

Autobiography as Scientific Text: A Dialectical Approach to the Role of Experience

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Review Essay:

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Abstract: *The Sneaky Kid and Its Aftermath* is a first-person account of the (sexual) intimacy between a researcher (Harry WOLCOTT) and his research participant (Brad, the sneaky kid). Two years after the events, the sneaky kid returned with a vengeance, beating up the researcher and burning down his house. Autobiographical texts may lead readers to confuse author and literary figure of the same name. Any critique of the protagonist potentially can be read as a critique of the author and therefore as an ad hominem attack—to mark the difference I propose to differentiate the two for the purpose of deconstruction (here, Harry WOLCOTT and Wally Haircut, respectively). In my reading, the relationship between Wally Haircut and Brad is highly unsymmetrical in terms of FOUCAULT's knowledge/power concept and BOURDIEU's analyses of the relations between economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Wally Haircut, I will argue in part, had everything to gain in these dimensions and his research participant, the "sneaky kid," had everything to lose. This is just how it turned out. Unfortunately, Harry WOLCOTT failed to draw on existing social theory to provide a reasonable explanation of the events. I conclude with a "two thumbs down."

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1. Introduction

Autobiography is an emergent literary form for writing scientific texts (ROTH, 2000). Because author and literary figure bear the same name, autobiography raises problems for the critique and deconstruction of this literary form. This review is about (a) the confusion of authors and protagonists, (b) the confusion between authorial intentions and reader receptions, (c) the relationship between biography and understanding text, and (d) the relationship between researchers and their participants. I develop these problematic issues using the follow two autobiographical episodes. [1]

(A day in the summer of 1979.) I have just finished my M.Sc. thesis on the "Stopping Power in Protons from 20 to 120 keV," waiting for my last oral examination, wondering what I will do with my life. Beginning a job as an industrial physicist, leading a smug middle-class life including the annual vacations somewhere in France or Italy, and spending the next 35 years at it does not seem to be a an interesting alternative. I spent much of the last several years reading physics and philosophy somewhere along a river or in a cabin, photographing interesting scenes and events and developing my own photos, painting old farm and fishing houses. Continuing at the university by doing a Ph.D. is therefore not an option, because I have come to reject schools or universities as places of learning (my conviction, "If you want to stop learning something, go take some classes in it!"). The two most viable cultural "career alternatives" (WOLCOTT, 2002, p.50) at this moment are, (a) working for a year and then buying a few square meters of land and a trailer, then stop working and live a sparse life growing vegetables or (b) hitchhiking to and living somewhere in Central America on less than five dollars a day. Two months later, I will have begun to enact the second option. [2]

(A day in the summer of 1986.) I am sitting at a table in one of those restaurants that offered an all-you-can-eat salad bar for three dollars. I had been eating for an hour, chosen (cottage and other) cheeses to get protein, and fresh vegetables for the vitamins. I am so full, I can hardly move. But I know I will not have anything to eat for the next 23 hours. In the evening, it will be water. In the morning it will be water again, I do not have the money for coffee, tea, or whatever else people normally drink and eat in the morning. Should I feel hungry during the day, I will drink water again. Three dollars a day is all I have during the summer, sleeping on wilderness campgrounds where I can stay for free, or sleeping in a car that I cannot drive because I do not have the money for the gas. Sometimes I get lucky and find a person who wants someone they can trust to sit their apartment for a week. Sometimes I sleep in an office at the university, but sleeping outside is much more pleasant. I often bathe in a lake, sometimes I take a shower in the physical education facility. I wash my clothing in the lake, or in a shower, and dry them outside in the campground. But I do not borrow money to "be better off"; I am too proud to ask friends (any relatives live continents away) and live on the little I have. I do not have much money, but I am free. "Freedom's just another word," Janice JOPLIN used to sing, "for nothing left to loose." I do not know what

other summers will be coming, finding me in the same sort of situation, a little more or a little less money per day. Nothing left to lose and therefore free. [3]

In the hermeneutic sciences, there is general acceptance of the presupposition that lived experiences shape who we are and who we become; how we read and understand a text is an outcome of a transaction between the text and ourselves (RICŒUR, 1991). If I, the author of this text, claim to have sympathies for Brad, who, in *The Sneaky Kid and its Aftermath* beat up another protagonist, Harry, then readers may feel that this makes sense because of apparent similarities between the "I" in the two paragraphs and Brad. It is also self-evident that autobiography is a reduction that cannot ever capture the fullness of present or past experiences (MÜLLER, 1972) and that time changes how we understand past events (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1945). Thus, whether I, the author of this essay, would use Paragraphs 2 and 3 at another point in my academic career is far less clear, in particular because "in every writing, and consequently, in every experience ... there is this experience of incineration" (DERRIDA, 1995, p. 209) that makes us forget how things were at a previous moment in time. Although perceptive readers may discover similarities between the events represented in the previous paragraphs and Brad, one of the two main protagonists in *The Sneaky Kid and its Aftermath*—opting out of "normal" career trajectories and freedom that comes from owning little and having nothing left to loose—the relationship between Brad's lived experiences and mine remains open. This is so, because the relationship between my lived experience and the above accounts remain open, as does the relationship between Brad's experiences and the account provided in *The Sneaky Kid*. It remains open not only to me, the author of these paragraphs, but also to you, the reader. In reading these lines, you are countersigning this text in the way I countersigned *The Sneaky Kid*. Neither WOLCOTT's nor my text can ever be a means for the "transference of meaning, the exchange of intentions and meanings" (DERRIDA, 1988, p.20), for both texts, as texts in general, "free meaning from its tutelage of the mental intention" (RICŒUR, 1991, p.149). [4]

Writing comes with a responsibility, especially autobiographical writing, "because a [autobiographical] *récit* ... is not simply a memory reconstituting the past; a *récit* is also a promise, it is also something that makes a commitment to the future" (DERRIDA, 1995, p.206). This responsibility relates to the author. But there is also a responsibility on the part of the reader. If the two paragraphs were part of a novel, you (the reader) could talk about the protagonist as making stupid mistakes or decisions, about feeling sorry for himself, or about his narcissism. You could do so even if the novel was written in the first person. If, however, the author claims that the text is autobiographical, then the issues become more complicated. Any comment about stupid mistakes, feelings, or narcissism all of a sudden can be construed as ad hominem attacks on the author. For the critique and deconstruction of autobiographical texts, I therefore propose separating the living author and his or her protagonists (even in the case of a [purported] autobiography) and any claim of overlap (i.e., truth) as impossible because of the ontological gap between any entity and its representation (LATOURET, 1993). To clearly differentiate between the author and the first-person protagonist of *The*

Sneaky Kid and its Aftermath, I change the latter's name to Wally Haircut.¹ (This journal's policy to capitalize authors' surnames further allows me to signal the difference between the author Harry WOLCOTT and his protagonist.) [5]

2. Dialectic Perspective on Experience

"There is no universal set of things to be desired or events to fill one's days and dreams, just as there is no absolute set of things to be learned. What people learn or want or do or dream about is embedded in particular macro- and microcultural systems" (WOLCOTT, 2002, p.7).

WOLCOTT wrote these lines first in a report to the U.S. National Institute of Education, continues, which, because nobody seemed to react to the report, he published in the *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* immediately after having become the editor of that journal. The story was subsequently republished in different venues, as a chapter in a book on complementary methods of research, as a chapter in one of his own books, now again in this book. It constitutes a central aspect of the author's professional career since the early 1980s. The report contains the story of Brad, a "sneaky kid," who squatted in a little cabin on Wally Haircut's 20-acre homestead. Brad mostly lived on the 70 dollars worth of food stamps, and income from occasional jobs in the community or for the author. WOLCOTT continued his account in the *Sneaky Kid* chapter that opens this book, "What he [Brad] had learned to want was a function of his culture, and he drew narrowly and rather predictably from the cultural repertoire of the very society from which he believed he as extricating himself" (p.7). Brad was a free spirit, but in living outside society, he squarely lived inside it. Because Brad did not need more than the food stamps, he was free to do as he wanted, much as I was free and without committing myself to banks or other lenders. Brad did not have many needs—he supplied himself with things by stealing, something that I had never done, and therefore was free. But, as WOLCOTT recognizes, these choices, living in the woods or on a wilderness campground, are not just personal choices but are some function of the existing culture. There is something true about this statement, though I disagree about the "function," because I recognize the dialectical relationship between the generalized action possibilities at a collective level and the concretely realized actions at the individual level. More importantly to me, WOLCOTT attributes these ideas to his alter ego, Wally Haircut, having arisen from the interviews that he conducted with Brad. But such

1 In the novel *Pale Fire*, Vladimir V. NABOKOV (1962) made the relationship between author and his work the central theme. The novel consists of a 999-line poem, apparently by an academic named John Shade, followed by a 200-page commentary by his colleague Charles Kinbote. Who the narrator within the novel is has become a topic of scholarly debate. Did John Shade invent Charles Kinbote or Charles Kinbote invented John Shade? Perhaps another colleague, V. Botkin, invented both of them? Perhaps John Shade's dead daughter Hazel' ghost prompted both John Shade's poem and Kinbote's commentary to it? (e.g., BOYD, 2001). In *Ulysses*, James JOYCE (1986) devoted the entire Chapter 9 (pp.151-179) to a theory of the special relationship between SHAKESPEARE and the ghost in *Hamlet*. Accordingly, SHAKESPEARE was said to have played the Ghost in Hamlet, crying out on stage to his two son's, as actor to Prince Hamlet and as father to Hamnet SHAKESPEARE who had died around the time that Hamlet was first played. It has been suggested that SHAKESPEARE has been something like the ghostly father of JOYCE and, similarly, NABOKOV the ghostly father of *Pale Fire* (ROSENBAUM, 1999).

ideas have existed before. The integral relationship between the possibilities open to individuals and the possibilities existing collectively at the level of society is a core issue of dialectical materialist thought originated by Karl MARX, and which was subsequently developed by Russian social and cultural-historical psychologists (e.g., LEONT'EV, 1978; VYGOTSKY, 1962) and philosophers (e.g., IL'ENKOV, 1977). [6]

From a dialectical materialist position, societal life and individual life are dialectically related. For society to survive it has to be concretely realized by individuals; but individuals need to embody society in their actions to survive. In their actions, individuals therefore always concretely realize action possibilities that exist at the collective level. Theories that isolate the inner nature of humans from societal relations and that reduce human inner life to mere "inwardness," in which human beings are understood as maintaining their lives in given social and material environments, are therefore simply false.

"Human thinking, in its specific and determining characteristics, must be understood not merely as the analysis/synthesis of individually posed problems, but rather as appropriation of societal modes of thinking with which the individual realizes socially developed forms of analysis/synthesis in his or her individual thinking and only in this way becomes able to contribute to the development of these thought forms" (HOLZKAMP, 1991, p.59). [7]

Therefore, the social nature of human beings consists not of anthropological and psychological constants, but rather of a historically contingent developmental potential that makes it possible for individuals at each cultural-historical moment of societal development, with its expanded social appropriation of nature, also to change their own nature (MIKHAILOV, 1980). [8]

Whereas we act freely, we do realize existing possibilities at the collective level. In every act, I realize cultural possibilities that I have come to enact because of my interactions with others and with all the objects that already had a place in culture. When I lived in cars and on wilderness campgrounds, or went hitchhiking toward Central America, I did not do something that existed outside of society. I concretely realized a possibility at the collective level—there were places where you could eat as much as you could for three dollars a day, there were tents and cars that provided shelter against adversities and bad weather, there were farms that could afford paying a lad's day of work with a meal, and there were lads such as I who did want to work for a meal. Later, when I was hitchhiking toward Central America, I concretely realized possibilities that existed at the collective level—there were people with cars, there were people inviting me, I had a sleeping bag that allowed me to sleep in the ditch beside the road when I did not have an invitation to stay with someone. In a similar way, Brad, the sneaky kid, enacted possibilities that existed at the collective level, drawing on whatever resources that he had at hand. He could go and get his monthly ration of food stamps, he could do odd jobs (getting thumped in your butt is really something odd for many people) for a little money, or he could provision himself by taking food and other cultural items without paying for them. Even the recognition of something as a

resource cannot be abstracted from the culture that stands in a dialectical relation to its concrete enactment through Brad. [9]

Although we make individual choices, these choices are already understandable by others. When we chose to act one way rather than another, it is because we are already using elements from our cultural repertoire to account for making the choice for ourselves and inherently for others. There is therefore no subjectivity without intersubjectivity. Individual subjectivity always involves the transgression of pure individuality in the direction of participation in collective subjectivity and therefore has interpersonal character. At the very moment when I articulate something very subjective, for example, "I feel sad," I have to use a language that I inherited from the other, which is already culturally existent, which is already understood by others. At the very moment I index myself as a person through the use of the reflexive "I," I use a sign, which in its very nature is non-identical with what it refers to, it is "not-I." "I" is both personal and social, there is no "I" without a "you," there is no Self without the Other, there is no subject without an object (other), no individual without the collective (RICŒUR, 1990). [10]

Similarly, by interviewing Brad, publishing a report and article from it, Wally enacts general cultural possibilities. Even the author's apparent refusal to do much reading but rather to focus on writing (WOLCOTT, 2001) is a general cultural possibility, though failure to appropriately situate your writing in the intellectual history of culture may be penalized in the review process. Even the nasty part of the *Sneaky Kid* story, which I unfold in this review, the (homo) sexual relationship between a researcher and his participant, is part of the general possibilities, which have been concretely enacted by Wally and Brad. Whether these actions were or are ethical or unethical, moral or immoral, or normal or perverted will not be the point of my review. Others have engaged WOLCOTT on this point. On the other hand, *The Sneaky Kid and Its Aftermath* can be read as the protagonist Wally Haircut's long justification of an event in the quest for redemption. The point of my essay lies in articulating a critique of asymmetrical relationships that lead to further asymmetries, accountability and responsibility for actions, and the need to contextualize studies in the existing literature. But before getting there, I will articulate the dialectic of reading and review the structure and content of the book. [11]

3. Dialectic of Reading

Every qualitative researcher knows that texts are inherently overdetermined—there is no one sense (some people say meaning), one message, or *one* reading possible. Rather, any particular sense, message, or reading emerges from the dialectic of READING, which can be analyzed using reader and text as two aspects of the same unit. In fact, there is nothing that moves from the text to the reader, like a message or idea, there is no transfer of an author's intended meaning to the reader. Rather, by engaging with a text, readers articulate their existing practical understandings of how the world works *in front of the text* (RICŒUR, 1991). There is no message *in* or *behind* the text not even *between the lines*, but only an unfolding of understanding in the transactions between

reader and text. But each reader has developed in a culture (and therefore developed culture), has concretely realized cultural possibilities and become an individual through his or her experience in an already patterned, cultural-historical world. Thus, my reading of *The Sneaky Kid and Its Aftermath* is a reading of the book rather than *the* reading of the book; it is a concrete realization of the possibilities of reading this book—and therefore tells us something about the culture of which WOLCOTT, I, and my readers are co-constitutive members. [12]

The possibilities for my reading emerged from my life experiences, themselves concrete expressions of the possibilities to enact a life in our culture. Thus, my experiences of freedom while living on a bare minimum are important and perhaps defining moments for the kind of reading that I will present here. The exact relation between my reading and these experiences can never be established however appealing the connection may appear, because every trace of past experience has the nature of "cinder [which is] something that remains without remaining, which is neither present nor absent, which destroys itself, which is totally consumed, which is a remainder without remainder" (DERRIDA, 1995, p.208). Other moments that bring forth my reading are the vast amount of literature that I have come to know through reading. Elsewhere, WOLCOTT (2001) acknowledges that he does not read extensively, because, he argues, as an academic, one is either a reader or a writer. The use of sociological and social psychological theory could have led to a more reflexive text, and, because of the dialectic of understanding and explaining (see RICŒUR, 1991), would have assisted in the analysis of the incident involving the sneaky kid and the subsequent fall out that it caused in the scholarly community. [13]

Perhaps my reading is more sympathetic to Brad despite his crime, burning down Wally Haircut's house, because I have lived in down and out situations, because I lived inside society all the while living outside of it. Perhaps my reading is more sympathetic to Brad because I understand the insider/outsider relation not only through my lived experience but also through my theoretical, cultural-historical, dialectically informed lens. Perhaps my reading is not more sympathetic to Brad at all; I may have simply disliked the way in which Wally Haircut talks about himself, a way that can be read as self-glorifying and redemption seeking arising from his relationship with the *Sneaky Kid*. But whatever an empirical study (anthropology of reading) would reveal, my reading is a concrete realization of the possible readings and therefore tells us something about our (scholarly) culture more generally. [14]

4. Structure and Content of The Sneaky Kid and Its Aftermath

This book is essentially about one (ethnographic?) study, the events it engendered, and the resources for actions it provided in subsequent situations. In Part One of the book entitled "The Sneaky Kid," WOLCOTT writes an ethnographic study and describes some of the events that followed it. The basic story is that of an influential article that had been printed in the widely used *Complementary Methods for Research in Education* (JAEGER, 1988), and read by many graduate students. Drawing on his interviews with a young squatter on

his extended property. Brad, the "sneaky kid," WOLCOTT developed a story about the difference between schooling and education. The story itself, reprinted once more as Chapter 1 ("Adequate Schools and Inadequate Education: The Life History of a Sneaky Kid") in this book, is an interesting case study but a little bit of existing social theory would have pushed the analyses to be more revealing. [15]

In a subsequent article, WOLCOTT revealed, among other things, that his protagonist, the ethnographer Wally Haircut, had initiated and had a homosexual relationship with Brad, his research participant. The piece mainly focused on cultural alternatives to career options. In Chapter 2 ("The Brad Saga Continues"), WOLCOTT relates much of the material from this article. The chapter also includes more of the juicy details of the relationship between Brad and Wally Haircut, including explicit and graphic descriptions of the sexual relation (Brad's having an erection, him being excited) and that Brad not only consented to sex but also enjoyed it. [16]

The relationship with Brad had repercussions not only in the educational field, but also in Wally's personal life. After having gone for two years, Brad returned and burned down the author's home, which the latter shared with his lifelong partner Norman. The events surrounding Brad's return constitute the core of Chapter 3 ("The Return"). Brad, who had been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, admitted to arson (for which he was tried and sentenced) and to assault (he had beaten Wally with a piece of lumber). The trial and surrounding events are told in Chapter 4 ("Out"), in which WOLCOTT presents Wally Haircut as the victim further victimized in the process of the court proceedings. I am not feeling sorry for Wally, and will articulate a theoretically informed analysis of answerability and responsibility in the fifth section of this essay. [17]

Following these revelations and in response to disapproval in the educational community, WOLCOTT took the opportunity of writing an invited chapter on validity in qualitative research to reflect on the ethics of being intimate with one's research participants. The contested nature of WOLCOTT's position and his writings constitute Chapter 5 ("More Truths, More Consequences"). This chapter, together with the material appearing in the first and second chapters, constitutes the "Brad Trilogy." WOLCOTT presents Wally as a victim, this time in the professional community, where some members found sexual intimacy between researcher and researched objectionable. [18]

Part Two of the book, "Where Do Our Studies Go?" is devoted to more of the aftereffects of the original events. Chapter 6, ("The Rebound"), is entirely focused on the contested reprinting of the original Sneaky Kid piece in *Complementary Methods for Research in Education*. In Chapter 7 ("A Play on Words: The Brad Trilogy as Ethnodrama") the author relates how the trilogy came to be turned into a play. This play is reprinted in the appendix. The interesting point in my reading is that the character of the play and the character of the earlier story are both characters always different from the living person Harry WOLCOTT who wrote the latter and added the former to make a book. [19]

In Chapter 8, ("Drawing Lessons") the author reflects on possible lessons that can be drawn from his articles and the events that surround it. In it, WOLCOTT continues to tell the story of the ethnographer Wally Haircut as double and triple victim. [20]

I had really looked forward to this book (ROTH, 2003) and began reading it with the expectation of reading an important contribution to the literature. As my examining proceeded, WOLCOTT convinced me more and more strongly that his protagonist Wally Haircut delivers an apologetic, self-indulgent, egocentric, uncritical, and ideological account of the events surrounding and following the original research. I felt less and less sorry for Wally Haircut and his adventures and thought that he really needed to stand up and articulate the responsibility that came with each of his actions. In the following sections, I discuss but a few points of my reading. [21]

5. Some Thoughts

5.1 On the dialectic of actions

Actions have the interesting property that in their execution, not only does the subject engage with the object and thereby change the sociomaterial world, but also the subject produces and reproduces him or herself—a form of "consumption" of the subject by the community (ENGESTRÖM, 1987). Furthermore, each action also creates sociomaterial resources that are subsequently available to the interacting subjects themselves (ROTH, TOBIN, CARAMBO, & DALLAND, in press). Two subjectivities, like Wally and Brad, are therefore not independent from one another but, in collective action—e.g., participating in interviews, having a sexual relationship, or being employer and employee—the two not only produce outcomes (changes in the world), which become resources for further action, but also produce and reproduce themselves and their relation. [22]

In the process of establishing new levels of intersubjectivity, two or more interacting subjects become a little more like the other; in the very notion of intersubjectivity, two or more persons come to understand a situation in the same way, or assume that they understand in the same way, developing a common element. When we now look at Wally and the Sneaky Kid together in the cabin, they produce many hours of interview material. They also produce and reproduce themselves as individuals all the while uniting to form a unique whole in their sexual embrace. Finally, they also produce exchange relations as Wally decides when the sneaky kid Brad would be paid and for which actions he would be paid, his "doing odd jobs," doing the interview, and, who knows, for the sexual favors as well, implicitly or explicitly. [23]

These actions come with, as I show below, a responsibility or answerability, which WOLCOTT has not accounted for. These actions and their outcomes become resources for further actions on the part of both Wally and Brad. Wally publishes and republishes the original piece, as elaborations or sequels. Brad, the sneaky

kid that he has always been, cannot get over the relationship, and returns with a vengeance. Although they both used the outcomes of the relationship as resources for further actions, the way they deployed these resources was quite different, because of their vast differences in the capital that they each had brought to the situation. The relationship between Wally and Brad was always asymmetrical, from the initial advances throughout the relationship, when the author paid for interviews, reading through the articles, and the other jobs that Brad was asked or offered to do. WOLCOTT acknowledges the asymmetry between Brad and Wally in descriptions such as, "I tried to be as fair and consistent with him as I could in our every interaction" (p.44), and he presented Wally as "lay[ing] down the law" (p.45). [24]

5.2 On the movement and translation of forms of capital

Actions bring about changes in the world; they have outcomes, which provide resources for further actions. These outcomes can also be accumulated, constituting forms of capital. Social agents are

"bearers of capital and, depending on their trajectory and on the position they occupy in the field by virtue of their endowment (volume and structure) in capital, they have the propensity to orient themselves actively either toward the preservation of the distribution of capital or toward the subversion of this distribution" (BOURDIEU & WACQUANT, 1992, pp.108-109). [25]

There are three fundamental species of capital: economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital (BOURDIEU, 1986). Social capital is the sum of resources (actual or virtual) that accrues to individual and groups due to the network of formal and informal relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. Cultural capital, which could also be called an informational capital, represents the non-economic forces such as family background, varying investments in and commitments to education, social class, and other cultural resources (language, theories, beliefs). Economic capital constitutes, among others, the financial resources available to and accessible by social actors. BOURDIEU adds to these forms another one, symbolic capital, which is the "form that any one of these three species takes when it is grasped through categories of perception that recognize its specific logic" (BOURDIEU & WACQUANT, 1992, p.119). The forms of capital cannot only be transformed into one another but can also determine the relative forces, position, and strategic orientation of two or more interacting individuals. [26]

In the present situation, actions provided quite different resources for Wally Haircut and the Sneaky Kid. The former uses his existing cultural capital to transform the interview material into a report. Because the report was apparently not sufficiently read, Wally subsequently used his social capital, his relations to others in his discipline and his institutional placement as editor of the journal *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* to get the piece published in this journal. He used his social capital subsequently to get the piece repeatedly republished. How much this social and cultural capital has transformed itself into monetary

capital is not easy to establish. Wally repeatedly makes the point that he did not gain financially—for example, when Brad's mother hypothesized during the court proceedings against Brad for his arson. But he also described repeatedly how spending some money on Brad really would be covered by the money received for the original report, how he held back money until Brad had completed a job, and so forth. He also tells us proudly of the 5,000 copies that he sold of his book containing the trilogy, which certainly resulted in a nice royalty check from his publisher. In *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing* (WOLCOTT, 1999), the author repeatedly admitted to the pressure in academe to publish or perish—in contrast to many other places in this world, North American universities make careers and salary progress dependent on "productivity," which is measured in part by counting publications (and sometimes even page numbers). At the time Wally interviewed Brad, he was about 50 years of age. He had another 15 years to go in academe, and therefore, the articles, books, and notoriety that he got out of all of this are an important aspect of the professional career to be accounted for. [27]

Wally Haircut had all the cultural capital to transform not only the interviews into a written piece that was repeatedly republished, but he also had the cultural capital, the intellectual resources, to transform the experience in other ways. For example, by talking to his long-term partner Norman about his sexual encounter, Wally transformed this experience into a virtue. Wally justifies having this dual relationship, saying that Norman was not interested in sex that Wally, despite his 50 years, still wanted. So Wally uses his existing cultural resources to transform what could have been seen as an infidelity into a virtue—in fact, this entire book is about translating and legitimating something many people will find objectionable into a virtue. That is, Wally had sufficient resources to put the sexual relationships behind him and continue with his life after Brad's departure. [28]

Brad, on the other hand, did not have the same kind of resources. In terms of cultural capital, Brad could barely write, and WOLCOTT makes the point by transcribing a letter in all its orthographic shortcomings (p.25). We know little about the kind of relationships Brad had before he got to "meet the author," we know particularly little about any sexual relationships he may have had. We know that Brad had been shipped back and forth between his parents, and going from school to school, there were few opportunities to appropriate cultural capital of the type that Wally had. I agree with WOLCOTT who suggests that (a) there is a difference between schooling and education, (b) "School is a lousy place to learn anything in" (BECKER, 1972), and (c) we learn more in school but at the interstices of formal schooling and outside school. But despite all of this other education Brad has had, when the two encountered one another, Wally was not only a bourgeois professor with more than a decent income (living on a 20-acre property) and sufficient financial capital to pay Brad for his various jobs but also was a cultural and social capitalist in comparison to Brad. The defense attorney suggested, "[Wally] seeks help for Brad, but it's help with a hook ... to get him well to continue the sex. Get well here, where I am, where the sex is" (p.93). Wally did use his social and financial capital to help Brad, but it was help with a hook. There was always a hook, Brad had to finish the job—but we only have Wally's word (in a double sense) for what it meant to "finish the job." [29]

With little capital to mediate the products of their relations, Brad ends up hating the professor, who, in Brad's words, "screwed with my head, my ass and my life too much" (p.98). Brad used his cultural capital as a resource to interpret their joint actions as screwing with his head, ass and life. That is, Brad used his cultural capital to translate the events as having been screwed, in more than one way. It is exactly when there are substantial differences in the cultural capital that come with formal and informal education among the culturally rich that ordinary people feel "screwed in their heads." It is exactly because those culturally rich have "their way with words," that inequality is produced and reproduced in such relations. Having a homosexual relationship, in Brad's words, "was a low-down, dirty, disgusting perverted thing to do and that is what I have to live with for the rest of my entire life" (p.98). Brad did not have the cultural resources to interpret the relationship at the moment of the encounter, and especially not afterward, during the moments that the desire to pay back Wally Haircut some of the pain that he had received. Was it the first sexual relationship Brad had? Was it the first homosexual relationship that he had? During the trial for arson, Brad asked to be sent to the hospital rather than the prison where he could be sexually victimized. Has he had such experiences during his stay at reform school? Brad certainly did not have the cultural capital to mediate this encounter and the aftermath that it had for him. He returned with a vengeance, and not only was "burning down the house" but also was "burning down the bridges." Rather than increasing the possibilities for acting, his actions decreased his possibilities, his room to maneuver. There was no way back, no way out of the cul de sac into which he was headed. Wally had "screwed with his head," and the cultural resources available to Brad for interpreting it became a referent for his subsequent actions. [30]

5.3 On knowing what other feels

What did Brad feel during the sexual relationships? "I have no way of telling whether he was as stimulated as I [Wally] was," writes WOLCOTT (p.43), "but there is no faking an erection, and he was always there with his." But in part, as medical and anecdotal evidence shows, such erection is mediated by pressure on the prostate, which a penis in a man's rear end does in fact exert (PERRY, 1982). Even an innocent medical examination of the prostate can result in erection and ejaculation. There is no way of telling that Brad's erection did not come, involuntarily, from the stimulation provided by Wally's actions. This did not seem to be Wally's main concern, which appeared to be that the "sex with Brad was an absolute delight" and that he "was highly stimulated by his youthful body" (p.43). Wally is singularly concerned with his own satisfaction, stimulation, and gratification. He admits that Brad did not indicate overt sexuality. We also read that Brad did not want to go to prison, because he would be sexually victimized. This does not sound like a Brad who particularly likes having a homosexual relation, or, if he did at the moment, used his cultural capital to translate the experience into something that prospectively he viewed as horrible. [31]

But Wally has his way with words, "It is curious how Brad repressed any indication of overt sexuality, guarding the idea that he felt he was constantly preoccupied with sex, for he was so daring in other ways" (WOLCOTT, p.43). So

Brad did not indicate sexuality, he "repressed any indication" of it, but "there is no faking an erection" (p.43). Wally is very close to saying that Brad said no, or said nothing, but really meant saying yes? For those who do not yet know, this is a typical male argument to explain why they pursued sexual aggressiveness although the other person, usually female, did not want to grant them any favors. So Brad repressed his desire, but could not fake an erection—all the more reason for Wally to experience "absolute delight" (p.43). A very close acquaintance once told me about his homosexual relationship, sustained until he received, with the help of his influential partner, a medical certificate of being a homosexual, which was sufficient to be excluded of the compulsory military service in his country. I do not know whether this person felt any pleasure; but the fact that he had only female relationships before and after suggests a rather utilitarian attitude during the homosexual relationship. [32]

Wally insists that Brad "consented to the sex," but WOLCOTT does not provide us with a cultural analysis of the situation, the differences in capital that the two had coming to the situation, and the differences in capital with which the two would come out of it. Wally insists that Brad had consented to the sex all the while insisting that Brad had delusions, fantasies, and "mental problems" (p.81). [33]

5.4 On the role of theory

There is a dialectic of (practical) understanding and explaining (GARFINKEL, 1967; RICŒUR, 1991). To explain a situation, we already have to have a practical understanding of it and a practical understanding of explaining. Practical understanding therefore begins, envelops, and terminates structural analysis, and therefore our efforts at explaining. But practical understanding, to develop and unfold, requires explaining, structural analysis (HOLZKAMP, 1983). Without structural analysis, practical understanding remains undeveloped, constituting a form of ideology that is in an unquestioning and unreflective way brought to the lifeworld situations we face. Practical understanding alone leaves us stuck in the life problems as we face them, without the possibility to make the structural changes required for lasting change to come about (HOLZKAMP, 1983). In my reading of *The Sneaky Kid and Its Aftermath*, there is too much ideology and too little cultural-historical, critical analysis. Let me make a case. [34]

"Truer words were never spoken" (WOLCOTT, p.86). Wally Haircut has a particular relation to truth and to interpreting events, including the court proceedings dealing with Brad's arson and other documents. Throughout my reading of the case, I felt that existing theory would have enhanced the analysis. The analysis of the court proceedings could have been done in the light of the analyses of similar material presented in *Discursive Psychology* (EDWARDS & POTTER, 1992) or *The Spectacle of History: Speech, Text, and Memory at the Iran-Contra Hearings* (LYNCH & BOGEN, 1996). Both books provide excellent case studies of how contentious issues are worked out in interaction (the basis of all culture [MIKHAILOV, 1980]), how truth is constituted rather than being an ontological category that is apparent in statements such as "Truer words were never spoken." [35]

In the absence to such references, the analysis remains at the level of common sense. It comes as no surprise that Wally "came away with no respect for the courts" (p.86). There it is, the courts, the highest accomplishment of his democratic country, where the judicial system has evolved to deal in an impartial way with issues, even those that involve the most powerful, deserve no respect from Wally Haircut. Poor Wally! He has had to account for his acts, and thereby had to take responsibility for them in a public forum, where he could no longer adhere to the delusion of being the innocent victim, and then walks away "with no respect for the courts." He had "always assumed the system to be much better" (WOLCOTT, p.86)—better for Wally, allowing him to walk away from being accountable? [36]

Again, there was an issue of money. A copy of the proceedings would have cost Wally \$4,000 if he had to pay for a transcription. Luckily, Brad's earlier appeal required an official transcript, and Wally could get a copy of the official transcript for a total of \$397. Again, the situation had worked in his favor, Wally saved money (financial capital), got away cheap, and then used it to promote his own cause, the publication of this ranting justification entitled *Sneaky Kid and Its Aftermath*. His social capital, knowing the publisher who invites him to write the book, allowed him to further increase his various forms of capital. "No doubt things could be worse," but everything had a pretty good positive twist for Wally. [37]

While reading, I highlighted the comment "about the implicit messages the jury was receiving as to what was ahead and how, as good citizens, they ought to be thinking about it" (WOLCOTT, p.87). However, communication can never be the transference of meaning (DERRIDA, 1988). Message has its etymological origins in the Latin *mittere*, to send. From a classical information theoretical perspective, a message is a piece of information sent by a sender via some medium, a telephone cable, a courier, to some receiver. To make any sense at all, sender and receiver have to be tuned in the same way, have commensurable coding and decoding procedures. Human communication is not that simple, if we think of language as being the medium. There is no unique coding and decoding in place—the very notion of sign (a vehicle) implies uncertainty, difference, "differance" (DERRIDA, 1981), variability, ambiguity, trace, cinder, and so on (MALPAS, 1992). Now the very opposition of implicit and explicit messages no longer makes sense—the issues would have deserved much more complex (existing) cultural tools for interpretation. There is more than one sense to any word, any sentence. [38]

5.5 On answerability and responsibility

I read the entire book as the protagonist Wally Haircut's attempt to extricate himself from this answerability: Brad was of legal age, "he had consented to the sex. Only later did Brad express misgivings about it" (p.81). (As indicated, Brad did not have the same sophisticated cultural capital that Wally had to deal with "being screwed.") This part of the argument repeatedly shows up in the text. Brad was of legal age, though Wally claims that the court got it wrong when it accepted it to have been 19 rather than the 20 Wally claimed. No doubt, Brad was of legal age, but he was also not fit to be accepted in the army. Despite his nice body, fit

for an actor, or so Wally whispered into Brad's ear, he was unfit for the Marines, having been classified as a ninth grader at the reform school. But Wally abrogates his responsibility and answerability, Brad was of legal age and he consented. (Let us leave aside for the moment whether Brad really liked "being screwed.") [39]

Even if we know someone else, and know ourselves, we still have to grasp the "truth of our interrelationship, the truth of the unitary and unique event which links us and in which we are participants" (BAKHTIN, 1993, p.17). Accordingly, to understand an object means that we have to understand our "ought" in this relationship, the attitude or position that we ought to take with respect to it and other individuals. For our participation in interaction, we are responsible; each act "presupposes my answerable participation, and not an abstracting from myself. It is only from within my participation that Being can be understood as an event, but this moment of once-occurrent participant does not exist inside the content seen in abstraction from the act *qua* answerable deed" (BAKHTIN, 1993, p.18). We are answerable for each act, every moment of our lives, every act is an answerable act: life itself "can be consciously comprehended only in concrete answerability" (BAKHTIN, 1993, p.56). [40]

Wally was and is answerable in more than one way. He was initially in the situation with Brad. The two were doing whatever they were doing (interviewing, engaging in exchange relations, having sex), or, drawing on Brad's language (cultural resource), "screwing with [Brad's] head." Wally is answerable now for his actions then, in the cabin Brad had built. He is also answerable now for the ways in which he (unrepentantly) promotes his own case, proclaims his innocence, his victim status, rallying whatever resources he had been culling from the situation in the first place. He is responsible for his physical and verbal actions, the categories he used to describe and transform the original experiences that had so much of an aftermath. From an ethnomethodological perspective, the use of even simple, mundane descriptive categories makes available (possible) a variety of inferential trajectories in situ; these are grounded in the various salient features bound up with or constitutive of these descriptive categories for the practical organization of what relative mundane knowledge is at the moment (JAYYUSI, 1991). These categories and this knowledge have their responsibilities, for the various salient features "provide grounds for moral properties, for finding that certain kinds of events or actions may or may not have taken place, for determining culpability, even for defeating the applicability of the category or description in the first place" (JAYYUSI, 1991, p.241). The categories are bound to and used in knowledge contexts in which description and appraisal and all conceptual, moral, and practical issues are irremediably interwoven. [41]

6. Conclusion

In this book, Wally Haircut conforms with the cross-cultural stereotype of the U.S. American—boisterous, loud, vain, conceited, playing the "poor-me-I-am-hurt" card when he realizes that others don't buy into his argument, holding others hostage with his money, being the sole owner of truth. A dialectical approach to culture would have better helped WOLCOTT in constructing an explanation of the sequence of events, especially for garnering some of the support for Wally's case. Wally not only has a unitary conception of truth—a cultural ideal that has had important implications for Western ethos—but also that he is its beholder. The dialectical approach would have allowed WOLCOTT to work toward a cultural dialectic of knowledge and desire (e.g., NUCKOLLS, 1995) or toward a cultural-historical analysis of the dialectic of capital and its exchange and transformation. He could have relativized both Wally Haircut's desires and knowledge, and arrived at a more sophisticated analysis of *The Sneaky Kid* and its aftermath. After reading WOLCOTT's previously published *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing* (ROTH, 2003), I was looking forward to reading this latest installment from the author. However, the book was a disappointment, my reading produced disappointment. "And what is your evaluation?" you, the reader, may ask. Paraphrasing the popular (North American) film-review notion, "Two thumbs down for *The Sneaky Kid and Its Aftermath*." But, I hasten to add, critique always involves judgments, and readers need to keep in mind that "[t]he authority of judgment or critical evaluation is not the final authority for deconstruction," for "[d]econstruction is also the deconstruction of critique" (DERRIDA, 1995, p.212). [42]

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