

VALENTINA GULIN ZRNIĆ
Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Zagreb

DOMESTIC, ONE'S OWN, AND PERSONAL: AUTO-CULTURAL DEFAMILIARISATION

In this reflexive methodological and epistemological review, the author discusses the research in which the researcher almost entirely – practically, contextually and cognitively – participates in the field. It is a situation that mobilises the circumstances of the researcher's life into a scholarly-research enquiry. The author's field experience in studying an urban community is reconsidered within the concept of *auto-anthropology*. The concept is expounded through three key research auto-references: in relation to the discipline (the subject of research and the methodology); in relation to one's own (culture and society); and, in relation to the personal (autobiographical).

Keywords: auto-anthropology, anthropology of contemporaneity, methodology, Other and/or Proximate

"Fieldwork is situated between autobiography and anthropology"

(K. Hastrup)

I live in the New Zagreb neighbourhoods. I spent my childhood in one of them, received most of my schooling in another, and moved into the third with my new family. This most recent relocation coincided with the beginning of my research work on that particular residential community. This made possible and realised the methodological precept of long-term fieldwork. The element missing after years of research has been the usual return from the field. Namely, the classic methodological paradigm implies separateness between the studied community and fieldwork on the one side, and the researcher's home and academic community on the other side. When there is a lack of spatial distance between those elements, and when they are realised "coevally", the methodological and epistemological issue concentrates less on *entering* into the field – a theme often analysed in theoretical literature and reflexive field reviews – and more on *stepping out* of the field. I take this thesis as an issue on the basis of my own research experience of contemporary urban everyday life. Further, I shall reconsider "construction of the field" within the concept of *auto-anthro-*

pology in a situation in which the researcher's circumstances of life are mobilised in a scholarly-research undertaking. The concept will be expounded through three key research auto-references: in relation to the discipline (the subject of research and the methodology); in relation to one's own (culture and society); and, in relation to the personal (autobiographical).

About the research

This methodological and epistemological analysis has derived from my own long-term field experience gained during the preparation of my doctoral dissertation (Gulin Zrnić 2004).¹ In dealing with contemporary urban culture, I chose one urban entity as the subject of my research. New Zagreb, situated south of the Sava River, was built intensively between the 1960s and 1980s. Nowadays it consists of some ten housing estates. I have selected one of them – the Travno housing community – as a case study. Various materials have been used in the research, for example, town-planning documentation, newspaper material, school essays, and the like. Recognisable ethnological fieldwork methodology has also been applied. Over four years, I was a constant observer and participant in the life of the housing community, and conducted a series of open-type interviews. Starting out from interviews with my acquaintances and friends, and continuing with untargeted selection by the snowball method, I collected testimonies about the urban experiences of people who differed in age and gender, origins, education and social status, as well as in duration of living in New Zagreb. The interviews usually started with the time inhabitants had moved in and were developed further towards everyday habits, practices and social networking, also encompassing the individual sense of belonging and identity. The interview themes have been analysed through several perspectives: descriptive (the level of everyday life); comparative (comparison to some earlier housing situation); evaluative (opinions or appraisals); and, imaginative (mental maps). I collected a considerable corpus of urban experiences of New Zagreb, which gave rise to many themes about life in a socialist and post-socialist city,² evolving into an ethnological or cultural anthropological interpretation of the city in the second half of the 20th century.

¹ Some of the methodological issues were discussed at the session "Creating urban memories: the role of oral testimony" organised at the 7th International Conference on Urban History, Athens, 2004.

² Some of the research topics that have been analysed and interpreted in the dissertation are the relationship between the architectural precepts, ideological discourse and everyday life; stereotyping of the urban setting; community building and place-making; the identity of city inhabitants and community attachment; conceptions of home; reflections of the contemporary political, economic, and social and cultural transition at the level of everyday life in New Zagreb neighbourhoods (Gulin Zrnić 2004).

The research conducted belongs to the anthropology of contemporaneity or the anthropology of the proximate, which could be defined as the *researcher and the field sharing the same contextual nest*. The objective of the research has been *to create a systematicised knowledge of everyday life*. As a field of research, everyday life has an exceptionally fluid character (Highmore 2002). The creative and inventive nature of everyday life culture, as emphasised by Michel de Certeau (2003), lies in the adoption and processing of the ready-made products that come about through the dominant political, cultural, and economic system. One of those ready-made products has been the housing estate, which became the basic study unit in my research project. In de Certeau's sense, everyday life being an "invention" is inexhaustible and unlimited. Each attempt to translate it into a static form – in written form – is the means by which that everyday life is "tamed". That taming is the inscription of the discipline. It means that disciplinary specific approaches and themes are introduced in encompassing contemporary everyday life in order to understand it through the scholarly looking glass. The cultural anthropological taming of everyday life in my research project has been based on the interpretative understanding of the emergence and interweaving of semantic structures, and the creation of subjective meanings, within the semiotic concept of culture (Geertz 1973). Meanings of the city – studied in this project from the aspect of the contemporary urban housing areas and communities in my own society – derive from "lived experience", which becomes the basis for the creation of cultural meaning. On the one hand, it has its source in personal and shared meanings. On the other hand, cultural meaning is also derived from the adoption and processing of ideological, architectural, and sociological meanings already inscribed in producing and shaping of space. The specific themes that have been introduced analytically are "community building" and "place-making". Community building implies the analysis of diverse formal and informal forms of community organisation on a territorial, residential principle. Furthermore, the crucial analysis relies on the interpretative approach, investigating the experience of the community as a practical and symbolic unit of urban life, as well as the perceptions and meanings that the participants attribute to the community. The community thus becomes a narrative, mental, symbolic and subjective construct, as discussed by Anthony Cohen (1995). Place-making is a theme within the sub-discipline of the anthropology of space and place that has been developing over recent decades. Theorising the space within cultural anthropology as "semiotically encoded and interpreted reality", Setha Low defined "the phenomenological and symbolic experience of space" as one of the research perspectives in the anthropological approach to the living space (Low 1999:112-113). It is an anthropological assumption that individuals through their "lived experience" transform material *space* into a symbolic *place* (Feld and Basso 1996; Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003; Frykman and Gilje 2003). Thus, I consider the community and the place as processes, and as socio-cultural

constructs, which are formed on the basis of the experience and meaning attributed to them by participants. These are the dynamic processes of symbolic constructions that constitute the relationship of the individual and the city in contemporary everyday life.

This briefly described research project and the field experience connected with it provide the foundation for the consideration of methodological and epistemological dilemmas in studying contemporaneity, and conducting research in one's own culture and society, utilising oneself, among others, as a narrator about the very themes of the research.

Permanent *insiderness*

My research participation is also mine in terms of my personal life, at various analytical levels. I have been, and am, a participant in the life of the society both during the socialist period, and in the transitional period during the 1990s. I have been, and am, a participant in the social and cultural peculiarities of that life, and a witness to the changes in urban culture of Zagreb. I am an inhabitant of the urban setting in which I conduct my research. By all this, I confirm and legitimise my participatory position, my *insiderness*. However, it is not a temporary position in the field but rather a *permanent* one, linked to my personal life. That means that I build the professional "construction of the field" in the space and time of my non-professional everyday life. From another view, one anthropologist said that "anthropology began to seep out of the confines of an academic career and spill over into what had become part of my home life" (Dyck 2000:32). This is research in which "the conditions of the researcher's life are created as the field", the one when "you forget to take notes because you feel this is your life", in the words of one particular researcher (cf. Emerson and Pollner 2001:254). It is research in which the position of endogeneity (the life of the researcher) and exogeneity (the research project) are blurred.

On the one hand, there is a danger of lack of scholarly sensitivity because one's own life is involved in the field itself. On the other, my existential participation has considerably expanded a range of themes and experiences upon which I have been able to speak with my interlocutors, adding depth to their general responses by focusing on the specificity of a particular period or on the relations that we have been talking about. It has not taken long for my interlocutors to recognise me as someone who has been sharing with them the experience of life in a specific residential living environment. Their initial formal attitude towards me grew into a freer and more relaxed one. In this way, research in the domestic field bears the characteristic of "basic insiderness", which implies the sharing of certain basic knowledge, feelings of belonging, and emotions, between the researcher and people involved in research (Povrzanović Frykman 2004:87-90). The extent of my "basic insiderness" was confirmed by a comment

given by one of my interlocutors. He asked me, after the interview, why I was questioning him about things which, after all, I already knew. The answer lies in the altered research interest in anthropology. If Bronislaw Malinowski wanted to fathom the "native's point of view" in order to understand "*his* vision of *his* world", decades later, the postmodern paradigm promoted the notion of "multiple truths" to understand "*their* visions of *their* worlds" (Narayan 1993:676). If I continue to paraphrase the same syntagma, I could say that I tried in my research to understand *their* vision of *our* (shared) world.

However, my insiderness in *our* world has not been all-pervasive. The distinction between the *outsider* and the *insider* could be relevantly inferred on the micro-level, within the social groups that function in the neighbourhood's public places where I conducted my research. Because of my own concerns, I was nearer to participation in some particular groups, such as the group of mothers with children or those of the church community. On the other hand, I had to carry out a sort of infiltration into other groups because of a difference in interests (for example, dog-owner groups), or because of gender difference (for example, the male groups that play Mediterranean bowls). Consequently, my permanent insiderness is positioned, and, with all my personal experiences will result in only one of the "partial truths". My most striking outsider position is my scholarly one, in which education and the scholarly discipline sensitise the researcher to particular insights. I regard that "bicultural" nature in which the individual belongs to the world of scholarship and the world of everyday life (Narayan 1993:672) as the specifically pronounced position of the researcher of contemporaneity and the proximate. That biculturality becomes a fluid context in which what is one's own and personal is amalgamated.

I discuss my research in relation to the anthropological paradigm through the approach of *auto-anthropology*. Such an approach is defined in a situation in which the circumstances of the researcher's life are mobilised in scholarly-research work. The key methodological and epistemological considerations are thus linked with *stepping out* of the field, while reflexive deliberation is defined in the relation towards *one's own* (society and culture within which the research is conducted), and towards the *personal* as autobiographic.

Domestic field, one's own culture, a personal story

Cultural and social anthropology, as disciplines of the American and British tradition, have shaped their scholarly structure and level of recognisability by pivotal orientation to the Other – the primitive, the tribal, simple, oral, exotic and distant. The European traditions of ethnology – and thus the Croatian – have also singled out the Other and canonised it through a series of research years as "old, popular, and authentic". In various

scholarly circles in anthropology/ethnology, one of the research subjects – the Other – has become a temporal and spatial category, and also an implicit category of identity, bearing cultural, symbolic, value-system and political significance.

In the second half of the 20th century, interest has gradually turned to focus on *one's own*. The British "anthropology at home", the American "urban anthropology", the domestic "ethnology of our everyday lives" are indicative names to that change of course. For example, in Croatian ethnology, *everyday life, the city and contemporaneity* were the concepts within which Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, more than twenty years ago, argued for the research potential of ethnology as a critical science about culture and society. At the beginning of the 1970s, the author discussed the introduction of *the present* as a relevant research category, despite, as she said, the criticism and scepticism of her colleagues at that time (Rihtman-Auguštin 1988:9). By introducing the structural and communicational definition of culture, the exclusive orientation towards study of the village and folk culture was discontinued, and the urban area was introduced as the *locus* of research. More or less classic ethnological themes were located within a new referential framework of research, which implied considerable change – in the political system (socialism), existential space (the city), an industrialised time, the urban life (complexity, diversity), and the modern world (traffic, technology). *The Ethnology of Our Everyday Life*, as the author entitled the collection of texts (1988), marked an attempt towards critical redefinition of ethnological research. In the methodological sense, discussing the re-conceptualisation of the ethnological subject, Rihtman-Auguštin examined the capacity of ethnological methods to create the relevant material for interpretation of the cultural and social complexity, implied in research into the present. The specific nature of ethnological research practice – the qualitative, individualised and in-depth approach – has continued to be a recognisable tool in the theoretical and analytical consideration and ethnological interpretation of the city and contemporary everyday life.

The new orientations in the discipline during the 1970s and 1980s had to square accounts for their new position in relation to the two traditions. Firstly, this had to be done in relation to the earlier frameworks within their own scholarship, seeking for a conceptual and methodological paradigmatic link. Secondly, in relation to the research fields of other sciences, primarily sociology, whose research area, in the traditional 19th century division of science, was squarely in modern (urban and industrialised) societies. The positioning of new research pursuits of "one's own" within anthropology, initiated a critical discussion on the capacity of the anthropological theoretical tenets, concepts, research units and methodolo-

gical instrumentation for dealing with the new research area – contemporaneity, multiculturalism, multiple identities, complexity and modernity.³

The traditional anthropological canon – "Other – *There* – Different" – fundamentally has changed only its central, spatial part in its veering towards contemporaneity, the very space *between* the researcher and the researched. The new framework could be defined as "Other – *Here* – Different". American urban anthropological studies, particularly those of the 1970s, were often based on research into the communities that feature urban Otherness and diversity – ethnic communities, deviant groups, the marginalised and the homeless (Eames and Goode 1977). "Otherness" as a subject of ethnological research in modern societies is also emphasised in the observations of the French ethnologist, Marc Augé. His "nearby Other" is close to the ethnologist since they partly share "criteria and data", but they are not "fully culturally similar" (Augé 2002:30-31). Otherness is, Augé argues, a key characteristic of the ethnological insight, it "corresponds to the distance necessary to make it possible for observation to avoid being similar to mere auto-reflexion" (*ibid.*).

My analysis of my own fieldwork and experience annuls, in fact, the Otherness in both space and subject. This shift in research focus (there-here, other-we) is also referred to in the corresponding definition allocated to the name of the discipline, *auto-anthropology*. Although this is a term of broad meaning that is not unified among various authors, I focus on its definition with regards to the change in the research subject of the discipline itself. Furthermore, I shall reflexively comment on the research process, discussing the hybrid nature of *autobiographic ethnography*.

I would argue that auto-anthropology (or auto-ethnology, depending on the scholar's disciplinary heritage) implies a multi-type positioning in relation to *one's own* as the cultural, social, political, economic, symbolic, and contemporary. Firstly, in the analytical sense, auto-anthropology is the one in which the subject of research is the researcher him/herself and his/her immediate environment (Augé 2002:25).⁴ Thus, this is a *spatial* defining which replaces "there" by *here*. We can further define auto-anthropology as the study "carried out in the social context which produced it" and as research in which the researcher and the researched group share "the kinds of premises about social life which inform anthropological enquiry" (Strathern 1987:16-17). When Strathern discusses auto-anthropology, she states that "the anthropological processing of 'knowledge' draws on concepts which also belong to the society and culture under study" (1987:18). Commenting in a similar vein on the

³ A host of literature analyses the changes in the subject of research within various national disciplinary traditions, see Eames and Goode 1977; Jackson 1987; Rihtman-Auguštin 1988; Segalen 2002.

⁴ In that sense, Augé (2002) differentiates "auto-ethnology" (the researcher's immediate environment as the subject of research) and "allo-ethnology" ("the ethnology of the Other").

research of his own (Swedish) culture through the aspect of bourgeois life, Löfgren observed that "much of our anthropological discourse is rooted in a middle-class vision of reality: a way of perceiving, classifying, and organizing the world. Many of our analytical tools have been produced or redefined in this intellectual setting, for example polarities like nature/culture, public/private, individual/collective" (1987:91). This is a matter of defining auto-anthropology in a contextual sense, where one's own becomes *a category of knowledge*. In other words, "local knowledge" and the anthropological discourse in research into one's own culture derive from the same or similar worldviews, from sharing the fundamental meaning of forms of social relations and categories. It is not the elimination of the plurality and heterogeneity of one's own as culture and society. Rather, it is emphasising the major general sharing of the common fund of knowledge, concepts or experience by narrator and researcher in an auto-anthropological project. Therefore, *we-here* becomes the subject and context of research, leading to the disappearance of the spatial and cognitive distance between those we are researching and us as researchers.

Thus, for example, in a recent, almost programmatic text, Peter Niedermüller theoretically discussed the field of "European ethnology" as "auto-anthropology". This field primarily inherits from the political, social, and cultural experience of the transitional 1990s, as well as from various ethnological (European) and anthropological (cultural and social) heritage. "European ethnology" would develop as a new discipline, whose theory still remains to be elaborated, but its primary object of research would be its own complex, present society, with deliberation on cultural and social concepts, and the processes and change that currently take place (Niedermüller 2002). Therefore, ethnological understanding of one's own *is* "auto-anthropology", characterised, as the author contends, by conducting research in its own context.

My personal research situation overlaps many "auto" references, the mentioned spatial and contextual —that is, research into one's own as "place" and as "knowledge" — and I would add, the experiential and the identifying. And that is the third dimension further expanding the notion of one's own in auto-anthropology. Consequently, the leap into "one's own" is an adventure that is both scholarly and personal, since reflexivity and processuality are not only a characterisation of my research stance towards the field, interlocutors and the development of the research undertaking, but also a dynamism of a personal nature. The *personal* (I) and *my own* (society, culture) overlap in my research, making up a *continuous fluid research context*.

It is in that very fluidity that the classic twofold nature of research work is redefined. That twofold nature is inscribed in the *drawing nearer* to the researched, which characterises "ethnography" — field work, inter-subjectivity and interactiveness — and, later, in *distancing from* the researched, which is borne by interpretation and relates to anthropological "scholarship". These two anthropological procedures differ in their

emotional potential (the first implies subjectivity, the second objectivity); in research style (interaction is realised in drawing nearer, and interpretation in distancing); in a diverse temporal dimension, which Johannes Fabian (1983) calls "coevalness" and "allochronism"; and, finally, in the double nature of our "ethnographic personality" – of the ethnographer's two egos, being simultaneously participant and analyst – as mentioned by Anthony Cohen (2002). That twofold nature is also expressed in "spatial symbolism" – *here (the home)* and *there (the field)* – in which "place becomes a way of distinguishing work from non-work, us from them, and social investigation from life itself" (Knowles 2000:55). The twofold nature of the traditional paradigm is pivotal for the authority and credibility of anthropological education and the knowledge that anthropology produces.⁵ That traditional anthropological model of the "twofold" – place, relation, feeling, etc. – is not so differentially clear in my research. "Here" and "there", with all the meanings they bear, do not exist as distinctive places or procedures. Instead, they are interwoven, and certain soft, permeable spots will be commented upon from the conceptual, methodological and narrative aspect in continuation of this text.

What was missing in the field that I selected was the first impression. As a researcher, I have always been in the field, and I often found the initial impetus for sensitisation of my own research in thinking about my life in New Zagreb, my utilisation of the space, social networks, or growing up. As other researchers have concluded: "my personal cultural and social history is *the very ground* on which knowledge, in the frames of the project, is produced" (Povrzanović Frykman 2004:90). Partially, the concepts about which I shaped research questions have been created from my thinking and notes about my New Zagreb life. It is an *integral* part of the research process itself. It has often happened that the first versions of the written texts based on this research, ranged from the scholarly to the diary discourse, or vice versa, or that they are interwoven.⁶

In this research, the everyday life, concepts and processes of the city are both the theme of my research and aspects of my personal life. Unlike

⁵ Distance was long the basis of the creditability and legitimacy of anthropological work: "... anthropological conventions regarding the selection of fieldwork sites have first insisted on cultural, social and spatial distance as a gauge of ethnographic authenticity but then measured the craft of anthropology through the capacity of its practitioners to render the distant familiar. The nearby is assumed not to require this alchemy and is thus treated as ethnographically unproblematic" (Amit 2000:4).

⁶ The diary "as a specific combination of the ethnographic and biographic method" is the basis of a recent sociological paper about the city of Split (Lalić 2003). This is in keeping with the trend of (re-) introduction of qualitative methodology in contemporary sociological research, which methodologically draw closer together anthropology and sociology. However, in the epistemological sense, unlike in postmodern anthropology which produces knowledge within the notion of the "socio-cultural construction of reality" and "the ethnography of the particular", sociologists continue to refer to the axiom of the objective and representative (ibid. 2003:313), so that material obtained by qualitative methodology is analysed quantitatively in many sociological studies.

empathy – emotional, intellectual or imaginative – my research position has demanded a contrary procedure that we could call estrangement, defamiliarisation or rationalisation. It is necessary to take a *step back* from entrenched and taken-for-granted thought and practice, and to undertake a *departure from* the personal, experiential field of living and validations. For example, the method of participant observation has been redefined in such a process on the basis of completely contrary principles from those set by Bronislaw Malinowski during the 1920s, from which anthropology draws one of its methodological specificity. The phases of drawing near to the foreign and unknown social and cultural community, "entering" into the community and familiarisation, which would finally result in grasping the "native's point of view", are redefined in research of one's own and the personal in *distancing from* the community, *stepping out* of the community, and *rationalisation* of the interiorised (knowledge, history, experience). The process of familiarisation – *going native* – as promoted methodologically and epistemologically by anthropological tradition, takes another direction. It becomes necessary to achieve defamiliarisation by *going foreign*.

An essential precept of my research work is the new stance towards the classic ethnographic axiom "go out into the field". I do not enter the field in order to conduct research into the models of meaning, feelings, moral and value systems norms. Instead, I am *in the field*, ontologically and epistemologically co-existing with the field. That fact has influenced my idea to tell the *personal narrative*, in an imaginary dialogical form according to the themes prepared by the questionnaire. In other words, an idea to appear as a narrator or informant. By doing this, I have consciously placed myself in another position which requires a certain effort in maintaining the separation of one's own narrative and the analytical deliberation taking place at the same time. I have also obtained important insights into implementing the interview methods themselves. I noticed the difficulty associated with systematising thought into a coherent response in the part of the questionnaire in which I had intentionally put direct questions. For example, I was interested in research of "home" with themes such as the idea of home, the elements which make up a home, relations with other structural frameworks – culture, society, socialism, etc. All those aspects have been richly contextualised during conversations with people by talking about their personal experiences, origins, status, and by descriptions of their everyday practices. During the interview, I would put direct questions, such as – how would you define home? – to which I hardly ever received a direct answer. I encountered difficulty with conceptualising a notion – its content and borders – in the form of a condensed response, when I put the question to myself. This is how I became aware of the necessity to discuss the *concepts* within which we think about our lives, assess our situations, and conceive and contemplate the city. They are *taken-for-granted* concepts used to explain our lives and situations. They are interiorised, culturally close at hand, everyday, and in

which I am myself a participant. Through the research process they could be raised to *awareness*, and set as interpretative and scholarly *concepts*. Those elements of everyday knowledge, experience and practice *become* concepts through the research and analytical process by which the scope, content, elements, structure, and the like, are defined. This further enables, for example, the potential comparative prism (gender, age, ethnic, educational and other) in the synchronic interpretation, or the recognition of the changes in the diachronic aspect. By defining the concept, I introduce the etic (scholarly and outsider) perspective into the emic (everyday and insider). In research of "Other" culture, when the researcher and the researched often share neither language nor key cultural and social concepts, certain translation occurs from one cultural context (usually non-western) into another (usually the context of western culture, from which a specific disciplinary interpretation is derived). Conversely, the context is the same in research of one's own culture (what Strathern would label as "cultural continuity", 1987:17), and the researcher operationalises it according to disciplinary analytical interests (it is the mentioned de Certeau's inscription of the discipline into the everyday life) in order to uncover the processes and changes that are taking place in the backdrop to explicit social and cultural life.⁷ Research in the domestic field also implies a marked *sensitisation* and pronounced ethnographic *imagination* on the part of the researcher towards his/her own space, culture, and even to his/her own life, as a way of defamiliarisation of one's own, and a distancing from the closeness that renders invisible many things in everyday life. Clifford Geertz (1983) spoke of "transcultural identification" as a necessary basis for carrying out fieldwork in foreign cultures. In contrast, one could designate the key field characteristic of research in one's own culture as *auto-cultural defamiliarisation*. In fact, the anthropology of contemporaneity and anthropology of the proximate impose the research position of the *stepping back*.

From the research aspect, recurrent reading of professional literature created distance and always brought me back conceptually to my research position and the project – to my identity as a scholar. I continually moved *between* my field research, anthropological theory, and urban studies by non-Croatian researchers that often helped me in making meaningful some research question, or in drawing comparisons. However, in contrast to the traditional paradigm, no critical dividing line was established between those three points, regarding either space or time. While I was involved in the interpretation by computer, just one look out the window from the same place could become, in fact, field observation. Raising my eyes from the screen to the window was an instance of that twofold disciplinary nature discussed earlier. In that case, stepping out of the field

⁷ Noel Dyck (2000) argues that it is *just* anthropology that has the capacity to identify, present and study the forms, activity and relations in socio-cultural life, which are often overlooked or taken for granted in Western European societies.

meant a mental and intellectual concentration on only one aspect of research work, the critical and analytical one.

Secondly, although the research was not initially defined as comparative, research sensitivity encouraged the eyes and ears always to be open to information, by which comparisons could be drawn – from focusing observation on types of urban settings in the city, to paying attention to the comments on everyday practice given by people from other parts of the city. At numerous opportunities – from a bus ride to a meeting with friends – all the senses were heightened to notice diversity, allowing perception of the familiarised. The diversity was particularly evident in my encounter with the housing estates that I intentionally visited in other countries during the research period. For example, while in Milan in the Autumn of 2003, I went to a housing estate dating from the 1960s and 1970s. All the condominium buildings there, together with their green areas, are fenced parallel to the line of the footpath and the road. Each fence bears a sign *No trespassing*, and is there to protect private property. The fences around those buildings defined the rhythm of walking along the wire-mesh fencing, and determined the vision of the entire space of neighbourhood as bordered, foreign, separate and inaccessible. Lacking any fences, New Zagreb continues to display its unfettered expanses, it offers itself to strolling, there's nothing to block your view, it is communicative and the footsteps have a dispersed and straggly rhythm. The absence of fences in New Zagreb was a fact that I had not been consciously aware of during my life in that part of the city, having only noticed this specificity after my visit to Milan. In other words, this became an articulated detail of everyday life only when contrasting the fenced and open spaces of the housing estates, which could be perhaps an indicator of diverse political attitudes, economic and market systems, and the conception of sociability and movement. I am not putting forward here the existence or absence of fences as an argument for a general claim about the differences in political and social systems, but am taking them as an example of a series of associations that comparatively make possible defamiliarisation, and a raising to awareness of the proximate. Space as a potential political expression becomes an even stronger analytical perspective if we bear in mind that it naturalises our experience throughout life, as explicated by Pierre Bourdieu (cf. Low 1999:114). In other words, it becomes unquestionable since it is absorbed into everyday life and practice to the level of lack of awareness. At the moment that such facts are raised to the level of consciousness, a series of questions arises, some of which could become research themes. In my research I started to wonder whether the neighbourhoods without fences were an indication of thinking of the city in the socialist manner. Further, does New Zagreb support the current dominant system of evaluating persons, success, status, private property, obligations and responsibilities, since other principles were inscribed in its physical building during Socialism? New Zagreb, one could say, is too "collective" for today's society, which rests on the

principles of individuality. Apart from that, in the new democratic and liberal system, New Zagreb will become a challenge for interventions to be made and new power relations to be inscribed. For example, building new churches on the New Zagreb housing estates could become an interesting research topic. New Zagreb estates were built according to the town-planning concept of the functional and all-encompassing urban neighbourhood or "housing community". It contained all amenities that met the needs of their inhabitants – shopping, services, education, sport, and recreation – foreseeing everything *except* religious needs. In keeping with the political orientation of the Socialist State, no churches were built on those new estates. Nonetheless, Roman Catholics came together in flats adapted for all religious needs and practices. With the new political system in the 1990s, church buildings started to spring up on those estates, built largely in green park areas. Some inhabitants and interlocutors regard this building as "normal". Others find it extremely problematic since it could disturb their everyday practical use of the neighbourhood, the inscribed identity of the housing community, the ecological value of life, etc. The conflicting nature of a contemporary process (democratisation) on the micro level of everyday life (in a housing estate) is thus opened up and saturated with new insights and research questions.

However, despite how great a stepping back we might make as researchers, we always remain native informants. When research is undertaken in one's own society and culture, the researcher cannot avoid his/her own experience. It is not only the experience of the field and the situation, but "lived experience". The very conversion is debatable, both epistemologically and methodologically: "using myself as an informant about my own society (...) as a part of the process of systematically transforming cultural familiarity into systematic knowledge" (Gullestad 1991:89). Therefore, I would argue, there are two key meanings implied in auto-anthropology – *distancing from one's own*, and *an incorporation of the personal in the researched subject*.

The experiential directness by which the anthropological methodological paradigm is legitimised is brought to its maximum in such a research situation. It is intensified to the degree of blurring the position of researcher/interlocutor, objective/subjective, maintaining distance/being involved, and deformation/authenticity.⁸ In this pendulum position – my own research of my own hometown, community and culture – it is also difficult to distinguish between scholarly observation, and the autobiographical consideration of one's own life. One inspires the research question in the other, intuitive responses demand some form of verification in other experiences or research explanations, while the scholarly ana-

⁸ The relation between the researcher and the researched was a particular issue in the domestic scholarly tradition of the 1990s, in the corpus of so-called "war ethnography" in which the researcher him/herself became a potential narrator, a witness to wartime experiences (Čale Feldman, Prica and Senjković 1993; Jambrešić Kirin and Povrzanović 1996).

lytical level is galvanised with analysis of personal experience. To the level to which those two discourses – scholarly and autobiographic – remain obvious and separate, they are not problematic. On the other hand, however, I found myself on thin ice when I tried to assess the possibility of my personal story becoming part of the body of collected narratives about urban life. Should I set it apart as a separate autobiographical-analytical essay? But why should it be given separate status, and how would one carry out some sort of separate, autonomous analytical process on that material? Or, should it be included with all other narrative material and life stories (under a pseudonym or my own name?) from which quotations, concentrated fragments and illustrative parts would be set apart for the interpretation? For some time now, the author's own story has already been a legitimate part of the ethnographic genre, but it is still defined differently in the situation under discussion. This is not a question of researcher's field autobiography as promoted by the postmodern, including the auto-reflexivity of field notes and depiction of the creation of the ethnographic context and knowledge. It is, rather, the life story of the researcher, which thus becomes a part of the narrative corpus. In accord with the concept of auto-anthropology as a field and discourse on researching one's own culture and society, we can also speak of *autobiographic ethnography* as a hybrid genre of ethnography and autobiography, thus, of writing which would mix the personal and one's own.⁹

That genre is immanently dialogical at both the research and personal level. At the first level mentioned, the dialogue is achieved through the interview model that is not probing but conversational. I encountered the difficulty of keeping on with the formal questionnaire framework when talking with my informants about mutually experienced themes. It often developed into a conversation that was more like an *exchange* of

⁹ There is a rich body of studies that examines the use and significance of the personal story in research of the ways in which both individual and social forms are culturally constructed through the biographic genre. The emergence of the terms that link the life story and the discipline date from the mid-1970s, but they were not fully systematised terminologically in their use by various authors. The terms used are *ethnographic autobiography*, as the life story of an "ordinary" member of society; *anthropological autobiography*, as a new genre in which the anthropologist becomes an autobiographical subject; *auto-ethnography*, as writing about one's own culture without necessary autobiographic references; *native anthropology*, in which earlier informants become authors of studies about their own culture; *ethnic autobiography*, as a personal story of members of ethnic minorities; and *autobiographic ethnography*, which introduces the anthropologist's personal experience into ethnographic writing. Summing up the diverse forms, the editor of a collection of auto-ethnographic articles defined the term as "self narrative that places the self within a social context". This is, at the same time, a method and a text, where the authorship may be that of the anthropologist (when he/she is dealing with his/her own culture), but not necessarily so (Reed - Danahay 1997). The converging and permeation of the biographical and ethnographical genres prompted the key question of the relationship between the researcher and the collocutor, the scholarly authority and legitimacy, authenticity, and experience (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Okely & Callaway 1992).

experiences, opinions, comments, agreements or disagreements. In the beginning, in the first interviews, I tried to reduce my voice to a minimum of involvement, forcing myself to maintain research distance. With time I succumbed to the pleasantness of conversation and the interviews themselves became richer. When later transcribing the interviews, I noticed that the conversations are also created as a personal dialogical form, within which I enquire into my personal attitudes, evaluations, and situations. Furthermore, on the basis of current conversations, I developed some theses during the interview and rejected others, leaving it open for my collocutors to react immediately on the spot and to comment on them directly. Thus, these conversations with collocutors had two key characteristics. Firstly, they were *permanently open processes in creation of the research undertaking*, according to the postmodern idea of "co-operative production of ethnography" which annuls the researcher's monopoly in creating knowledge (Marcus and Fisher 1986:71).¹⁰ As indicated in one piece of contemporary research, the collocutors "participated in the construction of the subject of research" (Čapo Žmegač 2002:41).

The second characteristic of interviews conducted within auto-anthropology is that a *revalorisation of personal experience* takes place at the same time.¹¹ The research has stimulated my greater reflexivity towards personal experiential situations, places, and encounters, provoking some new emphases, evaluations, and richer memories in parts of my personal life story. Anthropological research does not deal with the anthropologist, but still, the anthropologist as a researcher cannot avoid her/himself, as Anthony Cohen has said. Discussing the relationship between the anthropologist's personality and the field, Cohen observes the lack of prominence given to the specific field experience. It is the one in which the researcher, while endeavouring to understand the complexity of the Other and the foreign, comes, in fact, to comprehend him/herself and his/her personal complexity (Cohen 1992:223). This momentary field self-comprehension further becomes a source and resource of research, in which the anthropologist "uses him/herself in researching others". In my opinion, that "self-conscious anthropology" of which Cohen writes as "a learning device", is an important and specific modus also contained in auto-anthropology.

¹⁰ One should also take into account the snare of postmodern thought to which Kirsten Hastrup drew attention: "At the autobiographical level ethnographers and informants are equals; but at the level of anthropological discourse their relationship is hierarchical. It is *our* choice to encompass their stories in a narrative of a different order. *We* select the quotations and edit the statements. We must not blur this major responsibility of ours by rhetorics of 'many voices' and 'multiple authorship' in ethnographic writing" (1992:122).

¹¹ Kirin Narayan gave an interesting comment on her research in India, where she grew up and lived: "Reflecting on India with the vocabulary of social analysis, I find that new light is shed on many of the experiences that have shaped me into the person – and professional – I am today" (1993:678).

Besides, considering the dialogical nature of meetings with collocutors, and the openness of the discussions in which one encounters various arguments, disagreements, contradictions, competitive interpretations, and the most diverse perspectives, has also confirmed conversations as *forums for the narrators' reflexivity*. The stories were usually temporally constructed around the individual and family life-cycle phases, where the change in the location of home was an important mainstay for the beginning of the story. Further descriptions of everyday life made it obvious how involved they were in the unfolding of everyday life in the neighbourhood; how much they knew about the events and people in the neighbourhood; how familiar they were with the conception of the "housing community" and of New Zagreb as a whole; and, how they assessed their own physical environment. Situations are always commented on and descriptions given on the basis of the information that a person possesses, deriving partly from certain general knowledge, newspaper information, rumours and then, largely, from personal experience. Apart from that, almost all of my interlocutors took a comparative position, contrasting life in the Travno neighbourhood with some other housing environment or area in which they had once lived. Another comparative axis was the time of Socialism and the time of transition. The network that defined differentiation of the "here-there" and "before-now" experience was created on the basis of these two factors – one spatial and the other temporal. On the basis of these two axes, the individual describes, organises and also contemplates his/her personal experience through the conversation with me, as researcher, in the situation of a research interview. Many people I spoke to confirmed our conversations as a personal awareness-building process and an examination of their own concepts. Describing and explaining some of her evaluations of the social practice of everyday life in Travno, one of my interlocutors said: "When we are talking together like this I am in a dilemma if it is like that or not". Another became aware of the fact of the individual view, since she said "but that is only how *I* see it". A third, describing her experience of life in Travno, came to understand it – "while this, just as I am explaining it to you, is actually the key to my understanding ...". It seems that this other, autoreflexive side of the research story, the one that relates the *narrator's deliberation* of his/her personal situation underscored *in the conversational context of the research itself* is not emphasised enough in anthropological problematisation of the methodological corpus.¹² Therefore, I would argue that in auto-anthropology defined as being oriented towards one's own and personal, this *twofold auto-reflexivity* – that of the researcher and the narrator – is present to a considerable degree.

¹² It is somewhat more emphasised in oral history and discursive analyses of themes which relate to some traumatic experience (such as war, enforced resettlement, being confined in a camp, and the like), which is re-lived in the conversation.

Conclusion

There are not many texts in Croatian ethnology that reflexively, methodologically and epistemologically deal with the issue of fieldwork. This paper associates with that theme and is the outcome of my consideration of my own research experience. It was only at a later stage, when the research project was almost completed, that I positioned my own experience within the concept of auto-anthropology, which has not yet been adequately discussed in Croatian scholarship. Namely, looking for a suitable frame of reference for my research, I applied the existing term that appeared in the resonance of postmodern thought and was saturated to a considerable extent with the postmodern anthropological discourse and its demands. However, I discuss it through several perspectives that sprang out its relevancy through my research. It is the annulment of (spatial and contextual) Otherness, reversal of the specific methodological paradigm and full incorporation of the autobiographical. With these elements, I am discussing this concept as a frame of reference within the research of contemporaneity or the proximate. Consequently, in this reflexive review, the prefix "auto" refers to three key aspects in the definition of auto-anthropology. Firstly, it refers to *autoreflexivity* within the field of scholarship itself as an open field that is subject to criticism and redefinition. Secondly, auto-anthropology refers to *one's own* – research into one's own culture in which there is a "cultural continuity" since the researcher and informants share the research context. Thirdly, the reference relates to *the personal* as a dynamic concept of deliberation and re-evaluation of personal experiences during the research. The personal and one's own implies relations from the perspective of the researcher. Both in relation to the personal (experience) and to one's own (society and culture), the researcher is encased by the field to such an extent in the discussed concept of auto-anthropology that he/she is obliged constantly to examine his/her very *stepping out of* the field. The traditional canon of anthropology "Other – There – Different", changes all three elements in auto-anthropology – its subject, space and character. With its specific anthropological methodological and conceptual foundation, auto-anthropology creates knowledge in a new three-dimensional notion of *We – Here – Similar*.

Epilogue

Since I am still living in the neighbourhood that I once "constructed" as the field, I am trying today to "deconstruct" it, and to free myself of my researcher hypersensitivity. When I meet my neighbours, I try not to listen to their sentences, statements and comments primarily as potential material. I try to stroll through the neighbourhood without necessarily starting to monitor some of the social groups that gather there, in an effort to distinguish the structure of the sociability network. I try to go to the small corner shop without thinking of the relations of the transaction in inter-

pretation of social action, while talking to the salesperson. Nonetheless, the knowledge I have created through my research work has unavoidably become part of me personally and of my worldview. At the time that the produced knowledge will be available to readers – namely to the inhabitants of New Zagreb – it will, at least in part, become knowledge with which *one thinks about the city and lives the city*. The former implies the utilisation of the anthropologically produced self-knowledge as a conscious attitude, while the latter is an interiorisation of that knowledge to the extent that it becomes taken-for-granted in everyday life.

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DOMAĆE, VLASTITO I OSOBNO: AUTOKULTURNA DEFAMILIJARIZACIJA

Valentina Gulin Zrnić, Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, Zagreb

SAŽETAK

U ovome refleksivnom metodološko-epistemološkom tekstu autorica raspravlja o istraživanju u kojemu je istraživač gotovo potpuni sudionik terena, praktično, kontekstualno i kognitivno, odnosno, o situaciji kada se okolnosti istraživačeva života mobiliziraju u znanstvenoistraživački pothvat. Vlastito terensko iskustvo u istraživanju suvremene urbane zajednice autorica promišlja unutar postmodernog koncepta *autoantropologije*.

Prefiks 'auto' odnosi se na tri ključna raspravljana aspekta. Prvo, na *autorefleksivnost* unutar same znanosti kao otvorenog polja koje podliježe redefiniciji predmeta istraživanja, metodologije i epistemologije. Drugo, autoantropologija referira na *vlastito* – istraživanje vlastite kulture unutar "kulturnog kontinuiteta", u kojemu istraživač i sudionici istraživanja dijele kontekst istraživanja. Treće, referenca se odnosi na *osobno* u istraživanju, koje je dinamičan koncept propitivanja i reevaluiranja osobnih iskustava tijekom istraživanja, i kazivačevih i istraživačevih. *Osobno* i *vlastito* podrazumijevaju relacije iz perspektive istraživača, preklapajući se i čineći kontinuirano fluidan istraživački kontekst. I u odnosu na osobno (iskustvo) i na vlastito (društvo i kulturu), u raspravljanom konceptu autoantropologije istraživač je toliko opleten terenom da kontinuirano ne mora propitivati *ulazak* u teren, što je često raspravljana terenska tema, nego upravo *iskoračivanje iz* terena. Kad je istraživač ontološki i epistemološki sužavljen s terenom, nužna je *autokulturna defamilijarizacija*, o kojoj se raspravlja u tekstu kao o *udaljavanju* od istraživane zajednice, *izlaženju* iz zajednice, *racionalizaciji* interioriziranog (znanja, povijesti, iskustva). Potrebna je i izrazita istraživačka *senzibilizacija* i etnografska *imaginacija* kako bi se defamilijariziralo od vlastitoga, od bliskosti koja čini nevidljivim mnogošto u svakodnevnom životu. No upravo nas ova istraživačka situacija kulturne bliskosti čini i kazivačima. U tekstu se problematizira vrednovanje osobne istraživačeve životne priče u odnosu na korpus narativne građe koji stvara tijekom istraživanja i oblikovanje intervjua kao trajno otvorenog procesa kreiranja istraživačkog pothvata.

Ono ključno u čemu autorica propituje koncept autoantropologije, nastojeći u njemu konstruirati okvir za vlastito istraživanje i terensko iskustvo, jest ukidanje Drugosti

(prostorne, kontekstualne), izokretanje specifične metodološke paradigme i inkorporiranje autobiografskoga. S tim elementima, ovaj u hrvatskoj etnologiji još uvijek nedovoljno problematiziran pojam, nudi kao odrednicu istraživanja unutar antropologije suvremenosti ili bliskoga. Tradicionalni kanon antropologije – *drugi - drugdje - drukčiji* – u autoantropologiji zamjenjuje sva tri elementa, predmetni, prostorni i karakterni. Uz specifičan antropološki metodološki i konceptualni temelj autoantropologija stvara znanje u novoj trodimenzionalnosti *mi - ovdje - slični*.

Ključne riječi: autoantropologija, antropologija suvremenosti, metodologija, Drugi i/ili Bliski