

## **Doing Field Work in Japan.**

### **Design, Access and Role of the Researcher.**

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#### *An ethnographic approach*

The ethnographic approach has been the *raison d'être* of anthropology for a century and has been employed in organisational studies to study social practices. There are several advantages to the ethnographic approach. Ethnographic studies bring in-depth knowledge about the normally inaccessible world of micro processes in corporations. It brings insights about decision-making processes that have otherwise been inferred by analysis of strategy papers and annual reports. It thus qualifies and elaborates on other data. The ethnographic approach improves upon other methods through triangulation in the field. It reveals the contingent nature of cultural production and provides us with understanding of the dynamic and embedded nature of cultural processes.

Nevertheless, although the ethnographic method is now well established, the problems of subjective personal interpretation and sources of bias in dealing with ethnographic material still arise. The researcher subjectivity is unavoidable in any research from the activity of categorisation in more positivist approaches to observation and participation. The inevitability of subjectivity in ethnographic research rests upon the involvement of the researchers personal trajectory. The trajectory consists of 'whole series of mental photographs'<sup>1</sup> acquired throughout personal and professional social experience (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:205) which are processed during data gathering and analysis. Although the verbalisations and statement of the news producers in the present project represent their interpretation news production, the implications or implicit meanings are interpreted on the basis of the experience and insights of the ethnographer. The social experience of the participant observer provides an interpretative basis for implicit cultural meanings

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<sup>1</sup> Bourdieu credits his ability to understand or even to anticipate the experience of situations that he has not known firsthand, such as work on an assembly line or the dull routine of unskilled office work, to experiences throughout his youth and his social trajectory in very varied social milieus.

in news production. The question of objectivity and validation of results therefore lie within the researcher's assessment of the consequences of methodological choice and its effect on the fieldwork experience and data gathering.

This working paper is an appraisal and reflection of research experience in Japan, its uncertainties and ways in which these influence research results. In order to make the research process transparent (replicable in positivist terminology) the research set up, design and data collection and the strategy of presentation are reflected upon. Hence the access and researcher identity will be discussed. The fact that I was foreign, female and a non-professional journalist had different consequences for the collection and presentation of data, which are discussed in turn.

### *Uniquely Japanese*

The aim of the study was to observe and describe Japanese corporate practices in detail with the assumption that *'International news in Japan is produced just like anywhere else in the world'* (Chief desk, NHK)<sup>2</sup>. The fact, however, that I foreign *and* exploring micro processes in the intermezzo between global and local created a frame of reference for interviewing and observations that as anticipated brought insights about professional practices. Meanwhile, it also brought an overwhelming amount of knowledge about Japanese 'unique' cultural characteristics. The interview statements as well as the initial advice for doing fieldwork contained much information about being Japanese (*nihonjinron*), which will also be discussed in this paper.

## **An explorative-integrative approach**

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<sup>2</sup> Much scientific literature builds on anecdotes about Japanese management systems and inter-personal communication as being different from the West. The approach in the present analysis is to refrain from reinforcing 'orientalist' stereotypes. Said (1974) defines 'orientalism' as a way of 'coming to terms with the orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience' (p.4). The Orient is according to Said the cultural contestant of Europe and one of the deepest and most recurring images of the Other. The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) and has since antiquity been a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes. Said differentiates between the European Franco-British involvement from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the end of WWII. Since the Second World War America has dominated the Orient and has approached it with historical 'orientalist' generalisations in mind.

The notion of research method refers to the actual techniques of investigation used to study the world: questionnaires, interviews, participant observation, documentary research etc. Research methodology has to do with the logic of interpreting results and analysing findings. Theory is closely linked to the logic of methodology; processes of inquiry into social life are ordered and informed by "conceptual schemes" these latter being in large part of what "theory" is and what it is for. (Giddens,1984: Preface).

Field studies may theoretically be divided into two approaches namely the inductive and the deductive approach. The inductive perspective develops or 'grounds' theory through observation in the empirical field (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) while the deductive approach (Yin, 1989) tests hypothesis in the empirical field based on existing theories. The present project aims to describe and develop an understanding of the inner connections and influences in production processes through an appropriate theoretical framework 'grounded' in observations in the field.

The notion of gate-keeping and the 'classic' ethnographic studies of newsroom production provided the initial background knowledge about news production before entering the Japanese newsrooms. Participating in the International News Flow Project at Copenhagen University in the process of coding the recorded material from two weeks in September 1995 gave insights about the International News Flows material. (See description of project in chapter one). Weeks of viewing and analysing the news material quantitatively and qualitatively were part of the preparation before entering the newsrooms.

The description that best captures the dialogic process between making a theoretical framework and measuring empirical findings is an *explorative-integrative* approach (Maaløe, 1996:57, 271). The *explorative* phase of the research process included investigation of newsroom practices and interviews. The *integrative* phase involved the analysis of data and application of the theoretical framework, which in this case was drawn upon from different disciplines (see Clausen 2003).

Field work is often complex, chaotic and full of discrepancies which is made into case stories that do not reflect the turbulence and arbitrariness of the actual research process. Bourdieu calls this a 'biographical illusion' (ibid: 207, footnote 169) referring to the traditional linear life-story and narration employed in formal research by ethnographers and sociologists. The exercise of arranging

the processes of interviews, the transcription of 'raw' material into scientific discourse is according to Bourdieu an 'artificial' exercise of making the temporal structure of lived experience into a linear trajectory of logic narration<sup>3</sup>. The exercise is an intersubjective condition for scientific reporting and part of its genre conventions.

Thus, the analysis is often not a deduction of hypotheses, although it is presented as such. In a broader sense it is a hermeneutic act moving between analysis of meaning construction at the micro level (texts, visuals and production practices) to a more abstract level of interpretation of socio-cultural phenomena at a macro level. The findings, which amount to exemplary 'thick' descriptions (Geertz, 1973) and interpretations are based on interviews with news production staff and thus based on their perceptions of news production. This method of interpretative research, 'double hermeneutics' (Giddens, 1984) implies an understanding that scientific concepts and interpretations are of second-order<sup>4</sup> in the sense that the field of study has already been interpreted and constituted as meaningful by the people who live in it. The study of a field therefore is "to know what actors already know, and have to know, to "go on" in the daily activities of social life" (Giddens 1984: 284)

In sum, the explorations of news presentations, production practices and mental strategies of news producers form the basis for academic interpretation. Theoretical 'schemata' from several academic disciplines inform the integration of theoretical concepts.

## Research Design

The model provides an overview of the research design. The following is a general discussion of methodology, which precedes a more detailed description of the fieldwork experience. The study of news presentation and news production practices through observation and interviews makes

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<sup>3</sup> The formal researches of Virginia Woolf, Faulkner or Claude Simon would appear to Bourdieu to be more 'realistic' (if the work has any meaning), anthropologically more truthful, closer to the truth of temporal experience, than we are accustomed to in the linear narratives of traditional novels. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:207)

<sup>4</sup> The social anthropological concepts of *emic* and *etic* resembles this method of knowledge derivation. *Phonemics* and *phonetics* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992)

triangulation of results possible: The employment of several research methods enables an investigation of a phenomenon in different ways.

*Content analysis*

The recorded news was viewed and analysed quantitatively before entering the newsrooms. The analysis formed a basis for knowledge about the ‘product’ and made it possible to recognise the staff involved with the presentations. The analysis of news made specific questions in the

**Model: Methods employed in the study of textual strategies in international news production.**

	Analytical levels	Units of analysis	Method	Theoretical perspective
Macro	I. Global	'Global' news (Denmark and Japan)	Content analysis	Globalisation Communication Sense-making  Textual and contextual framing
↕	II. National	Extra media influence at national stations	Interviews with media managers and experts	
	III. Organisational	Org. decision-making processes - shared ideas	Interviews and observation at two stations	
	Micro	IV. Professional	Social processes individual scripts	

newsrooms possible. Later in the writing process, the analysis of news content enabled a comparison with findings in production processes as statements and observations about textual production were traceable in the analysis of texts. The findings in this way enable a triangulation of findings.

Content and discourse analysis based on texts alone tends to assume ‘preferred readings’ in the decoding of messages. Alternatively they make assumptions about how producers have encoded messages in texts. The present project operates with the notion that news discourses are *polysemic* (Fiske, 1986, 1987) that a text has several interpretations coexisting as potentials and may be actualised differently depending on the sociocultural background and personal experiences of its audiences. No actual ‘reader’ would therefore, under natural circumstances, understand a text as interpreted by the researcher:

In a certain sense, the new ‘meaning’ is neither that of the original sender, or of the text itself or of the audience, but a fourth construct, which has to be interpreted with care. (McQual, 1987:184)

Meaning creation is understood in this article as being arbitrary and contextual depending on the frame of reference of the semantic clauses. There may not only be a fourth construct but a fifth or a sixth *et cetera*. An exhaustive account of possible meanings may amount to infinite interpretations, which is not purposeful. In the present research the analysis of discourse in texts *cum* the textual strategies of the news producers renders one way of double checking findings possible.

### *Observation*

Observation provides opportunities for being a part of a work environment. This was important to make sense of work procedures and information flows within the company. Observation importantly provided the opportunity to make leverage between what was said and what was done. Observation in the present project provided knowledge about negotiation in editorial meetings, informal and formal networks and the atmosphere in the newsroom, which differed throughout the day according to deadlines or breaking news stories. Observation further and importantly provided access to knowledge about production procedures that were not expressed (tacit knowledge) by the

news producers such as discussions about how to frame news events. For instance script writing which was a major part of work efforts involved negotiation of concepts, names, language terms and choice of visuals comparisons with agency scripts and conversations across the computer screens. These details may only be caught through observation. They did not surface in the accounts of the news producers when asked to describe their work. On the other hand the study of personal considerations (mental strategies) and perceptions of news events on location could not be observed but were revealed in individual interviews. The context of newsroom observation and interview is described further below.

In a question of validation and reliability, the issue of leading questions has been one of the main critiques of qualitative interviews.

We cannot ask people about their impressions and then experience their answers to be cultural truths. People do not speak in truths. They answer questions, which we ask (Hastrup, 1992:31. Original emphasis)

The fact that the issue of leading questions has received so much attention in interview research may be due to a 'naive empiricism'. (Kvale, 1996:159):

There may be a belief in a neutral observational access to an objective social reality independent of the investigator, implying that an interviewer collects verbal responses like a botanist collects plants in nature or a miner unearths precious buried metals. In an alternative view, which follows from a post-modern perspective on knowledge construction, the interview is a conversation in which the data arise in an interpersonal relationship, co-authored and co-produced by interviewer and interviewee. The decisive issue is then not whether to lead or not to lead, by where the interview questions should lead, and whether they will lead in important direction, producing new, trustworthy, and interesting knowledge. (ibid)

In any communicative activity volunteering 'interesting' information a framework for willingness to communication has to be established. Trust in the researcher through pre-established report provides good conditions for communication. The issue of researcher identity is elaborated below.

In the present and in previous interviews surveys (Clausen, 1997) when a positive report was established interviewees regardless of efforts to avoid contradiction and discrepancies (Potter and Whetherell, 1987) *talked about what was on their mind*<sup>5</sup>. The frame of reference established in the interview situation through research agenda and questions put forth would guide the verbal accounts of the interviewee. In cognitive terms interviewees would draw on schemes of knowledge cued by the interview questions. However, regardless of this cueing the interviewee was confined to contribute personal recollections and retrievals from memory. Various concerns, reflections and strategies inevitably surface during information exchange. One to two hours of conversation reveals much information about what is on in the mind of interviewees. Further, the pre-established report and presentation of research theme serves as a priming mechanism that (consciously or unconsciously) prepares schemes of knowledge available about the topic of interest. The task ahead lies in the analysis and traces of inner connections in the interview material and the re-framing of issues into an academic context.

### *Interviews*

Although the initial interviews and visits to the newsrooms were *explorative*, it soon became imperative to concentrate on the production of specific news events, which made the interviews more focused although still semi-structured. The interviewees' statements are seen, as discussed above, as co-authored by the interviewer in a process of interaction. The Interview is to be understood literally as *inter-views* (Kvale, 1996). Thus, they are an inter-subjective enterprise people talking about common themes of interest. The interviewer does not collect statements. Her questions cues aspects and topics to be addressed, and her listening and following up on the answers co-determines the course of the conversation.

The interviews were conducted with personnel from all levels of the companies as practised by several scholars in news production (Warner, 1970, Epstein, 1974, Schlesinger, 1987, Paterson, 1996) but did not include executives at the boardroom level. Interpersonal communication through computers and the use of technology was not part of the study (Paterson, 1999, Cottle, 1999). The interviews were semi structured with the 'cultural ignorance' approach (Spradley, 1979) which

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<sup>5</sup> As an example, viewers although watching and asked to comment on NHK news would refer to TV Asahi if they

empowers interviewees through active listening and encouragement to elaborate. All the while the interviewees are made understood that they are well informed and their perceptions are valid.

Through three months of regular observation at NHK, and the more occasional observation opportunities at TV Asahi, I was familiar and had talked with most of my interviewees on several occasions. Some had already explained part of their working experiences before the actual interview but volunteered information again with no hesitation when the tape-recorder was turned on. The information offered in the interviews differed according to the position and experience of the interviewees. Trainees and scriptwriters were generally very detailed in their explanation of procedures, while highly ranging executives with many years in the news production business were more apt to explain production strategies as 'a sense of news'. In other words socialisation and internalisation of structures over time seemingly made knowledge of work procedures and production strategies (values) less conscious.

Generally, the news producers were eager to participate in the study and talked with no reservations. Most talked at length about an issue, especially the journalists, who had been active on location and engaged in the specific news events. Some interviewees especially those in managerial positions and some of the anchors did not recollect the actual production process of the three 'global' news. They had been preoccupied with different aspects of production and the specific news was not present in their minds. A short news presentation may have enhanced their recollection of the events. However, in most cases they contributed with more general information about international news production.

I adhered to the same basic questions throughout the entire interview period (which lasted from May 1996 until November 1997). This strategy was not followed in order to quantify answers i.e. generate positivist results, but in order to get multiple insights into the research issues (which only became apparent after some investigation and observation at the stations) by making questions based on the same interview cues. This strategy gave access to a large scale of 'interpretative schemes' about a limited number of phenomena.

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were used to watch this channel And *vice versa*. (Clausen, 1997)

Another methodological point was the fact that I did not transcribe interviews while doing fieldwork. This had the effect that my personally accumulated knowledge and insights were not reflected upon and immediately incorporated in the subsequent interviews. The bulk of transcriptions (finished 2 years later) provided answers to basically the same interview questions. They concerned:

- The production of international news
- Decision making
- News criterion and news values
- Audiences
- The political message of the station
- The production of the three 'global' news

Some news producers talked at length about these questions. Others were more concise in their answers<sup>6</sup>. Common for all interviews was the positive attitude and easiness with which conversation flowed. Many of the foreign correspondents seemingly enjoy being on the other side of the microphone. The interviews resulted in many 'selfcontaining stories' about news production. These individual stories were later 'torn apart' and reassembled in sections of generalised themes.

### *Questions not to ask*

The question about the political stance of the station turned out to be problematic (causing a sense of uneasiness). Asking directly about political engagement would entail breaking a frame for social and professional conduct (Goffman, 1974) anywhere: In journalism in particular the objectivity criterion is a professional ideal. In Japan the clause of neutrality and impartiality in the broadcast law, was a sensitive subject with reference to the Tsubaki affair (the firing of a TV Asahi director

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<sup>6</sup> Kvale (1996:145) lists some quality criteria for an interview. 1) The extent of spontaneous, rich, specific, and relevant answers from the interviewee. 2) The shorter the interviewer's questions and the longer the subjects' answers, the better. 3) The degree to which the interviewer follows up and clarifies the meanings of the relevant aspects of the answers. 4) The ideal interview is to a large extent interpreted throughout the interview. 5) The interviewer attempts to verify his or her interpretations of the subject's answers in the course on the interview. 6) The interview is "self-communicating"- it is a story contained in itself that hardly requires much extra descriptions and explanations.

who openly advocated a anti LDP political stance) and the reactions were one of surprise. I was told that I would not get anywhere with my research if I asked this to other directors.

Frankly, Fuji is free from politics. It is not a *communist* country. We are not propagandists. We are newsmen. We are free and have to be neutral. You will get the same answer at every station. From a business point of view, it makes sense to be neutral. If you make a standpoint, you get some fanatics around you but you loose others. Business and personal belief is two different things. The personal beliefs of the staff do not interfere with business. (Executive Director of the News Department, 1997).

At another commercial station the reaction was similar.

The TBS journalists try to follow the station policy. TBS does not have a set policy. The news producers try to follow the 'atmosphere' of the station. TBS is not politically involved and if they were they would never admit it. No stations admit that they support the Socialist or the Liberal Democratic Party. That our only set policy". (TBS Director of Political News, interview 1997).

The answer represents the overt (*tatemae*)<sup>7</sup> politically correct attitude guided by the clause of neutrality in the broadcast law. It also represents the normative claim of 'objective' reporting. The covert (*honne*) state of affairs was in fact that politics play an important role in news production. The political action behind and occasionally on the scene (screen) was openly 'admitted' among the more liberal broadcasters (See Clausen 2003).

### *Transcription of interviews*

Eighty per cent of the formal interviews were conducted in Japanese. Most of the international news producers were fluent in English (through stationing abroad and scriptwriting training) but they were more at ease talking about their work in Japanese. The use of Japanese during interviews turned out to be an advantage in the transcription process. It was possible to transcribe and translate

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<sup>7</sup> In the terminology of Goffman (1984) *front stage* and *back stage*.

Japanese sentences because clarification of terminology was in many instances made during the interviews. In the English interviews on the other hand, I had relied on the English expressions without asking for clarification. The English interviews mixed with Japanese words made sense in the interview situation but away from the newsrooms or coffee-houses (*kisaten*) where the interviews took place, I had forgot the original understanding and meaning of the arguments. The coherence and situational understanding was lost and too many alternative interpretations possible in retrospect. Long passages of the English interviews could therefore be included in the analysis.

The interviews between 40 minutes and one and a half-hours. In order to make the interviews coherent repetitions and the frequent verbal acknowledgement (*aitsuchi*) paralanguage that is so common in Japan was omitted.

A confessional, impressionistic or realistic presentation?

An ethnographic approach opens up for various possibilities of presenting the material because of the multifaceted observation and phenomenological encounters in the field. Three kinds of rhetoric styles of presenting ethnographic fieldwork have been presented (cf. Kvale, 1996:269), the **realistic**, the **confessional** and the **impressionistic**. A *realistic* tale is narrated in a dispassionate, third-person voice, with the author absent from the text. The author is “the distant one” in a tale based on an assumed “Doctrine of immaculate Perception” (ibid). The natives’ point of view is produced through the quotes that characterise realistic tales; the quotes render a story authentic while the many technical and conceptual issues of constructing a transcription from an oral conversation are bypassed. With the ethnographer having the final word on how the culture is interpreted, she takes on an interpretative omnipotence. The *confessional* tale, narrated in the first person, is highly personalised and self-absorbed and often include hardships in the field endured and overcome, with accounts of what the fieldwork did to the ethnographer. The *impressionistic* tale is self-conscious and focuses on an innovative use of techniques and styles, highlighting the episodic, complex and ambivalent relates studied. The impressionistic tale unfolds event by event, suggesting a learning process.

According to the outline of classic uses of rhetoric<sup>8</sup> (Kvale 1996), the presentation style in this chapter *confessional* and *impressionistic* and not presented as a *realistic* or positivistic account of affairs.

The analysis of discourse (interviews and news presentations) forms the basis of this study. However, as mentioned above the non-verbal was equally important in the exploration of micro processes. (Hastrup, 1992) The observation experience in the newsrooms was important for understanding news production processes and for making sense of the work accounts of the news producers.

The fact that experience is part of the analysis makes it an implicit factor in the presentation of results. In other words, the understanding and description of working processes is a subjective enterprise, which makes the present study an account *not of universal character but as articulated and experienced in interactions in certain contexts*. The context is Japanese international newsrooms at a public and a private station as elaborated in the following.

### **Access to Japanese newsrooms**

The data and insights that a researcher can obtain depend on access to the field (field as defined in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992 and specifically understood as the field of relations, which are significant to the people involved in the study). The main strategic concern in setting up the present projects was whether to try to gain formal or informal access. Through formal access, which would be granted by a higher level executive at the broadcast stations, I would be allowed into the newsrooms moving top down in the organisation. Through informal access, I would move bottom up through introductions from one employer to another.

In any case access to a professional field does not automatically guarantee meaningful access to people in the setting. The choice of informants and their co-operation affects the data collection. As Hammersley and Atkinson argue (1990), while physical presence may not in itself be problematic,

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appropriate activity may be so. I decided on a strategy to obtain formal access but eventually the set up became a mix of both.

The access to any field depends on personal connections. Observation and interviews in newsrooms are by nature a confidential matter as they concern company strategy, production policy, political matters and in the case of international news is closely connected to domestic and foreign policy. Additionally, news is one of the programs that have the highest viewer ratings of any station. News broadcasters therefore are constantly aware of viewer ratings while trying to protect the originality of their own program. Thus, the trust in the researcher and the legitimacy of the project was important in getting access. The initial preparations, observation and the interview process lasted from the spring of 1996 until the end of 1997.

Three factors were vital in obtaining access to the newsrooms in Japan. The most important point was the 'construction' of researcher identity. In anthropological terms the *rite en passage* the stamp of acceptance depended on this identity. In Japan one's 'social capital' (Bourdieu, 1984) and steps up the social ladder to a very high degree depends on the rank of the University attended. The social elites in economic, political and juridical positions are graduates from elite universities. Many staff members at TV Asahi and NHK staff were alumni from the elite Universities: Tokyo, Keio and Waseda. A project like the present one affiliated with one of these institutions was welcomed.

Secondly, personal introductions to prominent members of the broadcasting world and to 'arteries' of human relations (*jinmayku*) within the media institutions were of importance. On several occasions, I learned that I would *not* have been able to receive even the most general information on my own<sup>9</sup>. The strategy of making initial interviews with media experts and top executives at the Japanese broadcasting stations gave the project scope and the affiliation with Keio University opened many doors. Finally, the fact that the project was part of an international academic study published in a foreign language added credibility (minimised anxiety) and was a convincing point. I will elaborate on these factors in the following.

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<sup>9</sup> One such occasion was a visit to the National Assembly of Private Broadcasters (NAB), where I was not permitted access to the library until my identity had been verified in form of a written introduction. Another was at Sofia University, where I needed the personal reinforcement by a Professor in order to even visit the library.

Through introductions at the NHK research centre, I visited the directors of the international news department at TBS, Fuji Television, Nihon Television and the English CBS (the American affiliate of TBS) in order to get a broad perspective on international news production<sup>10</sup>. In addition, I met and interviewed some members of the Japanese Press Club. Doing research at two competing stations was a difficult set up to start with. After meetings and interviews with the competing commercial TV stations, I was introduced to management staff at NHK and TV Asahi in order to establish an agreement. The executive manager at NHK had strong alliances. He was very open to the research idea and initially introduced me to the director (chief desk) of the international news department who again introduced me to all relevant staff. I spent more than three months at NHK and was free to join editorial meetings, news production events and to conduct interviews. Access to *News Station* was more complicated.

*News Station* is the flagship program at TV Asahi and the executive manager and the producer in charge at the time did not wish the production strategies to be analysed or publicised in any form. I was allowed to interview one of the program directors and yet another but then my path of introductions stopped. I went back to my contact at the NHK Research Centre who tried to open news paths. However, formal access was not granted.

For months, I was pondering. What were the hindrances to gaining access to *News Station*? Was this failure personal (being a woman, an academic, a non-Japanese)? Or did it have something to do with the nature of connections (i.e. the key connection were not the 'right' person) Or was it in fact connected to organisational politics (in the sense that no commercial station is going to let someone attached to NHK study it)?

The answers to these questions depended on a combination of circumstances.

As free observation was limited to NHK, a detailed comparative description of the ad hoc working procedures at the two stations was not possible. The results thus are based partly on experience at NHK, some observation experience at TV Asahi combined with interviews. Further, it serves mentioning again that the interviews are made in retrospect approximately two years after the actual

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<sup>10</sup> The VIP at the NHK Research Centre offered to invite these prominent media figures to a panel discussion (hearing) about the challenges of international news production. However, because my research focus was production processes from the perspective of individuals, I decided to establish a personal rapport through personal interviews.

production of the world news. The individual considerations therefore are made in retrospect. Further, it was not possible to see the actual editing of the visuals and texts of the news items in focus.

### **The role of the researcher**

As discussed above, the observer inevitably impacts the social setting by his or her presence, or interaction. It is obviously not possible for any research enterprise to capture reality in its 'pristine', natural form because of the 'observer paradox' and intrusion in the physical space by merely being present. As discussed above the researcher is closely intertwined in the research process, wherefore scientific research cannot escape from his or her own personal and professional background<sup>11</sup>.

'Interpretations and negotiations are needed to decontextualise observation situations at all junctures of fieldwork and analysis' (Silverman, 1997). Three factors influenced the data obtained and interpretation of fieldwork in Japan, the fact that I was foreign, a novice in news production and female.

Being a foreigner affected the field-work and data collection process in two significant ways. Firstly, the international scope of the research was welcomed and supported. Secondly, the interview transcripts contain an overwhelming amount of information about being Japanese. (see *nihonjinron* discussion) This provides much insight about cultural differences and identity construction in the intermezzo between global and local. However, these utterances may not have been so pronounced if the researcher had been Japanese and not Danish? Further, being Danish had an effect on the interviews about the UN Women's Conference. Many interviewees would relate their answers to my background. They would comment on women's conditions in Denmark by either excusing the Japanese conditions or praising the Scandinavian. An analysis without taking this bias into consideration would make Scandinavia stand out as the 'other' in questions of gender and gender equality. When in reality, US condition in all respects (in the newsrooms at any rate) including the issue of gender was perceived as the comparative 'other'.

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<sup>11</sup> Ethnography is always necessarily political in the sense of serving someone's interest, wittingly or unwittingly; and that only by consciously linking it to the right sort of politics can we ensure that it will serve the right interests. (Hammersley, 1992). The Japanese news producers were generally interested in and looking for new inspiration or outside comments about the Japanese media system in general and their institution specifically. They were welcoming

The fact that I was a woman did not seem to affect access and interaction in any significant way<sup>12</sup>. I was welcomed in a professional manner with a matter of fact attitude of ‘lets get to the point, what would you like to know’. In this sense, I was treated, as Japanese perceive Western professional women should be treated. Through previous work experience in Japan, I had mastered the female polite language (although I did not use the high pitched tone) in which you speak humbly of yourself and respectfully address others. I made it a habit to position my encounters male and female as superiors in my use of language although I was careful not to be too formal, which would have been interpreted as creating a distance. An insight into traditional hierarchy (respect for ones superiors), language codes and norms I had learned through work experience and through years of studying Japanese linguistics and traditional Japanese arts.

The fact that I was a novice in practical journalism had the effect that many voluntarily approached me in the newsroom in order to explain the content of meetings and happenings. As a participant observer (with emphasis on *observation*), I tried not to be in any one’s way. I attended the general meetings at NHK except the evaluation meeting after the News Seven, which was restricted to upper level staff members. When I was not engaged in meetings or conversations, which was most of the time, I watched the monitors or scribbled immediate impressions and conversation in my field notes<sup>13</sup>.

While at NHK, I made it a point to have lunch with different staff members on a one-to-one basis. These agreements worked well as the 8-hour shifts meant a continuous change of members. They also provided access to many individuals, as I was not associated with certain lines of connections.

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the opportunity to exchange views and brainstorm about media products and production strategies. (People who did not make themselves available may have seen less advantage in this interaction).

<sup>12</sup> In the interview situation, however, on two occasions, I neglected to probe into the concepts of *womanism* and *feminism*. Being female, I anticipated the answers instead of making the respondents elaborate. My preconceived understanding of what these concepts mean to women (also Japanese) was a hindrance to learn and acquire new knowledge.

<sup>13</sup> I did not, as practised by most ethnographers, make systematic, rigorous notes about my experience in the field. Processual insights and methodological details may be wasted due to this lack. My field notes included multiple impressions and fragmented descriptions, which are only included occasionally in the report. An analysis of these would contribute to different tales and anecdotes from the field that lies outside the scope of this thesis. The considerable amount of interview transcriptions forms the bases for analysis. Further, and importantly the interview are conducted in 1997, two years after the actual production of the 3 global news. Observations thus are used as interpretative background for the analysis of interviews but for a more general description of work procedures at the public service and a commercial station (see chapter 6).

Although unaware of the flow of their work, I found a common ground in the international activities and interests in international affairs of both academic and journalist as *cosmopolitans* and *cultural entrepreneurs*. I will elaborate on this point as this lifestyle and expert knowledge of other cultures to an extent made journalists a special kind of group apart from their main audiences. I deliberately say journalists because the non-journalistic staff expressed much more concern with and wonder about audience gratification and ability to understand than staff with a journalist background who were more concerned with professional values and the issues of coverage than with their audiences.

### **Advice for doing field work**

As mentioned above, the fact that I was foreign affected the fieldwork experience and data gathering considerably. In regard to access it was undoubtedly an advantage to be a white Caucasian woman. However, although most interviews were conducted in Japanese, the fact that I was foreign cued explicitations of a repertoire of perceptions about being Japanese. An overwhelming part of the transcriptions of interviews were concerned with information about Japanese ‘uniqueness’, which presumably would not have been volunteered to a Japanese researcher even in discussions about international news. (This knowledge would have been implicit).

As an example, an anecdote about the agrarian<sup>14</sup> traditions of Japan, which exemplifies the historical development of the uniqueness of Japanese interpersonal communication, was presented to me upon arrival.

The anecdote served as advice for successful integration through an understanding of Japanese professional practices.

Japanese organisational culture can be traced back to the agricultural communities who worked together to irrigate and cultivate rice paddies. As compared to Western hunting cultures work in the rice-fields is done very meticulously in close corporation. When

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<sup>14</sup> The horti-cultural tradition of the Japanese has left other metaphors now used in Japanese mainstream business settings. *Nemawashi* literally ”binding the roots” refers to the process by which consensus is developed in Japanese

### Advice for doing field work in Japan

1. Pretend not to be well informed about the way of the Japanese. Be well prepared but always have an air of not knowing and looking at it from the perspective of a curious not understanding foreigner.
2. Take advantage of being a foreigner. Do not translate the purpose of the research into Japanese. Act like a foreigner as much as possible. Too much Japaneseness makes the interviewees uneasy. They will gladly explain anything to a foreigner.
3. Make sure to announce that your work is academic and published in English. That way the broadcast staff can talk freely as there is no fear for repercussion from their superiors. The leadership at the stations is not threatened by publishings in English because they will or cannot read them.
4. The group feeling is very prevalent. Japanese people have no access and are not easily accepted into new groups. Foreigners, however, have access right into the middle of things and are easily absorbed in the circle and have the right away to the middle of the group or top of the hierarchy.
5. Remember to start any conversation with *osechi* praise of the person or company. This is a custom and works with most Japanese people. (Compare your helper to a dog. The better you bring it up the more you can pull it by its ears)
6. In Japan a lot of things are not said, but implicit. It is understood by actions, relationships and just in the air whereas in the West things have to be expressed in order to exist.
7. Use your title as much as you can. You are part of another group, Copenhagen Business School, which is important for the Japanese. Stress your Japanese connection with Keio. Make sure people see you all the time over a long period of time. Again and again. They do not get tired of you - but acquainted. You become part of the system.
8. You have to interview prominent people in the media world in order to understand the power relations. It is important to be acquainted with many prominent figures. Even if they do not add anything to the research just having been with them affiliates you in a way.
9. In order to get in-depth knowledge you have to stick around for a long time and importantly your attitude should be: I came to Japan, so please help me - and *not* with the supposition that people ought to help.
10. The Japanese business cards have many meanings. In the US you can count on the title and the rank that it reflects. In Japan the title is often ambivalent.

harvesting period comes, everyone is prepared and without counselling or communicating with each other, as in consensus, harvesting starts. (NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute, 1996)

This anecdote represents theories about Japaneseness (*nihonjinron*) and provided an 'exotic' image of the Japanese past. Through the anecdote, I was to learn that the Japanese communication style relies on *implicit emotional communication*. The patterns of Japanese interpersonal communication following this explanation supposedly lack emphasis on the logical and verbal presentations

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organisations prior to a formal decision. The root-binding refers to the groundwork and bottom up approach of informing employees and involving everyone in the group before making decisions.

encouraged in the logical and verbal confrontational communication style of the West. Japanese interpersonal communication is a performance of *empathy*. Following the beliefs of *nihonjinron*, the Japanese mode of thinking and behaving is so unique that one has to be born Japanese to understand it. In the anecdote, action happened by watching others through this inherent empathy and consideration of the emotions of the group. Through the harvesting metaphor, these social mechanisms were related to the media world, where everyone closely keeps an eye on each other. The sincerity in which this was mediated as cultural knowledge (truth) was genuine. However, it remained an interesting anecdote but did not reflect the modes of communication encountered in the professional practices in the newsrooms.

Mixed with open-mindedness and intuition, the insights and advice displayed above helped smooth integration while doing fieldwork. Some of the points of advice may be considered to be universal knowledge about considerate behaviour in any organisation. Others could be traced back to ideas of how Japanese perceive themselves *nihonjinron* (the discourses available about being Japanese), which surface in interaction with foreigners. The continuous reinforcement of these self-perceptions will be discussed in the following.

### ***Nihonjinron* – uniquely Japanese**

The Japanese self-perception is dominated by a continuous reinforcement by academic and ordinary belief that Japan and the Japanese are ‘unique’. The organisational ‘uniqueness’<sup>15</sup> and differing production styles made explicit in the interviews are analysed for publication in Clausen 2003). The many statements about Japanese cultural aspects, which are discussed in the following, reflect anthropological and sociological discussions about Japaneseness (*nihonjinron*). Much theorising has been done about the difference between Japanese and others. Many of these theories (by Japanese and foreigners scholars) are based on the US as the “ethnographic other”<sup>16</sup>. In my

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<sup>15</sup> Cognitive sense making involves deciphering an element of uniqueness at the individual, organisational and national level. An aspect of emotional maturation is the individuation, that is distinguishing one’s unique personal self from other members of society (Maslow, 1962) The organisational uniqueness is the creation of a distinction between one institution and others (Martin, 1983). National chauvinists distinguish their own country from others and emphasize its distinctiveness (Gertz, 1973).

<sup>16</sup> There are exceptions such as Nakane Chie *Japanese Society* (1970, 1994 ninth print) who makes many parallels to Indian culture.

fieldwork and study of individuals, I experienced many exceptions to these generalisations., which is the motivation for the following discussion.

Many accounts of difference in communication are based on the US as the significant other. (See Gydekunst and Nishida, 1994). In relation to the US, which is represented as individualistic, horizontal (class based solidarity), valuing independence (selfautonomy), Japanese society has often been characterised as collectivistic (Wagatsuma, 1984) group oriented, interpersonalistic (*kanjinshugi*). The 'vertical stratification' which implies commitment to the group such as family, school and company plays an influential role in shaping the message in an interpersonal communication context. Given this cultural norm, Japanese people's collectivistic concerns often tend to be manifested in "high-context" and implicit form of communication (Hall, 1974) versus the Western 'low-context' more explicit form of interpersonal communication<sup>17</sup>. Attributes that are cited as being "uniquely Japanese " include indirect communication (Kitano, 1993), concern for face (Sueda, 1994) and harmony. Several terms have been introduced to describe the Japanese communication behaviour: *ishin denshin*, *amae*, *hara gei*, (Doi, 1973; Nakane, 1972, Lebra, 1976, 1993). These communication characteristics describe some of the interpersonal behavioural characteristics by the Japanese in their daily interactions. However, these characteristics have been largely extracted from cross-cultural comparisons between Japanese and people who have extremely different cultural backgrounds. Consequently, the observers of Japanese culture (assume and) are assumed from the beginning not to be able to fully understand the Japanese people because of their supposedly unique mode of thinking and behaving.

Breaking away from these generalisations pose a difficult dilemma in research. Among scholars who question the 'group model' of the *nihonjinron* theories are Harumi Befu (1980,1987) and Peter Dale (1986). A model of conflict as opposed to the traditional model of harmony has been introduced by Krauss (1984). However, it takes a 'Maoist leap' (Moeran, 1999) to part from the preconceived theoretical ideas that have hitherto determined the way of thinking about Japanese society. Moeran refers to the indigenous concepts of *uchi/soto*, *omote/ura*, *tatemaie/honne*, *senpai/kohai* and makes a moderate critiques of the 'vertical society' notion of Nakane Chie (1970)

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<sup>17</sup> It is agreed by linguists across cultures that seventy per cent of all communication is non-verbal. The tone of voice, body language, gestures, eye-contact and facial expressions are part of the non-verbal communication.

by suggesting new methodologies to the study of Japanese organisation<sup>18</sup> (Moeran 1999). Kosaku Yoshino (1999) writes against the notion of Japanese uniqueness and makes aware how the cultural stereotypes of *nihonjinron* are reinforced in English language education, in tourist brochures and academic writings. Cross-cultural comparisons have emphasised the Japanese uniqueness to the extent that 'commonality between the Japanese and non-Japanese is forgotten'. (Yoshino, 1992). The Japanese scholars in knowledge management Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) described Japanese communication as *empathetic* while the Western was *sympathetic*. Nonaka, Korch and Eicho (2000) changed this claim to a more universal notion that people from both parts of the world were able to be both sympathetic and empathetic.

It is a continuous dilemma for scholars involved with research on Japan whether to emphasise *specific* or *universal* characteristics of Japanese management and communication. The issue is addressed in this study because the *nihonjinron* discourses were plenty in the interview material (less elaborate in news presentations). The perceptions of Japanese uniqueness are socially available. They are internalised by individuals and made *discursive* in encounters with the foreigner ethnographer. A recurrent statement among the Japanese news producers and used as explanatory background for the success of *News Station* was that Japanese are not able to voice their opinion. This reinforced conception of *nihonjinron* surfaced several times during the interviews. In the case of assertiveness and outspokenness the US may be unique<sup>19</sup>. By US comparison any other culture may seem less verbal and less assertive<sup>20</sup>.

The *nihonjinron* stereotypes form the basis for understanding what Japanese are like (for foreigner and Japanese). In cognitive terms the basic scripts and schemes for understanding Japanese behaviour are grounded in these cultural explanations. The ideas of Japanese cultural distinctiveness

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<sup>18</sup> The suggested sociologic co-ordinates employed in the study of Japanese social organisation are: hierarchies, networks, markets and frames.

<sup>19</sup> Communication techniques are emphasised in the United States educational system. Students are provided with public speaking abilities and assertion techniques. American students are encouraged to express themselves in speech and debate classes and as extra curricular activities from High School through University.

<sup>20</sup> When the circumstances allow, Japanese young people are not subdued. My teaching experience at Keio proved students to be knowledgeable and eager to word their opinions in discussions. In their independent presentations they clearly stated their opinions and findings. The fresh and outspoken character of the students may dampen, if not put to creative use when entering conservative mass media companies? In the newsrooms, I encountered outspoken individuals and less so, as I would in any country.

(*nihonjinron*) whether built on myths or state initiated nationalistic identity constructions<sup>21</sup> are consumed and (re)produced and thereby have an effect in their consequences. During six years of living in Japan, the incidences are countless when I heard foreigners talk about their Japanese colleague who was always different from these cultural generalisations. No Japanese at close encounter was ever perceived as the stereotypical ‘high-context’, ‘non-assertive’, ‘group-oriented’, ‘empathetic’, ‘emotional’, ‘afraid to loose face’ person, ‘who could not say no’.

The main consumers and reproducers of *nihonjinron* are according to Yoshino (1999) business elites and people who pursue learning English in an effort to become internationalists (*kokusaijin*), which is still and attractive quality for most Japanese. These internationalists or so-called ‘cultural intermediaries’ (from Featherstone, 1991:43<sup>22</sup>) use *nihonjinron* actively in two ways: cross culturally and organisationally (Yoshino, 1999). In this light, the Japanese news producers who both master English and engage in cross-cultural activity may be studied with interest as ‘cultural intermediaries’ as they manage the ideas of Japanese cultural distinctiveness in the intermezzo between global and local.

It is fair to state that the advice to set up a project of scope with formal introductions to networks of prominent figures did create a feeling of belonging on my behalf and obligation (*on*) (*giri/ninjo*) of the news producers, which in retrospect opened some doors. However, systems of connections and introduction are universal phenomena and function as social lubrication world-wide. The connections in the media world and the working relations in the international newsrooms were ‘*multi-stranded*’ (Moeran, 1996:268) and based on personal attribute and experience as found elsewhere. This contradicts the ‘vertical’ principle as described by Nakane (1970) where rank is determined by age and hierarchy of belonging rather than personal attribute

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<sup>21</sup> In a study of *nihonjinron* taking a ‘secondary’ perspective a ‘market’ perspective on the *production* and *consumption* of discourses of Japaneseness instead of that the classical primary perspective of state production of national identity and reinforcement through education,

<sup>22</sup> ‘Mediators’ is used in the present project in order to avoid connotations connected to a middle class educated in style and tastes to be perfect consumers and ‘cultural intermediaries’ (Featherstone 1991). The ‘new petite bourgeoisie’ (Bourdieu, 1984), refers to the rise of a middle class in France who challenge the distinct practices of the upper class. Japanese society has hitherto been characterised as *not* being structured by class or caste but rather by vertical stratification by institution or groups of institutions. Even though social classes like those in Europe can be detected in Japan, they do not reflect the social structure in Japanese society, where it is not workers against capitalists or managers but company A against company B (Nakane, 1976). Nevertheless, elitism and notions of class are described in other studies (Mouer and Sugimoto, 1986).

### **News producers as cosmopolitans and cultural mediators**

In the early stages of fieldwork, international affairs and the experience and interest in other cultures was a connecting point in conversation with the news producers. All staff members in the international newsrooms at both NHK and News Station stations had been stationed abroad for longer or shorter appointments. The challenge of gaining and mediating knowledge (information through experience) to a 'home' audience was a common point of interest. The 'coexistence of cultures in the individual experience' (Hannerz, 1997:239) and the communication of it was a vocational challenge for the foreign correspondents and the focus of study in the present project.

The experiences and situation of the news producers *and* the foreign researcher was in a sense similar to the 'cosmopolitan' as described by Hannerz (1997). The notion of 'cosmopolitanism' (including bureaucrats, politicians, business people, and diplomats) entails a certain *orientation* towards others and a cultural *competence*.

Cosmopolitanism is first of all an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other. It is an intellectual and aesthetic stand of openness toward divergent cultural experiences a search for contrasts rather than uniformity. (Hannerz, 1997: 239)

The 'orientation' towards others includes an element of acceptance that cultures are divergent. Divergent rests upon the assumption that culture is a collective phenomenon, which is primarily linked to interactions and social relationships, and only indirectly and without logical necessity to particular areas in physical space. 'Cultures tend to overlap and mingle'. (Hannerz, 1990:238)

'Competence' (or preferably intercultural communication skills) Hannerz defines as both a generalised and a more specialised kind. 'There is the aspect of 'a state of readiness, a personal ability to make one's way into other cultures, through *listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting*'. (Ibid:239. My emphasis). There is a cultural competence or a built up social skill in manoeuvring more or less expertly with a particular system of meanings and meaningful forms. Competence, according to Hannerz, with regard to alien cultures itself entails a sense of mastery, as an aspect of the self. One's understandings have expanded a little more of the world is somehow under control. Yet according to Hannerz there is a curious, apparently paradoxical interplay between mastery and

surrender for the cosmopolitan (which also concerns the news producer and the ethnographer). In some cases the cosmopolitan may construct his or her own unique personal perspective out of an idiosyncratic collection of experience. In others, s(he) may negotiate with the other culture but accept it as a package deal. Even this surrender, is a part of the sense of mastery. Yet, the surrender is of course only conditional. The 'cosmopolitan may embrace the alien culture, but s(he) does not become committed to it. All the time s(he) knows where the exit is' (ibid: 240).

The possibility of 'exit' is against the anthropological ideal of assimilation and oneness with the people investigated. Exit nevertheless is always a possibility of the researcher (and the journalist abroad) which has different implications for relationships during fieldwork. The 'locals' first of all do not have an opportunity for exit, which always makes an imbalance that can be positive and negative for both parties. The positive part is that communicating with a foreigner creates new spaces or 'free zones' in which conditions for communications are independent of restrictions and inhibitions of the surrounding culture. Much can be said within these 'free zones' (new frameworks of social interaction) and it is within the ethical considerations of the researcher not to compromise the volunteer.

Over time, I became part of the Japanese newsrooms and became acquainted with the staff. I continuously approached news producers with questions about their work procedures in order to measure my perceptions with theirs. But not only, did I have an exit, I also let them have one. Every day, I checked in at the front reception at NHK who called the chief desk in the international department in order to give me a visitors pass. After a while, the chief desk suggested a permanent pass, but I kept checking in at the reception in order to give the him an opportunity to renegotiate access if he felt my that my presence in the news rooms was intruding.

### **A final note**

The study of meaning production in social processes is a subjective endeavour. "What we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to". (Geertz 1973:9). The access to these data depends to a great extent on successful networking and construction of researcher identity in the field.

It is important to emphasise that the strategies and considerations in social processes in the material obtained through observation and interviews are merely the *top of the iceberg* of a universe of thoughts (mental processes) that go into decision making and knowledge transfer. The processes within individuals are *inaccessible* and the personal and professional strategies of news producers only made explicit through cues by the researcher whose constellation of mental schemes is limited by her personal and professional trajectory - the 'mental prison' (Bourdieu) within which meanings are perceived and interpretations are confined.

Nevertheless, the common sense reflections of news producers made discursive in this project give insights into individual strategies and methods of classification in socially constructed webs of meaning within the field of international news production. This web of significance, again, is connected to and (re)negotiated by social actors on a larger scale in society at large.

In sum, despite the limits of interpretative research - accounts of personal and professional experience in international news production - do provide in depth knowledge about social processes in the production of mass mediated discourse as perceived by competent cosmopolitans and cultural mediators.

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