**Beyond the Featureless in Social Theory: Text-Play and Epistemology -
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Abstract

Experience of social facts are inherently underscored by literature, which actualizes data
from the field, providing a virtual bridge for self-projection into the undefined. Written
strategies are the spinal chord that allows the grafting of theories. Epistemology, in other
words, is the result of weaving alphabets and cultural codes. Wolfgang Iser's concept of
text-play stands out here in light of the transcription of the immersive experience of being
'there' to create new psycho-dynamic theatres, in the 'here' – as dictated by displace-
ment-based anthro approaches to social fact (Geertz, 1988). Acted out in a self-unfolding
that defies conceptuality, text-play takes on a life of its own insofar as it is the field's de-
rivative and transplant. By connecting literary materialism with the imaginary and the
plastic, this bounce-back mechanism forms the flickering shadows behind the construc-
tion of knowledge, coagulates the bricks of the Atlantic pyramid, indiscriminately
projects the poietic hook to the indicible. Embedded in its *nocciolo,* the strategy of the *as
if* links social theory back to its subject, cuts out structuralism. Text-play marks the birth
of the epistemological performative. For an anthropomorphic substantiation, I balance the
key epistemological threads necessary for the architecture of anthro discourse – humanist
construction, *par excellence,* of infinite story-telling: *sapienza* (la) of man about man.
This article is a sequel to my take on the theory of interpretation published amid the col-
loquia of this journal in 2014. Integrating text-play function benefits an honest self-ap-
praisal of the way the anthropologist *films back.*

KEY WORDS : *textuality, episteme, split signifier, transference, bracketing, cartesian
anxiety, suspended denotation, intentionality, metaphor, map/territory*.

Introduction

In addition to his elaborations concerning thick description (Geertz, 1973), the emphasis on the *littérarité* of social theory was introduced to the study of anthropological epistemology by Clifford Geertz in *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Geertz, 1988). Subjectivity, authorship, textuality and note-taking infuse transcriptions in civilization studies with broodings about the 'self.'

Monograph-genesis takes a sharp turn away from realism towards self-fashioned reflexivity, lived out by the smalti glass tiles hieroglyphics, human essence cryptograms. In the philosophical study of humankind, this aspect can be traced back to Bronisław Malinowski, who actualized the paradox of social theory's textualism by leaving behind his intimate diary, thus provoking epistemology's dualism, which involved the immanent tension between objectivity-subjectivity.

Malinowski conflated the epistemological debate, by privileging the inscription of the *je-intime*, in spite of his demonstrated efforts to establish an empirically based social science in his monograph, *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (derived from field evidence, le terrain). This tension inherent in realist fact being based on the operationality of experience vs. the ontology of being, determined anthropological/sociological theory. The exposure of egocentric diary entries placed stress on individual experience to scrutinize cartesian anxiety. A further backtracking demonstrates that Franz Boas had also made recourse to literacy-based approaches to cultural exploration, as is evidenced by his collected stories of the Eskimo on Baffin Island (Nazaruk, 2015).

Textualism may very well be the nervous centre of social and anthro research, layed out along a *filière* of historical traces, back to the time of the invention of sister disciplines. Like pastoral narratives, texts have always mirrored experience, at the very least, in the mimetic sense of representation (Auerbach, 2003). In addition, they have acquired depth due to their function as the *reservoirs* of affects, ideas, images, and transcriptions of experience. In this article, I want to go one step further, and present the connected resolution that texts are in themselves experience, actualized and acted out through play and grounded in writing; my aim being to establish that those faculties determine the *poiesis* of social theory.

Bourdieu's usage of the phrase *philosophical fieldwork* in '*choses dites*' (sic) supports this idea. Texts are a type of philosophical *Weltanschauung,* which replaces the referential factor of immersive activity – the field. Entering the world in this framework, one performs participant observation not through the eyes of another culture,

but by brushing against the psyches: mental incarnations of existential, spiritual, meta-physical and physical experience – of other writers, who *enfantent* such scriptural arte-facts.

Suspended, in a virtual world, which creates other worlds, the epistemic project takes off. The denotation of signifiers is no longer the field with the intentionality of the subject, but a web of other texts with, indeed, eclipsed intentionality; notably, because they take-off and live a life independent of the source, sparked off by phantasms of the imaginary. In its genuine *incroccio* and performativity, play of texts transcends constitu-tion, or denotation of the signifier, accounting for the creation of the conditions necessary for this trigger into cultural hyper-reality.

Definition of text-play

Text-play is something that arises from the co-existence of the fictive and the imaginary in staging the human condition "in a welter of unforeseeable patterns" (Iser, 1993, p. xvii). It arises out of the channeling of internal forces – affects, reason, drives such as desire, intentionality – onto a model of free play which cannibalizes the object of study through a tour de force, anchored to the occurrence of signifying and reception, as well as the attribution of meaning. According to Iser, meaning is the outcome of an inti-mate rapport between a text and the interpretant, organizing consciousness in a post-structural formation of global figures that purport to transcend chaos in the Gestalt world.

"Like meaning, the fictive element of fiction cannot be the basic constituent of the text. Meaning is primarily the semantic operation that takes place between the given text, as a fictional gestalt of the imaginary, and the reader; hence, it is a pragmatiza-tion of the imaginary." (Iser, 1993, p. 20).

While text-play is initially denounced as liberated and free-floating, the pragmati-zation of imaginary attributes is intentionality, directing the imaginary to serve the needs of: a) fictions, and b) subjects. Through text-play, the imaginary guides the "generative matrix of the text" (Iser, 1993, p. 21). Malinowski's démarche of setting his fieldwork in the Trobriands, or Boas's in Baffin Island, represents such an experiential coalescence. This underscoring of a life-project, where the imaginary guides the phantasm, transpiring in meaning-producing outcomes such as cultural monographs, proliferated out of a field that aims to be scientifically deterministic. Insofar as they aim to satisfy criteria of reason and the scientific project, monographs have realist underpinnings. Yet, by providing an

out-of-the box semiosis around the structural differential, it is their innate ability for text-play that licenses their inscription into the cultural canon.

The emergence of sociologists as authors (Geertz, 1988) is validated by text-play showing how "sounds can be awakened" (Husserl in Iser, 1993, p. 141), to determine the "figural factors" indispensable for the co-option of social/anthro texts into literary studies. Sociologists realize this thesis by adopting social fact as the basis for an atélier for sketches of abstractions of personal (and likely metaphysical) life. By focusing on sociological aspects of man's behaviour in collective society, scientists and culture studies inventors use text-play to live out the subjectivity that plagues their personal notes from the field, to then obliterate that subjectivity. They reverse the denotation of maps extracted from referential territories. Text-play enables this gear-shifting because it is applied to the imagining of an object no longer present, constituting a "decaying sense" (Hobbes in Iser, 1993, p.173). Fancy gives rise to various combinatorial of human experience, which social researchers transcribe through field notes, and transform into cultural monographs. Text-play relies on the imaginary, which does not produce its own salience, but which expounds the corollary of primary constituents of ethnographic experience (Iser, 1993, p. 184). This experience extends between perception, dream, and hallucination :

> "The factors that influence the manifestation of the imaginary will vary in their complexity. In perception, it is visual anticipation governed by intentional projections that release the imaginary. In the idea, the imaginary is directed by memory-laden, cognitive factors aiming at presenting the absent and the non-given. The dream is dominated by consciousness that the imaginary is nothing but imaginistic, although consciousness has no control over the images. In the daydream, the imaginary plays with our preoccupations, producing projected gestalts and then snuffling them out. In the hallucination, the imaginary triumphs over consciousness, which is present only as mutilated intentionality."(Iser, 1993, p.184)

Through the performative power of living it out like an identity and an invocation, the assimilation of the imaginary, results in the text-play that shadows fictions. Text-play is aided in these ethnographic fictions by the rewriting of experience, which predicates the framework of the magnum opus through permutations of textualism.

Signifying text-play

A semiotics of text-play aims to lay out the relationship between signs (texts) and their denotative function (in this case: performative play-acting abilities). This scheme presupposes the ability to seduce via text through aesthetic appeal to the imaginary of reception. 'Text' (writing, journals) connotes a signified of detachment, replacement and displacement from a referent, which may be that of:

1. Fieldwork or terrain in its geopolitical, descriptive stance or cultural underpinnings;
2. An ideation triggered by the imaginary which hails the author to live out the reality of other constructed worlds.

This second referent, is, in turn, the signifier of an unlimited semiosis which brings on the powerful works of fantasy, driven by desire. The existence of a double signification is present in the process of deconstructing the sign for 'text'.

Signifying the ability to depart from premises into thought and affect-laden spirals of authentic experience – detached, but fuelled by a feeble notion of the field – such 'text' is produced. Through further extrapolations, incarnating a signifier for the free blanket space of the emergence of institutions, such *hyphology* (Barthes) circumscribes the human condition (Iser, 1993, p. xviii). At all levels of the interaction, there is a double operation of imagining and interoperating (Iser, 1989, p. 250). There is hence a double or triple bind at the level of signification, subject to splitting following oppositionary pulls to models of reader-reception theories.

Justified on the grounds of scientific inquiry, a reformulation of the same problem posits a divergent definition of the sign ('text'). First, text is the field ('truth') including the idea of the virtue and purity of 'being there,' *ici et là-bas* (Geertz, 1988), signifying also the workings of the ego, which tries to balance the id and the superego. At the very least, the ego has been *there* and tries to work out solutions of reconciliation. In that sense, text is data, reason and judgment. Second, the sign ('text') represents the roots of the libidinal instincts, passionate desire and the self-in-the-process-of-reparation. It determines the extent of the subjectivity of the author.

The sign ('text') is both the geographical, cultural, social world surrounding the author, underscoring dark, intimate predilections and intimate attachments. The fork between the realist determination of text by the field and the seemingly unobserved shadow of personhood: risks the eruption due to the two-tier notion of mind body-dualism. The field is the body to be materialized, the self is the mind: immaterial clashing with the

physical world to capture its essence and live an experience. A semiotics of text-play unravels the substance of an old-age proposition, extending it, however, to the third dimension: that of illimited pantomimes.

The performative identity-building aspect of coming together in an homo(i)erotic dance represents the *to* and *from* movement of waves, or more dramatically, the contradictory juxtaposition of adversaries in Geertz's Balinese cockfight. 'Play' is acted out by men who write texts. Play is politics, and text-play is both libertarian and Machiavellian. Text-play uses idealization to create new experiences, constellations of social and cultural power. Play becomes co-opted as yet another signified of 'text,' naturalized through social roles.

Iser suggests that one may arrive at entering a new life through play, where "the imaginary can only run in circles" (like in Beckett, Iser, 1993, p. 246). Thus, possibilities exist to completely erase the original referent of fieldwork, inaugurating a fantasy of dream-like dissociations. It is possible that Malinowski's intimate journal was one such conscience that suspended its own intentionality (Iser, 1993, p. 246), despite his intense efforts to inscribe the natives as real.

In dream-like states, the difference between signifier and signified disappears as opposed to being maintained. Which brings me to posit that Bronisław Malinowski's attempt to erase and reformulate his diary was to promote coherence, a tribute to the Social Powers and to reconnect the text-signifiying-dissociation with the text-signifiying-the-field. Since the connection was weak, Malinowski revamped his texts through re-writing (réécritures) to impose his will for clarity and transparency, before the rational-minded reception, satisfying a norm anticipated by him, despite the divergence of his original experience, which explains boundary-crossing.

From the point of view of semiotics of text-play, Iser captures the problem by arguing that in the map-territory relationship, the *suspended denotation becomes the map*, instead of the *map being the territory* (Iser, 1993, p. 248). The difference is that the territory will collapse in the text not-as-itself but as its own split-signifier. The result being the production of an impression: a *simulacrum*. The latter is to be distanced from the territory by the intrusion of the split-signifier, to coalesce and prejudge the pull on the referent in unforeseen patterns, contextually determined by sweet creativity and inventiveness. This explanation of the 'split signifier' endorses the view that Aristotelian and Auerbachian mimesis is an out of reach mirage. It is always what we perceive we see, not what we actually see that counts. Often, visulism (Fabian, 1983) meets tricks along the way.

Rejection of semiotic accounts of textuality

Critics of this essay recommend looking for historiographical accounts of textuality in Yuri Lotman and Umberto Eco. The pursuit of this path has led me to discover convergence between my programme and theirs concerning the finality of the research: texts, sign and human experience. Yet on the grounds of their overly intense favoritism towards encyclopedic approaches to sign, accomplished through literary anatomies (Eco, 1984; Lotman, 1977; Lotma, 1990), I cannot credit these two scholars in the area of sociology of meaning. Their systematic, structural approach conflates experience with patterns and modules that obliterate the beauty and mystique of the study of man in society. Much diagrammatic visualism (Fabian) informs their topographies. Human experience goes beyond such maps of general semantics (Korzybski). To capture human experience, there is a need to go beyond the outline and the point-form lists and *recettes de cuisine* to produce meaning through the experience of reading and interacting with the text, to unveil the performative aspects of touching and being touched by the alterity of fleeting ideas, including entering into the tenebrous labyrinth of silences excommunicating traces of being in nothingness.

Lotman and Eco do not accomplish this. Their work is based on an undisclosed attachment to scientific aspirations vis-à-vis social reality. To these two authors, reality can still be grasped, captured in a psychoanalytic box, with an indiscriminate quantum field. It is my opinion that reality can not be grasped, mainly due to the performative aspect of social life, which is by definition undefined and boundless. As Julia Kristeva argued, to feel social reality, there is only one way: through a "révolution du langage poétique" (1974). Only in literature, can a medium be found for encompassing desire and power, a social dimension of psychoanalysis, cultural institutions and ritual, i.e., social fact. As much as science has good intentions, it defies the figment of Maslow's theory of basic needs – the deployment and connection of the human bond to society.

While this essay attempts to demonstrate text-play in social theory via a semiotic approach, it is premised on fidelity to literary values, because the 'human' aspect of social experience can be gauged only within the *innommable* power of literary expression. The study of signs contained within sign-sociology and sign-informatics indulges in the presupposition that the organization of human signs is universal, irrespective of external millieux and stimuli. The attribution of sign values appears to be local-specific, which calls for studies on the cultural differences of social norms. Exhausting the case could be

done only if genealogies of meaning and non-meaning are interpreted from a cross-cultural perspective (Marcus & Fischer, 1986).

Discussed here through Iser, the structure of the *as-if,* is plastic: it connects literary materialism with visceral imagination, establishing the parameters of a human hook, which allows one to transcend this precarious imbalance. The power to imagine elevates man beyond the boundaries of signs, meanings become recreated and rewritten, on *bâtit des châteaux en l'air.* Human experience is locked in the abodes of common men, for which language is always insufficient, although man is the shepherd of being (Heidegger, 1947).

This essay offers common interest because, driven by a desire to construct the fundamentals of human knowledge, it connects the intangible with the tangible. Since it does not anticipate that the attachment of systemic values sabotages the complexity and conundrum of secrets within the social body, the semiotic approach is self-destructive. It takes things at face value, and disqualifies epistemological depth and experience-depth. It involves much catachresis, being thus deforming. My approach in this essay goes one step further because it links semiotics with an inquiry into epistemology, which somehow absolves it from the sin of falling into discursive *effacement.*

Textuality and the problem of knowing

Epistemology of text-play has affinities with the natural sciences by embedding interaction in hard, realist facts in so far as it channels phenomena and experiences. While on the surface, text-play is related to semiotics as an arrangement of non-intentional and intentional signs, its deep emphasis on fieldwork makes text-play grounded on solid, verifiable fact. Text-play is not a mood or the invention of a whimsical psychic phenomenon: implanted in social structures, it is a game, which makes the mind engage with the image of fieldwork, creating, by elimination and through interaction, a social culture of hybridity, polyphony and exchange. The language aspect of text-play makes it seem like a literary creation, but in fact, it is the result of concrete maneuvering of hard data, arranged through rhizomatic reconnections to obtain specific cultural results. The code in which this data is transferred is linguistic and literary, but the heart of the problem is realist, which precludes it from being considered a 'soft' science.

The mind-body division seems irreducible to reason and passions, which are enmeshed together. Being considered instead in terms of objectivity-subjectivity, they possess ethical refrains (obligation vs. sensibility). In anthropology, this debate has been

represented by the juxtaposition of ethnographers' writings, between cultural monographs (synthetic and reasoned) and autobiographical texts (diaries, field notes) – which are held to be distinctively subjective, despite being derived from the above-mentioned hard aspects of "going out there to see it for yourself."

Ethnography, then, is a blurred genre, because it mixes both aspects of the epistemological question into outputs, which seem drawn from the inborn qualities of authors. This disproves ideas such as "mind is nothing but brain." It also casts a new twist to the notion that, "if mind is not physical, how can it affect the physical world?" It certainly shows that the 'ghost in the machine' has outward effects on reality, feeling other's reception of human artefacts/remains/da-sein. The objectivity-subjectivity debate has often been analyzed from the perspective of visual perception. Iser's text-play is unique because by entering the world defined by the mode of 'play,' text becomes altered and may lead to the creation of hallucinations, which are not induced through contact with illicit substances, but are the result of crossing and clashing of threads of ideations, producing unique synergies.

Cartesian dualism endorses deductive reasoning, evidence, exhaustivity, reduction and causality, which pose limitations to Iser's system of ideations. As ideation of text-play raises the player to a new life, with a break from old ontological premises, there is no certainty that notions such as neutrality and faithfulness can be realized. Text-play is post-fact. One becomes subsumed by its actions in the new phase – after the participant's observations and the collection of data – allowing the reader to immerse in the field through a sort of mental reconstruction of links, bringing him nearer and reinscribing his distant glance through a state of awakening.

Text-play is post-field, but in fact, it is an empirical testing ground for collected data, strengthening the canon in a vertical fashion (Saussure, 1916). Text-play resists determinism and decomposition. It builds an artificial, socially constructed 'science' postulating a phenomenal and interactionist concept of knowledge, based on the interactionist self. Text-play is the backyard of a research perception labyrinth, inspired by real facts, but transcending surface boundaries.

This constructive aspect of text-play allows us to transcend the subject-object dichotomy through interactivity, bracketing the illusion of positivism. Moreover, text-play is sophisticated to the point of allowing an observer to experience the 'qualia' of a headache, the taste of wine, or the perceived redness of the sky, thanks to its *as-if* ability. In this way, this aspect also poses a fundamental challenge to materialist explanations of the mind-body problem. Text-play circumvents qualia's inability to be verbally account-

ed for, controlled, or to be heartfelt. Texts can be arranged to appear like simulacra of reality, assuming different relationships to physical brain-states.

Mechanics of text-play

History

Iser explains the shift in discussing post-structural aspects of ideation as overcoming "closed systems" (the cosmos of Greek thought and the medieval world picture), where the focus is placed on mimesis to channel tangibility, despite issues of perception (Iser, 1989, p. 249). Representation goes through a crisis, because world-making replaces linear description, exploding the sign via steps entailing new levels of capturing the senses. Representation was a qualifier of art during Medieval times, but was hardly ever well described, except for accounts like those of Gombrich, which emphasized its process-abilities (Iser, 1989, p. 250). Representing reality is thus different from painting a pastoral painting – it throws man into phases of metaphysical and ontological conditions, as a result of defamiliarization through the enactment of subtle and discrete psycho-dynamics, pulling him into a grammatical matrix of otherness.

Location

Location moves from the field: from representing reality, from subjectivity: representing the autobiographical self to the only sphere of performative contestation: the literary text .

"Authors play games with readers, and the text is the playground." (Iser, 1989, p. 250).

This statement localizes text as fieldwork, but it also identifies the unique and privileged notion of the anthropologist as author (Geertz, 1973). As a location of culture, the text becomes potentially activated through the interpretative attempts of reading-bound social theory. Dis-locating culture from the field (realism) to the text (incorporation of literary idealism) presupposes the presence of an author-reader relationship. As personal factors tinge the decoding process of signifiers, which give meaning only through the inclusion of others through the masquerade of the self, this dialogue is enmeshed in subjectivity.

Culture being transported and subject to a transfer of attachment, locating culture in the text violates the notion of 'truth.' This shift preserves culture at the moment of writing and liberates the taking on of meaning, by aligning a crescendo of suggestibility-laden indicators which serve to direct the interpretation process. While semiosis is unlimited, located culture is assisted by language:

"For no matter which new shapes the reader brings to life, they are all certain to encroach on – and hence change – the referential world contained in the text. Now since the latter is fictional, it automatically invokes a convention-governed contract between author and reader indicating that the textual world is to be viewed not as a reality but *as if* it were a reality." (Iser 1989, pp. 250-251).

Dis-locating the world in texts prompts the split-signifier to dominate discourse instead of reality, foiling the notion of accurate map-replacing. The smallest play-space is produced by the split signifier, which is stripped of its designating function so that it may be used figuratively, thanks to the text's fictional indication that what is said is only to be taken *as if* it were meant. This introduces the idea that the split signifier is really representative of the imaginary, which is embodied in fiction, a replica of the world – a human invention projected onto a literary medium.

"And so whatever is repeated in the text, is not meant to denote the world, but merely a world enacted." (Iser 1989, p. 251).

As a result of brushing against the all-powerful stimulus of fantasy, 'enacting' is driven by the ideation of the *as if*. Dis-location of ideational culture in a text, its production of fictionality, becomes an embodiment of a type of necessary sensory boundary-crossing. Literary intoxication elopes from the confines from fact:

"Hence in disclosing itself, fictionality signalizes that everything is only to be taken *as if* it were what it seems to be, to be taken – in other words – as play." (Iser, 1989, p. 251).

Dislocation of culture into text *de facto* invites an end to conservatism, and an aperture for inquisitive, inventive, reflexive inter-textuality of the ludic, which undermines the foundations of social life and discourse by deconstructing rationality and scientific determinism.

Lifeline

The lifeline of games is preserved, so long as the results are not achieved. Social fact, then, is often a lifelong unresolved *cursus* of tensions. The persistence of social riddles lies in their inability to satisfy the players on the the justice of outcomes, bringing on just or unjust wars:

> "Games head towards results, and when the differences are either bridged or even removed, play comes to an end." (Iser, 1989, p. 252).

Overcoming social barriers leads to a diffusion of anxiety about outcomes and underscores enmities due to competition. In a text that dislocates culture, the game is not A vs. B, but concerns the aspect of playfulness, which leads to newly constructed worlds. The interpreter feels on edge by entering a defamiliarizing zone, but there is no inherent danger in being a third party to a fictionalized culture, even though just or unjust attachments may be formed. When options are critically examined by living out the *as if* ideations, text-play is the prerequisite antecedent to informed choice,

> " If we take the result of the textual game to be meaning, then this can only arise from arresting the pale movement that, more often than not, will entail decision-making . But any decision will eclipse countless aspects brought to view by the constantly shifting, constantly interacting and hence kaleidoscopically iterating positions of the game, so that the game itself runs counter to its being brought to an end." (Iser, 1989, p. 252)

The metaphor of the kaleidoscope serves to rearrange meaning based on power-positions, to show the infinite potential of signifying interpretation. The game builds on itself, when *anthropos* idealizes the *as if* catapult, because it provides a passage to a safe-heaven of renewed straddling positions, distanced plungeons into reflexivity, "upholding the difference it seeks to eradicate." (Iser, 1989, p. 252). Defying further conceptualization (Iser, 1989, p. 253), the *train train quotidien* of text-play depends on duality, where the author seeks to remove or maintain a difference.

Text-play can be interpreted in terms of stakes and strategies, which define the possibilities. Like fieldwork, of which it is a simulacrum, text is the subordinate field, where a social theater takes place, that the authors themselves cannot consciously de-

scribe, because 'play' is bigger than language and bigger than social facts. It is a ghetto, where new forces of complicity emerge to undercut and decenter the dominion of power, by walking the underground corridors of value-clashes within social order. Text-play is the inborn site, the crossing of vertical paradigmatic narratives (Saussure, 1916) http:// visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/S4B/sem03.html).

> "Even such one-sided theories as those of Huinzinga, assert that play precedes all its possible explanations." (Iser, 1989, p. 253).

Setting the game in motion (Iser, 1989, p. 254), split signifiers and schema form the constituent parts of play-space. Culture is located in literature like in a dream-like space, *imagogie*. Regarding transformations and figurations of the featureless (Iser, 1989, p. 254), play may well be the inactive potential of the imaginary (Iser, 1993, p. xviii). Outcomes may be calculated like in game theory, but the subjective quality of the game remains unparalleled, and is subject to mystery-mystification: non-representability.

The game's only shadow may be deflected by measuring, if you apply a realist approach, or feeling, if you apply a subjective approach – the calm oscillations that "permit the coexistence of the mutually exclusive" (Iser, 1989, p. 255). Games transmute into a flow of opposing energies through orchestrated motions of conflict and renewal. They are dances in the cultural sense, a galop to transcend shifts in the balance of power, liberating incommensurable desire to become *assouvi*.

Play arises from absences to be filled (featureless aspects of the imaginary), which require unfolding (Iser, 1993, p. xviii) and for which fiction offers the site for negotiation. Because play is implanted with psychic experience, it has plasticity that can only be captured to consume intricate patters in indeterminate ways (Iser, 1993, p. xviii) by the "staging of the human condition" (Iser, 1993, p. xviii) through discursivity. Iser proposes a typology of four games: agon, alea, mimicry and ilinx. I will provide applicative illustrations for these from the cultural world around us, notably by using as examples the games Bronisław Malinowski played in his ascent.

The first game is agon, or rather, a fight or contest over values or norms. An example of agon is the juxtaposition of just and unjust wars, like the Cold War vs. Western hegemony or the Arab-Israeli conflict. In fiction, these can be transposed as competing claims for truth-values and identity politics. Calculating risks in Machiavellian terms may be a manifestation of agon, exemplified in terms of theories of international relations.

The second game is alea, based on change and the unforeseeable, through defamiliarization (Iser, 1993, p. 256). By exposing the shortcomings of dominant thought,

have offered portraits of alterity, literary studies, which challenged familiar semantics, by outstripping allegiance to ethnocentrically determined premises. The work of Malinowski serves in that vein to paint a portrait of the indigenous as a very intelligent counterpart to the white man (Payne, 1981), which Malinowski continued by supporting non-Western PhD candidates like Xiatong and Kenyatta. Similarly, Gayatri Spivak's call for the inclusion of subaltern voices in discourse is another such example. Lafitau's work, *Mœurs de Sauvages Américains*, prompts us to ask: What if the tables were turned?, posing a self-image of the white man through his contact with the other, instead of over-analyzing the 'savage.'

The third game is that of mimicry, a play pattern designated to generating illusion. Malinowski's monograph provided the illusion, which structured research through a "unity of voices" in the social theory program at the London School of Economics, but which he himself ruptured by revealing his diary. Two premises support the play pattern of mimicry:

1. The more perfect the illusion, the more real the world it depicts will seem.
2. If the illusion, however, is ruptured and revealed for what it is, the world it depicts becomes a looking glass enabling the referential world outside the text to be observed (Iser, 1989, p. 256).

Malinowski's illusion was armoured and helped to strengthen the observation of cultural norms of scientific determinism. Posthumous admission to the diaries called for stepping out of the comfort zone to acknowledge a concealed reality, which actually acted here according to the play pattern of agon, a contest beneath the philosophical foundations of social action with its overwhelming subjectivity. Mimicry consisted of perfecting the effacement of this aspect, to fit the anticipated norms of behaviour as a means to political advancement. Similarly, disclosure of the diary's contents revealed a seed of the defamiliarizing alea play pattern, as it advanced an unconceivable portrait frustrating the "reader's convention-governed expectations" (Iser, 1989, p. 256).

This leads to the conclusion that the game is ever changing, irreducible to one set of rules, marrying the "subverted, undercut, canceled positions, carnivalizing them as they are played off against each other." (Iser, 1989, p. 256). Hence, the fourth game, ilynx, the intermarrying of other games.

Conclusion

By framing his exposition on text-play in terms of transformation-induced presence or absence, Iser challenges the revocation of representation by reducing it to an illusory status of mimicry, which feebly transcribes data as "staged transformation" (Iser, 1989, p. 260), triumphantly transplanting the *as if* onto hardly tangible realities. In its inducement of process imagining reality, alluded to is 'performance' in social theory, culturology refashions the brute nature of this social fabric when creating hybrid fictions.

Although these staged transformations are not lies, they are certainly 'absent' or flickering "by means of the fact that staged transformation is only play" (Iser, 1989, p. 260). Defined by a geometric algorithm, the open-ended human script spectacle involves the reader taking part in masquerades.

With regard to the cultural monograph, Malinowski's strategies during his life appear conservative. Yet an x-ray of his literature exposes the application of aleatory rules – in the areas of analysis and writing, credibility granting to his innovation. It is safe to posit that Malinowski used text-play to stage a 'literary performance' at the LSE, by engaging in a never-ending endorsement of split-signifiers through rewriting (*réécriture)* of the drama of fieldwork, which further distanced the map from the territory.

Despite the inaccuracy of the somewhat Machiavellian narrative manœuvres, the self was cut to promote realist fact. Malinowski's case can be used as a golden rule for coining the professional rituals of researchers/social thinkers, who use discursive strategies to *stage* dissimulation of social facts. Through phenomenal manipulations of the *as if* ideation in the heart of a subject, the pursuit of sociology undermines the possibility of objectivity. By connecting the points, *as if* transcends reality and pushes the anthropologist to over-perform at his analytical functions with original scriptural outcomes. The material fused with the metaphoric, Wolffgang Iser's *as if* abolishes structuralism and links social theory back to its subject.

Acknowledging text-play, i.e., writing and narrativity in the social sciences, one absolves oneself of falling into partisan traps of privileging Self over Other. Before grammarizing and structuralizing knowledge, text-play offers explanative power for understanding the sensible interpretive process. By appealing to passion and creative invention, text-play draws theories on the quest to cultivate the field. Underscored by the mystic power of the *as if,* imaginary spirals pull authors towards unlimited semiosis in the modelization of experiments. Writing sublimates the transcendence of semiotic ecology. There is unabsolved faith that anthropology exhumes the human differential.

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