehm

4.2.4.2 Analysis

My opening question to the Ambassador is an open-ended question, leaving him the freedom to state his opinion freely:

I: So what I wanted to ask as for these weekly meetings I just wanted to know (0.4) as for your part what are these meetings to you?

Although the question explicitly asks for commitment, for personal opinion, the Ambassador's initial response (l.4-14) is utterly non-committal. His opening statement is highly impersonal, lacking explicit attitudinal values and suppressing subjectivity. At this point he does not state what the weekly meetings are to him but instead proclaims what they are, what they are meant to be. The bare declarative (*these meetings are an attempt to...*) presents the propositional content of his utterance as a fact, a given, with the use of nominalization (*an attempt*) acting as a powerful objectifying device. Moreover, the use of the personal reference *the Ambassador* suppresses individual identity and foregrounds institutional role and status.

Summarizing, the Ambassador's opening statement is structured so as to background attitudinal values and close down the dialogue to alternative viewpoints. It is a proclamation of institutional values, which are presented and propagated as uncontestable and non-negotiable.

Following the assertion and declaration of the meeting's indisputable value and purpose, the Ambassador gradually switches to a heteroglossic, dialogic position, taking into account alternative viewpoints and the possibility of contestation (*which may be of relevance to their work; which they think is of general interest; it's really to involve them*).

Moreover, from line 18 onwards, the detached objectified opening statement is counterbalanced with increased personal statement of opinion, signalled by the frequent use of the first person pronoun (*I mean, I have worked, I remember, I mean, it's useful to me*), the use of intensifying grading

expressions (*enormously, often, most, very*) and the use of explicit attitudinal expressions:

It's difficult to understand [negative appreciation]
One does appreciate enormously [generic appreciation]
The most crazy ideas [negative judgement]
It's often useful [positive judgement]

Explicit attitudinal positioning and personal commitment reach a climax in the following statement:

A: ehm and it's often useful I remember I mean it's useful to me
very useful to know what was going on (0.5) and also to feel
involved

In this utterance, the Ambassador switches from a general, detached statement *it's often useful* to a deliberate personal assertion *I mean it's useful to me*. He explicitly subjectivizes his utterance and casts his voice as just one of a number of possible voices. The repetition of the positive value judgement *useful*, the use of the quantifier *often* and the booster *very*, make this a powerful and assertive statement of personal opinion.

The gradual shift from an impersonal detached proclamation of values to a highly explicit and personalized statement of opinion is in fact a powerful rhetorical and tactical move. For the most part, its rhetorical strength resides in what traditional rhetoric¹⁶⁰ has termed *logos*. Switching to highly explicit attitudinal positioning and personal commitment helps to build a well-reasoned, logical argument and provides evidence for the values proclaimed in the opening statement. Personal experience collected from memory (*I remember it was useful to me very useful to know what was going on and also to feel involved*) serves to support and confirm the propagated values, thereby relying on an argument of logical induction.¹⁶¹ There is an implied logic in the Ambassador's argument that moves from the specific to the general: what has been true for me, must also be true for others. If

¹⁶⁰In classical Greek rhetoric, there are three basic kinds of persuasive appeal: *ethos*, i.e., projecting a trustworthy, authoritative or charismatic image; *logos*, i.e., logical argument through induction or deduction; *pathos*, i.e., creating an emotional reaction in the audience.

¹⁶¹In an inductive argument, the writer or speaker holds up a specific example, and then claims that what is true for it is also true for a general category. For instance, 'I have just tasted this strawberry. It is sweet. Therefore all strawberries are probably sweet'.

meetings were useful to me, there is good reason to believe that they are useful to others as well.

Explicit attitudinal positioning, showing commitment and subjectifying utterances also enhance the Ambassador's *ethos*. By gradually opening up the dialogue and moving to a heteroglossic position, the Ambassador projects himself as knowledgeable and with the greater good at heart. By demonstrating that he is fair and courteous to other views he presents an image of himself as open-minded and knowledgeable.

But even though he deliberately subjectivizes/internalizes his utterances and acknowledges other views, he also suppresses these alternative views. Although he establishes his voice as representing but a number of possible heteroglossic positions, he at the same time locks out alternative voices.

For instance, whereas *it was useful to me* is highly and explicitly internalized and therefore fundamentally heteroglossic, it is nonetheless closed. The bare declarative confronts the alternatives, sets itself up against them and narrows down the dialogue. They are useful. To me. Full stop. Undisputable. Uncontestable. To challenge an utterance such as this one, interlocutor, one has to put a lot at stake interpersonally.

In other words, rhetorical signals that open up the dialogue are stopped and overruled by a rhetorical position that fosters the monologue and conformity to the propagated doctrine. In the remainder of the fragment, he uses this rhetorical strategy to its full potential.

In lines 34 to 45, the Ambassador raises a contested issue: whether or not the meetings should be more frequent. Expressions of ignorance (*I don't know*) and of possibility (*maybe, seem*) and the use of downtoners (*sometimes*) introduce other voices and open up the dialogue to other possible alternative views. In this way he anticipates¹⁶² possible objections to the argument he is developing. However, whereas he evokes voices taking a different stance towards the frequency of the meeting, he downplays their argument and ultimately knocks down all possible counterarguments in an authoritative and strong statement: *but we try to stick to them regularly and*

¹⁶²In fact, the Ambassador resorts to the rhetorical strategy of anticipation (i.e. the English term for *prolepsis*), whereby a rhetorician foresees and replies to objections.

have it as a regular function so that the thing works properly. Declarative, unmodalized. Authoritative and strong.

What seems like an effort to put forward multiple points of view and to cast his voice as just one of a number of possible voices is in fact a tactful strategy to proclaim his voice as the only one, superior and irrefutable. He anticipates counterarguments, downplays them and in so doing, strengthens his argument. He evokes voices taking a different stance towards the frequency of the meeting but at the same time locks these voices out.

Closing down the dialogue is also noticeable in the following statement:

A: so we do have a so there's some regularity and predictability for the life of the people working here

Again, although internalized, this utterance is utterly authoritative, strong and closed. The proclamation *so we do have*, with stress on the auxiliary *do*, increases the strength of the commitment with the utterance in question and has the effect of increasing the interpersonal cost of rejecting it. In addition, the use of an impersonal existential sentence construction *there's some regularity and predictability for the life of the people working here*, presents the propositional content of the utterance as a straightforward statement of fact.

Towards the end of the response, monoglossic statements gain the upper hand. The Ambassador's closing statements are bare assertions. He doesn't bother to claim truth or validity for his utterances. He simply presupposes it. What he says is self-evident and indisputable:

A: So that's the answer

A: But that's the reason

Summarizing, the ambassador's response is a complex configuration of lexico-grammatical meanings. He switches from indirectness to directness. He skilfully interweaves general statements with strong personal opinion. He alternates tentativeness and considerateness with a high degree of certainty, authority and strong assertive claims. He manoeuvres between an impersonal, detached proclamation of values and explicit, highly committed attitudinal positioning; between overtly assertive, authoritative claims and

tactful considerateness; between the uncontested and the contestable, between the monoglossic and the heteroglossic.

However, rather than a random amalgam of meanings, his answer is carefully and strategically designed to convince real and potential audiences of the importance and necessity of the values he proclaims. He cautiously builds up an argument, relying on a complex arrangement of persuasive strategies.

To begin with, part of its rhetorical force results from *logos*. **Well-reasoned argument** supports the beliefs he proclaims. For instance, personal experience collected from memory and an argument of logical induction serve as evidence to support the proclaimed value of involvement.

Second, its rhetorical force stems in great part from *ethos*. The argument is carefully built up in order to project an image of himself as a credible, reasonable and trustworthy person. One of the ways in which he tries to create an effective *ethos*, or an appeal to credibility, is by demonstrating that he is fair and courteous to alternative views. By explicitly considering opposite points, he establishes fairness and enhances his image as a trustworthy person.

In other words, the Ambassador uses **a multisided argument**, that is, one that presents his position but also summarizes and responds to any objections real or potential audiences might have.

Part of the rhetorical impact of multisided argument resides in the fact that it is far more probable that real/potential audiences will consider the speaker worth listening to because they are treated respectfully. By acknowledging that there are possible opposing views and carefully considering their concerns, it is far more likely that dissenting souls will judge the Ambassador worth listening to because they are treated courteously. By opening up the dialogue, the Ambassador shows that he is less willing to assume shared knowledge with his real/potential audience. The orchestration of dialogue gives them a voice and grants them unique individuality, with their own thoughts, feelings and beliefs, which, in turn, may result in more readiness and willingness to take on his point of view.¹⁶³

¹⁶³This has been aptly illustrated by Hasan (1993) and Hasan & Cloran (1990) in their study of naturally occurring dialogues between mothers and children. The study analysed semantic

However, the Ambassador's discourse reveals contradictory messages. Rhetorical signals opening up the dialogue are time and again stopped and overruled by a rhetorical position that fosters the monologue and conformity to the propagated doctrine. Whereas one message explicitly aims for the exercise of power "through the manufacture of consent" (Fairclough, 1989:3) and grants others unique individuality, with thoughts, feelings, beliefs, with a right to self-regulation and personal judgement, another message overtly celebrates the power of authority and the need for obedience, submission and dependence.

The Ambassador's language is a cross between democracy and hegemony, "[a] contradictory [mixture] of discourses of equality and power" (Fairclough, 1995:80). His response tactically manoeuvres between the heteroglossic and the monoglossic, between courteous considerateness and overtly assertive, authoritative claims, between the contestable and the uncontested:

Solidarity-based system ¹⁶⁴	Power-based system
Democracy	Hegemony
Equality	Power
Heteroglossic	Monoglossic
Consent	Authority
Interdependence	Dependence

choices in the construal of a context of control: making command, giving reasons, challenging, supportive comments. To what extent would mothers issue direct or indirect/suggestive or prefaced commands, to what extent would they provide logical reasons, social reasons, threat or elaborated reasons? Findings were that using elaborated reasons to support a command, mothers show that they are less willing to assume shared knowledge with their children and in this way they project their child as an individual in its own right, with its own subjectivity, its own thoughts, beliefs and feelings. A major conclusion was that the use of elaborated reasons not only reduced the chances of open conflict and challenge but also resulted in more readiness and willingness to take the mother's point of view, in what Hasan (1993) has called true power, where the subjugated becomes a willing accomplice in his/her own subjugation (Hasan, 1993).

¹⁶⁴The rhetorical cover-up of power relations has been abundantly documented in the work of Norman Fairclough (1989, 1995). He observes a trend in contemporary society across whole ranges of institutions which has been documented in various languages, away from an overt, explicit marking of power, away from a "power-based system" towards a "solidarity-based system" (1989:68, 70). He notes the increasing "democratisation of discourse" (1995:79), which involves the reduction of explicit markers of power asymmetry between powerful and non-powerful social classes and his work amply illustrates contemporary discursive strategies for simulating solidarity and "constituting a veil of equality" (1989:195).

The Ambassador's winding rhetorical moves, then, exceedingly display how power may be dressed up as its antagonist player, that is, solidarity. Explicit attitudinal and dialogical positioning are rhetorically and strategically used to create an impression of solidarity and common interest with his staff members as well as considerateness for their views. Propagated values are subtly projected as the outcome of co-operative agreement rather than as enforced and imposed upon participants. However, lexico-grammatical resources for dialogical positioning only simulate solidarity and equality but in effect serve to justify, legitimise and maintain that which is ultimately non-negotiable, uncontestable and irrespective of individual attitude, evaluation or opinion.

To conclude, a linguistic-descriptive analysis of the interview has revealed how a discourse of solidarity is rhetorically used and strategically manipulated in order to justify, legitimize and maintain proclaimed values and beliefs. In what follows, a content analysis of the interview will investigate and interpret the norms that are propagated. What are the values that the Ambassador advocates? Which are the norms he sets?

4.2.5 Content analysis of the interview

The Ambassador frequently and explicitly refers to the weekly meeting's instrumental value as a forum supporting and enabling information access (*to make sure that anybody who's involved in the work of the Embassy ... is aware of what is going on*) and information sharing (*a chance to interact*).

[BE:20.06.00:1] 1.02 min.



CD 1 Track 46

- A: well (0.5) these meetings are (2.1) an attempt to (1.5) eh make sure (0.3) that anybody who's (0.3) involved in the work of (1.2) the Embassy or the ehm British Council which is an emanation of the Embassy in in some extent (0.9) **eh is aware of what is going on** (1.2) ehm (0.8) so that they are in the picture **that they know what (0.4) the Ambassador is doing and what other people are doing** which may be of relevance to their work (0.8) and to give them a chance to ehm (0.4) raise any matter which they think is of (.) general interest (1.4) eh it's really to involve them in the work of the Embassy and in a wider sense (0.9) ehm (1.3) so that everybody's (0.3) know knows everybody else



CD 1 Track 46

- I: mmm
A: and regularly has a chance to (1.3) to (0.1) >interact as it were<

In addition to an overt orientation to its instrumental value, the Ambassador openly endows the weekly meeting with ritual, symbolic significance. The symbolic value of the meeting to generate an increased feeling of collectivity among participants is foregrounded:

[BE:20.06.00:1] 1.02 min.

- A: well (0.5) these meetings are (2.1) an attempt to (1.5) eh make sure (0.3) that anybody who's (0.3) involved in the work of (1.2) the Embassy or the ehm British Council which is an emanation of the Embassy in in some extent (0.9) eh is aware of what is going on (1.2) ehm (0.8) **so that they are in the picture** that they know what (0.4) the Ambassador is doing and what other people are doing which may be of relevance to their work (0.8) and to give them a chance to ehm (0.4) raise any matter which they think is of (.) general interest (1.4) eh it's really **to involve them in the work of the Embassy and in a wider sense (0.9) ehm (1.3) so that everybody's (0.3) know knows everybody else**
- I: mmm
A: and regularly has a chance to (1.3) to (0.1) >interact as it were<

He proclaims the ritual function of the meeting as a binding mechanism (Guanon, 1945) that should engender social solidarity among its performers and make them more intimate with one another. He stresses the meeting's symbolic value as an opportunity for the creation of common meaningful space, which enables them to communicate their experiences and desires. Moreover, staff members' experience of the collectivity and the sharing of that collectivity is projected as depending on their own free will (*a chance*), taking into account participants' own unique subjective, individual positions.

The Ambassador continues emphasizing symbolic meanings of solidarity and equality by insisting on a "relaxation of distance" (Goffman, 1959) between the powerful and the subordinate:

[BE:20.06.00:1] 0.30 min.



CD 1 Track 47

- A: well I have worked (0.3) in Embassies over many years
I: mmm
A: starting from the bottom ehm one does appreciate enormously to know something of what is going on at the top
I: mmm
A: even if anything to know that what isn't going on
I: mmm
I: 'cause (0.3) junior people in an Embassy eh often have the most crazy ideas about what is happening higher up
I: mmm
A: ehm and it's often useful I remember it was useful to me very useful to know what was going on (0.5) and also to feel involved
I: mmm
A: and have the chance to contribute
I: mmm

The view he proclaims here ties in with Goffman's description (Goffman, 1959) of the practice in mental hospitals to bring the nurse and even attendants into "sacrosanct" staff conferences so as to decrease the distance between non-medical staff and the doctors. The Ambassador's claim echoes Goffman's observation that "by sacrificing the exclusiveness of those at the top, it is felt that the morale of those at the bottom can be increased" (Goffman, 1959:196).

In other words, the norms and values the Ambassador sets, firmly rest on a principle of *covert power*, on neglecting or masking status and position divisions and on aiming for equality, unity and harmony.

However, similar to conflicting lexico-grammatical meanings described earlier, contradictory messages are apparent. On the one hand, the Ambassador firmly establishes a symbolic norm for the weekly meeting as an opportunity for the creation of "common meaningful space" and an occasion for bridging the distance between the powerful and the subordinate. On the other hand, he sets a symbolic norm for the meeting as a confirmation of status divisions. In contrast with earlier mentioned principles of *covert power*, the Ambassador frequently and explicitly

advocates *overt power*, an affirmation of distance and a confirmation of status divisions. Consider for instance the following statement:



CD 1 Track 48

[BE:20.06.00:13] 0.08 min.

A: I think it's (0.8) extremely important that the **Head of Mission** (1.3) and his **Deputy** and **others** (0.7) should be fully informed of what's going on.

At the surface level, the statement reveals a normative orientation to the informative purpose of the meeting. However, by relating this norm to a ranking order (1. The *Head of Mission*; 2. The *Deputy* Head of Mission and 3. *others*), the utterance manifestly sets the norm for an affirmation of authority relations, that is, *overt power*. In other words, aside to proclaiming its instrumental purpose as an information forum, the Ambassador advocates the meeting's symbolic, ritual function as a collective affiliation and confirmation of status differences. This is also the case in the following statement:



CD 1 Track 49

[BE:20.06.00:3] 0.03 min.

A: so that they know what (0.7) the **Ambassador** is doing and what **other people** are doing.

Manifestations of "a power-based system" (Fairclough, 1989) increase up to a point where the Ambassador describes the meeting not so much as a *chance to ... interact* (see above) but as an opportunity *to give people a chance to know what the **Head of Mission** is doing* :



CD 1 Track 50

[BE:20.06.00:14] 0.12 min.

I: yeah
A: the weekly meeting is more t-
I: to be involved
A: more to give out and to **to give people a chance to know what the Head of Mission is doing** (0.8)
I: okay
A: ask him anything ehm (1.1) and and their colleagues too.

Summarizing, in setting norms and values for the weekly meeting, the Ambassador emphatically insists on values of solidarity and equality. He stresses the meeting's symbolic function in creating a common meaningful space, which enables participants to communicate their experiences and desires. He propagates an ideology which fundamentally departs from an idea of sharing knowledge rather than assuming it, imposing it or taking it for granted and projects staff members as individuals in their own right.

At the same time, the Ambassador proclaims the symbolic function of the meeting as a collective affiliation of hierarchical relations, insisting on an affirmation of inequality and status differences.

This striking contrast closely parallels the contradictory mixture of lexicogrammatical meanings described earlier. It indicates that the weekly meeting is a strategic tool in what is essentially a cover-up operation, with a proclaimed ideology of shared power, shared knowledge and equal opportunities masking and covering up an authority-based system promoting authority power, status differences and inequality.

4.2.6 Conclusion

This section has focussed on processes of enacting power. It has examined how the political leader of the community, that is, the Ambassador, propagates a shared doctrine. It has investigated how he describes and justifies the ritual procedure of a weekly meeting; how he perceives and rationalizes the event. Which are the norms and values he imposes? And most importantly, what are the ways in which he skilfully shapes his argument and presents himself in a credible way so as to encourage people to accept the imposed norms and values?

A content analysis of the interview has indicated how he firmly insists on values of solidarity and equality and regards involvement and participation as major motives for the weekly gathering. Highly similar, a linguistic-descriptive analysis of the interview has revealed the use of multisided argument and dialogic positioning to create an impression of solidarity and common interest with his staff members as well as considerateness for their views. In other words, the Ambassador openly and strongly insists on principles of democracy, participation, shared knowledge and shared power.

However, analysis has revealed conflicting messages. Overall, the interview is a cross between democracy and hegemony, “[a] contradictory [mixture] of discourses of equality and power” (Fairclough, 1995:80).

By means of a discourse of democracy, the Ambassador covers up, maintains and legitimizes¹⁶⁵ his position of authority and dominance. He rhetorically manipulates a dialogic stance to present monologic norms as the outcome of co-operative agreement. He proclaims the weekly meeting as the embodiment of an ideology of shared power, shared knowledge and equal opportunities to mask and cover up an authority-based system promoting authority power, status differences and inequality.

To which extent, then, do participants fall victim to this distorted representation of power relations? Are they deceived into what Marx has called *false consciousness*?¹⁶⁶ Do they see through the ideology that is forced upon them? The following section renders and represents participants’ multiple and differential interpretations of the proclaimed values. It examines to which extent their perceptions accord with the central, salient ideology of democracy. To what extent are instrumental and symbolic norms expressively or consciously present among participants? Do they validate the

¹⁶⁵All forms of government operate as a form of authority in which an individual or group of individuals wield power over the majority. In order for any government to perform effectively, those in power must convince everyone else that they deserve the authority they have. In political science and sociology, this is called *the legitimacy of authority*. Weber, for instance, distinguished three main modes of claiming legitimacy. Authority may be based on rational grounds and anchored in impersonal rules that have been legally established. This type is rational-legal authority, which has increasingly come to characterize hierarchical relations in modern society. Traditional authority, on the other hand, often predominates in pre-modern societies. It is based on belief in the sanctity of tradition, of ‘the eternal yesterday’. Unlike rational-legal authority, it is not codified in impersonal rules but inheres in particular persons who may either inherit it or be invested with it by a higher power. Finally, charismatic authority rests on the appeal of leaders who claim allegiance because of their extraordinary virtuosity, whether ethical, heroic, or religious (Cosser, 1977:226-227).

¹⁶⁶The notion of false consciousness is one of the most controversial and disputed of Marx’ concepts. There is no evidence that Marx himself ever actually used the phrase “false consciousness”. It appears to have been used – at least, in print – only by Engels (1893). (See also Eagleton, 1991:89). Marx claimed that ideology blinded the working class to their true conditions. In his view, the dominant class used ideology to mislead the working class from their true interests. He was convinced that if the workers saw through the ideology forced upon them by their dominators, they would realize that they had been deceived into a “false consciousness” that perpetuates the cycle and keeps them docile. The concept is related to Gramsci’s (1971) notion of “common sense”. The dominant ideology in any society is a set of common sense assumptions that legitimates the existing distribution of power. Ideology makes this structure of power seem “natural,” “normal,” or “inevitable,” and therefore beyond challenge.

norms that are set? What kinds of contestation are there around the values that the ritual of a weekly meeting is due to enshrine?

4.3 Acting upon power: validating the norms

"The principle of justification of norms is no longer the monologically applicable principle of generalisability but the communally followed procedure of redeeming normative validity claims discursively."

Jürgen Habermas¹⁶⁷

4.3.1 Introduction

The Ambassador insists on the instrumental value of the meeting as a forum supporting and enabling information access (*to make sure that anybody who's involved in the work of the Embassy ... is aware of what is going on*) and information sharing (*a chance to ... interact*). He clothes it in symbolic means, displaying it as an opportunity, *a chance* for individual members *to contribute*, create solidarity and bridge hierarchical divisions. He projects the weekly meeting as *useful*; *useful* to him and hence useful to other staff members and to the working of the Embassy.

To what extent do participants agree upon the *usefulness* of the meeting? To what degree are instrumental and symbolic norms expressively or consciously present among participants? Do they validate the norms that are set? What kinds of contestation are there around the values that the ritual of a weekly meeting is due to enshrine?

¹⁶⁷See Habermas, 1979:90. Drawing on the work of Piaget and Kohlberg, Habermas identifies seven stages in the development of moral consciousness. The ideal of open, unfettered communication constitutes the core of Habermas' definition of how society must come to function. To him, this is an essential condition for the development of ethical and moral maturity. Habermas characterizes his final stage seven as the place where "the principle of justification of norms is no longer the monologically applicable principle of generalizability but the communally followed procedure of redeeming normative validity claims discursively". Habermas' critical theory puts considerable emphasis on inter-subjectivity and his ethical dimension "moves beyond the private Kantian 'legislation' of universal maxims for one's proposed actions into a social and dialogical dimension in which my understanding of the right, as well as my understanding of my needs and inclinations, requires an openness to, and equality with, others in a process of discursive will formation" (Martin, 2004).

4.3.2 Divergent evaluations

Interviews with informants reveal opposing evaluations. At one end of the extreme, the projected symbolic norm of the close-knit crew co-operating and *usefully* attuning its efforts to achieve a common goal is straightforwardly echoed and repeated:



CD 1 Track 51

[BE:16.05.00:3] 0.14 min.

B: because we have a huge we cover a huge ehm (.) variety of subjects (0.9) ehm (0.6) and it may be: that (0.7) something that you are engaged on could fit **usefully**: into (0.4) someone else's work

Another informant implicitly refers to the instrumental function and potential of the meeting (*a tool*) but claims that it is *misused*:



CD 1 Track 52

[BE:30.05.00:25] 0.05 min.

E: I personally think that the weekly meeting is a (0.4) is **a tool that's misused**

At the other end of the extreme, the usefulness of the meeting is flagrantly and bluntly denied:



CD 1 Track 53

[BE:20.06.00:4] 0.20 min.

C: If I had the chance and I thought it was worth (.) which I don't I would probably take him up against the wall and say (.) look baby these these (0.6) bloody (.) meetings of yours are really too long and too (0.4) ill shaped (0.4) and eh **they're not serving an enormously useful purpose** (.) but (0.7) that's the way he wants it, he's the boss so we live with it.

4.3.3 Echoes of the projected ideology

Whether affirming or contesting the usefulness of the meeting, all participants are consciously aware of the norms, purposes and values that it is due to attain and *supposed to* accomplish. Following my usual question *what is the purpose of the weekly meeting?* the majority of participants

would sometimes almost literally echo and repeat the instrumental purpose and symbolic value of the meeting as they are proclaimed by the Ambassador:

[BE:06.06.00:3] 0.22 min.



CD 1 Track 54

J: I think well I I would stick to the to the three purposes I think it's done (0.5) so that ehm (2.0) the Ambassador knows what's going on (1.6) which is important; b. (0.7) that everybody else knows what everybody else is doing (0.8) and thirdly (0.7) a sense of eh (0.6) collegiate (.) community spirit.

The second purpose in the informant's meticulously composed list corresponds almost literally to the Ambassador's formal declaration that weekly meetings are *an attempt to make sure that staff members are aware of what is going on so that they know what the Ambassador is doing and what other people are doing*. Purpose three (*a sense of collegiate community spirit*) echoes the projected ideology that weekly meetings are there to *involve staff members in the work of the Embassy and, in a wider sense, so that everybody knows everybody else*.

Overall, the projected *idea* of participation and involvement, of information sharing and *collegial community spirit* is firmly instilled and ingrained. The projected norm of the 'team',¹⁶⁸ of the close-knit crew that fits together to form a persuasive whole and holds together as a unit, co-operating and combining its efforts to achieve a common goal, is manifestly present in interviews:

[BE:06.06.00:1] 0.04 min.



CD 1 Track 55

J: they are knowing (0.5) what everyone in the Embassy is up to (0.2) so that there is a coherent whole

¹⁶⁸The concept of "team performance" or "team" is a fundamental point of reference in Goffman's study of impression management (1959) and he defines it as "any set of individuals who co-operate in staging a single routine" (1959:85). The Ambassador propagates the idea of a "team" with team-mates being related to one another by "bonds of reciprocal dependence and reciprocal familiarity" and where the "mutual dependence created by membership in the team is likely to cut across structural and social cleavages in the establishment and thus provide a source of cohesion for the establishment" (1959:88) (See also chapter 5 below).

However, a significant number of informants contrast the projected ideology of *collegial community spirit* with *reality* as they perceive it:

4.3.4 The truth of the performance

4.3.4.1 Cohesion versus competition



CD 1 Track 56

[BE:20.06.01:3] 0.44 min.

- C: Ostensibly the idea of (0.2) an office meeting is to ehm inform one's colleagues and with particular reference ehm to the Ambassador [about =
- I: [mmm
- C: = a) what he's doing and b) what you've been doing in support of the eh overall objectives which we're all supposed to be working towards ehm (0.7) whether that's true in practice it is >obviously it is true< in that people say what they've been up to ehm but eh in practice I think the reality of it is in cer- to a certain extent it depends how seriously you regard it as as a forum ehm if you do take it seriously then I think **eh there's quite a deal of eh (0.5) look, aren't I clever I'm I'm I'm doing something to impress the Am- the boss**



CD 1 Track 57

[BE:30.05.00:25] 0.15 min.

- E: I think it's a fantastic opportunity for everybody in the Embassy to get together and find out what everybody's doing (1.6) ehm (1.2) but (0.8) **some people use it as an opportunity to try and impress the Ambassador**

These reports picture the weekly meeting not as a co-operative environment but as a fiercely competitive environment, where opportunistic moves prevail over opportunities. Propagated values of information-sharing, solidarity and equality are juxtaposed to perceptions of status contest. Self-concern outweighs the projected idea of *collegial community spirit* and concern for a common goal. Participants exploit the weekly meeting as a forum for expressing and demonstrating *how many feathers they wear in their hair* and consider it an opportunity to improve and reinforce their standing with the boss:

[BE:20.06.00:12] 0.41 min.



CD 1 Track 58

- C: yes they I think it is seen as as a way of ehm (0.6) impressing the leadership of (0.5) you know (0.7) also reiterating your your ehm (0.7) your (0.4) ownership of a certain piece of the action a bit like a dog sort of pissing around his tree so everybody knows that that particular area belongs to it (0.5) ehm (0.4) and demonstrating that you are (0.4) you know a serious player and that people don't cross you if you without having good reason >that sort of thing< eh I think that applies actually to any any social eh (0.5) construct ehm (0.5) **people have a need to: demonstrate how many feathers they wear in their hair**

[BE:20.06.00:12] 0.34 min.



CD 1 Track 59

- C: A number of them I think find the whole thing a complete bore (0.3) and they just want to get it out of the way (0.7) ehm (0.9) and others as I say feel differently (0.8) ehm (0.6) all I would say to those who find it a complete bore is a. I sympathise with your view because it is an awful bore (0.6) but nonetheless **it is your one chance to** (0.3) ehm (.) you know (0.2) and also actually it's not just a question of (0.7) of ehm (1.0) projecting yourself as a means for you: of if you're () good enough **to actually work out how good your standing is with the boss**

The contrast with the projected ideology of collegial coherence is sharp. This, however, is not the only contrast which emerges from interviews.

4.3.4.2 Opportunity versus obligation

The Ambassador firmly insists on the weekly meeting as a gathering where staff members *regularly* have *a chance to ... interact, a chance to contribute*. In contrast, participants consider partaking in the meeting and making a contribution at the meeting not so much as an opportunity but as an obligation:



CD 1 Track 60

[BE:06.06.00:1] 0.07 min.

J: there's a (0.3) temptation (0.3) on (.) many people's (0.4) heart just to say something because they feel that **they ought to**.



CD 1 Track 61

[BE:16.05.00:13] 0.04 min.

N: In this meeting here (0.4) I think there is a bit of pressure on everybody to say something



CD 1 Track 62

[BE:16.05.00:14] 0.09 min.

I: and why [is that pressure there?

N: [it's smaller (.) it's a smaller meeting (0.3)

I: yeah

N: ehm (0.4) I think it's (0.6) eh by and large **it's expected**.

Participants are consciously aware that they are *expected to* create a front-stage impression of the close-knit crew co-operating and combining its efforts to achieve a common goal; that they are expected to perform a "show of proper affective involvement" (Goffman, 1959:102); that they have to contribute *to look engaged*.



CD 1 Track 63

[BE:30.05.00:19] 0.12 min.

L: I think **people feel that (0.6) they have to say something (0.5) just to look (1.0) engaged** and I sometimes raise things which (0.7) are of marginal interest to everybody else (0.4) simply to have something to sa:y.

Someone not contributing to the meeting definitely places him/herself outside the group norm. This may be derived from the following fragment:

[BE:16.05.00:10] 0.15 min.



CD 1 Track 64

- B: well I **it's a personal thing** I mean if someone (0.3) low down scale feels intimidated then they won't speak up and that's a personal decision certainly not (0.2) the: objective that they should sit down and feel intimidated and not contribute (0.4) well it's counterproductive really hhhhhh.

This fragment highlights the tension between *personal decision* and the collective norm. Not contributing to the meeting is denoted - or should I say denounced - by the informant as *a personal thing* and hence implicitly juxtaposed to the collective norm. Highly similar, the following fragments describe not contributing to the meeting as *a personal way of looking at it* or as depending on the *personality*.

[BE:20.06.00:3] 0.09 min.



CD 1 Track 65

- C: a:nd a lot of people say >well the hell with it, I've got nothing to say, move on to the next person, I really don't want to know< ehm (1.5) **it's very much a personal way of looking at it.**

[BE:06.06.00:2] 0.16 min.



CD 1 Track 66

- I: Would you say there's a pressure on people to eh (0.5) when they go round the table (0.6) to to speak up and say something or can you just say no I haven't got anything to say?
J: that very much depends on the personality
I: yeah
J: ehm (0.7) that very much depends on the personality.

In short, the projected democratic notion of an opportunity to interact and *a chance to contribute* is flagrantly contradicted by participants. Participants do not perceive meetings as a genuine and valuable opportunity for close cooperation and interaction. Instead, contributing to the meeting is perceived as an act of obedience and commitment to the Ambassador's will and to the projected group norm of solidarity, participation and involvement.

4.3.4.3 Two monologues do not make a dialogue

Informants repeatedly contest the projected *idea* of a two-way information *exchange*. Instead, they describe the meeting as *a one-way flow of information-sharing*. The meeting gives them *an audience* that listens to them, an opportunity to *advertise* what they are doing, to *project the importance* of one's section to the other Heads of Section:



CD 1 Track 67

[BE:23.05.00:20] 0.04 min.

G: Instead of just **a one-way process** (.) which that particular meeting seems to be.



CD 1 Track 68

[BE:30.05.00:5] 0.12 min.

T: Sometimes there are (0.4) there are **interactions** between (.) ourselves and other parts of the embassy (0.6) but they're fairly **limited**. Mainly it's it's really a case of (0.7) letting them know what we've been doing.



CD 1 Track 69

[BE:30.05.00:31] 0.04 min.

E: As I say to me it's just a (0.2) to me it's (0.3) almost **a one-way flow of information**



CD 1 Track 70

[BE:20.06.01:3] 0.07 min.

C: and so you want to be able to project to the others the importance of what your section is doing



CD 1 Track 71

[BE:23.05.00:15] 0.10 min.

G: I think what it does for me ehm (0.8) **it gives me an audience** who listens to me and I can say what we are doing so if you like **I'm advertising what what we're doing.**

Informants' reports indicate that participants seek confirmation more than information, appreciation more than participation. Speakers at the weekly meeting "treat all their hearers as audience and provide them with a verbal performance which seeks only appreciation, not actual participation ... Participants take turns as narrators and audience, rather than as conversational interactions. Hearers await their turn to give their own performance and, while expressing appreciation for a previous performance, do not treat it as a contribution upon which they are building" (Malone, 1997:56).

Again, this sequence of soliloquies is in sharp contrast with the projected idea of collegial corporation and information sharing.

4.3.4.4 Our meeting versus *his* meeting

While the Ambassador insists on the mutual benefit for him and the other staff members and extrapolates the usefulness of the meeting to the Embassy community as a whole, by way of an argument of logical induction, informants repeatedly stress that the meeting is *his* meeting. What's more, a number of informants claim that the projected goal of keeping everyone informed is in fact secondary to the principle aim of informing the Ambassador:

[BE:06.06.00:3] 0.16 min.



CD 1 Track 72

J: ehm eh (0.9) and as I say that there are (0.6) good reasons that the (0.5) two that I mentioned one that the Ambassador knows what's going on which is important (0.8) eh (1.1) **that we all know what each other is doing is less important**

[BE:30.05.00:30] 0.06 min.



CD 1 Track 73

E: It's less of (0.2) keeping ehm everybody informed (0.6) and **more of keeping the Ambassador informed**



CD 1 Track 74

[BE:16.05.00:2] 0.13 min.

N: they tend to be: (0.2) ehm an opportunity for (1.0) **the Ambassador** to hear what (0.3) other people are doing (0.5) and for the (1.4) **Ambassador** himself to tell others what he's doing.

These reports stress the Ambassador's right to inform and to be informed over participants' opportunity to interact. They spotlight the Ambassador not only as the central player but also as the first and main target audience.

4.3.5 Cover-up operation

"We have always preferred the reputation of being democrats to the notorious inconveniences of democracy. Now, we can enjoy the reputation without the inconveniences because we have trivialized democracy to the extent that it is no longer threatening to those in power or demanding to anyone. Democracy spreads because it has been rendered meaningless and innocuous without losing its symbolic value. While it spreads, our world is more repressive."

Claude Ake, Nigerian Scholar¹⁶⁹

As was demonstrated in the previous section, interviews show repeated signals of a firm authority-based system and strongly contradict the projected democratic idea of solidarity and equality. In this way, they increasingly confirm how the Ambassador has created an elaborate cover-up; how he has created a false impression of solidarity; how he projects and presents the meeting as promoting equality and solidarity while in essence it serves to maintain/sustain an authority-based system.

This cover-up operation of a power-based system by means of a solidarity based system, is flagrantly revealed by the Ambassador's right-hand (literally, because this is where she sits at meetings) self-correcting:

¹⁶⁹See Adentula, 1997:1, cited in Ellsworth, 203:71.

[BE:16.05.00:9] 0.12 min.



CD 1 Track 75

- B: Everybody who's at the table
E: yeah
B: **is expected to eh >is offered the opportunity<** (0.6) to make (0.4) ehm either to make observations on something (0.4) to ask a question (0.4) or to inform

Almost ironically, then, weekly meetings create solidarity not so much because they promote interdependence and offer genuine equal opportunities for interaction but because they endorse a shared commitment to authority and power. The team-enhancing property of the meeting resides not so much in a fulfilment of an ideology of democracy, equality, involvement and participation but in a joint venture and agreement to perform allegiance to the central authority and the norms it projects.

The following fragment, for instance, manifestly reveals a perception and acceptance of an authority-based system (*that's the way he wants it, he's the boss, so we live with it*):

[BE:20.06.00:4] 0.20 min.



CD 1 Track 76

- C: If I had the chance and I thought it was worth (.) which I don't I would probably take him up against the wall and say (.) look baby these these (0.6) bloody (.) meetings of yours are really too long and too (0.4) ill-shaped (0.4) and eh they're not serving an enormously useful purpose (.) **but (0.7) that's the way he wants it, he's the boss so we live with it**

In the remainder of the interview, the informant continues along the same line:

[BE:20.06.00:4] 0.27 min.



CD 1 Track 77

- C: There's nothing wrong with the meeting but it it goes on too long (0.5) and there are too many people at it quite frankly it could be a much smaller (0.6) and more targeted ehm (1.0) institution but (0.8) you will find in in embassies **it very much reflects the**

**views and attitudes of the Head of Mission the Deputy
Head of Mission if they want to do it one way (0.7)
particularly the Ambassador then that's the way it's done
so you have to accept it there's no point in ehm (0.5)
moaning about it ehm**

Weekly meetings allow for and demand a collective affiliation, a tribute to and acceptance of the community leader and the norms he projects. This, then, is the fundamental way in which they create and promote community solidarity.



CD 1 Track 78

[BE:06.06.00:12] 0.02 min.

D: I mean we all defer to the Ambassador **it's his** meeting.

Summarizing, informants' reports undeniably reveal a community that is distinguished and determined by hierarchy, denomination and difference. They disclose a community order based on deference and rigid hierarchy; with a chain of command structured from top to bottom and a pecking order which is unambiguous and logical; with a straight-up vertical structure regulating the conduct of the community; where lower ranking positions are obliged to accept or espouse the views (or rather the wishes) of high-ranking positions; where rules and roles are fixed, rigid, predictable and stable:



CD 1 Track 79

[BE:06.06.00:4] 1.26 min.

J: the Ambassador is (0.5) is a function of office (1.4) eh you would tend to (0.8) defer to (1.3) whether you (0.9) think that he's right or wrong (1.1) you (.) can more than happy argue >I will more than happy argue with him< but ultimately (0.6) **y-you will need a certain (0.4) a certain respect** (0.8) but that's because (1.7) the: Ambassador is is (1.6) ehm >in a slightly old-fashioned sense< is the embodiment (0.8) of (0.7) of eh the British Government overseas (1.1) eh whereas **everyone else from the Deputy Head of Mission downwards is simply (0.6) an officer (1.3) working towards the Ambassador** (0.7) eh so we will keep (1.1) that distinction (1.0) both inside eh and outside the Embassy that the Ambassador is somebody who is (0.8) the () of the Government overseas in this country in

Belgium ehm eh and **it'll be in his name (0.8) that all decisions are taken** (0.8) when any of us write a eh a telegram (0.5) which we send back to London we send it back in his name (0.8) not in (0.5) in our name that's beginning to change (1.0) eh but (.) at the moment (0.5) that hasn't changed.

In this rigid vertical authoritarian structure, where organizational members are faithfully devoted to accomplish the requirements of the system and offer deference, diffidence, consideration and loyalty to leadership, carefully avoiding offence to his authority and courting his favour, a discourse of democracy is strangely out of place. There is a lack of congruence between a discourse promoting equality, shared knowledge and shared power and a community order that infers that one person is above another or deserving of difference. Although its symbolic value is greatly enhanced, democracy is in this way rendered meaningless as a substantive guide to governance. It is reduced to an empty signifier, devoid of meaning, shallow and emptied of political substance. It is reduced to the mere superficiality of a performance.

4.3.6 Conclusion

To conclude, the usefulness of the meeting is a contested issue among participants. Some claim that it serves a *useful purpose*, others bluntly deny its utility. Whether or not they accept it is useful, nearly all participants echo and repeat the goals that the meeting is due to attain. They are consciously aware of the purposes, norms and values that the meeting is *supposed* to accomplish, and the *idea* of participation and involvement, of information-sharing and *collegial community spirit*, is firmly instilled and ingrained.

In sharp contrast with these echoes of the projected ideology of solidarity, democracy, opportunity and equality, interviews repeatedly reflect signals of a firm authority-based system. Participants express that there is a pressure on people to speak at the meetings and that they *are expected to* and *ought to* contribute. What is presented by the Ambassador as an opportunity and a right, is perceived by participants as an obligation and an act of commitment to the projected norm of participation and involvement.

In this way, interviews with participants unmistakably unmask the ideological ambiguity which pervades the Ambassador's discourse. They confirm that the weekly meeting is indeed a cover-up operation. Although

projected and presented as promoting solidarity, it essentially serves to maintain/sustain an authority-based system.

To which extent, then, do participants fall victim to this distorted representation of power relations? Are they deceived into what Marx has called *false consciousness*? Interviews undeniably prove that participants clearly see through the ideology that is forced upon them. Participants generally know, accept and treat the meeting not as an opportunity for enhancing collegial community spirit, but as a collective affiliation to the Ambassador's status and position as head of Mission and leader of the community.¹⁷⁰

Participants, then, are far from blind victims to a process of ideological delusion. They do not have false beliefs and are knowingly aware of the 'truth of the performance'.¹⁷¹

It would be a powerful overstatement to claim that participants are being deceived into *a false consciousness* and to call the cover-up operation a process of ideological deception. Instead, it is a manipulative masquerade. A game of two faces. Participants know the rules of the game and they play the game. They wear the mask. Knowingly, consciously and aware.

Although its symbolic value is greatly enhanced, democracy is in this way rendered meaningless as a substantive guide to governance. It is reduced to an empty signifier, devoid of meaning, shallow and emptied of political substance. It is reduced to the mere superficiality of a performance.

Overall, perceptions of performance strongly pervade the interviews. Participants are consciously aware that they are *expected* to create a front stage impression of the close-knit crew co-operating and combining its efforts to achieve a common goal; that they *have to contribute to look engaged*. They repeatedly stress that the weekly meeting is a forum where participants seek only appreciation, not actual participation. They describe

¹⁷⁰This illustrates Gramsci's concept of "common sense" (1971) or the fact that ideology makes the structure of power seem "natural", "normal", or "inevitable" and therefore beyond challenge.

¹⁷¹"The sense in which it [ideology] is a delusion must be one which depends on a claim that, if I were to come to know something about the functional properties of this form of consciousness, I would no longer retain it. A form of consciousness qualifies as 'false' or a delusion because my retaining it depends in some way on my being in ignorance of or having false beliefs about its functional properties" (Geuss, 1982, cited in Dumain 2001).

the meeting not as two-way information exchange but as *a one-way flow of information-sharing*. The meeting gives them *an audience* that listens to them, an opportunity to *advertise* what they are doing, to *project the importance* of one's section to the other Heads of Section.

Aspects of performance constitute the central focus of the following chapter. Whereas preceding chapters almost exclusively focussed on ethnographic interviews with participants, a final chapter deals with interaction at the meetings and investigates more closely how a *team performance* (Goffman, 1959) is staged; how participants are stimulated and encouraged to create and foster an emergent and convincing impression of a team "possessing a united front" (Goffman, 1959:94).

Chapter 5

5. Staging a team performance

"All in all, then, I am suggesting that often what talkers undertake to do is not to provide information to a recipient but to present dramas to an audience. Indeed, it seems that we spend most of our time not engaged in giving information but in giving shows. And observe, this theatricality is not based on mere displays of feelings or faked exhibitions of spontaneity or anything else by way of the huffing and puffing we might derogate by calling theatrical. The parallel between stage and conversation is much, much deeper than that."

Erving Goffman¹⁷²

*"We all wear masks [...] they are buried deep inside us. Sometimes you wear the mask. And sometimes the mask wears you."*¹⁷³

"How can I wear the mask of this role, playing the part others force me to fit into?"

Clayton Larrabee¹⁷⁴

5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter has drawn attention to the propagated symbolic norm of 'the team', projecting the embassy community as an interdependent and interacting unit, co-operating closely to achieve a common goal. It has pointed at expectations of *participation* and *involvement* and has highlighted the pervasive pressure of a "solidarity-based system" (Fairclough, 1989). In addition, analysis of interviews with participants has laid bare perceptions of *performance*. Participants formulate that they are *expected to* create an impression of the close-knit crew co-operating and combining its efforts to achieve a common goal; that they *have to contribute to look engaged*.

This chapter investigates more closely how a *team performance* (Goffman, 1959) is staged. In the manner of Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown, and inspired by Goffman's dramaturgical approach to interaction, it investigates

¹⁷²Goffman, 1974:508, cited in Duranti, 1997:296.

¹⁷³<http://www.frontierpublishing.net/anthology/masks/mtitle.html>

¹⁷⁴From *Mask of the Role*, see www.larp.com/sereion/soundandfury/archive/118pdf

the elaborate set-up of a ritual ceremony and celebration – “as an expressive rejuvenation and reaffirmation of the moral values of the community” (Goffman, 1959:45). It examines the explicit and implicit articulation of shared values and the ways in which participants are stimulated and encouraged into accepting, producing and reproducing these values to create and foster an emergent and convincing impression of a team “possessing a united front” (Goffman, 1959:94).

First, this chapter examines the complexity, paradox and tension between the various role behaviours of the Ambassador as the director, the central player and the first and main target audience of the *team performance*. How does he employ and integrate a variety of dramaturgical techniques as well as differentiated role-playing to align participants with community values and involve them in the process of accomplishing a common goal?

Next, weekly meetings are analysed as a performance where powerful and powerless roles are acted out. The second part of this chapter explores aspects of role allocation, role negotiation and status contest. It examines the director’s impact on the distribution and construction of roles, as well as explores participants’ vying for status and bidding for power.

Throughout, the analysis and interpretation departs from local practices which were observed and recorded in the field. However, the intrinsically emic perspective of the interpretation is enriched with an etic, theoretical perspective by repeatedly drawing upon Goffman’s dramaturgical approach to social interaction (Goffman, 1959). The following section, then, presents a brief summary of Goffman’s views and the basic concepts he uses.

5.2 Goffman’s dramaturgic metaphor¹⁷⁵

5.2.1 Introduction

In *The presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) describes how our “social selves are constructed on stages” (Scollon & Scollon, 2003:57). Interaction is portrayed as a “performance” providing others with “impressions” that are in agreement with the desired goals of actors:

¹⁷⁵Goffman uses three metaphors for viewing social life: drama, ritual, and game. See Branaman (2000) for a concise summary and interpretation.

"Thus, when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey." (Goffman, 1959:15-16)

In every interaction we communicate our definition of reality to others, that is, what we say reflects our perceptions of reality. The version of reality that we communicate Goffman calls our *line* and his argument is that we communicate in ways that are aimed at getting others to accept our *line*. Part of having our *line* accepted involves playing a role that creates agreement between our version of reality and the image we want to present to others (*face*¹⁷⁶).

5.2.2 Front

A central concept in Goffman's dramaturgical approach is the concept of *front*, which he describes as "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (Goffman, 1959:32). In other words, *fronts* work to standardize, they are "expressive equipment of a standard kind" (Goffman, 1959:32).

Various signs and signifiers are used in projecting the *front* and "social front can be divided into traditional parts, such as setting, appearance, and manner" (Goffman, 1959:39). The *front* is "the equipment, including physical props of the social setting as well as personal expressive equipment¹⁷⁷ such as rank, clothing, sex, or age, that functions to define the performance for observers" (Branaman, 2000:lxv):

"First, there is the 'setting', involving furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon it" (Goffman, 1959:32-33).

¹⁷⁶This is the image of the self that is presented. Face is what others assume and it is the image that others see or consider to have been expressed by the actor. See Goffman (1982:5-45).

¹⁷⁷Goffman divides the "stimuli which make up personal front" (1959:34) into 'appearance' and 'manner'. Whereas appearance tells the observer of the performer's social statuses, 'manner' indicates "the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation" – dominant, aggressive, yielding, receptive etc. (1959:35).

“ ‘Personal front’ refers to the other items of expressive equipment, the items that we most intimately identify with the performer himself and that we naturally expect will follow the performer wherever he goes. As part of personal front we may include: insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like. Some of these vehicles for conveying signs, such as racial characteristics, are relatively fixed and over a span of time do not vary for the individual from one situation to another. On the other hand, some of these sign vehicles are relatively mobile or transitory, such as facial expression, and can vary during a performance from one moment to the next”. (Goffman, 1959:34)

A *front* must be convincing – “in line” with expectations. This is significant in terms of attributing ethical, correct or “inappropriate” characteristics. “The actor, in order to present a compelling front, is forced to both fill the duties of the social role and communicate the activities and characteristics of the role to other people in a consistent manner” (Barnhart, 1994). In short, credibility is won by satisfying the expected duties and manners of an attributed role.

“When an actor takes on an established social role, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it” (Goffman, 1959:37). We have a repertoire and vocabulary of “manageable fronts” which we use across a multitude of settings. Just as we know what the next tune is in a Beethoven Sonata or Queen’s Bohemian Rhapsody, we prepare and deliver responses. Personality trait definitions become collective, normative terms; common understandings in a vocabulary. In other words, “a given social front tends to become institutionalized in terms of the abstract stereotyped expectations to which it gives rise, [...]. The front becomes a collective representation in its own right” (Goffman, 1959:37). When we take on a new job role, for example, an expected *front* is already waiting in the incumbent’s workplace. We perform the job and do the *front* that comes with it.

5.2.3 Idealization

Another way in which a performance is “socialized, moulded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented”, is by means of *idealization*. Goffman refers to *idealization* as the tendency of actors to present idealized impressions for their audience

(Goffman, 1959:44): "A performer tends to conceal or underplay those activities, facts, and motives which are incompatible with an idealized version of himself and his products" (Goffman, 1959:56).¹⁷⁸

5.2.4 Back region and front region

Related to actors' attempts to present an *idealized front*, Goffman distinguishes between *back regions* and *front regions*. The *front region* is the place where the performance is given and standards maintained; "a back region or backstage may be defined as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course" (Goffman, 1959:114):

"It is here that the capacity of a performance to express something beyond itself may be painstakingly fabricated; it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed. [...] Here the team can run through its performance, checking for offending expressions when no audience is present to be affronted by them. [...] Here the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character." (Goffman, 1959:114-115)

For instance, "a waiter takes on a different face and demeanor as he passes through the kitchen door to enter the main dining room to attend to customers. When he returns to the kitchen to place the order he has received, his demeanor again changes; he relaxes, chats with the cook, perhaps he even speaks insultingly of the customer to whom he has just shown the utmost deference and respect" (example taken from Scollon & Scollon, 2003:57).

5.2.5 Team performance

The concept of *team performance* or *team* is "a fundamental point of reference" (Goffman, 1959:90) in Goffman's study of impression management and he defines it as "any set of individuals who cooperate in

¹⁷⁸Goffman specifically thinks up and lists five different ways in which people conceal their "secrets" (1959:52-53). In addition, performers may exaggerate that their actions, or the relationships they have to others, are "special" and worthy of preferential attention: "A performer often engenders in his audience the belief that he is related to *them* in a more ideal way than is always the case" (1959:56).

staging a single routine" (1959:85). Performances commonly involve cooperation of a team which works together to express the characteristics of a social situation: "In many interaction settings some of the participants cooperate together as a team or are in a position where they are dependent upon this cooperation in order to maintain a given definition of the situation" (Goffman, 1959:96). "Team-mates tend to be related to one another by bonds of reciprocal dependence and reciprocal familiarity" (1959:88):

"There is then, perforce, a bond of reciprocal dependence linking team-mates to one another. When members of a team have different formal statuses and rank in a social establishment, as is often the case, then we can see that the mutual dependence created by membership in the team is likely to cut across structural or social cleavages in the establishment and thus provide a source of cohesion for the establishment. Where staff and line statuses tend to divide an organization, performance teams may tend to integrate the divisions." (Goffman, 1959:88)

In what follows, I examine the orchestration of a *team performance*. How do participants jointly orchestrate and agree upon "a given definition of the situation" (Goffman, 1959) for an anticipated audience, that is, how do they jointly build and decide on the *line* (Goffman, 1959) they will maintain **for a non-present audience**? I explore the weekly meeting as a *back region* where "illusions and impressions are openly constructed", where "the team can run through its performance, checking for offending expressions when no audience is present to be affronted by them" (Goffman, 1959:114-115).

5.3 Rule as role: the Ambassador's differentiated role playing

5.3.1 Director of the performance

"When one examines a team-performance, one often finds that someone is given the right to direct and control the progress of the dramatic action".

Erving Goffman¹⁷⁹

5.3.1.1 Introduction

According to Goffman, a team-director "may be given the special duty of bringing back into line any member of the team whose performance becomes unsuitable" (Goffman, 1959:102). In the interview, the Ambassador explicitly commented on this aspect of his role to "correct for improper appearances" (Goffman, 1959:103) and bring back into line deviant behaviour:



CD 2 Track 1

[BE:20.06.00:7] 0.12 min.

A: well if if th- if there's somebody who's (0.7) handling a:: matter which (0.4) on which (0.5) I know that **they need they should** be taking a view or doing something then **I will** (0.4) you know **prop them** into into saying something or doing something

Normative expressions (*on which I know that they need they should be taking a view or doing something*) pervade this utterance and position the Ambassador as a critic, *evaluator* and judge, subjecting accomplishments of the group to a set of standards. At the same time, the fragment reveals aspects of his role as an *energizer* (Benne & Sheats, 1948)¹⁸⁰ who prods the

¹⁷⁹Goffman, 1959:101.

¹⁸⁰In 1948, Benne and Sheats published an essay in which they attached labels and descriptions to the functional roles they observed individual group members taking on in small-group communication encounters. They outlined a number of roles under three headings: group task roles; group building and maintenance roles and self-centred roles. Task roles focussed on goal accomplishment; maintenance roles focussed on relationships; and individual roles focussed on counterproductive individual vs. team needs. Group task roles included that of *initiator/contributor* – a person who recommends new ideas about a problem; *evaluator-critic* – a person who subjects accomplishment of the group to a set of standards of group functioning in the context of the group task; and *energizer* – a person who prods the group into action. Over 50 years later, Benne and Sheats' functional role theory remains a pivotal element in the study of role behaviour in small-group communication.

group into action, supporting, stimulating, *propping* a show of "proper affective involvement" (Goffman, 1959:102).

In what follows, I will explore the multifaceted role of the Ambassador as the director of a *team performance*. How does he stimulate and claim "proper affective involvement"? What are the means, sanctions and rewards he uses to encourage or demand participation as well as to maintain interest or involvement in the meeting? How does he position himself as the central critic and judge of participants' reports and actions? How does he propel the notion that there must be standards to abide by?

The analysis will explore two dimensions of *team performance*, two performance *frames* as it were. First, the fragments discussed below capture a glimpse of the weekly meeting as a *back region*, where "illusions and impressions are openly constructed", where "the team can run through its performance, checking for offending expressions when no audience is present to be affronted by them" (Goffman, 1959:114-115). A large portion of fragments reveals participants rehearsing a public *team performance* in the private, secluded and safe area of the meeting room with the Ambassador directing and controlling the performance. However, not only does the Ambassador set the *line* and supervise a *team performance* for a non-present, anticipated audience, he also directs, criticizes, stimulates and rewards participants for effective *team performance* at the very event of the meeting. At this point, the staff meeting becomes the front stage for *team performance*, with participants taking turns as actors and audience for one another's performance.

5.3.1.2 Announcing the team's line

The Ambassador's role and function of a director supervising, controlling and rehearsing a *team performance* for a non-present, anticipated audience became most apparent during the ad hoc crisis and turmoil of the Euro 2000 football cup.

On June 17th, more than 16,000 British football fans, without tickets and without hope of acquiring tickets, had made the trip to Charleroi in Belgium to cheer on their team from the streets. This was in addition to some 10,000 ticket holders. There had been violence before and after the match against Germany, in Brussels and in Charleroi, and hundreds of British supporters

were arrested. As a result, England was threatened with expulsion from the European Championship and UEFA¹⁸¹ issued the following statement:

"The UEFA Executive Committee has today called on the UK government and the Football Association in London to take the necessary steps to stop English hooligans from travelling abroad. Following the violence in Brussels and Charleroi, the UEFA Executive Committee stated that these English hooligans are a disgrace to their country and a blight on the national team. Their actions over the last 48 hours have left a scar on the tournament and left us wondering why more wasn't done to prevent them from travelling. The scenes of the last two days cannot be allowed to continue. Euro 2000 is a celebration of European football, not an excuse for a small minority of English fans to cause havoc. The UK government owes it to everyone concerned to take steps, similar to those taken in other parts of the EU, to stop these so-called fans from travelling abroad. We cannot allow more people to spoil international tournaments for genuine fans. Other governments have shown that it can be done and we call on the UK government to take the necessary steps as a matter of urgency. UEFA will have to determine whether the presence of the English national team at this tournament may be maintained, should there be a repetition of similar incidents."¹⁸²

In staff meetings following the incidents with British hooligans, the Ambassador repeatedly emphasizes the team's strategic position to avoid antagonizing *the Belgian authorities*, to *accept responsibility* and counterbalance accusations with *grovelling apology*. These instances reveal a most acute and urgent call for united team action and show the Ambassador taking up a director's role, firmly announcing the team's *position*, setting a *line* and obliging all members to follow it:



CD 2 Track 2

[BE:20.06.00:4] 0.54 min.

A: ehm (0.4) meanwhile I've given three interviews on (1.3) the media ehm (1.7) eh one on Flemish television in (0.9) Mechelen,

¹⁸¹The Union of European Football Associations, almost always referred to by the acronym UEFA, is the administrative and controlling body for European football. It represents the national football associations of Europe, running nine national and four club competitions in Europe, controlling the prize-money, regulations and media rights to those competitions.

¹⁸²From <http://www.soccertimes.com/international/2000/jun18.htm>

in which they asked about this (1.6) hooliganism (0.9) eh () one in the evening to (.) French television in French recorded here (0.4) and one first thing this morning on RTL radio (1.8) and getting up at half past six (1.0) ehm () **the line is absolutely clear on all this** it is () grovelling apology for what's happened (1.6) ehm (0.7) and stressing that we have taken (1.6) supplementary measures to try and ensure (1.7) that these hooligans who (0.9) caused all this trouble () deported and don't come back here (0.9) ehm that's what (0.5) they're mostly afraid of at the Belgian authorities.

[BE:20.06.00:6] 0.58 min.



CD 2 Track 3

A: Anyway the: (0.4) I think the important point from the public representation point of view is that (0.4) we're not going to (0.8) argue or toss about whether the police could have been (0.4) less tough or tougher (0.4) or whatever (1.1). **The line is to accept responsibility** this is a (1.0) this is a national disgrace >which it is< (0.8) ehm (0.8) support the UEFA (1.8) eh ultimatum which is which is what Kevin () has done, which is right too (1.1). 'Cause if you argue with those people they will (0.9) >or simply antagonise them< they'll be even (0.4) more dd-determined to kicking them out of the competition (0.7) which some English commentators will be delighted to see () ehm (0.6) so really it's to ride with this punch and ehm (1.2) hope >and it's now happening< that the: treatment in the press will become (0.7) rather more balanced and () postmortems later to get into all the detail.

[BE:27.06.00] 0.09 min.



CD 2 Track 4

A: So we, from the beginning we've always said that (0.6) we would support the Belgian police in taking as tough a line as they thought necessary (0.8) **and that remains our position.**

A director's guidelines are all the more apparent in the following fragment, in which the Ambassador tells participants how to treat the hooligans who,

apparently, are being locked up in prison with hardly anything to eat or drink:



CD 2 Track 5

[BE:20.06.00:7] 0.13 min.

A: Okay I think it's (0.3) fully important that **we should seem to be doing (2.0) what we (1.1) need to do** on the consular side (0.8) however (1.1) little sympathy () have for these people.

In this fragment, the Ambassador openly calls for the maintenance of an *idealized front* (Goffman, 1959), encouraging staff members to defend and promote hooligans' rights, regardless of how they really feel and think of them. The fragment not only stresses aspects of performance and impression management (*we should seem to be doing*), but also highlights how team members need to perform differently for different audiences. On the one hand, they need to put on a credible performance for *the Belgian authorities*, on the other hand, they have a duty towards hooligans as British citizens whose interests they need to promote and defend. In short, team members are not only encouraged to act conform to the duties and manners of their attributed roles but also to switch freely between roles, perform differently for different audiences and wear an appropriate mask for every occasion.

The degree to which role-switching and expectations of *idealized front* pervade the diplomatic community is aptly captured by the American sociologist Randall Collins (interview by Maclean & Yocom, 2000),¹⁸³ who himself was the son of a diplomat:

¹⁸³Randall Collins may be regarded as a leading figure in contemporary sociological theory. Collins grounds his theories in a complex action-theoretical framework that, in his view, takes into consideration the emotional and semiotic contours of human action as these are revealed through phenomenological investigation. This framework, which revolves around the notion of *interaction ritual chains*, marries insights from Goffman and from the Durkheim of *The Elementary Forms* (1995). It produces an image of individuals as strategic pursuers of "emotional energy" whose interactional choices, whatever their manifest meanings, take shape in an interactional economy where solidarity is the unit of exchange.

"How has your background affected your subsequent theories and work? What kinds of experiences did you have during your upbringing that affected your sociological theories?"

I grew up in the state department. My father was a foreign service officer. Among my earliest memories is being in Berlin at the end of the Second World War. We went to Moscow, were stationed in Germany in various places, and South America. Interestingly enough, my friend from grad school, Arlie Hochschild, also grew up in the state department, although her father was an ambassador much more high-ranking than mine. And we both agreed that this experience made us receptive toward the ideas of Erving Goffman, **because there's nothing like the diplomatic world for this stark contrast between what happens on the very formal idealized front stage and what happens back stage.** I can remember my mother being wonderfully polite to people who were coming to visit in this tremendous round of sociability in the diplomatic world, and then she'd shut the door and it was like she took off a mask and became a different person. So, I think that's one source of it."

Summarizing, interaction during meetings at the time of the Euro 2000 football cup most pertinently reveals how a public *team performance* is staged in the "backstage region" of the meeting room. Extracts demonstrate the Ambassador's crucial role in supervising, directing and streamlining a *team performance*, obliging team-members to possess "a united front" (Goffman, 1959:94) and jointly follow the *line* that is set. Apart from "united" role-playing, team members are also instructed into differentiated role-playing. Whereas one *line* is set for *the Belgian authorities*, another is adopted for British citizens and team-members are obliged to adapt accordingly, with the ease and grace of a seasoned diplomat, a skilful performer and a loyal team-mate.

5.3.1.3 Collective address

Instances of collective address are exceptional in embassy staff meetings and markedly deviate from the standard pattern of a round of the table where turns are allocated in a predictable way. Only on rare occasions during meetings, does the Ambassador address the whole team. However, when they do occur, these instances of collective address enhance, stimulate and encourage participation in shared views, needs and goals and

display a team-director's urge to create and maintain a consensual environment:



CD 2 Track 6

[BE:20.06.00:3] 0.11 min.

A: We then had (1.1) the Queen's birthday party in the Rue du ().
It's always a (0.9) howling success. But I'm biased. **Is that what everybody else thought too?**

All: yes yes



CD 2 Track 7

[BE:27.06.00] 0.38 min.

A: Ehm (2.4) what was interesting I think about Hugo Young's (1.2) démarche was (0.7) he started off by (0.8) saying what a pleasure it is to (1.0) come to Brussels and address (1.1) people who are all totally and utterly (1.0) dedicated to the future of Europe (1.2) you know in fact that wasn't at all what his audience consisted of (1.2) as he discovered (1.5) there are many ehm (0.7) nuances in that position ((coughs)) (3.8) **did anybody get any feedback from him what he thought about it?**

S: J. did. I didn't.

A: Right

In each of these two fragments, instances of collective address allude to an event (the Queen's birthday party, a staff seminar) in which all or nearly all participants of the meeting were present. In this way, they reaffirm participants' reciprocal dependency as team members.

The team-enhancing quality of instances of collective address was again most apparent at the time of the calamities of the Euro 2000 football tournament. In the meetings which took place in this period, the Ambassador collectively addressed the whole team and openly invited contributions on *this sad subject*. These instances of collective address display a director's urge for consensus building, shared vision and collective commitment at a time when joint action, shared vision and effective *team performance* were most acute and indispensable:

[BE:27.06.00] 0.07 min.



CD 2 Track 8

A: Right, does anybody else want (.) any reflections on this (.) sad subject? (2.8) Right ehm.

[BE:27.06.00] 0.03 min.



CD 2 Track 9

A: So that's that (0.3) ehm (0.6) did anybody want to say anything about this (0.3) whole affair?

5.3.1.4 Sanctioning

Customarily, the Ambassador monitors and sanctions participants' absence at a meeting. The following fragment provides an example of how he reprimands and criticizes participants for not being present and failing to comply with the community norm of *participation*:

[BE:20.06.00:1] 0.40 min.



CD 2 Track 10

- D: he was chucked out [twice twice at ninety-eight
[((door slams))
- A: right ehm (0.7) ((slams paper on table)) we need to make this fairly snappy because (1.0) there is rather a lot going on (1.2) ((throws papers on table)). **Anybody else coming?** (3.0) ((puts glass firmly on table))
- T: Normally (0.9) S. and the DA
- A: So does S. (0.4) the DA is not coming ()
- P: No the DA is eh
- A: Does he send his representative?
- P: No well he's there's no one (2.0) apart from (1.4)
- A: There is no one?
- P: I think G. is on leave
- E: yeah
- P: [G. is on leave
- A: [On leave is he? Yeah (3.1) ((rubs hands)). Right just a quick ehm (0.2) survey of what's been happening and then I want to talk about the (1.1) Euro 2000 and what's happening there

Overall, this fragment radiates irritation and aggravation. When the Ambassador enters the meeting room, signs of non-verbal communication (slamming the door, smacking his diary down on the table) express impatience and annoyance. His opening line (*there is rather a lot going on*) announces aggravation about the unexpected outburst of British hooliganism which upset the Euro 2000 tournament (see section 5.3.1.2). Although seemingly neutral and merely informative, the question *Anybody else coming?* actually gives vent to disappointment about the poor attendance of his team. In spite of participants' tentative, almost apologizing replies,¹⁸⁴ the mechanical repetition as well as the falling tone in *There is no one?* exceedingly show irritation and disapproval building to a climax in a final sarcastic *On leave is he?* Summarizing, this short exchange at the start of a meeting affirms and reaffirms a community norm of *participation* and *involvement*. Although confrontation and critique do not openly occur, *Anybody else coming?* detects and sanctions violation of a norm and may be considered a director's penalty for poor *team performance*.

Semi-informative, sanctioning questions about participants' presence are a regular feature throughout meetings. The following fragment, for instance, is very similar to the previous extract. By way of a mocking, sarcastic question monitoring and sanctioning the absence of the Defence Section, the Ambassador establishes and affirms his role as director of a *team performance*, insisting on the team's unconditional motivation, co-operation and involvement. Again, signs of non-verbal communication contain a most direct expression of power. Slamming the door and smacking his diary down on the table, the Ambassador exerts control by simply reminding people of his presence and thus of their common political culture:



CD 2 Track 11

[BE:27.06.00] 0.08 min.

(door slams)

A: **No Defence Section?** Selling helicopters somewhere?
(smacks diary down on table)

¹⁸⁴The controlling, reprimanding and sanctioning impact of the Ambassador's question is apparent in the long subsequent silence, with participants' delayed reply signalling trouble and announcing a dispreferred response. To avoid direct confrontation, one participant speculatively and tentatively mentions two participants who *normally* attend the meeting. To soften the impending critique and to avoid antagonizing the Ambassador further, his personal assistant (P) prefaces apparently dispreferred answers with a mitigating *well* and *I think*.

A similar sarcastic and sanctioning tone is manifest in the following fragment:

[BE:27.06.00] 0.12 min.



CD 2 Track 12

- A: **We haven't got anybody from consular section?** ((throws pen on table))
S: Eh (1.0) D.'s (0.4) he's eh I think he's suffering a l- () leg injury infected rather it's nothing bad
A: It's kind of him to stay away (.).

Checking and monitoring participants' presence as a way of insisting on collegiality, solidarity and *team performance* extends beyond the event of the meeting. In the following fragment, for instance, the Ambassador collectively addresses participants to check on their joint presence as a team at an event organized by one of the staff members:

[BE:27.06.00] 0.07 min.



CD 2 Track 13

- A: **Ehm was everybody here (0.4) around this table present at this event?**
L: Mmm yeah (0.7)
A: Yeah (0.6)
S: Everyone (0.6)
L: Mmm

5.3.1.5 Rewarding

"Loyalty has to be earned and to earn it you have to acknowledge a job well done. Productivity rises for teams that are rewarded for the work they do. It's a simple fact. Your bottom line rises with a team that feels appreciated."

Dr. Barton Goldsmith¹⁸⁵

Whereas he persistently sanctions participants for their absence and for violating the community norm of participation and involvement, the Ambassador also rewards participants for effective *team performance*. The

¹⁸⁵Dr. Barton Goldsmith is a business consultant and author. He is considered an expert on small business and his columns appear in over 150 publications, including the *Los Angeles Business Journal*.

strategy of rewarding “proper loyalties” (Greenblatt 1988, 135-136, cited in Weidle, 2002:9) is noticeable in the following fragment, in which the Ambassador most explicitly states his gratitude for a job well done, encouraging and motivating team members to hang in through a crucial moment of crisis:



CD 2 Track 14

[BE:20.06.00:5] 0.56 min.

- A: I mean I (0.4) all I want to say is that (0.8) **I’m most grateful for everybody’s (1.1) efforts. Some are not here of course ’cause they’re actually dealing with it** (0.8) ehm (0.3) it is rather important (1.3) it’s highly political ehm Mr. Verhofstadt¹⁸⁶ and Mr. Blair had (0.6) exchange yesterday in Portugal and are going to meet again today before they break up (2.3) eh (0.4) it’s extremely depressing that (1.4) this country’s image has been (0.5) besmirched by these people (0.9) even if (1.1) there are mitigating circumstances and (0.8) notably (0.6) the fact that it seems this is a new generation of hooligans too (0.7) and nobody knew anything about (0.9) they’re not registered on any intelligence lists (1.1) and they seem to be (0.5) bank managers and other (0.8) eh I don’t know what this says about our society but (1.1) ehm (0.8) I don’t think even if all the measures in the world are being taken that that these people could necessarily be kept out (0.9) **That’s what that’s what we’re saying. I think that that is correct?**
- S: Yeah it is correct.

The fragment shows the Ambassador in the role of a director, stimulating, encouraging and rewarding participants for an effective *team performance* (*I’m most grateful for everybody’s efforts*) with the use of explicit evaluative lexis (*it is rather important*) positioning him as a critic and judge propelling standards to abide by and reaffirming values which team-members should follow in unison and close co-operation. The contrast with the irritated, sanctioning and annoyed tone with which the Ambassador opened this very same meeting (see fragment 10) is stark and most aptly reveals a dramaturgical talent at double role-playing and a capacity to switch roles unabashedly. Contrary to mockingly sanctioning participants for not being present, the Ambassador now tactfully expresses understanding for the

¹⁸⁶Guy Verhofstadt was the prime minister of Belgium at the time.

absence of participants (*Some are not here of course 'cause they're actually dealing with it*). Moreover, the fragment captures a dramaturgical switch from a role of the director of a *team performance* to a role of a central actor in a public performance. With *it's extremely depressing that this country's image has been (0.5) besmirched by these people*, the Ambassador for a moment moves from the realm of the *backstage region* of the meeting to the spotlight of the *frontstage region* where he fulfils a central role as a spokesperson,¹⁸⁷ representing and defending the British nation for the public. With *That's what that's what we're saying* the Ambassador drops *front*, steps out of character, and moves from the frontstage to the backstage again, verifying and checking the accuracy of his performance (*I think that is correct?*) with the Deputy Head of Mission (S), almost as if he is rehearsing his lines.

The following section further examines the Ambassador's talent for differentiated role-playing. Not only does the Ambassador direct a *team performance*, he is also very much "the centre of the show and the dramatically dominant participant in it" (Goffman, 1959:105). Not only does he give explicit directives to enhance an effective team-performance and position himself as a straightforward judge and critic of participants' actions, he also implicitly enforces community values by playing the lead part acting out core community values for other participants to follow and imitate.

5.3.2 Central player

"When we study a routine which requires a team of several performers for its presentation, we sometimes find that one member of the team is made the star, lead or centre of attention."

Erving Goffman¹⁸⁸

5.3.2.1 An acclaimed soloist

Customarily, the Ambassador opens staff meetings with a long, detailed monologue in which he goes through the nitty-gritty of his diary. These opening speeches may take up to ten or even twenty minutes and describe in meticulous detail the various lunches, seminars, funerals, festivals and

¹⁸⁷The switch from a self-referencing *I think* to collective referencing in *that's what that's what we're saying* indicates the extent to which the Ambassador operates as a spokesperson.

¹⁸⁸Goffman, 1959:103.

other official events he has attended in the past week. The opening monologue constitutes a “dramatically dominant part” (Goffman, 1959:105) of the weekly meeting, or, as one participant describes in an ethnographic interview:



CD 2 Track 15

[BE:30.05.00:2] 0.05 min.

M: the bulk of the meeting is taken up by what the Ambassador has done on a day-to-day basis for the previous week

In other words, the Ambassador claims and gains a dramatically dominant role partly by virtue of the length and duration of his speaking turn. Moreover, his long opening speech is by definition uninterrupted by other participants. Only occasionally does he cue the supporting cast to add a valuable comment or opinion (see for instance, fragments 6, 7, 8, 9).¹⁸⁹ Holding and keeping the floor for a long, extended time, only sparingly inviting others to take a turn, he firmly anchors his position as the leading actor, as “the star, lead or centre of attention” (Goffman, 1959:103) of the *team performance*.

5.3.2.2 Enacting a central position in a network of relations

Not only does the Ambassador claim an audience and gain central status on account of the sheer length of his contribution, the meticulous detail of his accounts, the painstaking portrayal of political and social encounters, of “the tremendous round of sociability in the diplomatic world” which Randall Collins refers to (see above), all the more enhances his major and central role:



CD 2 Track 16

[BE:27.06.00] 1.42 min.

A: All right ehm (0.2) on the Wednesday I gave eh (0.4) lunch for the Chief (0.4) Minister of Gibraltar (1.0) Mr. Caruana¹⁹⁰ (1.7) who

¹⁸⁹The Deputy Head of Mission forms an exception to this dramatic rule. As the Ambassador’s ‘understudy’ and partner actor, he picks up cues and freely enters the monologue with supplementary information or a statement of opinion. (An ‘understudy’ is an actor who studies and rehearses the role of the lead actor for performance in case the lead actor is prevented from appearing. I use the term to refer to the fact that the Deputy Head of Mission chairs weekly staff meetings in the Ambassador’s absence.)

¹⁹⁰Peter Richard Caruana has been Chief Minister of Gibraltar since 1996, when his party, the Gibraltar Social Democrats (GSD) first came to power. His party was re-elected to office in 2000

ehm was extremely eh (1.7) eh (0.7) forceful and persuasive. He's a lawyer > which is not surprising< I think he's also half Spanish actually (1.2). You know, he addressed this lunch which was laid on I was simply acting as the host for the American-European () Association (0.7). There's quite interesting people there our Lady Baroness Nicholson, ehm (0.3) James Manch Mancham¹⁹¹ (1.0) who was the president of the Seychelles and was deposed and now lives in Hurlingham (2.0) eh (0.9) no Spaniards because they (0.4) de-hhh-clined, but (0.7) ehm some MEP's, including a Belgian MEP (2.1). Anyway th-this was quite a forceful presentation and I think it persuaded some people who hadn't known anything about this subject, such as (0.8) Christian Jacobs, who's the () man, who's more interested in the tax position (0.6) in Gibraltar. That eh (2.1) that th- that Caruana has a point (0.4). Caruana's simple point is that (1.1) the people of Gibraltar and him have (0.8) certain rights under the UN (1.4) charter of Human rights (2.0) and that the Spanish Government (0.5) cannot just (1.0) ignore them, he was saying they must have sovereignty back, (0.6) any more than the British government can ignore them and say that we we can dispose of you as we see fit (1.0) we're also bound by international law (1.9) That was his message.

The foregoing extract from an opening monologue proffers a prototypical example of the usual way in which the Ambassador goes about performing centrality. The fragment provides a thorough and detailed account¹⁹² of the visit of the Chief Minister of Gibraltar and while the account actually features Mr. Caruana as the central performer, stressing his *forceful* and *persuasive* presentation, it very much puts the Ambassador in the forefront. The report starts off with a self-centred *I gave eh (0.4) lunch for the Chief (0.4) Minister of Gibraltar*. Although the Ambassador mitigates this opening statement with *I was simply acting as the host for the American-European () Association (0.7)* and self-corrects an active *I gave eh lunch* with a passive *lunch was laid on*, he firmly sets the tone for an account stressing his central role as a host, not only for the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, but also for a

and 2003. He is a barrister by profession, having trained in the United Kingdom, and is also a Queen's Counsel.

¹⁹¹Sir James Richard Marie Mancham was the first President of the Seychelles from 1976 to 1977. He was deposed by his prime minister, France-Albert René.

¹⁹²The account continues long after the presented extract.

whole gathering of *interesting people*. In short, the rich and detailed story of 'who's who' and 'who said what' markedly displays how he fulfils the role requirements and expectations of a central position in a network of social and political relationships.

5.3.2.3 An actor and comedian

The ambassador's role and talent as a central performer is also manifest in the way he skilfully employs humour. In the ethnographic interview, the Ambassador reveals and affirms a deliberate and conscious use of humour:



[BE:27.06.00:5] 0.40 min.

A: Well I try and keep the atmosphere ehm as light as possible ehm (1.7) 'cause even if the matters are very serious ehm (1.7) I find that you can communicate better if you (0.6) are making it (1.0) in a human way (1.3) eh without becoming (0.5) frivolous o:r (0.6) just (1.5) making the whole thing (0.7) making lighter (0.6) I mean some of the issues we discuss are are (0.5) very important (1.3) but my **ehm feeling is and my (0.2) style has always been that (1.5) you should try and make things (1.1) interesting and as amusing as possible as it were (0.4) 'cause that's the best way you can get your message across.**

In his own saying, the Ambassador uses humour to communicate more effectively, to get his message across better and to stimulate and maintain the participants' interest in the meeting. Partly, this is very much a director's voice, aspiring, encouraging and stimulating involvement and participation in the joint effort of a meeting. Partly, it is also a skilled communicator and actor's voice, trying to get his message across to a public.

Throughout, the Ambassador's interaction style shows a fondness for the insult, the pun, the sarcastic retort and the formulaic joke. Overall, these instances of humour reveal a preference for performance-based humour over participatory forms of humour.¹⁹³ For the most part, his jokes and

¹⁹³Jenkins (1985) notes that male humour tends to be more performance-based than women's humour. Jenkins observes that men's humour is characterized as self-aggrandizing one-upmanship. She notes that they more often use formulaic jokes that are markedly separate from the surrounding discourse and involve a performance. This establishes them as credible

sarcastic remarks not so much contribute to the dialogue and to the creation of solidarity but, instead, distract and disrupt from it, being oriented at claiming an audience and gaining status.

A distinct preference for performance-based, self-aggrandizing humour and a lack of supportiveness toward participatory forms of humour emphasizing interaction, solidarity and community, comes to the surface in the following fragment, which shows the Ambassador adopting a persistently unsupportive attitude towards participants' joint creation of laughter:

[BE:27.06.00] 1.35 min.



CD 2 Track 18

- A: That was that. Ehm (0.7) that evening I attended the: Newcastle (1.7) City Council reception. They've (0.8) they've come here in force and they're (0.8) propagating their (1.3) virtues of their (0.5) region. Ehm they were using the North of England office in the Avenue Tervuren (1.5). They made a presentation (0.8) at which they said that (1.5) **Newcastle is the is the most (0.3) is the second most desirable place to live in Europe.**
- C: [Hhhahahhaaaaa
[Why?
- M: [The rest is completely ()
- T: [Yeah. It's full of Jordies¹⁹⁴ unfortunately
- S: the first most desirable place is the rest of Europe
- All: Hhhhaa
- A: No it was ehm it was (1.8) >God I knew () what it was<
- T: So can you
- N: Brussels
- T: yeah
- A: But eh (1.9) at times the quality of life in Newcastle is (0.5) is exceptionally high (1.0) which was (0.8) new to some of us
- E: In certain areas (0.7)
- A: What? (0.3)

performers and gives them an audience. Recently theorists have become uncomfortable with such sweeping statements and many have doubts with regard to polarizing genders so distinctly. At best, Jenkins' claims may be considered large generalizations, which are nonetheless useful in that they point to interesting phenomena and provide a base for further, qualitative research (see also Hay, 1995).

¹⁹⁴Geordies (Jordies) are, very strictly, the folks from the towns and cities of the lower Tyne. The name is generally used as a popular way of referring to people from Newcastle and the Tyneside.

E: In certain areas
 All: hhhhhhhhhhh
 S: Grecians and Romans (0.7) queuing up to
 T: Hhhh[hhhh
 C: [Well, I remember once going to Belfast, where the deputy mayor said ()'Welcome to the Venice of the North' hhhhhhh All the English just fell out of laughing, I remember that very well.
 A: Where are the canals in Belfast?
 C: God knows (0.2) it's the river Lagan, that's ()
 All: hhhhhhhhh
 B: It's supposed to be south border?
 C: Naaa
 A: Right on the (2.0) ((turns page of diary)) Thursday eh (1.4) we listened to the John Palmer's conclusions on the Faro summit (0.4) which were not totally convincing

In the fragment, the Ambassador tells of the Newcastle City Council reception he attended on the Wednesday before the meeting. His reported claim that *Newcastle is the is the most (0.3) is the second most desirable place to live in Europe* triggers loud laughter among participants and, following that, a succession of spontaneous and witty remarks creates lively multi-party interaction, briefly interrupting the Ambassador's soliloquy with collegial colloquy. Mutually supporting one another and co-operating in constructing and building up the succession of jokes, team members openly declare and enhance solidarity with the group and the put-down¹⁹⁵ joke about Newcastle as an uncultured place full of charvers,¹⁹⁶ criminals, drunks, and sluts very much serves as a vehicle for defining both team membership and group membership as British citizens. On closer inspection, the Ambassador does not really partake in the co-construction of the humorous exchange. He remains at a distance. He doesn't join general laughter, nor

¹⁹⁵Put-down humour literally puts down the object in order to elevate the subject (Gilbert, 1997). "Hierarchy is essential to most humour" (Gilbert, 1997:324). "[T]here is no 'equal opportunity' humour. Some individual, group or institution is always the target of humour, especially marginal humour" (Gilbert, 1997:322).

¹⁹⁶The word charver (also chav, chava, charva) refers to youngsters, typically wearing things like Kappa tracksuits and Berghaus jackets, smoke Lambert and Butler cigarettes, have hooped gold earrings, spit constantly and wear at least one gold sovereign ring (a gold band attached to the bottom of a gold sovereign coin) on each hand. Another trait common to the charva is a loud, slightly sarcastic, nasal laugh and slow 'can't really be bothered to talk' speech. Typical slang words that Charvas use are 'belta', 'mint' and 'waxa' all meaning 'good' or 'great'. With the prefix of 'pure' or 'total' this would mean 'really good'. Adapted from <http://www.scallycentral.com/files/origins.htm>

does he build on the jokes. On the contrary, he tackles, almost spoils participants' joint sharing of humour by refuting their humorous interventions with serious, stick-to-the-facts replies and serious and informative questions, as well as shortcutting the humorous exchange with an impatient, forceful and authoritative *right*.

Although the fragment is a manifest display of group solidarity through the joint construction of humour, it far from shows a director's successful stimulation and creation of group cohesion through humorous exchange, as the ethnographic interview partly suggested. However, it does show a director's irritation over the loss of control as well as a central actor's disappointment at not being the centre of attention. The persistent seriousness with which the Ambassador continues the conversation and counters participants' jokes, indicates that participants have made a joke out of something which wasn't intended to be humorous. Apparently, participants' joint and solidary exchange of jokes has stolen and interrupted a central actor's show.

In short, this instance very much points in the direction of a strong preference, not so much for participatory forms of humour, but for a performance-based humour. More than it is the Ambassador's role to support and stimulate participants' joint sharing of laughter, he insists on taking up the role of the leading actor, entertaining and actively invoking laughter, whereby the audience is expected to, is *supposed to* applaud and laugh at his successful and humorous performance. Overall, that is the script for daily staff meetings, and participants are expected to act accordingly. These implicit stage directions are most cynically revealed in the following fragment, in which a participant frankly comments on an unsuccessful joke of the Ambassador:

[BE:20.06.00] 0.35 min.

- A: On Thursday (1.4) ((turns page of diary)) there was the presentation of the Silver Whisk 2000 trophy which I I unfortunately couldn't present but S. ()((looks at S.)) is going to present one by the Welsh.
- S: yeah
- R: really
- A: It moved on from the Welsh rare bit (0.4) to the Welsh even rarer bit.



CD 2 Track 19

- C: **hh I think we are supposed to laugh actually ()**
 A: Nobody unders- nobody understands the joke.
 C: Hhhhh
 A: Ehm (0.5) it's actually a quite important event and ehm
 C: Yeah actually it is (0.7). We can build on that (0.5) starting from next week.

In this fragment, performance aspects of humour are most openly revealed. When the Ambassador's intended humorous remark *It moved on from the Welsh rare bit (0.4) to the Welsh even rarer bit* fails to generate laughter, the Head of Commercial Section frankly comments *hh I think we are supposed to laugh actually*, clearly positioning participants as an audience that is *supposed to laugh* and applaud at an actor's successful performance.

5.3.2.4 Protagonist versus antagonist

In either of the two foregoing fragments a dominant and major antagonist player emerges. In both instances discussed above, the Head of Commercial Section (C) comes to the fore as an influential and dominant player who very much steers and dominates the interaction. In fragment 19, his *hh I think we are supposed to laugh actually ()* is dominant almost on the verge of being arrogant, undermining a central actor's performance by drawing explicit attention to an unsuccessful joke. In fragment 18, it is not so much the Ambassador's reported claim which triggered off multi-party interaction, the go-ahead for lively and entertaining colloquy was in fact given by the Head of Commercial Section's explosion of exuberant laughter. Moreover, in the remainder of the fragment, the Head of Commercial section firmly and loudly claimed the floor with a joke about the mayor of Belfast welcoming visitors to *The Venice of the North*.

However, in both fragments, dominant moves of the Head of Commercial Section are firmly countered by the Ambassador. In fragment 18, the Ambassador counters the Head of Commercial Section's explosion of laughter with persistent seriousness and stick-to-the-facts replies. In fragment 19, the Ambassador firmly takes up the director's role, reaffirming standards and norms for participants to follow with *ehm (0.5) it's actually a quite important event*, whereupon the Head of Commercial Section steps back in line again with an explicit show of agreement in *yeah, it actually is*, satisfying the Ambassador's positive face and counterbalancing the threat of his previous remark. In short, in both fragments the Ambassador firmly holds a position

as a director and central actor, claiming dramatic and directive dominance over his supporting cast, firmly redressing and countering "communication out of character" (Goffman, 1959).

5.3.3 Conclusion

To conclude, the Ambassador employs a wide range of dramaturgical techniques and accommodates divergent role requirements to ensure that community values are incorporated and to demand, stimulate and reward intimate co-operation of participants in maintaining a given definition of the situation. The skill and ease with which he masters shifting role requirements and successfully integrates dramatic techniques gives evidence of his dramaturgical superiority. He is a manager of strategies, fabricating complex variations of roles with a high level of dramaturgic dominance.

First, he firmly takes up the role of a director, controlling and supervising an effective *team performance*. He sets the *line* and brings back into line "unsuitable" performances (Goffman, 1959). He directs and corrects, that is, he resorts to both positive and negative directives for securing the loyalty, participation and involvement of team members. He rewards proper loyalties by praising participants' joint efforts as a team. He sanctions team-members for not being present at the meeting and failing to comply with the community norm of participation. He openly and collectively calls for participation and involvement during moments of crisis and explicitly uses value judgements which position him as a critic and judge of participants' actions.

Not only does the Ambassador direct a *team performance*, he is also very much "the centre of the show and the dramatically dominant participant in it" (Goffman, 1959:105). Holding and keeping the floor for a long, extended time and only sparingly inviting others to take a turn, he firmly anchors his position as the leading actor, as "the star, lead or centre of attention" (Goffman, 1959:103). The meticulous detail of his accounts, the painstaking portrayal of political and social encounters, markedly displays how he fulfils the role requirements and expectations of a central position in a network of social and political relationships. Insults, puns, sarcastic retorts and formulaic jokes are used as a dramatic technique for building an audience and gaining central status and establish him as a credible performer. Participants are positioned as an audience that is *supposed to laugh* and applaud for his successful and humorous act.

The dramaturgical shift from a director's role to a leading actor's role exposes a significant contrast and indicates a team balancing between conflicting norms. On the one hand, weekly meetings display a director's efforts at aligning participants with community values and involving them in the process of accomplishing a common goal. On the other hand, meetings form the stage for an actor claiming a dramatically dominant solo part, only minimally allowing for participation. In other words, whereas the team meeting gives voice to a director's attempt at creating a close and cooperative unit, celebrating values of participation and involvement, it also provides a stage for a leading actor seeking appreciation, not participation. As a result, the team swings between conflicting norms, between an explicit requirement and formulation of a norm of solidarity as opposed to an implicit role model of claiming one-upmanship.

Whichever way the balance turns, team members are at all times expected to follow and support the director/lead player. Either of the two roles is highly authoritarian, dominant, strict and firmly grounded in a "power-based system" (Fairclough, 1989), requiring either unconditional support or unconditional attention. Team members are expected to affirm the superior control and authority of their director as well as give tribute to the dramatically dominant part of the lead player. In short, more than supporting a solidarity-based system, the *team performance* maintains/sustains an authority-based system and, throughout, attempts at reinforcing solidarity are secondary to and overshadowed by a dramatic manoeuvring for power and authority.

5.4 Role allocation, role negotiation and status contest

"In general, then, one finds that those who help present a team performance differ in the degree of dramatic dominance given each of them and that one team-routine differs from another in the extent to which differentials in dominance are given its members."

Erving Goffman¹⁹⁷

Weekly meetings can be analysed as a performance where powerful and powerless roles are acted out. However, it is not simply a case of attributing power to, say, the Ambassador, in opposition to an inevitably passive and powerless group. "Roles can be and are subject to a certain amount of negotiation, within the constraints of the meeting structure" (Bargiela-Chiappini, 1997:76). In what follows, I explore aspects of role allocation, role negotiation and status contest. First, I examine the director's impact on the distribution and construction of roles. What are the ways in which the Ambassador either validates or disqualifies participants' contributions at the meeting, casting them either in a major or a minor role in the performance? Next, I explore participants' vying for status, bidding for power or claiming a powerful role.

5.4.1 Allocating the parts

Apart from correcting for "improper appearances", Goffman notes how "a director may be given the special duty of allocating the parts in the performance and the personal front that is employed in each part" (1959:103). By providing supportive comments, asking clarifying questions or, on the contrary, briefly and abruptly interrupting or shortcutting contributions, the Ambassador distinctly validates or disqualifies participants' contributions to the meeting. In this way, he either allocates them a lead part or gives them the status of a *walk on*, that is, a lineless part which does not have much importance to the action of the play. Consider, for instance, the way in which he supports, stimulates and agrees with an extended statement of opinion from the Deputy Head of Mission:

¹⁹⁷Goffman, 1959:105.



[BE:27.06.00] 4.43 min.

- 1 A: So that's that (0.3) ehm (0.6) did anybody want to say anything
2 about this (0.3) whole affair? >I mean it's put <(1.6) our
3 relations (0.9) back a bit I think. I mean, it's (1.5) I apologized on
4 (1.6) French television, on () television, Flemish television,
5 French radio (1.0) ehm (1.7) w-we make no bones at them
6 they're just you know it's our fault and we're not going to criticize
7 the Belgian police for whatever they may have done (1.6) ehm I
8 mean it's typical that line has come from (1.2) from the top
9 there's no point in arguing about it ()
- 10 S: Ehm (2.0) I think the the conclusion I draw is that (1.5) you can
11 do any amount of eh (.)
- 12 A: Preparation
- 13 S: Preparation at the official level, but, if the (0.8) if there are
14 certain basic (1.3) misunderstandings eh (0.8) at the political
15 level (0.9) ehm then quickly the whole the whole structure can
16 can start to crumble and that that appears to be what has
17 happened here and that (1.3) Jack Straw¹⁹⁸ (0.9) thinks he got an
18 assurance out of Duquesne¹⁹⁹ in one of their earlier meetings that
19 (0.8) eh the Belgians would (0.9) take a tough line in (0.5)
20 prosecuting and detaining people (1.2) ehm and the Belgians
21 have not have not delivered on that that out of the nine hundred
22 and something arrested only three have actually been taken to
23 court and one of those has got off, one has been sentenced (0.9)
24 one is pending I think. On the other side of the coin eh Duquesne
25 thought he had eh eh an assurance from (0.9) eh from Jack
26 Straw that we would do everything possible to stop these people
27 coming to Belgium.
- 28 A: As the Germans have done
- 29 S: Eh (0.8) I think they () we couldn't go as far as the Germans,
30 but they nonetheless thought that we were setting in place
31 structures and by providing these lists and so forth that (0.5) the
32 main trouble makers would be held back (1.5) eh which which we
33 have not delivered on (1.2) ehm for (2.3) for good reasons in one

¹⁹⁸Jack Straw was Home Secretary from 1997-2001. He was appointed Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 8 June 2001.

¹⁹⁹Antoine Duquesne was Belgian Minister of Internal Affairs from 1999-2003.

34 sense ehm the legislation doesn't permit it and the (0.8) certainly
35 the way the cultural phenomenon of hooliganism works in Britain
36 doesn't permit it (1.3). You don't have (0.5) a limited number of
37 people who you could in some way ehm (1.5) proscribe and
38 [and and and
39 C: [(aside whispering))
40 S: You have (0.3) a whole (0.3) subculture of of people for who
41 (1.0) eh getting tanked up and having a fight (1.3) is is part of
42 the fun of following football (2.8) ehm and (1.0) it happens on a
43 minor scale ehm (0.4) probably every Saturday night in many
44 towns in in England not to mention other parts of the United
45 Kingdom
46 A: mmmm
47 S: Ehm (0.5) so (0.8) in a sense both of us were caught; the
48 Belgians were caught by their legal system which which only
49 (0.5) allowed prosecu- prosecutions in certain very limited (0.5)
50 cases with with clear evidence (1.4) ehm (0.8) and we were
51 caught partly by the legal system partly by the phenomenon that
52 we're dealing with. Ehm, but there's certainly been (1.3) >I think
53 with hindsight < eh (0.9)
54 A: [Misunderstandings?
55 S: [Quite a lot of platitude, but a a a certain amount of talking past
56 each other (0.8) ehm when it's come to the crunch that's led to
57 irritation and disappointment on on on both sides of the political
58 level (1.9) ehm (0.5) which is still going on and was evident in
59 the in the in the most recent (0.8) eh conversations between
60 Straw and Duquesne and I think that'll (1.6) that that damage
61 will (1.7) will take some time to ehm to recover. The the the
62 silver line perhaps is that ehm I think ehm (1.7) eh Verhofstadt
63 (1.2) and and Blair have somehow managed to (0.8) to keep out
64 of all this ehm and and eh I think certainly I think Verhofstadt has
65 this broader picture of Britain and the value to him of a
66 cooperating Britain and I don't think that that relationship has
67 been damaged.
68 A: Yeah I hope not. I mean eh (0.8) the basic problem as you say I
69 think was (1.5) that we signed an agreement; I mean, we
70 weren't even informed of it. >I've never seen this agreement<
71 (1.3). The Belgians would to have hooligans out, arrest them
72 (0.9) trial them, prosecute them, convict them, at which point we

73 could then (1.5) carry that over into our law, I mean, ban them,
74 well for life
75 S: Exactly

As described earlier, the Ambassador's opening monologue is by definition uninterrupted and only occasionally does he invite other participants to provide a supplementary comment or opinion. The fragment shows how the Deputy Head of Mission (S) picks up the Ambassador's cue *did anybody want to say anything about this (0.3) whole affair* and provides his view on the Euro 2000 matter in a long, extended personal statement of opinion (1.10 *Ehm (2.0) I think the the conclusion I draw is that...*). Supportive cues from the Ambassador at possible turn completion points, stimulate the DHM into contributing more (1.12 *preparation*; 1. 28 *as the Germans have done*; 1. 54 *misunderstandings?*). These supportive cues not only indicate that the DHM's contribution to the meeting is highly valued, but also display agreement, on the Ambassador's part, with what he says (1.46 *mmm*; 1. 68 *yeah I hope not*). When the Ambassador takes the floor again, he takes up the DHM's argument (1.68 *I mean eh (0.8) the basic problem as you say I think*) and as such pays due respect. In turn, the DHM supports and backs up the Ambassador's account (1.75 *Exactly*). Summarizing, the dialogue between the DHM and the Ambassador very much communicates a message of unison and coalition. All the more enhanced by a side-by-side arrangement at the table (see chapter 3), it conveys to other community members that they form an alliance, working together in a co-ordinated fashion and geared toward a common goal. Although they both provide their own personal view and opinion, they are on each other's wavelength, and the dialogue very much shows a partnership of equals with mutual respect for one another's vision and opinion.

In contrast, the following fragment shows how the Third Secretary Political Section is cast in a minor role. Although partly enhancing and validating her contribution with supportive questions and answers, the Ambassador cuts her short with a co-operative, yet abrupt turn-completing *that's enough* followed by *thank you very much*, which, although formally praising and valuing her contribution, very much signals to move on to the next part:



CD 2 Track 21

[BE.27.06.00] 0.42 min.

E: Not a lot (1.3) just post (1.2) Euro 2000 (2.0) get down to real
 business now.

- A: Was the Duke of Kent content with his
 E: He was very [happy he was
 A: [Excursion
 E: impressed in how quickly we got him from A to B and back again
 A: mmm
 E: Ehm he said it's the first he's he's actually managed to get out for
 a football match in his life.
 A: He confessed to me he didn't like football most of the time.
 E: Yeah hhhhhh
 A: Restricted information there
 C: hhh
 A: Anyway leaving the job soon
 E: Yeah, he's been doing it for twenty-nine years now
 A: mmm
 E: He said that's (1.4) quite an
 A: **That's enough (2.6) thank you very much.**

The contrast with the supportiveness and manifest display of respect for the DHM's long, extended projection of personal opinion is sharp. Whereas fragment 20 very much shows a partnership of equals, fragment 21 contains explicit conversational evidence of the unequal status of the director and the supporting cast. In fact, the DHM and the Third Secretary Political Section represent two extreme poles on the scale of power and status. As the extracts show, the Ambassador has a major role in affirming these status differences, allocating a lead part to the DHM and giving the Third Secretary Political Section the status of a *walk on*, a lineless part, which is of not much importance to the action of the play.

These manifestations of differential role allocation go against the Ambassador's open and explicit aspiration for equality and respect for each and every single individual's opinion. Consider, for instance, the following fragment from the ethnographic interview in which he explains the origin and history of the *standard routine of going round the table*:

[BE:20.06.00:6] 2.51 min.

- I: Do you because there's a standard routine of going round the table (0.5) which is (0.8) a formal aspect but ehm h-have you introduced that (.) routine or (0.8) is it?



CD 2 Track 22

A: I think so I'm not sure what my predecessor did but (0.5) that routine I in fact (1.8) developed when I or (1.0) discovered and used ever since I worked in the: (0.8) British Cabinet Office in (1.7) from nineteen eighty-two to eighty-five (0.4) the Cabinet Office is a specialist organisation in London which (2.0) tries to (0.3) or its aim is to (0.4) support the Cabinet system of government we have in the UK (1.1) so you have Ministerial eh Cabinet (0.8) Committees and Official Cabinet Committees the very existence of these was secret for many years that that's gone now I think it's well known (1.2) that these committees exist and what the structure is (1.6) and the purpose of those committees is to (0.6) develop a (2.0) interdepartmental view on (.) on an issue which has interdepartmental ramifications (0.9) if it concerns any one department then it wouldn't come to the Cabinet Office (1.2) and if it concerns any two departments then they can (0.5) fix it and it probably wouldn't come but a lot of issues have (0.9) involve a lot of departments and may even need to go to the c- full cabinet eh chaired by the Prime Minister (1.3) in which case the Cabinet Officer would handle that and (0.5) p-process it and prepare it for (0.5) Cabinet decision that all sounds rather high-flying and **that that is a formal structure (1.0) but it always struck me as being a very good way of (0.8) getting at the truth and getting a joint (0.8) view** (1.2) and I was I was the eh in the secretariat of the: (0.8) what was called the overseas policy and defence committee of the Cabinet (0.9) and we were actually fighting a war ehm the Falklands War (1.7) and a lot of these meetings on a daily basis (0.9) to do all to make to to run the whole thing and **it always struck me and again this partly comes from having sat in committees as an ordinary member (1.7) that you need to (0.8) go round the table because otherwise people are () too (0.5) afraid to say anything or eh (1.6) too shy or (1.0) eh maybe too bored even but ehm (1.1) if you actually go round and you actually make people contribute** or at least you (1.5) unless I always at the end I always ask people who want to come back again because sometimes after discussion ehm they realise what they wanted to say and forgotten all (1.4) and then you can go round again and say if you wanted if anybody has any (1.7) esprit d'escalier then now is your chance

- I: [So you find
A: [that's where it came from
E: Mmm so you find it very important that everybody gets a chance
A: Absolutely yeah
E: to contribute

In the fragment, the Ambassador insists on the significance of *going round the table*, not merely as *a formal structure* but as *a very good way of (0.8) getting at the truth and getting a joint (0.8) view*. In this way, he explains and backs up the meeting's standard routine with claims of a solidarity-based system, all the more enhanced by an argument 'that he is one of them', that the reason why he insists on going round the table *partly comes from having sat in committees as an ordinary member*. However, the Ambassador's claims of solidarity and equality are contradicted by his verbal behaviour at the meeting, which most elaborately builds up a joint view with a high-ranked staff member but shortcuts the contribution of a low-ranked Third Secretary Political Section. Although by definition all participants have equal opportunity to contribute to the meeting, and although equality is enhanced and formally legitimized by the standard round of the table, participants are not treated on an equal footing. By either enhancing a player's performance with supportive cues and lending the floor for a long, extended time or shortcutting it authoritatively and abruptly, the Ambassador co-constructs and decides on players' potential and opportunity for participation.

5.4.2 Vying for status

Whereas its proclaimed aim is to enhance participation and safeguard the participants' right to speak, the standard round of the table also very much constrains participation. The fixed pattern of successive monologues, briefly interrupted by short question-and-answer sequences between the Ambassador and the participant, severely limits opportunities for spontaneous and unplanned contributions. With the exception of the Ambassador, participants hardly interrupt a speaker or join a conversation relating to a territory which is not their own. Asking a question, providing a supportive comment or making a statement of opinion, entails a powerful and forceful interactive move. First, asking a clarifying question infringes on the participant's rights as a speaker and as such challenges his negative face, "his want to be unimpeded" (Brown and Levinson:1978:70). Second, quests for supplementary information question the participant's status as an

expert in the matters he reports. They challenge the participant's positive face, the positive self-image that he claims for himself, his attempt to make "a good showing for himself" (Goffman,1967:5). Third, asking a clarifying question or providing a supportive comment threatens the director's face, who, in principle, has the prerogative of trespassing the Heads of Section's territories with informative questions or supportive comments.

Therefore, whether or not participants join in their colleagues' reports and partake in a conversation relating to a territory which is not their own, is not only and merely an act of participation but also very much an act of power. Consider, for instance, the following fragment taken from a meeting chaired by the Deputy Head of Mission:



[BE:09.05.00] 0.52 min.

S: So let's go round, G.?

G: eh busy week for (0.5) Defence ehm with the (0.2) strategic defence review being published (0.7) in all the papers (0.8) ehm basic summary is that they're going to shed (1.2) 5000 jobs (1.2) ehm there won't be redundancies (1.2) there'll be normal time expiry (1.3) so (0.6) makes us wonder about the time frame (1.7) how long that's gonna take ehm

S: Will you be briefing at Belgians when it comes through? (1.6)

G: No I'm afraid I don't think ehm I think they'll just do their own (0.5) do it themselves

S: Yeah

C: When you're saying jobs do you mean combat trips or civil service?

G: Ehm (0.8) it'll be right across the board

C: mmm mmm

G: although the latest on the radio this morning was they're recruiting for the medical army which is quite strange

In the Ambassador's absence, the Deputy Head of Mission (S) takes up the role of chair, and, with it, the right to infringe on participants' territories (*Will you be briefing at Belgians when it comes through?*) However, as the fragment shows, the Head of Commercial Section (C) asks an additional clarifying question (*When you're saying jobs do you mean combat trips or civil service?*). By joining in the discussion, the Head of Commercial Section

not so much conveys that he shares goals with the speaker, that they are co-operators, that “they are cooperatively involved in the relevant activity” (Brown and Levinson, 1978:125). More than an act of participation, his question is a manoeuvre for power. Whereas the DHM is acting out and reaffirming his central and powerful role as chair and stand-in director of the performance, the Head of Commercial Section, who is in fact lower-ranked, claims a directive and supportive role and is openly vying for higher status. Bidding for power on the part of The Head of Commercial Section is all the more manifest in the following fragment:

[BE:11.04.00] 0.23 min.



CD 2 Track 24

- G: His replacement will be starting his training (0.3) >his language training< (0.5) some time (0.5) in May (1.2) so before then we should be able to better recommend an ()
- A: Right
- G: And that's it
- A: thank you very much
- C: Do you do want to say something about the generosity of RF Brugen actually ()?**
- G: Well I was I was going to wait actually and see what they give us and (0.2) we've been
- A: What's this?

In the fragment, the Head of Commercial Section (C) formulates a question after the Ambassador (A) has signalled the end of a participant's speaking turn (*thank you very much*). Not only does his intervention show disrespect for the Ambassador's formal role as Chair of the meeting, his question also claims a director's role, *propping* the participant *into saying something on a matter on which he knows he should be taking a view or doing something* (see ethnographic interview with the Ambassador, fragment 1). Forcefully ignoring a director's cues to move on the next part, intruding on another participants' territory and arrogating a director's role, the Head of Commercial Section is openly and manifestly vying for power. The following fragment shows yet another subtle act of power on his part:



[BE:27.06.00] 0.12 min.

- C: Certainly I (0.3) in my absence I was impressed fascinated to see your ehm (0.4) conversation with the Dutch Consul-General in Antwerp ehm (0.3) they play hardball these Dutchmen don't they ehm? Glad to see you saw him off ().

In the fragment, the Head of Commercial Section congratulates the Ambassador on an excellent performance. In fact, the fragment is up for double interpretation. Either it may be regarded as an overt display of an attempt to improve one's standing with the boss (see chapter 4, interview fragment 58) or it may be considered as a subtle way of inverting roles, whereby a lower-ranked team-member congratulates the highest in rank for an excellent *team performance*. In either way, aspects of status contest are involved and the Head of Commercial Section is again manifestly vying for status.

5.4.3 Conclusion

The preceding section has explored aspects of role allocation, role negotiation and status contest.

Analysis has pointed at instances of differential role allocation, limiting or enhancing the participants' potential and opportunity for participation in the *team performance*. By either enhancing a player's performance with supportive cues and lending the floor for a long, extended time or shortcutting it authoritatively and abruptly, the Ambassador co-constructs and decides on participants' role in the performance.

These manifestations of differential role allocation go against a projected ideology of equality and respect for each and every single individual's opinion. Contrary to claims of a "solidarity-based system", an overt authority-based system governs the proceedings of weekly meetings, whereby a central authority firmly and authoritatively restrains, constrains and controls the participants' degree of commitment, involvement and participation in the *team performance*. Moreover, more than an act of solidarity/commitment to the shared goals of the team, contributing to the meeting constitutes an act of power and an attempt to improve or enhance

one's status in the community. Reporting on one's actions of the past week becomes a matter of performing a credible solo act; asking questions is not merely an act of showing interest, but a bid for power; setting up a dialogue with another participant is not merely a matter of demonstrating cooperativeness and supportiveness with other team members, but a way of displaying alliance and coalition and reinforcing a strong and unbreakable position of power.

Chapter 6

6. Conclusion

"Post-modern ethnography is a meditative vehicle because we come to it neither as to a map of knowledge nor as a guide to action, nor even for entertainment. We come to it as the start of a different kind of journey."

Stephen Tyler²⁰⁰

With hindsight, the writing of this PhD has features of a quest, a sort of voyage of search, adventure and exploration. I entered a cultural milieu, a setting where a group of people with certain shared beliefs engage in a set of distinctive and mutually intelligible practices. I embarked on an exploration in which I moved from being an outsider to an insider, from stranger to participant observer, from incompetent to habitué, trying to capture the rich and complex fabric of community norms and values.

I look back upon this study not only as a journey into a particular site and its culture, but also as an exploration of methodological and epistemological possibilities. In many respects, I embarked on a "different kind of journey" (Tyler, 1986:140). The vicissitudes of the field forced me to step back from the traditionally "one-sided monologism of linguistic science" (Bakhtin, 1973) and replace the epistemological ideal of a neutral view from nowhere by multiple views, each situated somewhere. In a Bakhtinian sense,²⁰¹ I commenced on a journey which was essentially and inescapably dialogic. Instead of an objectivist interrogation of arbitrarily defined others, I entered into a dialogue with informants and became an integral part of the research area.²⁰² This intense and dynamic dialogical process allowed me – if not

²⁰⁰See Tyler, 1986:140, cited in Gottschalk, 1998.

²⁰¹According to Björklund (2000), Bakhtin employs the term 'dialogue' (or dialogization, dialogism, double-voicing) in at least three senses, which can be viewed as dialogue at different levels. In the widest sense, 'dialogue' stands for a view of the whole human existence in the world: "To be means to communicate dialogically. When the dialog is finished, all is finished. [...] One voice alone concludes nothing and decides nothing. Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence" (Bakhtin, 1973:213, cited in Björklund, 2000:7). This is the sense in which I have used the term. In a second, more narrow sense, dialogism refers to the view that any discourse or utterance provokes response and in turn responds to, builds on preceding discourses to ultimately form a complex organized chain of discourses. The third sense of dialogue refers to whether words (or other linguistic expressions) that are used in a speaker or writer's utterance are felt to be someone else's words or not. For an outline of Bakhtin's dialogic conception of language, see Björklund, 2000.

²⁰²As Fontana (1994:209) remarks, "ethnography should not be based on the researcher's understanding (which places him or her in a privileged interpretative position) but on a

forced me – to explore differences and conflicts and actively involved me in challenging taken-for-granted assumptions:

“[in a dialogical encounter] one begins with the assumption that the other has something to [...] contribute to our understanding. The initial task is to grasp the other’s position in the strongest possible light, [...] in which we can understand our differences.” (Bernstein, 1989:16-17, cited in Headland, 1990:14)

Throughout the text, I have tried to render ‘the dialogue’ and attempted at making the reader aware of the often invisible interactive process which constitutes ethnography, a process where informants are active and influential, and where a researcher constitutes an integral part of the research area “moving and acting within it, rather than drawn from a transcendent, detached point” (Marcus, 1994:567). By rendering extracts from ethnographic interviews, I have tried to increase the informants’ active presence in the text, to evoke their points of view, to acknowledge their participation in the development of the story, and to somewhat reduce the authority of my own voice, perceptions and understandings.²⁰³ Some of these voices have confirmed my perceptions, others denied them, many guided the questions I attended to and tried to answer, and others made me rethink what I am understanding. In turn, I incorporated my own voice. Not so much the voice of a detached neutral-objective observer who controls and observes it all, but that of a subjective personality, with specific traits and a specific personality influencing the research process. In contrast with realist tales (Van Maanen, 1988), where the author seeks to erase him/herself out of the text, I allowed myself to be present in the text (by simply using the pronoun I) and to self-reflect²⁰⁴ about choices of site, topic, methods, voice, textual strategies and authority claims. Elements of narrative are distributed throughout the text; I use strong metaphors to inscribe (rather than describe) various instances and experiences and far from the self-assured expert, I have presented myself as “an anti-hero,

‘dialogue’ between the researcher and the natives, in which both participants in the dialogue are an integral part of the study”.

²⁰³ Although I have tried to increase participant’s active presence in the text, I realize that my voice and perceptions are still dominant, that I still control the Others’ presence in the text.

²⁰⁴For Greer (1990:64, cited in Gottschalk, 1998), “to be self-reflexive in ethnographic discourses means that one knows who one is, and knows the position from which one speaks, writes and observes [...]”.

blundering and coping in strange adverse circumstances" (Atkinson, 1990:106).

I have also tried to establish "a dialogue with the social sciences in general and the other subfields in particular" (Duranti, 1997:22). I mobilized a range of theoretical perspectives and practical methodologies to solve problems. I took on the role of mediator, making disciplines meet, arranging connections between research traditions and their complementary/contradictory viewpoints; establishing a dialogue between the various viewpoints.

I took the risk of seeming eclectic; each change of writing style or delving into other fields of expertise could come across as inconsistency, as promiscuity, as schizophrenia, as evidence that I am 'a jack of all trades and a master of none'. I took the risk, driven by the same aspiration which is present in post-modern thinking. Negri, for instance, talks of human 'multivalency', the fact that we can connect to others in a myriad of different ways if only we tried, if only we ceased to enjoy being just one thing yet good at it, if only we didn't have just one area of expertise, just one writing style, one personality.

All of this very much links my work under the umbrella of post-positivist ethnography and "its insistence on de-authorization, modest truth claims, *petites histoires*, subjectivity, evocation, self-reflexivity, the problematics of representation, etc." (Gottschalk, 1998). It highlights a post-modern insistence on critical self-reflection and introspection and celebrates the post-modern spirit of freedom, liberating and giving licence to explore alternate approaches to the adventure of existence. Above all, however, it tries to live up to Duranti's standard for a "successful ethnography, [...] in which the researcher establishes a dialogue between different viewpoints and voices, including those of the people studied, of the ethnographer, and of his disciplinary and theoretical preferences" (Duranti, 1997:87).

This very same concern with an ethics of dialogue makes it very hard to draw this text/analysis to a close. After all, this work is incomplete without critical and differently positioned responses to it by its (I sincerely hope) varied readers.²⁰⁵ Nonetheless, I insist on summarizing the results of my work

²⁰⁵Among them, I hope, will be some of the participants of the meeting. Upon completion of this study, however, all participants will have moved to another

in a few brief concluding remarks, not so much as an end point, but very much as the start of an ongoing dialogue.

Whereas a first part of this dissertation mainly covered issues of epistemology, theory and methodology, a second part has been designed to give the reader a three-dimensional view of the Embassy community's practice of a weekly gathering of Heads of Section. It has explored the meeting's role in shaping, structuring and restructuring, forming and transforming, stabilizing and destabilizing the community's cultural system, thereby integrating a socio-cultural perspective, a political and a dramaturgical perspective. The main messages proliferating from this multidimensional approach centre around six notable contrasts. I view these contrasts not as binary opposites or mutually exclusive dichotomies, but as fields of tension. They are not separated from one another but intricately linked and entwined, in a dynamic and dialectic interplay.

Ethnography: a method or a mode of knowing?

Attempts to define the discipline of ethnography often degenerate into offhand and loose definitions or restricted methodological recommendations in terms of observer-present research or other ethnographic techniques. It is not until recently that, aside from methodological aspects, epistemological dimensions have been incorporated in attempts to define ethnography and account for what it truly encompasses. In the *Handbook of Pragmatics*, Agar (1995:583) defines ethnography as "a term that refers to an epistemology, a kind of representation, and a research method". Blommaert (2001) emphatically attributes ontological and epistemological status to ethnography. Slembrouck (2005b) suggests that "ethnography is perhaps best thought of as an epistemology". In this study I have traced the history of ethnography and its intellectual origins so as to filter out a number of core fundamental ethnographic assumptions. I have disentangled ethnography's historical connections to other related traditions and approaches, notably anthropology, constructivism and phenomenology. Each of these supplies supplementary threads of thought, which, twisted together, form a tight theoretical and methodological rope. In line with Blommaert's argument (2001:2), I have demonstrated that ethnography involves "a perspective on language and communication", a "programmatic

diplomatic mission. To a great extent, this inevitably hinders the possibility of a continuing dialogue.

view", "a 'full' intellectual programme" with a firm theoretical if not ideological ground. I have put forward ethnography as a paradigm in its own right, with theoretical assumptions and beliefs which extend far beyond the mere methodological concern of producing an accurate description of cultural practices. I have argued that ethnography has a distinct epistemological and ontological identity, that it is firmly rooted in philosophical ideas of what constitutes reality and what constitutes knowledge, as a unique "set of propositions that explain how the world is perceived; [...] a world view, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world, telling researchers [...] what is important, what is legitimate, what is reasonable" (Sarantakos, 1998:31).

Participant observer or observer as participant?

Pelto & Pelto state that much of the essence of the ethnographic profession "is based on the assumption that we must enter into close social interaction with the people in our research communities if we are to succeed in gathering significant information on their culture and social organization" (1973:269). The cultivation of personal relationships with local informants as a way of learning about a culture is a unique feature and principal characteristic of the ethnographic approach. Being "directly involved in community life, observing and talking with people as you learn from their view of reality" (Agar, 1996:163) constitutes the essence of ethnographic enquiry. Duranti (1997) aptly calls it "a building stone of anthropology's contribution to our understanding of human cultures" (1997:89).

Long after finishing fieldwork, I have struggled with the frustration of not having been able to conduct a *proper* ethnography. I was indoctrinated by the common view in much anthropological literature, of the ethnographer as someone who eats with the group, works with them, relaxes with them. But we are always "at the mercy of those who agree to take us in" (Scheper-Hughes, 2000:133). We enter their world, their territory. "Ethnography is really quite an arrogant enterprise" (Agar, 1996:91). Restricted conditions of access and contact have been critical in making me move away from the idea of participation. I counteracted to signals of protectiveness by trying to be the least intrusive as possible. Along Gold's continuum of levels of involvement in observation, I stayed put with the role of *observer as participant* (Gold, 1958). During meetings I would record from the least harmful and intrusive position, uninvolved, detached, passive (although

actively noting down). I accepted my visits being restricted to Tuesdays only and interviews being formally scheduled and arranged beforehand.

The conclusion I have drawn from this is that creativity, flexibility, and ethical adaptation to the field are far more important than compliance to rules produced elsewhere by somebody else at another time and for different purposes; that there are a variety of strategies for the conduct of ethnography, as long as they are attuned to the site and the people one interacts with, and enable the ethnographer to practice her/his craft while remaining ethical.

A text-oriented or a participant-oriented approach to discourse analysis?

Before entering the field, the linguistic research I conducted was highly, if not exclusively, text-dependent. The "flux of fieldwork" (Burawoy, 1991), however, convinced me not only of the added value but also of the need to assign a much more active role to the language user and supplement a text-dependent analysis of meaning with ethnographic interpretation. An exclusive focus on the text turned out problematic because it leaves out of the communicative process, the active work done by participants. Rather than an "agency implied 'in the text'" (Slembrouck, 2005a), language users came into focus as real people with actual identities and with an active impact on the production and interpretation process of discourse. Overall, then, this study may be considered a plea for accepting a participant-oriented approach in social discourse analysis; an appeal for adopting a research perspective which relies not only on textual messages for decoding, describing and interpreting discourse processes but integrates the multiple and diverse interpretations of initiators and recipients of those messages into the analysis. In line with Slembrouck's argument, this study insists on the necessity of drawing the language user into the analysis of social discourse processes and shows that "the participant perspective [...] as a resource of knowledge and as an interpretative perspective [...] cannot be explained away" (Slembrouck, 2005a). For instance, ethnographic tools of analysis allowed for a documentation of the real rhetorical effect of the Ambassador's discourse, for a representation of the multiple and differential interpretations of the values he proclaims and a description of the actual impact of persuasive strategies on organizational participants. The joint use of the essentially text-oriented framework of Appraisal Theory and

ethnographic tools for analysis has revealed and confirmed perceptions of ideological delusion which a fine-grained analysis of text alone could never have substantiated.

An instrumental or a symbolic purpose of meetings?

This study has pointed at the tension between assumptions about a task-focussed, instrumental purpose of meetings and their symbolic, implicit meaning as organizational ritual and symbol of collective experience. The widespread and established view in academic literature is that the work of meetings is instrumental, palpable and explicit: meetings "are there to make decisions, engage in deliberation, to conciliate about content in conflicts" (Peck, Perri & Gulliver, 2002:1). This image suggests that organizational participants use meetings "as a tool to facilitate culturally defined 'business' or 'work' " (Schwartzman, 1989:38). However, interviews with participants have revealed not only an explicit awareness of the meeting as a facilitating form, an instrument for transmitting organizational information, but also a recognition of its social, symbolic, implicit meaning. Participants' accounts stress, confirm and support a view that "meetings are for doing something organizationally important but which is unspoken, does not appear on the agenda [...]" (Peck, Perri & Gulliver, 2002). Overall, ethnographic interviews voice a view on meetings as "an occasion for a number of things, including fulfilling role expectations, defining virtue and truth, interpreting what is happening, challenging or re-affirming friendships, power, and status, socialization of members, and having a good time" (March & Olsen, 1976:11-12, cited in Schwartzman, 1989:42).

Following from that, this study has explored the weekly meeting's role as organizational ritual and has tried to establish an understanding of its symbolic purposes. First, analysis has pointed at the significance of the weekly meeting as a compensatory ritual counterbalancing the instability and insecurity of the diplomatic community. The formal, standardized, repetitive nature of a weekly gathering offers community members ritual reassurance and compensates for the uncertainty of the diplomatic service, its ever-changing relations and its continuous turnover of personnel. It offers predictability to individuals whose social position, relationships with others and experiences are subject to constant change. Close examination of ethnographic interviews has furthermore demonstrated that the meeting has an important socialization function, stimulating and regulating the process

by which organizational members become integrated into the community. When a new party enters the common space of the meeting room, seating instructions operate as a corrective mechanism for adapting the individual to the group's doctrine. Unveiling a secret and hidden insider's practice and demanding acceptance of its legitimacy, seating directives give newcomers "ultimate standards of reference" (Turner 1970:368-369). Similar to Turner's (1977) description of the communication of the *sacra*, the most sacred things, they instruct, initiate a newcomer in the secret symbolic of the new social and cultural milieu. In addition, detailed inspection of the seating plan and investigation of participants' seating strategies has unveiled the meeting's symbolic purpose of consolidating hierarchical relations between participants and validating the current social structure. Seating positions publicly display participants' place either in the centre or at the margin of the socially categorized space of the meeting room, reflecting their position at the centre or the periphery, the top or the bottom of the dominance hierarchy. In this way, they are a strategic instrument for affirming and reaffirming, negotiating and contesting one's position in the community's hierarchical order, in short, for controlling the status-organizing process of the community.

A "solidarity-based system" or a "power-based system"?

A substantial part of this study has indicated how the political leader of the community, that is, the Ambassador, promulgates a non-authoritarian, democratic, egalitarian regime and proclaims the weekly meeting as the place for achieving democratic ideals (community participation, equality). A content analysis of the ethnographic interview with him has indicated how he firmly insists on values of solidarity and equality and regards involvement and participation as major motives for the weekly gathering. Highly similar, a linguistic-descriptive analysis of the interview has revealed the use of multisided argument and dialogic positioning to create an impression of solidarity and common interest with his staff members as well as considerateness for their views. In other words, the Ambassador strongly insists on principles of democracy, participation, shared knowledge and shared power. He stresses the meeting's symbolic function in creating a common meaningful space, which enables participants to communicate their experiences and desires. He propagates an ideology which fundamentally departs from an idea of sharing knowledge rather than assuming it, imposing it or taking it for granted and projects staff members as individuals

in their own right. In short, he projects a "solidarity-based system" (Fairclough, 1989).

Yet, conflicting messages appeared. Overall, the interview with the Ambassador is a cross between democracy and hegemony, "[a] contradictory [mixture] of discourses of equality and power" (Fairclough, 1995:80). Whereas one message explicitly aims for the exercise of power "through the manufacture of consent" (Fairclough, 1989:3) and grants others unique individuality, with thoughts, feelings, beliefs, with a right to self-regulation and personal judgement, another message overtly celebrates the power of authority and the need for obedience, submission and dependence. Rhetorical signals opening up the dialogue are time and again stopped and overruled by a rhetorical position that fosters the monologue and conformity to the propagated doctrine. Moreover, the propagated symbolic norm of solidarity and equality is repeatedly contradicted by an overt insistence on and an affirmation of inequality and status differences. Summarizing, the Ambassador's discourse is pervaded by ideological ambiguity.

In close parallel, interviews with participants have highlighted a community balancing between conflicting norms. Overall, the projected *idea* of participation and involvement, of information sharing and *collegial community spirit* is firmly instilled and ingrained. The projected norm of the 'team' (Goffman, 1959), of the close-knit crew that fits together to form a persuasive whole and holds together as a unit, co-operating and combining its efforts to achieve a common goal, is manifestly present in interviews. In sharp contrast with these echoes of the projected ideology of solidarity, democracy, opportunity and equality, interviews and observational evidence repeatedly reflect signals of a firm "power-based system" (Fairclough, 1989). A significant number of informants contrast the projected ideology of *collegial community spirit* with *reality* as they perceive it. Participants express that there is a pressure on people to speak at the meetings and that they *are expected to* and *ought to* contribute. What is presented by the Ambassador as an opportunity and a right, is perceived by participants as an obligation and an act of commitment to the projected norm of participation and involvement. Moreover, the majority of participants picture the weekly meeting not as a co-operative environment but as a fiercely competitive environment, where opportunistic moves prevail over opportunities. Participants exploit the weekly meeting as a forum for expressing and demonstrating *how many feathers they wear in their hair* and consider it an

opportunity to improve and reinforce their standing with the boss. More than an act of solidarity/commitment to the shared goals of the team, contributing to the meeting constitutes an act of power and an attempt to improve or enhance one's status in the community. Reporting on one's actions of the past week becomes a matter of performing a credible solo act; asking questions is not merely an act of showing interest, but a bid for power; setting up a dialogue with another participant is not so much a matter of demonstrating cooperativeness and supportiveness with other team members, but a way of displaying alliance and coalition and reinforcing a strong and unbreakable position of power.

Analysis of interaction at the meetings has confirmed perceptions of a team swinging between conflicting norms, balancing between an explicit requirement and formulation of a norm of solidarity versus an implicit role model of claiming one-upmanship. On the one hand, weekly meetings display a director's efforts at aligning participants with community values and involving them in the process of accomplishing a common goal. On the other hand, they form the stage for an actor claiming a dramatically dominant solo part, only minimally allowing for participation.

The recurring contrast between projections of a "solidarity-based system" and undeniable evidence of a "power-based system" on multiple levels of discourse and interaction has laid bare an elaborative and subtle form of normative control. By means of a discourse of democracy, the Ambassador covers up, maintains and legitimizes a position of authority and dominance. He rhetorically manipulates a dialogic stance to present monologic norms as the outcome of co-operative agreement. He proclaims the weekly meeting as the embodiment of an ideology of shared power, shared knowledge and equal opportunities to mask and cover up an authority-based system promoting authority power, status differences and inequality. Summarizing, symbolic values of solidarity, involvement and group cohesion and an ideology of democratic governance, participation and collegial corporation responsibility are used as a tactic for "inducing general acquiescence in power arrangements" (Edelman, 1977:161, cited in Kertzer, 1988:42).

Although its symbolic value is greatly enhanced, democracy is in this way rendered meaningless as a substantive guide to governance. It is reduced to an empty signifier, devoid of meaning, shallow and emptied of political substance. It is reduced to the mere superficiality of a performance.

Analysis has demonstrated that participants are far from blind victims to this process of ideological delusion. They do not have false beliefs and are knowingly aware of the truth of the performance. They are consciously aware that they are *expected* to create a front-stage impression of the close-knit crew co-operating and combining its efforts to achieve a common goal; that they are expected to perform a "show of proper affective involvement" (Goffman, 1959:102); that they have to contribute *to look engaged*.

Backstage or frontstage?

Following from that, this study has investigated more closely how "a team performance" (Goffman, 1959) is staged. It has examined the ways in which participants are stimulated and encouraged to create and foster an emergent and convincing impression of a team "possessing a united front" (Goffman, 1959:94). Analysis has thereby highlighted the "stark contrast between what happens on the very formal idealized front stage and what happens back stage" (Randall Collins in an interview by Maclean & Yocom, 2000). Analysis has pointed at role-switching and expectations of *idealized front* pervading the diplomatic community; how team members are not only encouraged to act conform to the duties and manners of their attributed roles but also to switch freely between roles, perform differently for different audiences and wear an appropriate mask for every occasion.

To conclude, this study has shed light on contrast and difference. It has portrayed a community balancing between conflicting cultures, a community cut off from its homeland in peninsular isolation; a community of expatriates in foreign surroundings, standing on the margin of another culture. It has pictured an outsider's struggle to enter this closed community of Others, blundering and coping in strange, adverse circumstances, making whatever struggling progress she could make in interpreting the collision between two worlds and two cultures. It has exposed a researcher's dilemma between a norm and requirement for objectivity and an awareness of the inherently subjective and complex nature of perception. It has explored the tension between assumptions about a task-focussed, instrumental purpose of meetings and their symbolic, implicit meaning as organizational ritual and symbol of collective experience. It has juxtaposed the propagated role of meetings as the place for achieving democratic ideals (community participation, status equality) with evidence of participants manoeuvring for

position, exploring the boundaries of territory and face and skilfully acting upon institutional norms. It has studied the contrast between frontstage and backstage behaviour and examined forms of role embracement.

Swinging the reader back and forth between opposite poles, I hope this study has created a sense of dynamic tension which "defamiliarizes", replaces one-dimensionality with multidimensionality so as to ultimately provide a newer, richer perspective. If anything, I hope it has prompted a more reflective approach to the taken-for-granted.

Epilogue

Closing Time²⁰⁶



CD 2 Track 26

This dissertation has given voice to a variety of perspectives and a multitude of entangled views. To end with, I would like to add a musical dimension. Because, I guess, at some point, words fail. Because, somehow, the jazz-tinged piano chords, the soft trumpets and fade-outs of Tom Waits' *Closing Time* give voice to the ambiguous mixture of satisfaction, doubt and fatigue that accompanies the ending of a seven-year process of creative writing and thinking. But most importantly, because borrowing the voice of a relentlessly inventive musician like Tom Waits allows me to cast a glance at the future, towards consistent inventiveness in dealing with demanding subject matters.

All that remains for me to say is thank you for reading, thank you for listening.

²⁰⁶Song from the album *Closing Time*, 1973, by Tom Waits. I owe warm thanks to Jeroen De Keyser for introducing me to Waits' music.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Official request for permission

22 March 2000

Mr. S.
Counsellor and Deputy Head of Mission
The British Embassy
Rue d'Arlon 85
B-1040 Bruxelles

Dear Mr S.

GHENT UNIVERSITY RESEARCH PROJECT

It was a real pleasure for me to read that the British Embassy would be willing to co-operate in providing **native English data** for research purposes. As promised I will give you further details.

My research is on spoken interaction. The aim of my PhD thesis is to investigate the **negotiating mechanisms** that native speakers of English rely upon at meetings.

With financial assistance from **The British Council** I have been conducting some preliminary theoretical research at the Communications Research Centre of the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Loughborough, UK, which has an international reputation in the field.

The research relies on a combination of Conversation Analysis and the ethnographic method of participant-observation, which states that the observation of a particular community is not attained from a distant and safe point but by being in the middle of things. As such, I would like to ask the British Embassy to allow me to observe a segment of the daily working of its staff and attend **internal staff meetings**. In the process of observing, I would try to be the least intrusive as possible. Recordings are essential to the success of the study but, of course, they will only be made following your consent. I would also like to ask participants a few brief questions with regard to the meeting they have attended.

In my estimation, the observation, recording and interviewing would take approximately **three weeks**. Since I also teach English to university students, **the month of May** would be the only possible time for me to be away from university.

The results of this study will be presented at the **international conference** "Text and Talk at Work" at Ghent University, August 2000.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that, as a linguist, I am only and solely interested in language use. Therefore, any information that you should consider confidential would be omitted and the identities of the participants will in any case be made anonymous.

I shall be pleased to provide any further information you may need and am convinced that our co-operation will be fruitful.

Yours sincerely

Ellen Van Praet
Lecturer in English

Referees Prof. Dr. A.-M. Simon-Vandenberg (Ghent University)
 Prof. Dr. Stef Slembrouck (Ghent University)
 Prof. Derek Edwards (Loughborough University)
 Ms Denise Depoorter (British Council)

Enc. Letter of reference by Prof. Dr. A.-M. Simon-Vandenberg

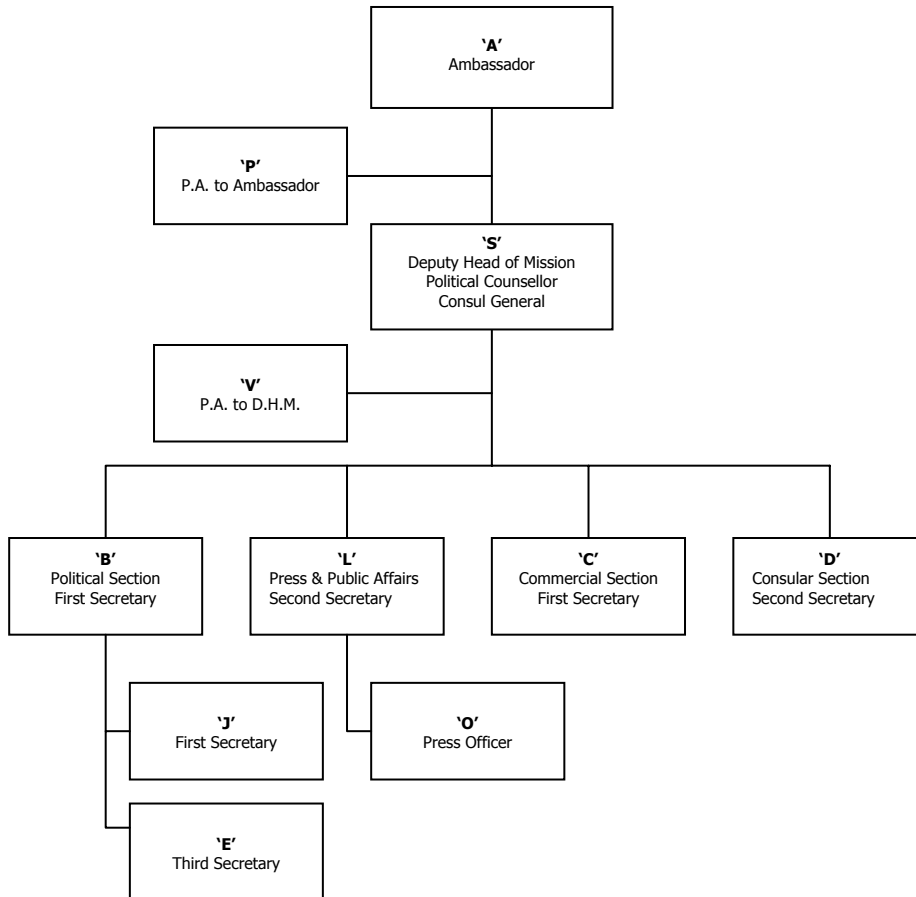
Appendix 2: Transcription glossary

The transcription symbols used in this work are common to conversation analytic research. The following glossary has been adapted from Hutchby, I & R, Wooffitt, R. (1998). *Conversation Analysis. Principles, practices and applications*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

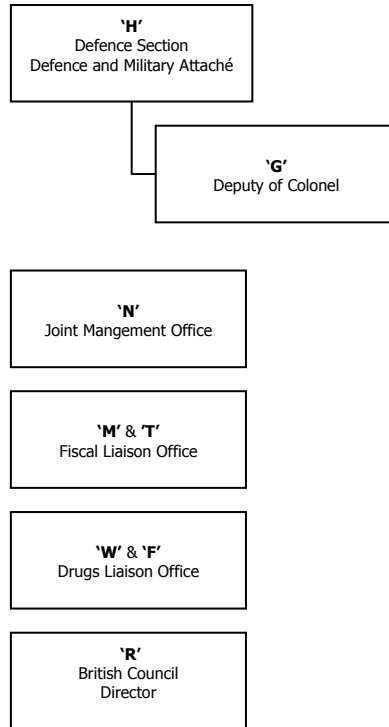
- (0.6) The number in brackets indicates a time gap in tenths of a second
- (.) A dot enclosed in a bracket indicates a pause in the talk of less than two-tenths of a second
- = The 'equals' sign indicates 'latching' between utterances
- [] Square brackets between adjacent lines of concurrent speech indicate the onset and end of a sequence of overlapping talk
- A dash indicates the sharp cut-off of the prior word or sound
- : Colons indicate that the speaker has stretched the preceding sound or letter.
- () Empty parentheses indicate the presence of an unclear fragment on the tape
- Under Underscored fragments indicate speaker emphasis
- >< 'More than' and 'less than' signs indicate that the talk they encompass was produced noticeably quicker than the surrounding talk
- ((text)) Additional comments from the transcriber describing e.g. gesture and other non-verbal communicative aspects of the interaction

Appendix 3: Organisation chart

'Insiders':



'Outsiders':



Appendix 4: List of audio-tracks

Audio-CD 1 Track 1	[BE:09.05.00:1] 0.41 min.	77
Audio-CD 1 Track 2	[BE:11.04.00:1-2] 2.04 min.	83
Audio-CD 1 Track 3	[BE:23.05.00:19] 0.39 min.	96
Audio-CD 1 Track 4	[BE:20.06.00:3] 1.49 min.	96
Audio-CD 1 Track 5	[BE:20.06.00:6] 0.20 min.	100
Audio-CD 1 Track 6	[BE:20.06.00:13] 0.10 min.	107
Audio-CD 1 Track 7	[BE:30.05.00:9a] 0.15 min.	109
Audio-CD 1 Track 8	[BE:30.05.00:9b] 0.21 min.	109
Audio-CD 1 Track 9	[BE:30.05.00:11] 0.17 min.	109
Audio-CD 1 Track 10	[BE:20.06.00:02] 0.23 min.	110
Audio-CD 1 Track 11	[BE:20.06.00:10a] 0.08 min.	111
Audio-CD 1 Track 12	[BE:20.06.00:10b] 0.05 min.	111
Audio-CD 1 Track 13	[BE:16.05.00:16a] 0.08 min.	111
Audio-CD 1 Track 14	[BE:30.05.00:8a] 0.19 min.	112
Audio-CD 1 Track 15	[BE:06.06.00:3] 0.09 min.	113
Audio-CD 1 Track 16	[BE:30.05.00:28] 0.15 min.	113
Audio-CD 1 Track 17	[BE:30.05.00:8b] 0.27 min.	113
Audio-CD 1 Track 18	[BE:30.05.00:7] 0.17 min.	114
Audio-CD 1 Track 19	[BE:27.06.00:a] 0.45 min.	115
Audio-CD 1 Track 19	[BE:27.06.00:a] 0.45 min.	117
Audio-CD 1 Track 20	[BE:30.05.00:17a] 0.06 min.	118
Audio-CD 1 Track 21	[BE:30.05.00:17e] 0.38 min.	119
Audio-CD 1 Track 22	[BE:06.06.00:16a] 0.08 min.	119
Audio-CD 1 Track 23	[BE:06.06.00:17] 0.12 min.	120
Audio-CD 1 Track 24	[BE:30.05.00:17b] 0.11 min.	121
Audio-CD 1 Track 25	[BE:30.05.00:29a] 0.16 min.	121
Audio-CD 1 Track 26	[BE:20.06.00:10] 0.26 min.	124
Audio-CD 1 Track 27	[BE:06.06.00:16b] 0.04 min.	131
Audio-CD 1 Track 28	[BE:30.05.00:29b] 0.11 min.	131
Audio-CD 1 Track 29	[BE:20.06.00:8] 0.11 min.	131
Audio-CD 1 Track 30	[BE:30.05.00:17c] 0.13 min.	132
Audio-CD 1 Track 31	[BE:30.05.00:28b] 0.10 min.	133
Audio-CD 1 Track 32	[BE:06.06.00:17a] 0.12 min.	133
Audio-CD 1 Track 33	[BE:20.06.00:8b] 0.12 min.	133
Audio-CD 1 Track 34	[BE:30.05.00:28c] 0.03 min.	133
Audio-CD 1 Track 35	[BE:16.05.00:6] 0.48 min.	135

Audio-CD 1 Track 36	[BE:30.05.00:2] 0.40 min.	136
Audio-CD 1 Track 37	[BE:16.05.00:16] 0.37 min.	137
Audio-CD 1 Track 38	[BE:06.06.00:13] 0.16 min.	138
Audio-CD 1 Track 39	[BE:20.06.00:11] 1.09 min.	139
Audio-CD 1 Track 40	[BE:06.06.00:9] 0.03 min.	141
Audio-CD 1 Track 41	[BE:20.06.00:6a] 0.50 min.	142
Audio-CD 1 Track 42	[BE:06.06.00:3] 0.13 min.	142
Audio-CD 1 Track 43	[BE:20.06.00:6b] 1.00 min.	142
Audio-CD 1 Track 44	[BE:20.06.00:1] 1.35min.	158
Audio-CD 1 Track 45	[BE:20.06.00:1] 2.28 min.	166
Audio-CD 1 Track 46	[BE:20.06.00:1] 1.02 min.	174
Audio-CD 1 Track 46	[BE:20.06.00:1] 1.02 min.	175
Audio-CD 1 Track 47	[BE:20.06.00:1] 0.30 min.	176
Audio-CD 1 Track 48	[BE:20.06.00:13] 0.08 min.	177
Audio-CD 1 Track 49	[BE:20.06.00:3] 0.03 min.	177
Audio-CD 1 Track 50	[BE:20.06.00:14] 0.12 min.	177
Audio-CD 1 Track 51	[BE:16.05.00:3] 0.14 min.	181
Audio-CD 1 Track 52	[BE:30.05.00:25] 0.05 min.	181
Audio-CD 1 Track 53	[BE:20.06.00:4] 0.20 min.	181
Audio-CD 1 Track 54	[BE:06.06.00:3] 0.22 min.	182
Audio-CD 1 Track 55	[BE:06.06.00:1] 0.04 min.	182
Audio-CD 1 Track 56	[BE:20.06.01:3] 0.44 min.	183
Audio-CD 1 Track 57	[BE:30.05.00:25] 0.15 min.	183
Audio-CD 1 Track 58	[BE:20.06.00:12] 0.41 min.	184
Audio-CD 1 Track 59	[BE:20.06.00:12] 0.34 min.	184
Audio-CD 1 Track 60	[BE:06.06.00:1] 0.07 min.	185
Audio-CD 1 Track 61	[BE:16.05.00:13] 0.04 min.	185
Audio-CD 1 Track 62	[BE:16.05.00:14] 0.09 min.	185
Audio-CD 1 Track 63	[BE:30.05.00:19] 0.12 min.	185
Audio-CD 1 Track 64	[BE:16.05.00:10] 0.15 min.	186
Audio-CD 1 Track 65	[BE:20.06.00:3] 0.09 min.	186
Audio-CD 1 Track 66	[BE:06.06.00:2] 0.16 min.	186
Audio-CD 1 Track 67	[BE:23.05.00:20] 0.04 min.	187
Audio-CD 1 Track 68	[BE:30.05.00:5] 0.12 min.	187
Audio-CD 1 Track 69	[BE:30.05.00:31] 0.04 min.	187
Audio-CD 1 Track 70	[BE:20.06.01:3] 0.07 min.	187
Audio-CD 1 Track 71	[BE:23.05.00:15] 0.10 min.	187
Audio-CD 1 Track 72	[BE:06.06.00:3] 0.16 min.	188
Audio-CD 1 Track 73	[BE:30.05.00:30] 0.06 min.	188
Audio-CD 1 Track 74	[BE:16.05.00:2] 0.13 min.	189

Audio-CD 1 Track 75	[BE:16.05.00:9] 0.12 min.	190
Audio-CD 1 Track 76	[BE:20.06.00:4] 0.20 min.	190
Audio-CD 1 Track 77	[BE:20.06.00:4] 0.27 min.	190
Audio-CD 1 Track 78	[BE:06.06.00:12] 0.02 min.	191
Audio-CD 1 Track 79	[BE:06.06.00:4] 1.26 min.	191
Audio-CD 2 Track 1	[BE:20.06.00:7] 0.12 min.	203
Audio-CD 2 Track 2	[BE:20.06.00:4] 0.54 min.	205
Audio-CD 2 Track 3	[BE:20.06.00:6] 0.58 min.	206
Audio-CD 2 Track 4	[BE:27.06.00] 0.09 min.	206
Audio-CD 2 Track 5	[BE:20.06.00:7] 0.13 min.	207
Audio-CD 2 Track 6	[BE:20.06.00:3] 0.11 min.	209
Audio-CD 2 Track 7	[BE:27.06.00] 0.38 min.	209
Audio-CD 2 Track 8	[BE:27.06.00] 0.07 min.	210
Audio-CD 2 Track 9	[BE:27.06.00] 0.03 min.	210
Audio-CD 2 Track 10	[BE:20.06.00:1] 0.40 min.	210
Audio-CD 2 Track 11	[BE:27.06.00] 0.08 min.	211
Audio-CD 2 Track 12	[BE:27.06.00] 0.12 min.	212
Audio-CD 2 Track 13	[BE:27.06.00] 0.07 min.	212
Audio-CD 2 Track 14	[BE:20.06.00:5] 0.56 min.	213
Audio-CD 2 Track 15	[BE:30.05.00:2] 0.05 min.	215
Audio-CD 2 Track 16	[BE:27.06.00] 1.42 min.	215
Audio-CD 2 Track 17	[BE:27.06.00:5] 0.40 min.	217
Audio-CD 2 Track 18	[BE:27.06.00] 1.35 min.	218
Audio-CD 2 Track 19	[BE:20.06.00] 0.35 min.	220
Audio-CD 2 Track 20	[BE:27.06.00] 4.43 min.	225
Audio-CD 2 Track 21	[BE:27.06.00] 0.42 min.	227
Audio-CD 2 Track 22	[BE:20.06.00:6] 2.51 min.	228
Audio-CD 2 Track 23	[BE:09.05.00] 0.52 min.	231
Audio-CD 2 Track 24	[BE:11.04.00] 0.23 min.	232
Audio-CD 2 Track 25	[BE:27.06.00] 0.12 min.	233
Audio-CD 2 Track 26	Closing Time – Tom Waits	251

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