

Der Feldweg läuft aus dem
Hofgartentor zum Ehnried...
Vom Ehnried her kehrt der Weg
zurück zum Hofgarten-tor...
Das Einfache ist noch einfacher
geworden.

Heidegger: *Der Feldweg*

Vive la France - quand même

Heine: *Fransösische Zustände**

The 'Hermeneutic Circle' of Hans Skjervheim

Per Otnes

Among contemporary Nordic philosophers few can equal the standing of Hans Skjervheim (1926-). This is not the place for a CV, for which cf. the introduction to Skjervheim 1991. But he certainly is a main figure behind the *hermeneutic turn* of recent decades (Bostad 1995,

* For translations of foreign language quotes see p. 229-30.

1997, Østerberg 1996), away from the logical empiricism - once of Uppsala school fame - so dominant in the late thirties and the early post-1945-years, its main local proponent being Arne Næss (1912-), the leading philosophy professor at Oslo University 1939-70.

The idea of reassessing Skjervheim's¹ role and writings took off from two recent texts, Jon Hellesnes' brief essay (1996) *The last caution from Skjervheim*, and Harald Grimen's anthology of HS's shorter texts (1996). A first cursory reading will give something of a double exposure, one picturing the philosopher as almost a latter-day radical, a budding leftist in his mature age, the other leaving an impression of an uncompromising and rather dismal conservative, of verbose anti-marxism, a man of no compromises, making a point of letting even old heroes appear, now, plain old (Adorno, cf.p. 190 below).

For second, more thorough readings of the commentators and their sources there is also the question of internal consistency in a writer who made it his vocation to pinpoint and criticise such shortcomings in others. Then there is the question of the scope, broad or narrow, of his interest and commitment in issues professional or political. First and last, however, it is the obvious question post fact: was he right? or wrong? to what extent? what should we keep, revise, or reject today?

The chain of arguments is as follows: Left or right leanings is first assessed solely on the evidence of his texts in various periods. After a digression on his not challenging Economics, follow discussions of his philosophy, notably his his *Participant and Observer*² distinction, including a provisional suggested amendment so far. Next, his use of the concept 'trans-intentionality' is discussed, partly as test of his internal consistency, but more as a display of his philosophical role,

¹ Hereafter abbreviated HS. - His writings, sparingly translated, are almost exclusively in the New Norwegian language form, a laudable instance of a *littérature mineure*. Hence the exception here, following his own example (HS 1959), trying to open up a minor language contribution for wider appreciation, criticism etc.

² Hereafter P-O.

i.e. acting *vis-à-vis* some opponents as an observer or a not very thorough participant. Habermas' praise and criticism of HS are read in that light, and his P-O model changed and expanded in the process - from existential choice via language game (Wittgenstein) into social field (Bourdieu). Based on this is a critical review of the *herrschaftsfreien Dialog* model - sound or inviting deceptions? a question left open, though more nearly supporting the Field model than the Communicative model. Next, from philosophy and texts to history, reviewing HS's fields as an actor, placing his 'text in their context'. Finally a conceptual recap of the contemporary, somewhat reduced status of his P-O-couple, as if 'squaring the hermeneutic circle' of his life, times and thinking.

Turning Left ...

Hellesnes, after a parade of HS's exploits³ starts with claiming that

... by the end of the 80s and the beginning 90s a political reorientation occurred in HS. Not to the effect of a change of his basic social philosophical views, which remained as they were during the 70s. But he realised that an altogether different group than the left radicals was really a danger for society (Hellesnes 1996:6)

- viz. the yuppies and the ideology they left behind, notably MBO or 'management by objectives'. And Hellesnes goes on quoting HS from an interview by Thue (HS 1991):

³ Though no doubt worthy of honours this intimates a process of consecration under way. Having liked and admired the man and his work (while not often agreeing), his worldly proportions should yet be retained - 'on earth as it is in heaven'. The curious custom of philosophers, their very uneven division of labour between the consecrated few and their numerous exegetes had better give way for future on par discussions.

(MBO) originates in Business Administration, which from the logical point of view is weakest among all the social sciences. Right from the start there are simplifications so crude that it all becomes absurd when it is implemented in the universities, colleges and the education system in general ... letting room for simpleton Jacobins who want to turn all of society upside down. The fact that they are Jacobins of the Right only makes people not believe their eyes (Hellesnes 1996:7, HS 1991:27).

Earlier he said:

In my opinion it is a philosophical insight that such a language (stemming from business administration) is only marginally adequate for most serious contexts. I generally do not approve of business administration's colonisation of intellectual life (HS 1991:16).

And Hellesnes goes on pointing out that HS at that time was applying his old criticism of instrumentalism not only to his old enemies positivism and marxism but to "*new management*" (Hellesnes 1996:8), i.e. MBO, as well. The source in HS himself here seems to be mainly a short press feature article from 1990, reprinted in HS (1992:255-58), plus the interview quoted⁴.

Other traits of his political reorientation as seen by Hellesnes include criticisms of the tabloid, or "yellow" press (Hellesnes 1996:9, HS 1992:37-44), and criticisms of post-modernism and post-structuralism (HS 1991:28-9, 1992:45-58 cf. p. 202-6 below).

⁴ Østerberg (conversation) speaks of a public meeting in Oslo university's *Gamle festsal* the same year (1990), where Skjervheim maintained his criticism of MBO, but adding notably that «business managers have abandoned MBO by now».

... or staying Right?

The focus and general impression of Grimen's anthology (HS 1996) is very different. HS emerges as a genuine 'value conservative', of firm, unchanging basic opinions. For example, Grimen makes the point that his interest in the ecology debate was *not* a left-leaning change of his later years but firmly rooted in writings up to 20 years older (1996:37, cf. p. 181 ff.). HS is a die-hard anti-marxist, to the point even of blaming a non-marxist writer (Faldbakken) who, in differing with social-realist literature, still quotes a colleague (Fløgstad) saying that Marx by now is part of our common folkways. Undue concessions if not even a yielding to marxism, wrote HS in 1981, admonishing said authors to quit dabbling and leave philosophical problems to the philosophers (HS 1996:52-3), such as Nils Gilje and himself. Indeed the bulk of Grimen's book is a rather monotonous parade of anti-marxist arguments⁵, making HS appear as akin to the French *nouveaux philosophes*, whose exaggerated and largely superficial texts enjoyed short-lived 1970s fame, an interlude largely slighted when the post-structural and post-modern waves arrived. Too poor a company for HS, a much better philosopher⁶.

The only not so conservative criticisms found in Grimen's collection are (1) a short paper on the 1960s university reform proposals (*Ottosenkomitéen*)⁷, and (2) a group of four final papers on ecology or environmental problems. The first is 'radical' in the sense that it worries

⁵ Part II's 115 pp. out of in sum 185 p. HS's own texts.

⁶ Østerberg says HS spoke of e.g. Glucksmann as a *compagnon de route*. Whether in the straight (fellow traveller) or in the Leninist («useful idiots») sense we do not know.

⁷ The committee's proposals, once causing a wave of protest, are by now (1997) established facts in much of academic coursework, not well remembered - if not even actively implemented - by some of those who were active protesters 30 years ago.

... that a thoroughly well-organised course of study will necessarily make for a situation where those (students) who are critically inclined to the totality will be maladjusted, since they will necessarily "waste time", and hence risk falling out of the system (1996:46, NB orig. publ. 1969)

The second, more prolonged criticism, makes the point in passing (HS 1996:186-92) that marxism, too, has no solution to environmental problems. But the substance of his argument is a proposal to allow more room for philosophy (there too) in discussion and action on the environment, with some support given e.g. to the 'ecosophy' of Arne Næss (1976) and the *Technik-philosophie* of Hans Lenk (1982). And there is a prolonged review of a text by Valéry, of *Zauber-lehrling*-worrying content, ending with HS concluding that philosophy well applied may nullify such worries. Not one word about the MBO-criticisms focussed by Hellesnes⁸.

There are even traces of a turn towards the *more* conservative. In the early 60s he recommended Bonn as the place for further sociology study "because Adorno is there, the cunning old fox"⁹. In 1980 he summarily dismisses Adorno and his negative dialectics as "a monument over a time that is past", supporting instead Kolakowski's criticisms of Adorno and his basic root in marxism (HS 1996:151-4).

*

A diptych of striking contrasts should by now be in full view. Whose is the better picture? Which has a better basis in the sources?

⁸ In all fairness, one brief such text is included in Gilje and Grimen's earlier anthology, HS 1992:255-8, cf. previous mention.

⁹ Norw. *Bonn, fordi Adorno er der, ein gamal luring*. For written, not spoken praise of Adorno, cf. HS 1976:403-11.

On balance steady

The sources are meagre for a start. HS being a talker rather than a writer left texts, brilliant at best but never copious; two longer treatises and further essays, most of them brief, the latest published in 1990-91¹⁰. Hellesnes' views are based mainly on Thues' interview (HS 1991), and further two short essays from 1987 and 1990¹¹. Grimen's basis is mainly older texts, with the important exception of the two final essays in his collection (1996:194-224), both on ecology, both first published in 1991, quite sufficient to establish that there are no signs of a HS 'radical turn' on environmental issues.

In support of a 'radical turn' in HS we are left with two essays and an interview, then. On review the impression is that Hellesnes has a point which he slightly exaggerates. HS' later views on MBO and the tabloid press are earnestly critical, no doubt, hence welcome and agreeable. Yet they are in keeping with his established views, notably academic elitism¹² and economic paternalism which cannot in any reasonable sense count as 'radical'. He opposed MBO in universities more for worrying over conservative than over radical students' and teachers' futures - just as he did in his *Ottosen*-criticism 20 years earlier (cf. p. 189 above). And his 'anti-yuppieism' in economics was directed mainly against its public applications (by *Statskonsult*) and further against young upstart or parvenu business administrators and their instrumentalist errors, but not against established, 'old' corporate or political leadership, never a target of his criticisms¹³.

¹⁰ When he suffered a stroke which ruined his capacity for work (Hellesnes 1996:6).

¹¹ Both reprinted in Gilje & Grimen's collection HS 1992:37-44 and 255-8.

¹² An acid test of which being what you do if brilliant academics of opposite stands threaten to dominate the Academe: still favouring academic freedom for all? or only for those close to your own views? cf. 220 below.

¹³ His (rare) mention of political (Labour) leadership is ultra loyal if not bordering on the embarrassingly servile. Cf. HS 1976:451: "... my criticism of social democracy is of course not a total rejection but directed against a certain lack of self-reflection in social

One single trace of a more radical turn is visible; his statement that "Norwegian society is beginning to turn into an unhappy (*utriveleg*) place to live in" (1991:22, cf. 1996:7). This contrasts notably with his dismissal of Østerberg's reproach of him back in 1968: "You are not unhappy (*vantrivs*) enough over this society"¹⁴. But lamentably, even here on closer look his 'unhappy turn' is concerned not with the economy, the level of living, or with social conflicts, it is the current lack of concern for his 'instrumentalist fallacy': confounding practice and pragmatic action¹⁵ (HS 1992:172-8) which worries him.

We tentatively propose to group HS with philosophers known as 'reactionary modern' (Herf 1984), or *louche, révolutionnaire conservateur* (Bourdieu 1988, orig. 1975)¹⁶, in effect close to Heidegger and to Gadamer. We return to an appraisal of his role, discourse and texts seen in a broader context in this paper's conclusion.

Excursion: "Business as usual"

It is easy to agree with his criticism of Business Administration as "weakest among the social sciences", a discipline of "crude simplifications" etc. Only a pity HS never wrote an argumentation underpinning this view, which is mere unsupported opinion as it stands. Such a wealth of criticism of sociology and other social

democracy as it is at present ... which should be possible to correct, although it may take some time", first published in 1968, with Labour out of office.

¹⁴ His quote of DØ's spoken characterisation of HS occurred during a Students' association address in 1968, first printed in HS 1976:389.

¹⁵ Or seeking to resolve moral social problems by applying empirical, *zweckrational* reason only.

¹⁶ Curiously, Bourdieu and Herf do not refer to each other, although they present in many ways parallel exposées of positions and actors of the German philosophical field during the c. 1910-30s.

sciences (education, psychology, structuralist anthropology etc.) but hardly another word on Big Brother Economics¹⁷, the hegemonic discipline above all! Following Durkheim according to whom Economics is a doctrine not of facts but of *des simples possibles*, we might even add that Economics is basically a mathematically expressed generalisation of Accountancy, for which no one ever claimed a scientific status.

It is often forgot how recent a discipline Economics really is. When Rousseau wrote on *économie* in *La grande encyclopédie*, only four years before Smith's celebrated *The wealth of nations*, his long article covered topics which today would be labelled political science or constitutional law. There was a summary, though, on economy proper:

Résumons en quatre mots le pacte social entre les deux états. *Vous avez besoin de moi, car je suis riche & vous êtes pauvre; faisons donc un accord entre nous: je permettrai que vous avez l'honneur de me servir, à condition que vous me donnez le peu qui vous reste, pour la peine que je prendrai de vous commander* (Rousseau 1772)¹⁸.

This may suggest an explanation of *why* HS, the ardent social science critic, never criticised the positivism of economics¹⁹: Such a criticism

¹⁷ With one exception, HS 1996:209-11 (orig. publ. 1991), his mildly critical mention of Gudmund Hernes work' concluding that in neoclassical economics, "...the relation between *is* and *ought* is much too unclear, yes, from my point of view it seems not to be confronted at all".

¹⁸ Imagine reading that in a contemporary encyclopedia! Freedom of the Press would seem to have lost prestige roughly in proportion to the gains of Wealth and with it, Economics.

¹⁹ Apart from its marxian versions, plus his brief and late mention of MBO, cf. above. — A second reason for his not criticising Economics may be the difficulty of the task (cf. note 15), or simply, Economics' intricately mixed character: e.g. a super positivist definition of value; 'we need not define essential value; operationally, value is what people's choices show that they prefer'. Yet it has a non-positivist purpose, the heritage from accounts, *to win riches predictably*. So despite all its 'positivist' counting and modelling the discipline is in this respect basically committed rather than aloof, i.e.

might indirectly have weakened his intractable anti-marxism²⁰, by weakening its main current competitor. Stranger then that more *gauchisant* antipositivists did not challenge conventional Economics either. A task yet to be taken up?²¹

To be sure, there is an anti-positivist tradition within Economics itself but, lamentably, with pronounced ultra-liberal overtones (Hayek, v. Mises). The present division between 'positive' and 'welfare' economics is closer but yet not anywhere near the positivism controversy in the other social sciences. Yet curiously, self-appointed positivists such as Comte and Durkheim did approach anti-positivism - in their analyses of Economics. In his *Règles*, the latter comments as follows on J. S. Mill's definition of Economics' subject matter, given as follows "... those social facts the goal of which ... is the acquisition of wealth" (Mill):

Indeed, in all types of research it is only when the explanation of the facts is rather advanced that it is possible to establish that they have a goal, and to identify it ... Nothing then assures us in advance of the existence of a sphere of social activity wherein the desire for wealth really plays such a preponderant role ... The ideological nature of economics is implied even in the expressions used by economists...²²

'participant' rather than 'observer', cf. below. So 'instrumentalist', yes but not 'value-free'. Economists aim for change and gets it - sometimes.

²⁰ HS opposed marxism for two basic reasons: (1) he claims that its value theory is erroneous, and (2) he thought that a state of no, or entirely abolished, Authority (*Herrschaft*) is an impossibility (HS 1976:449) — in effect that 'some will always be more equal than others', cf. the present paper's conclusion.

²¹ We do not have to start quite from scratch, cf. Ramsøy (1985, 1986, 1992), to a certain extent followed up by Grønmo 1995. And Østerberg (1987) stands out, chapters 3, 6 and 7 notably, though mainly concluding that there is an interminable deadlock between liberal economics and its opponents.

²² From Durkheim (1964:24), orig. publ. 1895. NB the first sentence is retranslated here, the printed Engl. trans. being misleading (e.g. French *but* given as meaning, not goal). — As for Economic's ideological nature it follows directly from Mill's definition above:

Let's create *homines economicos* in our image, said Economy to unsuspecting *Homo* - until then mere *Sapiens Sapiens*. Economics, then, is Generalised Accountancy presented in a form so intricate as to obscure for the multitude that wealth or accumulation must of necessity come from the many and go to the few. A fact so obvious that denying it has become an industry in itself.

A Labour 'mid-bencher': Positive or critical?

HS' first main or basic commitment was the philosophical criticism of empirical social science²³. This anti-sociology brand of his was slow in gaining acceptance; however pertinent there was perhaps an exotic streak in it, a worry based in little-read classics such as Pareto and Mannheim (HS 1973, reprinted in 1992), drowning in the later debates over marxism. With the benefit of hindsight there had probably been more reason for worrying over less philosophical, less 'science-internal' problems: viz. the increasing dependency of social research on its commissioning agencies, private or public²⁴.

Those who study wealth and its accumulation cannot well be against that; to which the rejoinder that copying Medicine, which studies Disease while being against it, would place Economics where most present economists would not feel at all comfortable. And the classic amendment, substituting 'growth, full employment, stable prices, just distribution' for wealth in Mill's definition is largely past history - notably nos. 2 and 4 (full employment and just distribution).

²³ Largely replaced by criticisms of marxist influences c. 1968-83, followed by a quietist period until his ultimate few texts, highlighted by Hellesnes.

²⁴ Cf. Eriksen 1994 for a number of grotesque even if possibly slightly exaggerated examples. Cf. further Mjøset's (1991:213) almost clairvoyant inference that giving Coleman-Hernes' power through exchange model unlimited validity "will have general corruption as the consequence", "delightful reading" according to his reviewer (Nilsen 1992:55), both writing well before Hernes' role in the *Fidenco* affair became public knowledge (cf. Otnes 1997). - There is also the possibility that HS became less critical of (commissioning) authorities later in life, with policies he favoured now in power.

His 1964 paper, 'Sociology as a science: Positive or critical?' is perhaps pivotal. Written when the student unrest was yet not even nascent, it delineates positive from critical as follows:

Human actions and human opinions can be studied in two different ways. On the one hand in their facticity, whether opinions exist and actions take place, including their functions in a wider context. On the other hand one can ask whether human opinions and attitudes are true, whether human actions are right, whether social institutions are just... according to ... three old criteria of evaluation ... the true, the good and just, and the beautiful ... A theory which studies social phenomena not only in their facticity but evaluates them according to one or more of the mentioned criteria, is a *critical* theory (HS 1976:211).

Four years later he mentioned, in passing though positively, Horkheimer's classic (1937), praising notably some proponents' reluctance to put critical theory into practice, unlike 1968's hasty students (1976:404, 411). But the classic statement "The critical theory of society takes as its object Men as producers of their total historical life form" (Horkheimer 1937:625) is absent, yes, distant, among the 68 students but even more in HS – then, earlier or later.

The course of events upset, frightened and angered him, turning the mild depressions and open discussions of earlier years into a continued aggressive defence against marxism, vulgar or erudite. So the person who introduced critical theory here turned away rather soon, or towards modified tasks, i.e. opposing its leftist branch, marxism, not seen as much of an enemy prior to 1968 in his home country. The change indicates that his philosophical base was existential rather than dialectic when put to the test (cf. note 31 and p. 205 below).

Apart from that, the impression is that he was not a man of strong and outspoken commitments. He did not often take stands on current, day-to-day political affairs²⁵. According to Hellesnes he was a Labour Party member, a 'mid-bencher' sort of, opposing wings both to the left and to the right, but "without opportunism"²⁶. Except for opposing right wings (which? when?) we grant that willingly, i.e. that he did not seek personal gain or advantage, position, standing etc. - that he was content with expressing and publishing his own ideas, as it becomes a real philosopher (but cf. note 64 below).

His 1957 counsel elucidates this:

As a matter of principle one cannot objectivise oneself, (HS 1976:53), and

We cannot choose to be committed; given that we are in this world, we are committed already, to some thing or another (HS 1976:63).

Very well, but *to what?* He rarely specified his *own* "thing or another", thus risking to leave an impression of general or lofty but still rather narrow commitments; a *crusader* or *issue expert* in the terms of current political science (Offerdal 1992)²⁷. A quietist then in most worldly, non-philosophical matters, perhaps even to the point of anticipating ex-prime minister Harlem Brundtland's "steady course". Or even back to "keine Experimente"²⁸; so many things being *not* important to change, the risk or error may well reside in trying to, not acquiescing.

²⁵ Except for major issues such as Norwegian EEC-EU membership which he ardently supported though not much in writing.

²⁶ Personal communication, Feb 1997, cf. the present paper's concluding section.

²⁷ Other types include *horse dealers* and *generalists*, neither suiting HS.

²⁸ A germaniser (as against germanophobia, germanomania, francophile, the word *germanophile* does not seem to exist), he is known to have supported the policies of Erhard, the *Wirtschaftswunder* of West German 50-60s, as early as in September 1961.

The last two HS quotes are from his pathbreaking *Participant and observer* (P-O) essay, its pioneer role²⁹ later hailed by Habermas (1982:163 ff.), about whose views more later (p. 207 below). HS's basic example is a person who says to me (him): 'the costs of living will rise even more'. To which 'I' can respond by taking one of two fundamentally different attitudes, either attend to the facts, whether the costs etc. will rise, i.e. *I participate* or commit myself to a discussion, agreeing or differing³⁰. Or I may limit myself to attending only to the 'secondary fact', that he holds the opinion expressed in the quote, cf. HS 1976:52; *I observe*. However, a change between these attitudes is presented as purely a mental effort, a choice or a voluntarism.

His main critical point is that the second position believes itself, mistakenly but yet at times effectively, to be dominant, whereas the first takes both to be equally non-dominant or competing for dominance³¹. Taking the other as an au pair participant in a dialogue, an exchange, encounter etc. is not (easily) combined with taking him/her as a fact in the world, e.g. to be explained, not discussed with, and vice versa. In rough outline this anticipates the critical-positive distinction just mentioned.

From a historical point of view the term *positivism* is far from unambiguous, (cf. Mjøset 1991:50, Slagstad 1976). We suggest that the core of that issue in sociology is *confusing the fact and the project aspects of agency*; deed done vs. deed envisioned; positively given factual results or situations, *vis-à-vis* more wanted, not yet or ever realised alternative results.

²⁹ Or a close follower's, HS 1959.

³⁰ A telling retort, in best P style, would be: 'Do you know, in France they have two price indices, one public (INSEE), the other CGT or left trade union. Guess which shows the higher increases?'

³¹ In the final analysis, the explicit basis of HS's distinction is found in his firm belief in a "... transcendental ego, or following Jaspers "Existens"" (HS 1976:54).

A social construction of nature ?

A different definition of positivism stresses 'data collection, methods and theories taking (natural) science as the ideal' (e.g. Kalleberg in Haga 1976:180, cf. Østerberg 1997:5). In retrospect that is inexact. The social and the natural sciences are different, absolutely. But the main difference is *not* that Nature is entirely un-constructed, not-man-made, whereas Society is³². The idea of a Nature existing independent of Man's uses, understanding, classification etc. of it is in itself no mean construction (cf. Bachelard 1940 and others of 'the French epistemological school'). 'Real Nature' is an open game (cf. p. 212 below) as well - our 'inorganic body' (Marx) - with human activities, industry, science, classification etc. very much part of it. It is seen, processed, evaluated with human tools, including concepts - *as* social in natural as in social science. Hence the idea of *a rupture phase*, correcting past misconceptions, has come to social science largely from its natural colleagues (cf. Bachelard p. 201 below) - *as* anti-positivistic in both contexts (Bourdieu 1973).

In sum, *the belief that the sciences of nature are themselves part of that nature is not correct*. Not only is 'pure' or 'virgin' Nature hard to find, now that human society affects the climate and even outer space. But what we say, think, believe about or do with that Nature belongs more nearly to our understanding of it, scientific or commonsensical, than to 'pure nature'. So, although social and natural science methods do and must differ, interpretation has a place in both. And whereas agency and intention (for us atheists at least) are (probably) absent in 'pure nature', it is *not* in Man's conceptions of it (cf. Ruffié (1982, 1997) on Darwin's 'ethnocentrism').

Returning now to the definition of positivism followed here: Whether positively given or distant alternative, an outcome is rarely of equal

³² The early Rousseau, whose often (mis-)quoted 'back to Nature' might seem to claim just that, turned into an erudite Linnéan in his mature years.

value or harm for all involved. The question of for whom? *qui bono?* who benefits (most)? will arise for closer analyses of positivist studies – *and* for its alternatives. A positivist 'mere observer' is most often tacitly or in effect on the side of a currently dominant coalition of some sort - a hegemony in Gramsci's sense. His counterpart the 'committed participant', however, while unable to act as if aloof or totally disinterested, is nevertheless not necessarily disclosing his full, true and undistorted interest in an outcome. A question, then, to be asked of HS and adherents as much as to the positivists, empirists, instrumentalists, marxists etc. whom they criticised: Becker's (1967) classic 'whose side are we on?'

A changed observer role?

Over the years I've come to doubt the soundness, wisdom and validity of the classic P-O distinction. The doubt is inspired partly by Walter Benjamin, partly by Bourdieu, partly by Habermas, by HS himself, even perhaps by unlikely analogue Richard Sennett.

Starting chronologically, in Rousseau's *Julie*³³ we read:

Je trouve aussi que c'est une folie de vouloir étudier le monde en simple spectateur. Celui qui ne prétend qu'observer n'observe rien, parce qu'étant inutile dans les affaires et importun dans les plaisirs, il n'est admis nulle part. On ne voit agir les autres qu'autant qu'on agit soi-même.

This, though roughly in keeping with HS, is *not* born out in the *flâneur* writer/researcher role, Baudelaire, Wilde, Benjamin etc. They may indeed be *inutiles dans les affaires* – the appearance of which being something of a dandy *noblesse oblige* – but certainly not for that

³³ Seconde partie, lettre xvii.

reason *importunes dans les plaisirs*: They do gain access, if not quite everywhere, while still keeping an aspect of themselves apart from the field accessed – ambiguous, role distant (Goffman), amphibious (Østerberg) or plain independent, spleen, blasé. Arne Næss' "scientist from Mars", an easy target for ridicule in HS' writings, has perhaps a less ridiculous forbear in the early Montesquieu and his "Persians in Paris" - the eye *as if* from without, making insiders, willingly or not, see themselves as different even in their most quotidian routines. Current ethnology calls it e.g. contrasting and perspectivation³⁴.

This is somehow paralleled by Bourdieu et al. (1973) and his teacher Bachelard's (1940) idea of a *rupture* phase of science – natural, hermeneutic or social: A scientist worth his/her salt must, sometimes at least, see through the mistakes of forbears, colleagues, or their field of study. And the social researcher position allows one, with effort, to see through the *doxa*, or tacit, 'self-evident' creed, something the regular participants often can, or will, not (cf. historical research).

Now is not this simply a fresh assumption of a privileged or dominating observer position in (social) science? No, it is not, if we are to believe Bourdieu. For a phase of 'participant objectivation' or 'socioanalysis' must always follow rupture, and its two subsequent phases, construction and testing: *Le sociologue s'efforce de traquer son impensé spécifique ... de retourner ses instruments de pensée contre (lui)-même*³⁵.

If anywhere, there is room for some reluctance here. Obviously, 'socio-analysis' or 'Our school is always open for new rounds of professional self-criticism' cannot be affirmed as mere principles, stated and held once and for all. Such statements of principle abound,

³⁴ And HS himself expresses his rough agreement with Apel, according to which objective methods of explanation etc. can play a role for modifying human self-conceptions, acting as a contrast foil and correction for situational and motivational Verstehen (HS 1974:102).

³⁵ From Bourdieu, cited in Otnes 1997:109, cf. Bourdieu et al. (1973).

from the most different corners, yet regularly covering smug obdurate dogmatism. A superior status will depend, not on principles but on each new future practice – whether next 'new rounds' are in fact faced with open mind and better arguments. An 'I'm a better self-critic than thou' is bordering on the inconsistent, and worth nothing if not followed up in deeds, real debates.

Finally, as for Sennett the (near) parallel is in the rejection of intimacy and its "tyranny". HS' 1957 essay (in HS 1976, 1992 etc.) features a short but vivid section where a young philosopher sees a psychotherapist, who analyses his affirmation of 'absolute idealism' as 'father fixation', thus angering our philosopher, who after reflection revenges himself in exposing the psychologist as a rigidly self-defending 'debunker', arousing anger on both sides and hence equal terms or footing for all – viz. two 'participants', not one 'observer' and one 'participant'. The personal commitment in both, i.e. HS and R. Sennett, strongly suggests personal experience with a psychotherapy rejected, for - it seems - not entirely convincing reasons.

Summing up so far, we suggest that an Observer, despite HS, can sometimes, with efforts, see better - or differently, 'below surfaces'- than a Participant. The unreflective belief that s/he must, always, as a matter of course is, however, as mistaken as it always was.

Skjervheim - observing philosophy?

The Thue interview surprisingly introduces 'trans-intentionality' – a concept taken from hermeneutic philosophy (HS 1991:18, 26-7). The compatibility of this c. 1990 stand with his much earlier P-O distinction is not at all evident:

Transintentional interpretation is fully legitimate. By that I mean the following: If we have two philosophers, A and B,

then it is fully possible that A has understood B's position better than B himself understands his own position. It is a principle of hermeneutics that Verstehen equals Besserverstehen. This will have implications for how philosophers relate to each other (1991:26-7).

This applies to philosophical debates, not everyday life, it is true. But philosophy can, no more than social science, be exempt from its own principles. If the social sciences are criticised for neglecting or misusing the P-O distinction, philosophy too will have to be touched. So, is there not a likeness after all between philosopher A who understands B "better than he understands himself", and the observer who takes B's statement as a mere fact, an "attitude" for protocolling and counting, say, instead of earnestly discussing its claim to truth? The answer will depend on the credibility of A and B being on equal terms in the context of their discussion – less or more equal than the old P-O couple? If one position dominates - or earnestly believes that it dominates - the other, then the A vs. B situation will end up as very nearly equal that of P vs. O. And what about HS himself?

He goes on (further from the same source):

I hold that any decent philosopher should be willing to meet his fundamental opponents sometimes, but not every day ... Yet one norm is essential: Before you criticise another (philosopher), you must be able to describe the other's point of view impartially and correctly, taking care not to misrepresent the other's stand from the outset. That is a precondition of an interesting criticism. But I do not support only the right to criticise but also its risk. Returning to our two philosophers, A and B. Say that A writes a transcending criticism of B but next that knowledgeable people will see at once that it is B's understanding of A which is better than A's of himself. Then A is making a fool of himself, even if it is on a formally high level (HS 1991:26-7)

Now, does he or doesn't he? Reviewing his textual remarks on Deleuze, Derrida, Lyotard, Bourdieu, Foucault, Lévi-Strauss etc. must raise acute doubts. Was HS really 'describing the other's point of view impartially and correctly, taking care not to misrepresent the other's stand' etc.?

Hardly: Foucault 'who announces the decentration of the subject and the death of Man', yet during the Paris lecture attended by HS 'the great subject Foucault was sitting, centering everything around himself', (HS 1996:163-4). Of Foucault, certainly a fundamental opponent, we find three further mentions, a quote from a short peripheral text (HS 1992:53, 58), a second-hand, very inexact mention (:233-5), plus a two-paragraph, less than half a page, comment on *L'ordre du discours* and *L'histoire de la folie* (HS 1996:170-71). That is not taking another philosopher seriously at all.

As for Derrida there is a little more, a paper of 12 pages. But it is entitled *Invitation to (cultural(?)) suicide?*, its conclusion that Derrida is not really taking philosophical problems seriously – in effect (though becomingly *en*, not *hors texte*) that he is copying forebear Empedocles, said to have thrown himself into the volcano Etna's crater (1992:57). This comes close to repeating the claim, not infrequently heard, that the post-modern are in fact *anti-modern*, *wieder-vernunfzig* i.e. irrational, reactionary, or even immoral³⁶.

There is very brief mention only of Deleuze, while Lyotard and Bourdieu (not often coupled) are summarily dismissed with the phrase that they are 'both lacking solidity', as against Derrida who is only 'very eccentric' (1991:28). HS said (in 1980, cf. 1996:161) that he 'had

³⁶ We cannot go into Pålshaugen's detailed comparison of Derrida's *Signature Event Context* with Habermas' (mis)reading of Derrida through Culler and Pratt, only cite its conclusion: *Habermas lifting his hands as if victorious, heedless of the fact that he has not even been near the pitches where Derrida plays his game* (Pålshaugen 1988:38). Skjervheim would seem to very nearly copy this role of Habermas' — an instance of 'naive cries you're naive', cf. p. 216 below.

come to value French culture in a totally different way than before', i.e. higher, yet he is manifestly not at all patient with the exponents named here. He is certainly not practicing a *herrschaftsfrei* discussion; he summarily dismisses their views without a thorough discussion. And somehow Nietzsche in the end is more palatable, more worthy of printed space than Derrida and Foucault, even if as basically wrong (1992:47-51)³⁷.

Why is total dismissal so important? Why not keep a 'waiting list' instead, for the 'very eccentric' and those as yet found 'lacking solidity'? However badly mistaken Heidegger, Marx, or Derrida etc. may be, we may nevertheless feel free to appreciate elements of their view. Baudrillard, at least as 'eccentric' as Derrida and probably 'less solid' than Bourdieu and Lyotard, is still unsurpassed for explaining politician contempt. Marx, while basically tenable may still be a hopelessly mistaken economic determinist, party theorist etc.

The basic reason behind HS' categoric dismissals would seem to be that he cannot accept to let go the idea of a 'transcendental ego'. Strange as it may seem, for according to some, his 'transintentional interpretation' is based in more general ideas of a *precedence for intersubjectivity*, taken from Dewey, Peirce as much as from Habermas, Apel, Gadamer³⁸. What role is there for a transcendental subject if intersubjectivity rules? Is it not rather habitual thinking lingering on; the transcendental ego being close in kin to the authoritarian personality, who – while well known in both countries – still is more nearly German than French?

³⁷ Cf. his germaniser status, note 28 above.

³⁸ Hellesnes, personal communication. There is mention of Benveniste too (HS 1992:72, 76), his point that the 1st and 2nd personal pronouns are defined symmetrically and simultaneously, contrasting with the 3rd: *I, you, we* are the talkers-listeners just now, whereas *s/he, they* are merely talked about. But HS goes on, a little too quickly from there, stating that 'Philosophically, the human subject ... is a necessary basis for linguistics'. It is true that Benveniste says 'C'est dans et par le langage que l'homme se constitue comme *sujet*' (i.e. the inverse of HS), but that is not to say that he would have to deny that Man may also *decenter* himself as a subject, in and through that same language.

Anyhow, the transcendental ego is a philosophical postulate, neither a cornerstone of the universe nor an 'immortal soul'. Toying with alternatives should meet with the same equanimity as toying, say, with Euclid's postulates. It is certainly not the end of knowledge, or morals, justice, beauty and rationality; it is only a different philosophical base for that and more.

Finally, as for philosophers and the rest of us making fools of ourselves or not, HS is lamentably beside the point. True, it happens 'that knowledgeable people will see' - and unanimously agree - that A's purported transcending of B's views is a mistake. An as usual situation, however, is for disagreement, not unanimity, to arise, and to *persist*, sometimes even in the longest of runs. The fields of knowledge have contested borders too (cf. p. 212 below). We are then left with different groups, schools, or doctrines, both of knowledgeable people, both claiming that the other group, of course not their/our own, are making fools of them/ourselves etc. Laughter, within or between groups, never was much of an argument. It is not only 'I laugh at you and you laugh at me'; it is 'I believe that unbeknownst to you the *others* are laughing at you', and (perhaps) vice versa. The barrels shook with hilarious laughter, some of it imagined; time to peep outside³⁹.

Summing up this paragraph, HS' idea/ideal of the Participant is a program not, or not very thoroughly, effected within his own philosophical discourses.

³⁹ The Thue interview discusses the feelings experienced by the two while reading (about) Derrida, nausea (Thue) or sand in the mouth (HS). May a respecting non-adherent of Derrida etc. answer, as non-argumentatively, that plodding through Wittgenstein may feel as dry, and Nietzsche so nauseating - his abominable Superman-Slaveman nonsense - as to never quite take off?

Habermas: conditional support

Habermas is often read as supporting HS⁴⁰. True, he lauds his pacesetter role, but on closer look does not adopt his stand entirely. A step in the right direction but not yet Habermas' own position:

Dabei stellt sich die Frage, ob (man) die von Skjervheim unterschiedenen Fälle zwei und drei⁴¹, das Verstehen des semantischen Gehalts einer Äusserung und das Reagieren auf den mit ihr verbundenen Anspruch, gültig zu sein, überhaupt unabhängig voneinander behandeln kann. Skjervheim bietet noch keine befriedigende Analyse (Habermas 1982:166-7).

Habermas notwithstanding, we should grant HS that no matter whether his P-O pair may seem intertwined or inseparable today, they were generally not thus seen within the social sciences of the 50s and 60s. Belief in the independent, 'objective' role of an unreflecting observer's privileged position was widespread indeed, and it is to Skjervheims honour that he helped undermine it, hopefully for good.

⁴⁰ And vice versa, true but only up to a point. In 1984 HS wrote that even if Habermas (1981) is a "distinguished work, it is yet in many ways untidy, as well as ambiguous on some decisive points, one of which being Habermas' unclear relations to Marx and the marxist tradition ... an imagined marxism (perhaps, but still) ... a residue of loyalty to a type of hypothetic original marxism ... (so that) Habermas does not escape interpretations (of Marx etc.) which are apologetic rather than correct" (HS 1996:169). While Habermas is seen as an imagined marxist who (mistakenly) still believes he is one, Bourdieu is portrayed by some (e.g. Wallace & Wolf 1991) as an imagined non-marxist who (mistakenly) believes (and says) that he is *not* a marxist. Very conveniently elastic, these second-hand imaginations.

⁴¹ Consider a new exemplification of *Fälle*, or cases 1-3: 1) I heard him say 'mai marnashil hum', 2) I heard him say (in Hindi) that he is mortal, 3) To which I counter, there are Indians who claim to be, as they see it, immortal. - As for 'straightforward' case 1), it is, almost by definition, difficult bordering on the impossible to repeat verbatim the first instance of a quote in a totally unknown language; a phoneme being defined as a unit of sound which makes a difference for the meaning.

If the P-O positions are not mutually exclusive⁴², and no single position is dominating the other, then what? We may adopt both at a time, or move in and out of one or both, all or most or some of the time: Now I consider the truth of your proposition, now I speculate what made you propose it, or I count it as just another fact – and of course vice versa for you. Habermas, however, goes on to consider Schütz and Garfinkel but before that, Wittgenstein:

...die Bedeutung der kommunikativen Akte kann (der Interpret) nur verstehen, weil diese in den Kontext verständigungs-orientierten *Handelns* eingebettet sind - das ist Wittgensteins zentrale Einsicht und der Ausgangspunkt für seine Gebrauchstheorie der Bedeutung (p. 168-9),

As a criticism of HS this seems to imply that his P-O positions are not really distinct (cf. note 42) in the first place, and too much of an abstraction, a purely mental or verbal construction, a freely chosen attitude, in the second. No real action, no tools etc., i.e. no real language game situation is involved. 'Don't ask the meaning, ask the use', that goes for social action as much as for language. But how?

⁴² It is fair to note that HS himself granted that right from the start, i.e. in 1957: "In everyday life, there is no question of the first or the second or the third, but of all three attitudes at the same time. As a matter of principle the human condition is not unambiguous, but 'equivocal'. In this equivocal situation the human sciences are suspended, and that is the root of their complicated fundamental problems" (1976:53). - So the error he criticised does not consist in shifting but in getting stuck in an observer position only. On reflection, a 'lingual reification' seems to be involved: The 'observer' unilaterally steps out of the I-thou-symmetry (cf. Benveniste, note 38), treating *thou* as a *s/he* or an *it*, a thing in the world spoken about. Note, however, that in (older) French, the second person singular has condescending connotations: *tu* is meant for servants, children, wife, intimates etc. - what used to be subordinates; respectful address required the plural *vous*. In contrast, (older) German used *er* or the third person singular for addressing subordinates.

What the hodman might have asked Wittgenstein

The language game theory of meaning⁴³ is impressive yet not without its problems. The point has been made elsewhere (Otnes 1997:84) that situations – where a thing named appears together with its operators and its name, uttered or written, all in actual, simultaneous, *gerade* use – are less than common, and further, not easily produced at will.

So observing builders who practice their 'language game' while actually working is a case in point: Hard to come by, and then next, liable to ask an outside observer *why* s/he is looking. Which means that the case of such a game, not being a construction of your own mind, but coming effortlessly and unquestioningly to you for observing it at ease (and not observing you in return), may be something of a rarity⁴⁴.

While convalescing some weeks last autumn, i.e. out of season, on the Gran Canaria, it so happened that my small bungalow terrace overlooked directly a construction site, another bungalow under construction with roofing now in process, only some 30 yards distant. Impossible not to see (the heat made the terrace the only comfortable place for lunches and afternoons), and hear (angle grinders cutting, or rather piercing, a variant of so-called Spanish tiles every so often), and no need to legitimate an observer's presence: living across the road, simply. And they mortar tiles to the roof in Spain, which takes time, a team of four men using nearly two weeks doing some 50 square yards⁴⁵.

⁴³ Another 'reactionary modernism', differently in form but from a neighbouring source?

⁴⁴ It is common knowledge that Wittgenstein tried his hand at architecture during 1926, thus attaining legitimate P and O positions in a relevant non-thought context. Socially, however, it seems he was as much of an oddball there as in any other activity he ventured into.

⁴⁵ In intricate forms though, including a pyramid and a half-pyramid.

Adding to the interest of the situation is the fact of your observer's workable but limited Spanish, things named being recognised more often from their use than from their local names.

They did enact their game as expected, with cries of *mortero*, *tejas*, *amoladora*, *taja aqui* or *asi* abounding. They did, but not only that. A very frequent cry was *agua*, *lleva* and then drinking, not mortaring, water was fetched and consumed. And there was a great deal of joking going on: *cansado*, *¿eh? que hiciste ayer ¿vino o hembra? ¿y tu esposa, que dijo?* and scolding, bossing and teasing the boss, practical joking, numerous misunderstandings and *¿qué?s*, as well as casual observations: *¡vea, vea el halcòn!* etc.

There were roles, a sturdy older boss, and his mate, of normal build and lesser age, both cutting and mortaring, third a nondescript meagre hodman carrying hods and tiles (and doing most of the *¿que?s*), and a young apprentice reduced to running the mixing drum and pushing the wheelbarrow (and being the object of frequent jokes).

There were no remarks heard about their neighbour on his terrace, though, a person clearly visible under his awning, having meals, reading books, playing music, cleaning and tidying, changing attire, coming and going – and often, attentively watching them. There was also no accosting from either side, despite curiosity on at least one.

The ironies of military training

In some contrast, consider the same observer's second observation setting, the local beach, *la playa*, chosen as a site for military training in this slack season: A number of male youths in their late tens or early twenties *en la verde oliva*, the military green, were tenting near by, c. a hundred of them – judging from their looks and speech mostly from *la peninsula*, not *isleños* or locals. Their tents were out of view

but certainly not their beach activities: Trying to operate dinghies by paddles or outboard motors is not at all an easy task for teams of landlubbers but great entertainment for polite but very attentive bathers, not numerous and mostly locals, that is very *aktuell* *verstehenden* onlookers. The fact that some soldiers wore bathing shoes (private property or?) on the fine sandy beach did not at all inspire due future respect for the tough Spanish Marines, whether dinghy paddling, skin diving, attacking or defending beaches.

But did they feel it, and did they respond, to their being ridiculous while in full view! They were under command, to be sure, but not very obedient: Not even Xerxes could command breakers, so no end of irony, like as if falling in the water singly or by numbers, doing circles or shouting in 'Volga boatmen' rythm while paddling, despairing over mulish motors with exaggerated gestures etc. - all for the tacit benefit of a small but very appreciative public (whose young females were targets for flirting in the evenings). Yet there were no laughs nor overt remarks from said public. It was there, simply, making the troops feel ridiculous, and ironically exaggerating in order to hide or soften that feeling⁴⁶.

The fact that irony, joking in or out of the situation etc. plays a part in most real-life language games is, perhaps, not foreign to the Wittgensteinian doctrine, although not much focussed. What may yet be foreign is the influence of outsiders over the game. Heeded, overtly or not, present or not present, they may at any moment influence or dominate the game of the insiders – or themselves be influenced or

⁴⁶ The question 'might they have, even without a public?' is easily answered: Yes, but that would involve their going in and out of the P - O roles - in the way held to be typical of everyday life (note 42) - in teams, as it were. Laughs or ironies are regularly *with* some, at the expense of some (others). A joker has two targets, one for sharing laughs with, the other for being laughed at.

dominated by it. It is reciprocal, potentially at least: the observed observe their observers, not only vice versa⁴⁷.

In sum, here is an O who is not a P while having chosen neither position, in one case unable to change proceedings had he wanted to, in the other as unable *not* to change them.

Material or lingual games?

So a *prima philosophia* may possibly exist, but not a *prima societas*, a first or basic, as if isolated, social situation. All such situations, however well secluded, are open for external influence. That is, all real games, language or social, have environments, who may decisively influence the inside gaming at any time (Otnes 1988). Fringe players may join and core players leave, not at will perhaps, but yet regularly impossible to keep in line⁴⁸. Or in bourdieusian terms, every field has a border, always potentially at stake, a part of that field's game (*illusio*). There is no such thing as a totally closed game. We will return later to the question of HS's own games, their borders and environments in different periods.

In sum, at first sight banal: Language games are not only that; they involve so much more more than signs, rules, utterances. They include actors, acts, tools, objects, settings, knowledge. In short, they are social and material, not purely lingual games. A case in point is

⁴⁷ A fairly well-known study in Norwegian sociology is Johansen (1973), portraying the changing views of hoboos of their observers, and the observers of the hoboos, during a long-term action research project involving the running of an asylum etc.

⁴⁸ A current case is the Norwegian *POT* or special branch secret police scandal: While top secret in principle a heated debate involving harsh criticism, all public and official, broke out (1996-7), its subject abusive practices e.g. tailing innocent people's legal activities, trading such information to Labour and TUC (right-leaning) leaders etc. So not even 'hyper secret forever' is immune to the influence of fringe players, changing borders etc.

Bourdieu's analysis of obstacles to effective christian rituals (mass, eucharist etc.) as seen by a French vicar (Bourdieu 1982:104 ff): In addition to mistaken language of the ritual, there are errors of agent, place, time, tempo, behaviour (gestures, *comportement*), dress or attire, of instruments, all of which occur. Thus presenting bran wafers, in a basket not on a silver tray, at home, wearing everyday clothes etc. may be as bad or worse than misreading, say *hoc est porcus*⁴⁹. Bourdieu's far-reaching conclusion is that the performative or illocutionary force of expressions cannot be found in the language alone.

Returning finally to HS's dichotomy it is too much of a purely mental or philosophical construction, a choice or attitude of the mind, to be changed by efforts of a similar type alone. But P-O encounters do not happen like that in real life. Should a total stranger state a fact to us just out of the blue - 'the costs of living will rise even more', say (cf. p. 197 above) - we are likely to overhear or snub him/her at once, to not listen and even less to engage in discussion. That requires a setting, previous events, and a minimum of shared activities. There always is; much is always, not given but more or less unambiguously suggested by the context, attire, gestures etc., even between 'total strangers'. Take Robinson and Friday, one dressed and armed, the other not; one of light, the other of darker complexion. Or an anthropologist's first encounter with 'totally isolated' indigenes⁵⁰.

The strength of commitment is also not necessarily what puts a person in the P position. However strongly committed, most of us will for example never be allowed to address say an major TNC board of

⁴⁹ For the correct *hoc est corpus*, sometimes given as the etymological base of derogative hocus-pocus.

⁵⁰ A related problem is dealt with by Todorov (1982). Among the dangers it may present we note the risk of being classified as an other so entirely strange as to not be counted a fellow human.

directors, or a Parliament⁵¹. And if a committed person can be suspected of manifesting a stand, not even the galleries' O position will be open. The media as an alternative are also 'open' only in a very differential way, both for being admitted and for the treatment you receive after admittance (cf. Bourdieu 1997).

Situatedness

When can you state a fact to a 'total stranger' and expect to be responded to in earnest? Some typical cases suggest themselves: (1) a shared context of some duration, waiting in the same queue e.g.; (2) being introduced or introducing oneself - 'you don't know me but we both know ...'⁵² (3) the fact stated is general or conspicuous enough - 'nice/bad weather, eh?' or 'have you heard that JFK/RR has been shot?' (uttered on the proper date in 1963/81) etc⁵³. In sum, there is an element of minimal shared interest in all three: 'we will soon suffer/enjoy the effects of fact X, nothing much to do about it presently'.

To say nothing about the *not-even observer*, the dull, nonplussed or uninterested overlooker who will perceive rudiments if anything - a common character indeed⁵⁴; e.g. the streetwalker who is not even *blasé(e)* (Simmel) but routinely puts on his/her 'I'm not really here, I'm on my way elsewhere for more important business' - wearing the

⁵¹ Spain's Cortes invited a speech from Habermas in November 1984 - a nice gesture indeed but making them not much wiser, it would appear.

⁵² For the 'Say haven't we met before?' has turned rather suspect. Cf. Røhme (1995) on how we deal with 'odd others' in public transport.

⁵³ Conversation, or politely saying nothing yet keeping it interesting is another case in point but no less requiring a setting, perhaps even more in Norway, where the art of casual chats between anonymous urbanites hardly is well developed.

⁵⁴ Still reading, are you?

proverbial 'face that we keep in a jar by the door' (Lennon-McCartney).

Now obviously, HS takes for granted that some context is given beforehand, students in a cafeteria, university colleagues in a lunchroom, guests in the same pub, campers at the same site etc. But even then his original P-O does not exhaust the possibilities. If acceptable A states fact X to me, he *may* want to invite an open discussion, but alternatively, to (1) distract my attention so as to avoid my raising another issue, (2) indirectly spot my attitude to more salient fact Y, without my catching on, (3) want to study my reaction (if fact X has a shock aspect e.g.) (4) make my (better) acquaintance (5) win my support for a stand, position, party, frame etc. S/He may even (6) want *me* to observe *him/her*, 'Have a good look, you're facing the fact-X-stater!' Indeed, *multivocality* might be the typical thing, combining several aspects with not even the speaker realising (all). Colloquial speech, briefly, is rather much more complicated than most examples used by language philosophers - the *phatic* (Jakobson), perhaps, most complicated of all.

Lots depend on looks, dress, pose or poise, 'habitus'. Who is this A, really? An economist? Wino? TUC-activist? Employer? Housewife/consumer? Weirdo? A politician perhaps? Or a mere voter?

Say that B is listening to A, the Bank of Norway president giving his annual speech which contains the statement that 'the costs of living ...' etc. Or that it is my almost colleague, the economist and fellow party member in charge of constructing the present cost of living index: How will B, or I, react then? Eminence or expertise will often make, *not* for discussion, commitment, 'participation' but for HS opposite, 'observation', where the striking fact that *eminence* A says X overrules most inclinations to discuss X, with him or with others. This 'observer' fact may even enter a next discussion as an argument in its own right: 'Now even (the great, the expert) A supports fact X'. Or

alternatively, A may be seen as 'abusing his/her position', 'exceeding his/her powers' etc.

Summing up, the 'pure' P-O situation must be something of a rarity, its two positions rarely a matter of conscious choice. One, or both, can be closed, guarded, or objects of struggle, competition. We cannot assume, then, that the mere raising of an issue implies inviting a shared search for a joint, 'best', conclusion⁵⁵.

Naive cries you're naive

This raises the question whether both Habermas and Skjervheim are overly optimistic on behalf of a *herrschaftsfreier Dialog*. Wittgenstein mentions the possibility of its being rash of us to suppose that the smile of an infant may not be dissimulation⁵⁶ (1975, 249). If lies, if deceit in varying doses, is not an exception but the rule, not only of language but of its socio-material setting, then it may indeed be naive to go on *as if* in the *herrschaftsfreier Dialog*, to go on discussing as if someone were earnestly listening or wanting to answer. Less naive then to try to get around if not transcend that "language was given Man in order that he may hide his thoughts" (Talleyrand⁵⁷) – although not only language but social settings generally – playing, if need be, by a different set of rules, or a stretching or transcending of that rule set. If perlocutions go before illocutions, then what? If it is fool or be fooled, is it still the better course to not fool back (or try to pre-

⁵⁵ But cf. Goffman's masterly Expression games (1970:64-7) for an underpinning of the narrow social limits to deceit, even by 'experts' such as spies, counterintelligence.

⁵⁶ Among parents, a common belief used to be that infants' very first smiles were symptoms - of stomach-ache, not well-being etc. Connecting the grimace called a smile to its conventional sense has to be learned, too, even if probably very early.

⁵⁷ The Talleyrand quote is taken from Ottar Grepstad, oral communication 28.9.96.

empt)?⁵⁸ If we can't even open our mouths (or publish a phrase) without 'being placed' (Bourdieu), as e.g. well-bred, well-read, 'urban', creative or not, speaking 'good' or not so 'good' English etc. - and then, being (not) answered or generally dealt with accordingly, how can we ever be sure that a bona fide invitation to 'just discuss a fact' will be responded to in good faith?

Mentioning Talleyrand, the view of Heine who experienced him in action is worth review:

Wir haben freilich keine andere Garantie seiner Ehrlichkeit, aber sie ist hinreichend; denn noch nicht hat ein ehrlicher Mann zum dreizehnten Mal seinen Eid gebrochen. Ausserdem versichert man, dass Ludwig Philipp ... zu ihm gesagt habe: "Herr v. Talleyrand, was man Ihnen auch bieten mag, ich gebe Ihnen immer das Doppelte". Indessen, bei treulosen Menschen gäbe das dennoch keine Sicherheit; denn im Charakter der Treulosigkeit liegt es, dass sie sich selbst nicht treu bleibt, und dass man auch nicht einmal durch Befriedigung des Eigennutzes auf sie rechnen kann⁵⁹.

Talleyrand and consorts do of course not (often) advocate outright lies, and certainly not if recognised as such. Their course is to distort or twist a fact, or very gently biasing it for serving a purpose while *avoiding* outright lies. Heine's point, here reminiscent of Habermas, would seem to be that too much lying, gentle, elegant or not, will lead to general distrust or a breakdown of predictability. Now first, we may already be experiencing that, in politics, publicity and daily life, e.g. our Central Station example, note 58, or cf. Wacquant (1997) for a

⁵⁸ As for the prevalence of deceit consider a story told by a newcomer to New York's Central station, trying the most innocent of approaches towards strangers, 'excuse me, Sir, can you tell me the way to ...?' And this huge elderly African American grabbed him by both shoulders, eyed him gravely, and said: 'Son, whatever you do, *never* again ask a stranger the way around here'.

⁵⁹ From 1886, *Französische Zustände*, dated March 1832.

very well-substantiated view on the 'carceral continuum' as a countermeasure. And second, before we state proudly that at least in science, a person caught faking or distorting his/her facts will be defrocked immediately: Would that s/he were but we had better remember that drawing the line is sometimes not at all easy, as demonstrated e.g. in the current debates over Holocaust/Gulag, over race or sex and intelligence etc. What is truth, what honest search for contested new truths, what smug support of established doctrine, and what mere cover for extremist - or indeed mainstream - creeds or movements?

A participant/an observer and his times

Turning now to our final evaluation of HS and his life's work, we explicitly reject the vulgar marxist 'basis vs. super-structure' determinism, the view that economic basis determines everything⁶⁰. There is nothing even remotely marxist, however, in holding that ideas, discussions, participants, observations etc. are, somehow, more or less, influenced by and influencing the general course of current events. *Geist* or *Zeitgeist* conceptions are in point but not really required, for it is a very well-known principle of historian method or source criticism: *Treat a (narrative) source as a (mute) relic*, i.e. don't take it at face value, look for its background, context etc.

So while evading determinism, a final summary overview is in order, a sketched outline of HS's projects, his games - existential, lingual, or material - their borders and environments in various phases of recent history:

⁶⁰ A view explicitly rejected by Engels himself in a letter to Bloch, cf. Østerberg (1977:115-6).

It is hard to imagine two more contrasting characters than Arne Næss (p. 186 above) and Hans Skjervheim, meeting at Oslo's Institute of philosophy in the early fifties: The latter an allodial farmer's heir (Norw. *odelsgutt*), at best a rural «aristocracy» from a mountainous periphery, the first from a super rich Oslo shipping family, Norway's urban, bourgeois aristocracy, if ever there was one. Their setting, the institute, was open-minded and tolerant in many ways, not of very pronounced political profile but still not without its tinge of post-war reconstruction optimism⁶¹. With Næss remaining largely aloof, HS, we hypothesise, was basically worried that the dominant Social Democrat regime might go, or be driven, too far to the Left - from 'just distribution' to plain levelling say. A situation reminiscent of Rokkan's portrait of contemporary political oppositions of the right (in Dahl, ed. 1966); having to build a policy despite prospects of being outnumbered for several coming elections⁶².

His personal project became to fashion a broker or diplomat sort of role for himself: A person of non-leftist convictions who could still engage leftists and non-leftists alike in frequent discussions, not alienating either wing. Though primarily a philosopher, eventually creative and erudite, this role was, bluntly phrased, a free-lance, self-styled influence agent on behalf of the center-right.

As students we used to despair over his having no advice on what to do *after* we had grasped his two main points, that sociology deals irreducibly with the interpretation of facts' senses, and that 'value-freedom' was impossible. However, if there was a subtext it was 'don't be afraid to go against the tide'. 'The tide' then was a Center Left Social Democracy seemingly of immovable staying power - and not

⁶¹ As viewed by the present writer, studying there for a year and a half in the late fifties-early sixties, and, though majoring in sociology, staying in some touch for years after. Pacifism and atheism were openly expressed, economic radicalism rarely.

⁶² Later known as 'the valley of shadows' (cf. Psalms 22:3) in local political lore, attributed to Kvanmo by Furre 1991:435, although with the opposite wing, the Left Socialists, now seen as mainly affected.

without its allies in the functionalist, positivist style social science of the 50s. – If this is so, HS must have opposed not only the positivist form but *sotto voce* also the 'problem-oriented' *contents* of contemporary beginning social science, of which Næss himself was a pioneering main inspirator (cf. Mjøset 1991, Thue 1997).

His go-between role met with unusual success, especially during the early sixties, which found the Labour regime under increasing pressure, from the Left but much more from the Center-Right, who took over government 1965-71, the first substantial non-Labour rule for three decades. But the role proved not to have a staying power comparable to its old opponent. In the later sixties, when leftist voices of new strength and appeal rose, his career somehow pivoted, his Roskilde years (1974-5) probably decisive: His old mediator role, with a smile for and from all, collapsed. He could no longer speak to his new left students without alienating them, abroad and, though less so, at home as well.

He responded with worry, anger, fright and eventually with harsh counter-attacks. Interestingly, while certainly discussing not observing theories and facts, he still reacted in rather total conformity with the classic (vulgar) psychology stimulus-response, aggression-frustration model. His basic long-time worry would seem to be a future Norwegian civil service manned with marxist academics, on a scale much more dominant than its forebears, the vocal but very small *Mot Dag* group of the 1930s. This risk was seen as big enough to warrant an all out battle of arguments, continued even years after the student revolt had given way fairly totally to "the neo-conservative reaction which it provoked" (Habermas 1992:162). His commitment to the anti-marxism issue was no doubt always strong; the protracted bitterness of his arguments, however, due to his being, now, a mediator robbed of his role.

When 'the second antipositivist conflict' arrived 1979-83, with Østerberg, Thomas Mathiesen etc. harshly criticising the rational

action models of Gudmund Hernes and Jon Elster no intervention at all came from HS⁶³. Why? He may still have thought other fronts, notably opposing marxism, more important. Alternatively, he would perhaps not risk having to defend Østerberg, Mathiesen etc. - both anti-positivists - against (near) positivist fellow party adherents such as Hernes, Elster and consorts. Further, both Østerberg and Mathiesen are erudite critical theorists, of marxists leanings but well able to defend themselves against HS' usual arguments. We may even trace, perhaps, a tiny tinge of conceit - 'don't rock the boat now that it's finally coming my way'⁶⁴.

After, there were boom years and recession years, and changing governments of both center-right and center-left parties. Norway struck oil, which, together with our version of 'the right wave' lead to years of yuppie excess culminating in 1987-8, ending in major 'hangover', including high finance bankruptcies, State rescue takeovers – much disputed but still effective – etc. The prestige of neo-conservatism, yuppie style reached an all-time low in 1991. Possibly as an effect, the status of social science started to reascend. Whereas the mere mention of LSE (or Norw. near counterparts *Blindern, SV*) would bring spontaneous laughs from mid-eighties' TV publics, confidence was now regained, with new respect, new assignments, new growth in staffs and students etc. gradually returning. The anti-left war was largely seen as won⁶⁵, while a new mini-wave of less radical discontent provoked by the yuppie years, carried the day - for a time.

⁶³ Cf. Mjøset 1991 chap 10 for an overview of the debate, HS's non-intervention being noted by Mjøset too p. 237.

⁶⁴ No doubt a Labour adherent in later years, he is said to have identified as a Liberal (*Venstremann*) in Bergen c. 1968. So his joining Labour, probably around that time, may betray a slight opportunism in him after all: that of 'if you can't beat'em, join'em'. His strong 'stable state'-preferences are evident: Best if the world changes slowly and not much, best if inequalities between people are not much reduced, best if centre ideas are cherished not challenged.

⁶⁵ More so after the Eastern European collapses 1989-91.

The later 'radical' texts of HS is better seen in this perspective. A major enemy defeated, combined with the vulgar right making fools of themselves, made for a small number of perceptive but moderate criticisms of this new, minor enemy. He was by now a winner, not in opposition, a man who have had all his original worries allayed, the Left so far off mark as to be by now negligible.

A complicating factor of recent years is the *mea culpa generation* – the aspiring, middle-aged, middle echelon elites whose basic worry seems to be 'can I ever be forgiven for the 68er values I once held?' While often sincere the attitude is also employed as an 'anti-bouncer-device', sometimes of dubious efficiency, for getting past the gatekeepers to the infield of legitimate decision-making.

Prospects for the impenitent or *ne regrette rien* sub-generation would seem bleaker, however. Where and which are the current openings for critical theory, for the successors of revised 'participant'-style sociological studies? Neither numerous nor easily found they are yet not inexistent. The basic problem, we suggest, is finding answers to the *qui bono?* question (cf. Becker 1967 and p. 199 above). Whereas some branches of critical theory seems to be stuck in resignation over not finding a general 'Historical' or 'Critical Subject', others hold that that grand leading role is not really required. The Critical Subject is not necessarily one, integral, complete or general, it is often fragmented, to be identified in concrete studies of struggles taking place in various sub-fields of society, e.g. in their different forms of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu).

The bunch of present social science in Norway is, however, neither regretters or in remorse but rather a local *noblesse d'état*, in the slightly moderate form typical of the Nordic countries⁶⁶. Voices pro

⁶⁶ Cf. Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:119, developed briefly in an interview for the book's Norwegian translation, p. 245-7. Cf. also Johansen & Prieur (1995:3): "L'État providence scandinave a été construit par des intellectuels "radicaux"...comme une utopie universelle, un modèle...".

critical theory are now reoccurring (e.g. Engelstad 1996:241-7) but who will fund critical research? The classic eccentric Big Businessman now gone, the Academe can, no more than the Administration, be expected to fill that role or foot that bill. Still loopholes persist, such as this Yearbook.

Conceptual recap

So far for the historic, holistic or concrete summary of HS and his times, his 'texts in their context' (Pollak 1986). About time to summarise the abstract, conceptual contents as well.

Much of it hinges on his P-O distinction, dichotomy, - or rather couple, dialectic. For his 'critical theory' soon degenerated, lamentably, into a unilateral critical *practice* - his prolonged battle with marxisms of several tinges. Agreeing or not, there is nothing much creative about that side of HS.

But the celebrated P-O bit: Following Habermas for a start, it is innovative yet not a satisfactory solution. The 'pure observer' position - beliefs notwithstanding - is at best a limiting case, at worst an outright impossibility. A fact corroborated by linguistics too (cf notes 38, 41-2 above on Benveniste etc.), since phonetics and semiotics, or spoken sound and its meanings, are inherently interrelated; we simply cannot distinguish phonemes without distinguishing (morpheme) senses.

For first readings, the impression is that HS *advocates* the P position, as against its counterpart, or O, as a 'better', more true or just, or less biased position. And true, he takes exception to the unreflective 'O

superior' position, the belief that an aloof observer gets the better view as a matter of course, the better the aloofer.

To which we counter, after 40 years, that this does not rule out the possibility of another, a *reflective* O position, passing (if possible) from P to O and back time and again, and ending up (at best) by seeing or realising what the engulfed, grass-roots Ps can or do not. The P position may be privileged as an 'insider' but, if unreflecting, that advantage is soon lost. Insiders have, of course, (literal) in-sight but as much or more misconceptions, limited, *borné* views. The 'Montesquieu effect' (p. 200 above) is in point, the Outside O who spots the inside Ps in their ridiculousness, their *impensées*, *non-vues* or *omissions*. A much less subjectively secure position than 'old' unreflecting O, this new relative is forever dependent upon its ability to reflectively substantiate its position - if, and even if not, challenged by other Ps, Os or indeed anyone knowledgeable about the situation in question. – Briefly, *the reflection, not the position is what counts*.

Now, we noted (note 42 above) that HS himself conceived P-O as a dialectic rather than a mere distinction, a movement to and fro rather than two separate, isolated positions. We agree, repeating that if possible a sociologist should occupy both and pass from one to the other in the manner of HS' 'everyday life'. The point is, however, that this is not at all regularly possible; one or both positions may be closed, not attainable at will, for most, in the short or longer runs. New, prospective Os can be dismissed, as much as a new - or indeed an old - P. A field's borders are always part of that field's game, so the players keep arriving and leaving, at will or unwillingly.

Habermas, remember, passes from HS into Wittgenstein, from existential choice into language games which comprise not only words and pure wills but in addition actors, implements, operations, artefacts. An advance, agreed, but still one feels that there is something missing; there is something perhaps too purely thought or imagined about Wittgenstein's examples. They are constructed,

abstract rather than occurring, lived experience. So they appear as closed, or inside games, experimental constructs by intention independent of the real, wide worlds of which they must form parts. Our two, 'lived' instances demonstrate, ultimately, that an 'outside' but legitimate observer (reflective or not) on occasion changes nothing or very little, on other occasions (helps) effect(s) fundamental change.

But next and finally, if real language games are open, not closed that openness is of course not general but usually a very selective and contingent thing: *Some* will gain admittance, some will leave at will, and some be pressed to leave in their capacity of more or less active Ps or Os or both. This is where *situatedness*, its signals and insiders' and pretenders' knowledge of such, enters the picture; a transcendental base or conditions of possibility of a field and its games, as it were⁶⁷. One cannot 'just join' or 'just observe', one gives off signals of who or what one is, signals which cannot help ease or impede admittance and further outcomes - sometimes as intended, sometimes not, sometimes even upsetting intentions (counterfinality), as illustrated not least by the story of HS' own life.

The good side of this is that not even the most secluded of settings will fail to give off all signals, and so will be amenable to some types of study despite all secrecy or resistance. The not so good, however, is that even the commonest, most trivial, everyday setting for all its 'openness' still is not easy to really 'see through', or understand profoundly, in its multivocality.

But then, by now, is not social science a broad profession, reasonably strong, pluralist enough and able to cope with that and more?

⁶⁷ Much as I dislike that type of argument in general, cf. Otnes 1997, note 104, it has perhaps a place here.

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Translation of (longer) foreign language quotes.

P. 185: The field lane runs from the courtyard gate to the marsh rushes... From the marsh rushes the lane goes back to the courtyard gate... Simplicity has become even more simple.

Long live France - after all.

P. 193: Let us summarise in four words the social contract between the two estates. *You need me, for I am rich & you are poor; let us make an accord between us: I allow you to have the honour of serving me, on the condition that you give me what little you have got left, for the trouble I will assume commanding you.*

P. 200: I have found also that undertaking to study the world in the manner of a pure spectator is foolish. He who pretends to do nothing but observe does not in fact observe anything, for useless in business and importunate in pleasure, he will gain access nowhere. One does not see others act except to the degree that one acts oneself.

P. 207: This opens the question whether cases two and three as distinguished by Skjervheim, i.e. understanding the semantic content of an utterance as against taking a position on its corresponding claim of being valid, are at all possible to deal with as two independent cases. Skjervheim does not yet offer a satisfactory analysis.

P. 208:... the meaning of communicative actions can only be understood (by an interpreter) because they are embedded in the

context of *action* which is oriented to readability - that is Wittgenstein's central insight and the starting point for his Use theory of meaning.

P. 210: Mortar ... tiles ... angle grinder ... cut here or thus ... fetch water ... tired, eh? where were you last night, wine or women? and your wife, what did she say? ... what? ... look, look the falcon !

P. 217: We have indeed no other guarantee of his honesty but it suffices, for as yet no honest man has broken his oath for the thirteenth time. And further one assures us that Louis Philippe ... allegedly has said to him: "Mr. Talleyrand, whatever they may offer you, I will always give you twice as much". However, among faithless people even that would give no security; for it is in the character of faithlessness that it will not remain faithful towards itself, so that one cannot count on it even by satisfying its self-interest.