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IN-CULTURE DIAGNOSIS AND CULTURAL 'FIELD' STUDIES

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IN-CULTURE DIAGNOSIS AS AN ELEMENT OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS

Diagnosis is a research method usually applied with a strictly defined aim (epistemological, social, mobilising, or political). It responds to a specific demand for knowledge about socio-cultural reality. If those who conduct a diagnosis are aware that they do so 'in culture,' this diagnosis will follow a certain, loosely defined, set of rules derived from reflexive cultural analysis and multi-sited ethnography. The idea to locate the concept of 'in-culture diagnosis' in the context of multi-sited ethnography originates from an interdisciplinary team of scholars, including the author of this article, who worked on the volume *In-Culture Diagnosis*.¹ This idea was then further developed by the author. In-culture diagnosis and cultural diagnosis are not synonymous. The *in-culture diagnosis* blurs the subject-object division between the researcher and culture understood as a closed set of elements. Situating a researcher *in culture* implies reflection on the consequences of his or her immersion, rather than attempts to obscure or reduce these consequences. Similarly, in-culture diagnosis and cultural analysis are not identical and overlapping sets of practices. The former can be a part of the latter

¹ *Diagnoza w kulturze*, ed. Marek Krajewski, Agata Skórzyńska, Narodowe Centrum Kultury, Warszawa 2017, <https://nck.pl/upload/attachments/318698/Diagnoza%20w%20kulturze.pdf> (accessed 20.11.2020).

if it respects at least some rules and assumptions of interdisciplinary studies on culture. In Polish research practice, ‘studies on culture’ and ‘studies in culture’ are conducted from various perspectives, including sociology, anthropology, ethnography, cultural studies, and linguistics, all of which follow their discipline-specific assumptions. However, I propose that ‘in-culture diagnosis’ can have a transdisciplinary character and establish a common ground for different parties involved. I also argue that fieldwork is particularly suited to respect certain epistemological and ontological foundations of cultural analysis. I extract the basic set of assumptions governing cultural analysis from the legacy of international studies on culture, chiefly from historically oriented version of British culturalism. Nevertheless, other more or less akin contemporary cultural theories are also worth mentioning, such as the relational notion of culture and concepts developed after the action and practice turns. Below, I will show what these theoretical perspectives can tell us about fieldwork, what general and specific suggestions they offer to researchers who already work on cultural diagnosis, and with what knowledge they equip scholars who are about to enter the field.

One of the essential theoretical frameworks for my understanding of in-culture diagnosis is multi-sited ethnography.² This orientation has profound consequences for understanding and doing fieldwork in diagnostic research. It also carries the rather heavy baggage of the reflexive turn in social sciences, especially in anthropology and ethnography. As Douglas R. Holmes and George Marcus point out, this baggage results, on the one hand, from the fact that cultures under anthropologists’ and ethnographers’ scrutiny undergo globalisation-induced transformations that lead to their fragmentation, increased mobility, and internal differentiation, as well as to intercultural conflicts. On the other hand, it results from the postmodern revision of social sciences themselves, which took place predominantly in the last decade of the twentieth century (a significant contribution to the articulation and implementation of this revision came from cultural studies).³ Thus, contemporary anthropology and ethnography complicate both their research object (cultures) and subject (the reflexive scholar, researched as co-researchers). However, within multi-sited ethnography what is most profoundly and critically revised are namely the notions of field and fieldwork. This method significantly expands the field as a concept so that it accommodates various forms of knowledge, discourses, power, and materiality. Being in the field means here not only the documentation of different practices but, first of all, a sensibility to new ecologies and politics of knowledge. Researchers collaborate not with local informants but rather with people who specialise in their own worlds and are experts in their own cultures. They take people’s knowledge seriously and approach it as a para-theory of a given aspect of reality. Hence, ethnography starts to perceive itself as a sort of expert knowledge that cannot

2 See, Marta Kosińska, ‘Tereny’; Agata Skórzyńska, Tomasz Rakowski, ‘Ujęcia’, in: *Diagnoza w kulturze*.

3 See, Douglas R. Holmes, George E. Marcus, ‘Refunctioning Ethnography: The Challenge of an Anthropology of the Contemporary’, in: *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd Edition, ed. Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, Sage Publications, London – Thousand Oaks 2005.

make claims to objectivity and exclusivity. It meets other sorts of knowledge in the field, steps back from scientific discourse in which it assumes the role of a judge, and takes the position of one among many. Such ethnographic discourse relies on negotiation and cooperation. Consequently, we increasingly observe the ‘fieldwork’s entanglements in multiple sites of investigation and in complicitous forms of collaboration that have changed markedly what anthropologists want from “natives” as subjects.’⁴

CONSTRUCTING THE FIELD: WHAT CAN ONE SEE THERE AND HOW TO REFRAIN FROM CONQUEST?

Fieldwork in ethnography and anthropology underwent a significant change at the turn of the 21st century. This change was so profound that it has revolutionised field research in virtually all social disciplines, including sociology and cultural studies. Generally speaking, the classical empirical analysis in a positivistic spirit has been gradually replaced by research founded on cooperation, dialogue, and mobilisation, or activity guided by the principle of social justice.⁵ Selecting from a whole range of different forms of participant observation, researchers have increasingly defined their role as participants in the communities they study. Usually, this participation takes one of the following three forms: peripheral membership (a researcher enters the group but does not take part in its core activities), active membership (a researcher enters the group and engages in core activities but does not commit him or herself to the group’s essential norms and values), and complete membership (a researcher participates in the group’s life, accepts its values, and act as its spokesperson).⁶ When fieldwork – including in-culture diagnosis – is done in a community similar to the researchers’ own social environment, they should (regardless of the form of their membership) actively contextualise and reflect on their own values, attitudes, interests, and strategies vis-à-vis the studied community.

It would be difficult to imagine a contemporary form of in-culture diagnosis in which researchers take roles entirely detached and distanced from the reality they study. Consequently, it is also difficult to think about fieldwork in which they assume a possibility of entirely objective and disengaged observation. Today, such a conviction should be discarded, together with other positivistic myths about the objectivity of sciences. It is replaced by researchers’ active reflection on the relations they establish and maintain with different elements of the cultural reality they study. Among other things, an in-culture diagnosis

⁴ D. R. Holmes, G. E. Marcus, ‘Refunctioning Ethnography’, p. 1100.

⁵ See, Michael V. Angrosino, ‘Recontextualizing Observation: Ethnography, Pedagogy, and the Prospects for a Progressive Political Agenda’, in: *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd Edition; Michael V. Angrosino, Kimberley Pérez, ‘Rethinking Observation: From Method to Context’, in: Norman K. Denzim, Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd Edition, Sage Publications, London – Thousand Oaks, 2000; Magdalena Dudkiewicz, ‘Metodologiczny kontekst badań aktywizujących’, *Animacja życia publicznego. Zeszyty Centrum Badań Społeczności i Polityk Lokalnych* 2 (5), 2001.

⁶ Michael V. Angrosino, *Doing Ethnographic and Observational Research*, Sage Publications, London – Thousand Oaks 2007, p. 55–56.

is a form of such a reflection. This idea was expressed most clearly by Michael Angrosino and Kimberley Pérez when they wrote that fieldwork creates (nothing more and nothing less than) a situational context in which researchers assume different roles.⁷ Thus, what comes to the foreground is an interactive and situational character of the field where one engages in different relations. The relational, situational, and interactive character of fieldwork ‘inserts,’ so to speak, a researcher in relations of power, interdependence, subordination, and various interests. This perspective of someone ‘inserted’ into the field allows him or her to see it from within and in an interactive and relational manner. Consequently, it is difficult to perceive the people one meets in the field as ‘objects of study.’ It is worth remembering that the researcher–researched relationship, once achieved, is reciprocal and allows us to treat each other as collaborators and co-researchers.

The late 1990s saw a decisive opening of fieldwork research to a cultural studies perspective. Cultural analysis allowed a broad and critical view on collected data and presented everyday practices as embedded in the context of power, politics, and domination. Within this inclusive and contextual perspective, the concept of the ‘field’ also expanded significantly. The idea of a research field as something *given* was gradually replaced by acknowledging its *constructed* character. Furthermore, the field ceased to be perceived as a geographical place inhabited by a society characterised by some particular culture. As a result, it has been ‘released’ from locality, put into motion, defragmented, and – consequently – deconstructed. If we accept the assumption about the relational, interactional, and situational character of the field, then its defragmentation means the process of connecting and disconnecting different perspectives allowed by the researcher’s mobility. In other words, fieldwork resembles the process of drawing a map that depicts cultural practices and features of a researched group. It is also a translation from one explanatory perspective to the other, and a search for agreement between different sites.⁸ As a result, a researcher assumes the role of a mediator.

Because cultural practices and qualities grow fast in the meshwork of social ties and networks, they are not limited geographically (provided that the diagnosed groups are characterised by various forms of online and offline mobility). Such a perception of the field does not need cartographic skills. Rather, it requires an ability to produce problem-oriented, socio-cultural topography, which unfolds not only horizontally but also vertically – on the temporal axis. For this reason, an essential element of the methodologies and methods of in-culture diagnosis is historically oriented cultural analysis. When we recognise some aspects of life as cultural, we also admit their historical character: the fact that they were shaped in a certain way at a certain time and as a result of the particular entanglement of reconstructable events and circumstances.

7 M. V. Angrosino, ‘Recontextualizing Observation.’

8 See, George E. Marcus, *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1998, p. 84.

REFLEXIVITY OF THE DIAGNOSING SUBJECT

To be sure, neither cultural studies nor relational concepts of culture sanction a privileged role of the simplistic version of sociologically oriented diagnosis. Such a – still often used – diagnosis is limited to surveys and interviews with inhabitants of a given ‘field.’ Even if, at first sight, the methods of obtaining data for such diagnosis may seem attractive and ingenious (they use games, workshops, visual materials, art supplies, etc.), their deficiency stems from the fact that they only allow collecting information from ‘respondents.’ Hence, this kind of diagnosis does not take advantage of:

- 1) ethnographic methods and tools, such as field observation, participant observation, and cooperation with research subjects treated as co-authors or collaborators;
- 2) methods and tools of cultural studies, including the analysis of narratives, discourses, contexts, historical aspects, and visual representations. Most importantly, it does not apply from the onset of research a problem-oriented and contextualised approach to the conceptual operationalisation of ‘diagnosis’ and ‘field.’

The basic form of sociologically oriented diagnosis always reaches for the same fixed set of tools (surveys and interviews) regardless of who orders and conducts the diagnosis, what are the aims of this diagnosis, and what are the characteristics of the ‘field’ the researcher enters. Furthermore, these tools are mistakenly taken for methods of diagnosis.

Reflexivity is, as it were, an implicit feature of in-culture diagnosis as a research strategy based on the awareness that researchers are not actors who enter the field from completely external reality, but that they live in this field and are entangled in its meanings. Reflexivity is a particular mode of being adopted by qualitative researchers in cultural studies, anthropology, and sociology. Each of these disciplines went through the process of reflexive self-correction. For today’s qualitative research, the most vital and inspiring of them is the reflexive turn in anthropology.⁹ In-culture diagnosis is less concerned with these aspects of the reflexive turn that are related to the construction of ethnographic text or ways of recording research and its ‘scientific’ representation. The aspects that are more relevant for in-culture diagnosis pertain to data production, selection, and theoretical operationalisation, as well as to researchers’ position as producers of knowledge about a given community.¹⁰

For a wide range of research on culture, a key achievement of the reflexive turn was a retreat from thinking in terms of ‘peoples and cultures’ where the latter were ‘integral entities’ inscribed in the lives of particular communities.¹¹ This was

⁹ See, Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Routledge, Kegan Paul, London 1978; *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford, George E. Marcus, University of California Press, Berkeley 1986.

¹⁰ However, we must acknowledge that it was the critique of knowledge representation and the construction of anthropological narration that posed the question about culture as researcher’s construct rather than an epiphenomenon of some symbolic entity discovered by means of empirical research.

¹¹ See, Akhil Gupta, James Ferguson, ‘Culture, Power, Place: Ethnography at the End of an Era’, in: *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Ethnography*, ed. Akhil Gupta, James Ferguson, Duke University Press, Durham 1997.

a move in the opposite direction from the one made by Franz Boas, who separated the notion of culture from the natural order and thus gave an independent status to the research on culture.¹² Now, thinking about culture has returned to a dense meshwork of interrelated animate and inanimate beings, from which it is difficult to ‘extract’ any pure finding which one might call culture.¹³ As far as fieldwork, including in-culture diagnosis, is concerned, these developments reveal a set of difficult and subtle problems: How to classify cultural phenomena and differentiate them from social issues? How is culture ‘visible’ during fieldwork?

What is ‘visible in the field’ during in-culture diagnosis results not only from participant observation but also from previously adopted methodologies and methods. The latter two terms are not synonymous in cultural analysis. Methodologies allow for creating a set of epistemological and ontological assumptions that inform a diagnosis. Based on them, methods specify a set of research tools and techniques of data gathering, processing, and documentation.¹⁴ An essential difficulty in understanding the concept of the field in in-culture diagnosis stems from the specific epistemological situation in which the previously accepted methodological assumptions outline the contours of this field. At the same time, these contours result from field observation during which a researcher is aware that easy, ‘armchair’ conceptualisations can obscure knowledge coming from field data. None of these two aspects is sufficient in itself as an independent research approach. Unfortunately, the complexity of diagnosis stems from the fact that it requires a subtle balance between the two.

Keeping the balance between careful selection of methodological premises and conscious choice of diagnostic methods is possible, for example, following the cultural studies programme proposed by Angela McRobbie and later Ann Gray.¹⁵ According to them, one needs to start from ethnographic observation of

12 A. Gupta, J. Ferguson, ‘Culture, Power, Place.’

13 Such an understanding of culture as a ‘purified object’ was popular in both anthropology and cultural studies. For example, one finds it in Marshall Sahlins’ understanding of culture as a sort of structural ordering and in the distinction he made between prescriptive or semiotic-normative and performative or operational cultural structures. Culture forms a ‘separate order’ also within Clifford Geertz’s concept of ‘culture as text.’ We find various manifestations of similar thinking in British cultural studies, starting from Leavis’ school with its concept of culture as the order of values and man’s highest achievements, which was contested by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, to Raymond Williams’ understanding of culture as the order of ideas and meanings permeating practices of everyday life, and even to his notion of ‘structures of feeling,’ to Stuart Hall’s notion of structures of meaning. However, we must acknowledge that different forms of British culturalism and structuralism tried, to a various degree, to preserve the dialectics of meanings versus habits, semiotics versus politics, and the normative versus the material. See, Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780–1950*, Anchor Books, Doubleday, Garden City, New York 1960; Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Vintage Books, New York 1966; Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some Problematics and Problems’, in: *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies 1972–79*, ed. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, Paul Willis, Routledge, Taylor-Francis, London – New York 2005; Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart, ‘The Uses of Literacy and the Cultural Turn’, in: *Richard Hoggart and Cultural Studies*, ed. Sue Owen, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2008; A. Gupta, J. Ferguson, *Culture, Power, Place*; Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1985; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, Basic Books, New York 1973.

14 Ann Gray, *Research Practice for Cultural Studies: Ethnographic Methods and Lived Cultures*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks – London 2003, p. 4.

15 A. Gray, *Research Practice*, p. 7; Angela McRobbie, ‘Post-Marxism and Cultural Studies: A Post-Script’, in: *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler, Routledge, Abingdon – New York 1992, p. 730.

‘relational interactive quality of everyday life’¹⁶ or, in other words, of different ways in which social and communicational relations between people develop. Such an approach allows us to overcome the logic of the binary opposition between text and experience. Following contemporary relational concepts of culture and object-oriented philosophy, we can extend this observation of culture’s interactive quality beyond interrelations of human beings to include objects, animals, technologies, and all sorts of matter. This perspective, which embraces materiality, is not new to cultural studies. For instance, in Jim McGuigan’s approach, cultural analysis has a multidimensional character as it ‘seeks to make sense of the ontological complexity of cultural phenomena, [...] many-sidedness of their existence, [...] the circulation of culture[,] and the interaction of production and consumption, including the materiality and signifiatory qualities of cultural forms.’¹⁷ It is worth adding here that also the ethical dimension of McGuigan’s cultural analysis is fully compatible with the imperatives of in-culture diagnosis. As far as their goals and values are concerned, both perspectives seek to serve the public interest.

Ann Gray underlines that the methods and tools of cultural studies need to be applied reflexively. This means that one cannot select them once and for all already during research planning. It is also better not to treat them merely as a set of skills with which the diagnosing subject is equipped. There is no such thing as a set of methods in an iron box of tools, always to be used when one studies ‘cultural processes, meanings and practices.’¹⁸ Following Gray’s suggestion formulated for cultural studies, one should treat methods as implicit in a given research field. This means that a researcher should not impose them from above. Instead, he or she should gradually and carefully select and adjust them to the specific character of the research field as it unfolds in time. Hence, the selection of tools is in itself a reflexive process developing under the influence of all other elements of research. It is difficult to say which of them is the most important because they are all reflexively interrelated.

WHAT IS INVISIBLE IN THE FIELD: DATA AS CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

The relational and interactional nature of fieldwork reveals a constructed character of cultural ‘orders’ collected from the field. Data never ‘speak for themselves.’ The acknowledgement of this fact is among the crucial achievements of this strain of cultural studies that engages in ethnographic research. Paul Willis underlines that there exists no pre-theoretical way of observation. More precisely, the very observation of any object takes place through the lens of data organisation. According to Willis, the search for unexpected data or ‘non-prefigured’ knowledge should not turn into dangerous illusions about research activities. It is essential to be conscious of our limits as researchers and not to conceal the personal pre-judgements with which we start our projects.

16 A. McRobbie, ‘Post-Marxism and Cultural Studies’, p. 730.

17 Jim McGuigan, *Cultural Analysis*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks – London 2010, p. 1.

18 A. Gray, *Research Practice*, p. 5.

Every diagnosis brings from the field things that are not there, namely personal pre-judgements of researchers.¹⁹ It requires skill to notice and suspend them, especially since they usually concern key issues of in-culture diagnosis, such as social relations and their determinants on the one hand, and analytical procedures on the other hand.²⁰ Nevertheless, in the process of continuous thematisation of our own constructs about the research field, we need to be open to these aspects of the field that we do not anticipate; to expect 'being surprised.' According to Willis, to do so, we need to remember an essential, if often overlooked, requirement of qualitative research, namely to acquire as many relevant data as possible. This requirement is often simplified by contrasting qualitative research as based on a small sample with quantitative research as based on a large sample.

In Willis' rendition, data collection and analysis are not two separate stages but one multi-layered and circular process in which we move back and forth between data and theory.²¹ This approach received the name of reflexive methodology. It is typical for cultural analysis but, at least on a basic level, it also applies to in-culture diagnosis. The main feature of reflexive methodology is that the priority is given to theoretical interests over technical aspects of research. This theoretical approach includes reflexivity or, in other words, an understanding of one's own social position and the resulting 'expectations, codes and cultural forms of understanding.'²² Hence, Willis calls for an abandonment of the hegemony of research methods. Instead, he proposes a loose set of methods that can take different shapes in a relatively unconstrained way. It includes various forms of participation in studied communities and methods based on social interaction. The final selection of techniques of data collection depends on the researcher's inventiveness. In this respect, Willis offers researchers considerable freedom. The role of inventiveness is also underlined by McRobbie, who points out the example of Stuart Hall. Without aspiring to 'sociological accuracy,' Hall's analyses present a 'micrological politics of meaning,'²³ indicate specific flashes of meaning on a micro-, rather than macro-, level, and seek to inspire new and develop existing research threads.²⁴

OBSERVATION THROUGH A DATA ORGANISATION SYSTEM: ARRANGING THE FIELD

A departure from thinking in the categories of 'peoples and cultures' also means a departure from imagining culture as bonded to a particular place or form of locality.²⁵ It is not the opposition of local versus global that shapes the fieldwork.

19 Among contributions to this auto-reflexive view on researchers' entanglements in social reality, it is worth to mention C. Wright Mills' sociological approach. See, A. Gray, *Research Practice*; Charles Wright Mills, 'On Intellectual Craftsmanship', in: Charles Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1959. In this work, Mills defines research attitude as a sort of everyday, systematic craftsmanship.

20 Paul Willis, 'Notes on Method', in: *Culture, Media, Language*, p. 80.

21 P. Willis, 'Notes on Method', p. 81.

22 P. Willis, 'Notes on Method', p. 81.

23 Angela McRobbie, *The Uses of Cultural Studies*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks – London 2005, p. 16.

24 See, Paul Willis, *The Ethnographic Imagination*, Polity Press, Cambridge – Malden 2000.

25 See, Akhil Gupta, James Ferguson, "'Beyond Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference', *Cultural Anthropology* 7 (1), 1992.

Such an opposition assumes that the ‘field’ we enter is already given as local and that, from this perspective, we can comfortably observe how the local is influenced by the global. However, it is better to approach the categories of locality and place as *constructed* and not as *given*. Consequently, we can also adopt the stance according to which being in the field is about the researcher’s movement as he or she follows the mobility of the researched subjects. Mobility and change are two current categories that we have to consider when asking fundamental questions about the field: How do the people whom we study think about this field? Does anybody really consider our field as his or her *place*? What maps of this place do people carry in them? By what means (such as actions, values, relations, or meanings) is the ‘commonality’ of a place established? Does this ‘commonality’ prevail over individuality or is it the latter that dominates? Finally, if it turns out that our field is not anyone’s place, then what is it?

The opposition between local and global is certainly not a binding dichotomy for multi-sited ethnography, which moves away from a ‘static’ model of thinking about the field as a definite, local ‘point’ thrown into a specific ‘context’ of global interdependencies. Instead of *gazing* at one fixed point, multi-sited ethnography prefers to *look* from different perspectives, progressively moving in between them. Such an approach allows for a better understanding of the research problem. It challenges the traditional ethnographic arrangement of the field as a *mise-en-scène* that a researcher has in front of his or her eyes. Rather, multi-sited ethnography offers a complex and continuously moving sequences of scenes.²⁶ It replaces dichotomies of place versus context and local versus global with more complex trajectories of interrelations between different perspectives of understanding. Instead of ethnography as a theatrical staging with the field as a scene and the researcher as a spectator, we get a perspective that evokes contemporary performance and installation art, where mobile representations construct the space of the research field.

This new and inclusive arrangement of the research field concerns also in-culture diagnosis. Diagnosis as a recognition, understanding, giving voice, and recommendation inherits several essential features from multi-sited ethnography and its redefinition of the field. First, in-culture diagnosis can translate between different languages: from expert to everyday, from everyday to para-ethnographic, from para-ethnographic to political, and from political back to everyday. A researcher conducting diagnosis needs to know how to translate one perspective into another and how to reach an agreement concerning their use with different subjects, communities, and groups of interests.

Second, in-culture diagnosis is characterised by a particular sensitivity towards oppressed and marginalised groups, following the ethos of ‘research for social interest and the call to strengthen social justice.’²⁷

²⁶ See, G. E. Marcus, *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*.

²⁷ This ethos comes from applied anthropology and sociology, at least to the degree to which these disciplines are expected to provide binding solutions for the public sector. As far as anthropology is concerned, what I am referring to is public expertise combined with response to socially significant questions in the spirit of ‘public anthropology.’

Third, in-culture diagnosis assumes a critical position in the same sense as different currents of critical ethnography and cultural studies do.

The two last features, namely critical approach and giving voice to subjugated groups, do not form a set of strict rules for in-culture diagnosis. Rather, they formulate a sort of *critical intention* of the diagnosing subject, who needs to ask him or herself the following questions:

- On whose behalf do I conduct this diagnosis?
- What and whose interests does it serve?
- Can it lead to the marginalisation of or a discrimination against certain persons or groups?
- Whose voices were thus far neglected in research of this particular cultural field?
- Has it ever been the case that a specific ‘politics of diagnosis’ aimed at these people or groups caused their marginalisation, silenced some of their voices, or led to the situation in which certain problems could not be adequately expressed?

The list of questions related to the process of constructing the field for diagnosis shows that ‘research’ in general, and in-culture diagnosis in particular, is a form of knowledge production located among and in close relation to other ways of knowledge production. The politics of this production starts already with the construction of the research field.

A DISORDERED PICTURE: THE EVOCATIVENESS OF THE FIELD

A researcher who enters the field should remember that he or she is not looking for culture as something to be discovered, but a process and a reservoir of continuously produced and reproduced cultural relations, objects, and qualities. The most significant finding of reflexive anthropology is that culture as an ‘extracted totality’ is a fiction or a narrative construct produced by the researcher. For a long time, the dominant approach to culture in sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies was to present it as a specific order, a pattern of human activities, or a system of values and structures of meaning. The reflexive turn in all these disciplines questions the very concept of culture as a particular quality characteristic of a given place or society; it also questions the assumption that there exists an ‘internal’ order of culture.²⁸ For a researcher who enters the field, the consequence of this reflection is that to search for cultural order is a futile task and to imagine such an order as an aspect of culture is premature. The reality we observe can be full of tensions, internal conflicts, and contradictions that do not match the order of logical reasoning. It is, then, essential to be aware – already during the field observation of phenomena that may present themselves as meaningless chaos – of one’s intellectual inclination to organise the reality.

See, Barbara Tedlock, ‘The Observation of Participation and the Emergence of Public Ethnography’, in: *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd Edition.

28 A. Gupta, J. Ferguson, *Culture, Power, Place*.

Cultural analysis – or, at least, this part of cultural analysis that engages in ethnographic fieldwork – explicitly advocates the search for and analysis of contradictions and incoherencies in culture. These can include

*contrasting moments of subjective experience, tensions between what is said and done, differences between what collective forms or materials seem to say or promise and what actually happens or is experienced – and between the researcher's expectations, codes and cultural forms of understanding and those which he or she is uncovering.*²⁹

The traditional, naturalistic approach cannot deal with contradictions. Consequently, it sees them as errors or failures. On the contrary, in the qualitative methodology, contradictions are the source of crisis that is inspiring and pregnant with meaning; they provide moments of creative uncertainty.

The reflexive choice of research methodology likewise defines the researcher's political stance and intention and confirms his or her decision to conduct an in-culture diagnosis. In order to position him or herself in a diagnosed social reality, the researcher must ask *who speaks* in the diagnosis, whose voices are allowed to make a statement, and *who is the recipient* of this diagnosis. In this model, in-culture diagnosis is the product of collective work. Consequently, it gives voice to particular groups and communities situated vis-à-vis other groups and communities. It can have an integrative power, but it can also lead to the differentiation of and antagonisms between social groups.³⁰ For these reasons, in-culture diagnosis is always evocative, which means that it takes its shape in a dynamic process of giving and denying voice to particular individuals, groups, entities, or problems. It evokes different social and political voices, languages, dialects, and discourses. Such a character of in-culture diagnosis has its roots in 'ethnography as an *evocative* genre of cultural analysis.'³¹ The reflexive turn in research practices of ethnography and anthropology has revealed that various forms of fieldwork, including diagnosis, always give or deny a voice and that researchers never take positions that are neutral and detached from the politics of social reality. This activist and evocative form of in-culture diagnosis is not just another stage in the development of diagnosis as a research practice. Rather, it results from the reflexive exposure of two facts: that every diagnosis is characterised by an implicit modality of evoking some voices while hiding other voices, and that every diagnosing subject is involved in different forms of politics and relations of power. Furthermore, the current anthropological experience of the field – the latter having expanded dramatically since the initial research on non-literate cultures – reveals serious difficulties in maintaining an 'expert' discourse of diagnosis. Often, such a discourse cannot stay isolated from competitive ways of describing social

29 P. Willis, 'Notes on Method', p. 81.

30 Elspeth Probyn, *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies*, Routledge, London 1993.

31 Punima Mankekar, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India*, Duke University Press, Durham 1999, p. 49 (original emphasis – translator's note)

reality and can be challenged by diagnosed groups who have their own concepts of themselves.³²

In this context, an approach presented by the researcher conducting an in-culture diagnosis may be similar to that of the cultural worker, who acts for and together with local communities and supports good practices of cultural production. The history of this public role stretches back to the American activism of the 1930s and the origins of cultural studies in Great Britain, where scholars of culture acted as public intellectuals.³³ Another approach relevant to this discussion has developed within the community arts movement, where a researcher assumes the position of research facilitator. In this case, he or she combines research with support for a given community – he or she collects not only field data but also presents the conclusions to the community, informs it about the diagnosis, and discusses with its members the results of the project.³⁴ Finally, the research approach that originates from art-inspired qualitative research and is most closely related to relativist concepts of culture is A/R/Tography. It positions researchers-artists as A/R/Tographers of social relations. Inspired by relational aesthetics, it searches for and finds meanings at the relation-conductive intersection points – not only between human subjects but also among inanimate objects, and between people and things.³⁵ Thus, in-culture diagnosis casts researchers in different roles as it triggers situational and relational mechanisms of informing, correcting, talking, consulting, and advocating – all of which serve as tools for collective reflection in the joint projects of diagnosis. In this context, it may be worth reminding ourselves about the status of method in cultural analysis. It has been identified as a ‘social relationship’ driven by contradiction, inconsistency, rupture, and predicament, all of which are various manifestations of the crisis in social relations.³⁶ This crisis needs to be addressed and worked through. In this sense, the social method is dialectical. As Paul Willis puts it, the focus on the ‘the rich veins of “lived” contradiction is what can most distinguish the “qualitative” approach.’³⁷

THE FORMS OF CULTURE’S VISIBILITY IN THE FIELD

How is culture ‘visible’ in the field? What ‘cultural stuff’ can one search for and expect to find in the process of diagnosis? Obviously, answers to these questions depend on the concept of culture adopted as a part of the diagnosis’ theoretical toolkit. If the researchers’ theoretical assumptions are based on the relational approach and international cultural studies, they will look at culture in a holistic

32 M. V. Angrosino, ‘Recontextualizing Observation.’

33 See, Deborah Barndt, ‘Touching Minds and Hearts: Community Arts as Collaborative Research’, in: *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*, ed. J. Gary Knowles, Ardra L. Cole, Sage Publications, London 2008.

34 D. Barndt, ‘Touching Minds and Hearts’, p. 355.

35 See, Stephanie Springgay, Rita L. Irwin, Sylvia Kind, ‘A/R/Tographers and Living Inquiry’, in: *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*.

36 With its particularly strong emphasis on intra-cultural location of researchers and the consequences of this fact, Paul Willis’ old proposition to understand research method as social relationships provides interesting implications for in-culture diagnosis.

37 Paul Willis, ‘Notes on Method’, p. 82.

way. In cultural studies, this holistic doctrine resulted from the culturalism of Raymond Williams, who defined culture as ‘a whole way of life’³⁸. Later, it was further strengthened by the idea of ethnographic research as aiming for a holistic description of individually and collectively experienced symbolic systems. In Williams’ anthropologically oriented concept of culture, the idea was not to study some objectively existing cultural orders viewed as separate entities. Instead, it was to ask how cultures are experienced in their entirety, what is the complex attitude of people and their aggregations towards their worlds and lives, and how they ‘live their expressive lives as a symbolic whole.’³⁹ An essential feature of this understanding of culture was its relational character. It focused on presenting in cultural analysis how systems of relations and interdependencies between different elements of lived worlds are organised. According to Willis, ‘In order to see the spirit move in those pieces one has to reach for the central unifying symbolic concepts that are deposited in no single-artifact or activity, but only in the dialectical relation of all parts to each other.’⁴⁰

This call was expressed in an even more potent form by the relational concept of culture, where the latter is defined as a particular way in which characteristic and unique elements of a given group are interconnected.⁴¹ Here, culture is a trait, a mode, and a quality of connections and relations. This concept is constructed so as not to reduce an understanding of culture to only one out of many possible approaches, for instance, ideational, behavioural, or substantive, but to allow researchers to focus precisely on the character of existing relations. Relational view on culture offers – like earlier British culturalism did, if for slightly different reasons – a democratising approach that broadens the cultural field and, at the same time, expands the notion of culture to include also non-human groups and communities. To put it simply, whenever in the process of diagnosis we find aggregations that are interwoven into a network of connections and relations, we can say that they have a specific culture. When directed properly, a relational look – if we are able to shape in this particular fashion the researcher’s sensitivity – is non-hierarchical and tries to embrace all interconnections that are constitutive for a given group. Following the multi-sited ethnography approach, it also strives to view these interconnections from many different perspectives. It is an inquiring look, which does not automatically accept these relations in the field that come to the fore and seem obvious. Rather, it pays attention to the sets of relations that are serendipitous – temporary and resulting from seemingly insignificant and accidental arrangements. Relational perspective is also particularly sensitive to different forms of participation in culture, understood as creating, being in, maintaining, or destructing relations. This conceptualisation underlines

38 R. Williams, *Culture and Society 1780–1950*, p. xiv.

39 Paul Willis, ‘Symbolism and Practice: A Theory for the Social Meaning of Pop Music’, *Soundscape – Journal on Media Culture* 4, 2001, http://www.icce.rug.nl/~soundscape/VOLUME04/Symbolism_and_practice.shtml (accessed 20.11.2020).

40 P. Willis, ‘Symbolism and Practice.’

41 Marek Krajewski, ‘W kierunku relacyjnej koncepcji uczestnictwa w kulturze’, *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 1, 2013.

a socialising effect of participation in culture and shows that behind every configuration of cultural relations there is always some (inevitably political) project of socialisation.⁴²

NORMATIVE ORDERS AND CULTURAL PRACTICES: A TRAP OF ACCEPTED AND RESPECTED ORIENTATIONS ON VALUES. OR, HOW TO FIND OUT WHAT PEOPLE REALLY DO.

The relational approach offers scholars a wide range of possibilities for fieldwork and very innovative research. It opens up a space for participant observation that allows for identifying the main kind of relations that constitutes a given group. Furthermore, a conceptualisation of the research field as a field of connections, situations, and interactions allows researchers to thematise the relations they are involved in. Of course, the relational perspective does not neglect loosely structured in-depth interviews, in which interviewees themselves indicate what is vital to them and choose the narrative paths. However, this perspective's stress on *character, sort, and quality* of relations and interconnections suggests that the information provided by interviewees should be verified through observation, cooperation, and participation. This is so because research participants may not explicitly thematise all cultural and social ties important to them. They might focus only on those relations that are particularly constitutive, disturbing, problematic, or intense for them at the moment of diagnosis, but omit these relations that seem obvious or not worth mentioning. Moreover, the feelings research participants have regarding the character of crucial cultural ties can reveal their different quality when we look at them from a slightly different perspective.

An old dilemma of cultural analysis of how to distinguish between accepted and respected judgements (opinions or convictions) may also accompany the in-culture diagnosis. In the most basic sense, what is at stake is the ability to discern what people think (or think that they do) from what they really do. The social-regulative concept of culture distinguishes between the *acceptance* and the *respect* of a judgement or opinion. In the first instance, the subject of an action is conscious of a normative judgement which is attached to this action and which says, 'this is the way things ought to be.' In the latter case, the subject respects an opinion in practice – in that he or she systematically undertakes that specified action – but is in fact unaware of the normative judgement ('this is the way things ought to be') that he or she thus follows.⁴³ The difference between accepting and respecting the cultural judgements is clearly marked in surveys or qualitative in-depth interviews often used in diagnostic research. When the researcher does not recognise the difference between these two possibilities – consciously accepting and the merely respecting certain judgements – the results can be full of paradoxes. Below, I indicate just a few of them:

⁴² See M. Krajewski's statement in: Krzysztof Stachura, Piotr Zbieranek, *Transformacja pola kultury. Modele działań i strategie adaptacji*, Instytut Kultury Miejskiej, Gdańsk 2015, p.17.

⁴³ See, Jerzy Kmita, *Późny wnuk filozofii. Wprowadzenie do kulturoznawstwa*, Bogucki Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Poznań 2007, p. 52–54.

- A situation in which a person declares the acceptance of certain values and normative convictions but, at the same time, systematically acts in a way that indicates that he or she respects entirely different beliefs. For example, this person declares that road safety is essential to him or her but continuously breaks the rules, exceeds the speed limit, overtakes other cars where it is not permissible, and, sometimes, drives under the influence of alcohol, or does not react when someone else drinks and drives.
- A situation in which a person consciously accepts a negative normative judgement but, simultaneously, systematically acts in a positive way, therefore respecting a judgement that is contradictory to the accepted one. For example, this person declares his or her lack of acceptance of people belonging to some faiths and cultures but stays in close and friendly relations with such people.
- A situation in which a person systematically engages in a certain activity thereby respecting a particular normative value but asked about this value is unable to recognise it as the subjective reason for undertaking this activity. For example, this person is deeply engaged in the everyday support of neighbours but does not say that ideals of voluntary work or social engagement are important to him or her. Rather, he or she understands this kind of support as 'natural' and embedded in his or her family traditions.

These examples indicate that drawing solely on research participants' declarations may lead to incorrect conclusions. If we want to learn what people think about, how they justify, and where they place in their lived worlds a practice we study, a diagnosis needs to confirm their declared convictions through observation. This sort of confirmation is also necessary when we check to what extent the convictions that a given person declares find reflection in his or her everyday practices. Cultural practices and their motivations, or actions and values behind them, can contradict one another, thus negating the concept of culture as an organized order.

Relational diagnosis tries also to notice marginal relations in the research field. But how can we know which of the observed socio-cultural relations are marginal, if we avoid a judgmental and hierarchising look? Relational observation is an approach resulting from a theoretically oriented methodology. We assume that a researcher applies it consciously and accepts certain epistemological foundations typical of relational perspectives. Such a theoretical and practical toolkit can be described as a sort of strategy that facilitates the researcher's movement in the field of cultural relations. This strategy allows the researcher to adopt an appropriate position, such as conscious acting against hierarchical cultural approaches. We should remember that we encounter such approaches not only in social sciences and the humanities but also in the media, public education, cultural policy at different levels of government, or in strategies adopted by cultural institutions. They evaluate various forms of participation in culture as more or less valuable and more or less 'cultured.' In a way, relational perspective acts against these approaches as it presents and highlights as equally important all sorts of relations and all parts of a group within the scope of the diagnosis.

CULTURAL MODES OF SOCIAL LIFE: LANGUAGE, INTERACTIONS, NARRATIVES, MEMORY, IMAGES

Does relational perspective in diagnosis focus solely on cultural relations and ties, thus abandoning the once key subjects in cultural studies such as values, norms, language, interactions and communication, texts and discourses, images and visual orders, relations of power and knowledge, and – most importantly – cultural practices as such? Definitely not, because when we diagnose the character of relations that can transform the aggregations of animate and inanimate beings into collectives that coexist as cultures, we also ask about these relations' qualities and features. We can imagine relations based on a highly normative set of values (for instance, religious). Alternatively, we can think about an intensely interactive character of cultural ties manifested through specific forms of social interaction, as it the case with youth subcultures. It may also happen that the community ties rely on some sort of discrete practices that evolve over time. At first glance, it can be challenging to establish what ties keep such a seemingly shapeless, unspecific, and anomic community together. This is the proper moment to look for hints among these, usually marginalised, aspects of the community that involve non-human animate and inanimate beings: people's relations with architecture, public space (urban and rural), animals, natural environment, forms of dwelling and mobility, or management of space and time. The list of possibilities is virtually endless. Hence, depending on the character of studied relations, we can apply relevant research tools of diagnosis, including linguistic, visual, practice-oriented, communicational, and artistic methods.

We thus can see that the relational perspective in diagnosis is non-reductionist and does not limit the scope of methods traditionally associated with cultural analysis. Rather, it gives us an opportunity to reorganise the whole range of methodologies, methods, and tools at the very moment when we apply them in our research. This perspective allows for postponing the decision regarding our methodological approach until the relations binding the studied community together are 'projected' before our eyes. It is difficult to think about a research approach that would be more transdisciplinary than this kind of in-culture diagnosis that waits for a green light – i.e. the researcher's decision about 'how we are going to do it' – with the entire toolkit of humanities and social sciences at hand. During in-culture diagnosis in the field, it is also important to bear in mind both the dialectical character of the notion of culture and the resulting research consequences of this character. This dialectics – clearly expressed in British culturalism and essential for the relational concept of culture, as well – is based on the recognition that culture is a dynamic process permeating everyday life practices and that, simultaneously, it emerges from these practices. More precisely, cultures are located in the dynamic relation between doing things and the things that have already been done. From the perspective of British cultural studies, Dick Hebdige described this dialectics as a tension between two understandings of culture: as a process and as a product.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ See, Meaghan Morris, 'A Question of Cultural Studies', in: *Back to Reality? Social Experience and Cultural Studies*, ed. Angela McRobbie, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1997. See also, Dick Hebdige, *The Meaning of Style*, Routledge, Abingdon, New York 1988.

For researchers doing fieldwork, the above observation points to an important fact that a static perspective on, for example, cultural institutions operating in a given place – including the number of visitors, the types and calendar of events, and the profile of the staff – offers only a partial view on the institutional-cultural order in that place. This sort of perspective is hardly able to show how – thanks to or despite what factors – this order exists. Hence, it is important to plan diagnosis in such a way as to grasp the very moment of doing things, of entering into relations, establishing coalitions, solving problems, and all other modes of acting that create and sustain certain cultural forms in a given area. Moreover, this kind of diagnosis approaches the already existing cultural forms both as a resource and the context for subjects operating in the area of research. Recognition of this fact opens up the possibility for a more critical diagnosis, which values the historical contextualisation of the cultural conditions that we grasp as static at a certain moment. The scope of methods and tools used for this sort of diagnosis reaches far beyond those approaches that only allow us to grasp ‘momentary impressions.’ In this context, it is worth remembering that the diagnosis can benefit from taking into account both material and semiotic aspect, as one does not exist without the other. Like in cultural studies, one can approach material aspects of culture as conditions, qualities, and effects of relations and interactions between different subjects (actors/actants/participants). Within this perspective, our relations, actions, and their interdependencies take place in the material world, are limited by material resources, and lead to tangible effects (even if these effects reveal themselves only at a later time). One can also think about materiality in the categories of the relational concept of culture: not as about the environment in which human activities occur, but as their co-factor, an actant, and an element of relations forming the culture of a given group. Furthermore, cultures do not function without communication. Culture is a trait of communities and societies rather than individuals who live in isolation – it would be difficult to find a theory of culture that claims otherwise. This means that cultures are shared and permeate human relations and interactions. Hence, it would be quite inconvenient to study them without paying attention to how people communicate and interact. Among British culturalists, Raymond Williams spoke up for the role of communication in cultures:

*[...] the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meanings, and thence common activities and purposes; the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to the tensions and achievements of growth and change.*⁴⁵

Williams emphasised the real, material circumstances and consequences of communication processes and, by extension, cultural processes. He also underlined their dynamic, processual, and changing-inducing character. One of the most important battles in international cultural studies was fought to save culture from being reduced to its semiotic and ideational aspects (related to cultural

⁴⁵ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Broadview Press, Peterborough 2001, p. 55.

norms and values) and to study it as a whole, in its semiotic, ideational, and material dimensions. Stuart Hall's concept of encoding-decoding was one of the attempts to preserve this dialectics in descriptions of communication processes in culture. From the perspective of in-culture diagnosis, which respects some assumptions of cultural analysis, his concept can prove very useful because it broadens the researcher's field of view. It also allows us to understand why culture is a process (and not a static state of affairs). In cultural studies, this processual character of culture was traditionally understood in terms of cultural production. The circulation of meanings and values in cultural communities cannot do without physical 'tools.' It requires both material resources and 'sets of social [...] relations.'⁴⁶ Culture is about continuous, processual reproduction of certain forms of the already known reality and their transformation into new, previously unknown forms. Hence, it can be understood as a never-ending chain of reproduction and production. The researcher who starts an in-culture diagnosis can approach his or her task in terms of different aspects of dynamic cultural production, as proposed by Hall:

- *production* (culture is made according to specific rules, with specific tools, in concrete places, by certain animate and inanimate individual and group subjects, under particular institutional and political order, and so on);
- *circulation* (culture is spread and shared by specific institutions and individuals, permeates human communication, interactions, and forms of cooperation);
- *distribution* (culture not only spreads in informal networks of grassroots practices of everyday life, but some of its aspects are systematically distributed by means of various self-government, national, media, non-governmental, or educational institutions);
- *consumption* (some aspects of culture, such as practices, ways of behaviour, trends, and goods, are objects of cultural practices of consumption);
- *reproduction* (Culture is a process. Although culture seems to stay 'the same,' different people and communities transform it in different ways each time when they engage with, and thereby 'reproduce,' cultural resources. The cultural reproduction means that the culture simultaneously *is* and *is changing*).

Stuart Hall's model can be no more than just an initial roadmap for researchers undertaking diagnosis – a perspective that increases their sensitivity during observation. It would be naïve to assume that when we enter the field, we will be able to see culture with the 'naked eye.' When young students of social studies enter the field, they often ask with surprise: 'But, actually, what are we supposed to study?' The above map depicting different aspects of culture can help us identify its various 'modes' and 'circuits,' and most importantly, steer us towards thinking about observation in terms of access. Finally, another crucial question to be asked in a cultural analysis is which subjects, institutions, and organisations are included in and which are excluded from particular cultural processes, and why

⁴⁶ Stuart Hall, 'Encoding, Decoding', in: *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During, Routledge, London – New York 1993, p. 508.

this happens. The critical character of the presented project of in-culture diagnosis emerges, first of all, from historically increasing reflexivity in cultural studies. The shift from textual orientation towards realist, materialist, and performative understanding of cultural processes has led to the re-evaluation of meanings and values as traditional elements of culture and their firmer embedment in the materiality of social and political reality. In methodological terms, this re-evaluation has allowed us to move away from 'radical interactionism' (i.e. cultural studies' fixation on processes of interaction, communication, and production of meaning) and turn our research attention towards questions of political conditions and consequences of the processes of cultural production understood as the processes of socialisation.

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ABSTRACT: The text presents a concept of diagnosis in culture with a particular emphasis on the field research practice as well as on a broadened definition of field. Diagnosis in culture is discussed as a particular form of cultural analysis, and as a research practice theoretically anchored in the field of reflective and critical cultural studies and relational approach to culture while relying on lax rules worked out on the ground of multi-sited ethnography in what concerns methodology. Diagnosis in culture shows researchers as subjects engaged in cultural practices being examined, as socially active subjects who establish various social relationships within the field of diagnosis, subjects adopting a particular mode of reflectivity that draws its rules from theoretical field of practice and performance oriented cultural studies.

KEY WORDS: in-culture diagnosis, cultural studies, cultural analysis, ethnographic methods

