IT TAKES MORE THAN ONE TO HOLD COMPLEXITY

Irritation and Collective Reflexivity in Ethnographic Research

Anna Hänni

Abstract

This article discusses the potentials and challenges of psychoanalytically oriented supervision groups for ethnographic fieldwork: interpretive, collective spaces that address ethnographic fieldwork's subconscious, emotional, and experiential aspects. While notions of scientific objectivity and epistemic violence towards interlocutors in anthropology have faced ample critiques, applied methodological tools for *doing* otherwise still seem scarce. Supervision groups offer a collectively entangled alternative to disembodied, patriarchal, and ultimately violent notions of anthropological knowing. Based on a reflection of my participation in a supervision group for ethnographic fieldwork, I discuss how reciprocal vulnerabilities were addressed in ethically and epistemologically relevant ways in this context.

Keywords: *psychoanalysis, reflexivity, ethnography, experimental methods, psychological anthropology*

The Group Is More Than The Sum of Its Parts: Caring About Ethnographic Experiences

This article focuses on a psychoanalytically oriented fieldwork supervision group for ethnographers[1]—a tool for reflexivity that has mainly been practised and theorized in German-speaking anthropology thus far. Despite its relatively marginal position within academia, this collective, open-ended, and playful approach to analysis bears significant potential for all researchers committed to postcolonial feminist reflexivity. Acknowledging the multivocality inherent in ethnographic observation, such workshops create a resonating space for reflecting on fieldworkers' experiences during and after fieldwork. They thus address a gap in ethnographic work that, after years of concomitant theoretical advances, deserves consideration: how ethnographers can *methodologically* address the call for reflexivity that began resounding, amongst other reasons, due to attentiveness to epistemic injustice in various social contexts (Fricker 2007; Spivak 1988), the writing culture debate, and feminist and other epistemological critiques within anthropology (Behar 1996; Bhabha 1994; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Fabian 1983; Jaggar 1989).

[1] This account is based on my participation in the group-analytic supervision group for ethnographic fieldwork facilitated by J. Bonz in Germany. In the following, I will use the abbreviated term "supervision groups".

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In present-day ethnography, fundamental inconsistencies exist between self-reflexive research and the conventions of academic life (Bonz et al. 2017, 28). Although scholars share a consensus about the necessity of (preferably uninterrupted) reflexivity in the field, the "how"—developing enacted tools that embody radical, theoretically informed reflexivity—remains largely unaddressed (Bonz et al. 2017, 54ff). Supervision groups address the need to re-value emotions within (increasingly neoliberal) academia as ways of knowing and as political forces in doing research (Jaggar 1989; Askins and Blazek 2017; Levy 2016; Schild 2021; Berry et al. 2017). Breaking the silence around fieldwork's personal, vulnerable side requires that researchers care about their own emotions and those of others in the field and the latent, often inconvenient ways ethnographic insight unfolds.

While supervision groups have been theorized about, initiated, and practised in German-speaking anthropology from the 1960s on, they seem largely absent from contemporary academia (Winter and Brunner 2013, 419), potentially because practices that attend to the unconscious face questions of legitimacy in society (Erdheim 1991, 24).

I joined a supervision group for ethnographic fieldwork because neither academic anthropology as a discipline nor institutionalized academic research formats provided me with practical tools for addressing and epistemologically exploring the *experiential* dimensions of witnessing violence (e. g. structural and physical violence, self-harm) and trauma in the field. By joining a supervision group, my hopes were more than fulfilled. I encountered the first collective space within academia that questioned, in practice, the precarious notion of the ethnographer as a "singular creation standing alone in her or his artistic achievement" (Gottlieb 1995, 21, 22). Moreover, I encountered an exciting, challenging, transformative way of conceiving and conducting research.

Reflexive understanding never evolves in isolation. While interlocutors contribute to ethnographic reflexivity, myriad individuals—colleagues, friends, domestic partners, and others—contribute informally to ethnographic reflection behind the scenes of most research in an ever-present "oxymoronic zone of academic intimacy" (Gottlieb 1995, 21). Neither truly reflexive fieldwork nor caring responses to vulnerabilities in the field can flourish in isolation; they only will if we accept that the relations of thinking and knowing are ones which require care, thereby affecting *how* we care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 69).

With "reciprocal vulnerability", I refer to the multitude of emotional, often structurally determined (Zizzo et al. 2021, 152) and sometimes traumatic (Lester and Reyes-Foster 2019; Pollard 2009; Schild 2021) experiences of the researcher and the research participant in the field. Ethically responsive ethnography requires the "vulnerable participation" of the researcher and interlocutor (Zizzo et al. 2021, 152). In this vein, vulnerability does not equal passivity or pathology but is a prerequisite for collaborative research and alternative politics of social change and mutual care (Butler 2016; Zizzo et al. 2021) in the field and academia.

Supervision groups do not efface long-standing questions of epistemic violence (Teo 2010), objectification, and power in research but provide "felt" epistemological "double breaks" that address those questions (Pels 2014, 230). The multivocality within our fields is acknowledged as researchers practice "experiencing as knowing" *among themselves*. It has been a long-standing feminist claim that emotions should be integrated into knowledge prac-

tices—especially those "outlaw emotions" of the marginalized that signal the wrongs within hegemonic structures (Jaggar 1989, 166).

How exactly do we perceive, interpret, and disseminate the messiness, boredom, and irritations of our fields? Why do some research materials disappear into a "to-do" folder while others are analyzed instantly? Furthermore, why would any researcher make herself vulnerable by exposing her "black box" of messy research experience to other academics? It seems uncommon within academia to discuss research material and its emotional, subjective dimensions in a cohesive, collective fashion outside theoretical debates and textual critiques. I argue not against conventional academic formats of thinking and understanding but for creating more specific, confidential spaces, such as supervision groups that *care about* vulnerability and epistemology in the field. Such spaces require that researchers risk making themselves (and their epistemological authority) vulnerable within patriarchal academia—but they also offer considerable amounts of relief, community, and humour.

In the following, I describe my participation in a supervision group during and after fieldwork in psychiatric clinics in Switzerland in 2022, focusing on how institutional and personal attempts at enduring the uncanniness of disrupted experience had unconsciously influenced my ethnographic perception. Through collective reflexivity, I understood why some research notes from wards felt impermeable and confusing, rife with enumerative, impersonal, protocol-like language. I understood why I had captured encounters outside wards (i. e. at the park on clinical grounds) with much more phenomenological density. I will conclude by discussing how collective reflexivity enabled me to understand that *how* I perceived and analysed different clinical spaces was deeply influenced by how suffering was institutionally "formulated as an aesthetic object" (Good 1993, X)—and thus integrated or expelled from consciousness.

Psychoanalysis and (Counter)Transference in Anthropology

Following a historically estranged relationship between European anthropology and psychoanalysis, the questioning of the ideals of objectivity and detached observation led anthropologists to a renewed interest in psychoanalysis (Deluz and Heald 1994, 10) and work at the intersection of these fields (Corin 2007; Crapanzano 1992; Davies and Spencer 2010; Ewing 1987; Jackson 2010; Levy 2016; Lorimer 2010; Lundgaard Andersen 2012; Obeyesekere 1990; Robben 2020). More recently, there has been a renewed interest in transference and countertransference in qualitative research (Gemignani 2011; Holmes 2014; Lundgaard Andersen 2012; Meek 2003; Midgley 2006; Winter and Brunner 2013, 419). These concepts have been defined within clinical contexts as "a redirection or transfer of repressed or unacknowledged feelings, emotions, impulses, and desires from one object (person or event), most often, but not necessarily, from earliest childhood, to a contemporary object [...]" (Crapanzano 2019, 140–41). Others propose definitions of these concepts that are more appropriate for qualitative research, such as an "inchoate feeling–state response" (Cartwright 2004, 226) among researchers and interlocutors. Accordingly, strong emotions (i. e. excitement, anger, boredom, fear, shame, depression) in the field can be entry points into reflections on trans-

ference and countertransference (Bonz et al. 2017, 10; Hunt 1989, 61). In ethnography, these concepts diverge fundamentally from Freud's original use, as ethnographic encounters are non-therapeutic and concomitantly characterized by other interpersonal hierarchies (Crapanzano 2019, 143), whereby projective roles and positions between actors can be interchangeable (Gemignani 2011, 202).

Crucially, however, the potential of *applied* psychoanalytic methods in anthropology has remained unexplored and barely implemented so far (Gammeltoft and Segal 2016, 406). To work productively with countertransference, researchers must first resist the temptation to eliminate instantly all irritations and emotions that arise in the field through (mostly unconscious) defence mechanisms. Indeed, academia holds an array of "professional defences" that "decontaminate anxiety-arousing material by repressing or negating its affective content and human as well as personal relevance" (Devereux 1967, 83) or confirm biased preconceptions (Davies and Spencer 2010, 7).

Below, I outline the proceedings of the supervision group and illustrate them with vignettes from my participation.

The Supervision Group and How It Proceeds

The workshop group meets regularly during year-long cycles. Before the start of each cycle, new members are welcomed; membership otherwise remains closed. Group work is strictly confidential, which requires, among other priorities, a non-extractive stance towards others' research material and mutual abstinence in this regard. Each member decides if and to what extent their personal and emotional issues will be discussed, and the meeting venue is preferably outside the institutes where members work. Finally, there must be no close professional affiliation or hierarchical dependence between group members.

Supervision groups are chiefly epistemological tools and are not part of mental health services; however, they offer caring aspects that can significantly support well-being. For example, at the beginning and end of each meeting, a "free communication" period allows participants to voice their concerns as ethnographers. During those exchanges, the inseparability of the "professional" (doing ethnography) and the "personal" (e.g. work-life balance, job prospects, family, health) is addressed with openness and mutual attention, which I subsume as an act of care.

Over the course of one and a half days, the participants of these workshops immerse themselves in research material (fieldnotes, interview transcriptions) shared by four members before the meeting. The material is discussed in three phases. In Phase I (5–10 minutes), the author of the material contextualizes it and formulates the aim behind presenting it. Then, in Phase II (60 minutes)—the main phase—all group members spontaneously discuss the material without addressing the author directly. At this point, authors usually focus intently on listening, observing group dynamics, and taking notes; they may halt the discussion at any time, including when it feels too overwhelming. Finally, in Phase III (30 minutes), the author reacts to what has been discussed during the last hour, entering the conversation with the other group members. Clarifications, insights, and disagreements are voiced. As no final

"interpretation" beckons, individual members must decide which comments, if any, will be integrated into their analytical paths.

As immersion in others' research material provokes a collective exchange of associations, emotions, and images, this interpretive work proceeds radically differently from academic seminars and colloquia, each of which focuses on theoretical debates and textual critique. Researchers usually gain unexpected insights by exposing their research material to peers who are "strangers" within their field but committed to a caring, non-extractive attitude. The spontaneous, associative, and often contradictory reactions from others to one's research material can thus be experienced as a (productive) "offence", as interpretations beyond one's conscious acknowledgement and epistemic authority arise (Bonz 2017, 220–21). Researchers' perceptions of their material are thus temporarily shifted away from the version of the self that gave rise to the field notes (Bonz 2017, 13, 221).

In addition to processes of transference and countertransference in the field, participant emotions and reactions in supervision groups can be interpreted as countertransferences induced by the material, as both responses can be harnessed for a deeper understanding of said material (Bonz et al. 2017, 42). In these workshops, countertransference might manifest as condensation (mental images), displacement, ambiguity, or resistance (Bonz et al. 2017, 42; Erdheim 1991; Lundgaard Andersen 2012, 6).

Another source of knowledge is *how* the research material is presented: narrative arcs or breaks, vocabulary and writing styles, and even the material's organization into specific titles. Highlighting the informative power of textual flow within ethnographic material, Winter and Brunner (2013, 448) note that in addition to manifesting as ambiguity in the imagery of the text, the effect of the unconscious arises "as a destruction of language: as abrupt changes of subject, slips, gaps, and verbal unsoundness...[providing] a particularly productive access to the latent meaning of a text". Lorimer (2010, 101) describes how excessive, abstracting note-taking can serve as a defence strategy. Researchers can benefit more by becoming attuned to their emotions and associations during and after fieldwork rather than retreating into excessive description.

During their first sessions, new group members unaccustomed to working psychoanalytically and collectively with ethnographic research material can be as irritated as they are fascinated by this unfamiliar mode of academic collaboration. Over time, they become attuned to the emotional and associative echoes of others' material and learn to work with them as epistemological tools that are otherwise mostly subdued within academia (Becker et al. 2013, 194–95).

The vignettes below reflect my ongoing participation in a supervision group (starting in 2022) during fieldwork in psychiatric clinics in Switzerland. They are illustrative of the "productive offence" that arises when displaced aspects and emotions from the field (encompassing researchers and interlocutors) are picked up and amplified by the group during interpretative sessions—in this case, the uncanniness from witnessing lingering moments of dehumanization (self-induced, epistemic, and institutional violence) in institutions of caregiving. Violence and healing coexisted disquietingly within narratives depicting "the clinic" as a space of "protection", medical authority, and care. The interpretive session unveiled the latent content of my material, underscoring the paradoxical entwinement of a hopeful,

almost buoyant atmosphere with an uneasy sense of something important being silenced within a perceptual void. There, helplessness and overwhelm were present as "outlaw emotions"—those felt by interlocutors and myself that exceeded the bounds of conventional and institutional acceptability (Jaggar 1989, 166). A number of these reflected some interlocutors' experiences that encounters that were officially figured as "caring" felt violent; however, the primary reflection was of my own vulnerability, which was created by intimately witnessing violence, institutional failure, and self-harm without a chance to intervene and amplified by academia's lack of formats for addressing vulnerable experiences.

The supervision group profoundly supported the integration of the subdued and unbearable into the scope of my ethnographic reflection. Although this mode of understanding is best understood through direct practice, the vignette below hopefully captures what fascinates me about psychoanalytically oriented supervision groups: *They allow ethnographers to gain intimacy with their research field(s) (and those of others) by playfully questioning existing perceptions.*

A Vignette From the Supervision Group for Ethnographic Fieldwork

Below, I cite excerpts from the material I offered for discussion during various interpretive sessions.[2] The research material is in italics.

Interview with service user B in the park

(...) Service user B and I arrive on a park bench after a long interview. A gentle autumn morning. Below us are the lawn's patches of grass, and in front of us is the pond from which reeds sprout. A huge artistic object made from welded iron marks the corner of the park, together with a pergola overgrown by vines. Monotonously, some music therapy attendants play the didgeridoo underneath the vines. B bypassed the group hurriedly as we passed by some minutes ago. "That must be too loud for your recording device, isn't it?" The whole setting strikes me as surreal (...) there we sit now: he in his flip-flops and trainers, his thin, pale legs covered with knee-high socks. No more questions come to my mind, and B remains silent. I say, "Thank you for the conversation; I am happy having talked to you." He responds, "Me too! Finally, I went outside again; that doesn't happen very often." I ask, "So you would like to go outside more often?" He looks directly at me, saying, "I always need accompaniment; otherwise, I am not allowed outside because I have attempted suicide recently and haven't fully stopped contemplating it. Didn't you know that? You are my guard now." He grins broadly and stretches his legs out, seeming almost cheerful. For a second, I'm speechless. The nurse only told me to "take him for a walk" without giving any more information. As yet, I have no access to the clinical software where service users' histories are documented. I continue: "This role as a guard feels strange—after all, I am an ethnographer... Are you not outside more often because the nurses don't have time to accompany you?" He [says,] "Yes,

[2] Translated from German into English.

exactly. When only two nurses are on duty, going for a walk is not an option. But not leaving the station for several days is no big deal—with me, it doesn't matter anymore" (...). Overwhelmed by an uncanny feeling, I again struggle for words and reply honestly, though I worry about the accuracy of my words: "Thank you for sharing that. If you want, we can stay a bit longer outside (...) so you can enjoy the time outside to the fullest."

Notes from the ward: head psychiatrist's visit

Thursday morning. (...) We are waiting for the head psychiatrist in a crowded office; the interns [are] busy reading patient histories. An assistant doctor hands me a white coat. [At first,] I refuse to wear it, but she insists (...). The head psychiatrist arrives [and] we start our "round", which will last two hours. The number of staff members and interns accompanying the visit has grown to ten—and now to eleven, including myself. I feel deeply uncomfortable [as a contributor] to the [mass of] observers that cluster around service users' beds during their conversations with the psychiatrists. The conversations between the head psychiatrist and the service users centre largely around "balancing" moods and medication. They each last around five to ten minutes and leave me with the uneasy sense of having witnessed a vulnerable interaction that seems both intensely intimate and irritatingly mechanistic.

Interview transcripts

This contribution consists of transcripts and notes from interviews with dance, art, and movement therapists. Many such staff members circulated within the clinic but had their main therapy rooms outside wards in separate buildings. I found the spaces of every clinic I visited to exert an irresistible attraction on me, and I spent as much time as possible there.

In light of the research assignment (configurations of care and constraints in the clinic) my employer had assigned me, I thought this part of the material was trivial. Most of the interviews seemed to consist of mutually reinforcing methodological statements about non-medical therapeutic methods, occasionally accompanied by critical remarks about their marginalization within the medical hierarchies of the clinic.

The Discussion of My Material

Below, I describe how we worked with the material in the supervision group.

Eight ethnographers (five PhD students; others in various stages of postdoctoral research) and a moderator are seated in a circle supplied with cookies and tea. I sit with a pencil and a notebook on my lap while the other group members hold copies of the ethnographic research material I had shared before our meeting. As always, the only assignment before our meeting was to read all mate-

rials in a state of "free-floating attention" (Müller 2017, 166). *Three other group members will also present their material during this session, which lasts one and a half days. We start our session, and I briefly contextualize my ethnographic material and formulate my aims for this session: orienting myself within piles of repetitive field notes (which resist analysis and induce a strange sense of boredom in me) and becoming attuned to the phenomenology of space and time within the clinic. The material I put up for discussion includes an interview in the clinic park with a service user, notes from a group therapy session of Nordic walking in the nearby forest, interviews with art and movement therapists, and field notes from the in-patient ward.*

The hour-long interpretive session starts. Group members discuss, in an associative manner and without formal guidance, what specific thoughts, emotions, and associations my material provokes in them. I observe and note the communicative dynamics, topics, and emotions that unfold within the group. My material touches on the private lives of three persons present: one has a relative who works in a clinic; one is in training as a psychotherapist; a third states that she is a survivor herself and stresses what "intense" places wards can be while not commenting further on that aspect. I'm nervous. What if she perceives my descriptions as hurtful, triggering, or misrepresentative? Extremes in opinions and affective responses mark the atmosphere amongst discussants. Several members remark that my descriptions of the encounter with the service user in the park were enjoyable to read, ascribing to it a vivid, "almost poetic", and sometimes ironic style evocative of the sensory and affective dimensions of our walking interview and the surroundings. Among some participants, euphoria and a feeling of "wanting to read more like that" arises. After this initial buoyancy, however, an irritated discussant questions the bright mood within the plenum. She perceives my poetically verbalized encounter as disturbing; the service user had attempted suicide shortly before the interview and suffered from severe anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Beyond the contradiction between aesthetic form and troubling content, she feels irritated by the distanced and enumerative style of the other portion of my field notes: the descriptions of events within the ward. She remarks that this selection of field notes overlooks the difficult side of that institution, which is that a significant number of service users experience violence and coercive measures. By meandering through the literary aesthetics of the park, my writing concealed that the psychiatric ward, after all, is a troubled space. Others agree, and the atmosphere suddenly changes from lightheartedness to growing uneasiness. Several members find it hard to follow my sober and sterile accounts about the myriad events within the ward, as they can hardly picture the spaces and atmospheres—not to mention the personal experiences of service users and staff involved—due to my protocol-like writing style. Ultimately, a sense predominates in the group that there is a blind spot in my feelings and thoughts as a researcher regarding day-to-day life in the ward. The group moderator closes with the observation that the material and the dynamics during the previous hour of discussion leave the group with a feeling that something important remains unsaid.

In a session when my seemingly "trivial" material gathered from art and movement therapy departments is discussed, a long-standing group member has remained unusually silent and rises to speak only towards the session's end. She describes a feeling of intense physical and emotional discomfort without having an apparent reason for it; moreover, she reports feeling a sense of dread and invisibility within the group dynamic that manifests as an inability to enter the conversation during large parts of the group discussion. She describes having had the bodily sensations of sweating and the urge to physically leave the room. I feel uncomfortable as I am confronted with such

a strong countertransference to my material—but in far greater measure, this verbalization of the latent brings considerable relief and clarity. A central but displaced feeling within my field that characterized the experiences of the interlocutors and myself—the experience of not feeling seen in times of overwhelm—has been named.

During the final phase of the session, I share my thoughts and feelings. I feel simultaneously relieved and exhausted after the session.

The vignettes demonstrate how I understood that my ethnographic perception had been influenced by institutional and personal ways of handling (or not handling) trouble. It explained why parts of my material resisted understanding: I had yet to find words for the uncanny ways the psychiatric clinic—and ultimately, academia—sometimes fails to provide a "safety net" for those in urgent need. When ethnographers understand their entanglement within institutional and interpersonal processes of (in)visibilization and transference, reciprocal vulnerabilities become communicable and can be critically reflected on.

In the following, I take insights gained in the supervision group as a starting point to question the trope of the researcher as an isolated entity. I argue for a conceptual expansion of epistemological authority towards a fluid, entangled collectivity from which individuality emerges and recedes in constant flux (Mol, Moser, and Pols 2010, 10).

Insight I: Emotions as Knowledge About Vulnerable Experiences

The responses from group members in reaction to my material indicate a core aspect of the field: the struggles against—or co-creation of—the impending invisibilization of vulnerable experiences. The clinic officially adopted its function as a site of caretaking in times of existential need, but paradoxically, many interlocutors (service users and staff members) complained that they did "not feel seen" by others or the "institution". Interactions that are figured as "caring" within institutional discourses could easily be perceived as violent by service users—especially coercive measures. I met sufferers who did not receive psychotherapy, only heavy psychotropic medication. Some staff members became targets of physical and emotional violence and, due to dramatic shortages of staff, were severely overworked. On a weekday morning, I accompanied a doctor to an urgent meeting in a closed ward. A sufferer had died during the night, and the doctors speculated that the nurses could have prevented it. Highly agitated, the senior nurse from the ward retorts, "What do you expect under those inhumane working conditions? We are humans as well; we can't deliver what the institution demands from us anymore."

Witnessing such instances as an ethnographer sparked vulnerability within me, even though I do not inhabit a racialized, neurodiverse, or gender-nonconforming body in the field, any of which would have compounded it (see also Berry et al. 2017). I felt overwhelmed by witnessing how suffering, hope, violence, and helplessness paradoxically coexisted in many clinics. As I possessed one of the scarcest resources—time to listen and observe—sufferers and staff members repeatedly offered narratives of "telling how one really feels" in confidential interviews. However, my position was not that of a decision-maker or a therapist, which challenged me in one-to-one encounters with those compulsorily hospitalized or

suffering from acute suicidality and psychosis. The work environment that employed me to conduct this research did not offer any formats for dealing *emotionally* with the violence and vulnerabilities I witnessed, experienced, and co-produced as an ethnographer.

Sanitizing the scope of ethnographic "work" from diversely experienced vulnerabilities divorces the "values of the heart" from the "values of the mind" within academia (see also Mahmood 2008); this separation creates ethical and epistemological harm. Values of the heart involve caring about complex reciprocal vulnerabilities in collaborative, intersubjective research by taking seriously the asymmetries, dissents, and irritations that inevitably accompany anthropology (Pels 2014, 230 referring to Mosse). It is an epistemological necessity for ethnographers that intersubjectivity in the field undergoes a reflexive "series of asymmetrical breaks" (Pels 2014, 229–30), which I argue must include its latent dimensions.

Insight II: The Unconscious Dimensions of Institutions

My second observation concerns the power of the unconscious within institutions in their daily functioning and ethnographies about them.

In my field, clinical discourses and practices offer a common language for articulating affliction and healing (Lester 2007, 381) and provide structure for those who suffer "extraordinary conditions" (Jenkins 2015, 259). Paradoxically, however, clinical systematization often contradicts the *experience* of psychiatric suffering, which may be unbearable, unfathomable, and incommunicable to others, regardless of whether they share the affliction (Jenkins 2015, 261).

From the perspective of institutional ethnography, my ethnographic material's latent aspects reflected clinical "ruling relations" (Smith 2005, 10): forces that are often—but not exclusively—textually mediated and connect across space and time by organizing the daily lives of all involved. In her feminist (auto-)ethnographic reflection, Smith (2005, 13) approaches institutional power from sensorial and embodied lived experience, where becoming attentive to one's emotions and the unconscious means to practice "embodiment on the terrain of the disembodied" within institutional structures.

Mario Erdheim (1991) conceptualizes the unconscious as a force that is shaped by socio-historical processes and stabilizes societal power relations. He regards the social production of unconsciousness as operating most powerfully within institutions like schools, prisons, churches, political organizations, and—crucially—the academic discipline of social anthropology (Erdheim and Nadig 1983, 132; Erdheim 2010). Moreover, Lundgaard Andersen (2012, 7 referring to Wellendorf) adapts psychoanalytic terms to fit institutional research contexts such that "institutional transference" encompasses all attitudes, projections, and associations the institution and its actors hold towards researchers and "institutional countertransference" denotes the emotional, embodied reactions of the researcher to those projections and positionalities.

My ethnographic perception within the clinic had been subtly but fundamentally directed—in Devereux's (1967) terms, "distorted"—by institutional ways of (not) addressing excesses of trouble and vulnerability. The ward's ritualized gestures of care thus poten-

tially figured as acts of caretaking *and* ways of repressing the disquieting helplessness in a medical system that occasionally failed to respond adequately to vulnerability—as reflected in my excessive, mostly enumerative field notes, almost devoid of experiential and emotional dimensions. Academic silences around reciprocal vulnerability somewhat eliminated the anxiety provoked (Devereux 1967) by the uneasy fact that the ideal of rational "observation" and political stewardship took a toll on me as a researcher.

I have thus outlined 1) the ethical necessity of considering the unconscious within institutional ethnographies to address larger power structures and discourses that circulate within the field. These structures co-produce manifestations on unconscious or semi-conscious levels for all actors involved, including researchers. 2) Additionally, I addressed diverse forms of violence and vulnerability that are created by the invisibility of the experiences of interlocutors and ethnographers within institutional paradigms inside and beyond academia (see also Schild 2021; Teo 2010).

Limitations and Open Questions

I concur with Pels (2014), who argues that even "after objectivity", anthropology cannot shed its historical rootedness within objectivist ideals. While no universal answer solves the objectivity problem in ethnography, retreating to the "romance of harmonious collaboration" (Pels 2014, 230) will never be a satisfying solution. From another perspective, Bourdieu (1993) has argued for a "non-narcissistic reflexivity" within academia, in which "(...) scientific reason cannot be given its full force unless the 'psychoanalysis of the scientific mind' is taken further by an analysis of the social conditions in which sociological works are produced (...)" (Bourdieu et al. 1991, 3). This critique continues to inspire present-day ethnographic supervision groups that question the motivations behind the researcher's actions, including the habituated situatedness of researchers (Ribeiro and Miraldi 2022, 121). Bourdieu's "psychoanalysis of the scientific mind" resonates with the working gaps that supervision groups address within anthropology. Yet we must ask whether habituated epistemic injustice can ever be overcome within academia, especially when interlocutors are not part of research clusters. Cherishing an "unromantic" view of intersubjectivity within supervision groups may not be a solution but merely one step towards becoming capable of holding the field's complexity. Meanwhile, we must resist viewing reflexivity as "something that goes without saying", as it ceases to be a living inquiry when it becomes just another box to check off (Ribeiro and Miraldi 2022, 114).

Moreover, borrowing psychoanalytic tools in ethnography presents its own challenges (see also Gammeltoft and Segal 2016, 405). Historically, psychoanalytic thinking has reproduced naturalizations of social phenomena alongside culturalist and gendered universalisms that mask the multivocality of individual experience (Winter and Brunner 2013, 420). As struggles for orientation in an unfamiliar setting accompany ethnographic positionality, emotional responses in the field can also mislead (Davies and Spencer 2010, introduction; Lorimer 2010, 100). Countertransference as a reflexive tool should not be used as a gateway to detached objectivity but as a means for exploring the multidimensionality of emotional

resonances in the field (Lorimer 2010, 100). Researchers can modestly harness the latent irritations of human encounters (Bonz et al. 2017, 28; Hollway and Jefferson 2000, 47) as inspiration for new epistemological pathways.

The silence around reciprocal vulnerability in the field has only recently been addressed in the wake of discussions about the researcher's (mental) well-being (www.fieldworkinitiative.org) and violence during fieldwork (Fletcher et al. 2022; Lester and Reyes-Foster 2019; Mahmood 2008; Schild 2021; Berry et al. 2017). As such, many questions remain to be addressed regarding supervision groups. For example, how can an intersectional group of members be encouraged in the vein of "fugitive anthropology" (Berry et al. 2017)? Likewise, what are the interconnections and differences between psychoanalytically informed group work and other forms of reflexivity in social anthropology?

Conclusion: Reflexivity as a Vulnerable, Intersubjective Practice

If anthropology seeks to address (epistemic) violence and reciprocal vulnerability in the field through methodology, the researcher's emotions and experiences must be integrated into epistemological practices. In this work, I have discussed how intersubjective and larger institutional and societal dynamics create multiple, often displaced vulnerabilities in the field. Beyond being an ethical necessity for various parties, caring about reciprocal vulnerability opens up unparalleled ways of understanding the field. Such insights cannot be achieved by isolated, intellectual reasoning alone. Only through the collective reflexivity of the researcher's lived experience in the field—which already renders one vulnerable in academia—are they attainable.

The intersubjective and institutional dynamics within our fields, including their unconscious dimensions, can be addressed experientially within psychoanalytically informed supervision groups for ethnographic fieldwork. Such formats innovate on method insofar as they invite the researcher's attunement to fieldwork's unconscious, vulnerable dimensions—not in isolation but via *collective,* associative work. Such "vulnerable" work is only possible within protected, intentionally created spaces that embody a feminist ethics of care within academia. I close these reflections by calling for more practical engagement in this direction. Much experimentation remains, and many alliances require building to nurture further explorations of exciting, empowering values of the heart (Mahmood 2008) within academic research environments.

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Author

Anna Hänni is a PhD student in social anthropology at the University of Bern. In her PhD project, she explores therapeutic multiplicity in in-patient psychiatric care in Switzerland. Working with reflexive and collaborative methods, she researches embodied experience, the senses and relational dimensions of medical and non-medical caring encounters within psychiatric clinics.
annemarie.haenni2@unibe.ch
University of Berne, Institute of Social Anthropology / Institute of Criminology and Criminal Law