Transforming Otherness

Jason Finch and Peter Nynäs,
editors

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Introduction

Jason Finch and Peter Nynäs, Åbo Akademi University

A recognizable intercultural challenge is experienced today by people in different situations and contexts. This is due to increasing mobility, which is brought about both by crisis situations and the international labor market. However, people also come in contact with each other through forms of new technology such as the Internet, and of course through literature and film. In these different multicultural encounters, unfortunate misunderstandings and difficult clashes are commonly experienced. Several theoretical perspectives within studies in culture, communication, and language strive to achieve an understanding of such challenges and perhaps also practical solutions to them.

To some extent the chapters in this book identify with this aim, but they also emphasize that intercultural encounters need to be recognized from a perspective that is alert to their complexity. This is evident from the opening chapters by Iben Jensen and Fred Dervin. Both depart from traditional settings for intercultural communication, concentrating on job interviews and language learning and teaching respectively. Still, Dervin rejects culturalism in the shape of the vision of the Other and the self as reified cultures and identities, demonstrating that the appreciation of diversities is an unstable and long-term process: it involves elements which cannot always be controlled, such as one's own otherness*es*. In a similar

manner, Jensen demonstrates how culture can be taken into account in the intercultural encounters of everyday life—for instance a job interview—without magnifying the meaning of culture or ethnicity. Culture and ethnicity are often used as an explanation of difference in everyday life and if intercultural mediation is to be able to avoid "ethnicizing" or "culturalizing" an intercultural conflict, the first step is to focus upon the actual situation. Jensen proposes the need to reconceptualize intercultural communication as post-cultural communication and suggests a practice-theoretical approach in which culture has to be seen in intersection with other categories such as age, ethnicity, gender, body, and occupation. If, she writes, we start from the belief that culture is the predominant category in everyday life we construct otherness every time we use terms like intercultural communication, intercultural mediation, or talk about friendship across cultures.

Another theme running through the book is related to the concepts of otherness, mediation, and transformation. Transforming otherness can be understood or defined in at least two alternative fashions: either "ways in which otherness could be transformed," or "ways in which otherness can transform." We know very well that encountering otherness might evoke fears, negative attitudes, and a corresponding will to erase the otherness in front of us—both consciously and unconsciously. This will to erase otherness might also be subtle. Theories of intercultural communication might also perhaps lend themselves to ends like this in their emphasis on doing away with cultural differences between people, through defined and fixed identities like the culturalist positions criticized by both Jensen and Dervin.

Svante Lindberg touches on similar problems but from the perspective of migrant literature, asking how this can bring new perspectives to the debate in multicultural societies. Among other topics, he highlights the strong tendency among scholars to stress the ethnic belonging of migrant writers and

their cultural alterity in combination with blindness to fictive ethnicity. In contrast to this, he argues following the Quebec writer Simon Harel, interpreting literature today needs to be about understanding what factors shape a subject in its formulation as a topos or field combining intellectual and geographic characteristics, and about studying how figuration, alienation, trauma, and movement are expressed in this place relationship. Lindberg sheds light on the important shift from using the notion of *identité* to *identitaire*, the latter embedded in an understanding of identity as changeable and dynamic.

Of relevance for readers of this collection is the fact that thinking about otherness also raises questions about how it is represented and mediated and about the possible role of "third parties" in facilitating communication processes. Sometimes mediators, in the form of a third party, play a crucial role in facilitating the communication process and serve as channels of communication. In particular, the relevance of mediation processes is evident from studies of international conflicts where peace negotiators play a crucial mediating role. From this field of research, Kwok Leung and Pei-Guan Wu describe mediation as a situation when "an agreed-upon third party [without authority to force the parties in any direction] tries to facilitate the process for the two disputing parties to arrive at a mutually acceptable situation."[1] This is a good definition in that it is embedded in the trend in research in international communication and conflicts that mainly has "focused on the impact and effectiveness of mediation."[2] But as indicated above, mediation can also be understood in a broader sense related to communication and culture in general. This requires a slightly different point of departure. Mediation can simply be defined as someone intervening in a helpful way between people and groups who are different from each other.[3] By difference we mean here different positionalities that tend to keep people or groups apart.

Otherness can alternatively present itself as a source of development and as a provider of enriching perspectives. In her analysis of a documentary film and the ideals and motivations inspiring the filmmaker, Ruth Illman points to the transformative capacities of symbols as mediators in interreligious encounters. She shows how symbols—in this case those of a heart and a gift—can provide a platform for an understanding that reaches beyond the limits of self and other. She argues that a basic trust in humanity and an acknowledgement of our irrevocable interdependence is the primary motivator in this interpretative process. The fact that symbols are not absolute but relative, she claims, is part of their strength. It allows different people to use them as multivalent metaphors. Only as such open fields, she states, can the symbols become vehicles of transformation, enabling mutual trust and hope.

This basic trust in humanity as a bridge to community requires a subtle balance to be maintained in representations of self and other. A main concern, pointed out by Helena Oikarinen-Jabai, is that various problems arise in the process of intercultural mediation which are caused by cultural and political differentiation and exoticization, and these are sometimes used to validate stereotypical beliefs and images. Joachim Mickwitz follows a similar argument in his examination of how Moravian missionary tales operated among slaves in the West Indies during the eighteenth century. It is obvious that these books provided knowledge about the non-European world and were informative about this other world. At the same time, the books about the missionaries were used as socio-material, things to gather around. They became a unidirectional cultural encounter between a secure local culture and an exciting foreign and adventurous world. Tales about heathens and faraway lands legitimated the Moravian separatist movement and their work and allowed the movement to reflect their own position. The misery of the exotic slaves was transformed into tales about religious good-

ness and the books were read as proof of the power of true belief. As Oikarinen-Jabai underscores, in discourses carried out in both academic and art circles Eurocentric narratives have widely been understood as universal. For this reason, fresh approaches are needed in order to question ethnocentric modes of understanding. There is no reason to believe that this is a problem that we have left behind.

Geographical distance, cultural or ethnic diversity is not the main issue in this volume. Otherness is a potential threat to but also a vital element in all self-other constructs and representations. Jason Finch argues that the Victorian era gradually became something viewed with fondness in England between the 1920s and the 1960s: a shift in what literary scholars might understand as its reception. Mid-twentieth-century Victoriana, he claims, is comparable to the orientalism fashionable in the European decorative arts during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. On the one hand, this demonstrates that time, like space, is a constantly shifting other. Temporal othering, Finch argues, has more universality than spatial othering. Shaping the past in accordance with present-day interests is less unethical than subjugating ethnically different others who are alive now. Still, talking about the past is in no sense a harmless activity, when the foundation of almost all nationalist arguments on accounts of the past is taken into account. On the other hand, Finch also sheds light on the interdependence of self and other. Colonized people and colonisers are in a sense partners, as are different generations in the same family. They act in the same field, as do other pairs of opposites such as policemen and criminals. We are dependent on the other.

Among the many and diverse ways in which the other can be encountered which have partially been depicted in this brief introduction to the articles and the themes of this volume, there is of course the grey zone where otherness prevails as a haunting and desirable shadow in our experiences of people,

texts, and images. These can both blindfold us and gain a similar role as mediators when they facilitate a communication process between peoples and groups of positionalities. The mediating quality of a novel, for instance, might be dependent on its ability to open up new worlds for the reader and in order to do so negotiate various forms of difference, alterity and otherness in a complex way.[4] In a discussion of mediation, Roger D. Sell has argued against the use of dichotomies such as "*sender/receiver*" in communication: neither of the communicative parties should be viewed as more active than the other, he claims.[5] As we already suggested, taking this of view of communication implies a belief that the initiator of the communication must consider both his or her own positionality as well as that of his or her intended audience. This might for instance involve reflection on the ethical dimension which representations of otherness must have.

Various techniques for mediation or otherwise bridging the gaps between others could be envisaged. One would be simply to recognise the everyday, widespread and variable nature of self-other encounters and so neutralise their threat. Another would be to consider that encounters with otherness contain a potential to enable participants to transform themselves in a positive way. This is the position taken by Claus Madsen. He argues, using various mathematically derived metaphors to enhance understanding, that others can be a way for selves to understand their own internally divided nature. Madsen's approach is thus allied to some of the more explicitly critical discussions of "culturalism" which appear elsewhere in this collection. Ultimately, he seeks to enable all partners in otherness relations to become more mobile and in this, too, his work harmonises with Sell's notion of mediation. A different technique, based on reading and responding to literary texts, is proposed by Hannah Lutz. Using Gayatri Spivak's notion of the native informant to confront her own particularities as a reader rather than pose as a disinterested observer, she ar-

gues that readings of two anthologies of writing by American women with varied ethnicities can help in the construction of a space in which more difficult discussions related to cultural difference can take place. Without reducing the reality of these difficulties she proposes, in other words, the construction of an arena in which they can be debated.

Antony Fredriksson and Peter Nynäs, finally, introduce to discussions of intercultural competence a more reflective or critical approach developed from theories on documentary film. Both perspectives share an ethnographic ambition to represent the other even though they differ methodologically. Intercultural documentary film is influenced by postcolonial theory and critical ethnography and places an emphasis on mutuality, dialogue, and ethics. Fredriksson and Nynäs develop a critique of the well-known dichotomy between subjective and objective. It is important to address the fact that a certain way of seeing and representing always entails a world view. Still, due to the subjective-objective dichotomy and the epistemological claims made by more dispassionate perspectives, this dimension vanishes from sight together with the subjectivities of the observer and the object and the moral aspect of representation. This does not mean, the authors argue, that the notion of a documentary position (something which also underpins intercultural competence theory) has no value but, instead of reproducing predetermined and hegemonic definitions of other cultures through either dissociative or idealist strategies, spaces need to be created that foster increased reflection on people's own subjectivity, how they themselves enter and exit positions with moral and political dimensions. Fredriksson and Nynäs argue that insights from intercultural documentary film theory provide new and valuable insights into discussions of intercultural competence.

The chapters in this volume share the ambition of exploring otherness and in particular that of discovering how otherness becomes both a target and a resource for transformation, em-

bedded in the complexity of self-other relations and strongly dependent on the subtle and challenging task of cultural mediation. With this book we emphasize the need for further research into the role of cultural mediation processes in order to generate comprehensive perspectives on the multifaceted character of cultural mediation processes.

Notes

1. Kwok Leung and Pei-Guan Wu, "Dispute Processing: A Cross-Cultural Analysis," in *Applied Cross-Cultural Psychology*, ed. Richard W. Brislin (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 215.
2. Jacob Bercovitch and Allison Houston, "Why Do They Do It Like This? An Analysis of Factors Influencing Mediation Behaviour in International Conflicts," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44 (2000): 170-202, here 170.
3. Roger D. Sell, *Literature as Communication: The Foundations of Mediating Criticism* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2000), 291.
4. See, for example, "Unhomely Lives: The Literature of Recognition" in *The Location of Culture,* ed. Homi K Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 9-18.
5. Sell, *Literature as Communication*, 283.

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1

If Culture is Practice . . . ? A Practice-Theoretical Perspective on Intercultural Communication and Mediation

Iben Jensen, Roskilde University

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter[1] is to discuss how to take culture into account in intercultural encounters in everyday life—as in, for example, a job interview or in conflict mediation—without culturalizing or ethnifying.[2] To culturalize or to ethnify is to magnify the meaning of culture or ethnicity in a person's actions, beliefs, and values. Historically this has been done by constructing "the other" as determined by their culture in opposition to "ourselves" who are constructed as just acting (naturally) in relation to cultural values.[3] In all Nordic countries the media, public schools and public and private institutions have become part of an ongoing maintenance and reconstructing flow of this "culturalisation" and "ethnifying."[4]

My discussion starts with an example of an intercultural communication process, which is actually also an intercultural mediation, as I am giving an applicant from Pakistan feedback on his body language.

> I: I think you would have shown more energy if you had been using your arms more? You look a bit too calm.… Do you think it is because you were nervous?
>
> A: No no, but a friend told me that I should never use my arms. Danes don't use hands and arms to explain what they mean—so I just kept my hands on my legs…
>
> I: But it is ok to take your arms like this (shows).
>
> T: I thought it was better not to…

The applicant explains how his friend had told him to change his body language in order to perform in a more appropriately Danish manner. On the one hand his friend is right that very expressive body language can be overwhelming for an interviewer in a Danish context, on the other hand it might be difficult to act "naturally," when you imitate a Dane.[5]

However, the example shows how national stereotypes are part of knowledge sharing when the applicant is a member of an ethnic minority. Contrary to this, applicants not from an ethnic minority background made absolute no references to national ethnic gestures, but referred to the specific situation in the job interview and to their reactions from the interviewers. This illustrates how ethnicity used as an explanation of difference is privileged in everyday life. Similarly, in research into job interviews,[6] cultural differences are very often seen as the main reason why the applicant answers the way he/she does. In order to minimize the unintended impact on for example professional relations as well as in the research field it is necessary to rethink the concept of intercultural communication and intercultural mediation.

The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first, I argue that we need to rethink the concept of culture and intercultural communication in order not to privilege culture. I suggest seeing culture from a practice theoretical perspective, which means that practice is foregrounded, and focus is on body, on agency, and on appropriate performance. Furthermore I suggest that studies of culture are seen from the perspective of intersectionality—forcing us to study culture in

relation to other categories like age, gender, ethnicity, class, and education.

In the second section—in line with a perspective foregrounding practice—I provide an example of how a job interview can be analysed from a practice theoretical perspective. In the last section I argue that a reconceptualized concept of intercultural communication should be named post-cultural communication. This is meant to be a first step to avoid "culturalizing" or "ethnifying" cultural encounters.

Culture as Practice

In 1973 Zygmunt Bauman wrote a book called *Culture as Praxis*.[7] Bauman tried to clarify the three main discourses on culture at that time. Bauman saw culture as "concept," "structure" and "praxis." His main argument was that culture had to be understood from all three perspectives in order to grasp its complexity. The book was republished in 1999. In the new introduction Bauman still finds the approach with three perspectives fruitful as an attempt to clarify the subject of disagreement—but he no longer believes that this operation removes the ambivalence, or that it should be removed.

In 1973 Bauman praised the work of Clifford Geertz, who at the time had just contributed a new hermeneutic/semiotic approach to anthropology: "The interpretations of Culture." Geertz argued that anthropology was not to be seen as an objective science but as a subjective one—as the anthropologist not just registered but interpreted their data.[8] Bauman was not the only admirer of Geertz's new approach. The story goes that the American Anthropological Association were divided into two groups, one finding Geertz' emphasis on interpretation as part of science highly interesting, the other deeply shocking. However, the result of Geertz's work was an enormous hermeneutic/semiotic turn in the field of anthropology, which lasted for many years.[9]

In 1972 Pierre Bourdieu published his famous book *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (in French) in which he analyzed the practice of an agrarian society in Algeria as a system. The book appeared in English translation in 1977. Its influence on anthropology in the Nordic countries did not become apparent until the middle of the 1980s, but it has had an enormous impact ever since. James Clifford and George Marcus offered, based upon Bourdieu's key term *practice*, a fundamental critique of culture seen as systems and symbols and meanings. In their book *Writing Culture* they convincingly argued that anthropologists were selecting coherent patterns of information, when they constructed the cultures they wrote about.[10] The last discussion I will mention is that of William Sewell who offers a very interesting analytical approach, in which he argues that, although it is never done, it is possible to think of culture as a system and culture as a practice as complementary concepts hence practice implies system and hence system implies practice.[11]

The key discussions in the last four decades have been whether we could talk about culture as a concept, a structure, or as practice, and whether we should talk about culture as one coherent cultural system or as many practices in everyday life. My aim is also to work with culture as practice, related to structures, but from a new analytical approach which I find is able to use insight from both anthropological approaches, working with text and discourse without privileging it and working with practice without missing the ambivalence that Bourdieus' system of practice is suggesting.

Practice Theory: A New Analytical Approach to Micro-Processes in Social Life

In the last decade practice theory has been discussed increasingly in everyday life research.[12] Practice theory is distinguished from other cultural theories by foregrounding practice. The main argument is that our practice maintains

our social order. It is by certain doings and sayings that we maintain practice when we communicate, for example.[13] In a practice-theoretical perspective, practice is defined as:

> …a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, "things" and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. A practice—a way of cooking, of consuming, of working, of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of other etc…[14]

Practice theory is a particular reading of certain theoretical elements from certain researchers in order to create a new analytical approach to micro-processes in social life. The theoretical elements used originate from Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Michel Foucault, Harold Garfinkel, Judith Butler, and Bruno Latour. A practice theoretical reading foregrounds the common assumptions among these researchers about the performance of social practices. This perspective has no ambition of creating a grand theory, the purpose is rather to make a new reading on performance and social practices. Taking this perspective it is possible to focus upon practices in everyday life focusing on body, like Bourdieu—but not on habitus. The focus is on appropriate performance and normativity, but from an empirical sociological perspective, rather than a philosophical one like Butler.

Practice Theory as a Cultural Theory

The most ambitious attempt to think practice theory as a synthesis is offered by Andreas Reckwitz.[15] Reckwitz's main interest is to position practice theory in relation to other cultural theories. He argues that practice theory is a subtype of cultural theories, but that it differs from other cultural theories by the way the social is located. Reckwitz uses the location of the social as a dividing line to construct four ideal types of cultural theories, which I shall now briefly list.

The first ideal type is *Mentalism*: The social is *in* our mind. The social is placed in the structures, which form our minds

(structuralism) or the social is seen as subjective ideas following the intentions of the subject (phenomenology).

The second ideal type is *Textualism*: The social is *outside* the mind. The social is in chains of signs, in symbols, in discourse in text (semiotic-, discourse-, system theory).

The third ideal type is *Intersubjectivism*: The social is *in the interaction*, most obviously in the language, which is formed by rules. This means that sociality is within a constellation of symbolic interaction between agents (Habermas is the dominant example in this ideal type).

The last ideal type, according to Reckwitz is, not surprisingly, *Practice Theory*: The social *is in practice*. The social is reproduced every time we act as we are used to, since "Practice theory does not place the social in mental qualities, nor in discourse, nor in interaction."[16]

Although I disagree with Reckwitz's third ideal type on intersubjectivism and interaction as I do not see how practices would not be interactive, I find it highly relevant to discuss the difference between cultural theories from a meta-theoretical perspective. Reckwitz's ideal types offer a way to distinguish between different constructivist grounded cultural theories. Reckwitz clarifies how practice theory differs fundamentally by moving the focus from the individual to practice and by seeing discourse as just another practice—without privileging it.

What do We Gain from Practice Theory?

Ann Swidler argues that seeing culture as practice gives a solution to one of the biggest problems in sociology, which is to move abstract ideas into specific activities. She writes that "Practice theory moves the level of sociological attention "down" from conscious ideas and values to the physical and the habitual. But this move is complemented by a move "up" from ideas located in individual consciousness to the impersonal arena of discourse.[17]

In other words practice theory provides a new vocabulary for "ideas" and "values" because we can focus upon what people actually do, not on individual values or ideas, and on discourses (sayings). Swidler argues furthermore that the fruitfulness of practice theory is that it has renewed the focus on a definable empirical object.

> Both discourses and practices are concretely observable in a way that meaning, idealism and values never really were…. If culture is only practices, the problematic relationship of culture to action disappears. Culture cannot be treated as some abstract stuff in people's heads which might or might not cause their action. Rather cultural practices are action, action organized according to some more or less visible logic, which the analyst needs only to describe.[18]

However, Swidler adds that it might not be simple to describe "a more or less visible logic" and admits that this has become a primary challenge for cultural analysis.

A Practice Theoretical Perspective in Relation to Intercultural Communication and Mediation

I find three aspects in practice theory especially relevant for culture, intercultural communication, and intercultural mediation: body, agency, and appropriate performance. In a practice theoretical perspective, first, the *body* is seen as part of all activities because practices always include bodily activity. In this way a social practice is the product of training the body in a certain way. "When we learn a practice, we learn to be bodies in a certain way.... In that way a practice can be understood as a regular, skilful "performance" of (human) bodies," Reckwitz writes.[19] This view on body is equivalent to a social constructivistic approach in which we are doing categories with our practices and by using our bodies.[20] A practice theoretical perspective differs hereby radically from the intercultural studies of body language, which rightly point to the importance of body, but from a behavioristic perspective.[21] From an empirical/analytical approach this means that we by using a practice theoretical perspective can include

the body in the analysis. For example, by asking questions like: How is a trained body part of a job interview or in an intercultural mediation? How is body language part of an appropriate performance?

Every actor carries out a multitude of different social practices every day. The concept of *agency* in practice theory builds upon an early work by Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* from 1984, in which Giddens argues that actors are formed by structures but actors also form structures.[22] The concept of the individual is, in a practice theoretical perspective, related to Giddens' concept of an actor but it also focuses on individual activities. "The individual is the unique crossing point of practices, of bodily-mental routines."[23] This means at the same time, that individuals choose their doings/sayings and that practice theory install an actor in the processes, which means that communicators are seen as active, reflective and interpretive interlocutors. The communicator is formed by the structures and discourses in society, but is able to reflect and make individual decisions on how, for example, to handle cultural differences. By installing an actor, we can get rid of the idea of passive communicators like the ones constructed by Geerd Hofstede.[24] In an analytical/empirical analysis we can focus upon actions as active choices made by the interlocutors. We can be aware of individual and structural strategies.

The last element in a practice theoretical perspective is *appropriate performance*. As every practice is part of sociality, practice is always negotiated with norms in different fields and in relation to categories like gender, age, or ethnicity. Appropriate performance is part of every practice as we always could have done an activity differently. We could have followed another rule or created another practice by ignoring a well-known rule. "Appropriate performance" gives us a concept for normativity which is more local grounded than national culture is normally used in intercultural communica-

tion or intercultural mediation. By focusing on appropriate performance we are able to locate the performances within the actual communication situation as, for example, in the positionings the actors are doing.[25] To perform appropriately is always located within a situation, but it is also connected with expectations of behavior in relevant categories. We have diverse expectations for gender, for age, for professional groups and so on. In an analytical/empirical analysis we can focus upon expected appropriate performances in a situation and be more aware of misunderstandings related to different norms of appropriate performance.

Doings and Sayings—To be Analyzed

Theodore Schatzki, one of the most influential practice-theoreticians, defines practice as "a set of doings and sayings organized by a pool of understandings, a set of rules and a teleoaffective structure."[26]

Understandings means a practical understanding of what and how you have to do an activity; it is knowledge and know how in a broad sense.

By *rules* are understood explicit utterances on what has to be done, what could be done and what is important to do. Rules also include implicit principles, definitions, and instructions. Job interviews are characterized by an unusual articulation of both explicit and implicit rules.

The last part of a practice is defined as a *teleoaffective structure* which is a form of open affective and normative orientation. It is defined as follows: "a teleoaffective structure is a range of normativized and hierarchically ordered ends, projects, and tasks, to varying degrees allied with normativized emotions and even moods."[27] How you show your emotions in, for example, a job interview is essential to the impression you give.

As analytical terms we can use Schatzki's definition of practice to ask: Do the interlocutors share understandings of

what a job interview is? Do they know the same formal or informal rules about job interviews? How are emotions parts of the communication practice?

Analyzing Communication Practice in a Job Interview

Let us now try to analyse a job interview as a practice. The case is taken from a research study on job interviews done between 2002 and 2009. The purpose of the study was to examine how ethnicity, gender, and qualifications were negotiated in job interviews. Methodologically the study was structured as observations of about 100 job interviews. A majority of the job interviews are from Denmark, the others are from England, New Zealand, and Vietnam (Except in the case of Denmark, the interviews were carried out in English). The jobs required educational skills ranging from ninth-grade schooling to a master's degree. We are going to look at two "openings" for a job in the transport section. It is the same interviewer, the same location and the same job they are applying for. The "opening" is vital because this is where the interviewers form their first impression and where the applicants must show their competences in moving from informal small talk to formal dialogue.

André: A Nervous Candidate

André is about thirty-five years old. He is one metre 75 tall, average build, with black hair and brown eyes, and appears to be in good physical shape. He is wearing jeans and sweatshirt (and so is appropriately dressed). He is from Serbia and has lived in Denmark since the age of two. Gitte, the interviewer, is a white Danish woman of about fifty-five. The interview takes place in a small meeting room. Gitte and André are sitting at the end of the meeting table. I am sitting a couple of chairs from André.

André is quite nervous, when he enters the room. Gitte points out his chair and he takes his seat. The interview starts; the atmosphere is tense.

Gitte: Why have you applied for a job with us?

André: I have to admit that … that I had spoken to one of your bus … bus drivers.

Gitte: OK?

André: On the other side of the street, which was probably go … going for the airport ... Just behind there—they have something to do … do with you, I think?

Gitte: Yes, we have also …

André: They were just wa…washing the busses.

Gitte: Yes.

André: I think.

Gitte: Yes, a place, where busses are washed and cleaned?

Andre: Yes—cle… clean them.

Gitte: Umm.

André: … and I talked to him [bus driver], and he said … said something about, you need some employees.

Gitte: Yes.

André: … and I sa …said: "That's so exciting: I will apply for a job" …

Gitte: Yes.

André: … and then I just went to get an appli … aplication form on Valby bus central … and … and I have just filled it out and sent it in.

In a practice theoretical perspective the first focus is the body. During this opening André has moved his arm on top on the chair next to him, taking a position, which could be interpreted as very casual or "macho," but this is contradicted by his nervous rapid movements as he sits with a pen, banging it nervously into the table. Gitte stays calm during this opening and has a friendly body language while speaking in a friendly tone of voice. Next focus is upon agency. André is showing agency during the opening with his long story of how he actually got the formal application. As we shall see