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EPILOGUE

Sociality and uncertainty:

Between avowing and disavowing concepts in Anthropology

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'We set up a word at the point at which ignorance begins, at which we can see no further, e.g., the word "I", the word "do", the word "suffer":— these are perhaps the horizon of our knowledge, but not "truths".'

Nietzsche (1968:267)

The volume

This slim volume has the ambition to interrogate some of the fundamental aspects of anthropological practice, even to challenge them. How should sociality be studied by anthropologists and what concepts should be deployed in its elucidation?

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In the Introduction, Vered Amit explains that the intent is not to reinvent the wheel, gratuitously negating what has gone before in the discipline. Indeed, she decries a 'theoretical faddishness' that sees concepts come and go in a merry-go-round of unreasonable intellectual expectations and inevitable dissatisfactions. The sober practice is to recognize how all our concepts are enmeshed in a history of debates and reflections, however uneven, and not to try to make any concept do too much work. Sociality has long been conceptualized in Anthropology: what conceptual inventory best serves *contemporary* purpose? best engages with issues and circumstances in ethnography today, best addresses a repertoire of analytical questions Anthropology would today pose?

Four key insights underlie Amit's vision for the volume and its work. The first, as intimated above, is that contemporary circumstances may necessitate a re-focusing of anthropology's conceptual toolbox. For our concepts—our analyses and our theorizations—are grounded in our experiences of data-gathering. Anthropology is an empirical, data-driven discipline. We allow each ethnographer to be his or her own analyst and theorist; we expect this, indeed. The act of ethnography—of data-gathering more generally—warrants its individual license, for the experience vouchsafes its own truths. But, second, this does not merely deliver an endless catalogue of individual case-studies, as though monads, Amit is assured. Because an individual case-study of human social life, undertaken by an individual researcher, if described and analysed and theorized with sufficient truthfulness or authenticity gives rise to insights that extend beyond the particular case-study, ultimately to a human scale. Each case-study is ultimately, potentially, a human document, the individual instantiating the whole. In

short, anthropological conceptualization is grounded in but not restricted to particular ethnographic contexts. Third, however, is a recognition by Amit of an intrinsic pragmatism in the discipline. Steeped in the niceties of particular intimacies, anthropologists give short shrift to generalities that do not bear the stamp of the lived experience. The journey from the individual to the human whole is a complex one. How to navigate it without reducing or otherwise corrupting the detail of individual truth? Hence, Amit's claim that Anthropology is more likely to be effective if it focuses its conceptual efforts on 'mid-level' rather than meta-level articulations: neither too narrowly defined nor too sweeping. Indeed, this represents a range of conceptualization that the discipline can claim to have been very good at. Finally, however, Amit concludes that any conceptual application will likely only be partially successful, given the nature of sociality (its complexity, its shifting forms, its diversity). This calls for self-conscious acknowledgement on the part of practitioners. Indeed, Anthropology might look to this lack of comprehensiveness as a virtue, the very partiality of concepts, their ambiguity vis-à-vis particular cases, being intrinsic to their viability. To be good to think with is also to be good to think against.

These four tenets—concerning the *groundedness* of anthropological conceptualization; the human *universality* of individual truths; the ubiquitous *complexity* of individual details that cannot be sacrificed to general abstraction; and the intrinsic *partiality* of any attempt at conceptualization—are taken forward in the six chapters that follow the Introduction. Each chapter offers a particular conceptualization of sociality, as well as reviewing the history of debates around that concept (or its family terms),

providing ethnographic vignettes that illustrate the concept in use, and suggesting a critical way of taking the concept forward in the future.

1. Disjuncture. For Vered Amit, sociality is as much a matter of disjuncture as of engagement and association. The course of human lives—both temporal and spatial— entails repeated acts of engaging and disengaging; comings and goings that are as much a part of everyday relationships and routines as are commitment and engagement. To begin one activity is to break with another; each different activity may involve interactions with different others; we may assume very distinct roles and statuses during the life-course and through shifts in location; and so on. Spatial and temporal mobility is necessarily about both moving from and moving to, about departure as well as arrival, and the necessary gap between them. These gaps, in turn, call for a host of smaller and larger works of mediation that carry with them the capacity to smooth over but also to magnify the disjunctures.

It might even be argued that our various social involvements and interactions are not only routinely punctuated but *enabled* by the intervals between them. Disjuncture may feature as an object of desire in personal projects—as much to be pursued, and as difficult to achieve, as fixity. Disjuncture expresses an aspiration for new modes of activity, association, and fulfilment. Far from being reluctantly accepted or even feared, people may actively and self-consciously seek out disjuncture.

And yet, until recently at least, disjuncture has come to figure in our theorizations of sociality only when it has involved major cleavages or transformations—revolutions and fissions—and as derogations from previous states of aggregation and stability. Disjuncture has been conceptualized as supervening upon situations involving already

existing collectivities, structures, relations, daily routines and practices—rather than as a process in its own right, and worthy of its own attention. By interpreting disjuncture as a process working upon existing forms of sociality onus is placed on explaining the rupture, dissociation or disengagement rather than explicating the seeming routine or fixity. Is it not the case, today, however, that the assumptions underpinning this kind of conceptual ordering—disjunctures as *coming after*—may hamper our appreciation of the nature of social reproduction and change? What if we turned this conceptual order on its head and viewed disjuncture as the starting point rather than the end point of analysis?

      2. Social field. John Postill understands social fields to be 'dynamic clusters of practices, games and socialities'. A field is an organised, heterogeneous domain of practice and action in which unequally positioned social agents can be seen to compete and cooperate over the same public rewards. In Crossley's (2002:674) summation: '[fields are] sui generis social spaces (…) organised around the common participation of (…) "players" in a historically and culturally specific social "game"'. Postill's particular approach is inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu and the Manchester tradition of Max Gluckman and Victor Turner. In this work, the metaphor of a game is used to refer to social exchange that goes beyond rational-actor models of human agency. It is also recognised how important is a diachronic appreciation, and a resisting of structural-functionalist notions of social contexts as self-regulating entities. Conflict comes to assume centre-stage: both group-driven conflicts that spill over established fields (Turner), and the conflict-driven trajectories of individual agents within a given field (Bourdieu).

It is patent that social exchange is not a 'game' comparable to tennis, chess or Monopoly. For unlike these, 'players' in a social field will also struggle over the definition of what counts as the rules and the stakes at play. Yet the analogy is instructive nevertheless: a social field is a space of competition, as in a game where players enter and position themselves according to the powers and moves available to them. We might further distinguish between 'fields of practice' (such as anthropology, art, or rock-climbing) and 'fields of action' (such as protests, war, or disaster relief).

Equally patent is how far such conceptualization is removed from the received wisdom of 'field theory' as a formulation that stresses social reproduction and that does not account for dynamism or change. To repeat: fields are dynamic clusters of practices, games and socialities not conservative domains of habitual practice. The concept has the further advantage of being a neutral term, lacking the normative idealism of such others as 'public sphere' and 'community'. Finally, social field has an appropriate sense of scale for anthropology, as being generally smaller than states while still allowing for internally diverse configurations of people, practices and technologies.

3. Social Space. Deborah Reed-Danahay is interested to explore the concept of social space as means to encompass a social setting, a set of social parameters and a number of social boundaries (some fluid and some more fixed). In particular, emic notions of affinity, mobility and inclusion-cum-exclusion are appropriately illustrated as aspects of social space, as well as allowing us etically to reflect on the related issues of social distance and nearness, and the visibility of groups in social exchange. Imagining sociality in spatial terms possesses both emic and etic currency.

Social space proves to be a subtle concept. It is increasingly evident in contemporary social life that people may be close to others socially but distant physically; or close in physical terms but distant socially. As Hilda Kuper (1972: 411) tellingly advised, we must beware 'equat[ing] space, as a feature of the physical (tangible) world, with "social space"'. Nor is social space fixed in other ways. Both domicile-making and group-making may be said to be emic projects aimed at creating social fixities but we are also always etically aware of movement in the positions and positioning of individuals in and across such symbolic classifications. It is perhaps the case that social spaces are imagined as more concrete at the local level than the regional or global: the social space of an urban market or a physical education class assumes an abstractness when applied to an ethnic identity, and more again when applied to, say, postmodernism as an ethos. Finally, social space allows for a move away from 'container' notions of sociality; social space is a looser and more fuzzy concept that encourages thinking about the politics, metaphors, and practical ambiguities of space as it is everyday conjured up by individuals and groups. Social space, one might conclude, is a condition of social relations, something that people act not through but with.

4. Sociability. Sally Anderson would develop an emic notion of being 'sociable' into a flexible analytical tool. Commonsensically, sociability can be understood as the tendency to seek the company of others, to be friendly, especially with non-kin and semi-intimate others (friends, acquaintances, workmates), and extending to civil encounters with less familiar people beyond personal and professional circles (in voluntary associations and societies, lodges and clubs). These peaceable acts of relating, ludically unfettered by more structured conventions, are often deemed to be forms of social

exchange distinctly beneficial to people. Georg Simmel was drawn to sociability as a form of sociation, remarking on its democratic qualities: people engaging with each other in the style of equals, and seemingly with no instrumental purpose other than the success of the moment. In a development of this, Anderson encourages an appreciation of sociability as a heuristic device (rather than an ideal, normative blueprint) that throws significant light upon the tenuous and dynamic processes through which all relations—the apparently structured and the seemingly ludic, the endo- and the exosocial, the stilted and the informal, the intimate and the distant—are effected. The concept would draw attention to the 'trouble' with form facing all who participate in sociable occasions, moments and relations.

Though often used interchangeably with sociality, sociability clearly rests on different conceptual ground, indexing forms, moments and venues of *open* interaction and relationality across social differences, and among individuals stripped for the occasion to 'just themselves'. Attending to reciprocity and the etiquette of 'good form' are also essential aspects of sociability and index the need to stabilize an immanent lability in social exchange: good form helps transform the potential harm of individuals in interaction into harmony. But do not, *a la* Simmel, mistake sociability for a form in itself—an ideal type with particular structural properties. For this fails to grasp sociability's full analytical potential and the questions it raises: How do people work the shadows of good form and bad form? What are the generative capacities of a 'play-form' for constituting relationships both within and across social domains? To what extent is it the case today that a generalized sociability of all with all substitutes for more intimate relational forms?

5. Organizations. Gabriela Vargas-Cetina begins by observing that human sociality, understood as the propensity of people to form groups, has often resulted in the creation of lasting structures, which anthropologists have identified as 'organizations'. With the advent of real-time communications, however, and the rise to dominance of the World Wide Web, there has been great change to how organizations must function, how they establish ties with other organizations how they might reciprocally influence one another. This calls for a shift in conceptual emphases from a focus on the *perdurance* of relatively stable groupings to a greater willingness to entertain in analysis more fleeting forms of aggregation. Moreover, even if temporary, these ephemeral forms may still leave significant organizational traces, reshaping everyday life globally.

Vargas-Cetina's work is to suggest a conceptual arc from the perduring to the momentary: from 'organization' through 'corporation' to 'cooperative' and 'ephemeral' association. The contemporary project in anthropology should be to gage and chart how these interrelated forms influence and merge and challenge one another. This will provide an understanding of the multi-faceted ways in which people come together, and the varied agglomerations resulting from their sociality.

In particular, Vargas-Cetina would give due weight to the increased importance of new forms of association which are *non-corporate*, in that they are not based on a broad platform of agreement among their members, do not result in self-perpetuating collective subjects, and do not seek to acquire or maintain collective resources. Such associations are ephemeral in the sense that their members regard them as contextual and fluxional and do not expect them to last indefinitely. Their membership, furthermore, is voluntary; whether or not members are formally registered, their internal governance is weak (their

figurations of authority contingent), and their structure, memberships, aims and purposes change continuously. Married to new communication technologies, one might expect the significance of such ephemeral organization to increase further.

6. Networks. Vered Amit and Virginia Caputo recall how anthropologists have long been attracted to the concept of network because structuralist accounts have a tendency to obviate the particularity of individual behaviour. 'Network' points up the personal, the partial, the temporal and the practical in social relationality.

For its early Manchester School advocates, the network was suited to elucidate how behaviour had a personal order deriving from how individuals were personally linked with a particular set of other people, and the links these others had in their turn. These links may cut across a variety of situations, statuses and moments, thus drawing attention to individual agency and intention: to an interrogation of how particular persons claim, assemble, mobilize or are influenced by a set of social connexions. Equally, network lent itself to an encompassment of the partiality of an encounter, and the way in which critical factors shaping one situation might well extend beyond what is observable in that one setting. Networks had the potential to trace influential absences as much as presences, and to trace contacts that cut across different situations and institutions in an open-ended fashion. Moreover, the range of people to whom and from whom an individual might hold certain expectations of rights and obligations were no more fixed in time than in space, and might be always changing. (The total extent of identifiable people with whom expectations were associated was not necessarily coterminous with the more limited set of links that an individual might mobilize at particular times for the achievement of particular actions.) Finally, Network recognized the dialectic between the

imagination of particular forms of association and the complex efforts that had to be invested in potentially *mobilizing* these links; the individual's idea of his or her network and the considerations involved in putting the network into action might only partially overlap.

Ironically, in recent decades Anthropology has imagined Network to be some kind of general emic structural and cultural form: a systemic assemblage rather a matter of subjective personal links. In Actor-Network Theory, for instance, as in the New Melanesian Ethnography, people appear to be not so much authoring as inhabiting networks willy-nilly. The role of individuals as agents of sociality threatens to recede from analytical view, as do the partial, temporal and practical aspects of making, mobilizing, affirming, denying, unmaking and refusing social links.

The continuing worth of the network is in encompassing the ephemeral and dynamic nature of social relations in some lives, problematizing the tension between connection and disconnection, between stability and flux.

Conclusions and implications

Before joining this volume I found myself considering a conceptual framework that might identity anthropological disciplinarity, its breadth and complexity, and the necessary tension between its terms. I imagined six nodes, all linked to one another:

Humankind::Individuality::Society::Culture::Environment::History.

I further imagined how I might gloss the above terms, at a lower level of abstraction, as involving:

Capacity::Substance::Relation::Medium::Material::Occasion.

What this six-noded framework encouraged me to see was how:

1) As human beings we possess in common certain universal bodily capacities.

2) These are, none the less, individually substantiated in unique lives.

3) It is then manifesting these uniquenesses, expressing them, seeking to fulfil them and share them and not share them and hide them, that give rise to society and its complex of interactions and relations.

4) These interactions take place by way of certain symbolic media, certain languages of exchange, or cultures.

5) Moreover, these interactions take place within certain environmental spaces, material and temporal, domiciliary and transient.

6) And lastly, these interactions take place at certain moments; between moments there is entropic regress—things falling apart—but also attempts to have moments bear consequences—a routinization of things.

What are the special affordances offered by the six nodes put forward in this volume:

Disjuncture::Social field::Social space::Sociability::Organization::Network? Firstly, the flexibility of their potential interrelations. To set, for instance, Disjuncture against Sociability, and Social space against Social field, and Network against Organization is to be provided with a series of scales all of which, in interestingly different ways, might be said to turn on the distinction between *openness* and *closure*. How, in a particular social setting does the openness of Disjuncture give way or give rise to the relative closures of Sociability? How do the open extensions of Network marry with the apparent anxieties of closure of Organization? How does a Social Space come to

assume the institutional closures of a Social Field, and why on some occasions and not on others?

But then each of the terms can be recognised as being internally complex ('polythetic') as such. Organization thus spans an arc from the more routinized to the more ephemeral; Disjuncture is seen not only to cut a social tie but also to provide opportunities for new ones to close. An appreciation of openness and closure, in short, and how these might imbue different kinds, occasions and scales of social relations, would seem one of the key affordances of this volume's terms both severally and in conjunction.

If open versus closed already has a famous provenance in human science—a key heuristic in the social, historical and moral analyses of Karl Popper, for instance, and among his anthropological readership (Rapport 2005)—then the particular use of *movement* in this volume is something more striking. One is led to consider people moving towards and away from sociality in particular ways. Will one organize? Or will others endeavours to organize you? If so, will the outcome be an institution, a corporation, a co-operative or a more ephemeral association? Will one be sociable? If so, in what cultural medium will this take place? With politeness? After work? Among non-kin? And what effects will this sociability have on existing relations to which one might be committed or tied? Will there be a cost of disjuncture to be paid or a prize of disjuncture to be sought? As one endeavours to move across one's social space will there be physical hindrances—national borders and mountain ranges—and will space coalesce into a social field in which the moves open to one are apparently narrow or rule-bound, and the resources available to fund one's movement are competed after? In short, the

volume recognizes that sociality is not to be taken for granted. It is variable in nature, colouration and scale. It depends on personal perspectives and on moments. *It is not an abiding condition*. At least, it is so varied in expression and so internally diverse as a concept that it behoves the anthropologist more to examine its precise form in particular interactions than to assume it as a background. Sociality must be foregrounded as a necessary object of description and analysis whose shape and form is constantly in process, continually being worked.

Key to this version of movement, it seems, is doubt, or *uncertainty*. The movement towards and away from sociality is uncertain in outcome. Will sociality result? At the very least, what shape and form will sociality take? Will, emically, the outcome be satisfying, felt appropriate? Will, etically, the outcome be something that the anthropologist can sufficiently comprehend as sociality, and appropriately represent?

This recognition of movement and uncertainty is surely a key finding of the volume and a tantalizing conceptual question. Also the way it ties together the emic and etic. Our research subjects move in their lives along uncertain trajectories towards and away from social relations. Do they fulfil their intentions? We anthropologists endeavour to describe, analyse, theorize upon and compare these uncertain movements. Do we do them justice?

In 1992 Anthony Cohen published an article entitled 'Post-fieldwork Fieldwork' in which he reflected on the provisional nature of anthropological knowledge. Did he understand his research subjects on the Shetland island of Whalsay aright, Anthony Cohen asked himself? Had he captured the moment in his analysis? And was it not the case that the ethnographic moment seemed different to him each time he reflected upon

it? Moreover, that moment had now been possibly superseded by so many more in his informants' lives. What was it to say he had 'completed' a description or an analysis? Surely every such claim in human science had to be provisional. Any understanding and any description-cum-analysis was momentary (cf. Rapport 2012a).

The citation from Nietzsche with which I began this essay would seem to take Cohen's sentiment to its radical conclusion: any words we use about human life—whether as livers of a life or observers—are markers of hope rather than claims to certitude. They more display our ignorance, perhaps, than our knowledge. They more register our uncertainty and our anxiety than our confidence—or should be deemed to. They mark our life-journeys, the words we put to frequent use being a kind of horizon, speaking to the issues we are currently having to deal with and hoping to get beyond.

I do not believe that the contributors to this volume would be disconcerted by Nietzsche's conclusion. Disjuncture, Social field, Social space, Sociability, Organization and Network, are, in the editor's words, attempts conceptually to come to terms with contemporary issues and circumstances. They are words for today (cf. Rabinow, Marcus, Faubion and Rees 2009; Rapport 2013). Do they serve the pragmatic end of allowing for a re-thinking of anthropology, a provisional thinking?

But then how is this to be judged? What is a satisfactory (provisional) conceptualization? For Nietzsche, setting up words as bulwarks against ignorance could nevertheless be seen to serve a definite pragmatic end. There was a purpose to human life albeit that truth was elusive. In Nietzsche's view, the purpose of concepts (and other forms of art) was personal confidence and fulfilment (cf. Rapport 2003). It was within the capacity each human being to overcome the givens of the situations in which he or she

found himself or herself and to live a life according to his or her own lights, by virtue of his or her own authorship, as 'Master' not 'Slave'. At least, this thought contained the fictional claim and conceptual apparatus ('Overman', 'Master', 'Slave') that Nietzsche found did *him* good. 'I willed it thus'.

What is the anthropological purpose, if conceptualization and writing is ever a matter of provisional judgements? 'Justice' would seem a key contemporary term. Both doing justice in one's writing *in an aesthetic sense* to what one has experienced among one's research subjects—writing-up in the 'best' way one can—and doing justice *morally*: 'This is honestly what I experienced', and 'This is honestly what I feel my research subjects are due'.

'Justice' I see as a concept of a different order of magnitude to the 'mid-level' ones that Vered Amit has mooted as being Anthropology's forte. Nevertheless, it is on a 'meta-level' beyond the comfort zone of the middle that I want, finally, to take my comments. Amit herself recognises the possibility and the legitimacy of this kind of intellectual movement in her account of the way in which ethnographic descriptions might find themselves 'illustrated' by concepts, and her suggestion that mid-level conceptualization, while grounded in particular ethnographic occasions need not be 'restricted' by these. In other words, one travels intellectually from ethnography to conceptualization and back. But mid-level concepts are, by definition, not the furthest possible reaches of this journey.

It would be a meta-level of conceptualization in human science that I would understand as containing not only 'Justice' but also the six-noded framework that I introduced previously:

Humankind::Individuality::Society::Environment::Culture::History. The significance of this conceptual level is that I believe it takes Anthropology beyond the provisional, beyond Nietzsche's merely pragmatic notions of truth. These meta-level terms describe *ontologies* of the human condition.

In a brief case-study I consider how the mid-level concepts of sociality showcased in this volume might give on to meta-level truths.

A case-study

Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533-92)—more usually known today simply as 'Montaigne'—is celebrated for the *Essays* he published between 1572 and 1588 (1993). The third son of a country nobleman, Montaigne spent the first part of his adult life as a counsellor and member of the *parlement* at the city of Bordeaux, also as a courtier to King Charles IX at Paris. However, in 1572, his elder brothers having died and having himself had a near-death experience after falling off a horse, Montaigne left public life and 'retired' to the country estate he had inherited at Chateau de Montaigne. The disjuncture did not herald a hermetic existence exactly, for he lived the sociable life of a country gentleman, with neighbours, friends and family, together with occasional trips to Paris and a tour to Germany, Switzerland and Italy. It was the case, however, that the games of politics and religion into which he had been drawn at the royal court he found debilitating. And cruelty, whether in the context of religious persecution, legal justice, or even hunting, was hateful to him. In particular, the holy zeal and unreasoning violence of religious fanaticism—France was then in the throes of warring between Catholics and Protestants—was, Montaigne reckoned, 'putting a very high price on one's conjectures':

it seemed there was 'no hostility that exceed[ed] Christian hostility' (cited in Bakewell 2010:209, 214). Hence, for the remaining 20 years of his life, Montaigne opted for a very different social space; his chief chosen habitus was now to remove himself to the chateau tower that contained his library of Classical authors, and whose beams he had carved with philosophical slogans from the Stoics, Epicureans and Cynics in particular. Apart in his library, Montaigne followed advice from Pliny: 'Each man is a good education to himself, provided he has the capacity to spy on himself from close up'. 'I turn my gaze inward', Montaigne himself wrote:

> 'I fix it there and keep it busy. Everyone looks in front of him; as for me, I look inside of me; I have no business but with myself; I continually observe myself, I take stock of myself, I taste myself (…) I roll about in myself' (cited in Bakewell 2010:224).

This habitus was not born out of hubris: 'I set forth a humble and inglorious life; that does not matter. You can tie up all moral philosophy with a common and private life just as well as with a life of richer stuff' (cited in Bakewell 2010:317-18). By writing about himself may he not grind a lens through which others might espy their own humanity? In particular, might not such a habitus enable him and others to begin to come to terms with the truthful texture of a human life, its universal mixture of the grand and the petty, the wise and the inane, the wild and the gentle, the comic and the tragic, the consistent and the inconstant? 'Our life is part folly, part wisdom. Whoever writes about it only reverently and according to the rules leave out more than half of it' (Montaigne, cited in Bakewell 2010:155).

A key part of such a 'truthful texture' would include the perpetual movement of human life. 'I do not portray being, I portray passing', Montaigne wrote, and not so much 'the passing from one age to another' as the passing 'from day to day, from minute to minute' (cited in Bakewell 2010:36). The essays that he wrote about himself, about his perceptions and his conclusions, were therefore precisely that: 'essays', 'assays', provisional attempts. He would revisit his writings and reconfigure them (even after publication) until his final days.

And yet, authorship remained his, and his alone. These were *his* perceptions and *his* attempts at conclusions. Life remained individual, notwithstanding the vicissitudes affecting all physical things, including the meandering human mind. There was an 'I' upon which the vicissitudes fell, abidingly and continuingly; an 'I' that lived the journey through life, continuously and uniquely and in one direction, an 'I' that perceived and imagined and interpreted, constantly, however provisionally. One consequence of this insight, for Montaigne, concerned institutionalism, or the nature of the social fields in which human beings placed themselves and others. Each human being ought to find his or her own way according to their own lights, Montaigne concluded. From childhood on, nothing should be taken on mere authority or trust. For the world was more varied and complex, and more evolving, than could be incorporated in any system of knowledge that human beings might hope to hand down. Furthermore, each life contained its own nature, its own particular way of being consistent and inconstant, ongoing and diverse: 'There is no one who, if he listens to himself, does not discover in himself a pattern all his own, a ruling pattern which struggles against education' (Montaigne, cited in Bakewell 2010:58).

Another consequence of the individuality of life concerned social space. In Rouen Montaigne came into contact with a group of Tupinamba Indians from Brazil; on his tour of Italy he visited synagogues and attended a home circumcision; reading in his library he shared the time and the space with other living creatures, wild and domestic; around his estate he was confronted with trees and plants that also represented living beings. In all these cases, Montaigne realised, an element was shared: 'one and the same nature' runs its course throughout all, he concluded (cited in Bakewell: 2010:179). To recognise this was to follow a kind of inclusive sociability that was both moral and ludic. If a pet cat or dog wished to play when he, Montaigne, wished to write then was there not a symmetry of rights to be respected? Why was he any more than a mere pastime to his cat? In the nature of things there was no hierarchy of being. When a human being looked at a cat in a mood for play, even more when that human looked at a kitten or a puppy that was to be drowned in a bucket of water, one looked at a creature who looked back: a life looked at a life. Were not all living things owed justice or mercy and the space to be? No abstractions, no conceptualization, need to interfere here at all. Human being confronts cat and dog, kitten and puppy, Frenchman confronts Tupinamba and Italian Jew, and always 'there are only two individuals, face to face, hoping for the best from one another' (Bakewell 2010:327). Individual lives abut against one another: the sheer, physical, concrete truth of this strangeness-cum-banality Montaigne saw as providing the moral principles behind an everyday sociability that outweighed any fantasy of political or religious or other ideological rectitude…

On January 3rd 1889, Nietzsche collapsed on a street in Turin, precipitating a final 11 years of life in a state of seeming physical and mental decline. His last act before

collapsing was to embrace a cart-horse that was being beaten by its driver, and to weep. Nietzsche had previously written of his admiration for Montaigne, the 'freest and mightiest of souls' whose writing 'truly augmented the joy of living on this earth' (1997:135). If Montaigne had construed an intellectual network that took him back, by virtue of a series of links of personal appreciation, to the likes of Pliny, Plutarch, Tacitus, Marcus Aurelius, Seneca and Epictetus, then after his death commensurate intellectual and literary networks were to be elicited by those who looked to him for inspiration. Shakespeare was merely one of the first of many readers of English translations of Montaigne's work. Alexander Pope claimed that '[Montaigne] says nothing but what everyone feels at the heart' (cited in Bakewell 2010:282). For Ralph Waldo Emerson (1889:181), the sentiment was to be put even more personally: 'It seemed to me as if I had myself written the book, in some former life', a claim then precisely echoed by André Gide, Stefan Zweig and Leonard Woolf. The imagery favoured by Virginia Woolf was of minds 'threaded together' in a chain across time, hers and Montaigne's: 'any live mind', she wrote (1990:178), 'is of the very same stuff as Plato's & Euripides' [and] it is this common mind that binds the whole world together'.

What kind of phenomenon is the network that Virginia Woolf (and these others) elicited? The links she claimed with Montaigne, and back before him to Plato, are as much an insistence on disjuncture or decontextualization from her present—England in the early 1900s—as they are an insistence of conjuncture with other writers. Yet it was not a scholarly tradition or set of scriptural conventions to which she attended so much as a series of individuals puzzling over the same human questions of condition. 'What is my life?' In the words of another nineteenth-century English admirer, the poet and critic

Matthew Arnold (1965:591), Montaigne engaged in a 'dialogue of the mind with itself', and *this* is the nature of the network Virginia Woolf and others have construed. She and Arnold and Pope and Emerson and Nietzsche recognized in Montaigne—as he recognized in Pliny and Plutarch et al.—the individuality of a human being in discourse with itself… When I wrote, above, that one of the critical departures of this present volume of anthropological essays was the querying of whether sociality would result *at all* in the uncertain coming together of individual actors—whether they would be *sociable* and meet others in a *social space*, form a kind of *organization* perhaps, partake in a *social field* of common interests, extend themselves across *networks* of links—it was this kind of 'transcendent' possibility that I was adverting to. In finding oneself 'in conversation' with Plutarch, Tacitus, Marcus Aurelius, Seneca and Epictetus (Montaigne), and in finding oneself 'in conversation' with Montaigne (Shakespeare, Pope, Emerson, Nietzsche, Gide, Zweig and the Woolfs), what is being effected in the way of sociality? It is surely very different to what anthropologists have commonly taken to be sociality's grounds and form. Yet it is a sociality which the conceptual framework of this volume allows us to address: an imaginative disjuncture and conjuncture that exists in the mind alone; a social field that involves the 'game' of setting down in words on paper the often ephemeral sensations of a flowing consciousness; an association of self-conscious individuals who never need to or can meet to draw up an organizing credo; and a universal social space that breaches time and space and that is possibly invisible and unrecognized by all others; a sociability by way of personal judgments of others' authentic voices. Here is a human conversation consisting of individual acts of introspection (Rapport 2007, forthcoming). The uncertainty of sociality in a face-to-face

coming together of individuals is balanced by the possibility of a meeting of minds that transcends time and space.

I find it necessary to think in terms of the meta-concepts Humankind, Individuality, Society, Environment, Culture and History in order to comprehend what Montaigne and his admirers are doing here in their particular usages of disjuncture, network, sociability, social space, social field and organization. To cite Montaigne one final time, one of his key claims was that 'Every human being bears the whole stamp of the human condition' (cited in Bakewell 2010:193). In other words, humanity manifests itself in individuality: between humanity and individuality there exists an ontological homology. Every individual is a paradigmatic instantiation of the human, each equally human, each wholly human, each only human. This is something that Montaigne recognised, Nietzsche too, and Virginia and Leonard Woolf. According to the literary critic Philip Furbank (1999), the insight has played a major role in the history of literature. He calls it, appropriately enough, the 'monadic hypothesis', drawing attention to its asocial potential. There is, Furbank (1999:29) elaborates, nothing in the assertions by Durkheim and sociology concerning so-called 'collective consciousness' and 'collective representations'—the imaginaries and metaphors said to link individuals to communities and states—that is half so real (or so mysterious and under-conceptualized) as that which universally links individuals to one another as exemplars of the human species.

According to this present volume a monadic hypothesis also has significant pertinence for a human science such as anthropology. One recognises how individual

human beings call out to one another—even through their introspective writings—within a species space and across gulfs of history, environment, culture and society.

Envoi: The universal, the individual and the momentary

Montaigne distinguished his essays in self-writing from the writing of 'scholars': those who operated with analytical systems and presented their ideas with evidential proofs, as if definitive. *His* principal aim, contrastively, was to record personal experience in a way that seemed truthful to him (however non-systemic and non-evidential and provisional the result). Where does Anthropology locate itself in this classification? It is, I would say, both a scholarly pursuit and one in self-writing.

Ethnography as a methodology presents a natural affinity to Montaigne's efforts. The fieldworking anthropologist aspires to experiences that consist of sensory moments with particular others. Furthermore, the fieldworker insists on the possibility and the propriety of conducting research relations with any and all human beings who might be encountered. Irrespective of symbolic classifications that might define an individual as having an essential nature, status or character by virtue of their nationality, religiosity, ethnicity, profession, age or gender, the ethnographer deems *any* informant to be equally and paradigmatically *human*. The informant is a human Anyone and at the same time a human Everyone.

But what is the anthropological propriety after fieldwork? The ethos of this volume has been to make a virtue out of uncertainty: any conceptual apparatus is tentative, ambiguous and provisional, a pragmatic attempt to reflect circumstance and to join up individual cases. One must be loath to pawn the details of fieldwork for

generalities and abstractions in which momentary identities and identifications are lost. In this epilogic essay, nevertheless, I have wished to consider how one might marry a 'mid-level' uncertainty to a 'meta-level' conceptual stability, warranted by a science of human ontology. My final argument is that the individual case and the momentary construal, such as Montaigne and the ethnographer alike would deem to possess intrinsic value, *also* speak intrinsically to the universal: the individual case and the momentariness of its apperception can be conceived of as universal aspects of the human condition. The anthropologist who endeavours, in his or her writing-up, to preserve the substance of individual lives—in all their complexity, diversity, contrariety and momentariness—and to preserve the moments of their being known, *is thereby* acceding to aspects of human universality. For in doing justice to the individual substance of lives, the anthropologist *also* bears witness to species-wide human capacities; *and* to norms of social-relationality; *and* to traditions of culturo-symbolic expression; *and* to habits of environmental dwelling; *and* to the occasions of their practice and exchange.

Furthermore, in doing justice first and foremost to the individual substance of lives, the anthropologist encounters other transcendent conceptual realities—Humanity, Society, Culture, Environment, History—in their true concrete forms and not as abstractions. For all culturo-symbolic expression must be mediated and animated by individual intentionalities; all norms of social relationality must be experienced through individual interpretations; all the materiality of dwelling must be practised by individual bodies; and all the occasions of the above mediation, experience and practice must be acknowledged by way of momentary individual sensibilities. Given the unique contingencies of individual human embodiment, precisely how cultural media, social

relations and environmental dwellings will manifest themselves on any one occasion is inevitably a matter of uncertainty. It is such uncertainty that this volume has rightly, and innovatively, placed centre stage. The anthropologist of uncertainty—let me rather call him or her the 'cosmopolitan anthropologist'[1]—continues to privilege the momentariness, complexity, diversity and contrariety of individual lives, and aims to preserve the integrity of individual detail beyond the level of description, even to the level of meta-conceptualization. The ethnographic encounter is never to be reduced to concepts, categories or classes that would corrupt either its uniqueness or its universality.

Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, I learn, died on September 13th 1592, at the age of 59, of a quinsy that caused him to be unable to breathe. He was propped up in bed at the time, with family and servants in attendance, also a doctor, and a priest who performed a Mass. I preserve these details; I remember that they belong to Montaigne, and that they describe a human death from suffocation; also that how precisely he lived this death—how he animated the formal style of being a dying 'Frenchman', a '*seigneur*', a 'Catholic', a 'household head', in the 'sixteenth century'—is something I might imagine and hope intuitively to grasp but cannot definitively know.

NOTE

1. I understand 'cosmopolitan' here, after Kant, to be the attempt to write an anthropology that always bears in mind the necessary relation between '*cosmos*' or human whole and '*polis*' or individual instantiation (hence 'cosmo-politan'). For Kant this was both a scientific and a moral project. The 'cosmopolitan anthropologist' sought to deliver conceptual insight into the universal mediation of forms, relations, materials and occasions by Anyone, in any individually lived human life. By doing so the cosmopolitan anthropologist hoped to pave the way both to objective knowledge of human capacities and to just procedures for their global acknowledgement (Amit and Rapport 2012; Rapport 2012b).

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