

Chapter 3

Writing the world

Oscar Hemer

The discourse of cultural globalization has a parallel in post-colonial thought, but there has been surprisingly little contact between these seemingly closely related traditions. In this chapter I will propose a dialogue between the two, and suggest that the arts, and especially literature, may provide suitable common ground. Taking Paulo Freire's notion of 'writing the world' as a starting-point, I base my argument on a comparative discussion of three main writing practices (journalistic, academic and literary), drawing on my own experience as a writer and journalist and the 'transgressing' examples of Caryl Phillips, Flemming Røgilds and Antjie Krog. I end up with a discussion on the specific role of fiction in communication for social change, primarily as a means of investigation and secondly as a vehicle for empowerment.

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The global and the post-colonial

It may be worthwhile recalling that globalization is a quite recent concept, i.e. only some twenty years old. And when it was introduced, by Roland Robertson¹, it had quite different connotations from those it has since attained. Robertson's discussion of globalization was actually an offspring of the cultural debate of the '80s on the

1 The term is usually attributed to Robertson although he makes no claims for having coined it. It appears as early as 1985 in an article in the magazine *Theory, Culture & Society*, "Modernization, globalization and the problem of culture in world-systems theory", and is systematically discussed and defined in *Globalization - social theory and global culture* (1992). Robertson is also the father of 'glocalization', which he picked up in Japanese business jargon and gave his own interpretation.

60 | modern and the post-modern, and the G-word was originally an attempt to better describe 'the post-modern condition' by putting this general, all-encompassing, yet intriguing and somewhat obscure feature of contemporary culture in a global perspective. Robertson, Michael Featherstone, Scott Lash and other cultural sociologists involved in the magazine *Theory, Culture & Society* opposed the common notion of 'cultural imperialism' and pointed to the fact that global cultural flows were not just going in one direction, spreading Western (American commercial) culture to every corner of the world, as the analysts and opponents of 'McDonaldization' claimed and many of today's anti-globalization activists still take for granted.

In the arts, and at the time especially in literature and music, impulses were increasingly going from 'periphery' to 'centre'. *The Empire Writes Back* is the witty title of an influential textbook from 1989 by three Australian researchers in comparative literature, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, analysing the current literary revival in the Commonwealth, which seemed to almost exclusively involve writers originating from either the former colonies in the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and Australia, or minority groups in the metropolitan centre (London). What has been labelled 'post-colonial literature' is no doubt the most important global tendency in literature in recent decades, giving the very notion of *world literature* an updated relevance and new meaning, albeit perhaps not in the same sense as 'world music'².

The post-colonial is mainly attributed to the two principal powers of the late colonial era, the British and French empires, but post-colonial literature found its ground-breaking predecessor in the Latin American literary 'boom' of the 1970s. The influence of 'magical realism' and especially Gabriel García Márquez' masterpiece *Cien años de soledad* (A Hundred Years of Solitude) has, for good and for bad, been enormous among writers all over the world, not least in the former British colonies. Salman Rushdie, the iconic figure of the post-colonial literary boom, has often declared his debt to García Márquez for the conception of his twice Booker Prize-awarded first novel, *Midnight's Children*³. Latin American writers' main contribution to world literature was not only their syncretistic fusion of myth and history but, more importantly, their *incorporation of the colonial other* into the scheme of the (European) modern novel –not only as an ornamental figure, as in the abundant existing colonial literature, but as a subject⁴.

2 'World music', originally coined to describe western rock music with elements of popular music from Africa, Latin America and Asia, has become increasingly synonymous with the category 'ethnic music'; that is, any non-western music, traditional or modern, produced and distributed by the global music industry. Traditional European popular music is often also included in the diluted definition. 'World literature', going back to Goethe's definition from 1830, has of course other connotations but tends to attain a similar meaning as 'literature in one of the European colonial languages –in reality only English– by writers with a mixed or non-western origin'.

3 When the prestigious Booker Prize, given to prose fiction from the Commonwealth, celebrated its 30th anniversary in 1998, *Midnight's Children* was elected 'Booker of the Bookers'.

4 I have written several articles and essays about the Latin American contribution to world literature and its role as a 'missing link' to post-colonialism. See for example "Från dualism till pluralism. Carlos Fuentes och det latinamerikanska bidraget till romankonsten" (From dualism to pluralism. Carlos Fuentes and the

If we define post-colonial literature as literature which –explicitly or not– deals with questions of cultural identity and the remaining colonial structures of the post-colonial world⁵, it has its theoretical parallel in post-colonial thought, which mainly started as *post-colonial reading* of literary and scientific works, anthropological accounts, historical records, etc. in order to reveal and demonstrate the contradiction between the underlying assumptions and the (often unwitting) colonialist ideologies (Ashcroft, et al 2000)⁶.

The development of ‘post-colonial thought’ –eventually leading to the very specialized and quite marginalized academic discipline of today– runs parallel in time to the discussion on the post-modern, part of which developed into a discourse on cultural globalization, as indicated above. Yet, in spite of the obvious parallels and potential connections, there has, with a few but important exceptions, been surprisingly little dialogue.

The lack of communication can to some extent be explained by political and cultural differences, but the main obstacle has probably been academic specialization. The globalization of culture was typically a concern of (British and American) cultural sociologists and anthropologists, while the post-colonial theorists were mainly (Asian and African) historians or scholars of comparative literature. One of the ‘connectors’, with a natural foothold in both discourses, is Arjun Appadurai, whose exploration of the transnational public sphere (1996) has contributed a very useful theoretical framework for the study of media and globalization. Another exceptional example of concretely applied post-colonial theory, with direct relevance to our purpose here, is Indian historian Dipesh Chakrabarty’s profound critique of historicism –the basis of prevailing evolutionist development thinking, with its deep roots in colonial notions of Western supremacy (Chakrabarty, 2000).

If we are to address global modernity –or rather *modernities* in the plural– and imagine global change, I would argue that the post-colonial dimension is a necessary supplement and corrective to post-national globalization discourse. Re-focusing on modernity certainly does not imply a return to the modernization paradigm, which equated modernization and westernization. Cultural globalization in the sense proposed here could rather be defined as the de-westernization of modernity, what Chakrabarty means by *provincializing Europe* –that is, the task of exploring how European thought, which is now everybody’s heritage and affects the whole world, may be renewed from and for the margins (2000: 16). I further suggest that the arts may be the common ground where

Latin American contribution to novel writing) in *Peninsula* (1989) and “El Boom Revisited” in the Norwegian magazine *Marginal* # 3 (1994).

⁵ Actual power relations as well as more subtle mental figures, not only in the former colonial empires but also in countries like Sweden, which were not formally part of the colonial system.

⁶ An early example of post-colonial reading is Eric Williams’ *British Historians and The West Indies* (1966). Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), often regarded as the foundation stone of post-colonial thought as a discipline, is also basically a post-colonial reading of significant works in British and French literature from the colonial era.

62 | these different yet perfectly compatible discourses can best communicate. As demonstrated by the evidence of post-colonial literature, global modernity took on a plural form in art before being articulated in theory.

Writing practices

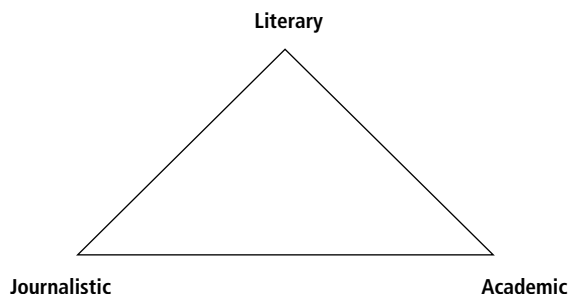
English, rich as it is in vocabulary, lacks a proper word for what in German is called *gestaltung*. The suggested translation 'design' is not quite accurate. 'Designing the world' is not what I have in mind here. Hence, for lack of a proper alternative, I stick to the verb 'writing'. And the 'surrogate' is actually even more appropriate, since it offers an unforeseen association with Brazilian liberation pedagogue Paulo Freire's work. Reading the word, he says, is dependent upon reading the world. Literacy, according to Freire, is that which enables us to more fully read and transform the world –to *write the world* (1987).

Appadurai also addresses the relation between word and world, which he considers to be the subject matter of cultural studies. In his wide understanding, "*Word* can encompass all forms of textualized expression and *world* can mean anything from the means of production and the organization of life-worlds to the globalized relations of cultural reproduction". Today, the tension between word and world is translated to a "complex negotiation" and the task of ethnography becomes "the unraveling of a conundrum":

What is the nature of locality as a lived experience in a globalized, deterritorialized world? (1996: 52)

I shall not go into further detail on Appadurai's analysis of "the role of imagination in social life", but his reflections on "ethnographic writing" certainly have relevance for the other forms of writing, not least fiction, which I shall discuss at greater length here.

There is, of course, an immense variety of writing practices, but I will concentrate on three main forms, or rather norms, and especially their inter-relationships. We are all more or less familiar with each of them –as readers, if not as writers. Let us call them the *literary*, the *journalistic* and the *academic* norm and illustrate their relationships using an equilateral triangle.



I have, for practical reasons, chosen a two-dimensional geometric figure, but in reality there are of course no such absolute categories as Literature, Journalism and Academia. They are all mixed and interrelated practices with more or less blurred borderlines. Yet they represent different approaches and perspectives, and are distinguished by certain clearly defined normative conventions. The model is not hierarchical; the three sides are equal and it does not really matter which position is where. There is, however, a reason, which I will explain later, why the literary norm is put on top of the others.

Unlearning to learn

So, let us start at the base and look at the relation between journalism and academia –apparently the two least compatible and most contradictory norms.

The academic way of writing is one that we all learn in its modest form at primary and secondary school –the *composition*. At university level it is refined as the *paper* and, in its most advanced form, the *thesis* or *dissertation*. The academic disposition follows a strict linear formula, containing the following elements: introduction, discussion, conclusion and summary. You can possibly leave out the summary, but none of the others as they are all essential for the understanding of the thesis. You must specify your research material and declare what theories and methods you have applied. You must build up your argument in order to draw your conclusion; this has to be solid, founded on previous research and according to specific scientific conventions. It takes time to write –and to read. It demands attention all the way. It is, by definition, a slow practice.

The journalistic norm represents, in most respects, the very opposite. When you come as a student to a School of Journalism, or as an apprentice to a newspaper or radio station, the first thing you are taught is to forget everything you learned in school –to turn the conventional writing formula upside down or the other way around: skip the introduction and get to the core immediately! I studied at Stockholm's School of Journalism in the mid '70s, before computers, and we were instructed to simply put the paper in the typewriter and start writing. Hand-written drafts, or even key-word dispositions, were strictly forbidden.

Now I am, of course, talking about the extreme journalistic norm –the one of news reporting.

*World Trade Center leveled to ground in terrorist attack.
Over 3000 dead.*

Only after giving the core information –the actual event– in one or two sentences, can the news reporter give the background and go into detail. The principle is simple: the essential facts first, then additional information of gradually decreasing importance, so that the editor can cut from the end without losing consistency.

According to a common myth, this formula of reporting dates back to the American Civil War of the 1860s, when the telegraph network was vulnerable to sabotage and thus unreliable. There is, however, little evidence of the 'inverted pyramid' being used during the war (Campbell, 2004). Nonetheless, it has been the ruling norm of news journalism in Western media since the late 19th century. News became an industry and journalism basically an industrial form of writing –*text production*. The inverted pyramid also lives on even without any practical reasons, although the Internet and new forms of multimedia journalism are now transforming the conditions of information access and distribution.

News journalism may not be our main concern here, but what I am hinting at is the journalistic approach, which can be applied to all journalistic genres, including arts and feature journalism. As a journalist working in the media, you are in a tough competitive situation. You simply have to get to the core and/or find a clue that catches the attention of your audience, in order to get your message across. Otherwise, all your creative efforts are in vain. You never get a second chance to make a first impression.

The journalistic norm would certainly make an interesting subject for post-colonial deconstruction. It is formulated by liberal ideals of freedom and transparency, while at the same time dictated by the industrial production process of the media industry and –most important– market forces.

Journalism has always been conditioned by the market more or less, but global integration of the media and entertainment industries makes commercialization of the media a prime driving force, blurring the formerly well-protected borderline separating 'news' from 'entertainment' (Sreberny-Mohammadi et al, 1997; McChesney, 1999; Hjarvard, 2001). What always applied to the tabloid press and commercial radio and TV stations is increasingly spilling over into morning newspapers and public service channels (this tendency towards market dictatorship, which may be a constituting aspect of globalization, strongly affects the publishing industry and thereby literature as well).

Investigative journalism

Academic writing is a *primary* practice, in the sense that it actually (ideally, at least) makes a scientific contribution. It is, from the journalistic point of view, *news*, i.e. the matter that journalism is supposed to feed on. Accordingly, the journalistic practice is mainly a *secondary* one; it reports and reflects on a primary source –an event, a commissioned report, a work of art, a dissertation. Journalism would then, ideally, be the art of summarizing, synthesizing and, thus, explaining a subject.

But journalism is also a form of investigation, and as a research method it has a lot in common with academic research, although this is never, or rarely, explicitly acknowledged. *Investigative journalism*, or muck-raking as it is commonly called among journalists, had its big break-through after *Washington Post* reporters Bill Woodward and Carl Bernstein's disclosure of the

Watergate scandal, which eventually led to the impeachment of US President Richard Nixon in 1974.

In the aftermath of Watergate, all self-respecting major Western media appointed investigative reporters and many still keep an elite staff of journalists with special privileges. But even these few star journalists have, from an academic point of view, ridiculously little time at their disposal. The standard would be a week or two –at the maximum a month– to do a major investigation into, say, the trafficking of women from the former Soviet Union and its links with global crime networks. What is more, while doing this research these investigative journalists would still be supposed to do at least some of the regular routine reporting on the side (as a regular reporter you work in a one-day perspective; if a commissioned report is handed out at 10 a.m. you are expected to deliver the article by 3 p.m.).

I worked for many years for the arts section of *Sydsvenska Dagladet*, the main daily newspaper of southern Sweden, edited in Malmö. Apart from literary reviews and chronicles and day-to-day commentaries, I specialized during the '90s in a form of essayistic travel writing from the world outside Europe, mainly Latin America and Africa⁷. I was not a foreign correspondent and I never wrote reports while travelling. I gathered my material and my impressions, and wrote the articles when I came home. Overall, this would be a process involving at least one month and at most three months of research, travel and writing.

From the employer's point of view, of course, this meant quite high costs for what was considered to be very exclusive material. They could send out a regular reporter and a photographer to fill the same amount of editorial space in less than a week. And they would not note any qualitative difference. Or worse: they would note the difference and prefer the latter news-oriented and presumably more easily digested reading. The well-researched (literary) reportage has become a very rare genre, at least in the news media.

Judging by current tendencies in the media, the gap between journalistic and academic practices is definitely widening. But although their positions are by definition contradictory and conflicting, they are also no doubt complementary and can perfectly well be combined. Many academic writers could certainly use a more journalistic approach.

Journalistic literature, literary journalism

The relation between the journalistic and the literary norm is perhaps even more antagonistic, or dialectical, but in a more subtle manner. According to a common saying, all journalists are frustrated novelists. In fact, few journalists dream of an academic career. There is even an explicit anti-academic sentiment in the media, stronger among journalists than in most other intellectual professions, while

⁷ Some of these articles are gathered in the books *Andra städer. 3 essäreportage från Syd* (1993) and *Kuba & Kina. 2 postkommunistiska reportage* (1996).

66 | many journalists *aspire* to become fiction writers. Sweden's commercially most successful novelists in the last few decades have, with but a few exceptions, all been former journalists⁸. And among the great majority of economically non-independent writers, quite a few make their living as (part-time) journalists. Not only do practitioners mingle, but the distinction between the forms is often difficult to draw; there are all kinds of mixed genres along the scale, from Norman Mailer's detailed documentary novels about the moon landing or mass murderer Gary Gilmore to the personal columns and semi-literary causeries which have boomed in the media lately.

New Journalism, launched by American novelist and non-fiction writer Tom Wolfe in the 1970s⁹, is a prime example of deliberately fused writing practices. One of Wolfe's own sources of inspiration was novelist Truman Capote's true crime story *In Cold Blood* (1966), an exposition of a multiple murder in Kansas, USA, in 1959. New journalism could be seen as journalism gone literary or documentary literature. However, as the term indicates, it sticks strictly to journalistic standards in terms of accuracy and factual detail. The 'new journalist' is free to use literary forms of expression and to voice his own subjective feelings and reflections, but he is certainly not allowed to add (fictitious) characters or events to his story. The writer of documentary or historical *fiction*, on the other hand, may make the same claims regarding *realism* but yet feel obliged to fill in the narrative gaps, with the excuse of providing an interpretation. This distinction is subtle but crucial, and I will come back to it later.

Yet the relationship is hardly an equal one. Like the academic, the literary writer tends to look down on journalism as an ephemeral and popular (even vulgar) form of writing. The traditional divide between 'high literature' and popular culture is still there, although the barrier is being broken down, not least thanks to post-colonial writing; one of the latter's most important features has been the incorporation of popular cultural forms and mythologies, and it often manages to reach a wide readership without compromising its artistic integrity.

Mutual respect

Literature and academia, finally, seem to enjoy the most harmonious relationship, partly because it is the least developed one. The fusions along this axis are not as abundant as other mixed genres and often meet with suspicion from both sides. In Scandinavia –and, to a lesser extent, in Anglo-Saxon culture– 'academic' connotes 'anemic' with regard to literature and 'essayistic' is not a positive characteristic when it comes to science (Latin cultures show greater acceptance for transgressions along these lines and subsequently boast a prominent tradi-

8 Marianne Fredriksson and Jan Guillou, to name two of the internationally most renowned.

9 It was codified in 1973 in a collection of writing co-edited with E.W. Thompson called *The New Journalism*.

tion of what we might call 'high-brow' essay writing). Yet, and precisely because the positions are clearly defined, there is also a sense of mutual respect between these two primary practices.

The construction of a novel is certainly different from the construction of a doctoral thesis, but in some cases, at least, they may both demand corresponding amounts of effort. Writers are of course more vulnerable (and sensitive) to market forces than academic researchers, but both are more or less dependent on subsidies and grants. As forms of investigation, the one is supposedly 'freer', the other more constricted by rigid (scientific) standards. In fact, literary standards may be just as constricting and inhibiting, but in a different manner.

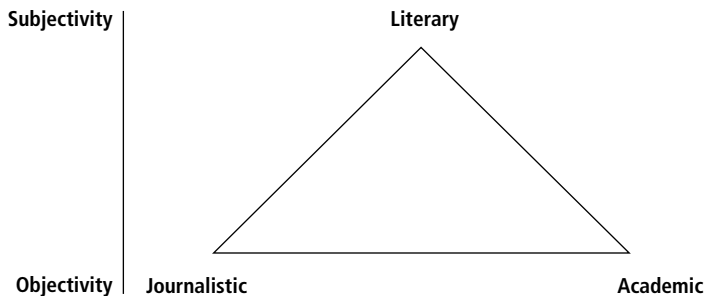
The subject matter

So far I have been reasoning uni-dimensionally, looking at these three positions two by two, as a set of different dichotomies. Now let us look at all three at a time in a more bi-dimensional way. Let us try to identify some genres that are actually fusions of the three approaches. The most obvious are the review and the essay.

There are all kinds of reviews, from the brief commentary in a daily newspaper to the comprehensive critique in an annual academic journal. The newspaper critic, whether an employee or not, is in a sense a journalist, but his standards are more academic than journalistic. However, they are not academic in the strict sense either, since they contain an important element of *subjectivity*. There is no established standard for the critique of a work of art. The critic is sometimes accused of being a 'judge of taste' and his critique random, merely a matter of taste. It is not, of course. There are several, mostly implicit, qualitative criteria, but these are not as easily detectable as those by which a scientific work is validated. In examining a dissertation one can use a check-list to ensure that this or that satisfies the minimum requirements. When reviewing a work of art one is actually examining another person's –the artist's– subjective expression. The subject matter is the subject itself.

The good review is faithful to its object, if not to the writer. My own experience as a writer is that the critic at best discovers aspects of my own work that I have not consciously perceived myself. The critic can thus be a co-creative interpreter, and the review a kind of extension of the reviewed work of art –literally a re-view, from a different angle.

The essay can be an extended review. But the essayist does not have to be a critic, and should in any case be *more* than a critic. He speaks in his own right and may also base his reflections on his own prime experience, as a researcher, reporter or human being (travel writing is another genre containing elements of all three practices, which can be approached from any apex of the triangle). What I am getting at is, once again, the element of *subjectivity* –the vertical axis of my figure and the reason why I put the literary norm on top.



'Objective' and 'subjective' correspond in this figure to the related yet not identical 'fact' and 'fiction', and both these dichotomies serve in defining the literary practice vis-à-vis the other two. But the tension between the objective and the subjective applies to both journalism and academia. There is neither a linear, gradual move from fact to fiction nor, necessarily, an exclusion process of 'either –or'. I offer three examples.

The Atlantic home

Caryl Phillips was born in St. Kitts in the Caribbean in 1959, moved with his parents to England in the early sixties and is now living part-time in London, part-time in New York –a typical post-colonial exile trajectory. As a black immigrant from the colonial periphery, growing up in dismal Leeds, he constantly faced racism and discrimination and naturally became concerned with issues of cultural identity and belonging. 'Home' is an essential concept in all his work, which comprises novels, essays and drama. Other themes that he always comes back to are the historical legacy of slavery and 'the burden of race'. He would probably consider himself to be mainly a fiction writer (his fifth novel *Crossing the River* was short-listed for the Booker Prize in 1993) but he is also a prominent critic.

The work I have in mind here is categorized as one of his non-fiction works, although he himself calls *The Atlantic Sound* (2000) a reportage novel. The title's 'sound' has a double meaning, but should mainly be understood in its geographical sense of the Atlantic as an inner sea, the inner sea of Phillips' own biography but also of modernity. The slave trade, trafficking in 'black gold', was the dark fundament of rising global capitalism, of embryonic globalization, if you will.

So it is a personal history, starting with the same Atlantic crossing that he did as a four-month-old baby, from St. Kitts to Dover, and now as a 40-year-old receptive reporter, while all the time referring to the primordial journey. But it also becomes a general history of the Atlantic, from this personal post-colonial point of view. Phillips continues his journey to some carefully chosen ports on both sides of the basin: Liverpool, Accra and Charleston, South Carolina, 'the Ellis Island of Afro-Americans'. He travels as an observant and sensitive reporter, recreating his impressions with poignant detail and great sensuality, and intelligently

commenting on them in a way that never stands in the way of the reader's own reflection. It is travel writing at its best.

But in the midst of these episodic travelogues, he suddenly puts in a historical short story from the late 19th century: the sad tale of an ambitious native palm oil producer from the Gold Coast who is cheated by his British associates. This character wants to buy his own steamship and sends the money to Liverpool in good faith and waits for the ship, which of course never arrives. So he sends his son to Liverpool, still in good faith, to find out what happened. The short story tells us about the son's wide-eyed impressions of Liverpool and his struggle for justice (he finally wins the case and sends his father's associate to prison, but loses the money).

This exemplary piece of post-colonial historical fiction is juxtaposed against Phillips' own visit to late 20th century Liverpool, which is clearly finding difficulties in dealing with its shameful past as a financial centre of the slave trade. From modern Liverpool the journey goes on to modern Ghana, the former Gold Coast. And so on. By moving between time layers and mixing genres correspondingly, Caryl Phillips makes the one perspective shed new light on the other. *The Atlantic Sound* is neither fiction nor non-fiction but novel, essay and reportage all in one. And above all, perhaps, it marks a home-coming, symbolically and literally. As Phillips remarks in the essay selection *A New World Order* (2001):

After thirteen years of compulsive itinerancy, I know my Atlantic 'home' to be triangular in shape with Britain at one apex, the west coast of Africa at another, and the new world of North America (including the Caribbean) forming the third point of the triangle (...) Across the centuries, countless millions have traversed this water, and unlike myself, these people have not always had the luxury of choice (...) These are the people that I have written about during the course of the past twenty years, and as one book has led to another, I have grown to understand that I am, of course, writing about myself in some oblique, though not entirely unpredictable, way (2001: 305).

The alienation effect

My second example, Danish poet and freelance sociologist Flemming Røgilds, is one of the few academic researchers that have deliberately approached a fictional form and method. Since the early '80s Røgilds has been doing extensive research on youth culture, especially among second-generation immigrants, in Great Britain and in his native Denmark. Like Caryl Phillips, he has been concerned with 'race' and 'roots', but from the (white) sociologist's point of view. In his books, based on participant observation and in-depth interviews, he always uses his own diary as part of the raw material. But in *Charlie Niensens Rejse* (Charlie Nielsen's Journey, 2000), subtitled 'Travels in multicultural landscapes', he takes a step further, turning himself as a researcher into a fictitious character. The year is 1997 and Charlie Nielsen, the writer's alter ego, a Danish cultural sociolo-

70 | gist of late middle age, (re)visits two European metropolises which can be construed in some ways as each other's opposites: London and Berlin.

Through the fictionalized form, Røgilds tries to achieve a *verfremdung* effect in German playwright Bertolt Brecht's sense, thus taking an 'objective' view of his own educational process during his sometimes bewildering excursions into the urban twilight zone. Charlie Nielsen takes us to parts of London and Berlin unknown to most of us, introducing us to scholars and intellectuals who help him understand what he is seeing. The book consists mainly of their analytical conversations, at a high level of abstraction yet firmly anchored in the surrounding reality, which raises questions for Charlie Nielsen such as what it means to be white, what the actual heritage of fascism is and in what way racism and nationalism are interrelated.

In Røgilds/Nielsen's analysis Britain and Germany respectively represent the heritage of empire and extreme nationalism in Europe today, and his travels turn into a journey of discovery into the complexity of our present age which, in Røgilds' own words

bridges the gap between innocence and experience at a specific point in European history which puts one in mind of the decline of the West.

However, it is not a sense of doom that stays with the reader, but rather the quiet confidence that Charlie Nielsen feels in London about the African Diaspora, where he has found a 'home away from home'.

The parallels with Caryl Phillips are obvious. Røgilds' fictionalized sociological documentary and Phillips' 'reportage novel' approach the same fundamental questions from different angles of my triangle, with corresponding amounts of personal risk-taking and involvement.

Guilt and truth

My final example is South African journalist/poet Antjie Krog's personal account of her country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Country of My Skull* (1999)¹⁰. The Commission, headed by Bishop Desmond Tutu, was set up soon after the first free elections in 1994. Its aim was to establish a picture of the gross human rights violations committed between 1960 and 1993, during the apartheid regime. From 1996 and over the next two years South Africans were exposed almost daily to the horrific testimonies of both victims and perpetrators. Antjie Krog –herself an Afrikaner, a descendant of the original Dutch settlers whose racist ideology and nationalist policy formed the apartheid system– covered the Commission's work for the South African radio. The search for 'truth and reconciliation' touched her own sense of guilt; it was a process in which she came to terms with her own history and heritage.

¹⁰ The first South African edition was published in 1998, but I refer to the British edition, with an added epilogue.

But *Country of My Skull* is more than her account of the hearings. Rather, it is her reflections upon her professional experience as a radio reporter and her personal (human) responsibility as an Afrikaner and South African. When she looks back at her work she realizes that there was something more, something which journalism (alone) could not cover. So she goes back to the records and tells the story all over again, but in a semi-fictitious way, in a kind of meta-journalism linked to the very core of the issue, the very concepts of truth and reconciliation.

In one of the chapters, exemplary of her method and style, she delves into the story –or, rather, the diverging stories– of the killing of black policeman Richard Mutase and his wife in November 1987. This was one of the innumerable violations committed by the regime's death squads. The three murderers entered the house, took the wife to a back room and waited for the victim's arrival. When he came they assaulted him and shot him in the head. Before leaving they also killed the wife, but left the couple's six-year-old son, sleeping in another room, to wake up and find his parents mutilated and murdered. It is not clear, from the three testimonies, whether the killing of the woman and sparing of the child were intended or not. It is not even clear who actually shot Irene Mutase, since two of the squad members put the blame on each other. Antjie Krog gives us transcripts of the three oral testimonies and a fourth, fictionalized account of the event, by writer John Miles¹¹. And she analyses them, she detects the imprints of the narrators, the "remembered core phrases and images that carry the distillation of the entire story". But even if the core elements overlap and give a seemingly objective view of what happened, one crucial question remains:

Either Hechter or Mamasela killed Irene Mutase. The truth does not lie in between. There cannot be a compromise between the two versions. Is the truth known only to the dead?
Between the bodies, the child Tshidiso remains. Which truth does he inherit? It is for him that the truth must be found.
And so, if the truth is to be believed in this country, it must perhaps be written by those who bear the consequences of the past (1999: 135).

So, how can we pursue the truth? Aren't we always stuck with a patchwork of subjective truths (and lies)? Don't we have to make more or less random selections and interpretations all the time? Of course, and to Antjie Krog this is an argument for using fiction in order to 'distill' reality. When confronted about her method she makes the following declaration:

I'm not reporting or keeping minutes. I'm telling. (...) I cut and paste the upper layer, in order to get the second layer told, which is actually the story I want to tell. I change some people's names when I think they might be annoyed or might not understand the distortions.

¹¹ John Miles's novel *Kroniek uit die doofpot* was based on documentation that was given to him in a Checkers packet by the dead Richard Mutase's lawyer.

But then you're not busy with the truth!

I am busy with the truth ... *my* truth. Of course, it's quilted together from hundreds of stories that we've experienced or heard about in the past two years. Seen from my perspective, shaped by my state of mind at the time and now also by the audience I'm telling the story to. In every story there is hearsay, there is a grouping together of things that didn't necessarily happen together, there are assumptions, there are exaggerations to bring home the enormities of situations, there is downplaying to confirm innocence. And all of this together makes up the whole country's truth. So also the lies. And the stories that date from earlier times.

And the affair that you describe in here. Is that true?

No, but I had to bring a relationship into the story so that I could verbalize certain personal reactions to the hearings. I had to create a new character who could not only bring in new information but also express the psychological underpinnings of the Commission. Surely I can't describe how I eavesdropped and spied on others? What gives a story its real character is the need to entertain –to make the listener hang on your lips (256).

Most journalists would probably buy the first part of the argument. After all, journalism could be just another word for "cutting and pasting the upper layer, in order to get the second layer told". But they would most certainly object to the second part –the bringing in of a fictitious character. This is where *Country of My Skull* crosses the line.

Antjie Krog met harsh criticism, especially from some of her journalist colleagues, for supposedly confusing journalism and fiction. That would have been a relevant objection if she had not openly declared and discussed her method. As it is a relevant objection to many other hybrid forms of journalism and fiction, such as Norwegian reporter Åsne Seierstad's much debated 'documentary novel' *The Bookseller of Kabul* (2003), where there is no discussion and apparently no awareness of the hazards in fusing genres and practices¹².

The three examples above are chosen precisely because they are consciously crossing genre-lines, not in order to confuse them but to deliberately let the different perspectives and norms illuminate one another. You can only do that if you master both –or all three– practices. And you will have to be anchored in one perspective, from which you approach the others. The very centre of the triangle is –and should probably remain– empty.

Fiction and social change

Fiction, like myth, is part of the conceptual repertoire of contemporary societies. Readers of novels and poems can be moved to intense action (as

12 For an interesting critique of Seierstad's doubtful claims on 'truth', see Terje Tvedt "The native strikes back. Om budbringere og verdensbeskrivelser" in *Samtiden* 4-2004.

with *The Satanic Verses* of Salman Rushdie), and their authors often contribute to the construction of social and moral maps for their readers (Appadurai, 1996: 58).

As my examples above indicate, fiction has a privileged position in relation to other writing practices when it comes to communication for social change. Dramatized fiction, especially, in the form of live theatre, film or broadcast soap operas, are potentially very powerful tools which should be handled with care.

Literature played a key-role in the formation of nation-states and the construction of national identity, in Europe as well as in the newly independent former colonies of Africa and Asia. Many post-colonial writers actively contributed to the nation-building process, providing mythology and epics for identification. Literature has served a similar, (nationally) modernizing and vitalizing function in Ireland, Norway and Iceland as it has in India and Nigeria. One important difference, though, is that the literature of the developing world is mainly written in the European colonial languages –English, French and Portuguese. The major exceptions are the non-European world languages, Arabic and Chinese, and the Spanish and Portuguese of Latin America, which are usually not regarded as colonial languages in the same sense as English and French. But translation into one of the European world languages –in reality English– is a prerequisite for recognition and incorporation into ‘world literature’¹³.

If literature –prose and poetry– played a crucial role in building the imagined communities of both colonial empires and nation-states, post-colonial writing –not only literature but other forms of mediated fiction and non-fiction as well– may serve as an important means of deconstructing the same mythologies and mental figures and, possibly, foster the building of new transnational and glocal communities.

The role of the writing I have pictured here as a transgressive practice is dual. It is primarily a means of investigation and discovery, secondly a vehicle for identification and empowerment. There is a conflict between these two objectives and my point is that the second must always be subordinated to the first. Writing which merely aims at behaviour change may or may not use fiction, but it is certainly neither literature nor journalism. It is, at best, social marketing and may have limited effect as such, more or less like commercial advertising –and like commercials it will have to be repeated incessantly. Lasting global change requires (the formation of) a global public sphere –or, rather, several over-lapping transnational or glocal public spheres. Writing and thus transforming the world, in Freire’s sense, is a complex process of collaborative teaching and learning.

13 This was a matter of heated discussion among some of the early post-colonial writers. The most radical position was held by John Ngugi from Kenya, who argued for the importance of a ‘decolonialization of the mind’ and decided to turn his back on his colonial up-bringing. He changed his name to Ngugi wa Thiong’o and started writing in his mother tongue, kikuyu. Whether he succeeded or not is difficult for an outsider to judge. But from an intellectual, if not artistic, point of view, such ‘de-linking’ strategies seem to be dead-end streets.

Media and Glocal Change

- 74 | Whether we are writers of fiction, journalists or social scientists, one first step would be to re-examine our own professional practices, whose conventions we too often take for granted, and, to quote Appadurai (2001), seriously consider the problems of the global everyday.