

On Creole Researchers, Hybrid Disciplines and Pidgin Writing

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It has ordinarily been assumed that the strength of a scientific discipline resides in its purity and integration, in its distinctness. Recently, however, contrasting opinions have emerged: that the strength of a discipline, at least in social sciences, is connected to its richness, plurality and the flexibility of its borders. Clifford Geertz in anthropology, Richard Rorty in philosophy, and Richard Harvey Brown in sociology are among the proponents of such an attitude. This essay takes their work as a point of departure to scrutinize a case of a “creolized” professional career, a hybrid discipline and a kind of writing that could be called “pidgin”.

Blurred Genres

Almost thirty years ago Clifford Geertz observed that the fashion of doing research, and especially of writing it, had begun to change – especially in anthropology, but also in other social sciences (Geertz 1980). After a hundred years of positivism, which in social sciences has been translated as an imperative to imitate natural sciences, the winds of change seemed to be stirring. Most likely it was a change in scientific fashion, as science, like any other collective phenomenon, is subject to changing fashions (Czarniawska and Panozzo 2008). This new fashion has been aided, or perhaps even led, by the methodological reflections of Winch (1958/1990), Feyerabend (1962/1997) and Kuhn (1975/1988). They were all keen to demonstrate that philosophy as well as the history of science questioned the ideal of the “true science” inherited from natural sciences. Social sciences seem to have recalled another ancestor: the humanities.

Slowly but surely, “laws and proofs” were becoming “cases and interpretations”, in a movement that Geertz called “the interpretive turn”, alluding to the “linguistic turn”.¹ Not for the first time, analogies and metaphors from fiction became legitimate – during the new installment of the complicated history of the relationship between social sciences and *belles lettres* (Lepenes 1988). A “third culture”, the one that showed interest in “how human beings are living or have lived” (Snow 1956), began to emerge. Being a mixture of the two original cultures, the third culture also mixed the genres with great gusto: philosophy blended with cybernetics and literature theory (Gumbrecht 1992), literature with empirical studies (Latour 1996), and allegories with ethnographies (Geertz 1972). It was there, in the vibrant fringe of blurred genres, that the new giants arose, all creolized personages: Michel Foucault (historian, philosopher, sociologist, political scientist); Niklas Luhmann (theorist and practitioner of administration, philosopher, cyberneticist, connoisseur of the Classics); Umberto Eco (semiologist, writer, journalist); and Bruno Latour (philosopher, anthropologist, sociologist). The examples do not have to be limited to the social sciences: Anton Zeilinger, the Viennese theoretical physicist, the designer of teletransportation, scrutinized with great interest the philosophical and rhetorical grounds of his own science (1997).

These brilliant authors are, however, rather the exceptions than the illustration of the norm in the “normal sciences”. But even in normal sciences there seems to be awareness of, or even a need for “the third way”, which, however filled with promises, will not be easy to chart. The present essay contains a tentative analysis of some such promises and difficulties.

Creole Researchers: The Case of “Malwina Gintowt”

I shall examine the phenomenon of creolized authors within social sciences using an actual case that has been anonymized. It is not a “sample” taken from “the population of such cases”, but an illustration of what I see as phenomena typical of the “third culture”. Malwina Gintowt is a scholar from Central Europe, who began her research career with a desire to understand and describe what was of such interest to C.P. Snow: “how human beings are living or have lived”. The most obvious choice of the field was psychology. Malwina Gintowt entered this field exactly at the point in time when the “old” European interpretative psychology began to be pushed to the margins by the “new”, scientific, quantitative U.S. psychology.²

After years of study, however, Malwina Gintowt came to the conclusion that psychology was not especially interested in how the majority of people live or lived. As far as Malwina

1 The expression “the linguistic turn”, originated with the anthology, *The Linguistic Turn. Essays in Philosophical Method*, edited by Richard Rorty in 1967.

2 A fascinating study of the history of U.S. psychology has been written by Ellen Herman, 1995.

could establish, most people spent most of their lives working. Psychology, in contrast, was mostly interested in children, the elderly, or people with psychological problems – in other words, mostly in those who for one or another reason could not work. What is more, even if certain authors (mostly creolized) dared to point out that people were “social beings” (Harré 1979), “the subjects” of psychological studies belonged to another species, that of “individuals”. These “individuals” could then be aggregated into “a collective” — but this was the result of a statistical operation, not of their interactions.

The right way out seemed to be in the direction of social psychology, and of organizational psychology. Both, however, were hostages to experimental psychology. Social psychology imprisoned the “individuals” in a laboratory, telling them to imagine being involved in an interaction with another individual (as in game theory). Organizational psychology isolated people from their organizing tasks, setting them in the same laboratory with an imaginary organizing task.

Years later, the validity of laboratory studies and the psychology of separated individuals became strongly criticized (Bruner 1986, Gergen 1994), but Malwina Gintowt did not wait so long. She decided that economics must be the discipline that was truly interested in activities typical for human lives.

When she decided to write a theoretical doctoral dissertation in economics (an enterprise very different from the empirical article typical for psychology), Malwina encountered a serious problem of style. While the articles in psychology were written in Past Tense (“the experiment demonstrated significant statistical differences between the experimental and the control group”), economics used the Simple Present: “the companies buy and sell”, “the market behaves”. Not a little surprised, Gintowt asked her adviser: “Does this mean that the companies actually behaved in this way? Or that they should be behaving in this way?” “Neither,” answered her professor. “The companies behave in this way in an economic model that is not situated in time or place”. Later, Malwina Gintowt learned from Deirdre McCloskey (1985) that this was a tense known as the Gnomonic Present, in which the time and the place are not relevant because economic laws are universally valid.

Somewhat disappointed by this discovery, Malwina Gintowt chose to enter a hybrid discipline, organization theory. Even this hybrid discipline has its problems, to which I shall return in the next section. But the advantages prevailed. Firstly, organization theory seemed to be truly interested in human activity that is central to human lives, within and outside the world of contracted work. Secondly, organization theory, being an “impure” discipline, did not try to discipline its adherents. Formally affiliated to organization theory, Gintowt sought help in anthropology, cultural geography, literary theory, history and philosophy. Her guide was Michel de Certeau: “readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves.” (1998: 174). “Border crossing” has become her motto.

Hybrid Disciplines: The Case of Management/Business Administration/Public Management/Business Economics/Organization & Management/etc.

What was this “undisciplined” discipline where Malwina Gintowt found her abode? The first problem of hybrid disciplines is their name. As indicated in the title of this section, hybrid disciplines have many names, and they are used differently in different countries and in different languages. The U.S. “Business Administration” is considered in many countries (for example Sweden) as synonymous with business economics, while in others (for example Germany and Italy) it is important to see “Business Economics” as part of economics, using economic theory and not the “soft” organization theory. In Poland it is called “Organization & Management”. Such differences exist not only in different places but also in different times.

This is not the place for an exhaustive presentation of the history of management and organization studies (see Jaques 1996, Shenhav 1999). Briefly, however, it can be said that while “Scientific Management” originated in engineering (Taylorism moderated by Human Relations), “organization theory” emerged only in the 1950s as a blend of theory of administration and systems theory (Waldo 1961). In the 1960s, systems theory invaded (or rather, was invited to march into) both “organization sociology” and “organization psychology” (see e.g. Katz and Kahn 1966).

In 1979, the government of Quebec asked the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard to prepare “a report on knowledge”. Lyotard concluded: “Knowledge is not the same as science, especially in its contemporary form” (1979/1986: 18). Many tried to draw conclusions from this observation, some attempting to create a “new scientific paradigm” that would be able to monopolize knowledge once more. Others drew a different conclusion, seeing this observation as a reflection on what is being done – and not being done – in social sciences; a kind of reflection that in time could replace “the method” in the narrow sense imposed by natural sciences.

Anthropologists, for example, returned from the ex-colonies with a reflection that was both profound and bitter. Their experiences have been incorporated by organization theory in several different ways. One of those was an invention of a new management instrument, called “corporate culture”; another was an adoption of a symbolic analysis that offered a reflection of a problematizing and critical kind. Older sources of inspiration have been called into service: literature, art, philosophy, esthetics, and semiology. Systems theory veered towards the theory of autopoietic systems (for example in works of Luhmann and Weick). But the new ideas did not cancel the old ones: *collage* and *bricolage* became the most frequently used French terms. After the attempts of the 1980s, the 1990s finally produced very clear ideas – on the state of confusion. Salmon Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* has become a cult text, a manifest:

The Satanic Verses celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, song. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the pure. Mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world (Rushdie quoted by Hannerz, 1996:65)

The situation in the 2000s is truly intriguing. The “methodological revolution” did not take place, after all. Many organization scholars continue to apply contingency theory or open systems theory, as if nothing had happened during the last forty years. An eminent U.S. scholar from Stanford Business School, Jeffrey Pfeffer, continues to desire “integration”,³ while the vanguard British scholar Gibson Burrell predicted a pandemonium (Burrell, 1997). The hope for a “pure theory” seems to be non-existent, even if reactions to an obvious fragmentation and polyphony differ. There seems to exist, however, a certain consensus on the desirability of transdisciplinary studies (which earlier on were called “cross-disciplinary”), and an acceptance – enthusiastic or resigned – of the return to arts and humanities as the sources of inspiration and even of models to emulate. But there is also a war against the evil axes of postmodernism and immensurability (Czarniawska, 1998), and, not least, institutional inertia that makes the lives of creolized researchers unnecessarily difficult, and the existence of hybrid disciplines precarious.

3 A description of a public debate between Pfeffer, Van Maanen and Perrow can be found in Czarniawska, 2003.

A Spiral of Problems and Solutions

The case of Malwina Gintowt, if not exceptional, is far from typical. This is what can be called an incidental career. One can argue that all careers are more or less incidental (Vironmäki, 2006), in spite of the legitimate “grammar of motives” that presents life as a project. Nevertheless, the planning of education systems, and the attempts to meet the demand of the labor market that are at its base, must be considered with all the seriousness it deserves. A demand for “creolized scholars” emerged a long time ago, approximately when the mass university became a fact of life. Specialist modules can be easily standardized and therefore equally easily repeated in different places, but their product is a graduate who knows all the relevant modules, not an educated person. Even the U.K., relatively late in establishing mass universities, opted for such specializations. C.P. Snow commented on this in 1956 as follows:

Somehow we have set ourselves the task of producing a tiny elite (...) educated in one academic skill. (...) I have given reasons why I think it is a disastrous process, for the purpose of a living culture. I am going to give reasons why I think it is fatal, if we're to perform our practical tasks in the world.

The new European universities created in the 1960s and 1970s (Lancaster, Karlsruhe, Linköping, Bielefeld) were seriously considering Snow's words. In Linköping, which is the university I know best among those, “hybrid departments” have been created, where scholars from diverse disciplines were to collaborate on studying “themes” judged important to society. They still exist: Tema T (technology), Tema V (water) etc. Thus the problem of incidental careers of creolized scholars has been solved by the creation of hybrid disciplines, but this solution has opened the door to still new problems.

The first of those was easy to predict: the employers (that is, the very same people who tend to complain that the division of university education in disciplines has nothing to do with division of labor in practice) complained that they had never heard of people specialized in “technology” or “water”. Apparently, it was much better to employ graduates in sociology or business administration and then grumble about their lack of practical skills. (The folk wisdom that claims that old problems are always better than new problems is unjustly ignored by organization theorists, but fully heeded by the practitioners). The new solutions needed time, adjustment, experience and new vocabularies in order to demonstrate the advantages of “hybrid disciplines”. In the meantime, old universities, always wary of the new arrivals (Czarniawska and Wolff 1998), exploited their advantages by offering graduates educated in the old manner. The solution was then promoted one stage up, to the doctoral level. The graduates in sociology, anthropology, and business administration took research courses within “Tema T”, in order to study science and technology.

The resistance came also from other elements of the dominant institutional order. Research in Sweden is mostly externally financed – by state, municipal, regional and many private foundations. Each foundation has its scientific committee, which is divided into subgroups – thematic or multidisciplinary – composed of representatives of different disciplines. I was a member of several such committees as a representative of my discipline, business administration. The procedure is usually the same: at the first round, the most interesting research projects were individuated among applications. The priorities were clear: the transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary projects were to be preferred. Indeed, those were usually among the most interesting. The second step consisted in counting money: it was usually in short supply. The third step was the decisive one: some projects needed to be sacrificed. How to make a choice between loyalty to Science, which would favor hybrid projects, or to your own Discipline, which gave you a mandate to be there in the first place? I

was often reminded of the words of Sir Anthony Blunt, the Soviet spy and respected U.K. art critic: “This was a case of political conscience against loyalty to country... I did not betray my conscience”. Good for him.

The third problem was common to the members of the committee and the scholars within “Themes”. How to compare an anthropological research project with an economics one? How to communicate within a project that gathers representatives of different disciplines? The solutions to these problems are at least two. One, typical for the so-called “cross disciplinary studies”, is to trust the competence of the colleague from another discipline without pretending to understand it (this is how economics earned much of its advantage). The other, typical for transdisciplinary studies, is to try to find a common language, and if necessary, create a new vocabulary adapted to the project at hand.

It is obvious, however, that there is no way for everybody to learn enough about other disciplines, no matter how interesting and relevant. A practical solution to these problems consists in the specialists trying to simplify their communications, and the non-specialists attempting to learn the key terms of the specialist jargon. The result is a *pidgin*, long known as “a trade language”. The purists may be shocked: is this not the way to the impoverishment of scientific language, with its subtleties and enormous efforts aiming at finding “proper names” for everything? Not according to Steve Fuller (1996), the scholar of science and technology – another hybrid discipline, where the historians, the sociologists, the anthropologists, the biologists, the philosophers and the engineers talk to each other for a long time and with great success.

Such a possibility seems exciting to some, and frightening to others.

In Search of Meaning: Social Sciences Between the Club and the Bazaar

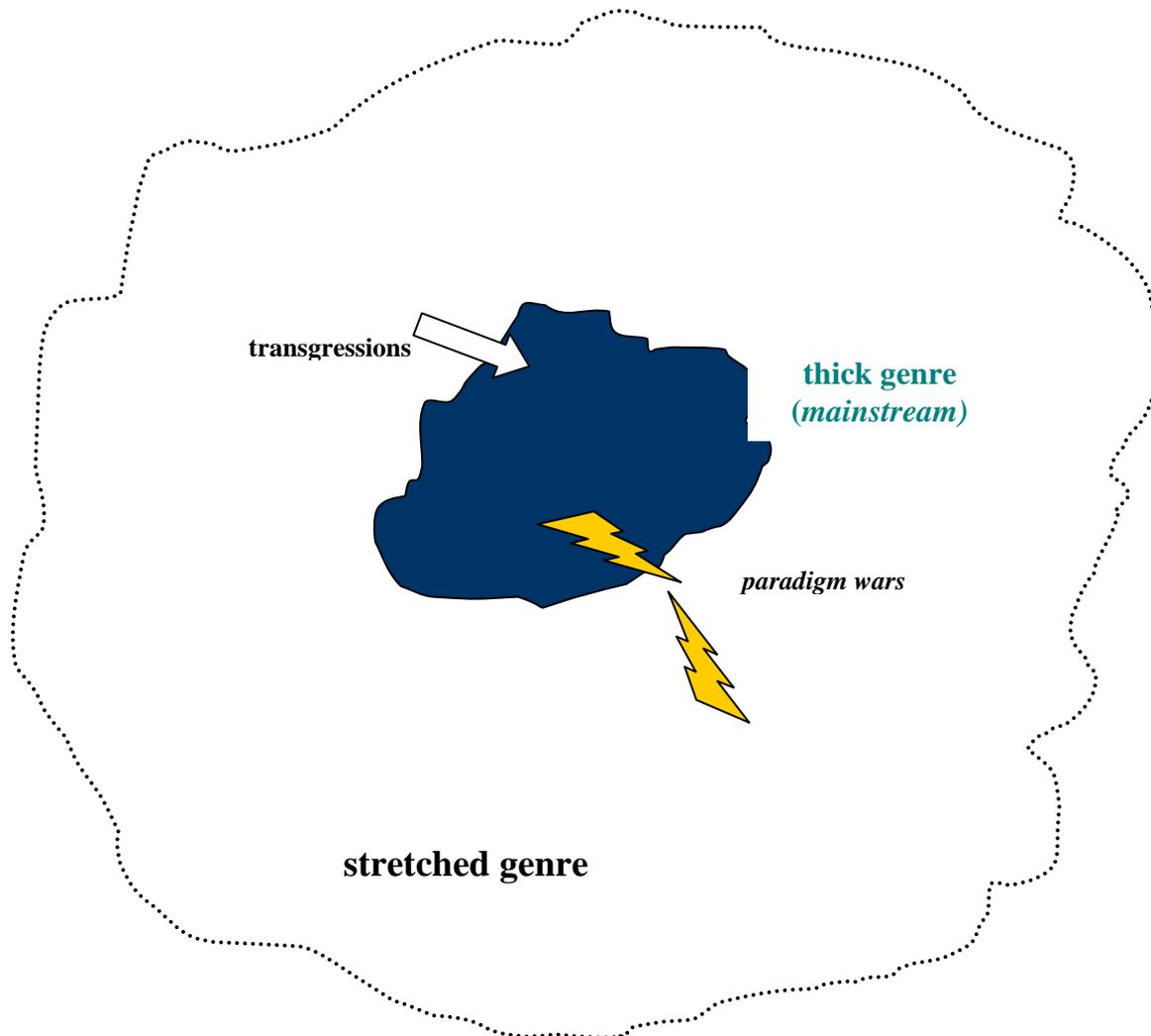
Clifford Geertz would probably have nothing against the fact that social scientists increasingly often speak pidgin to be understood. According to him, “we are living more and more in the midst of an enormous collage” (Geertz, 1986: as quoted by Richard Rorty, 1991: 209), and “the world is coming at each of its local points to look more like a Kuwaiti bazaar than like an English gentlemen’s club” (ibid.) Rorty wholeheartedly agreed that most of us spend our days on the bazaars of the global world, talk pidgin to make ourselves understood and to make a good deal, but then gladly go back to “our club”, where everybody talks the same language and the nuances can be appreciated. The alternatives to this shuttling between the two worlds have been tested and found wanting: either to close ourselves up in the club complaining that the world goes astray, or else to attempt to remake the bazaar in our way, entering with the force of legal acts if not with the armed forces. What is needed is not “the perfect language”, “an integrated discipline” or “the rigorous scholars”, but a will to communicate with each other, even in pidgin, doing all the necessary translations.

This postulate can be formulated in the terms describing the scientific genre. The U.S. sociologist Richard H. Brown suggested that this genre is subjected to the dialectic of thickening and stretching (Brown, 1998). *To thicken a genre* means filling it with received ideas and codified descriptions; to use the rules of representation literally, strictly and redundantly, with the aim of showing a reality already in existence. The results are texts that are traditional, closed and easy to analyze, confirming the premises known to the readers.

To stretch a genre denotes a movement in the opposite direction: exploiting the polysemy of the language, looking for new meanings through a constant change of perspective, employing irony and metaphors. In such texts, reality is under continuous construction, and the texts themselves are elusive, playful, and open. The readers are producers as well as consumers of such texts, as more likely than not, both writers and readers are creolized researchers from hybridized disciplines. But can thick and stretched scientific genres coexist, and if so, what may happen at the borders between these two worlds?

Living at the Borders

Here is a cosmology that I would like to suggest at the end of my essay. The genre – let it be called “social sciences” – is large, with imprecise and permeable borders. In its center there is a mainstream (why not?), busy with thickening the genre. All around it are “peripheries”, filled not only with “backwaters” (the opposite of mainstream), but also with lively streams that run much quicker than the mainstream. Some of them will run out into the sand, others will open new passages, all contributing to a stretching of the genre.



So far so good. The interesting issues concern now the relationships between the thick genre and the stretched one, and the events at the borders. As far as the first issue is concerned, there is traditionally an animosity between those who inhabit the center and those who live on the peripheries. But in this case, this spatial metaphor does not function well if taken literally. It would be better to say, using (metaphorically) the vocabulary of “needs”, that the stretched genre needs the thick genre for “weight” (that is, the negotiations in the committees of research foundations). The politics and the logic of representation demand the illusion of a discipline that is “well integrated” or at least “clearly delineated”. Equally, the mainstream needs the stretched genre for its renewal, for innovations: a truly thick genre is perfect but dead. While I am not sure I share Richard H. Brown’s optimism in seeing a dialectics of the two movements, thickening and stretching (what would be their synthesis at a higher level?),

I am quite convinced that, even in a static picture like mine, the borders are always permeable.

What happens at these borders? At present, two types of events: “paradigms wars” and “acts of transgression”. The paradigm warriors (observe the gender) fight fearlessly under the banners of “pure disciplines”, as if we hadn’t had enough of real wars. The alleged beauty of the “scientific debate” seems doubtful to me. A debate is not a dialogue, which is a search for new knowledge by two parties, because the first condition of winning a debate is to close one’s ears to the cries of the opponent.

I am not much convinced by “acts of transgression”, either. Within my spatial metaphor as represented by the picture, it is easy to notice that in order to transgress one must first ascertain that the borders exist. Applauding the heroism of transgressors, we contribute, together with them, to the maintenance of the boundaries.

What else, then? I would suggest plenty of meetings at the (moving) borders, picnics, potlatches, translations, and pidgin-aided transactions. Just as happens at the European Cultural Studies Conferences, for example.

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