INTRODUCTION: WALKING THROUGH WALLS

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In an interview recorded in 1994, André-Georges Haudricourt described himself as a "passe-muraille," a person capable of walking through walls (Bertrand 2002: 251). The *passe-muraille*, best known to French readers from the short story of that name by Marcel Aymé, is both marvelous and disquieting, a transgressive being – in both senses of the word – who refuses to acknowledge the barriers that contain and channel the movements of others. Haudricourt clearly had this complex of senses in mind when he chose the word to characterize his atypical career in French academia: an agronomy graduate who subsequently studied under Marcel Mauss, Haudricourt went on to conduct important research in such diverse fields as ethnoscience, phonological theory and the history of agriculture, often to the discomfiture of his more sessile colleagues.

For much of the past century, to say nothing of the present one, there has been a great deal of talk about the desirability of interdisciplinarity, and of breaking down the walls that impede communication between adjoining academic fields. The discipline of anthropology, as conceived (and exemplified) by Franz Boas, was to be just such a wall-less meeting place, where ethnologists, archaeologists, linguists, and physical anthropologists would collaboratively grapple with the complexities of human diversity (see, e.g. Boas 1899). Boas's vision took institutional form as the "four-field" or "Boasian" anthropology departments of many North American universities, where course offerings, faculty recruitment, and even the composition of internal committees conform to the principle of an asymmetrical confederation of canton-like subdisciplines, with social-cultural anthropology as the *primus inter pares*. Admirable as this Boasian plan might have been at the time of its conception, it has been increasingly subject to criticism and attempts at reconfiguration. Johannes Fabian (1993: 53) – himself a notorious *passe-muraille* – questioned the continued relevance of "that decisively modernist conception of a 'four-fields approach'" in the contemporary intellectual landscape of reflexive anthropology, cultural studies, post-processual archaeology, the various recent developments in human genetics, creole studies and sociolinguistics. To this list one might add the troublesome fault line running between "scientific" and "critical" stances within the discipline. It is a telling sign of the times that when the anthropologists at Stanford University split into separate "Anthropological Sciences" and "Cultural and

Social Anthropology" departments, the new wall cut across three of the four Boasian fields.

Where something akin to the Boasian configuration is maintained, one detects evidence of "the contemporary marginalization of linguistic anthropology" in North American academia (Darnell, this volume). Many leading anthropology departments now recognize only three subdisciplines, with linguistic anthropology either blended into a combined "socio-cultural and linguistic" section (e.g. NYU), or relegated to institutional invisibility (e.g. Columbia, Harvard).

Depending on the venue and the time, linguistic anthropologists have a room of their own, bunk with the ethnologists, are split apart by new departmental configurations, or fade into the background of institutionally unrecognized specializations like kinship or political economy. Nonetheless, the history of anthropology, and especially of North American anthropology, is to a significant degree marked by its relations with linguistics. As Keesing (1992) noted, the relationship has not always been a tranquil one. It has been a *pas-de-deux* where the partners approach, then separate, then approach again as the internal dynamics of each discipline shift, and as research focus oscillates between particularism and universalism, culturalism and mentalism. The relationship has at times fostered the sharing of models and exchanging of paradigms, the rejecting or borrowing of concepts, all of which has been beneficial to both disciplines: consider such offspring of crossbreeding as ethnoscience and ethnosemantics, structuralism, and more recently, cognitive anthropology, the dialogic principle and cultural creolization. Even if some of these approaches have not been as productive as had been hoped, and even if some have been the targets of intense criticism (ethnoscience and structuralism, for example), they have informed the anthropological practice of generations of researchers, and therefore, have become part of the history of the field.

This book has its roots in a special issue of the Québec journal *Anthropologie et sociétés*, published in 1999. The two editors, Christine Jourdan and Claire Lefebvre, were commissioned to assemble an "état des lieux" of ethnolinguistics, a term – more common in French usage than in English – for the study of the embeddedness of language in social and cultural life, in "ways of being." "État des lieux" is routinely translated "state of the art," but in fact the French and English phrases have very different connotational fields. "State of the art," especially when used as an adjective, brings up images of cutting-edge, top-end technology (audio equipment, for example), with all of the attendant bells and whistles. "État des lieux," which has a second sense referring to the inventory of rented property done at the beginning and end of a lease, evokes the far humbler scene of a landlord inspecting chipped paint and carpet stains. These contrasting perspectives are in fact well represented in the current discourses of linguistic anthropology – the high-theoretical, terminologically daunting writings of the semiotic functionalists, on the one hand, the repeated handwringing over the peripheral status of the field, on the other – but in the end, we decided

to go with neither orientation for the expanded English-language version of the *Anthropologie et sociétés* collection. The width of focus varies considerably from one chapter to the next, as do the historical depth, manner of presentation (or argumentation), and comprehensiveness of coverage. Summaries of past accomplishments and present debates are juxtaposed to forward-looking proposals, and even the surveying of new terrain to explore.

Like the self-described "vagabond" Haudricourt, many of the authors contributing to our collection followed atypical pathways across academic fields or indeed outside of them. The two senior authors in this volume are particularly dramatic exemplars of the *passe-muraille* profile. Alongside their multidisciplinary careers within the university, Paul Friedrich has published volumes of poetry, and Charles Taylor has been an active participant in Canadian politics. (In 1965 he ran – unsuccessfully – for a parliament seat against Pierre Trudeau.) It may be difficult – and is almost certainly beside the point – to specify in what manner Friedrich's activity as a poet has been reflected in his varied work as an anthropologist and linguist, or to what degree Taylor's hands-on involvement in debates over multiculturalism or the future of Québec has colored his sensitivity to the interdependance of language and ways of being. The same could be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of each of the *passe-muraille* represented in this book. It is not the point of this collection either to explain each contributor's research in terms of his or her education, career trajectory or interests, nor to carve the field of linguistic anthropology, or ethnolinguistics, into the set of subjects treated in the collection.

The ethnolinguistic perspective

Europe, 1937. Nazi Germany rearms, "enemies of the people" die before Soviet firing squads, the Luftwaffe tests its weapons on the Basque city of Guernica. Aldous Huxley watches two cats preparing to fight:

> balefully the eyes glare; from far down in the throat of each come bursts of a strange, strangled noise of defiance . . . Another moment and surely there must be an explosion. But no; all of a sudden one of the two creatures turns away, hoists a hind leg in a more than fascist salute and, with the same fixed and focused attention as it had given a moment before to its enemy, begins to make a lingual toilet . . . Such as it is, the consistency of human characters is due to the words upon which all human experiences are strung. We are purposeful because we can describe our feelings in rememberable words, can justify and rationalize our desires in terms of some kind of argument. Faced by an enemy, we do not allow an itch to distract us from our emotions: the mere word "enemy" is enough to keep us reminded of our hatred, to convince us that we do well to be angry.
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> (Huxley 1937: 84)

Erudite as he was, Huxley may well have had Herder in mind when he penned this passage, although he did not refer to him, or any other eighteenth-century

thinker for that matter, in his essay. What was clear to him is the fundamental difference between the wordless, reactive living-in-the-present of animals, and the thought world of language-using humanity. As Charles Taylor shows in his revisiting of Herder's critique of Condillac, the former's "constitutive" (or constitutive-expressive) theory of language is a necessary preliminary to an appreciation of how "language transforms our world," endowing all that surrounds us with meaning, enabling us – through expressive language, and also the nonverbal codes of gesture, stance and dress – to create new "ways of being" in the world, with their associated sets of values.

Although this insight into the intimate relation between language and what we understand as the essence of humanness goes back two centuries, there have been repeated moves in the subsequent history of linguistics to represent language as an object of study in isolation from its users and situations of use. Advances in historical-comparative linguistics, especially with regard to phonetics, contributed to mid nineteenth-century Neo-grammarian models of mechanical, "exceptionless" sound laws "decontextualized from their circumstances of use and any link to their users" (Tuite, this volume). To this narrow-scope, natural-scientific approach to the reconstruction and explanation of language change, Hugo Schuchardt opposed a wider-scope historical method which drew upon ethnographic and sociological data, information on naming practices and the expressive use of language, as well as the findings of historical phonetics and semantics. In the early years of the twentieth century, Ferdinand de Saussure, a historical linguist who studied under the leading Neo-grammarians at Leipzig, proposed his celebrated contrast between *parole* and *langue*, "a rigorous methodological distinction between language seen as the constantly changing speech habits of a community and language as a *system*, a virtual structure extracted from time and from the minds of its speakers" (Tuite, this volume). The Saussurean project of studying the virtual structures underlying linguistic competence has been carried forth most notably by the various schools of formalist grammar, whose models of language are characteristically situated in what two linguists recently dubbed "Chomskiania, the land of idealized speaker-hearers," these being a "uniform population modelled by a single solipsist speaking to himself" (Pierrehumbert and Gross 2003).

In view of the dominance of what are often – and perhaps inaccurately – called Saussurean models in the field of linguistics, the ethnolinguistic perspective could be characterized as the refusal to decontextualize language. Such a description, however, gives the false impression that linguistic anthropology is a reactionary movement, with goals defined in opposition to the methodology of whatever happens to be the leading paradigm in formalist linguistics. Some of the authors represented here do, it is true, contrast purely language-centered explanations to those which make reference to speakers as social agents, the internal dynamics of speech communities, and the situated use of language (Heller on bilingualism and codeswitching, Jourdan on creolization, Ochs and

Schieffelin on the acquisition of grammatical competence). Nevertheless, we wish to point out to any linguists who might be reading this that the ethnolinguistic perspective is not to be equated with what is commonly called "functionalism," that is, attempts to supplant all or part of formalist theories of innate, specialized linguistic competence with explanations that invoke more generalized cognitive capacities, or design exigencies related to the various uses to which language is put. Much work by linguistic anthropologists is compatible with – or, in any case, does not contradict – the putative existence of an innate language organ and dedicated mental modules (Chomsky 1980; Fodor 1983). Like ethnology, linguistic anthropology is a hermeneutical enterprise; in William Foley's words, "it is an interpretive discipline peeling away at language to find cultural understandings" (1997: 3). Ethnolinguistic inquiries tend to cluster around two grand approaches to the relation between culture and language, which had long been regarded as mutually exclusive: language depends on culture; language organizes culture. Although contemporary researchers no longer attach the same significance to this formal distinction, it is nonetheless at the basis of the division between the research methods of linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics, narrowly defined: cultural interpretation on the one hand, linguistic markers and social correlates, on the other. If linguistic anthropologists observe language with a wide-angle lens, they do not always focus on the same field of view, nor from the same standpoint. In this collection, the following themes – and probably others as well – can be adduced as points of convergence, drawing the attention of more than one author, and sometimes being subjected to quite different treatment by each: linguistic relativity, expressivity and verbal art, language socialization, translation and hermeneutics, language contact, and variation and change.

Linguistic relativity

On hearing the term "linguistic anthropology," the first thing that comes to many readers' minds is the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, generally understood as the principle that language conditions habits of speech which in turn organize and generate particular patterns of thought. But linguistic anthropology has likewise a contribution to make to the debate between particularism and universalism, which is once again a subject of interest in many sectors of American anthropology. One sign of this renewal of attention is the return to the classic works of authors linked to particularism, notably Edward Sapir (for example, Darnell 1990 and Sapir 1994; also Lucy's [1992a] important re-reading of the foundational texts on linguistic relativity). It is true that the linguistic relativity hypothesis has played a central role in the history of North American linguistic anthropology, in that the deep, organic relation that it postulates between language and culture is of central relevance to debates on the nature of the mutual determination of language, mental representations, and social action.

John Leavitt situates the linguistic relativity concept in an intellectual history going back to Herder and Humboldt, and forward to our own times. He delineates two grand perspectives on human nature, the one universalist, seeking natural-scientific laws to account for the important features of cognition; the other pluralistic and essentialist, inspired by Romanticism and the human sciences, according to which each language (and culture) has its own essence and "indwelling principle that cannot be classified into any general category, any more than a human being or a human face" (W. v. Humboldt "Von dem grammatischen Baue der Sprachen", translated by Leavitt). Within linguistics, the natural-scientific stream came to the foreground in the Neo-grammarian doctrine of sound laws, and continued on to Chomsky and generative grammar. The other, Humboldtian, stream is less well known to anglophone readers, but, as Leavitt demonstrates, it represents a highly significant component of the intellectual backgrounds of Franz Boas and Edward Sapir.

Boas received his early training in physics, then moved into the fields of psychophysics and geography. According to Leavitt, he began his intellectual activity "right on the cusp of th[e] antinomy" between the natural and human sciences. Unlike most of his predecessors on both sides of the divide, however, Boas "rejected the evolutionist package on every level," as well as "any ranking of languages and cultures according to a fixed standard." This led to accusations, from neo-evolutionists in particular, that Boas's "radical empiricism" and emphasis on individual difference made him irreconcilably hostile to sociological and anthropological theorizing (Wax 1956). Leavitt draws an original and useful parallel between Boas's ethnology and Marx's critique of political economy; with regard to the rejection of evolutionism, one might also juxtapose Boas and the German linguist A. F. Pott, the founder of modern etymological practice. The etymological study of word histories can be conceived as being, in microcosm, an enterprise comparable to the investigation of culture, insofar as etymologists operate at the interface of the law-like regularities of historical phonetics and analogical change, on the one hand, and the messiness of history, social networks and human creativity, on the other. Sitting, like Boas, astride the divide between the *Natur-* and *Geisteswissenschaften*, Pott likewise inveighed against those who applied natural-scientific models in a heavy-handed and simplistic way, especially when such theories were informed by unexamined Eurocentrism (Pott 1856).

Despite the difficulties of operating "within a pre-existing discursive field massively oriented either to universalism or to essentialism," Boas, Sapir, and Whorf developed a means of conceptualizing the relation between language and (habitual) thought that was "pluralist but not essentialist," in that linguistic relativity – like Einstein's celebrated theory in physics – does not privilege any single point of view, nor any fixed standard (such as Indo-European had been taken to be) for assessing the adequacy of human languages.

In her contribution to the present volume, Regna Darnell presents the career of Benjamin Lee Whorf, and the role he played in pre-war American linguistic anthropology. An atypical and original character in an academic landscape succumbing to the economic downturn of the Great Depression, Whorf drew the remarkable observations that guided his thinking about the relation between language structure and habitual thought as much from his professional experience as a fire-insurance investigator as from the study of "exotic" societies. Darnell offers the intriguing hypothesis that Whorf's celebrated formulation of linguistic relativity may have not been so much "a new theory or methodology but a pedagogical effort to translate the linguistic work of Sapir and his students so that it would be comprehensible to non-linguists." Whorf died young, before he could give his intuitions the extended treatment that they required. Nonetheless, his work has drawn enormous attention, and criticism, since his death. It is clear that many interpretations and utilizations of the "Whorfian hypothesis" go well beyond anything Whorf himself appeared to have intended. Darnell warns her readers against simplistic readings of Whorf, which present his hypothesis as holding that linguistic categories mechanistically constrain thought. She limpidly delineates the differences between the approach of Boas and that of Sapir. This section of her chapter is important for what it reveals of the foundations of the Americanist tradition of linguistic anthropology, which will eventually steer it in the direction of culturalist and cognitivist frameworks: phonemic models, theories of mind, the ontological relation between language and culture.

Cognitive anthropology, earlier known under the labels "new ethnography," "semantic ethnography" or "ethnoscience," coalesced toward the end of the 1950s in the context of a movement in linguistic anthropology seeking to revise the notion of culture then favored by ethnographers. The new movement insisted on methodological rigor and the necessity of identifying fundamental cultural categories. As explained by Penelope Brown in her contribution to this volume, the notion of culture, until then primarily derived from the study of "behavior or artifacts," should be replaced by one which foregrounds the role of systems of knowledge and mental dispositions. Brown summarizes the forty-year history of cognitive anthropology's examination of the relation between language (and other semiotic systems) and thought, the role of language in organizing knowledge, etc. These questions have been at the center of vigorous debates between "(i) those who emphasize universals of human cognition vs. those who stress the importance of cultural differences, and (ii) those who treat cognition as 'in the head' vs. others who insist on its embodied, interactional, and contextually dependent nature." The first part of the chapter presents an overview of the initial approaches and goals of cognitive anthropology through the 1970s. The second part is concerned with the North American tradition of research on cultural models. The third section presents some new approaches to the issue of linguistic relativity, especially those which focus on spatial language and

cognition. The author concludes by looking toward the future of the program of cognitive anthropology, suggesting some areas where fruitful research might be undertaken.

The article contributed by Paul Kay is in response to the debates provoked by the hypotheses presented in Berlin and Kay (1969) on the typology of the basic color terms of the world's languages. Their conclusions appeared to contradict standard interpretations of the Whorfian hypothesis. They imply, first of all, that a set of no more than eleven perceptual categories can account for the referential range of the basic color terms of any human language. Secondly, more elaborate color term systems evolve from less elaborate ones in a partially fixed order. In his chapter in the present volume, Kay responds to three objections raised by John Lucy, Anna Wierzbicka and others: (1) In many (perhaps all) languages, lexemes used to denote chromatic features also denote non-color properties, such as ripeness or succulence; (2) The basic color lexemes of many languages do not constitute a distinct formal class, in terms of morphology or syntactic properties; (3) The findings reported by Berlin and Kay (1969), and similar investigations in the "Universals and Evolution" tradition of research, are an artifact of the methodology used by these approaches. Kay presents a vigorous and detailed rebuttal to these criticisms in his paper, drawing upon his more than three decades of research on color terms, as well as the contributions of numerous other scholars who have looked at this lexical subsystem in various languages.

While much of the research on linguistic relativity has focused on readily delimitable semantic domains such as color, number, and space, the average learner of a foreign language is struck by differences less amenable to psycholinguistic testing: the expressive potential of the new language, the tropes and metaphors preferred by its speakers, the distinctive forms of verbal art and conversational genres. Edward Sapir – a "minor poet and a major phonologist," in Paul Friedrich's characterization – once wrote that "the understanding of a simple poem . . . involves not merely an understanding of the single words . . . but a full comprehension of the whole life of the community as it is mirrored in the words, or as it is suggested by their overtones" (Sapir 1929a [1949]: 162). Language is, by its very nature, a competence shared by a community; a phonology, grammar and lexicon structured in ways that are comparable to, but different from, those of other languages; an expressive and constitutive medium through which "we present, enact, and thus make possible our way of being in the world and to others" (Taylor, this volume). According to Jakobson's (1960) communication-theoretic model, the poetic function of speech is oriented toward the message itself, the linguistic form *as* form. Dry and technical it may be, but Jakobson's definition can be extraordinarily fruitful if one uses it, as Friedrich does, as a standpoint for viewing the multiple interactions and relations among language, the social group, and the individual. The ethnopoetic project has as its goal, one might say, the working out of the manifold

implications of "form about form" for both individual creativity, and what Friedrich calls "linguaculture," a neologism intended to capture the fundamental fact that "culture is a part of language just as language is a part of culture" (Friedrich: 219). Among the facets of ethnopoetics explored in this chapter are: (1) the aesthetic and expressive potential of language structure (phonetics, morphology, etc.); (2) the dilemma of universalism and linguacultural situatedness; (3) the inevitability, yet impossibility, of translation; (4) the poetics of "non-poetic" texts. In his concluding sections, Friedrich reflects on the possibility of reconciling philosophical and poetic conceptions of truthfulness, and the political nature of poetic texts.

Language contact

The phenomena that are described by the term *contact* in anthropology and in linguistic anthropology have challenged conceptions of culture and language as whole, bounded and organic entities. At the core of that challenge lie two issues: first, how to understand the processes of contact itself with regard to such a reified understanding of culture; and second, how to analyze the effects of contact-induced change. These two questions have forced anthropologists to engage with the issue of change as an inherent part of culture and language, and thus to apprehend social and linguistic realities in terms of processes and not simply in terms of traits and features. Central to this discourse on change are "otherness" and an understanding of the effects that alterity has on the conception of self, on group identity, and on cultural positioning. Interpretation of the other is the key feature of the contact situation. Permanent exposure to "otherness" through contact with neighboring groups may lead to various linguistic practices that have been described in the literature in terms of interference, interlanguage, bilingualism, multilingualism, language shift, language crossing, obsolescence, pidginization, and creolization. In some cases, sustained contact has led to an exacerbated sense of group identity that may be symbolized through the enhancement of linguistic differences (as in the Amazon basin or Melanesia). Anthropologists interested in contact-induced cultural change have focused on cultural borrowing, diffusion, reinterpretation, syncretism, translation, and acculturation; but also on biculturalism and multiculturalism and, more recently, on cultural creolization and on the effect of globalization on local cultures. Some forms of contact, such as colonization and forced displacements of population, are extreme types that, through imposition of new ideologies and modes of life, have severely altered, and often destroyed, the pre-existing balance of power among neighboring groups. They have often brought about the birth of new languages (such as pidgins and creoles), but also the death or attrition of others. Under colonization, or any other form of hegemonic conditions, the cultural anchoring of languages is challenged and often shattered, compelling individuals and groups to adopt the language spoken by the dominant power,

or whatever language that will allow them to survive socially. In most cases, the question of choice is irrelevant.

In this volume, two chapters address some of the linguistic effects of cultural contact: Jourdan presents an analysis of the genesis of pidgin and creole (PC) languages, while Heller discusses bilingualism with regard to linguistic and cultural theory.

Jourdan tackles the question of PC genesis from the angle of culture, power and meaning. Convinced as she is that the birth of new languages cannot be dissociated from the social condition of their genesis, and that the impetus for PC genesis is found in the lived experience of their makers, she seeks to identify the cultural components of this experience that have led to, and shaped, the development of these new languages. Considering primarily those pidgins that have evolved in plantation societies of the Atlantic and Pacific, and starting with the concept of culture, Jourdan revisits the conditions prevalent in these social worlds. A discussion of the social organization of the plantations and of the work practice on plantations, as well as of practices of cultural retention on the part of the workers, leads her to propose that *work*, and work-related activities, have been among the main loci of pidgin genesis. Special consideration of the power relationships that were characteristic of plantation societies allows her to shed light on the conflictual and consensual relationships that have made pidgins possible. She further suggests that in situations of liminality or cultural alienation, the birth of a new language may be constitutive of a form of resistance against hegemony. She concludes that, given human agency and the social conditions that served as their matrix, the birth of pidgins and creoles was inevitable.

One outcome of sustained contact between ethnocultural groups has been bilingualism or multilingualism, a phenomenon that has been often portrayed as a pragmatic response to local sociolinguistic realities. In her chapter, Monica Heller moves away from such a functionalist approach to bilingualism, and instead examines it from the points of view of linguistic theory, the demands of the nation-state and the political economy of culture. Her own research on codeswitching demonstrates the challenges it poses to core tenets of linguistic theory. Whether it is considered from the perspective of universal grammar, or from an interactionist theory of language, codeswitching challenges the conception of language as an autonomous system. She asks: "What if grammar were the order speakers impose, more or less successfully, on their linguistic resources?" But bilingualism also challenges directly the organicity of the nation-state conceived as the bounded collective space where the unity of language and ethnicity takes place, a representation which has driven many a language-policy reform. More interestingly, bilingualism is seen as a resource deployed by speakers in making meaning, and on this basis Heller calls for a reassessment of traditional tenets in linguistic anthropology concerning language, identity and culture. In her view, language is best seen as a complex