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Systems Thinking in Anthropology

Understanding Cultural Complexity in the Era of Super-diversity

Edited by
Sylvie Genest

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Guest Editor

Sylvie Genest

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"Déliaisons-2" by Francine Saillant.

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About the Editor

Sylvie Genest

Sylvie Genest is a professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). She holds a PhD in the Social Sciences and Humanities, as well as artistic and professional awards in music composition and creative practice. Her academic research and teaching draw on anthropology, semiotics, communication studies, cultural studies, and feminist theory, adopting a transdisciplinary hermeneutic approach informed by systems thinking. She has published with leading academic presses, including PUQ (Canada), L'Harmattan (France), and Routledge (United Kingdom).

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Editorial

Introduction to the Special Issue on Systems Thinking in Anthropology: Understanding Cultural Complexity in the Era of Super-Diversity

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The objective of this Special Issue is to highlight the efforts of contemporary anthropologists to integrate the theoretical framework and methods of systems thinking into their research. Systems thinking is approached here as a modeling methodology that facilitates the understanding of complex cultural phenomena, such as the multiple processes shaping social relations in cross-cultural contexts.

Among the various lines of research in this area, this Special Issue focuses specifically on phenomena captured by the concept of superdiversity, first introduced by Dr. Steven Vertovec in his work on the evolution of migration patterns. By showing how "social, cultural, religious, and linguistic phenomena [. . .] combine with others like gender, age, and legal status" to produce a "diversification of diversity" in societies, Vertovec (2022) redirects the anthropological project toward a central concern of systems thinking: the "change of change." This concept was explored by Gregory Bateson (1972) in his general theory of communication, which aimed to explain the adaptive or transformative movements of the "mind" of human societies.

In addition to discussions on superdiversity, contributions were expected to engage substantively with concepts, principles, theories, or methods rooted in systems thinking, and, where possible, to explore how such approaches might enhance our understanding of social complexity in increasingly diverse urban environments.

As a preamble, the first text offers a curated set of themes illustrating how Vertovec connects systems thinking to the challenges of superdiversity. Tracing the origins of this approach to his training in religious studies, he explains how he interprets and applies systemic concepts such as context, organization, difference, system, double bind, threshold, and systemic boundary in his research.

The main body of the publication is organized into three sections, each progressing toward a higher level of abstraction: the first gathers contributions emphasizing inductive methods (Arsenault, White et al.); the second includes contributions applying systemic concepts or methods to organizational issues (Le Moing, Frozzini, Côté); and the third comprises contributions focused on systems thinking as a heuristic tool for modeling social complexity, particularly regarding the challenges of change (Potvin, Thompson & Pearce). The publication concludes with a contribution by the guest editor, discussing central methodological issues (Genest).

The **cover** of this edition features a work entitled *Déliaisons-2* by Quebec anthropologist Francine Saillant. This piece adds a powerful artistic, feminine, and Francophone tone to the publication. The French term *déliaison* denotes the play, movement, or early separation within a ship's structure, metaphorically reflecting the tensions and gradual disconnections that can occur within societies. The depiction of a hand also serves as a strong symbol

in support of the systemic anthropology advanced by Gregory Bateson in the 1970s. It invites us to cultivate a radically new way of thinking, without which we risk seriously misunderstanding the very nature of the human being, because, as Bateson said, he may not have five fingers at the end of each limb, but four angles between the fingers.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

List of Contributions:

1. Thompson, G. A., & Pearce, S. (2025). A systems thinking approach to political polarization and encounters of dysrecognition. *Humans*, *5*(3), 17. https://doi.org/10.3390/humans5030017.
2. Le Moing, A. (2025). Montreal's community organizations and their approach to integration: A system within a dual system. *Humans*, *5*(1), 7. https://doi.org/10.3390/humans5010007.
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Editorial

Super-Diversity and Systems Thinking: Selected Moments from a Conversation with Steven Vertovec

Steven Vertovec [1] and Sylvie Genest [2,*]

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1. Circumstances of an Interview with Steven Vertovec

We contacted Steven Vertovec in the fall of 2023 to invite him to participate in this Special Issue on systemic approaches when adopted by researchers, particularly anthropologists, in the context of their work on migration issues in the era of super-diversity. We sincerely thank him for agreeing to answer our questions on this topic, which seems to us to be of great importance.

The interview, moderated by Bob W. White, took place via Zoom on 17 January 2024. The transcript, obtained with the assistance of Maude Arsenault, was then edited by Sylvie Genest, who formulated a version suitable for publication. After proofreading and some adjustments, the version published here was approved by Professor Vertovec.

The resulting text takes the form of a series of themes on which Professor Vertovec shares his opinions, drawing generously on his previous work, his vast experience, and his spontaneous goodwill.

2. The Ferment of Systems Thinking in Anthropology

Early in my career, my academic background was in Religious Studies, which had a strong influence on my approach. I was immersed in Geertz's work on cultural models of reality, which I find very systemic, particularly in interpreting cultural systems and how individuals perceive and project these models onto the world [1]. As a scholar of religion, I was interested in exploring the relationships between myth, ritual, values, and everyday practices, understanding how these elements form religious systems. But later my focus shifted towards studying diversity in urban contexts. As a consequence, contextualization became crucial in my research. Context functions as a system that not only shapes but is continuously shaped by the interrelations between the elements that it contains.

My academic mentors, particularly James Clyde Mitchell, from when I was at Oxford, helped give me a deeper understanding of systemic thinking. Mitchell and Gluckman's situational analysis, which involves triangulating different layers of context around events, had a big impact on my work, especially in terms of methodology. The idea of "situational selection" introduced by Gluckman was a central concept of the Manchester School, and I think this encapsulates systemic thinking in an interesting way, making it possible to navigate between different scales of analysis [2].

3. The Social Organization of Difference

One way systems thinking directly influences my work is through the idea of the social organization of difference. I have written about this in an article where I take some inspiration from Mitchell's ideas [3]. I refer to three key components: the set of events or actual activities (encounters), the situation or meanings actors attribute to activities (representation), and the setting or structural context in which these things occur (configurations).

For me, those are the three parts of the Mitchell-Gluckman triangle. I have a section in that article on Mitchell and how it relates to situational analysis.

Mitchell was also one of the pioneers of Social Network Theory. He approached it metaphorically but also mathematically; he was originally a mathematician... so he brokered a lot of quantitative techniques for social network analysis, but he was also able to talk about social networks in a more classical ethnographic context [4]. I co-edited a festschrift for Mitchell called "The Urban Context". Clyde even contributed an afterword to it [5]. I also incorporate some of Barth's work into this discussion. Barth obviously did a lot of important work on social organization, especially his piece on ethnic groups and boundaries [6].

4. System

The concept of system is of primary importance, obviously. As an anthropologist, I primarily focus on social systems. To me, a system revolves around a series of interdependent relationships. Whether it's a person, a role or an institution, each component of a system maintains reciprocal links with the other parts of the system. When one part is affected, it impacts the entire system. Changes in one have ripple effects on the others, both quantitative and qualitative.

Another aspect of systems thinking that I consider very important for social anthropology is the openness of any system to its environment. One example of this is Gluckman's text "Closed Systems and Open Minds" [7]. The main message here is that it would be both naive and detrimental for a social anthropologist to concentrate only on one aspect of reality, ignoring other areas explored by other disciplines, or to limit her field of study in an attempt to separate it from the broader context of what is being studied. In other words, it's better for anthropology that researchers keep an open mind and avoid thinking about the systems they study as being closed.

So, I always conduct my research projects with this recommendation in mind. From 2011 to 2016, for example, I led a multidisciplinary team to carry out a project comparing diversity in public spaces in Singapore, Johannesburg and New York [8]. We explored the rules of spatial interaction that emerge from diversification, moving beyond closed-system approaches. Our research was carried out on a fairly large scale. But you could do the same thing on a smaller scale, that of a classroom, for example.

It is indeed a crucial methodological challenge to link different scales. In my work on super-diversity [9], I approach this by acknowledging that national policies shape immigration patterns, legal statuses, and economic participation. This happens at a higher, non-local scale. However, the effects of these policies play out at the local level through characteristics like gender, ethnicity, nationality, and legal status. So, it is a constant back-and-forth between these scales.

5. Double Bind

This is another major idea from Gregory Bateson's systems thinking that anthropologists of diversity have not always recognized as relevant to their work. Yet—and on this point I completely agree with Professor White and other authors who have published in this Special Issue—it is a concept that resonates widely in our field.

To demonstrate this relevance, I could cite the book, "The Cosmopolitan Canopy", in which Elijah Anderson talks about those cosmopolitan moments where everyone seems to get along, but there's always a moment when visible minorities are reminded that they're different [10]. I think this is a good example of a double bind situation that affects many migrants: at one point they are told "Be like us", and at another "You're different". They are caught in a vicious cycle where they cannot help but wonder: "What exactly do you expect from me?" These are difficult situations where they are constantly reminded of their otherness. It's not just a question of language, but also of subtle cues that send the message to migrants that they might be welcome, but that they do not belong.

Another example I could think of has to do with how we talk about immigration more generally. There is research showing that increasing diversification can actually improve social relationships, but at the same time there is a discourse that talks about diversification as something that is disruptive. That's what is being described in Susanne Wessendorf's article "Being open, but sometimes closed" [11]. As a result, people often find themselves in a double bind between their personal experiences and the discourses they're exposed to. And it shows in opinion polls. At the local level, people might say that the diversity is great, but at the national level, there is fear of too much immigration [12].

6. Threshold

I wrote somewhere that the diversity/super-diversity distinction is not a matter of quantity, but of the co-occurrence and mutual influence of a number of classifications [9]. The concept of super-diversity does not suggest the existence of a threshold or breaking point at which diversity becomes super-diversity.

That being said, actual diversification processes can strain professionals as it is observed in different areas or disciplines. A good example would be this 2021 article on "Teachers' Emotions in Super-Diverse School Settings" [13]. Research from Montreal indicates professionals developing new prejudices due to the challenges of working in a super-diverse environment. They require more time and resources, leading to burnout.

So, regarding social services, you could refer to my book in Chapter III and the bibliography [9]. You'll find numerous works that leverage the concept of super-diversity to address various professions such as teaching, nursing, social work, youth services, sports, and how they handle diverse contexts. Many researchers are actively exploring these questions and challenges within these fields.

On the subject of thresholds, the famous British journalist David Goodhart once wrote that there was "too much diversity" leading to social breakdowns [14,15]. I do not agree with this view. It is based on a misconception that homogeneity is necessary for the functioning of society. Challenges exist in health clinics or social work due to diversification. However, I see this as a resource issue, not a diversity issue. I recognize the challenges of diversification for professionals, but I think they would be the first to agree: the problem is not diversity per se. It's just that we don't have the appropriate level of resources or training to deal with it.

7. Multiculturalism versus Interculturalism

Around 2010, I initiated discussions on post-multiculturalism [16], and more specifically with Susanne Wessendorf, with whom I published "The Multiculturalism Backlash" [17]. When I coined the term "super-diversity" I had been thinking about this question for a long time. At some level, it was intended as a critique of multiculturalism, because multiculturalism as a political discourse was simply not addressing the change that was taking place in Britain at that time. It was just not fit for purpose, and so I tried to come up with something else. Whether that was fit for purpose I don't know.

Since then, new elements have been added to my thinkings on this subject.

Multiculturalism and interculturalism are certainly different paradigms. From what I know of interculturalism, at least the European variant, I probably lean more on that side of the debate. I mean I have never had the impression that interculturalism is essentialist; I do have that impression about multiculturalism, no matter how much the multiculturalists claim that it is not.

Multiculturalism still sounds to me like it is about bounded groups with homogeneous practices and values; groups that can be represented and can be given group rights. The debate about group rights was an important debate to have; group rights are something that had to be struggled for, especially if the idea is to create a society where group-based identity is no longer a problem in terms of equality or social justice. The fact that people presume that we are organized in groups and this group identity has to be defended or normalized, I think this is a problem. This is why we talk about super-diversity and about

intersectionality. In the same way, from my point of view, interculturalism is an argument against groupism.

Parekh's ideas resonate with this approach [18]. Public spaces should allow individuals to express their identities without confining them to specific group labels. If we agree that groups are socially constructed through active processes of identification and mobilization, the challenge is then to recognize diversity without reinforcing static group boundaries. In this sense, interculturalism challenges the notion of groupism by emphasizing dynamic interactions and fluid identities within public spaces. Quebec's interculturalism navigates a distinctive path, promoting inclusivity without erasing differences or promoting strict assimilation.

8. Systems Theory in Contemporary Anthropology

There is likely to be some reluctance among anthropologists to engage with systems theory, particularly in contemporary anthropology. In the early days, anthropologists like Edward B. Tyler discussed culture as an integrated and "complex whole" [19], leading to British structural functionalism. However, since the 1980s and the "writing culture" turn with Clifford and Marcus [20], there's been a shift away from viewing culture as an integrated whole towards recognizing its diverse and unevenly distributed parts. For example, scholars like Barth emphasized cultural complexity, where cultures are seen as composed of many parts that are inter-related and context-dependent [21].

Scholars like Mitchell and Gluckman were interested in social change, which wasn't well-received within traditional anthropology, especially British anthropology, which was focused on understanding integrated cultural systems from a holistic perspective.

Early systems theories, including cybernetics and the influence of French structuralism, were considered too orderly and static, even though this is not the case. There's a worry that embracing systems theory might limit our ability to understand cultural dynamism and change. In fact, contemporary anthropology is experiencing a boom in complexity theory. There's a lot of exciting work happening right now, exploring complex systems with an anthropological perspective. This approach allows us to avoid the pitfalls of rigid structural functionalism by embracing the dynamic processes inherent in complex systems.

It is intriguing to explore why complexity theory is attracting anthropologists now, especially in light of emerging questions about non-human interactions and artificial intelligence (AI). But, you know, although I am becoming more and more interested in complexity theory, I still have to say that in my opinion it basically comes down to systems theory. We talk about system dynamics and systems that provide an environment for other systems and so on. I think that the concept of super-diversity can shed light on a lot of this complexity. However, I think it is also essential to communicate these complexities in a clear and understandable way. And this is where diagrams and visual representations can help simplify complex ideas without losing their essence. That's why my team and I designed a set of innovative interactive tools with the intention to help people visualizing super-diversity and "seeing" urban socio-economic complexity. The aim is to picture, perceive and apprehend complex analyses of multidimensional data on urban diversity in new, more intuitive ways [22,23].

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Short Biography of Author

Professor Steven Vertovec is Founding Director of the Max-Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen, Honorary Joint Professor of Sociology and Ethnology, University of Göttingen, and Emeritus Fellow at Linacre College, Oxford. He has acted as expert or consultant for numerous agencies, including the Expert Council of German Foundations on Migration and Integration, the UK government's Cabinet Office, National Audit Office, Home Office, Department for International Development, the British Council, the European Commission, the G8, World Bank and UNESCO.

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Article

Ethnologist as Foreign Body: A Systemic Explanation

Maude Arsenault

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Abstract: During an ethnographic experience, which took place in a rehabilitation clinic, I had to deal with situations that required me to make a series of adjustments to my role in the clinic, so as to reduce my involvement with both patients and therapists. Although I expected to feel more at ease as the field progressed, instead, I felt as if my presence were more and more disruptive, and gradually becoming problematic. The systemic approach thus seemed the most relevant for clarifying the complexity of the interactions that were at play, and that shaped my experience, as I had to venture beyond reflexivity. The aim of this methodological article is to shed light on the need for constant adaptation in the ethnologist, in order to maintain their presence in the field, and obtain information to carry out research. In order to do so, a systemic triangulation has been performed based on the Donnadieu and Karsky method, leading to an analysis of some of the difficulties encountered, as highlighted via systemic thinking.

Keywords: ethnography; systemic thinking; clinical fieldwork; miscommunication

1. Introduction

The ethnographic approach is intimately linked to the ethnologist's personal experience, as it is built up over the course of interactions [1]. This explains the importance of reflexivity in anthropology, as it enables researchers to examine their relationships with their informants in such a way as to take into consideration how their own traditions [2] influence the knowledge that they construct. Fieldwork is a form of communicative interaction between ethnologists and their informants, who find themselves in the same space-time (what Fabian termed the coevalness of the ethnographic field, in 2014), but it also recognizes how this coevalness allows us (or not) to open up to the intersubjectivity of encounters during fieldwork. These relationships are only part of a larger whole, but it is through them that ethnologists can better grasp the systems that nurture them, and inform us of the social transformations that characterize, above all, contemporary societies.

Most anthropological texts include information on methodology, so as to meet certain criteria regarding the validity of ethnological materials, and the value of analyses. Ethnologists, thus, reveal certain elements about themselves, such as their self-defined identity and/or the one assigned to them by actors in the field, and/or the extent of their involvement in said field, elements which bear witness to reflections on their posture as observer, and the effect of their presence on interactions but, above all, on their own interpretations [3]. Nevertheless, even if the ethnographic approach is recognized as a path marked by pitfalls, crossroads, dead ends, forks, and topography [4], these elements rarely provide direct access to the doubts and strategies of adaptation and negotiation that characterize their approach [5–7]. Thus, they elude questions about the research process, or the dynamics of understanding [8].

Yet not only could it be interesting to look at the ethnologist's process of adapting to the surprises, unforeseen events, and obstacles that shape ethnographic work as a social phenomenon, but it could also be formative for aspiring ethnologists to glimpse at challenges others have had to face in their fieldwork, at the pitfalls involved, and reflections on how to deal with them, thus moving away from the notion that the ethnologist's role

(in anthropology, we often refer to Linton's definitions, which described the ethnologist's role as orientated to others' patterned expectations. For the author, in every society and every group, each member has some function or activity with which they are associated. What the individual does or performs, we generally call their role [9]) is largely learned "on the job" [4,8,10]. It is around this premise that I wrote this article, which aims to explicitly describe one of my field experiences, during which I encountered several difficulties. Given the nature of the ethnographic experience, which is reminiscent of an initiation rite [11], as the ethnographer finds themselves in a liminal state, a stranger [12], separated from their own culture but not fully integrated into the host culture [13], I expected some of these difficulties, such as the feelings of entering unfamiliar territory, of being an imposter, and of embarrassment and discomfort. However, others were more surprising, notably because I expected to feel more integrated as the research progressed, whereas, instead, I found myself feeling more excluded.

During this ethnographic experience, which took place in a rehabilitation clinic, I had to deal with situations that required me to make a series of adjustments to my role in the clinic, so as to reduce my involvement with both patients and therapists. Although I expected to feel more at ease as the fieldwork progressed, instead, I felt as if my presence were more and more disruptive, and gradually becoming problematic. I experienced this series of events, which required me to make major adjustments to my role as an ethnologist, not only as an ethnographic ordeal, but also with a certain bitterness, as I was unable to find the "*posture d'inscription relationnelle*" (relational stance) [14] that would have enabled me to complete my observation process. A posture of reflexivity allowed me to understand certain elements, particularly regarding my own traditions [2,8], but it did not allow me to understand what was at stake in the field, which sometimes put me, as a researcher, in a position of failure. I had to go beyond reflexivity, to understand that the adaptation of my role as an ethnologist depended not only on the relationships I had succeeded (or failed) to forgewith the actors in the clinic but, rather, on multiple interactions within the clinic. The systemic approach, thus, seemed the most relevant for clarifying the complexity of the interactions that were at play, and that shaped my experience. Not only did it provide me with the words to do so, but it also enabled me to take a broader look at the role of the ethnologist, which, far from being the result of a single individual's role, is, rather, the result of a system of interactions between multiple players. This insight constitutes the crux of this article.

The aim of this methodological article is to shed light on my role as an anthropological researcher in the field, specifically in a clinical context and, above all, on the need for the constant adaptation of this role, in order to maintain my presence in the field, and obtain information, to carry out the research for which I had been hired. This article, therefore, delves into this ethnologist's personal experience of the imperatives and constraints of the research field. It attempts to understand what ethnologists have to deal with in fieldwork, in order to grasp their role, and adapt it to the codes and norms of the field.

The article begins with an overview of the literature, to see what it tells us about the ethnologist's role in the field, particularly in clinical settings. This is followed by a description of my understanding of systems thinking, and what it offers as a tool for anthropology to explore this adaptation work but, above all, the mechanisms in place in the field that can make room for researchers, or that sometimes put them in a position of failure. Next comes a systemic analysis of my own field experience. This starts with an ethnographic account illustrating my day-to-day work as an ethnologist in a clinic, is followed by a systemic triangulation based on the Donnadieu and Karsky [15] method, and ends with an analysis of some of the difficulties encountered, as highlighted via systemic thinking.

2. Ethnologist in the Field

The ethnographic method has been developing in anthropology for over a century in different parts of the world, notably in Western Europe and North America. It provides an account of social facts [16], through empirical and descriptive results, and by setting

up a comprehensive study of phenomena [17]. Firmly established as the methodological cornerstone of social anthropology since Malinowski, who, in his own way, postulated a position of "ethnographic authority" (the ethnographer as a knowledgeable, disinterested, and trustworthy source of information) [18], the ethnographic practice was destabilized in the 1980s with the publication of *Writing Culture* [19]. This book, which has become an essential part of anthropological literature (and of the postmodern critique of ethnography), highlighted the implicit biases posed by the ethnologist's very position in the field, the choice of voices to be heard, and the materials to be transposed into the monograph. Considered a "watershed in anthropological thought" [20], the ensuing debate shed light on the limits of the ethnologist's objectivity and partiality. This led to a call for fieldwork with a greater personal component, including details of the researcher's feelings and relationships with the actors in the field. The intellectual legacy of this crisis is complex, but the increased importance of reflexivity and literary, dialogical, and collaborative approaches are all part of it [21]. Nevertheless, it is clear that profound reflections on the relationships between ethnologists and their informants have left their mark on anthropology, even leading some to situate its epistemological space in the intermediary space between the ego and the alter ego [22], thus recalling the importance of the dynamics of field encounters in the production of ethnographic knowledge [23].

Today, as the importance of reflexivity continues to grow, some authors focus on its practical application, such as through ethnographic vigilance, which guides the researcher's choices and influences their approach, while also serving as a lever for making their investigative practice more objective [4]. Indeed, in the absence of clear and precise guidelines for action in the field, the ethnographer must become hypervigilant, so as to closely follow the nuances of the environment, its uniqueness, and its contingencies. They must immerse themselves without being submerged, and wander without getting lost [24]. Ethnographic vigilance plays a dual role, as a theoretical concept and a methodological lever [4]. Practically speaking, ethnographic vigilance makes it possible to understand the evolving, meandering nature of field experience, as well as the researcher's relationship with their investigative approach, the actors involved, and the contingencies encountered. Fieldwork, thus, requires researchers to make a series of adjustments and adaptations, which they guide through reflexivity.

The ethnographer must, therefore, constantly define and redefine their role in the field [25–27]. They must adapt it during the course of the investigation, in particular, to gain the trust of the people in the environment under study. Ideally, they should even manage to be forgotten or, somehow, to make their presence invisible [28], which is not without its paradoxes, especially as, by definition, researchers do not master the codes of the community where they are working. To do so, their role must be adapted to the situation, and negotiated with their informants.

Ethnographers have a number of options when it comes to their role in the field. Thus, important distinctions must be made between active and passive roles [29], as well as between observational and/or participatory roles, where researchers either explicitly disclose their intentions, or do not [30]. Gold [31] offers us a simple typology of four roles for the ethnographer: the participant, the participant-observer, the observer-participant, and the observer. Participants become a member of the group being observed. Participant-observers, who explicitly state their research intentions, find themselves in situations where they must participate by observing, while, at the same time, creating and maintaining relationships with their informants [32]. Observer-participants, on the other hand, maintain brief, formal, and explicit contacts with their informants [33]. Finally, observers essentially withdraw from the interactions among their informants. This typology is interesting but, in my view, the roles should not be seen as mutually exclusive. They need to be filled at different times, and in different contexts [33]. For example, during their first moments in the field, ethnographers might opt for the role of observer, to have time to integrate the information they receive, in order to better master the codes of the field and, thus, gain the trust of informants. This choice may also be imposed on them by the field, as

it is linked to the 'space' allotted to them as researchers. As the research progresses, researchers will be better able to adapt to the situation, and be sufficiently accepted by their informants, in order to play an increasingly participatory role. In addition, some contexts are more conducive to one role than another. For example, in a clinical context, researchers may prefer to maintain an observer role, so as not to interfere with the therapist–patient relationship or the intervention in progress. In another context, the observer posture might make participants uncomfortable, for example, during a social activity, which might lead the ethnographer to take on a more active role, in order to gain acceptance.

Ethnographers must adapt their role to the codes and norms of the environment under study. This can be a source of shock for them, as the codes and norms in the field may be far removed from the researcher's personal background and traditions, even when the ethnography is carried out in the researcher's own social and cultural environment. Culture shock refers to the feeling of being disoriented and losing one's bearings when the environment studied is far removed from the individual's familiar universe [34–36]. Often used to refer to interethnic relations, it also applies to disciplinary or professional cultures. Culture shock is a feeling of not fitting in, or being like a third wheel [28]. It is to be expected that this feeling will be momentary, and will fade away as researchers find their place and are accepted in the milieu, although certain difficulties and resistance may persist.

There seems to be a consensus that there is no general answer as to what role the ethnologist should play in the field, especially when problems arise, as each research situation involves specific circumstances that vary from place to place and time to time [37]. Nevertheless, certain ethnographies with accurate, precise, and rich analyses should serve to inspire and inform us about what awaits us in our own field experiences, especially as there are similarities between certain contexts. My interest is in ethnographies in clinical settings, which often occurs in hospitals.

Despite many accounts of hospital ethnography [38,39], the information that might help anthropologists prepare for fieldwork in clinical settings is sparse, and too often context-specific. The tools to help the ethnographer make sense of, and describe, their personal experiences seem to be lacking. Furthermore, methodological reflections are mostly used to make better sense of what is happening in the fieldwork [40,41], rather than helping the ethnographer to prepare, and are mostly about consent and/or gaining access to the field [42,43].

One of the first things an ethnographer needs to think about is the role they will play in the field. In a hospital, the choice of roles seems to be limited to patient, healthcare professional, and visitor [44,45]. However, this choice does not tell one how to act in the field. Fainzang [46,47] points out the risk of field actors attempting to use the researcher for their own ends, and explains the importance—for ethical and methodological reasons—of not taking sides. Nevertheless, how to achieve this objective of "neutrality" (the idea of neutrality is problematic in social science. It "is logically untenable and anthropologically naïve" [48], as the proponent of the "unmasking tradition" [49] would argue that scientific progress is determined by social factors, such as personal or group interests. Nevertheless, the researcher's appearance of neutrality in the eyes of the informant is important in certain ethnographic contexts, in order to foster a trusting relationship. The goal is to gain access to contrasting information from a diversity of actors, so as to understand a phenomenon from all perspectives) appears more complex, as clearly demonstrated by the author's example of how patients can interpret a non-response or gesture as information about their prognosis.

In an interesting account of hospital ethnography, Chartrand [50] explain how she had to adjust her research method to the different situations she encounters. Therefore, she offers the reader a grasp at how she learned to ask for consent in a matter appropriate to her field context, to make good use, or not, of a recorder, and what method was more appropriate for collecting data. Although her reflection brings matter to the question of how to conduct ethnography in clinical settings, it keeps the discussion on methods, and leaves aside the interpersonal side, and does not offer tools to reflect on the matter for future ethnographers.

Finally, in a special issue on ethnographic vigilance and methodological reflexivity [4], Lapointe [14] offers us a highly personal account of her experience in a hospital. She entered the field as "someone unlike anyone else, whose rights, responsibilities and obligations were ambiguous" (translated by the author) (p. 174), and tells us that the pace of work in these environments, and the high staff turnover, make informal exchanges difficult, and hinder the integration of researchers. Finding her place was a burden and an obstacle that Lapointe felt in her body ("Discomfort in my body, which I experienced as a burden" (p.176), translated by the author). Lastly, she explains how the role of "all-round caregiver", which she herself cobbled together thanks to her experience as a personal care attendant, enabled her to find her place, and attain her research objectives.

These are some of the articles I found when looking for references on the role of the ethnographer in the field and, more specifically, in the clinical setting. To me, they remain very general and sporadic. Apart from a few hints about what to expect in the field, they did not give me any clear guidance on how to adapt to the field's codes and norms. Indeed, there seems to be an implicit expectation that the anthropologist will adapt to the field without too many difficulties, through curiosity and humility [12]. It was these implicit expectations that awakened feelings of failure in me when it was implied that I had to put more distance between myself and my informants, as if it were a lack of personal humility and curiosity that had hindered me in my reading of the codes and norms of the milieu. In this case, the systemic approach was a very useful tool in helping me to understand that this was not the case.

3. Systemic Thinking

Systems theory, inspired by the work of Gregory Bateson, among many other academics inspired by the Palo Alto School in communication and related fields in social sciences and humanities, is based on the idea that behaviors and beliefs, often regarded as individual factors in certain disciplines, are, in fact influenced by a multitude of factors, which, taken as a whole, contribute to the construction of a "system". From this perspective, systemic approaches are based on the interconnectedness and analysis of different levels of systems (individual, organizational, and societal, for example) in order to understand the singularity of each life course in relation to large-scale structures, patterns, and interactions [51].

For Bateson, human communication is based on contextual frames of shared reference, but also on complex everyday decisions about the type of information relevant to context-specific communication ("the difference that makes difference") [52]. To support his theory, the author drew on set theory, notably the notion of logical types, as well as the concept of recurrence or patterns in social relationships, and various original concepts, to explain the dynamics of equilibrium and disequilibrium, such as homeostasis, feedback, and schismogenesis. Bateson's systems theory approach emphasizes the dynamic and interdependent nature of systems, as they exhibit both continuity and change. According to this approach, studying interactions at the micro level is essential to understanding how systems evolve over time [53].

In the social and communication sciences, systems thinking is used by Gregory Bateson to put forward a general theory of mind, i.e., to model the relationship between a system of thought and the environment that enables it to survive [54]. A system of thought adapts to the environment that gives it meaning, just as the musicians in an orchestra tune themselves to their fellow musicians, or ethnographers adapt their role according to the actors in their milieu. For Bateson, understanding an individual's behavior requires looking at the links that the person maintains with the other actors in the system, as these relationships are mutually influential. In these interpersonal communication processes, the question of interpretation becomes central, and can be the source of numerous communication breakdowns and cultural clashes.

Systems thinking is useful for representing complex objects, such as interpersonal interaction situations, characterized by imprecision, instability, ambiguity, and unpre-

dictability [15]. In my various attempts to make sense of my field experience, the notion of a system, seen as a set of elements in reciprocal action, and organized according to a goal [55], was useful, and enabled me to model the ethnographer's role during fieldwork, where there were, a priori, no pre-established role models. Indeed, ethnographers interact with the various actors in the field, all of whom have expectations and reactions that are largely indecipherable and unpredictable. It is with this incomplete and imprecise information that researchers must adapt their own actions, attitudes, and expectations, which may also seem imprecise, and even surprising to them.

Three systemic concepts, in particular, helped me to make sense of certain situations in the field: recurrence, the feedback loop, and the transducer. Recurrence is used to identify a pattern of behavior over time. This refers to regularities in behavior, which are used to create a pattern, and predict future behavior. The feedback loop is a process that depends on information sent by the environment and received by the system in order for it to adapt, so as to maintain its homeostasis (stability) [56]. Responding to its environment, the system then sends information back to itself on the result of this adaptation, in order to adjust, if necessary. For example, if informants in a fieldwork setting act with mistrust, then the researcher can act to reduce this mistrust (with transparency, or by addressing the subject of mistrust directly). Bateson calls it schismogenesis when the system instead engages in a process of differentiation that takes a symmetrical or complementary form [51]. For example, if the researcher becomes more transparent in order to reduce mistrust, but this transparency creates more mistrust, in turn bringing the researcher to respond with even greater transparency, the informants' mistrust could become so great that the relationship breaks down, with no possibility of being rebuilt. The result of such schismogenesis is not stability, but an imbalance in the system, and possible collapse. Finally, the transducer is what processes the transformation of an event (or a difference) into a signal. It is this transducer that captures the difference and transforms it into a stimulus that makes a difference, which potentially generates a new, more appropriate, adapted, or contextually sensitive tailored response. For Bateson [57], it is the difference that enables us to perceive. A difference must not only exist, but also trigger a volley of stimuli: the difference must make a difference.

Systems thinking is also used as a constructivist method for the artificial organization of a given complex situation [54], as a system is first and foremost a representation of an object based on observed patterns and models (which may differ depending on who is looking at it). This complexity stems from a wide variety of system components with specialized functions; non-linear interactions; the difficulty, if not impossibility, of exhaustively counting the elements that make up the system; and the wide variety of possible links [55]. Moreover, systems thinking is a construction of reality, and makes no claim to exhaustiveness. The knowledge acquired through modeling exercises, i.e., the presentation of a complex phenomenon in the form of a formal model, will never exhaust other possibilities of interpretation according to other purposes. Nevertheless, the approach remains rigorous, based on tangible clues of an analytical correlation, suggesting the presence of a pattern, and a system of interactions.

To give meaning to my experience in the clinical setting, I undertook a systemic exploration, as proposed by Donnadieu and Karsky [15]. This exercise consists of defining the boundaries of a system to be studied, in order to situate it in its environment, and understand the nature of the interactions involved. Systemic exploration also serves to sketch the internal architecture of the system, including its main components and relationships, to allow us to understand its evolution. Several tools are available for systemic exploration, including systemic triangulation, which I used to model my fieldwork experience. This tool requires us to observe the object from three complementary angles, each linked to the observer's point of view. It is through the study of these three aspects combined, and the ability to move from one to the other, that systemic triangulation provides an ever-richer understanding of the system:

(1) Its functional aspect: what does the system do in its environment? What needs does it meet? What is its purpose?

(2) Its structural aspect: how do the system's various components fit together? How are they related?

(3) Its evolutionary aspect: how does the system evolve? How and why does it change?

In the next section, I will draw on Donnadieu and Karsky's [15] methodology to model my role as ethnologist in my clinical fieldwork, elaborating on its functional, structural, and evolutionary aspects and, finally, taking a look at the difficulties encountered, to shed light on their nature.

4. Case Studies: The Ethnologist in a Clinical Setting

The first step in systemic modelling is to situate the phenomenon in a descriptive and quasi-photographic way [15]; i.e., to describe the system we are trying to model in as detached a way as possible, even if we recognize that it is impossible to totally subtract the interpretation of the researcher describing it.

An Ethnographic Tale

As a post-graduate anthropology student specializing in intercultural relations, I was hired to support a research team in collecting data for a project that had been in development for over two years. The project concerned the therapeutic alliance between injured immigrant workers and a multidisciplinary rehabilitation team. It aimed to document mechanisms and strategies for maintaining the therapeutic alliance, including the organizational, personal, and social factors associated with its weakening, breakdown, restoration, and stabilization. It was our shared interest in intercultural issues that led me to work with this research team, especially in a parallel project on intercultural skills. The other areas of this project—occupational health and safety and rehabilitation—were unfamiliar to me at the time.

To study the therapeutic alliance, we focused on its three components: trust between the therapist and the patient, partnership concerning the tasks to be accomplished, and partnership concerning the set goals [58]. To this end, the team implemented a mixed ethnographic design, combining qualitative (observation, interview) and quantitative (questionnaire for statistical analysis) research tools. Thus, we assured the continuous presence of a researcher in a rehabilitation clinic for the entire duration of a rehabilitation program (approximately eight weeks) for participating immigrant patients (for a total of 20 weeks), in order to observe and understand the clinical intervention context (e.g., clinical decision-making processes, day-to-day inter-institutional ties, and interpersonal relationships), the types of intervention (e.g., skills development, reconditioning, psychological follow-up), and the multiple interactions that take place among individuals (e.g., therapists, and managers). The researcher's observations were documented in a logbook. To complement the documented observations, semi-structured interviews with participants patients were conducted in two stages: at the beginning and at the end of the rehabilitation program. Lastly, a repeated measurement of the therapeutic alliance was taken every day, using the Working Alliance Inventory, a 12-items questionnaire addressing the three dimensions of the therapeutic alliance [59].

This research took place in a rehabilitation clinic offering an interdisciplinary return-to-work program with a high percentage of multi-ethnic clients. Access to the field was negotiated with the management of the clinic group that collaborated with us, including two members involved in research and development. These two individuals were only present sporadically at the clinic chosen for the fieldwork, but they ensured that our presence was accepted by the latter, both by management and therapists. It seems reasonable to assume that the level of acceptance differed from therapist to therapist. In addition, the consent of participants (the consent included three components: (a) participation in two 60- to 90-min interviews; (b) observation of rehabilitation treatment sessions; and (c) observation of clinical

team meetings in which they discuss the patient's treatment), both therapists and patients, was obtained by means of a form, as required by our ethical certification.

The clientele was diversified, but the participants in our study had the particularity of being part of the clientele following a rehabilitation program. They have been on compensated sick leave for more than a year, and suffer a form of chronic pain and, in the case of some of them, some psychological distress. This program, covered by compensation, is followed when primary care and attempts to return to work have failed. The rehabilitation program is a multi-disciplinary program that seeks to not only address patients' physical needs, but also explore their psychosocial issues. This meant that our participants were there through obligation to the third-party payer, the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CNESST), a government agency entitled to promote occupation health and safety, and compensation for injuries and rehabilitation; otherwise, they would have lost their income replacement benefits, in addition to having to live with chronic pain following repeated reports of failure.

The presence in the field was assured by three ethnologists. Of the five clinical field days per week, I was responsible for three or four, including the day of the interdisciplinary team meeting. The other two were mostly covered by the coordinator, while the principal researcher replaced us in the field when the coordinator and I had scheduling conflicts. This teamwork was also reflected both in the semi-structured interviews, which were conducted by different members of the team, and in the administration of the daily questionnaires, which were the responsibility of the person who had to be in the field that day. The following overview of a typical field day at the clinic provides a better understanding how our ethnography unfolded, at least from my part.

At the start of the week, I arrived at the clinic around 8:30. The clinic serves not only patients enrolled in a rehabilitation program, but also private clients who come for occasional treatments. The space is divided into public areas (a gymnasium, a reception) and private areas (administrative offices, and individual therapy rooms). The receptionist's desk bridges the two areas (see Figure 1). This is where the day began for rehabilitation patients, and where therapists came to distribute their individual programs for the day. They put all the programs onto clipboards, and placed them on the end of the front desk. When patients arrived, they found the clipboard belonging to them, and headed to the gym to start their day. The clinic is located in a building that serves other functions that we cannot name here for reasons of anonymity.

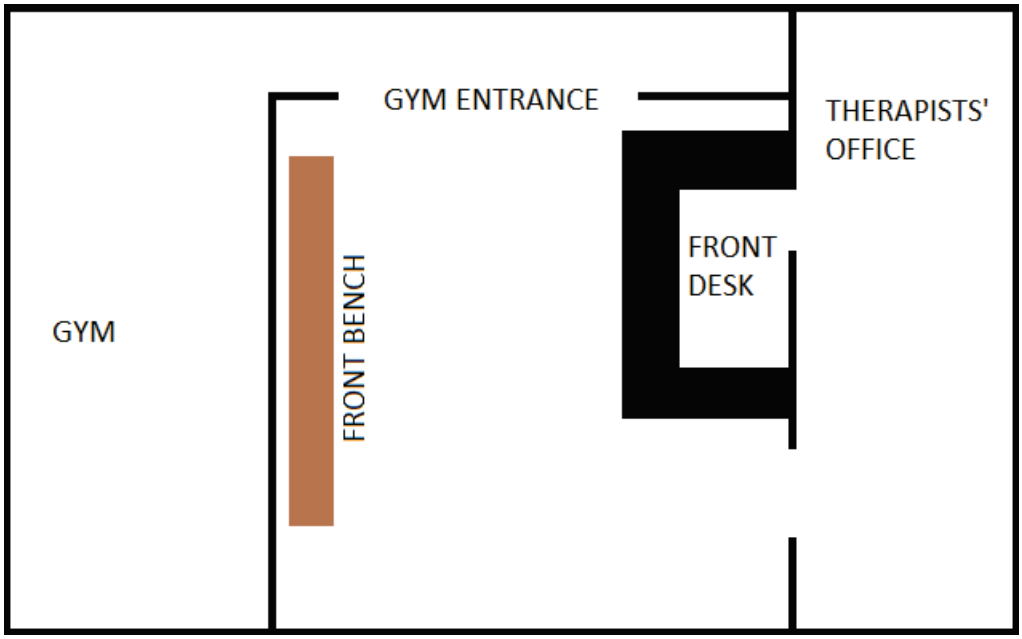

Figure 1. Plan of the clinic.

The kinesiologist in charge of the morning gym often made her first contacts with patients at this front desk. When I arrived in the morning, I also headed to it, as the research documents were stored there. I opened the drawer and selected the number of questionnaires needed for the day, based on the number of immigrant patients present multiplied by two (to include the version to be completed by the therapist). I then entered the immigrant participants' names and the dates, and inserted them into their daily plans. Next, I went to the therapists' offices, and placed the questionnaires on their desks. I then took an empty clipboard from the front desk, which I needed because it had a barcode that gave me entry into the gym, rather like a membership card.

I headed for the treadmills, which were lined up to form a line down the middle of the gym. This was where most of the patients started their day. Every morning, a series of accident victims crossed paths with people who had simply come to work out and keep fit. The difference was noteworthy: the patients' running speed was much slower, there was no sweat on their foreheads, and their faces often expressed the permanent pain, fear, and stress they felt. Moreover, a kinesiologist was often leaning in front of one of these treadmills, talking to one of the patients. They had to go there to see each patient, and catch up on their weekends or evenings, as well as to discuss their anxieties or goals for the day. Even if patients and therapists knew of, and consented to, my presence, I tried to fit in so that, paradoxically, my presence caused minimal interference. Therefore, I stayed active as they all did, by exercising. But first, I had to say hello to everyone, and check up on the study participants, in order to obtain information, and deepen the bond of trust. I then headed for a treadmill, preferably one near my study participants. This allowed me to observe their interactions with the therapists. From there, I could watch what was going on around me: which therapist was present? Had the participants in my study arrived on time? Were they interacting with other participants? At one point, I would see one of the participants looking at their plan for the day with the kinesiologist. I would approach them, grab a floor mat, and do some crunches next to them. Discreetly, so as not to disrupt the meeting, I tried to hear what was being said, and observe their non-verbal behaviors. It was a question of finding a complex balance in a paradoxical situation: being as invisible as possible so as not to be a disruptive element, while still being present enough to gather information. Following certain interactions, I would often go and see the kinesiologist, again discreetly, to obtain more information, check my interpretation, or add her perceptions to my notes.

At a certain point in the day, as my schedule dictated, the physiotherapist would take one of my participants for a private session. I would ask if I could join the meeting. I was welcome, but first I had to obtain the patient's consent. The patients usually did not mind, as they wanted to help us with our research. This is how I adapted my days to the rhythm of my participants' private appointments (physiotherapy or occupational therapy). These appointments differed greatly from one patient to another, and from one practitioner to another. For example, one member of the clinical team, who was very involved in research and development, included me a lot in his interventions and discussions. I noticed many demonstrations of cultural awareness in the way he explained his clients' symptoms to them. There were other days when the appointment was with an occupational therapist who had a much more personal approach to clients. During her meetings, she tried to create an atmosphere of trust and reassurance. My presence was less appropriate with this kind of approach, especially if the client was shy. I once saw a client cry. I felt that my presence was too much and, at that point, my role as researcher and my role as human being became more difficult to reconcile. I had to balance my curiosity as a researcher, my sensitivity as a human being, and my ethics as an observer. In any case, I decided to stay when more personal moments arose, so as not to rush or interrupt the unfolding of emotional situations, as this was a key moment in the creation of the therapeutic alliance.

I was often free to leave the clinic at lunchtime, as most of our clients were only on a half-day program, and finished at noon. I did, however, stay for lunch when a participant was present in the afternoon, or when there was a team meeting for the therapists in the

afternoon (Thursdays). There were very few of us in the gym on these afternoons, and the atmosphere was very calm.

When the day ended on Thursday, at 2:30 p.m., I waited for the weekly team meeting to begin. This was when the therapists would talk about each client, whom they had colour-coded according to the likelihood of them completing their rehabilitation mandate (from red to green). The therapists, thus, shared the snippets of information each had received from the patients. This enabled them to build a more complete picture of their patients, and to discuss intervention strategies that could help them achieve their goals for the day or for the entire program (e.g., endurance, pain management, functional capacity building, mobilization, return to work). Contextual, family, motivational, psychological, and other factors were discussed. This meeting gave me an overview of what the therapists were taking into account in their interventions, what was noteworthy for them, how they use the notion of culture in their understanding of their clients, how they felt about them, and whether they thought these feelings would have an effect on future interventions. This was how the day ended. I returned home exhausted from the multiple levels of effort involved in my day: physical, from the training; mental, from the research work; emotional, from the proximity to the immigrant patients' distress; and, lastly, psychological, from the level of self-awareness I had to maintain throughout the day to ensure that I took on the appropriate role at the appropriate time.

5. Systemic Triangulation

It was in this particular research context that I wanted to take a close look at my role as ethnologist, viewing fieldwork as an open system where the researcher receives information from their environment, and continually adapts so that their presence continues to be accepted, and they earn the trust of their informants. However, things are not quite so simple. This is a complex phenomenon, due to the many interconnections and interactions that characterize it, and the systemic approach is one way of unravelling it. Thus, I propose a systemic exploration of the ethnologist's role, which, according to Donnadieu and Karsky [15], is a method used to provide a reasoned and coherent knowledge of a complex object. To do so, I will use the systemic triangulation tool to look at the system from three different but complementary angles, as defined earlier: (1) functional, (2) structural, and (3) evolutionary.

5.1. Functional Aspects

Firstly, what do ethnologists do in their environment? In other words, what is the purpose of their work? The purpose of fieldwork is to gain access to a group's natural environment, in order to observe its actual everyday behavior, and analyze a given phenomenon [60]. The researcher's prolonged presence in the field enables them to describe in depth what they see as banal details, in order to convey what is going on in a particular socio-historical context [61,62]. In this case, the aim was to understand the therapeutic alliance between therapists and immigrant patients injured at work. The purpose was to describe, in a detailed and precise way, the interactions that attested to this alliance or to its absence, in order to refine our understanding of the concept of a therapeutic alliance in this particular context of immigrant worker rehabilitation, knowing, from the vast literature on the topic, the crucial importance of this alliance on the rehabilitation process and on positive clinical and occupational outcomes [63,64].

To this end, I had to earn my own informants' trust in order to gain access to their inner world and subjectivity. In a clinical context, where the very presence of a member of the research team is based on an agreement with the clinic, the therapists' adherence to the project depended on the ethnologist's discretion: I had to maintain an appearance of neutrality, and ensure that my presence did not constitute an additional burden for the clinical team and management, especially in a context of work overload, as observed in the clinic (during our days in the clinic, we observed several signs of work overload, including therapists' comments telling us that they could not address certain issues or carry out

certain interventions that they would deem relevant, due to lack of time, at the clinic level, but also in terms of the rehabilitation days granted to patients by the third-party payer) [28] and in other rehabilitation settings [65]. In addition, as the immigrants' participation was voluntary and consensual, I had to offer conditions for participation that were favourable, such as not adding a burden to the process (in terms of stress or time, for example), and being pleasant to be around.

5.2. Structural Aspect

Secondly, what is the structure of the system? In other words, how does the ethnologist relate to the various components of the system? Basically, ethnologists use their previously acquired knowledge and observations of the environment to adapt their words, actions, and attitudes to the key players in their research environment. A clinical environment must be seen as a place of care, expertise, and organizational and professional cultures [66], with its own rules, logics, and social structure. Despite this complex environment, this systemic analysis focuses on the two main categories of actors encountered by the researcher in the field: the clinic's therapists, and the immigrant patients.

As for the first category of actors, i.e., the therapist team, the researchers made a commitment that they would respect the ethical standards of the clinic and of their research, and that they would deliver the outcomes stated in the research specifications. On a day-to-day basis, I had to be transparent, and ensure that my presence in certain activities and my data collection techniques did not cause embarrassment, or hinder therapeutic activities. I had to exercise discretion and restraint, to ensure that I did not interfere with interventions. In addition to considering therapists at a professional level, I had to consider them at the personal level. For example, some people's personal insecurity or level of familiarity with the research world could influence my relationship with them. Thus, I had to be on the lookout for behaviors that might indicate discomfort, and deal with them sensitively.

Regarding the immigrant patients taking part in the research, several issues had to be taken into account. Firstly, they agreed to participate for different reasons. For some, it was to please and help the research team in our project. We also had to consider the possibility that some of them simply did not feel comfortable refusing to take part in the study. To ensure that this did not happen, I would repeat several times, and in different ways to make sure I was clearly understood, the optional nature of research participation, and the possibilities of opting out. In addition, I made sure to repeat this information if I observed, in their behavior, a desire not to be disturbed by our team (very short answers to questions, isolation, etc.). For others, participation in the project was based on the hope that their sometimes difficult, even chaotic, migratory, and professional integration path would be better understood by the research community, and that this would help improve government services and programs. I had a special relationship with them, as they were very generous with information. They tended to be more forthcoming about some of their difficulties or frustrations. Nevertheless, I had to be clear and transparent about the real impact of my research, so as not to mislead them.

Another issue that had to be taken into account was the participants' perception of my role within the clinic (this was not an issue for the therapists). It was understood differently by the participants, especially in terms of my degree of independence from the clinic, and from the compensation and rehabilitation system in general. I therefore had to ensure, as far as possible, that I acted in accordance with the researcher role that I wanted to assume, i.e., one who sought to paint a nuanced picture of the situation from the point of view of a diversity of players. I did this, notably, by demonstrating that I was not biased (in other words, to convince them that I was not in collusion with the clinic, the insurer, or their employer), in order to maintain the trust of all the players in the field. I had to gauge the degree of familiarity I needed to maintain with the immigrant patients in order to achieve my research objectives, while also respecting my ethical imperatives, and this degree depended on each person's personality and level of familiarity with the world of research. Above all, I had to listen to the participants, and pay close attention

to their non-verbal language, in order to understand their particular positions, and their perception of my role. Important interpretation issues play a major role in communication, particularly in an intercultural context, as the codes of immigrant patients could be very different from my own, such as physical proximity, emotional expression, eye contact, and voice intonation.

Moreover, as I was working in a clinical environment with a clientele living with chronic or persistent pain and long-term absence from work, I had to be very vigilant about my choice of words, and attentive to the worker's words, as they could be interpreted in a way that reinforced a worker's beliefs (e.g., that he was right in thinking his pain was due to an undiagnosed injury). The biggest part of the therapist's job was to try and change these beliefs, as there is a very strong link between perceptions and pain (e.g., there is no operation that will make the pain go away but, rather, constant work is needed on their part to manage it). At times, this became very difficult and paradoxical, as expressing support for immigrant patients, in my capacity as a good anthropologist who was demonstrating empathy and encouraging information sharing, could interfere with the therapists' work.

5.3. Evolutionary Aspects

The third and final question to ask when studying the components of the system involves its history, and how it has evolved over time. In my case, my presence in the field gave me an understanding of the clinic's norms and codes, and a better idea of what was expected of me. This learning process often required a series of trials and errors to adapt my role in such a way as to maintain good relations within the clinic, and obtain the information I needed. Over the course of my fieldwork, two main elements evolved: my degree of familiarity with the immigrant patients, and my discretion within the clinic.

Firstly, I had to consider the degree of familiarity to be maintained with patients and therapists. Lunchtime at the clinic was a good time to reflect on this. During gym hours, relationships were fairly formalized, as there was a relatively clear program to follow. Lunchtime, on the other hand, was a time when therapists took a break from their professional roles. Therapist/patient separation took place, and patients were free to dine where they wished, together or alone. In the early days, I spent my lunch hours with the therapists. Although I was not totally at ease, I felt that I had to be able to obtain some less formal information, and perhaps a glimpse of the therapists' subjectivity when they did not have to maintain a professional stance in front of their patients. Following a therapist's advice that I should go to lunch with the patients, as he believed that this was when they talked about their experiences with the third-party payer responsible for their compensation, I started going to the cafeteria. Nonetheless, I could see that the familiarity I was developing with the research participants over these lunches was creating discomfort among the therapists. They felt that our time together was having an effect on the workers' perception of their own situations. The fact that I was getting too close to the participants made the therapists suspicious that I was no longer neutral, that I was "taking side" [67]. This was particularly problematic, as our agreement with the clinic was to study the therapeutic alliance, which was a dual concept, including both patients' and therapists' perceptions. In this context, it was particularly important not to raise therapists' suspicions of me being biased in favour of the patients, which could expose them to criticism. The access to the field depended on it. I therefore had to readjust my level of familiarity, by distancing myself from the participants. I had to maintain the minimum level of contact necessary for data collection, but I could not become their friend.

Secondly, I had to consider the level of discretion a researcher needs to maintain so as not to affect the therapists' work. Private meetings between patients and therapists seemed a good time to think about this. In the early stages of the research, I followed the patients into their meetings. This did not appear to be a problem, especially at the beginning of the rehabilitation program, when interventions addressed single issues, such as how the program functioned, the work accident, and the symptoms of the injury. However, as the program for immigrant patients progressed, the issues addressed in private meetings

became increasingly delicate, especially when it came to discussing the return to work, which was often associated with a resurgence of symptoms, and sometimes led to a breakdown in the therapeutic alliance. Nevertheless, I continued to attend the meetings out of habit, until one particular encounter between a rather shy and secretive participant and the occupational therapist. The occupational therapist's very personal approach and discomfort made it clear that my presence was having an effect on the relationship of trust that they were trying to build. As this particular encounter had made us (both the research and clinical teams) aware of the undesirable effects of the researcher's presence during such an encounter, it became essential to adjust. Even if consent had been granted when participants were recruited for the research, at the beginning of the rehabilitation program, it seemed necessary to go beyond that first consent, and to practice a "continuous, situated and relational approach to informed consent" [68]. With the wellbeing of the participants in mind, it would not have been fair to only consider their first consent, as it would have been impossible for them, as it was for me, to imagine everything that the research was going to implicate. Therefore, as we became aware of this new facet of my implication, consent had to be reaffirmed by participants, which was not through the therapists. In order to continue pursuing the purpose of the fieldwork, i.e., access to the field, it was decided that the researchers would no longer attend private meetings, but would receive a debriefing from the therapist. Nevertheless, one of the consequences of our realization of the effect of the researcher's presence was that it set in motion a process of schismogenesis: the therapists became less and less tolerant of the researcher's presence, gradually reducing it, until its purpose—access to the field—could no longer be achieved.

In short, as a researcher, I maintained relationships with my clinical environment, mainly with the therapists and the participating immigrant workers. To continue pursuing my goal of building relationships in order to obtain information and carry out my research, my role evolved in relation to the aforementioned components. As the system observed was one of interpersonal communication, where the question of interpretation is central, communication breakdowns or cultural clashes sometimes occurred. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, I have chosen to use the systemic approach—in particular, the concepts of recurrence, the feedback loop, and the transducer—to examine three difficult situations that occurred during this research fieldwork, ultimately to make sense of them and, above all, to show that these difficulties were far from being the direct result of my own actions and words.

6. Communication Breakdown

6.1. Situation 1: Hypothesis Based on the Principle of Recurrence

To ensure that my role as a non-healthcare professional within the clinic was clear, and to maintain an appearance of neutrality with those involved in the field, I presented myself to the clinic's patients participating in my research as a student researcher with no connection to the clinical team or to the third-party payer at the heart of the compensation and rehabilitation system. I repeatedly mentioned that I was not trained in rehabilitation, and had neither the skills nor the qualifications to make a clinical judgment. I therefore adhered to the principle of never intervening or expressing an opinion about their rehabilitation programs or their injuries. In fact, I wore normal sports clothes, while the clinical team wore uniforms. In addition, when we took part in workshops, I always stood at the patient's side, and participated in a way that did not make me look like a facilitator. Regardless, there were a few occasions when participants in my study came to me for advice on their rehabilitation plan, such as how to do a difficult exercise. Of course, I reiterated that I was not in a position to answer, but I still wondered why they thought, for a moment, that I could.

Clearly, my behaviors with the immigrant participants were not sufficiently adapted to convey to them my desired role as a non-healthcare professional. Although Faizang [46] emphasized the importance of avoiding taking on a professional role, she gave no further indication of how to proceed. I therefore began to reflect on the signals I was sending to the participants that made some of them think I was part of the clinical team, despite my

efforts not to be seen as such. Looking back, I realized that, on a daily basis, I was picking up forms from behind the reception desk, which was reserved for the clinic's employees: no patients were ever seen on that side of the desk. I was also doing this at peak times when patients were arriving at the clinic, and the therapists—also behind the desk—were greeting them. This may be one of several possible explanations, but it seems relevant.

The systemic concept of "recurrence", which identifies a pattern of behavior over time, may be useful in explaining this phenomenon. For example, in the clinic setting, patients may recognize regularities in therapists' behaviors or attitudes (wearing a uniform, giving advice, not working out), and expect these same behaviors in the future. Similarly, there are some regularities in patients' behaviors.

Thus, the fact that (1) at the start of the program, I introduced myself to the immigrant patients as unqualified in rehabilitation, and not as a member of the clinical team, (2) that I took part in few workshops as a participant, and (3) that I refrained from certain behaviors (e.g., giving an opinion) did not appear sufficient to create a recurring pattern of non-professional behavior. My daily presence behind or beside the front desk, and alongside the clinic's team members, sent out a contradictory signal. Conceivably, particularly because of our respective schedules, some participants might have seen me more often behind the front desk than they saw my other non-professional gestures (contrary to other participants, who did not see me behind the desk, because they arrived later, when I was already in the gym). It was this recurring behavior that served as a model for the former, which could also explain why they then associated me with a therapist. Thus, I had to find another place for the forms, to avoid sending a contradictory signal about the role I wanted to assume in the clinic.

6.2. Situation 2: Hypothesis Based on the Feedback Loop Principle

While my role in the field was to gather information from the study participants, I felt I had to act in a way that would make them want to share information. To do so, I tried to make them feel valued, important, and respected, while maintaining a constant aura of receptiveness and openness, in order to make them want to share what they were thinking and feeling. On one fieldwork day, I walked up to a participant at the end of the program to say hello and get an update on his situation. This was a worker I did not see very often, as he was more likely to be present during my colleague's field days. Therefore, without insisting, I sat down with him for a few minutes and asked him a few routine questions that were not intrusive, but left room for him to express himself if he wanted (e.g., how are you? How is your program going?). Nevertheless, at the end of the day, the therapists informed me that the participant was thinking of withdrawing from the study.

The outcome of this situation made me realize that I had overlooked something. Côté [43] notes the importance of exercising intelligence and dexterity in social relations in the field, but gives little indication of how to go about it. From my point of view, my actions that day with the participant had been adapted: I had spent a few minutes demonstrating my interest and openness, but without pressure, in order to remain respectful of his boundaries, and avoid being too intrusive. It was during discussions with my colleague, who worked with him every week, that I learned that he was going through a very difficult and anxious period in his rehabilitation. At the time, the presence of an additional player (me), virtually unknown to him as he was used to being around my colleague, was adding additional stress that he could not manage.

The concept of the feedback loop can help us to better understand one of the factors at play in this type of delicate situation: information. By observing the actions, attitudes, and words of therapists and immigrant patients in the field, I was able to adapt my behavior. However, I was not present at the clinic every day, as my colleague went there one or two days a week. This missing information, therefore, acted as a break in my feedback loop.

As there were three ethnologists in the field at different times, not all the information sent by the environment was received by the ethnologist on site, which meant that they were unable to adapt their role accordingly. For example, under normal circumstances, when a worker showed signs of anxiety due to my presence (even if unequivocally), I would

have a certain instinct about the situation, and move away from the patient momentarily, to better analyze the situation, and act accordingly. However, in this case, it was my colleague who was aware of the unequivocal signs of anxiety, and that information did not reach me. Thus, I had no reflex to distance myself from the patient, and my questions must have prompted the patient, already on edge, to consider withdrawing from the study. We therefore had to set up and reinforce a more effective communication system between members of the research team, to ensure a better feedback loop.

6.3. Situation 3: Hypothesis Based on the Transducer Principle

I had already been in the field for a few weeks. Every week, I attended the interdisciplinary team meeting, where information and professional opinions were shared regarding the clinic's various patients. Sometimes, the attendees would ask me for information, as I had different access to the patients, and my input could help complete the patient's profile. At the time, I always refrained from responding to this request, mainly because the information I had would have added nothing new to what was already being shared around the table. As the weeks progressed, my relationships with some of the participants deepened. At one team meeting, I finally took the liberty of expressing my thoughts on a complex case that was of particular concern to me. Above all, I wanted to readjust the profile (of the patient on the personal level, and not on a clinical or diagnostic level) that the clinical team was painting of the patient, a profile that seemed to me to be not entirely accurate, and even discriminatory. At that precise moment, I felt I had an ethical duty, as a humanist, to share my information, so that the patient could receive an intervention plan that was appropriate to his real and complete situation. In reality, I was probably overstepping my role as an ethnologist. Following my intervention, the clinic manager informed me that interventions from me were no longer welcome at multidisciplinary meetings.

In this instance, it appears that I had misread the norms and codes of the milieu. Similarly to Lapointe [14], I had wanted to fit in with the local players, and had felt it important to find some use for myself within the clinic. However, some contexts are evidently less suited to the author's self-concocted "all-round caregiver" role. Presumably, it is more difficult to integrate into small teams where everyone's roles and tasks are well distributed and assimilated, especially when we have no caregiving experience. Nevertheless, this desire to do something useful probably played a part in my positive response to some therapists' requests for information. What I did not realize, however, was that some therapists' requests for my reflections did not give me the organizational legitimacy to share them, even though I had not ventured into the therapeutic and diagnostic realms, which are governed by ethical standards. I thought that this legitimacy came from my level of knowledge of the files, and it seemed to me that, at this point in the program, I had a good understanding of the case and the issues at stake for the worker in question. However, I had not fully grasped the codes that governed the status and roles of each person within the clinic in this specific context of interdisciplinary encounters. Furthermore, my relationship with the clinical team may not have allowed me to confront them with their biases. I must point out that the more time I spent in the field, the greater my comfort level with the clinical team was. I almost felt at home, even though I had only been in the field for a few weeks. I felt like one of them, which made me forget our different statuses. I shared a lot in common with the team members, due to our common backgrounds, such as language, accent, expressions, and cultural references. Being in the field on home ground gave me a feeling of familiarity that interfered with my reading of the context; I had thereby diminished the importance of status, and accentuated the importance of knowledge of the files and the patients' wellbeing.

The concept of the transducer can help us to understand this situation. It is the transducer that captures the difference and transforms it into a stimulus, which, in turn, tells the system that something is happening. A difference must not only exist, but also trigger a volley of stimuli: the difference must make a difference. I therefore believe that when ethnologists go into the field in a foreign environment, the number of differences that

make a difference (creating stimuli) is so high that they come to experience "culture shock". The difficulty in a home fieldwork setting lies in the fact that there are fewer differences. Hence, my transducer was not as alert when, in fact, I was a stranger in my own home [69]. I should have been particularly vigilant, and not trusted the level of comfort I quickly felt in the clinic. I did not doubt my knowledge of the milieu enough, and I allowed myself to offer my thoughts despite my non-professional status within the clinic. Everything was so familiar to me—the accent, the language, the way of doing things, the city I was in—that I allowed my transducer to work less hard, meaning that I was not totally aware of the differences in clinical culture, and did not adapt accordingly.

7. Conclusions

The systemic approach provided me with an invaluable tool for representing, in a comprehensible way, the various imperatives I faced during the research fieldwork. Although there is no recipe for fieldwork, as it is highly contextual, the systems approach is a tool that enables us to reflect on the interactions at play and to structure our thinking in such a way as to make it comprehensible and, above all, conscious. It should, thus, not only enable ethnographers to become aware of the different codes and norms at play in the field, but also make them explicit, so that they are able to give a personal detailed account of their experience. Systemics could help us to model the paths and journeys of understanding.

The systemic approach is also an important tool for the social sciences, as it provides a deeper understanding of certain phenomena and dynamics. In this paper, it could have led me to other equally interesting analyses, in order to answer questions such as the following: what are the codes, norms and customs in force in the system? Which actors are involved? Can they be involved in different systems? Are these systems interconnected, and how? Do they pursue different, divergent goals? Do these differing purposes ultimately render the overall system dysfunctional [52]? For example, I could have analyzed the situation where giving feedback to the multidisciplinary team was poorly received in terms of the encounter of several systems: the clinical system, which perhaps reacts negatively when confronted with its own limitations; the researcher's system, which must avoid displeasing its informants, so as to retain access to the field; but also the human system, which finds itself faced with an ethical dilemma, where a lack of information on the part of the therapist could lead to certain discrimination toward the patient. I could also have delved deeper into the process of schismogenesis that led me, the researcher, to withdraw from the fieldwork. Which system is responsible? That of the clinic studied, or of the clinical environment in general? Or is it the system of therapy used with vulnerable patients?

In this paper, I have used the systemic approach to explain my personal experience as a field researcher. This has enabled me not only to explain scientifically what happened, but also to evolve professionally, personally, and emotionally.

At a professional level, using systemic triangulation, I was able to reflect on, and detail, the interactions I needed to maintain in order to achieve my goal as a researcher. These reflections, in turn, enabled me to transform certain difficult situations into long-lasting learning. Thus, the personal and team reflections presented in this article taught me, not just in the context of this specific fieldwork, but more generally, about the reality of the ethnologist. I learned, first and foremost, about methodology, as well as about certain dynamics that might be more present in milieus subject to organizational imperatives (such as fixed schedules or work overloads) or professional imperatives (professional order, ethics, etc.).

In terms of methodological learning, I firstly realized that it was important to return frequently to research objectives and observation grids, especially when the outcomes of a research project have been identified in advance with various stakeholders by mutual agreement. As memory is a faculty that forgets and changes according to the curiosities, sensitivities, and understandings we have of reality, objectives and observation grids serve as compasses for researchers. Secondly, as "home ground" does not offer sufficient stimuli to remind researchers that they are in unknown territory, it may be useful to create what I call a "transitional routine". This consists of a routine that reminds researchers that they

are entering this unknown territory, and they need to be vigilant. Thirdly, when working with several people, the limitations must be recognized, and a functional method must be spelled out. In my opinion, it is preferable to be modest: it is better not to take any risks, even if the information obtained may be less rich, than to lose a bond of trust. In addition, a minimum of rigor and discipline is required when sharing information, to ensure that it is shared frequently, and does not embarrass a researcher [70].

From a personal point of view, as it is the actors' interpretations in an interpersonal communication system that make it complex, I acknowledge that my presuppositions, sensitivities, and personality had notable effects on my perceptions of the environment in which I found myself during the research fieldwork. My sensitivities as a human being and as a researcher sometimes led me in interesting directions, but away from the research objectives that were agreed with the clinical staff. Indeed, my interest in more vulnerable populations may have altered my observation of the therapeutic alliance as a dyadic concept (immigrant patients and therapists), as well as my ability to maintain an appearance of neutrality. They probably also influenced my interpretations of the situations I observed and, by the same token, the way I responded and adapted to these interpretations. In addition, my extroverted personality, and my ability to speak up in a group, certainly had an impact on my relationship with the therapists. Given this aspect of my personality, I readily accepted the invitation to give my opinion, and consequently learned that I will have to be particularly vigilant in the future about the codes and norms that govern the environments in which I will be doing research, especially as regards the ethnologist's right to speak.

The systemic approach also enabled me to put into perspective my role as an ethnologist during my research fieldwork in a rehabilitation clinic, and to understand certain particularities of the milieu. At a time when I felt "rejected" by the field, this perspective was invaluable in helping me to understand that it was not for lack of professionalism, competence, humility, or curiosity that I had experienced the difficulties I reported. Indeed, I had tried to adapt to the imperatives of fieldwork to the best of my ability, more specifically to meet the expectations of the various players with whom I was interacting, while at the same time attempting to meet the objectives of the research. However, clearly, the role in which I found myself was confronted with a major paradox: I had to make myself 'absent', so as not to hinder the alliance between therapists and patients, while, at the same time, be present, in order to collect rich data.

Thus, from an emotional point of view, the systemic approach enabled me to make peace with my experience, and to no longer feel as if I had not risen to the occasion. By explicitly identifying the issues encountered in the field, I was able to depersonalize the experience, notably by distinguishing between the researcher's personal and professional identities [71]. I even concluded that the problems encountered were not due to a system malfunction, but rather to the vital reflexes of any system to eject foreign bodies in order to ensure its survival or, at least, the continuity and regularity of its use and habits. This ethnographic research in a clinical setting required me to insert myself into an already well-established system: the therapeutic relationship. Like any other system, this already-functioning one had to fend off the intruder that might have led to its demise. The clinical system, which seeks to heal, requires a specific type of interaction between therapists and patients, where the latter often find themselves in a subordinate position, so that the reality of living with chronic pain can be accepted. On the other hand, the fieldwork system calls for an almost inverted type of interaction, where researchers find themselves subordinate to the patients, in order to gain access to their subjectivity. This type of interaction can even undermine the clinical system. Thus, all my goodwill would not have prevented me from encountering resistance to my presence on the part of the actors in the field. This is particularly true in organizational settings, where workloads and budgetary constraints make themselves felt; in clinical settings, where ethical and professional codes are tight and monitored; and in rehabilitation programs, where the difficulties of working with patients living with chronic pain are numerous and significant.

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Article

Talking about Difference: Cross-Cultural Comparison and Prejudice in Anthropology and Beyond

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Abstract: In recent years, the question of "difference" has become a central feature of public debate and social concern, especially in the context of transnational migration. The underlying question that we attempt to answer in this article is: how can we talk about difference without reinforcing prejudice? Starting from the observation that perceptions and representations of difference have an impact on the way that individuals and groups interact with each other in increasingly diverse urban environments, we argue that a systemic approach to the analysis of intercultural situations gives us a unique window into emerging discourses and evolving norms about difference. After a brief historical overview of debates surrounding cross-cultural comparison in anthropology, we consider how various fields outside of anthropology have drawn inspiration from anthropology in order to gain a deeper understanding of intercultural dynamics in various professional settings. This article also examines several anthropological concepts that have been used as tools to theorize cross-cultural comparison, and how participants in a new research methodology use the systemic notion of "cultural variables" to resolve the basic paradox underlying pluralist philosophy and practice.

Keywords: intercultural communication; indirect ethnography; comparison; difference; prejudice; systems theory; anthropology; Montréal; Québec

1. Introduction

While there has probably never been a period of history with more public discourse about diversity, contemporary Western societies are also plagued with deep-seated fears about difference. The polarization of social and traditional media has reactivated culture wars from decades past, and the question of diversity is at the heart of these debates. Given the hostile nature of these debates and the extent to which they are accompanied by the emergence of new forms of extremism, there is clearly cause for concern. It seems safe to say that in the wake of the events that led to the #MeToo movement in 2017 and the tragic death of George Floyd in 2020, the public conversation about diversity has begun to shift, placing much greater emphasis on gender and race-based discrimination, especially but not exclusively, in the United States. In recent years, the well-known version of diversity as folklore has given way to a diversity that is increasingly associated with the concepts of equity and social justice, a change that has been welcomed by human rights activists and critically minded anthropologists, but that has also fueled anger and consternation on the part of traditional social conservatives.

If it is true that we live in a period of unprecedented human mobility [1], then it is not difficult to see why migrant and refugee communities have been the object of so much concern. In many ways, these communities are on the front lines of diversity politics. The burgeoning literature on "super-diversity"—much of which was inspired by Steven

Vertovec's writing on the subject [2]—has consistently made the point that the study of diversity cannot be reduced to cultural differences, and yet there seems to be surprisingly little agreement about how to talk about difference in the context of global migration, apart from observing that certain categories of people are victims of systemic discrimination and within those categories certain people experience further stigmatization because they carry multiple markers of minority identity [3,4]. Why does difference matter? Is it possible to talk about difference without further stigmatizing those who are already victims of prejudice? How can we talk about difference without doing the work of comparison?

Since the beginning of anthropology as a discipline, anthropologists have had heated debates over the relevance of cross-cultural comparison: Is it possible to make comparisons across or between humans? What exactly are we setting out to compare and to what end? How can we talk about the differences between groups without falling into the trap of essentialism? "Never since the 1950s", writes Candea, "has the discipline seen such an efflorescence of discussions and proposals for comparison" [5] (p. 2), and yet the idea of comparison as an "impossible method" (ibid) is still very common among anthropologists. As we will discuss in this article, one of the central problems underlying cross-cultural comparison is the nagging discomfort with the notion of culture, a phenomenon which has certainly been a matter of increasing concern in recent years, but which is not at all new in anthropology [6]. Today, in an era where public discourse about diversity is more and more polarized, and where public debates about diversity increasingly call attention to the problematic and constructed nature of cultural identity, the idea of cross-cultural comparison seems not only antiquated but actually presents itself as an obstacle in settings where anthropologists must decide how, if at all, to talk about difference. The context we describe in this article—a series of interactive workshops that use ethnographic description to understand intercultural dynamics in cities—will attempt to show that cross-cultural comparison is not simply a possibility, or even a risk, but in some situations, it is actually a necessity.

As part of a project to study intercultural dynamics in Montreal, the Laboratoire de recherche en relations interculturelles (LABRRI) developed the "Intercultural Situations Workshop" (ISW). These workshops propose a series of concepts and tools that enable participants to identify, describe, and analyze situations in settings characterized by a high degree of ethnic and racial diversity. Following the discovery of what we refer to as "indirect ethnography", the ISW methodology was tested with local social actors, not only professionals and researchers but also through contact with everyday residents and citizens. This methodology has been the subject of several scientific articles on the dynamics of cohabitation in multi-ethnic settings [7]. Indirect ethnography enables us to identify data that is both more targeted and broader than traditional ethnographic fieldwork, because participants are asked to describe situations experienced in everyday life or at work, and because they are involved in a large number of territories as well as sectors of activity and intervention.

The implementation of the intercultural situation workshops in various settings across the city has made us aware that naming differences (especially differences related to race and ethnicity) can easily become a source of tension during workshops and between workshop participants. However, this tension is already present in many organizational settings, especially where employees are responsible for promoting diversity and inclusion [8]. Talking about cultural differences or naming particular communities is associated with the fear of saying things that might be interpreted as discriminatory or racist. Certain participants resist the idea of naming cultural differences because they believe that doing so will only reinforce negative stereotypes, thereby reinforcing or reifying dominant norms and social hierarchies. Others make the claim that they simply do not see differences since "all human beings are created equal". Discussions regarding racial differences are even more difficult for participants, a subject that we will discuss in the final section of this article.

As the largest French-speaking city in the Americas and the metropolis of the predominantly French-speaking province of Quebec, Montreal is a particularly interesting place

to conduct ethnographic research on intercultural dynamics in cities and our research is in many ways influenced by the local history of interculturalism. There is a longstanding tradition of research, public policy, and community-based action on intercultural dynamics in Québec [9–12]. Obviously, however, the problem of naming differences is not specific to the context of Montreal or the particular methodology that we developed to collect and analyze data about intercultural dynamics in cities. On the contrary, concerns about culture and the naming of group-based differences are at the heart of postcolonial critiques about how the West creates a particular position for itself as the central protagonist in the story of modernity, thereby relegating non-Western societies to the status of anterior and inferior [13]. It may even be argued that the question of cultural diversity constitutes a structural paradox at the heart of pluralist thought in contemporary Western societies [12], primarily since modern nation-states use ethnicity as a means of claiming legitimacy over specific territories while simultaneously promoting the democratic principles of diversity and equality. The underlying question raised by this research is deceivingly simple: how can we talk about difference(s) without reinforcing prejudice? Workshop participants in our research often expressed a sense of relief after hearing this question, since the underlying premise of the question recognizes that individuals and organizations are often faced with an impossible set of choices if they want to recognize the needs of specific groups without unwittingly contributing to further stigmatization. Indeed, in some situations, we were faced with the possibility that this question is impossible to answer.

In his influential work on systemic theory and social organization, Gregory Bateson makes the observation that any theory of communication must begin with the articulation of difference [14]. Echoing Bateson's interest in communication, Fredrik Barth's early work on frontiers shows how the foundation of human social organization is structured around relations of difference, especially in settings where group-based difference is articulated through the construction of ethnic borders [15]. The overlapping of multiple identities in humans means that we cannot necessarily predict exactly which difference or differences are considered relevant in specific communicational settings: in Bateson's terms, what is the difference that makes (a) difference? From this point of view, and if we agree that difference is a structural element of all human communication, then it would certainly seem counterproductive to ignore difference in the description and analysis of intercultural situations, but which differences matter and what is the role of "culture" in this debate? White (2017) has written about how the principle of pluralism in Western liberal democracies represents a paradox and how the different ways of talking about difference can put researchers and practitioners in what Bateson referred to famously as a "double bind", or a situation in which actors must respond simultaneously to two or more imperatives that are mutually exclusive [12]. In this case, naming difference can further stigmatize immigrants and minorities who are already faced with systemic forms of discrimination, but not naming difference makes it impossible to recognize the contributions and the needs of specific communities, especially those that are increasingly vulnerable precisely because they carry the markers of difference in everyday forms of social interaction.

Following systemic principles, we start from the assumption that perceptions and representations of difference—not only cultural but all forms of difference (ethnicity, race, gender, social class, language, religion, etc.)—have an impact on the way that individuals and groups interact with each other in increasingly diverse urban environments. Using concrete examples from workshops and focusing on the way that workshop participants struggle with the question of how—or indeed if—to name difference, we argue that a systemic approach to the analysis of intercultural situations gives us a unique window into emerging discourses and evolving norms about difference, especially in the context of super-diversity [2]. After identifying and describing specific situations that they either experienced or observed, participants are asked to apply some basic principles of systemic theory by first identifying the cultural variables that are at play in the situations they described. Then, participants and facilitators work together to explore how different codes or frames of reference may have led to a breakdown in communication between the various

actors involved in the situation. Invariably, the comparison of these codes makes it possible for participants to be more aware of their own frames of reference. The process described here is very similar to other forms of systemic analysis, where the comparison of two objects (presumed to be both similar and different) requires the observer to carry out a particular type of meta-analysis, jogging back and forth between two levels of meaning, in this case that which is common to all humans and that which is specific to a particular group [16].

After a brief overview of debates surrounding cross-cultural comparison in mainstream anthropology over the last century, we will consider how various fields outside of anthropology (particularly management and to a lesser degree psychology) have drawn inspiration from anthropology in order to gain a deeper understanding of intercultural dynamics in various settings. The following section will give some examples of how workshop participants used the notion of "cultural variables" in their attempts to resolve the basic paradox underlying the application of pluralist principles, effectively mobilizing systemic theory to talk about similarity and difference in complex communicative settings. In the final section, we will discuss how searching for the right words can help participants go beyond the double binds that characterize intercultural communication in increasingly diverse urban settings.

2. Comparison in Anthropology and Cross-Cultural Studies

Cross-cultural comparison has been a feature of anthropology since the beginning of the discipline, but the value of such an undertaking has not always been the object of consensus among anthropologists. Discomfort with cross-cultural comparison in anthropology has to do with the fact that certain branches of thinking in the early years of the discipline were closely aligned with the scientific racism that set out to use evolutionary theory as a means of justifying the alleged superiority of whites; comparison—in this case between "races"—was a central feature of this ideologically driven research agenda. Indeed, the history of "modern anthropology" often begins with critiques of 19th-century scientific racism, not only by Franz Boas in the United States but also by Bronislaw Malinowski in the United Kingdom [5].

Franz Boas, often presented as the "father" of American anthropology, was very critical of the comparative method associated with evolutionism, primarily because he believed that each society evolved in relation to specific contexts and environments. He refuted the ideas of a universal development of societies and of universal laws to which the human mind would obey [17] (p. 904) [16] (p. 56). He was an ardent empiricist and inductivist interested in culture-specific knowledge with an emphasis on historical and cultural context [18]. Boas's criticism of evolutionist ideology, his cultural relativism, as well as his methodological inclinations, may give the impression that cross-cultural comparison is contradictory or even irreconcilable with his vision of culture [19]. Lewis (1955), however, claimed that Boas actually wanted to improve it and specifically referred to his historical method as an "improved comparative method" [20] (p. 259). He argued that comparison required a complex analysis of the comparability of similar phenomena, because these similar cultural traits might have been the result of different causes [17] (p. 904). The role of his historical method was to discover the processes by which certain social phenomena emerge or evolve over time, what Boas referred to as diffusionism. If anthropology wishes to establish laws governing the development of cultures, he wrote, it must compare not the outcome of these developments, but their processes, paying special attention to practices on a small scale [17] (pp. 907–908).

Following Boas's criticism, but also in the wake of new approaches to fieldwork, cross-cultural comparison became increasingly unpopular amongst anthropologists. Berry writes that functionalism reinforced this feeling [21] (p. 120), most notably in the work of British social anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. Though this is something of a simplification [22], Malinowski is generally credited with developing the methodology of long-term intensive ethnographic fieldwork, disrupting the division between "armchair anthropologists" and those who conducted their own fieldwork [23] (pp. 15–19).

Malinowski emphasized the need to understand social and cultural dynamics from the point of view of insiders, at a time when many mainstream theorists were more interested in discovering general principles for understanding human social organization more generally [23] (pp. 15–19). Functionalist anthropology started with the premise that all cultures are fundamentally unique in their development. However, if all societies are unique and can only be understood in their own terms, how can we compare and generalize? [23] (pp. 15–19). Some authors began to refer to this question as the "Malinovskian dilemma". One of Malinowski's answers to this dilemma can be found in the functionalist approach itself. If all institutions meet basic human needs, then anthropology can compare institutions as responses to those needs. That being said, Malinowski's work, as well as the vast majority of British anthropologists of that time, rarely conducted comparative analysis or research and did not develop elaborate or systematic methodologies for cross-cultural comparison, at least not in any strict sense of the term. Generalization from a single field of research was not only difficult, but in many cases, it was frowned upon, and Malinowski's students are known to emphasize exceptions rather than categories or logical types [23] (pp. 15–19).

Radcliffe-Brown also offered his answer to the question. In response to Malinowski and Boas's work, he claimed that comparison is in fact possible and even constitutes the basis for the anthropological project as a whole. He saw anthropology as including both the historical method (as outlined by Boas) and the comparative method. Without comparison, he argued, anthropology would simply become historiography and ethnography [24]. The comparative method is "one by which we pass from the particular to the general, from the general to the more general, with the end in view that we may in this way arrive at the universal, at characteristics which can be found in different forms in all human societies" [24] (p. 22). In this vein, only the comparative method can offer general propositions, while the historical method provides specific propositions [24]. Thereupon, he made a distinction between ethnology, as "the historical study of primitive societies" and social anthropology, which would be a branch of comparative sociology [24] (p. 22).

Similarly, according to French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, the "ultimate goal" of anthropology was to achieve certain universal forms of thought and morality, while its primary goal was "to analyse and interpret differences" [24]. Lévi-Strauss was strongly influenced by structural linguistics. He borrowed from Roman Jakobson the theory that the underlying structure of a language comes from markers of difference [25]. According to Lévi-Strauss, this allows us to go past the opposition between Durkheim's positivism and Boas's historical particularism. This is to say that "universal constants"—which Durkheim advocated for—do not come from similarities or resemblances between cultures, but rather from "the hidden invariance of the relationships that exist between variables" [25] (p. 1, our translation). By analyzing the systems that come together to constitute a whole society, it would be possible to highlight invariants: the laws, present across different forms of social organization. Following this logic, anthropology would be the discipline that studies these invariants. By extension, the structuralist project would then be to start from observations of particular facts in order to deduce general properties and to put together a repertoire, or a "general inventory of societies", in which "each facet appears as a possible combination of these general and elementary traits" [26] (p. 2, our translation).

As an example, the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF), an inter-university non-profit founded in 1949 and based at Yale University, crystallized some of the most important debates in anthropology around cross-cultural comparison. In the 1930s, the Yale Institute of Human Relations, a think tank consisting of social and behavioral scientists, started to collect and classify cultural materials from various primary and secondary sources available at the time [27]. Research at Yale was rooted in a "long history of attempts to make available to scientists and scholars basic information on the peoples of the world, their environs, their behavior and social life, and their culture" [28] (pp. 1–2). The idea was both to improve access to ethnographic data, but also to develop a rigorous methodology for undertaking cross-cultural comparison. In the HRAF 2000 report, it is stated that the mission of the

databases was "to encourage and facilitate worldwide comparative studies of human behaviour, society, and culture" [29] (p. 3). HRAF provides a database called "Explaining Human Culture" which features more than 800 cross-cultural studies. Within this database, it is possible to search through the documents, or through thousands of "variables" and "hypotheses". For each document, one or more hypotheses are identified and marked as "supported" or "not supported" by the cross-cultural study. Perhaps not surprisingly, HRAF has been criticized by anthropologists of various theoretical leanings. This criticism "has been inseparable from criticism of the comparative method" [30] (p. 476).

This being said, there has also been important work on cross-cultural comparison outside of anthropology, especially in the historically eclectic field of cross-cultural studies. Debates in this field have been less concerned with theoretical or philosophical issues about comparison and more focused on conceptual frameworks or tools that can be used for the analysis of particular social dynamics. In this field, which includes a variety of disciplines such as communication, psychology, and management, there is a general assumption that certain variables or "cultural dimensions"—to use the expression of Edward T. Hall—exist in all human societies and that these variables can be compared across cultures. Often recognized as the "father" of cross-cultural studies, Hall was an anthropologist who played a key role in the development of intercultural training and in the emergence of intercultural communication as a field of study [30]. After earning his PhD and teaching for a few years, he became the director of the Point V training program at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), where he developed, from 1950 to 1955, training programs for American technicians and managers leaving to work abroad [31]. His work at the FSI was crucial in the development of his thinking on intercultural communication. He is best known in anthropology for his studies in proxemics, the cultural relation to space, but he also identified other dimensions of culture, such as the relation to time, and the division between high and low context in communication [32].

Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede took inspiration from Hall in his research on cross-cultural communication and organizational analysis. He is most well-known for his comparative model based on Hall's cultural dimensions. Hofstede initially identified four dimensions, but he later revised his model to encompass six dimensions: power, distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance index, long-term vs. short-term normative orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint [33]. Hofstede discusses what we have referred to earlier as the "Malinovskian dilemma" in the following terms:

> *Throughout the history of the study of culture there has been a dispute between those stressing the unique aspects and those stressing the comparable aspects. The first holds that "you cannot compare apples and oranges," whereas the second argues that apples and oranges are both fruits that can be compared on a multitude of aspects, such as price, weight, color, nutritive value, and durability. The selection of these aspects obviously requires an a priori theory about what is important in fruits [34] (p. 24).*

Hofstede argued that cross-cultural comparison requires clearly defined comparative criteria, the proper unit of comparison, and the functional equivalence of these units [35] (p. 17). In Culture's Consequences, Hofstede presents the results of a large research project on national differences, based on questionnaires administered to IBM employees in more than 50 countries in the 1960s and 1970s [34]. Hofstede's model of national culture might be one of the most notable examples of the comparative tradition in cross-cultural studies, as well as representing its statistical turn, especially given its emphasis on large quantitative data sets. Following in the footsteps of Hofstede, Erin Meyer, professor of management practice, has identified eight scales related to key areas in management (communicating, evaluating, persuading, leading, deciding, trusting, disagreeing, and scheduling). Comparison between countries based on these scales, according to Meyer, would help to grasp the influence of culture on international collaborations and help managers work more efficiently in these contexts [36]. Her work shows the legacy, in international management, of Hofstede's tradition of cross-cultural comparison, and how

distant it now is from Hall's anthropological work. This particular strand of cultural analysis, which identifies a limited number of cultural variables and is focused primarily on the fixed markers of national identity, is often a source of discomfort for anthropologists.

Recent research in the field of migration studies has approached the question of difference by going beyond the search for specific traits or characteristics based on cultural or national group-based identity. One way of doing this is to examine how discourse about difference actually structures human social relations in any given setting. As Steven Vertovec claims, studying "the social organization of difference [. . .] leads to better understanding of how social changes related to difference take place and generate various outcomes" [37]. Starting from Appadurai's conception of diversity as a lens to observe social processes, Vertovec places "diversity" prominently in the realm of public discourse and uses "difference" as a way to understand the socially constructed nature of representations, structures, and interactions. From this point of view, interactions are conditioned by the interpretation groups make from others, and it is important to address these representations because they can reinforce and reproduce the representations of others. However, it is not always simple to ask how the representations of other groups have become a kind of truth and how these representations can unwittingly reinforce stigmatization.

Looking back at the work of these different theorists and schools of thought has shown that the possibility of cross-cultural comparison has long been a source of debate. The analysis we propose in this article does not set out to demonstrate the value of comparison as a fundamental feature of scientific research or to make a case as it were for the value of "universals". We are also not trying to attribute a list of cultural characteristics to specific cultural groups, as has often been the case in various strands of cross-cultural research (for a recent critique of this approach, see [38]). Rather, beginning from the ethnographic descriptions of intercultural situations, we have set out to work with intellectually curious non-academics in the documentation and analysis of the social organization of difference. This work, which is at the border of fundamental and applied research, starts from a very practical concern, rooted in everyday communication and interactions. The nature of this process, which as we will show relies heavily on co-interpretation [39], requires us to talk about differences and to engage with cross-cultural comparison. In this context, it would be counter-productive to spend time debating about whether comparison is desirable or possible. We do, however, need to tackle the important question of how to talk about difference when the question of comparison invites itself into the debate.

3. The Difficulty of Talking about Difference

Gregory Bateson first asked the question about difference in human social organization, in many ways laying the groundwork for what would later become known as systems theory [40]. Bateson's analysis called attention to at least two facets of communication. First, he was attempting to show that human communication operates on the premise that objects have their meaning not because of their intrinsic nature or material characteristics, but rather because the way that humans name objects and ideas is at some level arbitrary. Bateson often illustrated this idea with a drawing of an object that could be seen as either a boot or a trapezoid, depending on the communicative context. According to Bateson, this arbitrary association between things and words can be seen as the glue or cement that makes communication possible, since human beings have shared codes with regard to the pathways of contingency that structure language: "In fact, what we mean by information—the elementary unit of information—is a difference which makes a difference, and it is able to make a difference because the neural pathways along which it travels [. . .] are ready to be triggered" [14] (p. 453).

The second element, no less important, was Bateson's insistence on the importance of context. Without context, Bateson argued, there is no meaning, and this is why communication in intercultural settings is so complex, since codes are not shared. Though Bateson was not focused on the question of intercultural communication per se, his work on communication is central to our understanding of how humans communicate with each

other in the context of super-diversity. One example of how context matters to the analysis of intercultural communication is the notion of situational identity. All individuals have multiple identities, and it is not always possible to predict or to control which aspect of individual identity will be considered relevant in any given context. From the point of view of systems theory, the analysis of communicative events in highly diverse urban settings requires us to understand how actors decide which aspects of individuals' identities are relevant to the particular situation being analyzed and how these decisions impact the outcomes of interactions. This observation about the importance of multiple, layered identities is central to recent research in the field of intersectionality. Indeed, scholars of intercultural communication have a great deal to learn from research on intersectionality, most notably the way that the layering of identities can exacerbate various forms of systemic discrimination and structural inequality.

Through his discussion of "logical types" and "patterns" [40], Bateson might have argued that the idea of talking about variation within groups (for example how some individuals do not feel at home with the habits or norms of their group) is a moot point if the purpose of cross-cultural comparison is to understand what leads to breakdowns in communication. When we compare characteristics at the group level (for example between Protestants and Catholics, or between Europeans and North Americans) we necessarily lose sight of diversity and complexity among members of the same group [41]; as anthropologists, especially given our conviction that the documentation of cultural complexity is an antidote to ethnocentrism [42], this proposition can be difficult to understand and to accept. The analysis of inter-group dynamics requires us to look at patterns that can be said to be representative of each group on the whole as well as patterns that may occur in interactions between groups. In this sense, the analysis of cultural variability is more concerned with patterns than exceptions (what Bateson referred to as probabilities) and more concerned with the analysis of practices at the group level than at the level of individuals. This focus on analysis at the level of group-based identities seems counter-intuitive given recent trends in the social sciences that focus on the individual level (life history, intersectionality, and individual agency), but as we will try to demonstrate, perceptions of difference in multi-ethnic urban settings tend to play out primarily at the level of dynamics between groups. Below we will discuss how the concept of "cultural variables" was mobilized during the intercultural situations workshops and how it affected participants' ability to maintain a critical distance with regard to various forms of group-based prejudice.

3.1. Cultural Variables and Prejudice

In the context of the workshops, we observed that cultural variables can be difficult to identify at first, but after being presented with a specific intercultural situation by a friend or colleague, most participants are able to identify one or more variables that apply to the situation. In some cases, participants will discuss among themselves to find the best way to name the variable and in the case of multiple variables (see the examples below) there will often be discussion to better discern between the different variables identified, including the question of how to prioritize them. The process of centering, which is "the conscious consideration of our own traditions and frames of reference" [7], makes it possible to better understand what aspect of a participant's identity is activated by the situation they are describing. This process can take some time and we noticed that participants from the majority group (in this case white francophone Canadians) can have a hard time naming cultural variables because they do not automatically think about themselves as being part of cultural diversity in their city or society [43]. We also noticed that certain individuals and groups (for example those from the white majority) find it difficult to talk about race or racial difference, especially when workshop participants included people from different ethnic or racial backgrounds.

After having identified and agreed upon a short list of relevant cultural variables, we ask participants to make observations about the identity of the person or persons involved in the intercultural situations they have set out to describe. Participants are encouraged to

name the different markers of identity that may or may not have played a significant role in the situation (ethnicity, religion, race, gender, age, etc.) and to reflect upon how these markers may have influenced their perception or the perception of the people involved in the situation. Many participants feel discomfort during this part of the workshop, either because they do not know how to talk about the markers of identity or because they are concerned about stigmatizing individuals based on ethnic or racial criteria. In general, we have been able to reduce this discomfort by explaining that the aim of the exercise is not to discriminate or to put people in boxes, but to understand what kind of prejudices are at stake and what markers of identity come into play in the situation being described; in other words, what difference or differences make a difference in any given situation?

With this information, participants are generally able to overcome their concerns about reinforcing prejudice, and in most cases other participants contribute to the discussion in order to arrive at a consensus about what identity markers are important and why, if at all, group-based identity is important to the analysis of intercultural encounters. Going through a list of possible identity markers even makes participants realize that some aspects of their identity that they did not think of were relevant, for example age or gender. In addition, naming differences helps participants go past the more obvious ones (race, ethnicity) and thus not only do they develop a more complex sense of diversity, but also this might lead them to deconstruct prejudices. It is important to mention that the goal of this exercise is not to catalog traits that correspond with particular ethnic or national identities, but to see how different types of identity markers are brought to bear in particular contexts or settings. The identity markers that are named become relevant in the context of a particular situation but fall to the side when the situation changes.

3.2. Intercultural Situations and the Dilemma of Difference

The self-reflexive group-based activity described above is an important part of what we have referred to as "indirect ethnography": a new methodology for eliciting and analyzing ethnographic data about intercultural situations in rapidly diversifying urban settings [7]. This methodology has proved to be effective in settings where participants are motivated to describe and analyze the situations they have experienced in their everyday lives as citizens or in the context of their professional activities. As it has not been tested in settings where participants are anti-immigration or opposed to pluralist principles, it cannot not be seen as a methodology that is suitable in all contexts. Nonetheless, this approach makes it possible to document a wide variety of intercultural situations, identify the cultural variables that underlie these situations, and provide preliminary observations about the dynamics of prejudice that result from what Gumperz classically referred to as "inter-ethnic miscommunication" [44]. Indirect ethnography is one way to capture the dynamics of social interactions in increasingly diverse urban settings, but it also enables participants to develop specific skills with regard to intercultural communication, for example the ability to describe intercultural situations, the ability to identify cultural variables, and the capacity to reflect on the specificity of one's own group. Below we discuss two examples of situations that were shared during the first phase of our research on cohabitation and intercultural dynamics in Montreal.

3.2.1. Situation 1: Movie Night in the Park

> *As part of the activities for Montreal's 375th anniversary, a cultural promoter organizes a film screening in an ethnically diverse neighborhood in Montreal. The film is scheduled for 9 p.m. and since it will be projected in public, it is preceded by a warning that the film contains scenes of nudity and violence. After the film begins, the crowd becomes agitated, especially during a scene featuring sexual relations between a French settler and an indigenous woman. Certain parents express their disapproval and leave the park. A disgruntled father, who the promoter assumes is North African, approaches him and strongly criticizes the decision to show a film of this type in the presence of children. Soon after, he is joined in agreement by two other fathers, whom the organizer assumes are*

from the same community. The promoter does not know how to react since he thinks he has taken all the necessary precautions for this kind of activity in public.

In describing this situation, the cultural promoter (of French-Canadian descent) was annoyed remembering how the situation made him feel. According to him, he had taken all of the necessary precautions related to the presence of a scene involving nudity: the film was projected late in the evening, and he made an announcement at the beginning of the projection. These precautions should have been enough to avoid any problems. Moreover, the fact that it was a film on the history of encounters between First Nations communities and various waves of foreigners, especially during the celebrations of Montreal's "foundation", should have been more important than the public display of nudity. He recalled that his initial reaction to the disgruntled fathers was very negative. Explaining why the situation bothered him, he claimed that a good parent should make sure that their children go to bed at a "reasonable time". He also felt that in the interest of their integration (he assumed the parents were immigrants), parents should recognize that nudity is not as taboo in Québec as it is in other parts of the world. They also should have recognized that the projection of the film was intended to facilitate dialogue about the history of relations between colonizers, settlers, and the various indigenous communities that continue to share the unceded indigenous territory today known as Québec.

In discussing his reaction with the other participants, he explained that with some hindsight he was able to better understand the point of view of the disgruntled fathers. He also suggested that their reaction could have been related to differences in cultural codes. At this moment, the discussion became more intense, as certain participants seemed to agree with his analysis and others questioned why it was necessary to make a connection between the reaction of the fathers and cultural differences. As mentioned before, caution was almost always present at this point of the workshop. Participants are wary of the possible pitfalls of starting to bring in cultural differences. In reaction to what the participant recalling the situation had said about "being a good parent", another participant asked: "How do we know what it means to be a good father in his country of origin?" This question triggered a less polarized but very thoughtful discussion about the cultural variable that had been identified by the group: being a good parent. Participants observed that the cultural promoter and the disgruntled parents most likely did not have the same idea about what it means to be a good parent and that ideas about being a good parent, while they can also differ among people in the same community, probably differ more significantly between communities.

By acknowledging that the cultural promoter and the disgruntled parents might have had different conceptions about "being a good parent", it was possible to go beyond the idea that one group, or the other, were bad parents. Rather, the participants were able to temporarily suspend their beliefs in order to examine different visions of parenthood and hypothesize that they might have been divergent, at least with regard to something as seemingly simple as bedtimes. In addition to the cultural variable of "being a good parent", participants also observed a number of other cultural variables, for example nudity, nudity in public, sexuality in public, inter-racial relations, and perhaps the most interesting, expression of disagreement. The cultural promoter was frustrated with the reaction of the disgruntled fathers, not only because they decided to keep their children up late, or because they were shocked by something that is not as taboo in Québec, but also because they employed what he considered to be an aggressive tone in expressing their disapproval (an element which in itself varies greatly from one society to another). The cultural promoter, who was concerned that his decision to show this film might have a negative impact on his employer or on social cohesion in the neighborhood more generally, explained that this event was very troubling for him. In discussion with the other participants, he conceded that "it was just a movie night in the park", but the situation had somehow spun out of control and initially he did not see how his own cultural values influenced his perceptions. In the context of the workshop, he was able to identify the cultural variables that seemed

to have been at play, and with the help of others he was able to put his finger on how his own values and judgments affected his analysis of the situation.

3.2.2. Situation 2: Headgear in the Workplace

> *An executive under my responsibility, a white man of Anglo-Saxon origins, informed me that an employee, a white francophone woman, was advised not to wear a baseball cap at her workstation. This employee then reacted by questioning why an Afro-descendant employee with Caribbean origins was allowed to wear a headscarf (headtie or headwrap, not religious). Our reaction was that you can't compare a headtie and a baseball cap. It was decided that the employee could wear her scarf, and that a baseball cap is not an appropriate accessory to meet customers. The employee was met and an explanation was provided that these outfits do not have the same value in a customer service context (casual vs. elegance).*

The core of this situation comes from what seems to be interpreted by the white woman as a form of discrimination since she was told that she could not wear a cap during business hours, while her colleague was allowed to wear a headscarf. The participants observed that one part of the problem was related to different visions of what is considered appropriate attire in the workplace. However, some participants also raised the idea that norms regarding casual attire may vary from one society to another. The participants in the workshop agreed that a baseball cap was not the same as a headscarf, but the emphasis placed on the cultural dimension led to a certain discomfort for certain participants. Again, this question was raised: should we be talking about cultural differences? Is that a productive lens of analysis? Then, the group started to ask if there might have been a racist or discriminatory element to the situation: "Is this woman being targeted because she is black?" Given that the situation was reported by a third party (a supervisor within the organization), this is hard to know, but the supervisors who were responsible for mediating this situation were conscious of this possibility.

The participants tried to see this situation from different sides. For the organization, the interdiction of wearing a cap was primarily a matter of providing quality customer service and reflecting their professionalism. For the employee wearing a baseball cap, however, the problem was situated in the relationship between attire and equity, especially since she expressed her concern that she was being treated unfairly. This situation, which was not initially perceived as intercultural by workshop participants "became" intercultural, since the identification of cultural variables shed light on the role that cultural codes about attire played in the situation. What this analysis shows is that the process of analyzing intercultural situations inevitably leads to some form of cross-cultural comparison. In this case, the comparison between two different perceptions of the same administrative norm shows how cultural differences can lead to various moral and procedural outcomes; some of these outcomes may lead to a positive social response, while others may lead to discrimination and exclusion.

The work of cultural variables makes it possible for participants to better understand how everyday situations and perceptions can contribute to larger systemic factors that are brought to bear on the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, in this case the extent to which members of the majority group make claims about differential treatment and the perception of "reverse discrimination". Working on cultural variables also enables participants to determine whether or not inter-ethnic dynamics are at play in the situation being described, or if some other form of identity-based marker is the root of the problem (e.g., gender, race, class, etc.). In the two cases considered above, it seems safe to say that talking about differences did not lead to more discrimination. On the contrary, through the process of comparison, explicitation, and centering, participants were able to see how, under certain circumstances, naming differences can reduce the effects of stigmatization.

4. Searching for the Right Words

Talking about differences between majority groups and minority groups can sometimes feel like walking on eggshells. In contexts such as Québec, people from the majority group tend to define diversity as something that is outside of themselves, a social category that applies principally to immigrants and refugees. In many circumstances, placing emphasis on differences can be perceived as an obstacle to social cohesion or what in the French-speaking world is often referred to as "vivre-ensemble" [11], especially for those who believe in the universal humanist ideals of French-style republicanism. In the context of our workshops, and sometimes in the safety of exchanges behind closed doors, people from the French-speaking majority ask for more detailed information and training about specific ethnic groups in order to have more sensitive or more effective interactions. While these requests may be misguided, they are clearly not made with the intent to discriminate or stigmatize.

The desire for a quick fix (in French "recette facile" or "solution rapide") in response to intercultural situations is a common reaction in many settings and is by no means unique to Québec. Although specialists in cross-cultural communication often discourage the use of a "quick fix" approach, the desire to identify specific communities with particular traits or characteristics may be seen as a common reflex in human communication more generally. Obviously, possessing information about specific communities or particular cultural characteristics is not enough to comprehend the complexity of intercultural communication, not only because this complex field of meanings necessarily involves codes from multiple perspectives within each community, but also because individuals are shot through with multiple, situated identities (some of which are in conflict with each other) and these identities can evolve over time. In this sense, context generates the meaning of encounters between different forms of difference and perceptions about difference determine what forms of difference matter, to whom, and with what consequence. Searching for the right words to describe complex intercultural situations is not just semantics. It involves doing the work of carefully interrogating nuanced perceptions of difference and taking risks in order to identify what differences are at play and why, while carefully monitoring the potential of differentiation to reinforce negative stereotypes and prejudice.

Looking back over the history of cross-cultural comparison within and outside of anthropology, and following the particular experience of indirect ethnography, there are several lessons to be learned. While it may be true that anthropology has produced "more versions and visions of the comparative method than any other discipline" [5] (p. 3), mainstream cultural anthropology (especially in North America) has focused more on the complexity of specific communities than on the interactions between communities [6,10]. This historical tendency in the discipline to focus on internal complexity makes it difficult to address the question of difference in rapidly diversifying contexts closer to home. Indeed, as Marcus and Fischer explain, much of the work completed by the students of Boas was focused on documenting cultural practices in other parts of the world as a way of combating ethnocentrism in the United States: "anthropology as cultural critique" [45]. In this sense, U.S.-based cultural anthropology was not engaged in an effort to make cross-cultural comparisons per se, but was invested in the idea of describing the complexity of non-Western cultures in the hopes that students and readers of anthropology would find some way to connect the comparative dots.

In the Malinowski-inspired tradition of long-term intensive fieldwork, anthropologists everywhere have come to believe that the only way to fulfill their duty as scientists and as citizens of the world is to dig down deep into the history and complexity of particular communities. Whether it be in the area of student supervision, in the evaluation of publications, or in their own plans for research, anthropologists are often reluctant to take on the task of cross-cultural comparison, claiming that understanding one ethnographic context is already extremely complex and that anthropology does not possess the tools to conduct systematic comparison across cultures. According to Candea, "...for many anthropologists writing over the past forty years or so, comparison is not just equivocal but also deeply

suspicious. And yet, it is unavoidable" [5] (p. 7). In addition to this disciplinary habitus or "culture", constructivist critiques of the culture concept have made anthropologists increasingly skittish about the idea of cross-cultural comparison, primarily out of fears of being accused of cultural essentialism or even worse, racism.

If anthropology—which as a discipline laid the groundwork for cross-cultural comparison in social science and humanities—has been running away from cross-cultural comparison, afraid to fall into the trap of culturalism, it is also true that scholars from outside of anthropology have rarely taken the time to explore the discipline's history of thinking about cultural diversity and cross-cultural analysis. The fact that Hall's work on "cultural dimensions" has had so much traction outside of anthropology should be a source of pride for anthropologists. Indeed, Hall saw his mission as an academic to help non-anthropologists understand the importance of culture [46]. However, the reduction of cultural complexity to a series of four to six "cultural dimensions" is deeply disturbing to researchers in the field of critical intercultural studies [10,38]. If, as in the case of mainstream contemporary anthropology, the goal of research is to further knowledge about particular communities, then cross-cultural comparison is not a necessary operation. If, on the other hand, the goal of research is to understand social dynamics between individuals and groups of diverse origins, then as we have tried to show, we are required to take seriously the idea of cross-cultural comparison. Working toward this goal requires tools such as cultural variables that make it possible to engage in serious discussions about similarity and difference, an idea that is central not only to intercultural analysis but also to systemic theory. Indeed, in some sense, it is the context and analysis of intercultural situations that requires us to address the question of cross-cultural comparison, and not the opposite. While comparison in cultural and social anthropology is concerned with the possibility of comparing cultures as abstract objects or entities, the ethnographic analysis of intercultural situations requires us to focus on interactions in specific contexts that are uniquely located in time and space. Given the nature of intercultural encounters, comparison is not an option but a necessity.

From a systemic point of view, we can look at different expressions of group-based identity (call them "cultures" if you will) as systems that are based on logical types, codes, and patterns. Individuals do not always fit into or fully understand these mechanisms, and thus variation at the individual level can be even more complex than the group level, but individual variation does not prove the irrelevance of group-based identity. It simply shows that groups are made up of internal diversity, something that we already knew. This particular form of analysis requires first and foremost the identification of what we have referred to as "cultural variables". In the context of the workshops we developed to document and analyze intercultural situations in Montreal, participants were motivated and surprisingly adept in the process of identifying cultural variables. As we had hoped, the act of identifying cultural variables led many participants to reflect on the norms and practices in their own communities (what we have referred to as "centering") and this very simple act of comparison in many cases led to a re-examination of socially accepted norms in the context of super-diversity. In fact, as the workshops have evolved, we have begun to talk about the identification of cultural variables as a key competency for professionals who work in multi-ethnic settings [7].

In his analysis of how anthropology might go beyond the paralysis of "our impossible method", Candea argues that the work of cultural comparison can be divided into at least two different approaches or postures. Whereas frontal comparison involves looking at the similarities and differences between "us" and "them", lateral comparison requires self and other to perform a type of Batesonian meta-analysis, changing perspective to look at the objects of comparison from outside of the us-them nexus: "...lateral comparison involves entities which are formally of the same kind, although different in content, frontal comparison involves entities which are constitutively different in form—indeed, constitutively asymmetrical [5] (p. 218). Therein resides the major source of discomfort: people from the historical majority tend to include people of immigrant background as objects of

integration and in some cases as obstacles to the project of "social cohesion". By working together in groups to identify the various cultural variables at play, workshop participants are able to objectify their own cultures by creating equivalencies between worldviews: relation to authority, risk perception, and leisure to name a few. This shift, which is usually unconscious, occurs with relative fluidity as participants in the discussion move from a frontal to a lateral form of comparison. Cultural variables in this context function primarily as placeholders, enabling participants to exchange examples of how the variable plays out in different times and places and to analyze real-life situations in which culturally specific codes may have led to miscommunication or tension. This temporary suspension (which Candea refers to as "bracketing") is essential to doing the work of cross-cultural comparison from an intercultural perspective. The goal of comparison in this context is not to compare two different cultures, but to provide participants with the necessary distance from their own culture in order to be able to analyze breakdowns in communication during intercultural encounters.

As we have set out to explain in this article, the work of identifying cultural variables—something that is not always easy—is not the hard part. The real challenge for workshop participants, and also for academics, is the difficulty associated with naming difference. First, in our analysis of intercultural situations, it is not clear that we have actually identified the difference that makes a difference in any given setting or situation; research in the field of intersectionality has shown us how the complexity of multi-factorial markers of identity can contribute to systemic discrimination in sometimes unexpected and disturbing ways [3,4]. This is especially true of situations that may seem to be about ethnic differences but in reality involve other identity markers, for example gender, generation, or race. On numerous occasions, we were presented with situations that were not intercultural at all, if by intercultural we mean inter-ethnic. Secondly, in the current era of heightened awareness about racism and systemic discrimination, there is always a risk of reinforcing stereotypes about specific communities and exacerbating the marginalization and exclusion that we as anthropologists have always set out to eradicate. Talking about difference is important, but it is never easy. It requires particular conditions in order to fight against the tendency to reduce or reify the identity of others. It also requires us to ensure that the reasons for wanting to name difference do not undermine the underlying principles of any anthropological endeavor: the admittedly utopian idea of "making the world safe for difference" [47].

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Article

Montreal's Community Organizations and Their Approach to Integration: A System Within a Dual System

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Abstract: This article, based on systems thinking, explores how community organizations in Montreal providing newcomers support through the various stages of their settlement process operate within a local municipal system and a broader provincial system, both promoting integration and intercultural relations. On a local scale, the City of Montreal has set itself the goal of raising public awareness of the benefits of cultural diversity and wishes to encourage positive interactions in the public space. For those interviewed during our research, this municipal model of integration does not necessarily align with Quebec's unique and unofficial integration model, interculturalism, which can be perceived as a political project supporting the French-speaking majority's interests and which may seem incompatible with the social justice values espoused by community organizations. This article is based on verbatim excerpts gathered from individual and group in-depth interviews conducted with 37 community workers in the spring of 2023.

Keywords: super-diversity; systems thinking; Montreal's community organizations; municipal and provincial approaches to integration and intercultural relations

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the strong growth of immigrant populations in Canada and the French-speaking province of Quebec has prompted their governments to question and rethink their model of integration, especially at a local level (White & Frozzini, 2022). According to Arsenault, White, and Dubé, the notion of integration itself is a complex one and could be defined as "a set of functional, cultural and social processes and interactions that enable newcomers to recognize themselves and find their place in the host society" (Arsenault et al., 2022). Federal and provincial integration policies, municipal public actions to manage cultural diversity, organizational dynamics, as well as daily social interactions and representations, are all complex interrelated dimensions that can impact immigrants' identities, as well as integration trajectories and group relations. For several years now, authors have been agreeing on the need to take an interest in "deep diversity" (Rachédi & Taïbi, 2019), a phenomenon also known as "super-diversity", which refers to the complexity of diversity, i.e. the multidimensionality of the human being, whose identity cannot be reduced to culture (White & Frozzini, 2022), as well as their multiple interactions with different individual, family, collective, and larger or smaller societal systems (Taylor & Gutmann, 1994) like the provincial and municipal ones.

In Canada, a policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual English-French framework was officially adopted on 8 October 1971 by then Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau. As this model of integration was immediately rejected by the Quebec government, interculturalism was proposed in a neo-nationalist move to assert itself against the federal government (Couture & St-Louis, 2022). Although these two models share several pluralist principles,

such as the search for social cohesion, the rejection of assimilationism, the recognition of diversity, and the fight against discrimination, the management of cultural diversity in Canada and Quebec has regularly been thought of in a conflicting manner for about twenty years (White, 2021). On a municipal scale, and with the absence of concrete proposals from the state, Canadian cities are thinking about welcoming and integrating newcomers by developing urban spaces to promote intercommunity exchanges and interactions (Boucher, 2016). In the province of Quebec in particular, six cities are recognized as "Intercultural Cities" by the Council of Europe. This program for the management and promotion of cultural diversity corresponds to a synergy between local, academic, and political actors. Established in 2015, it helps support local and regional authorities around the world in developing intercultural strategies by offering analytical and practical tools. More than 140 cities are now identified as "Intercultural Cities" by the Council of Europe, both in Europe and beyond, including Australia, Canada, Japan, Israel, Mexico, Morocco, and the United States (Intercultural Cities Programme, n.d.).

In Quebec, immigration is predominantly urban. Of the 500,000 or so immigrants the province receives annually (16% of all Canadian immigration), nearly 85% settle first in Montreal and its metropolitan area (Savard et al., 2022). As a consequence, one of the difficulties faced by Quebec municipalities, especially Montreal, the province's main immigrant settlement, is to combine, within the same territory, the rivalry of two integration models, one official under the federal state, the other unofficial under the provincial state (Carpentier, 2022). Despite the richness of cultural diversity, which is part of a unique Montreal identity, the city faces new challenges linked to the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion of people from different social and ethnocultural backgrounds.

In the fight against social exclusion in particular, grassroots organizations are close allies in supporting municipalities. As key players in issues concerning the integration of more or less recent immigrants or the fight against racism and discrimination, community organizations, which fall within the broader institutional framework of social action, are on the front line and in constant contact with people of all origins in order to meet their needs (Arsenault & Frozzini, 2024). Intercultural action or intervention consists, among other things, of supporting newcomers through the various stages of the settlement process and referring them to appropriate assistance resources (Montgomery & Bourassa-Dansereau, 2019). Driven by the values of solidarity and social justice, these organizations also aim to empower individuals while reinvigorating civic participation. Intercultural action in community organizations has a long history in Montreal, long before municipal action in this area. Yet, it is little-known and poorly documented. While the majority of studies carried out on pluralism and integration mainly focus on state action, there are still few studies devoted to more local scales, such as those of towns, organizations, or citizens' groupings, particularly from an ethnographic perspective (White, 2017).

For structural and financial reasons, the voice of community workers is also often downplayed, whereas their intercultural experience and expertise have been built up in the field, often within groups of committed players. The aim of this article, based on a previous research conducted on the various aspects of intercultural intervention and relying on the word of community workers (see Le Moing, forthcoming), is to understand how the community perception of integration fits into a dual system corresponding to distinct municipal and provincial approaches to integration and intercultural relations. This involves analyzing community action in relation to the municipal intercultural policy, which includes initiatives that aim to "raise awareness of the benefits of diversity" but "also seek to reduce the negative impact of discrimination while encouraging positive interactions between people of diverse backgrounds" (White & Frozzini, 2022). This municipal action, which steers clear of ideological confrontations between the multicultural

and intercultural models, can also be faced with a certain vagueness about an approach to intercultural relations that evolves according to the strategic choices of administrations or at the whim of municipal elections (Ville de Montréal, 2018). Montreal's successive mayors have taken different stances on intercultural relations, depending on their pro- or anti-federalist leanings. While the previous mayor, Denis Coderre (2013–2017), advocated the notion of living together above all, the current mayor, Valérie Plante (2017–), places greater emphasis on the notion of inclusion. At the provincial level, Quebec interculturalism, whose interactionist philosophy is nonetheless close to that prevailing in Montreal's community milieu, is the subject of much criticism from community workers, not least because of the current Legault (2018–) government's denial of systemic racism in Quebec institutions. As we shall see at the end of this article, and in the light of the testimonies gathered, criticism also focuses on the maintenance of a power relationship between "native" Quebecers and minorities, the latter being often perceived as belonging to a homogeneous whole, despite their different life, migration and socioeconomic backgrounds.

After presenting our conceptual framework, our research posture and our methodology, we will examine how the community-based system often operates independently of a broader municipal and provincial system based on different public intercultural actions and discourses towards diversity and integration. This article will therefore draw on several verbatim extracts, numbered and identified by the name chosen by the respondents.

2. Conceptual and Methodological Framework

The knowledge of those involved, both observers and actors in social interactions, is a valuable analytical tool. Our research draws on a variety of recent works to analyze integration models and intercultural relations from macro- and microsocial angles. These include works from the fields of political science (Lamy & Mathieu, 2020; Carpentier & Gagnon, 2020; Couture & St-Louis, 2022; Gosselin-Tapp, 2023). Our research also draws on a number of works in sociology and anthropology (Rachédi & Taïbi, 2019; Montgomery & Agbobli, 2017; Emongo & White, 2014; White & Frozzini, 2022). Finally, this research has been enriched by several critical works and essays that are interested in the emergence of forces opposed to political interculturalism in Quebec (Idir & Ekobena, 2019; Benessaieh, 2019; Abadie, 2017; Rachédi et al., 2020).

This research also commits to decompartmentalizing knowledge, which is one objective of critical research on integration and intercultural relations, also called intercultural research (Rachédi et al., 2020). Vatz-Laaroussi proposes several key principles for intercultural research, including prioritizing the epistemological reference points of Others to whom the word is given. This means that the construction of reality must be gathered from the point of view of those primarily concerned, i.e., the subjects-actors who live it and suffer from invisibility, even if this may cause the researcher a form of destabilization (Laaroussi, 2007). The aim of this method is therefore to decentralize the so-called "academic" knowledge, or at least reduce "the asymmetry of knowledge between the two universes in order to optimize the usefulness and relevance of scientific productions" (White & Gratton, 2017). In the context of research carried out with community organizations, gathering the views of stakeholders can help optimize intercultural knowledge, particularly that related to experiments and case studies.

In the spring of 2023, the testimonies of 37 community workers on the island of Montreal were collected in the form of semi-structured individual (19) and group (six) interviews. Prior to the research, we had already been able to meet with several institutional players in 2022 in order to gain a better understanding of the challenges of intercultural action in the metropolis. The consultation of a dozen university colleagues whose research and knowledge exchange activities were carried out in close collaboration with the practical

world was also useful in completing our data. Finally, in winter 2023, we contacted a total of 70 community organizations based on a number of lists provided by people in the community, university and municipal sectors who offer "intercultural" analysis and activities.

Lasting an average of 1 hour and 15 minutes, these 25 in-depth recorded interviews took place between April and May 2023. The recording of each interview involved guaranteeing the anonymity of the participants by asking them to choose a fictitious name that would be useful in identifying their testimony. In an effort to have their work taken into account, some respondents to our survey did not wish to preserve their anonymity and changed their first names. Also, some of them wished to publicize the name of their organization. The lack of institutional recognition they deplore no doubt explains why these participants did not wish to make their testimony anonymous, or indicated that they were not afraid of being recognized:

> *People will identify me quickly. It does not matter... Anyway, there is no secret here; what we do is public*. (1. Carlos)

Indeed, a number of organizations specializing in immigration issues are now well identified in the Montreal community landscape for publicly expressing their opinions on certain major issues related to the integration of ethnocultural and/or religious communities, issues which, according to these same organizations, are often subject to political instrumentalization. For example, the stir caused by the *Loi sur la laïcité de l'État* adopted in 2019 gave several of these organizations the opportunity to oppose Bill 21 in various media in order to denounce its discriminatory nature, to participate in consultation commissions and to issue recommendations to encourage society to become more inclusive.

These recorded interviews were initially intended to be semi directive but turned out to be quite flexible; the majority of interviews began with one or two general questions about the speaker's background and the presentation of their organization; the answers given were then freely developed around the values, formats and challenges of intercultural action, requiring minimal intervention on our part to redirect the interview.

Of the 37 respondents, 27 were women and 10 men, and more than 20 identified themselves as having an immigrant and/or racial background but having been living in Quebec for a long time. For some, this identification is crucial, as it involves them personally and guides their professional practice. Several respondents who identified themselves in particular as racialized and/or "visible", or as descendants of racialized migrants, spoke of situations of racism or discrimination of which they had personally been victims. The reactivation of these forms of exclusion has a daily impact on the helping relationship and on the awareness-raising work to be carried out with the community in general, which can also lead to a form of exhaustion.

These interviews were transcribed in full, corresponding to 550 pages of verbatims. These verbatims were then analyzed thematically, using the framework established in the interview grid and drawing on notes taken at the end of each interview (on reactions or situations observed during the recording). General themes, then numerous sub-themes, were identified, enabling us to gradually build up an analytical framework designed to account for intercultural intervention in all its complexity, operating mainly on a circumscribed local scale, but sometimes exerting an influence on a larger municipal (action may extend to the greater Montreal metropolitan area), provincial, or even federal scale.

At the end of an in-depth qualitative analysis of these 25 interviews, the data collected were organized around a thematic framework useful for understanding several phenomena rarely studied in the literature, such as the insertion of these community organizations in a defined historical, social, and institutional context, the more or less assertive claim of these organizations to so-called "intercultural" practices and approaches (see Le Moing,

forthcoming), and the organizational assessment of municipal and provincial actions in managing pluralism and discourses on integration as we shall see in this article.

3. A System Within a Local System: Community Organizations in the Face of Public Action in Montreal

Relying on the logic of systems thinking, we believe that the complex phenomenon of cultural diversity can be analyzed by observing the way in which various systems, such as provincial or municipal intercultural initiatives, have a possible impact on decision-making processes in the field, and influence or not community practices. That is why the main aim of this research is to understand how Montreal's community organizations operate within a local municipal system and a broader provincial system, both promoting integration and intercultural relations.

In particular, the testimonies of professionals offer relevant avenues of analysis regarding the City of Montreal's intercultural action, which has been structured over time in partnership with institutional bodies, as well as key local players such as community organizations. This municipal expertise, which is based both on the promotion of diversity and intercultural dialogue and on the fight against racism and discrimination, is also distinct from the provincial model of interculturalism, which has elicited stronger reactions during our survey.

3.1. The City of Montreal's Intercultural Action

For several years now, Montreal, like other Quebec municipalities, has set itself the goal of raising public awareness of the benefits of cultural diversity. Intercultural cities also wish to encourage positive interactions in the public space and promote a sense of belonging to the community (White & Frozzini, 2022), not least because the regionalization of Francophone economic immigration is currently one of the provincial government's priorities (Gouvernement du Québec, 2024).

For more than fifty years, the City of Montreal has been developing expertise in the integration of newcomers, in particular through the creation of several bodies such as the Conseil Interculturel de Montréal (CIM), which sets recommendations on issues related to inequalities or forms of institutional discrimination. The rapid transformation of Montreal's socio-demographic landscape (with the city's population hosting over 80% of Quebec's immigrant population), unlike any other municipality in the province, has prompted the city to develop public initiatives aimed at the socioeconomic integration of newcomers, as well as the development of "the welcoming and inclusive capacities of Montrealers" in its *Montreal Inclusive* action plan (Ville de Montréal, 2018). However, these actions as well as municipal institutions serving cultural diversity, such as the Bureau d'intégration des nouveaux arrivants de Montréal (BINAM), remain on the whole fairly unknown to community stakeholders, often because their organization has not applied for or obtained a funding program under this entity, such as the City of Montreal's *Programme Montréal Interculturel* (PMI), which aims to support intercultural rapprochement projects (Ville de Montréal, 2023). Other respondents who are aware of the City of Montreal's inclusion objectives and its selection criteria for funding community projects evoked, in the same way as the intercultural interactionist approach developed in the organizations, a relatively soft municipal action, mainly focused on the accompaniment and social integration of people of immigrant background.

This pluralist approach, which is seen as not very active but fairly consensual compared to the provincial approach, also no doubt explains why some speakers were unable to describe in detail the initiatives undertaken by the municipality, which they felt lacked prominence. Other testimonials reveal a certain suspicion of Montreal's intercultural action.

Public action, unlike community action, struggles to produce concrete results in terms of bringing people together:

> *Interculturalism is marketed but not necessarily acted upon. There are municipal bodies that welcome newcomers, and work on harmonious cultural and intercultural relations, but I do not see many tangible results. I see more community action than municipal action*. (2. Hélène)

Conversely, other respondents praised Montreal's openness and "pro-activeness" (E) in raising the awareness of diversity, promoting intercultural dialogue, and combating racism, notably through the PMI funding program, which recognizes community actions in line with these three objectives:

> *I am pleased that there is a program on intercultural issues, which means trying to create contacts and cultural mediation. And I am also pleased that there is a budget for promoting cultural communities. So I am pleased with the team because it shows the city's openness to communities (. . .) and to the intercultural approach*. (3. André)

3.2. Combating Racism and Systemic Discrimination in Montreal

The municipal action in Quebec in the fight against social exclusion and racism has clear objectives: to raise the awareness of the benefits of diversity, combat discrimination, encourage positive interactions between people of diverse backgrounds, and promote social cohesion within communities as well as a sense of belonging (White & Frozzini, 2022). It goes without saying that these objectives are not without their challenges, particularly when it comes to implementing them within a variety of municipal contexts that are supposed to adapt to diversity and ensure the accessibility of all public services to the entire population (Larouche-LeBlanc, 2018). The integration of immigrants also represents a complex, cross-cutting field of public action, involving the legal, political, socioeconomic, cultural, religious, and spatial sectors (Carpentier, 2022). The major challenge specifically concerns the fight against racism and discrimination based on cultural and religious affiliation, which regularly hinders the social, economic, and political integration of many individuals from immigrant and/or racialized backgrounds. For example, under the *Act Respecting Equal Access to Employment in Public Bodies*, a provincial law that came into force in April 2001, municipalities must implement hiring measures for ethnic and visible (or racialized) minorities in order to correct the inequalities experienced by these groups (as well as women, aboriginal people, and people with disabilities) in the workplace (Loi sur l'accès à l'égalité en emploi | CDPDJ, 2018). This program, dissociated from the intercultural model, is rooted in a broader pluralist model that rejects all forms of discrimination, including racial discrimination (White & Frozzini, 2022).

Montreal in particular stands out for the unprecedented creation of an Office of the Commissioner for Combating Racism and Systemic Discrimination, which is intended to give greater visibility to "the progress of commitments, initiatives and plans aimed at combating racism and systemic discrimination, as well as the transformation of organizational culture" and the pursuit of "awareness-raising among managers for the production of approaches to diversity, equity and inclusion" (Ville de Montréal, n.d.). In particular, it was the lack of representativeness of municipal bodies in terms of cultural diversity, which is still being pointed out today, that led to the creation of this office:

> *Today, just look at BINAM (...) Look at the directory. There are almost no immigrants on the staff*. (1. Carlos)

Following a broad petition launched in March 2018 by a collective of citizens and organizations to ask the City of Montreal to hold a public consultation on the issues of racial profiling in the Montreal police force and systemic discrimination in employment

(Office de Consultation publique de Montréal, 2020), an anti-discrimination commissioner, Bochra Manai, was elected in January 2021 after Montreal Mayor Valérie Plante, having taken the measure of the phenomenon permeating the municipal apparatus (Radio-Canada.ca, 2020a), had "*no choice but to recognize systemic racism. There was a need for action*" (4. Charles). However, some respondents commented on the lack of room for maneuver on the part of the Commissioner, whose initiatives are more in the realm of "*awareness-raising*" rather than "*sanctioning*", as would be desired by militant anti-racist citizens for whom "*it is not enough*" (4. Charles).

Nevertheless, in a context where the Quebec government does not recognize systemic racism, notably for electoral reasons and due to the "*highly sensitive*" nature of the subject (4. Charles), this recognition by the mayor of Montreal, formalized by the unique creation of an Office of the Commissioner, remains overwhelmingly approved. On the other hand, interculturalism, the integration model discussed at length during the survey, is perceived as not very inclusive, making the population groups concerned ever more vulnerable.

4. A System Within a Larger System: Community Organizations in the Face of the Integration Discourse in Quebec

As mentioned above, the main aim of this research is to evaluate, according to the logic of systems thinking, the intercultural actions undertaken by community organizations within a local municipal and a broader provincial system. Faced with two levels of governance in terms of pluralism, and given their different, sometimes divergent, objectives, community organizations may find it difficult to draw up precise action plans that must, above all, meet the needs of an increasingly vulnerable migrant public. A few speakers also stressed the sensitive and overly ideological nature of Quebec interculturalism, which they do not wish to comment on:

There is this whole game of politics, and I do not want to get into it. (5. Sophie)

4.1. Interculturalism as Quebec's Model of Integration

Canada is one of the first states to have placed a major emphasis on the development of cultural pluralism, the integration of newcomers, and the equality of cultures by adopting an official multiculturalism policy in 1971, which has since become part of the "current conception of Canadian identity" (Kymlicka, 2021). The country has chosen to set out central and clearly defined principles to grant "egalitarian" and differentiated treatment to its citizens of diverse origins (Mathieu, 2017) within an officially bilingual framework. It is this principle that fundamentally differentiates Canadian multiculturalism from Quebec interculturalism, which sets out the principle of integration and the recognition of a Francophone cultural majority (Bouchard, 2012).

Faced with the challenges posed by ethnocultural diversity, particularly in the Montreal community environment of the 1960s, Quebec adopted a unique integration model that gradually reconciled pluralist principles with nationalist concerns (Couture & St-Louis, 2022): interculturalism. But from the mid-2000s onwards, this hitherto relatively consensual model became politicized in a context of great social tension marked by several crises, such as the reasonable accommodation crisis (2007–2008) and the crisis associated with the proposed Charter of Quebec Values (2013–2014). The interactionist intercultural philosophy that prevailed in the 1960s has gradually been recuperated by political elites to shape an interculturalism that supports, in particular, the preservation of the historic core of the French-speaking majority as asserted by Bouchard and Taylor in their 2008 *Report of the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences* (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008).

However, this recovery has led to a certain political vacuum, given the countless debates that continue today on the definition of Quebec interculturalism and its degree of openness to pluralism. Faced with this vacuum, with a conception of integration that is supposedly different in Canada, and with a municipal approach that is careful not to associate itself with either of these two models, many community workers lack reference points in the field.

For a long time, the Quebec government has insisted on developing a common public culture to bring Quebecers of all origins closer together. However, this project remains strongly associated with nationalist, even independentist, aims, which were perceived by some respondents as not very inclusive. In our research, nationalism and the defense of the French language were often closely associated. The model promoted by the provincial government is based on the idea that the language of the majority constitutes a foundation for effective integration. Following the adoption in May 2022 of the *Act respecting the official and common language of Quebec, French* (Bill 96), aimed at reinforcing the status of the French language in the province, the affirmation of French as a referent of identity is also seen as a form of imposition by the majority according to our respondents.

The sensitive issue of the relationship with immigrants, in particular, was raised time and again. According to Carlos, one of our respondents, François Legault was reelected in October 2022 as Premier of Quebec "*on the basis that immigrants are a threat to society*" (1. Carlos). Political interculturalism is thus evaluated by respondents as a model of integration that is a priori open to cultural diversity, but in reality constantly blames and reinforces the stigmatization of immigrants:

> *Instead of seeing interculturalism as an asset, as a great contribution to our society, we have diminished it, and this has an impact on the identity of immigrants and visible minorities. But what is my identity? It is a crack, a fracture in my identity structure. Am I a Québécois? Am I really going to be a Québécois, or am I always going to have to pack my suitcase to go back to my country?* (6. Guy-Wadih)

These perceptions are in line with a widespread conception in community organizations that interculturalism tends to maintain a deliberate balance of power between a historical cultural majority and minorities, particularly those of immigrant origin, who would threaten its nationalist project. This ethnocentric vision induces processes of differentiation and social exclusion, processes sometimes experienced by the stakeholders themselves who pointed out the Legault government's denial of systemic racism in Quebec institutions:

> *You know, for a long time, there was a denial about systemic racism there. I know that with the CAQ, François Legault had said that there was no systemic racism in Quebec. I think there really is denial about that. I think the government really wants to ease its conscience by making efforts but always maintaining a kind of status quo. It is like the white man in Quebec who has most of the resources and then makes the decisions.* (7. Caroline)

According to the respondents, the political refusal to acknowledge the existence of systemic racism reflects a deeper social malaise. For some practitioners, the whole sensitive issue of everyday racism, which has become invisible, also arises in the context of community-based intercultural intervention:

> *There is also a question of system, earlier, we were talking about systemic racism, but there is racism in everyday society that is not.... You know, the definition of racism can change from one person to the next. I have the impression that racism in Quebec is less and less visible to a white person. But it is still there, and that is because I think we really try to be careful. Sometimes, I want to do something. But if someone from a visible*

> *minority says, "No, that is offensive", like... I tend to back off. It is all good will. But you try to be careful because... It is easy to make a faux pas.* (8. Greta)

Preventing structural obstacles and changing pluralistic discourse, whether popular, media or political, are undoubtedly the main challenges facing community organizations and professionals in a society where, according to them, prejudice is tenacious and where "the current racist discourse speaks first and foremost in terms of 'evidence'; evidence made up of stereotypes and implicit biases" (Idir & Ekobena, 2019). The stakes remain high for many racialized respondents, who express recurrent difficulties in identifying with Quebec society.

4.2. The Integration Discourse in Quebec: Identity Issues and Challenges

In assessing Quebec's integration model, respondents also expressed their views on what the host community should be. As it has often been denounced during our survey, Quebec's interculturalism neglects to take into account the structural factors of exclusion and is only interested in the cultural and identity dimensions of integration. There is a glaring discrepancy between a normative and ideological discourse based on the values of the host society and the increasingly precarious socio-economic situation of certain groups, such as new arrivals and racialized minorities (Le Moing, 2014).

For the community workers interviewed, the urgency, therefore, lies in the concrete exercise of minorities' social and economic rights, such as the right to dignified employment and equitable remuneration (Labelle, 2001), as well as the fight against systemic discrimination, which is rife in all sectors of employability.

In the private sector, situations of deskilling have been reported. Faced with the non-recognition of their diplomas by several professional orders, immigrants selected by Quebec for their advanced qualifications "*become aware of a certain number of obstacles" linked in particular to a fragile command of the French language and have to "begin a process of reorientation to look for a food job*" (9. Clara):

> *People who come with a certain professional knowledge should be given the chance... But often in immigration policy, I would say that there are obstacles for those who arrive. Yet, they are specialists in different fields. A lot of human resources are wasted*. (10. Maïka)

Often from racialized groups, skilled immigrants can be victims of racial profiling within certain corporations. In its follow-up report on the application of the *Equal Access to Employment Act* published in 2020, the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (CDPDJ) indicated that, for all discrimination complaints handled on the grounds of ethnic or national origin, the labor market ranked first. In particular, the CDPDJ recommended that all sectoral workforce committees strengthen their commitment to real equality in employment and the fight against discrimination (CDPDJ, 2021), hence the major role of community organizations in raising awareness among organizations:

> *You see, the people most at a loss when it comes to intervention or intercultural issues are corporations, for example, who have no idea what to do. That is why I find it so interesting to put them in touch with the community, because the community has the strength to explain the phenomenon they are experiencing, and also to share tools and ways of doing things*. (11. Sarah)

These awareness-raising and training activities offered by community organizations are indispensable resources for organizations whose teams are now largely made up of people from diverse backgrounds, and who may be faced with situations of incomprehension or conflict. Situations of systemic exclusion can also be observed in jobs in Quebec's public services:

> *Quebec society has a lot to do. Even in the public service, you recruit people for positions at the bottom of the ladder. Yet these are people destined for management positions*. (6. Guy-Wadih)

While the workforce of most public organizations has yet to achieve equality in employment (Radio-Canada.ca, 2020b), speakers also stressed the need to train civil servants, because, according to one of our respondents who wanted to be identified by the name of her organization, "*as long as service providers are not made aware of difference, they will not be able to welcome it*" (12. Corapprochement).

Many respondents intend to counter institutional resistance to fully embracing diversity through awareness-raising and training. The discourse of political inclusion that does not translate into action, coupled with a "*media discourse that exists on immigrants, which is xenophobic in Quebec*" (2. Hélène), and biased perceptions of otherness or popular "*myths*" fed by "*misinformation*" and "*the fear of losing something*" (1. Carlos) are all obstacles that community workers wish to tackle. "*Negative clichés about neighborhood young people*" (13. Tohu) or prejudices about immigration in general lead to "*problems of understanding, interpretation and perception*" (12. Corapprochement), where people "*camp out in radical postures*" (14. Les oiseaux colorés). Awareness-raising in private and public organizations and popular education can defuse misunderstandings in a society where immigration is often perceived as a "*monolith*" and where certain categories of immigration are "*demonized, like asylum seekers*" (14. Les oiseaux colorés):

> *We need to take action with the authorities, we need to take action with elected representatives, and we need to take action with citizens. We need to act on all fronts. It is not easy, but it can be done in a single line. I see it as a ladder that you take horizontally and then go, go, go! Then, each step of the ladder will include a sector or a department or something different. But you have got to get going, you have got to keep moving*. (12. Corapprochement)

Only by making individuals and institutions aware of diversity can dialogue be reestablished. While it may not be possible to reverse the power relations that are part of a complex systemic operation, the popular education and training components of intercultural intervention can help to change the social perceptions of the different Other. In addition, using an awareness-raising and support approach that starts "*from the individual towards the collective*" (14. CDFIA), some organizations aim to bring about a social transformation that will ultimately enable minorities to occupy more space within the host society, in a more peaceful manner. It is only at the price of full social and economic participation in this society that the conditions for belonging to the community can be met.

It is precisely the question of the collective sense of belonging that remains sensitive for respondents, especially given the current political context and ideological polarization around identity issues for Quebec's cultural majority:

> *I think there are a lot of people who no longer recognize themselves in the Quebec referent. The relationship of identification, of calling oneself a Québécois, when you see the way these issues of pluralism are handled, whether it is issues of systemic racism, or the stubborn refusal to recognize anything apart from the Aboriginal question*. (15. Karim)

When asked about his organization's future prospects and wishes, a stakeholder with an immigrant background spontaneously raises the crucial issue of belonging to Quebec society:

> *I would like to find a solution or find effective ways to work on the question of identity (...) And where it is hard to say, is that yes, I assume I am a Québécois. I am a Québécois because I live in Quebec, because I pay my taxes in Quebec (. . .) But where it is hard for*

> *the person, in my case, is that I will never be a Québécois, because everyone asks you that question*. (16. Chronos)

This process of systematic differentiation is also experienced by this long-time Quebec resident:

> *I keep hearing, "Where do you come from?" and then, "Are not you a Québécoise?" I am sorry. I have been a Québécoise for 25 years now!* (11. Corapprochement)

Depending on their personal backgrounds, immigrant, racialized, and Canadian-born community workers who took part in our research do not express the same needs for recognition and identification. But one common element guides their thinking and practices: the denunciation of a balance of power in a Quebec context where "*there is always this Them against Us*" (4. Charles), despite a desire to "*assume oneself*" and "*claim an identity as a Quebec citizen*" (16. Chronos).

5. Conclusions

Our analysis mainly reveals how integration and intercultural practices conducted by community organizations operate quite autonomously within a local municipal system but also want to differentiate themselves from a broader provincial system. Even if some synergies can exist between such systems, especially regarding the shared principles of recognition of diversity, social cohesion, and condemnation of any discriminatory practices, the vast majority of these respondents have pointed out their contradictions. They mainly denounce a closed-minded discourse on the part of provincial authorities that contrasts with the desire of the City of Montreal and community organizations to redefine better living together, and this in a context where the current government maintains a certain ambiguity regarding the recognition of ethnocultural and religious diversity.

By their committed nature, the testimonials of these professionals also reveal the complexity of the sense of belonging that some racialized and/or immigrant community workers have developed for Quebec society over time. They also question the sensitive, often conflicting relationship between the majority and the minority groups, as well as the debate over the national question.

Whether they affect migrant populations or the community workers themselves who took part in our research, the mechanisms of differentiation and discourses of exclusion denounced by our respondents hinder the social and civic integration targeted by community organizations. At a municipal level, these discourses are hardly palpable. On the contrary, by adopting an intercultural strategy, Montreal has been able to activate several significant levers to improve citizen rapprochement and, above all, combat the racism and discrimination present in many of the city's institutions. For stakeholders, the mayor's recognition of this phenomenon is an encouraging first step, despite the fact that Montreal's intercultural action as a whole is perceived as lacking vigor on the social transformation front.

While Quebec interculturalism and its interactionist approach could have won more votes, respondents denounced at length the political recuperation of a philosophy that gave rise, in the 1960s, to numerous intercultural initiatives within the Montreal community milieu. Today, according to the participants, interculturalism has become the identity standard-bearer of a cultural majority nostalgic for its past and is associated with a narrow nationalist discourse that is not very open to diversity, and suspicious of minorities that would compromise a social project to which they are not invited. Finally, can Quebec nationalism be updated "outside any essentialist posture on identity and the conservatism it entails"? (Sadjo Barry, 2023). In the face of such resistance, the path of awareness-raising and popular education by community workers seems to be a solution, although the power relations induced by structural exclusion are still powerful, according to the participants.

Under these conditions, full identification with Quebec society remains compromised for a number of community workers whose cultural backgrounds resemble those of the public they support, even though they have been living in Quebec for a long time and are heavily involved in the life of the city.

In a context where issues of interculturality and the reception of migrants are giving rise to debates and growing tensions, this study thus intends to offer avenues of reflection for more inclusive and equitable policies and practices. Municipal governments seek to respond to local needs, particularly in the reception and integration of newcomers and immigrant communities. These actors need information and strategies to better coordinate their efforts and maximize their impact. They need evidence and policy recommendations to guide their policies and programs. This study could provide an enlightening analysis, policy evaluation levers, and recommendations to support municipal decision-makers in their efforts to create inclusive and welcoming communities.

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Essay

System Intertwining and Immigration Action Plans: The Case of a Provincial Funding Program in Quebec (Canada)

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Abstract: The ability of political power to be deployed on several levels of governance is a key element of public administration, insofar as it enables the various needs of the population to be met. However, conflicts of competence, jurisdiction or vision can arise when it comes to articulating these different levels of management or intervention, particularly when policies with a broader scope are applied to local situations, thus proving ill suited to the realities experienced on the ground. This essay, with an example in the province of Quebec, illustrates how the provincial and municipal levels of governance—each with differing visions and objectives—are confronted with dilemmas respecting the constraints imposed by their levels of government. Through a systemic point of view, I show how intertwining systemic levels can produce conflicts since each has its own logic. This is explained with the example of a text-based mediated organization conducted by the "*Programme d'appui aux collectivités*" (PAC). The essay also identifies some challenges faced by civil servants working at two different levels of government as well as the place of the idea of resilience, and proposes recommendations.

Keywords: action plan; administrative prescription; city; levels of governance; resilience; system

1. Introduction

The number of immigrants and migrants residing over the years in Canada has increased from 167,810 in 2009 to 193,100 in 2020 [1] and numbers continue increasing. The most recent figures indicate 430,635 new people in Canada as the "highest population growth rate in any quarter since the second quarter of 1957" [2]. International migration is the main source of this growth as it represents 96% of it. The number of temporary migrant workers is also increasing rapidly from 340,000 in 2017 to 470,000 in 2019 [3], and new figures indicate that in the third quarter of 2023, there were 312,758 in Canada [2]. Other than helping cope with the demographic decline in Canada, immigrants have contributed economically and socially. In a recent report, the Government of Canada explains that immigrants account for one third of all business owners, over one third of people working in science, technology and research, and one fourth in social care and service sectors [4]. From this, it can be deduced that the Government of Canada sees several advantages to immigration in certain sectors of its activity. At the same time, immigration is complex, and the lived experiences of immigrants are not always positive.

As the literature has shown, immigrants tend to settle in large metropolitan areas [5] contributing significantly to the country's urban socioeconomic and cultural fabric. For small and mid-sized cities, numbers are growing [4], helping address the risks of depopulation, socioeconomic decline and revitalizing those communities. However, to these ends, preparing the communities becomes a priority for different levels of governance in a context of increasing social diversification (among and within humans with their history, experiences, worldviews, etc.) that has been increasingly taken into account, at least in the literature [6,7]. To this end, programs are developed. However, conflicts are observed

between different levels of governance when working on the premises of programs developed at one institutional level and implemented at another institutional level. Confusions and conflicts that are sometimes difficult to understand emerge.

In this essay, I show how intertwining systemic levels (institutional, group and individual) can produce contradictions and conflicts since each has its own logic. This is explained with the example of a text-based mediated organization carried out by the "*Programme d'appui aux collectivités*" (PAC) (an administrative prescription) that has, like any national program, a broad scope and therefore is not well adapted to the realities experienced on the ground as I will demonstrate. The essay also identifies some challenges faced by civil servants working at two different levels of government and the place of the idea of resilience. After a brief literature review about the tensions produced by implementing policies in multilevel governance structures, I propose a theoretical analysis of how systemic levels can be seen to intertwine with each other and produce undesirable outcomes. The essay continues with a summary of the territorial and governmental organization; an example of the development and implementation of an action plan on immigration; the analysis of the program used to finance it; followed by a discussion and finally some recommendations.

2. Implementing Policies and Tensions in a Multilevel Governance Structure

The implementation of public policies in organizations and/or at different levels of governance is often fraught with tensions, which can significantly impact the success of a policy. These tensions can be seen at two different systemic levels: (a) within each organization or (b) between organizations. Within the organizations, the role of frontline supervisors is important to minimize disruptive tensions [8]. Handling the tensions can be performed by identifying strategies such as legitimating, interpreting and shielding [9]. Furthermore, it is recommended to develop organizational policy capacity among civil servants who should be supported by policy leadership (discretion and judgment) to manage tensions like administrative capacity and state capacity [10]. The studies underscore the complexity of policy implementation and the critical role of organizational actors in navigating and mitigating tensions within organizations.

Similar tensions and conflicts can be observed between levels of government [11,12]. Tensions can be exacerbated in a multilevel governance structure, such as the European Union, where power struggles between different actors can hinder policy delivery [13] and the multiple accountability to both member states and citizens [14]. Even within a single level of governance (a city), in a multilevel governance structure, tensions can arise because decentralization seems to generate centralized relationship [15].

Furthermore, in a multilevel governance structure, the role of municipalities in immigration and settlement policies can be limited to a consultative involvement by the federal or provincial levels or governance [16]. Despite this possible limitation, cities are crucial in the settlement and integration of immigrants, serving as policy innovators [17] and with an increasing international role (participating in networks and foreign policy) [18]. The literature supports the idea that cities can influence national policies, as seen in the case of refugee settlement policies in Denmark and Sweden [19]. However, tensions can arise between local and national governments, particularly in the provision of services to residents, for example, with irregular immigration status [20]. The tensions emerge in part because city civil servants are at the front line and can be influenced by the socioeconomic and individual consequences of exclusion they observe.

In a federal setting like Canada, a truly multilevel governance structure [21,22] in the realm of municipal policy action is almost nonexistent [23] in a format allowing policy development. Nevertheless, the different administrative levels (federal, provincial and municipal scales) maintain the channels of communication open. This is not to say their representatives speak continuously, but specific situations and continuous interactions can trigger collaboration. How does this collaboration evolve? How do the mandates, the missions and the administrative prescriptions of the respective organizations influence the

discussions or negotiations between civil servants on the front line? How do administrative prescriptions set the framework of interactions?

3. Intertwining Systemic levels: Resilience, Administrative Prescriptions and a Common Conception of the City

From a systemic point of view, it is important to differentiate between distinct levels of governance with their mandates and missions. This facilitates the understanding of civil servants as agents of the administration with constraints and leverages during the interactions.

Here, it is important to remember the centrality of "difference" and "interactions" in the influential work of Gregory Bateson. His ideas of interaction patterns (symmetrical and complementary), the creation of relationships during communicative exchanges and the importance of the accumulation of interactions for the differentiation of human behavioural norms (schismogenesis) [24] are important for the understanding of social organizations as based on relations of differences (interactions where differences are observed). The relational perspective on human communication of Bateson (individuals' behaviours arise from their interactions [25,26]) is here based on the idea that "a difference which makes a difference is an idea. It is a 'bit,' a unit of information" [25] (p. 199). If this is a highly abstract way of approaching the world, it is also one that is grounded on the idea of constant contact in the world where interactions are produced and where: "mutual influence generates effects [. . .] which in turn modify the initial situation" [27] (our translation).

In an asymmetrical interaction between, let us say for the sake of the argument, two different institutions where one (the city) has less financial capital than the other (the ministry), the idea of resilience comes to mind to explain how the city will cope with the situation. There is a vast literature about this concept first used at the individual level, and which has gradually been applied to the community and city levels [28,29] and even at the national level [30]. Today, the idea of social resilience [29] is used as a way to indicate the work that has to be carried out on both sides (the host society and the newcomer) to produce a welcoming environment. It also points to the importance of local institutions and local contexts in facilitating the resocialization of individuals and groups and their inclusion in the new environment. Resilience as a process and a reaction [31] entangles the main ideas of flexibility and resistance: a person or an institution needs to be flexible in order to resist and cope with a difficult situation. Even though these characteristics are present and active, resilience as a process and a reaction can be incorporated as a method of governmentality which helps keep power structure in place [32]. The idea of governmentality plays a great role here:

> Its understanding is inspired by the Foucauldian definition, understanding governmentality as a form of governance characterized as "conduct of conduct" (Foucault, 2000, p. 341). Closely related to the concept of bio-power, this type of governance "includes any program, discourse, or strategy that attempts to alter or shape the actions of others and oneself" (Cruikshank, 1999, p. 4). [. . .] The governmentality model gets rather dispersed, with different actors on different levels, which can be understood as nodes within a complex web. Given this structure, the knowledge and power flow in different directions—governance is deployed in a less structured and hierarchical manner. As noted by Chandler, the government no longer claims it governs—rather, it facilitates, enables, rules through life rather than over life, which turns everyday governance into a "management of contingency" (Chandler, 2014, p. 104) [32] (p. 9).

Knowledge plays an important role since: "Governance on the micro-level of sites and citizens is powered by 'knowledge that can be organized into governmental solutions' (Cruikshank, 1999, p. 40)" [32] (p. 23). Power is then exercised through individuals (or groups) with their consent and for themselves. This course of action performed willingly does not imply control over individuals but some influence exercised through different means. In this paper, the influence or form of power that is of interest is the one between

the ministry, the city and the civil servants at the city level. Working at the institutional organizational level (there are three main interrelated organizational levels: individual, group and institutional) of the city implies the knowledge of (if not learning) the rules and procedures, i.e., codes of conduct and the coordination of these codes for action [33]. These rules and procedures set the expected frameworks for action since there is an expectation of a particular outcome from the institution as a specialized organization which standardizes and generalizes its operations across different locations [33]. The organization of translocal relations, as institutional ethnography teaches us, is mediated by texts:

> What I call the ruling relations [. . .] come into view from a standpoint in the everyday world as a distinct organization of translocal relations that are based on or mediated by texts. The replicable text makes it possible for the same words and images to be present to people in different places and at different times and hence to introduce into people's doings the same organizing—though not determining—component [33] (pp. 205–206).

Here, I will propose to adopt the idea of administrative prescriptions (programs, policies, laws, documents, etc.) since it addresses two elements of the capacities institutions have: (1) to manage or take control/handle something (administer); and (2) the official requirement or recommendation of something (prescribe). Indeed, "the institutional level is the one that can impose on the population a systematic organization that reflects a desire for control and surveillance." [34] (our translation). The need for control and by extension surveillance is found in this tendency that I call management technologies. Starting with the idea that our productive way of being in the world guides us to conceive everything around us as a tool to be manipulated [35–37], our technological engagement is marked by a will to control that is not limited to things and can also be applied to our relationships with others [38,39]. Darin Barney has explained this in an elegant manner:

> Because technology combines *techne* and *logos*, its political impact is not confined to the material world, and to conceive of these consequences as if they were so limited is to ignore the fundamental ontological implications of technologies that weave a particular range of political possibilities into the essential fabric of our humanity. Marx, Heidegger, and Grant understood that technology uses us as we use technology; that technology is not just the motive force changing our external world, but also constitutes our inner world, our mode of thinking about, and caring for, things. Technology affects what we *are*, not just what we *do* [36] (p. 55).

Thus, taking into account the extension of our technological experiences in our lives and returning to the Greek root of *tekhnologia* as systematic treatment, it can be argued that administrative prescriptions constitute important means based on text for the systematic treatment of the population. They are a constitutive part of the tendency to control and surveil by different means (management technologies) present in our society. In this context, administrative prescriptions are a good starting point to explore the means of organizing work and social relations since they help the coordination of institutional processes.

Text-based mediated organization carried out by administrative prescriptions can acquire variations by the actions of civil servants and the influence of their situation-specific particularities within a particular setting. Administrative prescriptions are also culturally situated as will be evident in the following sections with the analysis proposed about the "*Programme d'appui aux collectivités*" (PAC) from the "*ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration*" (MIFI). Here, I want to highlight some factors that anchor the civil servant's professional posture and some factors that facilitate a common ground and eventually an opening for agreements on contentious points.

(a) Anchors to the profession

Every institution has a mission and they can suggest vision mandates or objectives which propose general orientations. They cannot be ignored for the understanding of its functioning since they permeate the whole organization and constitute a division of

labour. The example I explore in this essay illustrates the interaction between the city of Saguenay and the MIFI through the PAC. Given the space I have, I will limit the analysis to the mission of these institutions.

The MIFI describes its mission as follows: "The Ministry's mission is to select immigrants who meet Quebec's needs, and to promote their francization, integration and contribution to Quebec's prosperity."[40] (our translation). What stands out is the idea of selecting people that meet the needs of the province and contribute to its prosperity. Even if there is a will to help some people to learn French (francization) to include them in their new society (integration), they are subjected to the utilitarian imperative of meeting needs and contributing to prosperity. In the case of the city of Saguenay, here is the mission given by the "*ministère des Affaires municipales et de l'Habitation*" (MAMH): "Working alongside municipal authorities to plan and develop quality living environments in the interests of our citizens." [41] (our translation). Here, the main idea is the development of an environment where it is good to live.

The focus of these missions are completely different: the first one promotes the management of a population to achieve certain gains and the second one prioritizes the engineering of the environment for the good of citizens. Here, I would like to draw our attention to the interesting choice of the word "citizens" which can be conceived as having an inclusive or an exclusive connotation. Indeed, it can indicate that we talk about the whole population (inclusive), but it can also indicate a more restrictive use and only apply to people who are considered to belong (citizenship). Having raised this concern, I want to insist on the fact that these missions guide the work of civil servants. And, in the case of the city, another influence comes from the social development approach adopted by employees in the departments responsible for recreation and community development ("*loisirs et vie communautaire*"). They oversee municipal action on diversity and inclusion in Quebec municipalities.

These influences coming from institutional preferences are at work during the interactions between civil servants from these two different institutions and found them in the institutional vision they are part of or the limits imposed by other organizations like the Treasury Ministry, which sets the amounts and the norms to allocate funds.

(b) Facilitating a common ground

The interactions between two different civil servants, each representing two different levels of governance and therefore different divisions of labour and missions, can at a certain point join in a common conception of the city where two ideas converge: *la ville et la cité*. In an urban setting, the ideas of *ville* and *cité* as Holden [42] explains, following the conception of Sennett [43], is one where the *ville* is seen as the spaces and the structures, while the *cité* is the way of living and conceiving our interactions with the others that live in the same city:

> In French, the distinction between the city of building and the city of dwelling is the distinction between the ville and the cité. The ville is a physical place, set of structures, functional flows; the cité is the anthropology, the consciousness, the political economy and the citizenship of the city [42] (p. 238).

The conjunction of these ideas (ville and cité) and the possibility that it could be shared among civil servants in opposite camps, can produce an opening towards negotiable outcomes. In other words, this is what happens when civil servants negotiate to improve the life of the population in the city as the objective.

Another factor that can play a part is the feeling of belonging to a shared community. We know the feeling of belonging, and sharing this feeling helps to maintain positive interactions with its emotional dimension and degree of participation [44,45] and therefore can also facilitate the development of a common ground between civil servants. Here, positive interactions are a key element and are based on the contact hypothesis from Allport [46] and the subsequent studies stressing, among other factors, the importance of

time spent with the other [47], and the sites or "zones of encounter" [48] where shared activities and common goals can take place.

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From a systemic point of view, we have the institutional level of interaction with the ministry and municipality (which are also two levels of governance) that impose some constraints on the civil servant. And we also have the individual level of interaction that can be observed when civil servants meet and their multiple identities operate. We can also observe the group level that can play a part as members of specific services in the respective institutions or as part of their preferred identities. Clear dividing lines between these different organizational levels (institutional, group and individual) are difficult to work in life since they are always intertwined and their different components articulated with each other in a way that can produce varied outcomes. To give a more concrete example of this intertwining of organizational levels and some challenges it produces, the next sections present an analysis of the "*Programme d'appui aux collectivités*" (PAC) as an example of a text-based mediated organization that frames the relationship of civil servants and helps us better understand the interactions between individuals navigating different systemic levels.

4. Quebec Territorial and Governmental Organization and Inclusion

Canada has a federal and a provincial government and each province has its own organizing structure of the territory. Quebec's territory is divided into *seventeen administrative regions*. These regions constitute the first geographical division of the province, but without political power associated. The second division constitutes a supralocal level consisting of the "*Regional County Municipalities (RCM)*" (territory grouping municipalities and, in some cases, unorganized territories—there are 87 of them in Quebec—and there are also fourteen cities and agglomerations that exercise some of the powers and responsibilities of RCM) and the "*Metropolitan Communities (MC)*" (there are two in the province: Montreal and Quebec). The RCM administer the development of the territory among other things and the MC ensure a more coherent planning and administration of the regions they cover. At this level, there is also the "*Regional Administration of Kativik*" which administers the development of the territories above the 55th parallel with some exceptions. The third division of the territory constitutes the local one. At this level, there are 1133 *local municipalities* and one regional government (Eeyou Istchee Baie-James) [49]. The territory of the province is vast but most of the population resides in the urban areas which are concentrated along the Saint Lawrence River. Moreover, there is a disparity among regions when comparing the total population living in those territories and the extent of the land (for example, in 2021, Montreal had a population of 2,025,900 inhabitants; a land area of 498 km^2 for a population density of 4155.1 inhab/km^2. The Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, for the same period had a population of 279,900 inhab.; a land area of 95,760 km^2 for a population density of 2.9 inhab/km^2 [50,51]). Most of the population is concentrated in 66 RCM (33% of the population). It is also important to acknowledge that 16.7% of the population (1,397,821) lives in 56 RCM of 10,000 to 49,999 inhabitants and 16.3% of the population (1,368,654) live in 10 RCM of 100,000 inhabitants or more [49]. There is clearly a divide in the experience of these populations growing in urban constructs that are so different in density.

Because of these differences that affect the experiences of the population, cities and RCM are well positioned to help create the conditions of inclusion for the new population: they have the authority to administer their territories and the proximity with their citizens which informs their knowledge about the needs. Despite their relative autonomy, municipal administrations remain at the mercy of government programs (federal or provincial), their funding opportunities and their policy and structural changes. Among many examples, the abolition of the "*Directions régionales de l'immigration*" (Regional Immigration Departments, RID) in 2015 still resonate in the collective memory. They helped coordinate programs and services with other structures that disappeared at the same time. Since 2019, the provincial government has started to implement a similar network, and today, there are nine RID, 86 integration officers and 73 regional immigration counselors [52]. As in any development,

there is always an impetus that comes from real needs and challenges like the shortage of labour force, the aging population, etc. The new regional structure in place is not a stranger to these challenges.

5. Organizing for Inclusion

In the case of the City of Saguenay, the process of development and implementation of the Immigration Action Plan (IAP) (Funded at 50% by the *ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration* (MIFI) at the provincial level through the "*Programme Mobilité-Diversité*" (PMD) (Mobility-Diversity Program)) represents a pathway that starts with economic and labour needs, demographic challenges, occupation and vitality of the territory and considerations of the humanity of people. Indeed, the process has made it possible for elected officials and members of the municipal administration to go beyond the economic dimension of the migrant's (a person with a temporary status) and immigrant's (a person having permanent residency or citizenship by naturalization, and born outside Canada) trajectory and include other human dimensions (democratic participation, health, leisure, sports, culture, community life, etc.) (I was privileged to witness this since I participated as an expert and member of a community group. I am still collaborating as a member of a consulting board organized by the city. Furthermore, I was also involved in a similar process (creation of an IAP) coordinated by an RCM).

This transformation of the vision of the other has not been achieved in silos, but throughout the process of promoting accessibility to local actors. Indeed, for elected officials and the municipal administration, it is essential to avoid exclusion so as not to create "citizens who are more equal than others". The city administration, along with the person in charge of the project, organizes the work in four steps: "(1) the completion of the state of affairs and the portrait of immigration services and initiatives, (2) the creation of working committees with partners consulted during the process, (3) the development of a concerted action plan, and (4) the evaluation of the process" [53] (p. 202) (our translation; for more details, see [54] (pp. 9–11)).

The first step (July to December 2018) being crucial, the choice to meet with people allows for the establishment of stronger bonds of trust between the community and the project leader, and by extension with the City of Saguenay. More specifically, the process included: (a) individual meetings, (b) the distribution of a questionnaire that identified organizations, services offered and initiatives in the community that promote intercultural relations, and (c) the organization of discussion groups that focused on the issues and challenges of living together in an intercultural context. These consultations also provide a space for reflection on considerations related to rapprochement, intercultural dialogue and the sustainable sociocultural inclusion of immigrants. During this stage, four major challenges were identified:

> (1) Promote the conditions necessary for the reception, settlement and sustainable establishment, (2) promote the conditions necessary for sustainable economic and professional integration, (3) promote the conditions necessary for intercultural rapprochement and dialogue and for sustainable social and cultural integration, (4) promote the conditions necessary for concerted action, strategic partnerships, transversality and complementarity of actions [54] (p. 10) (our translation).

It is important to understand that this first step allowed immigrant communities and their allies to address all their needs/concerns and make them visible/compelling to the city.

The second step (creation and consultation of working committees; January to February 2019) allows for the validation of the issues and challenges raised by the partners, the identification of elements of strategic positioning, and the confirmation of the objectives, means and adequate partners for their realization. The third step (February to April 2019) is the development of the action plan, which was officially launched on 3 October 2019. Finally, the fourth step should have started in 2020 with a series of evaluations over time. Given the disruption produced by COVID-19, only the progress and the final reports (from

the agreement that allowed the development of the action plan) submitted to the MIFI contain some information about the evaluation. Indeed, these documents mention the activities/actions that could be carried out until 2020. In this context, the fourth step is resumed in 2021 with the signing of a new agreement with the MIFI, announced on 17 June 2021. This agreement provides the necessary funds to restart the consultation, present the advances and find the best way to evaluate the process. It was therefore proposed to the MIFI to give the city one more year to fulfill the commitments of the action plan. This is so because the measures introduced by public health during the pandemic forced civil servants to make difficult choices which directly affected the consultations and evaluations.

6. The Programs

Developing services in a city requires investment. The provincial government's immigration ministry "*ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration* (MIFI)" developed and updated the past years different programs to help cities and community groups elaborate different projects at the municipal and the provincial levels. One of these programs was the "*programme Mobilisation-Diversité*" (PMD) that was replaced by the new "*Programme d'appui aux collectivités*" (PAC) in June 2020. In this section, both programs are explained since they influenced the conception of the City of Saguenay Immigration Action Plan (IAP) and the following steps.

The "*programme Mobilisation-Diversité*" (PMD) was established in 2012–2013 and the City of Saguenay developed and implemented its IAP with the help of two versions of the PMD (2018–2019 and 2019–2020). These two versions are presented simultaneously here, and later sections address the variations between them and subsequent versions, including the latest one (2023–2026). The PMD is described by the ministry as a program helping "building more welcoming and inclusive communities. This program is designed to promote the full participation of immigrants and ethnocultural minorities in French." [55, 56] (our translation). Two main objectives are mentioned:

> Support for structuring projects likely to promote the full participation in community life, in French, of people of all origins through the implementation of actions aimed at: (1) supporting the building of more welcoming and inclusive communities conducive to the full participation of immigrants and ethnocultural minorities, by encouraging openness to diversity and open and active intercultural exchanges; (2) creating conditions conducive to attracting and sustaining the settlement of immigrants in welcoming and inclusive communities, including fostering the growth of primary immigration and secondary migration out of the Montreal metropolitan area [55,56] (our translation).

Five ideas/aims stand out: welcoming and inclusive communities, participation, proper conditions, attraction and settlement. These ideas and aims continued in the new "*Programme d'appui aux collectivités*" (PAC) since they are steered to help achieve one of the main objectives of the government action plan: "The Program thus responds to Objective 4.1 of the ministry 2019–2023 Strategic Plan, which aims to 'increase the contribution of immigrants to the vitality and prosperity of regions.'"[57] (p. 4, our translation). The important aspect here is the growth of the regions using immigrants as a resource for that end. For that reason, the new version of the program in 2020 develops the previous objectives and specifies:

> [General objective] The program aims to contribute, through society's collective commitment, to building more welcoming and inclusive communities for immigrants and other ethnocultural minorities so that they can participate fully, in French, for the prosperity of Quebec.
>
> [Specific objectives] (1) Create conditions beneficial to the attraction, sustainable settlement in the regions and integration of immigrants and other ethnocultural minorities; (2) promote harmonious intercultural relations between Quebecers of all origins; (3) ensure the full participation of immigrants and other ethnocultural

> minorities in the life of the community, in French; (4) contribute to the fight against racism, intimidation and discrimination in order to promote respectful, egalitarian and inclusive living together [57] (p. 5) (our translation).

The latest version of the program (2023) insists on "promoting regionalization" [58] (p. 4, our translation) and eliminates the participation in the life of the community in French (this is because a new agency, *Francisation Québec*, was created):

> [General objective] The program aims to increase the capacity of communities to be more welcoming and inclusive. It contributes, with other departmental and government programs, to the attraction, integration and sustainable settlement of immigrants and other ethnocultural minorities, so that they can participate fully, in French, for the prosperity of Quebec [. . .].
>
> [Specific objectives] (1) Create conditions favourable to the attraction, long-term settlement in the regions and integration of immigrants and other ethnocultural minorities; (2) promote harmonious intercultural relations between Quebecers of all origins; (3) combat racism, intimidation and discrimination to promote respectful, egalitarian and inclusive living together [58] (p. 5) (our translation).

The programs are designed to help increase the dynamism of municipalities, but also to meet the "government desire to give overall coherence to the ministry's policies" [57,58] (p. 4, our translation). This is important to understand as a motive for certain restrictions imposed on municipalities in relation to another program which is specific to the community sector. The government expresses a will to not overlap the responsibilities with the services, which is a laudable objective, among other things, for its logic (maximization of resources). Nevertheless, as the next sections explains, this introduces limits and biases for the development and the engagement of people in the field.

Each program has a specific component for municipalities and RCM. The PMD had a broader description which did not precisely ask for the creation of an action plan as a condition to finance the imagined activities or projects included in that plan. The PAC explicitly does that in both versions:

> The activities and projects funded under this component must be integrated into an action plan for the attraction, sustainable settlement, civic integration and full participation of immigrants and ethnocultural minorities in French [. . .], including priorities for action based on a strategic needs analysis [57] (p. 6) (our translation).

The ministry also has to approve the action plan before signing another agreement for the implementation of the activities and projects included in it. In the latest version of the PAC (2023), the government introduced "eight characteristics" to define an inclusive and welcoming community, which cities applying to the PAC need to consider as a starting point for the reflections leading to development of their action plan [58] (p. 5, 32). In addition, the provincial government recognizes the importance of addressing the needs of the immigrant population in the context of each city. To do that, the government asks the cities to carry out a diagnostic of the needs in the territory concerning the attraction, the integration and the full participation of immigrants and ethnocultural minorities in the life of the community.

Like any program, the PMD and the two versions of the PAC set different conditions of admissibility (for organizations, activities and projects) and the rules or criteria applied (how to present the projects, activities or action plans, for the evaluation, the eligible expenses and their calculation, how the funds will be given, and other conditions (among the powers of the ministry, there is the capacity to terminate the financial assistance agreement at any time)). Furthermore, the new version of the PAC insists on the admissibility of "activities with a community impact" [58] (p. 6, our translation), the respect of previous agreements and to take into account sustainable development principles [58] (p. 15). All of these makes the selection of activities more complex.

Within all versions of the PAC, there is a closer oversight by the government through the supervision of the work conducted and the participation of an individual (representing the ministry) of the activities. On a side note, the regional immigration counselor participated in all the meetings leading to the creation of the IAP. With the PAC, this oversight (control and surveillance) can also be observed during the creation of an action plan since the MIFI can ask for preliminary versions or ask for any document. There is also a "management, monitoring and assessment committee" set in place as soon as the ratification of the financial assistance agreement to draw the action plan is carried out. This committee oversees the implementation of the action plan with members of the city and the MIFI among other individuals. As mentioned, the MIFI makes the final decision since they can reject the IAP (terminate their agreement to finance it) even if the municipality has approved it before sending the IAP to the MIFI. These measures of oversight allow the government to keep the initiatives proposed within the boundaries established by the programs.

The control and even the surveillance established by the government with these programs does not come solely from specific dispositions (although details matter), but also from the influence on the mindset of civil servants as the following sections explain.

7. Building with . . . Pressure

Before explaining the effects of the administrative prescription, it is important to give more context to the relationship between the city and the MIFI in our example. Among the partners, the relationship with the MIFI was a structuring factor that had an impact on the scope of the process. The city, from the beginning of the process, integrated the MIFI regional immigration counselor based in Saguenay. The good relationship between the MIFI's counselor and the civil servant responsible for developing the IAP was inestimable through the whole process: they show proof of dialogue between them. Indeed, it was not difficult to have access to each of them during the process and they were instrumental in helping to understand specifics with regard to their respective institutional knowledge. If the relationship with the counselor from the MIFI was positive, there was another factor which influenced the dynamic over time: the election at the end of 2018 of a new provincial government (*Coalition avenir Québec*, CAQ). The change of government was effective as of March 2019. The CAQ came with a strongly held economic view of immigration issues and a will of oversight and intervention which is the product of the politicization of immigration in the province. Indeed, immigration was one of the main delicate issues debated during the campaign and the CAQ proposed drastic changes in a campaign based on a nationalistic (see nativist) rhetoric that considered immigrants and some minorities as a problem to solve (see, for example, [59]).

The good relationship between the two civil servants helped go through a complex process of development but could not ease the structural weight of text-based mediated organization carried out by at least one of the many administrative prescriptions (the programs) (for example, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (S.C. 2001, c. 27), the Act to ensure the occupancy and vitality of territories (O-1.3), the Municipal Ethics and Good Conduct Act (E-15.1.0.1), etc.). This is performed by *two elements* of the framework set by the administrative prescription. The first element of the framework set by the programs start with the structure imposed through three components. *The first component* is the action plan which, on the first versions of the program, was not included in the section about the eligible projects. It appeared in the second version. In the latest versions, it became the first phase of the program accompanied by a guide to elaborate the action plan (see [60]). The second phase is the implementation of the activities and projects included in the IAP. The requirement of conceiving an action plan moved from a less central section (other conditions for municipalities) to the first requirement before starting any project on the territory. This change is important for understanding the coordination taking place across the province since every municipality willing to start any project for their immigrant population is forced to organize their work as prescribed. As I mentioned, the work

will presumably become more complex with the added requisites in the latest version of the PAC.

The second main structural organizing component of the programs is the section of the eligible initiatives, the projects and the interventions. This is where the main discrepancies in visions and objectives are situated since city civil servants can be confronted with different dilemmas. For example, guaranteeing access to services for all residents on the territory while respecting the constraints imposed by another level of government and the equilibrium of the social ecosystem of its territory. During the process of the IAP's conception, some negotiations between the city officials and the representatives of the ministry took place. Some friction was visible about the vision regarding the actions to be implemented and the conception of how the program should be. This is a classic imbalance between two systemic levels which do not share the same objectives and capacities. It creates an unbalance of power relation: the ministry having more leverage than the municipality who needs the subsidy. The program remains a rigid framework that is questioned since it does not allow much flexibility/adaptation to the reality of the city's environment. This seems more frustrating since the civil servant is well aware of the extended needs in the city. Before writing the IAP, the municipal employee mapped the situation and needs expressed by immigrants in the territory of the city with its partners, which, among them, was the MIFI's counselor. It was obvious that the civil servant's mandate constitutes a frame almost impossible to avoid. The MIFI's counselor always turned back to her superiors for information and verification. This reaction is guided by their procedures which affect the actions (self-control in this case) even if the individuals have agency. The new versions of the program (the PAC) mention the importance of having an IAP adapted to the particularities of the cities and the characteristics of their environment. However, there is a clear separation for the ministry between the projects or initiatives that can be subsidized by the PAC and the ones that fall into the "*Programme d'accompagnement et de soutien à l'intégration* (PASI)" (Program of accompaniment and support for integration). This can create some frustration as it reduce the possibilities for the city. Indeed, the city can only privilege some activities and there is no room to develop structures that can be needed in the territory.

The description of overall initiatives, projects and interventions expected is important for two main reasons: (1) the exclusion of projects which are inadequate following the descriptions but could have contributed to the vitality and the development of the localities; and (2) by extension, the capacity to orient the projects that could be proposed by the partners. Individuals or groups will not present projects that have any chance to be financed by the city and the MIFI if they do not respond to the objectives of the IAP and which could not go along the lines established by the actions mentioned in the IAP. Here, the gap created by the program and the community initiatives is more evident. However, civil servants were resilient in writing broader descriptions and when implementing the action plan: allowing projects which could fit with the objectives or replace some initiatives. This flexibility is possible by the resistance shown during the process of conception of the IAP and the subsequent work of organizing the selection of projects or contacting the partners to discuss the possibilities during a one-on-one session with the civil servant responsible for the IAP. Moreover, the concern about access to services and the knowledge accumulated after the first two steps of conception of the IAP grounded the three concepts adopted by the city: inclusion, equity and diversity. These ideas seem to influence the city's conception of social development through access to services and information, and were instrumental in countering the pressure from the ministry who at the time started to reorganize their provincial vision for access to services (through the channels decided and controlled by them). Another problem that can rise is that there is room for friction about the interpretation of criteria formulated in the PAC (the civil servants from the MIFI interpret the norms of the PAC) and the will from the representative of the MIFI to find ways to help. They are the keepers and the interpreters of the norms and establish where the line is drawn.

The third main structural organizing component of the programs is the accountability and financial assistance. Like every subsidy, there is always a set of rules for the accountability which are crucial for the respect of the agreement, but also the responsibility of managing public funds for the collective good. These obligations are standard procedures guaranteeing compliance with certain rules and allowing an oversight over the entire process. For example, one of the obligations is the authorization that a person representing the ministry (usually one of their civil servants) could attend any initiative or project carried out under the program (which was performed throughout the process of creation of the IAP). The more systematic and pressing method of oversight imposed is usually composed of three documents: (1) the signing of the financial assistance agreement; (2) the midyear progress report; and (3) the final report. These documents provided by the ministry include or ask for a multitude of information, allowing the reader to assess the progress or set more precise rules for future agreement. This oversight also comes with the leverage of the subsidy since, for example, at the one-year agreement in 2018, upon signing, the ministry gave 50% of the amount, then 40% at the positive evaluation of the mid-year report, and finally 10% at the positive evaluation of the final report. In 2020 and 2023, the percentages changed since the agreement is for three years and the amount of the subsidy was divided accordingly (one-third per year). The total subsidy for the conception of the action plan in 2018 amounted to CAD 125,000 (50% of this amount came from the ministry), and the second agreement obtained in 2019 was for the same amount [61,62]. The pressure to "fulfill the commitments" is obvious and civil servants in the city are expected to complete and send the required documents on time. A large number of resources (time, expertise, energy, etc.) are required to ensure the documents are properly completed and the addendums included, if needed. Here, it is not only the burden of the work that plays a great role, but also the dependency that is created for the subsidy with the stress related to the period of evaluation of the reports since their validation is linked to the funds.

Finally, the second element of the framework set by the programs is the influence of the idea that immigrants and minorities are resources that can contribute to the vitality and prosperity of regions. If there was a step towards the understanding that people need more than a job to settle, the economic imperative still has a strong influence on the structure of the program. Nevertheless, other human dimensions are present particularly on the guide to produce an action plan [60]. In the guide, there is a section about the characteristics of an inclusive collectivity, where several propositions contrast with the governmental discourse. For example, it explains systemic discrimination [60] in an understandable and coherent manner, which is surprising given the fact that the provincial Premier has denied its existence consistently [63,64]. In any case, the tendency to conceive immigrants as resources (demography, economy and settlements) is present, promoted and reproduced through the program across the province.

To conclude, the framework set by the program (structure and conceptions) plays an important role in organizing the work and social relations with the ensemble of mechanisms helping to coordinate the expected actions. Civil servants show some resilience through the process, allowing some openings for different initiatives, but helping at the same time to maintain the structure set with the help of the program. In the following sections, some recommendations are proposed to ease the framework set by the program and there is a discussion of some other important elements to consider in this analysis.

8. Discussion

We are used to seeing programs (governmental in this case) as frameworks organizing different projects with the same objectives, considering them to be simple procedures to follow. However, administrative prescriptions like the PAC have structuring and coordinating impacts that can limit or help the development of cities depending on their capacity for resilience, their knowledge of the needs expressed by the immigrant population and the centralized relationship created in a decentralized institutional context, as the literature points out.

Cities have demonstrated their leadership in coordinating their partners, mobilizing the experts in their territories and consulting the necessary sections of the population [65]; but they have limited resources. The extent of the coordination required to create an action plan and then implement it encourages us to understand the consequences of the framework developed by an administrative prescription as an example of management technologies. Knowing the possible consequences of this apparatus contributes to helping initiatives adequate to the contextual needs of the city to flourish. However, there is a fine line between the influence exercised by an administrative prescription like the program analyzed and the benefits of giving tools or guidance which necessarily orient the other.

An important corollary to this proposition is the centrality of resilience (flexibility and resistance) as a force of equilibrium which needs, from civil servants, the acquisition of institutional knowledge and an understanding of the social and organizational ecosystem of the territory. However, resilience can be a strategy of governance since it helps keep the power of the organization in check. This is not something consciously performed by the employees of the municipalities or the MIFI. Rather, it is a mechanism activated by their role as civil servants and their objective to provide access to services and valuable information.

On a more concrete note, programs are not based on a common, long-term understanding of local and regional immigration issues. They are focused on government objectives at the national level/scale, which do not necessarily respond to the realities and needs of municipalities. For example: (a) the impossibility of using leverage from other ministries; (b) the impossibility of using the 50% of the fund given by the city as they see fit; (c) the absence of liberty to implement services even if they are given by another partner like a community group; (d) the short time given between the program call and the submission deadline; (e) corollary to this is the lack of awareness of municipal deadlines; or (f) the tendency to privilege activities over the development of structures which are needed to prepare the territory. For these reasons, a collaboration that benefits the city requires structured, complementary, coherent, tailored and long-term actions between municipalities and the ministry. This is possible since the ministry has already acknowledged the importance of municipalities: their proximity to the population which other levels of governance lack. This proximity allows the cities to be aware, for example, of division among community groups or the internal difficulties some of these community organizations face. This knowledge is important when framing long-term strategies with community groups behaving with territorial reactions that undermine the common good.

A final element to mention is the fact that even if civil servants in the cities are obliged to conduct a diagnostic to assess the needs of the immigrant population—before conceiving their IAP—the needs and concerns of this population can be diminished during the process if they are considered as simply a few voices among a multiplicity of others from actors with different interests (employers, school boards, etc.). This can also be understood as the result of intertwining systemic levels (individual, group and institutional) when people position themselves during the process and communicate their preferences during the interactions.

Departing from some points raised in this essay, future work can focus on the impact the process of developing an action plan had on civil servants (their understanding of the process, the ecosystem, etc.). Deepening this knowledge could give us a better cartography of the impacts a process of development has on professionals in that sector. Research can also be carried out about the impact the development and implementation of action plans had on social relations, and more precisely, on intercultural relations. This is important since the process of socialization can be easily disrupted. Also, analyzing different cases with a comparative framework can lead us to understand some variations and commonalities. Finally, a second phase to test the propositions put forward in this essay has been considered, employing semi-structured interviews with municipal employees. In spite of some limitations, the idea that administrative prescriptions have structuring and coordinating impacts that can limit or help the development of cities depending on the resilience

of civil servants seems valuable for understanding the complexity of social relations and social constructs.

9. Recommendations

This list aims for a more harmonious development of the organizational capacities in every municipal community:

- The PAC should be flexible regarding the needs expressed by the cities: for example, by allowing the implementation of any project the city considers valuable for their population or institutional development (their structure).
- The capacity to use other resources from other ministries.
- The liberty for the city to use their part of the total budget from the program as they see fit among the initiatives proposed by the community.
- A reduction in the workload of city civil servants: simplify the MIFI forms and provide more resources to help them through the process.
- A recurring subsidy for the development of the city's capacities in relation to immigration issues.
- Through all the processes of elaboration, implementation and evaluation of the IAP the voices of immigrants in the territory must always be present and taken into account.
- A long-term common and coherent vision of the actions to be implemented regarding the regionalization of immigration between the cities and the ministry.

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Essay

A Reflection on Paradoxes and Double Binds in the Workplace in the Era of Super-Diversity

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Abstract: Occupational health and safety (OHS) is a largely technical field, still guided by a biomedical model of health that seeks to isolate factors that cause injury. Despite a growing literature on organisational and managerial factors influencing occupational health, their full integration into the OHS concept has been slow. A broader understanding is still needed to recognise the restructuring of work and the link between well-being at work and management style. In the context of a rapidly changing world of work, increasing workforce diversity, and inequality, OHS needs to take account of the social sciences and humanities to broaden its reductionist vision. Occupational illnesses, distress, and suffering, especially in relation to relational or organisational issues, have no initial cause or specific ontology; they result from a long-standing process or repetitive relational pattern that needs to be exposed and understood in greater depth, considering contextual factors and dynamics. Using the authors' anthropological backgrounds and the basic principles of the double bind theory developed many decades ago by Gregory Bateson and his colleagues at the Palo Alto School of Communication, we propose a reflection on pragmatic paradoxes or double bind situations in the workplace (which can be briefly defined as the presence of contradictory or conflicting demands or messages), their potential impact on workers' health and well-being, and how to resolve them. This paper sought to explore the world of pragmatic paradoxes and double binds by discussing different categories, types, or forms of paradoxes/double binds that occur in the context of occupational health and their underlying mechanisms. It also includes a discussion of the possible link to the concept of super-diversity, as it too is associated with migration channels, employment, gendered flows, and local systems. Finally, we discuss the practical implications of this understanding for health professionals, researchers, and policymakers, from a perspective of promoting more holistic and context-sensitive interactional approaches to occupational health.

Keywords: working environment; occupational health; systemic thinking; double bind theory; organisational paradox; managerial paradox; power dynamics; communication; well-being

1. Introduction

1.1. The Context of Occupational Health and Safety

In the complex field of occupational health and safety (OHS), many interacting determinants and factors influence physical and mental well-being. During the latter half of the 20th century, research in the field of OHS made significant advances, drawing on a wide range of disciplines: toxicology, epidemiology, industrial relations, management, ergonomics, occupational medicine, rehabilitation sciences (physiotherapy and occupational therapy), industrial psychology, biomechanics, engineering sciences, and so on. The social sciences also entered this complex, multi-disciplinary universe, notably the sociology of organisations, clinical sociology, the anthropology of work and health, management studies, communication sciences, and industrial relations. The growing influence of the social sciences in areas previously reserved for the medical and health sciences began in the mid-1970s with the introduction of the "biopsychosocial approach" in psychiatry by the

internist and psychiatrist George L. Engel and the "ecological systems theory" by the psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner [1] before spreading to other areas, where it influenced the conceptualisation of the model of social determinants of health [2]. This conceptualisation was then adopted by the World Health Organization in 2011 and adapted by many public health authorities around the world, which recognised, among other things, multifactorial workplace factors, such as job security, income, working conditions, inclusive practices, and access to health services and assistance in the event of an occupational injury. These models share a common concept of health based on the multidimensionality of risk or protective factors and the importance of context (cultural, social, relational, economic, climatic, geopolitical, etc.) in shaping the well-being and quality of life of individuals and entire populations. They moved away from a rigid biomedical or narrowly pathological approach.

Although these models have been widely accepted in many areas of intervention and research in health and social services, and although they have sought to emphasise the interdependence between individuals and their physical, social, and cultural environment, it was not always clear how they related to each other [3]. Despite this epistemic flaw, such models—often called holistic—provide valuable frameworks for understanding the complex systems that influence human development and interactions. Such models inspired the development of work disability prevention models to address the interplay and complementarity of workplace issues, insurance system issues, health care system issues, medico-legal issues, policies, etc. [4–6]. Systemic conceptualisations of health and illness have also made it possible to develop models of social inequalities in health focusing on social stratification and socioeconomic disparities [7], sometimes corresponding to ethno-racial disparities and the unequal distribution and recognition of cultural capital [8–10]. These more population-based approaches, useful in public health for planning interventions in prevention and health statistics, have taken little interest in the subjective experience of individuals and interpersonal interactions, whether at work or elsewhere.

Returning to occupational health and safety, work organisation and even management approaches and leadership styles began to be scrutinised and studied as possible structural or organisational factors affecting health and well-being at work, alongside the more conventional risks associated with chemical, biological agents, or ergonomic hazards [11]. The integration of organisational factors in the framework of occupational safety and health is not without its difficulties, and the recognition of illnesses resulting from such factors, essentially psychological in nature, can be laborious and puzzling. Paradoxical situations and double binds in workplaces would fall into this category of organisational factors involving management commitment, communication, blame culture, job satisfaction, task definition, interpersonal relationships, reward systems, etc. [12]. Before proceeding further, it should be briefly specified that "paradox" is understood here as a pragmatic paradox [13], a situation involving conflicting demands, messages, or expectancies within an organisation, and managing this paradox poses adaptative challenges for people involved in it. Paradoxes become double binds when conflicting demands or expectations seem irresolvable and cannot be responded to in any way, creating "no-win" situations for individuals. This will be described in more detail in a later section. Considering the problem of paradox and double binds in the workplace in the category of occupational risks has been slow to take root, and as a result, these phenomena may remain nearly invisible, like the "dark side" of organisations [14]. Perhaps the multi-dimensional nature of paradox and double binds makes it more difficult to address or identify, or such a conceptualisation becomes too compromising or threatening for an organisation that seeks stability or refuses to question its operating procedures. It is easier to blame a single individual for resisting change and failing to be flexible. Drawing on the work of French sociologist Vincent De Gaulejac [15], organisational paradox and double binds open the way to more existential considerations, like the manifestation of suffering as well as politico-ideological considerations (management ideology) and macroeconomic considerations (the transformation of contemporary capitalism and neo-liberal globalisation), which is likely to link the inner world and sociohistorical processes. In brief, neoliberal globalisation refers to an economic and political

ideology that emphasises free market capitalism, deregulation, reduced government intervention, and the promotion of global trade and investment. It often involves the removal of barriers to international trade and the primacy of market forces in shaping economic policy on a global scale [16].

In a world where global health challenges are becoming increasingly complex, understanding the nature of paradoxes and their systemic nature is crucial to making informed decisions and promoting genuine, sustainable well-being in the workplace. It is important that we examine these intriguing paradoxical situations and double bind and delve into their effects on human health. To avoid confusion, we will use only the term "double bind" in the remainder of this paper (except when we cannot do otherwise). It should be understood as a pragmatic organisational paradox that offers no easy way out.

The aim of this theoretical paper is to explore the typology of paradoxes and double binds and to analyse their potential impact on the overall well-being of workers and, more specifically, in relation to the functioning of organisations and workplace dynamics. It also aims to provide insights into the potential association between exposure to paradoxes and double binds and certain types of employment and power dynamics within organisations, especially in relation to the concept of super-diversity.

The reflections presented in this article are based on and inspired by a collection of studies and theoretical essays covering a vast interdisciplinary field: anthropology, sociology, management, public administration, industrial relations, communication, organisational psychology, occupational medicine, social work, labour law, ethnic studies, gender studies, public health, ergonomics, occupational therapy, and their subdisciplinary variants.

1.2. Expanding the Concept of Occupational Health and Safety

OHS is generally based on a rather narrow conception of the risks relating to health and safety at work: biological, chemical, physical, mechanical, and ergonomic risks, including psychosocial risks. Risks are defined in terms of exposure to various specific hazards and protection against these hazards. However, it is more difficult to define a level of risk when the hazard in question relates to a set of human factors, rooted in production processes and principles of work organisation and management. The further we move from industrial hygiene and occupational medicine in the strict sense [17], the more laborious and contentious the recognition of occupational injuries can seem. Occupational illnesses, particularly those relating to relational or organisational issues, have no initial cause or specific ontology; they arise from a long-standing process or repetitive relational pattern [18]. The effect of certain atypical or precarious forms of employment (e.g., temporary or on-call employment, multi-party temporary work, or irregular working hours) is now recognised by international bodies such as the ILO as posing a risk to workers' psychological health [19]. It is difficult to demonstrate beyond any doubt that these forms of employment may be connected to some form of pathogenic contextuality. The haziness surrounding managerial or organisational paradoxes is a striking example, as they fall into the category of the impalpable, unrevealed, or unnamed, and they are not generally perceived as a 'paradox'.

Various paradoxes may exist within organisations. They are difficult to uncover, sometimes go undetected, and have a direct influence on well-being and quality of life at work. Despite a growing knowledge of the various determinants of health at work, attributing the decline in workers' health to the organisation of work (the allocation and definition of tasks, achievement of objectives, etc.) is still far too uncommon a practice. While the 'organisational factor' does not always lead directly to occupational injuries or compensation claims, it severely alters the psychological balance and functional capacities of the people affected. This factor is subtle, operates at several levels, and can go unnoticed, just as its impact can be minimised or reduced to the individual level (mental, behavioural, or emotional). Emotional responses, often labelled as adjustment disorders (sometimes referred to as burnout), can be a camouflage or smokescreen for much more systemic

factors that alter the health and well-being of individuals and the ability of organisations to function and fulfil their mission [20,21].

1.3. General Overview of the Paradox and Double Bind Theory

A double bind is often compared to or associated with a catch-22 situation or defined by the statement "damned if you do, damned if you don't". It does not allow for an appropriate or satisfactory response because the individuals can be blamed or considered wrong no matter what they do. This is why the question of the paradox and double bind is important in the context of diversity and, more specifically, the "super-diversity" proposed by the anthropologist Steven Vertovec about fifteen years ago [22]. The notion of super-diversity aimed to capture the complexity and interplay of various social positions and their intersections, revealing multiple asymmetries and power imbalances in the process of social structuration and health inequalities [23,24]. Super-diversity not only refers to national origin (ethnicity and language), culture, and religion but also embraces broader notions of diversity that include migration trajectories and networks, access to employment, location, gendered flows, and response to local authorities. This vision is based on the premises of equality, equity, access and human rights rather than classical identity-based markers [22], to which an entire range of vulnerable situations (housing, transportation, geographical isolation, racism, etc.), including many dimensions of precarious employment, might be added [25].

Gregory Bateson's systemic theory helps us to better understand the dynamics of work within organisations, their possible dysfunctions, or deleterious effects and to identify solutions to remedy them [26]. Bateson believed it was necessary to focus on relationships, forms, and patterns in human communication, looking for processes beneath structures [27]. To do this, we need to develop a typology of organisational paradoxes and double binds, a term originally introduced by Bateson to describe certain patterns of dysfunctional communication within families. Both concepts involve conflicting demands or contradictory elements, often leading to emotional and psychological tension. Drawing up such a typology is essential because it is the only way of identifying solutions adapted to an organisation's specific features and power dynamics. This same organisation must then endorse the idea of the paradox/double bind and open up to dialogue, which is no small feat.

Bateson's paradox and double bind approach was part of the development of the Palo Alto School's approach to communication [13,28,29]. It was mainly used in systemic family therapy, although a new line of research and intervention developed later in the field of clinical sociology and management studies [14,30–33]. These concepts can only be considered within the framework of systems thinking. They are to systems thinking what a gene is to DNA.

Before going any further in the discussion, we will now provide a quick reminder of the elements of a double bind situation:

1. The presence of conflicting demands or messages (a primary injunction and a secondary opposing injunction, which is sanctioned if disregarded) [28,34];
2. An asymmetrical power relationship between at least two people (one of them is in a position of authority) [13];
3. An absence of a safe space for open communication and dialogue (revealing or addressing the issue at stake in the paradox could be seen as insubordination) [14].
4. There is no way to escape this paradox, given the characteristics of the workplace and the (abusive or authoritarian) power relationships that underlie it [28].
5. Double bind situations are repeated experiences, forming an interactional, relational, or organisational pattern [28,29,35].

It is now recognised that a paradoxical injunction can come from the organisational framework and not necessarily from a person. This will be seen in more detail later. Conflicting messages or demands are not ordinary contradictions; otherwise, it would be possible to choose which of the two demands to prioritise. Both demands have their own legitimacy. Two registers, layers, or sets of logic are intertwined in the same production

process, and achieving one involves compromising the other. It is not that the requests in themselves are senseless or contradictory but that each request leads to an action that does not produce the expected results. The first is linked to the personal work ethic or the ethical code of the profession involved, while the second is linked to a management style or approach (being productive, meeting quotas) or externally bound to complex institutional relationships and bureaucratic management [36]. As an example from the world of occupational health, safety, and rehabilitation, the paradox can be seen in the dilemma of applying a patient-centred approach versus a mechanism-oriented approach [6].

Workers are placed in a position of failure for every decision or choice they make, yet at the same time, they are held responsible for their inability to respond to the demands placed upon them [33] or accountable for their misguided decisions [14] while mistakenly feeling that they had a choice or full autonomy [37]. This makes it easier to enforce or justify disciplinary action from a management perspective [21]. For example, a worker may be pressured to produce more engine components for transport vehicles, even though the company has high quality standards. Increased or faster production may compromise the quality of production. This can lead to more frequent product returns or other complaints, which, in a double bind situation, puts the blame solely on the employees' skills and competence, with consequential sanctions or penalties against them [38].

Bateson also specified that it is not necessary for all these elements to be present in a double bind; individuals have generally learned to perceive their environment in the form of a double bind such that they have incorporated the "norm", and the contradictory injunctions can emanate from themselves without being explicitly asked for or required by a person in a hierarchical position [28]. The contradictory message comes from within, after incorporating a general standard of performance or service delivery that runs counter to a personal work ethic or professional deontology [6,39,40]. In situations of this type, some authors speak of a shift from the direct to indirect exercise of power. The mechanism of domination is transmuted into "subjectification" [14,30], shaping a "sense of self and identity" [30] and possibly a sense of duty, if not a work ethic, that provides a feeling of coherence. However, as Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson pointed out in a ground-breaking work, this coherence has its limits in an incoherent system or context [13].

Communication theory generally identifies three main types of paradoxes: logical-mathematical, paradoxical definitions, and pragmatic paradoxes [13]. Our topic relates specifically to pragmatic paradoxes and especially to the organisational pragmatic paradoxes that arise in the world of work and organisations. Pragmatic paradoxes refer to situations in which the practical implications or uses of a particular demand, request, or injunction lead to a contradictory or paradoxical outcome that can represent a major challenge in terms of adjustment and adaptation. Pragmatic paradoxes stem from interpersonal or social interactions and human communication in general. While this places us at the confluence of an anthropology of work, health, and organisations, we also monitor considerable theoretical developments and trends in the fields of management studies, industrial relations, applied communication, industrial psychology, and clinical sociology [31]. An interdisciplinary approach is needed to tackle the complexity underlying the notion of paradox in the workplace. In this paper, paradox means a pragmatic paradox by default.

1.4. Paradoxes and Double Binds: How Do They Differ?

Pragmatic paradoxes and double binds are closely related concepts that may seem interchangeable but in fact have distinct meanings and implications. Here we define paradox as a statement, a contradictory or conflicting message, and/or a demand that may impede the achievement of and satisfactory completion of one's tasks. The double bind arises from this unbearable lose-lose situation since there is no easy way out or clear option for escaping the contradictory or conflicting messages, in turn leading to confusion, frustration, tension, and emotional distress or despair. The double bind occurs precisely when the regulatory function within the organisation ceases to work [21]. The "oppositional tensions" inherent in any kind of pragmatic paradox no longer allow for

the exploration of new solutions or creative thinking [41]. At this point, the 'victim' feels permanently trapped, paralysed, with no alternative, and eventually sinks into a state of intense emotional distress [41,42]. This should not lead us to believe, however, that the double bind is an effect or a product of a paradoxical organisation. Things are not that simple. As Bjørn W. Hennestad, an economist and organisational behaviour specialist, clearly explained several decades ago [31], a double bind situation "has an influence both as cause and effect [...]. It is a product of a certain anti-communicative situation. It is a producer because it breeds more double binds" (p. 273). In other words, double bind organisations are systems of meaning and action, making communication and interaction possible, much like the all-encompassing but somehow cumbersome notion of "culture" [43–45]. Double binds are not easy to grasp for those who are immersed in them and live them on a daily basis, such that the "system" as a social construct is not thought of as a "system", but as "self-evident", almost natural, as a matter of common sense or "taken for granted" [46,47]. The same is true of corporate or organisational culture. It requires taking a step back and maintaining a degree of centration and reflective practice. These are not always possible in organisations with double binds or a certain level of dysfunction or pathology "as they undermine individual self-efficacy and well-being, as well as deteriorate organizational capabilities", in the words of Berti and Simpson [30] (p. 5). Fixing the problem may require both external reflexivity and reflectivity to mirror the internal failures, disruptive experiences, and debilitating processes [41].

1.5. Documenting Double Binds in the Workplace

This section discusses our review of case studies that describe paradoxical or double bind situations in the workplace or propose a typology based on field observations. It presents a summary of our main findings, specifying the sectors of activity concerned, the national context, the paradoxes identified and their impact in the workplace, the approach to diversity (when documented), the disciplines involved (first author), and the proposed avenues for research and action. To our original question, we could add: from these situations, can we extract categories, types, or forms of paradoxes/double binds, and how do they differ or complement those that may already exist? Depending on the category, type, or form of paradoxes/double binds, what are the effects on workers' health and well-being? What work contexts make people more likely to find themselves in paradoxical situations? We will look at whether precarious workers are more vulnerable to paradoxical situations and try to untangle the paradox issue in relation to the challenges of super-diversity. Finally, we propose avenues for future research and possible interventions to support workplaces.

We begin with an exploration of the different categories, types, or forms of paradoxes/double binds that emerge in the context of occupational health. We will try to understand the underlying mechanisms and how these equivocal situations can have unexpected effects on our bodies and minds. Finally, we will discuss the practical implications of this understanding for health professionals, researchers, and policymakers, with a view to promoting more holistic and informed approaches to occupational health.

2. Discussion

We will now discuss the different types of double binds as well as their possible effects in organisations and on certain categories of workers. We will also try to unravel the conceptual link between the double bind and super-diversity. Then, in light of the literature reviewed, we offer reflections on ways to correct double bind situations to develop resilient and healthier work environments. Finally, we propose future directions for research and avenues for action in the Section 3.

2.1. Types of Double Binds

What Do We Already Know about Typologies?

It is relevant to identify types of double binds in the workplace and group them into categories, classes, or families in order to better define the level at which they operate, their dynamics, mechanisms, and emergence and reinforcement patterns. For example, can a specific double bind pattern influence or cause another type of double bind? Some recent writings on double bind theory and organisational paradoxes suggest an interesting view of double binds and power in organisations [14], their effects on the paradox experience [30], and types of paradoxes according to their managerial or organisational dimension (which may relate to the level at which the double bind is played out) [48].

In an interesting attempt to schematise the mechanisms of double bind, Berti and Simpson [30] and Julmi [14] have proposed a two-fold axiology based on the "episodic" or "systemic" nature of the power exercised over individuals and the direct or indirect nature of the exercise of power [49]. Whereas the episodic exercise of power seems to refer to more discrete strategies based on the way of being of specific actors who play out their own personal interests, systemic power is more embedded in an organisational culture, its practices, and its mode of organisation [49,50]. Four main mechanisms are defined: domination and coercion as the direct exercise of power, and manipulation and subjectification as the indirect exercise of power. Coercion and manipulation may be episodic forms of power, while domination and subjectification relate instead to a systemic form of power. Coercion is visible and involves the limitation of available resources or assets to influence the actions of others; power acts are explicit. Domination is also visible; the institutions and system in place are accepted and perceived as natural or taken for granted; and hegemonic values are imposed with no safe space for expression without fear of reprisals or disciplinary action. Manipulation and subjectification are invisible. The former has the effect of limiting what can be discussed, debated, or negotiated within the organisation, thus limiting possible outcomes, while the latter reflects the psychological process by which a person integrates or internalises the paradoxical demand to make it their own practical and operational requirement, "shaping sense of self and identify" (p. 55). Manipulation patterns may also be part of "paratoxic" leadership (a contraction of paradox and toxic), as formulated by Julmi [34]. In this case, manipulation (or any kind of psychological abuse) may be seen as deliberate or purposeful [34].

All these double bind patterns create "paradoxical tensions" and disempowering effects. Blocking actions, curtailing speaking-up, delegitimising questioning, limiting access to decision-makers, or reproducing a climate of silence (be it active silencing or self-censoring) are examples reported by Berti and Simpson [30]. Berti and Simpson described domination as characterising a Kafkaesque organisation, while these authors linked subjectification to Orwellian doublethink [30]. The doublethink concept appears in George Orwell's dystopic novel *1984* to describe the indoctrination process that leads to the acceptance of two opposing points of view simultaneously, putting any critical thinking on hold. The analogy between the writings of Franz Kafka (see *The Trial*) and those of George Orwell (see *1984*) is interesting because each work depicts in its own way an absurd, anxiety-inducing universe through the manipulation of language and truth (as in *1984*), or through dehumanising and labyrinthine bureaucracies (as in *The Trial*), with both creating feelings of fear and helplessness, hopelessness, and despair in the face of a seemingly inescapable life-course or situation. While these fictions are very dark and gloomy, real life gives reason for hope, as we shall see below.

The mechanisms of power exercised over individuals involve a language of guilt and individual responsibility. The "victims" question themselves, feel powerless or disempowered, depreciated, anxious, fearful, sometimes dazed, confused, and vilified, take the blame and doubt their own abilities, or even feel guilty [34,37,39,48,51]. This "There is no one to blame but yourself" paradigm can leave workers feeling very lonely, for they can see no other way to analyse the situation they are caught in. In addition, even if there were a real possibility of speaking out, it is symbolically defused through the mechanism

of subjectification mentioned by Berti and Simpson [30] and Julmi [14]. The individual recognises themself fully in their work activity and in the way they give it meaning, and all the demands seem legitimate and coherent to them. The desire to conform to the organisation's expectations and to carve out a place within it stems from what Parrilla calls a self-referential paradox at the heart of structuring or shaping a sense of self and identity [52]. Neither metacommunication nor reframing the managerial demands is possible. Both speaking out and not speaking out have consequences: "damned if you do and damned if you don't" [39].

While these types of pragmatic paradoxes refer to dimensions of power and their hindering effects, other scholars, such as Evenstad, have proposed a typology of paradoxes based on organisational or managerial patterns that are mainly intended to control the production process to achieve optimum performance and output [48]. Focussing on operational efficiency, 'double bind organisations' as described by Evenstad reflect an operational duality that makes equilibrium unlikely, as is the case for the "change–stability paradox", "exploration–exploitation paradox", "acceleration–deceleration paradox", "intensification–quality paradox", and "autonomy/flexibility–control paradox" [48,53]. Some of these oppositional dualities may be embedded within the organisational strategies and corporate logics, while others are rooted in the sphere of daily operations and work management and in the control and evaluation of the production process and performance. The most obvious duality seems to be the intensification–quality paradox since it can reach the largest audience, who are asked to produce more with the least possible input (human resources, time spent, expenditure, etc.). This duality may undermine quality output and the individual's own work ethic, bearing in mind that manufacturing defects or shortcomings in production can occur more frequently. In public services, particularly in health care, neoliberal trends and the streamlining of services means a reduction in the services offered, a standardisation of processes, and a quantification of tasks in the wake of the New Public Management (NPM) approach [16,39,54], which emphasises cost control, results measurement, and performance incentives [55]. It also involves hierarchical supervision, the standardisation of work processes, and the measurement of results with an increasingly centralised system of operational management, a mechanistic approach to service delivery, and a divisional model of organisational structure [56]. The paradoxical effect of this type of management system has been reported in some studies on the health sector [55]. This is also described as a "failed paradigm" [54], prioritising ethics of effectiveness, efficiency, and economy at the risk of communication and relational ethics [57].

This is what anthropologist Linda Hunt meant when she said that "quality metrics reduces clinical work to quantifiable outcomes [. . .] prioritizing financial goals and managerial logics above the needs of individuals" [58]. This conflicting demand, often connected to medical Taylorism [59], is unbearable for many health practitioners [60]. It may also be in line with the autonomy–control paradox, in which workers are asked to be creative and innovative and to use their independent judgement while being constantly scrutinised, controlled, or monitored [32]. The acceleration–deceleration paradox is an organisational double bind in which workers are asked to maintain a relatively fast work pace and make decisions quickly despite the highly bureaucratic organisation, with its lengthy chain of command and procedural decision-making process, while the autonomy–control paradox operates, making them wait for their supervisors' approval and validation. Evenstad sums up this paradox as a "demand to work fast in a slow organization", referring to "ineffective organizational process, bureaucracy, and 'digital Taylorism'" [48] (p. 3). Digital Taylorism is defined as standardised administrative systems and procedures [48] (p. 8).

Other organisational paradoxes revealing other propositional dualities have also been identified in the literature. These include organisations that advocate a long-term vision while maintaining short-term measurement of results [32] and those that encourage initiative while applying rigid rules and having little tolerance for failure [32,53]. In line with NPM, some organisations introduce decentralised management while maintaining highly centralised performance indicators or seek to reduce operating costs while committing to

high-quality services [53]. A paradox between cooperation and competitiveness has also been reported [53].

In a paper on flexible working, sociologist Heejung Chung introduced the idea of a flexibility paradox [61], which combines the mechanisms of work intensification [48] and coercion [14,30]. In the flexibility paradox, coercion is itself paradoxical, since it takes place in a context in which an individual has perfectly integrated the values and ideology of the capitalist system of performance, competitiveness, competition, profit, individual responsibility, etc. This assimilation of values is congruent with a process of the intensification of work, which is also characterised as a process of "self-exploitation" since the injunction comes from oneself [61]. Here, the dimension of power stems from the 'work of culture' seen as an ideological system and a mechanism of power and control [62]. This is similar to the mechanism of subjectification [30,34] in that the integration of norms affects individuals in such a way that they believe that they alone are to blame for their failures [61]. As a result, they become more vulnerable to manipulation by managers who wish to sweep aside any criticism of their management style, "delegitimising questioning" or "curtailing speaking-up" [30]. Although Chung does not use the term double bind, we can see that the paradoxical situations described can develop into that. Just as one type of paradox can lead to another, so too can an accumulation of paradoxical situations or conflicting demands make it more likely that paradoxes will be transformed into double binds. This hypothetical avenue must be explored further.

An overview of recent writings on the double bind paradox in relation to OHS in its broadest sense provides further insight into work-related suffering and the symbolic violence that is exerted through various mechanisms or dynamics of power [63]. From its early beginnings in labour medicine and industrial hygiene, OHS was set up as a primarily technical field influenced by a biomedical model of health and illness [63]. Reducing OHS to the prevention of accidents and illnesses is no longer tenable in view of the new issues of psychological health, well-being, and quality of life at work, not to mention the complex issues of diversity and social inequalities [64,65]. Systems that fail to recognise this and to broaden their understanding of OHS issues are doomed to create paradoxical situations and double binds for employees who have nevertheless integrated a broader perspective of the issues.

We have seen that different dimensions of power exert varying effects that limit workers' ability to act to mitigate the effects of paradoxical situations. The paradoxical effects appear more visible when work environments become dysfunctional or when the tension regulation function no longer works [21]. To address the types of constraints present, we need to identify the different levels of injunction that can create dissonance and possibly a double constraint. This is no easy task, as it requires both researchers and workplace representatives to discern the different levels at which injunctions and their interactions are played out and, more specifically, to identify the 'invisible' or implicit injunctions that take the form of the integration of some managerial norm, value, or ideology, which each worker absorbs and regards as legitimate (e.g., the idea of performance, innovation, creativity, or autonomy). Then, in the second stage, it is necessary to identify the way in which these norms, values, ideologies, or managerial principles clash with or hinder the implementation of other equally legitimate principles (e.g., relational ethics, adapting the service according to needs, flexibility, empathy, and reflective listening). In some areas, the client-centred approach has become the standard of good practice, which is anchored in a humanistic or holistic view of care that tends to contradict corporate logic or policy-based patterns of intervention. This is what the medical historian Charles Rosenberg called a "mechanism-centered understanding of disease" in his reflections on the paradoxes of disease specificity (nosological tables and protocols) as it relates to "bureaucratic imperatives" [36] (p. 253). The obligation to be accountable from a strictly statistical or quantitative point of view (number of cases handled, number of documents produced, etc.) with no regard for the complexity of certain cases or the time and resources required to do quality work is an example of a paradox that makes work meaningless [66]. In some areas, the

client-centred approach has been the standard of good practice for many decades, but its implementation seems nowadays to oppose the corporate logic or policy-based patterns of intervention [54,57–59,67,68]. This position is untenable for conscientious, ethical practitioners [68,69]. There is much food for thought in the staggering amount of disenchantment in certain professions such as health and education, even if these untenable paradoxical situations do not automatically translate into sick leave or occupational injuries. From a medical point of view, given disease specificity, this would be very difficult to demonstrate [70] or even to take seriously [30] without considering the double bind (and its emotional correlates) as a legitimate response to organisational tensions [30].

Similarly, the mantras invoking creativity, leadership, and innovation sometimes hit roadblocks in organisations in which hierarchical control is strong or there is little room for change, adaptation, and transformation of practices. In this case, the type of change–stability or exploration–exploitation paradox involved can lead to the autonomy–control managerial paradox evoked by Evenstad [48]. In the healthcare sector, the principle of professional autonomy runs up against the full force of these performance and profitability injunctions dictated by the global economic demands and competitiveness of companies or the various regional departments of ministries or government agencies that follow the same model of competition espoused by the neo-liberal economy [54,59,71]. The longer and more hierarchical the chain of command is, the more constraints can arise, according to the acceleration–deceleration model identified by Evenstad [48].

Administrative bureaucracy can interfere with the autonomous decision-making and speed of execution that employees would be able to ensure if they were in full control of their work [69]. A variant of this autonomy–control paradox can be found in the decentralisation–central control duality proposed in Bollecker's study of French public administration and the application of new public management principles [53]. It is thus important that we continue analysing the logical links and interrelationships between the types of double bind paradoxes and their respective effects. That said, we know that to achieve this fully, a multi-level analysis is needed to take into account patterns that are not only interpersonal but that may also involve extra-organisational links and situated relationalities [72].

In short, identifying the types of paradoxes is important for developing appropriate solutions that reflect an organisation's structure, power dynamics, management model, and vision of productivity and performance. This typology is summarised below (Table 1).

Table 1. Types of paradox or double binds and corresponding dimensions.

Dimensions	Type of Paradox or Double Bind
Power dynamics and patterns	Coercion Manipulation Domination Subjectification
Performance and productivity	Intensity–quality paradox Flexibility paradox
Management and (self-)regulation	Autonomy–control paradox and variation in decentralisation–central control paradox Acceleration–deceleration paradox
General orientation and mission	Change–stability paradox Exploration–exploitation paradox

These dimensions may intertwine as in the flexibility paradox, involving the dimension of performance and productivity and the dimension of management and (self-)regulation. The great challenge and task for researchers is to connect these types and dimensions with specific effects and responses in the individuals exposed to them.

2.2. The Effect of Paradoxes and Double Binds on Certain Categories of Workers

2.2.1. Type of Employment: Precariousness and Other Contexts of Vulnerability

The development of OHS research on precarious work contexts and social inequalities in health over the last two decades has shown that certain categories of workers are exposed to a greater risk of sustaining occupational injuries and experiencing various obstacles related to the declaration of an injury, coverage by a third-party payer, and the rehabilitation and return-to-work (RTW) processes [73–75]. Workers in vulnerable situations are more often those with precarious employment status that offers little social protection and career prospects; temporary workers; or workers who are recent immigrants, racialised, or temporary foreign workers [6,76–80]. Precarious workers rarely have the space to express their OHS concerns and often prefer, albeit reluctantly, to remain silent and endure a dangerous situation or pain rather than risk reprisals or losing their jobs [76,81,82]. However, these operating conditions, arduous work, and intense physical demands of a job are not synonymous with paradoxical situations, even if theoretically they can create them. If precarious workers face major OHS issues, are they also more likely to experience organisational paradoxes and double binds?

The existing data do not support the conclusion that precariousness fosters double bind situations; precarious jobs may be a matter of reckless exploitation and abuses of any kind, but there is nothing paradoxical about them in a capitalistic context [64]. On the other hand, paradoxical systems could amplify the effect in precarious people because of overlapping vulnerabilities and precariousness [83]. Regular workers have more scope to express their disagreements, especially if they are union members, whereas temporary workers, on-call workers, and those who lack sufficient command of the language of the workplace and who are unfamiliar with their rights do not have the same power relationship [25]. The degree of familiarity with the functions of public institutions has been identified as a barrier to inclusion and to the full enjoyment of civil rights, including those relating to access to health care and the prevention of workplace injuries and disabilities [77].

To our knowledge, studies on organisational paradoxes do not specifically identify situations of job insecurity. However, it is important to point out that if issues of disempowerment are present when double binds are present, more precarious workers within the same collective may be more inclined to conceal the situation for the same reasons as mentioned above. It is not the precarious situation that induces or facilitates the genesis of the paradox, but this precariousness undoubtedly influences the possibilities of extricating oneself from it. Other questions that need to be addressed are whether the process of interactions leading to the double bind may also be a gendered process; whether the effect of the organisational paradox may be amplified in a context of significant social and structural inequalities; and how it may affect ethnic or racialised minority workers differently, including the way in which court judgements about racist violence in the workplace are handed down [84]. Racism in the workplace has also been addressed from a clinical sociological perspective [85], in which a paradox of the democratic ideal and self-censorship has been reported, highlighting the fact that some people feel the need to work harder in order to be fully valued and respected by co-workers from the 'national majority' [85]. Faced with the pressure of performance, racialised people may thus prefer to 'tolerate' micro-aggressions, racist comments, and jokes rather than speak out against them to avoid being perceived as "playing the victim" or unproductive [85]. The same pattern of silencing and self-censoring was also identified by Berti and Simpson [30], who showed the disempowering effect of these patterns, although they did not focus on racism.

2.2.2. Type of Organisation: Power Structure and Management Model

Does the effect of the double bind paradox affect certain categories of workers more than others? The question remains open, although the scientific literature seems to point towards an analysis of paradoxical situations based on the organisation's power structure. More specifically, this would involve, on the one hand, describing and analysing the management model, leadership style, and decision-making process used in an organisation and

on the other, describing and analysing the double bind mechanisms that apply depending on the characteristics of the organisation (structure, purpose and mission, values, division of work, size and scope, operations and process, communication, and ethical and social responsibility, among other things). Do certain mechanisms and power structures favour the genesis and development of double binds, and if so, what is the specific nature of these double binds? Are they upstream from interactional dynamics, or do they operate in conjunction with them? Many variables have yet to be understood.

2.2.3. When Paradoxes Strengthen the Stigma Effect

Stigmatisation is a powerful and pervasive phenomenon that occurs when individuals or groups are unfairly or negatively judged, stereotyped, or discriminated against because of certain characteristics or attributes (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, mental health, physical disability, and many more) [77]. Stigmas can be deeply harmful, leading to social exclusion, reduced opportunities, and emotional distress for those who experience them. In the literature we consulted, only one author has discussed the stigma effect behind the organisational paradox, particularly the flexibility paradox described above [61] (p. 79). Flexibility stigma can be particularly prevalent in organisations with high productivity pressures and performance vision, stigmatising people who do not fully match the performance model being promoted. For example, working long hours may be encouraged and perceived as an ideal and exemplary work performance, but it may be regarded less favourably by workers who see flexibility as seeking work-life balance. According to Chung, this is a gendered stigma, specifically, a femininity stigma, given the double burden of work and family caregiving that still weighs on women today [77]. However, it is too early to say whether this type of stigma has a greater impact on minority groups or people from diverse backgrounds than on others, although, from an intersectional perspective, the cumulative effect of stigma has been discussed elsewhere in relation to immigrant and racialised people who have been injured at work [77].

2.3. Super-Diversity, Paradoxes, and Double Binds: So, What Is the Connection?

Which work contexts are most conducive to the emergence of paradoxes/double binds? What does this have to do with super-diversity? The term "super-diversity" was coined by anthropologist Steven Vertovec [22] to illustrate the changing nature of immigration patterns and demographic shifts in urban areas and to address the complex interplay of various social factors such as national origin, ethnicity, gendered flows, legal status, diversity of migration channels and legal status, access to employment, location, and transnational dynamics, as well as the response of local authorities (service providers and local residents), etc. [86]. Super-diversity suggests that contemporary migration patterns have led to a proliferation of ethnicities, nationalities, languages, religions, and a wide range of social identities and experiences within a single geographic area and within groups where people interact and coexist [22].

However, contemporary social landscapes still exhibit inequalities and economic gaps that are perpetuated and widened over time [64,87,88]. However, these inequalities and systemic barriers to upward mobility are not random, and they affect certain people more than others. Intersectionality theory has sought to demonstrate this by providing an analytical framework that shows the cumulative effect of the multiple vulnerabilities of disadvantaged groups, most often associated with ethnic, religious, or racial minorities, to which the long-recognised gender effect is added [89,90]. Thus, the different social identities encompassed by the term 'super-diversity' intersect and interact to shape an individual's life course, experiences and chances, privilege, or oppression. For example, racism, sexism, and homophobia may operate simultaneously to compound the disadvantages faced by individuals who are labelled as belonging to multiple marginalised groups [89]. Super-diversity and intersectionality can then be used together to analyse the multifaceted nature of diversity and discrimination in contemporary societies.

Is super-diversity more likely to exhibit the experience of paradoxes and double binds? The answer depends on having precise categories that define the concept of super-diversity. Can precariousness and any other situation of vulnerability cause or predispose people to becoming trapped in various double bind patterns? Conversely, does a situation of precariousness or vulnerability make it more difficult to regulate or alleviate the effects of a paradoxical system? We can hypothetically assume that the effect of a paradox may be felt more acutely by people who are already experiencing several other stressful situations related to their life experience [83]. This hypothesis needs to be verified and developed further, for example, by comparing the reaction to paradoxes and double binds among workers within the same paradoxical system, to extract variants in terms of the possibility of escaping it.

Double bind situations can arise in any context where conflicting messages or demands are present, and it does not appear to be an exclusive feature of super-diversity. Additionally, not all interactions within super-diverse contexts will result in double binds or even paradoxical patterns. We can assume that job security and job type, which constitute an important dimension of the concept of precariousness [25], are important variables; a temporary, agency, part-time, on-call, seasonal, or informal worker may not see the benefit of openly revealing the existence of a paradox or double bind. However, other factors may also be at play, such as the personality traits of the people involved and the openness, humility, and empathy of the first-line manager and other senior managers. The dimensions of power suggested by Julmi [14,34] and Berti and Simpson [30] are certainly an essential element, indeed a crucial part of the various paradox mechanisms that need to be understood in depth if we are to identify the factors that make people more vulnerable to being caught in double bind situations and to propose actions to reduce the risk of escalating personal distress and despair and organisational dysfunction.

Migration history, employment history, ethnicity, and gender are all elements of 'super-diversity' that need to be considered when addressing issues of equity and inclusion. The notion of super-diversity thus has to be closely linked to the issues of precarious work, employment pathways in general, and intersectionality, even if super-diversity cannot subsume them. Diversity is advocated and promoted as an asset in most liberal democracies [91,92], but an asset for whom and under which conditions [93]? Discrimination and other chaotic pathways to employment can also be diversity's blind spot when it presents an idyllic vision of intercultural dialogue and diversity [94,95]. Is the notion of super-diversity still useful for us when it comes to studying workplaces, taking into account working conditions and precariousness, the vulnerability affecting certain groups, management ideologies and power dynamics? Is it not an impracticable, overstuffed, and confusing notion?

2.4. How to Fix the Double Bind: Building Resilient Work Environments

In light of the current knowledge on double binds and organisational paradoxes, solutions for eliminating them involve having a space for free and safe discussion, recognising paradoxical injunctions (in order to reduce their toxic nature), communicating about the "system" and dismantling its mechanisms, addressing why the situation is paradoxical, and providing greater autonomy in defining and dividing up team tasks [14,30,34,39,41]. However, presumably, the paradox and double bind effect can encourage the emergence of collective and individual awareness of what needs to be addressed and improved within an organisation. Paradoxes can be used as leverage if the existing structure, organisational culture, or leadership style is conducive to dialogue, open communication, and reflective practices. Otherwise, the paradoxical effect moves towards a double bind because no way out has been found; there is no Ariadne's thread to lead us out of the maze of organisational problems, failure, or dysfunction. Clearly, a fine line has to be walked in the search for organisational (re)balancing.

Paradoxical situations must be explicitly acknowledged [32] to allow for uncovering the defensive routines or tactics used by organisations to avoid "discussing the undiscuss-

able" [48] (p. 7). This aligns with the thinking of the Palo Alto School of Communication, which gave rise to the systemic theory of pragmatic paradox, advocating metacommunication, i.e., that by communicating about the 'system', dismantling its mechanisms, and analysing why it is paradoxical, we can free ourselves from its clutches [13,28]. Communicating about the system should be a collective learning experience so that we can learn from the paradoxical situation [31].

Building a resilient work environment requires not only a concerted effort from leadership, human resources, and all employees but also sincere determination and humility to tackle the various problems experienced in the workplace and the suffering they generate [96]. It is an ongoing process that involves continuously assessing the needs of the workforce and adapting strategies as needed to create a positive and thriving workplace (e.g., open communication, adaptability and flexibility, autonomy and empowerment to make decisions, supportive leadership, and collaboration rather than coercion/manipulation), while fully acknowledging that, as Putnam said, there are no one-size-fits-all remedies or turnkey solutions to alleviating the organisational tensions associated with the double bind [42]. It requires flexibility in the workplace and the ability to transcend and reframe dualities from a new emancipatory and empathic perspective [30]. Recognising the tensions arising from organisational paradoxes and integrating their underlying conflicting demands can also facilitate the achievement of equilibrium and is presented in the literature as a possible strategy combining flexibility and control [97]. This strategy can be particularly effective in open 'systems' [53,97] but can also be fragile and sensitive to any change in leadership positions. This means that the whole organisation must walk a very fine line to avoid falling off the cliff.

Finally, organisational strategies to mitigate the effects of pragmatic paradoxes in organisations must address the stigma that could be driving the silencing and self-censoring of employees who are worried about their personal self-image or reputation and prefer to endure an unbearable situation to the point of exhaustion.

2.5. Future Directions for Research and Avenues for Action

The study of paradoxical systems and the structure of organisations that generate double binds is not a new field. The basic theory has remained relatively unchanged over the last fifty years, except that the opening of a new channel for reflection and empirical investigation in the workplace has made it possible to pinpoint the unthinking nature of certain managerial discourse geared towards performance at all costs without regard for production and the achievement of autonomy in the workplace. Typologies, mechanisms for inducing double binds and maintaining them as a relational system, and different dimensions of power have been proposed. However, more empirical illustrations that consider the structure of organisations and the specificity of each workplace are needed in order to refine the existing typologies and the possibilities for eliminating or alleviating paradoxical effects.

2.5.1. Hierarchical Structure, Bureaucracy, and the Power Dimension

Metaphors drawn from literary fiction are an interesting way of showing the kind of atmosphere in which a person may repeatedly find themself, at work or in any other occupation, and the subtle mechanisms for controlling human activities and perhaps also for manufacturing mindsets (e.g., questioning ourselves when things go wrong in the work process and failing to recognise external factors). Not all highly hierarchical, bureaucratic organisations produce the same organisational pathologies. The phenomenon is not unique to large, complex, hierarchical organisations, since the theory of pragmatic paradox first emerged from the study of family dynamics. The paradox can be found everywhere in all types of organisations, but it is important to analyse the intersection of types of organisations, the power dimension, and the presence of certain forms of leadership. Are "total institutions", an expression coined by sociologist Erving Goffman in the late 1960s in his classic book *Asylum*, more likely to create paradoxical situations leading to double

binds? A total institution is generally understood as a closed and highly controlled social environment (a workplace, a community, or a political regime) in which individuals' lives are tightly regulated, typically characterised by strict rules, schedules, and authority figures (e.g., prisons, military boot camps, and mental institutions) [98]. The power dimension is undeniably authoritarian, but it is not clear that its environment is paradoxical, unless thinking models advocating individual autonomy, originality, or creativity are grafted onto it, in which case it could be related to the variety of autonomy–control paradoxes reported by Evenstad [48]. Perhaps the most important thing to underscore in this debate about the power dimension is the question of the source of injunctions. Clearly, injunctions can arise from the integration of societal norms and values, not just in interpersonal interactions as early double bind theories claimed [28], and the integration of norms and values results from the mechanism of subjectification identified above [14,30]. Subjectification is related to normativity, i.e., the principles and norms that guide us in regulating our behaviour and decision-making, which can also vary enormously from culture to culture and change over time. It involves reasoning about how we should act, given our goals, desires, and intentions. For example, if one wants to be more productive, it is normative to work more hours and limit one's time off work. But how are these norms imposed or made explicit? White and Germain introduced the notion of normative density, an interesting reference to the interconnectedness of coexisting norms or normative frameworks [99]—at whatever level, be it societal, cultural, political-legal, organisational, etc.—that structure personal life commitments and visions.

For reasons that may still seem obscure, are some organisations more prone to paradoxes and double binds? Depending on the nature of the intersection, are all double binds of the same type? What distinguishes the different organisational paradoxes? Do they have similar effects in terms of their emotional charge, and what are the strategies for escaping them? It is thus particularly important to analyse paradoxical systems, how they are introduced or created, and how employees help to set them up and reproduce them. It is hence essential to understand how organisations work from the inside and to examine the inner mechanisms in the workplace (power and management structures and dynamics, management style) used to set up paradoxical systems. Appropriate observation or detection methods for more effective workplace interventions could then be designed and implemented [30,33]. From an ethnographic point of view, the remedy may involve identifying and systemically analysing problematic situations in which all the elements can be identified and at their respective levels, as has been done in the analysis of intercultural situations workshops [100]. In this sense, situation-based workshops can be a good way of introducing and encouraging reflective practice.

However, workplace systems and dynamics are not isolated features or self-contained closed circuits, nor are they isolated from the rest of the world or from their immediate social, political, and economic environment. Paradoxes can arise from extra-organisational relationships driven by other political or economic agendas. It is also crucial to understand these inter-organisational and inter-institutional links in order to better understand the genesis of the double bind and the conditions under which it emerges, is maintained, and can be reproduced [34]. This question was raised more than thirty years ago by anthropologist Rosemary Harris in her seminal work *Power and Powerlessness in Industry* [101], which highlighted the complex power dynamics within industrial settings and their impact on individuals and communities. Harris examined power relations not only between individuals but also within larger social, economic and political structures, highlighting the legitimacy and democratic deficit in the face of rapid and complex changes in the world of work, along with the challenges of identifying and engaging with sources of power in modern, conglomerate-owned means of production [101]. A worker may be engaged in a production process that simultaneously involves different sources of power, and this may be conducive to generating different senses of priority and efficiency according to different levels of power and decision-making in the hierarchical structure [102]. This confronts the simplistic manager–employee duality that places the former in a position of powerfulness

and, following a biased and binary logic, positions them as oppressors, manipulators, and Machiavellian tricksters [103]. It also questions how bureaucracies and large, complex corporations operate, how they determine and plan their production activities, how they evaluate their performance, and how they understand accountability (to whom or for what body and for what purpose) [33,54]. Lower- or middle-level managers can easily be sandwiched by the higher-level "forces" at work, including the above-mentioned ideologies that shape our vision of the world, meaning, and experience.

2.5.2. Interaction, Interpersonal Communication, and Operationalisation of Policies and Strategic Plans

Likewise, more empirical studies and case studies are needed for documenting and clarifying implicit injunctions, in other words, injunctions that are not directly imposed, are somehow invisible, and are part of a common or shared managerial paradigm (e.g., performance and efficiency, pace, and intensity of work) and may facilitate the integration and acceptance of demands that may not be adapted to the operational and practical realities [14,32,33]. Studying attempts at metacommunication and how it is received in organisations (and at what level and by whom in terms of administrative function) and the conditions for its success is also vital to a better understanding [39]. In addition, we need to document the different individual responses to the double bind and the ways in which these situations are managed within the same paradoxical system [32].

Although it is beyond the scope of this article, the mechanisms leading to the double bind need to be taken into account, and personality theories need to be better integrated into the systemic analysis of the double bind [104]. This seems particularly relevant when considering asymmetric power relations and interpersonal dynamics, which can become a breeding ground for a double bind in the workplace or wherever a power relationship with potentially abusive authority exists. Conceivably certain leaders, by virtue of their personality traits [51,105,106], are more inclined to establish their power, control, and dominance through a certain number of manipulative techniques. The same applies to those who are more likely to become victims of malicious and "toxic leadership" [104,107,108], also dubbed "vampire leadership" [107]. The vampire analogy is interesting here because the vampire parasitises its victim, invading its vital space and sapping its vital energy in order to exist itself [109]. Understanding how interpersonal dynamics can turn the victim into a scapegoat, where the victim may come to embody (whether consciously or not) the shortcomings of an organisation, appears to be an overlooked, although essential, part of the double bind puzzle. Going a step further, we suggest that on theoretical grounds, the "victim" could even be analysed as a sacrificial victim [52] whose sense of personal identity is disrupted and whose mental and psychological equilibrium ultimately collapses with, in extreme cases, potentially fatal consequences [110].

The insidious and sometimes intangible nature of the double bind makes it even more pernicious and difficult to identify from a research perspective. How can we gather information on the subject when both perpetrators and victims are oblivious to the paradox? The next research step needed is to address this very question and develop observation tools, interview grids, and diagrams that will enable us to describe the organisational context in depth from every angle and ultimately conduct more advanced stages of analysis that allow for the cross-referencing of data at different levels of organisational complexity [72]. Important questions still remain.

3. Conclusions

The interactional–systemic theory of the paradox and double bind, applied to the anthropological study of organisations, work, and health, is not an old wineskin for a new wine. On the contrary, this theory demonstrates its full analytical power by revealing the unfathomable and invisible nature of certain organisational mechanisms and procedures that, like most cultural patterns, are taken for granted. These mechanisms are pernicious and subtle because they end up affecting the entire workplace system, creating suffering

at work, confusion, distress, and negative feelings of all kinds, and infusing dysfunction into productive operations and human communication. The study of the paradox and the double bind favours the analysis of organisational structure and interactional dynamics and their impact on quality of life, well-being, and health at work, rather than the study of inequalities linked to different positions, status, or identity attributes (even though these may also be linked to interpersonal relationships that are possibly indicative of systemic discrimination, exclusion, or economic exploitation) [89].

Reducing the weight of paradoxes or eliminating situations of double constraint is not going to eliminate the intensity of a task, the alienating nature of certain tasks, the precariousness of a job, or exploitation at work, as has been widely documented in Marxian, socialist, and critical theory-inspired work. However, developing detection tools and ways of eradicating double-bind paradoxes will undoubtedly give new meaning to workers' struggles in a context in which work continues to be an essential marker of our self and social identity, not an alienating, debilitating, and absurd experience with a narrow, dark horizon locked in toxic leadership and mismanagement. Work should be a haven for self-fulfilment, not an existential abyss.

The new management models and the technicalisation of certain work tasks must not dehumanise work, especially in its most intimate relational aspects. Perhaps the challenge for modern management, technology, and contemporary industrial society is to reconcile the imperatives of a highly competitive and financialised economy, which in many ways generates and deepens social inequalities, with the human organisation of work, with work experienced as a personal as well as collective achievement [111]. Understanding organisational paradoxes and double bind patterns can take us a step further along the path towards creating a healthy and satisfying work environment. The double bind theory, when applied to the workplace, must include a critique of the political economy of neo-liberalism and the proliferation of approaches to the management of "human capital" that are supposed to limit waste and unnecessary activities and increase productivity [112], which reinforces the ongoing process of precarisation [113,114]. It must include a critique of the hyper-individualism of our so-called post-modern societies, in which everyone is presented as an entrepreneur of themselves in a competitive market [115], the class struggle is replaced by the struggle for places, and the pursuit of happiness is simply a matter of individual will and reasoned choice [116].

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Essay

"Creative Anthropology" as a Unit for Knowing: Epistemic Object and Experimental System in Research-Creation "in" Clay

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Abstract: This essay takes advantage of the current context of superdiversity to define a form of hybrid heuristics between North American anthropology and research-creation "in" the arts. In an attempt to alleviate the epistemological disaster described by Gregory Bateson as the loss of the unity of the biosphere and humanity, I position myself within a nomothetic perspective of Boasian anthropology and a postqualitative approach to research-creation. My research-creation proposes clay as an epistemic object and develops a creative methodology in the form of an experimental system that borrows from the following two types of change observable in living organisms: static and schismatic changes. The artistic activities, presented as two heuristic cycles, seek to broaden the self-reflexivity inherent in the use of clay by human groups. They provoke decentring leading to a loss of control where a new identity has to be defined. This reveals itself in terms of system thinking as the reconstruction of a new reality that is defined neither entirely by my artistic practice nor entirely by my theoretical framework derived from anthropology. It is a "place of passage" between both. It is a new identity that can be defined by the "change of change" that I call "creative anthropology". This transdisciplinary approach introduces a "second glance" into anthropological research and opens up breaches through research-creation. It works to develop new narratives and test posthumanism in the field of my artistic practice.

Keywords: research-creation; Bateson; clay; creative anthropology; epistemic object; experimental system; transdisciplinary; postqualitative research; arts; superdiversity

1. Introduction

> "I surrender to the belief that my knowing is a small part of a wider integrated knowing that knits the entire biosphere or creation." [1] (p. 17)

In the introduction to Gregory Bateson's latest book, *A Sacred Unity: Further Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Rodney E. Donaldson uses this paper's opening quotation in his preface to explain a belief held dear by Bateson: "Bateson firmly believed that we are parts of a living world and that our loss both of a sense of unity of biosphere and humanity and of the notion that that ultimate unity is aesthetic is a disastrous epistemological error", he wrote [1] (p. 13). In most environmental studies or research on living organisms, aesthetics, defined as the science of sensitive perception [2], appears sporadically, when it is not simply missing. Yet, it is an essential and integral component of the epistemology of recursive systems for Gregory Bateson [3]. For him, the "difference that makes a difference" is aesthetic, meaning that the difference that matters is defined by an individual's sensitive perception in a given cultural environment and that this difference is therefore culturally situated. It is quite natural to understand Bateson's interest in aesthetics if we are aware of the researcher's family background, which enabled him to develop a genuine passion for the work of William Blake [4]. But his interest in the sensory, in creation, and in art also led him to set himself up as a critic of certain aspects of the scientific approach.

For Bateson, scientific research is not self-sufficient. "In fact, Bateson urges scientists to abandon the "simple vision" to which they are accustomed (and on which they are therefore dependent), and to supplement it with a poetic approach to their object of study" [5] (p. 2). Scientific research requires a sensitive eye, a "second glance" that William Blake found to be so significant in unravelling the interconnection of the physical and spiritual realms. It is this additional perspective, integrated into the scientific process, that would make it possible to counter the single perspective of modern science and its mechanistic approach to living systems [3]. But what Bateson is criticizing is not technical or methodological interdisciplinarity, but rather the contribution of artistic sensitivity to the scientific apparatus and the transversality of approaches that would enable scientists to learn from the arts, and vice versa.

Today, our world is considerably more complex than it was in 1972 when Bateson published *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. The notion of superdiversity, as defined by Steven Vertovec [6], can now be observed at every level of society. This diversification is constantly intensifying because of migratory flows, communication networks and the globalisation of cultural and commercial exchanges. In urban environments in particular, this growth in superdiversity has led to an increase in linguistic exchanges [7] and encouraged the emergence of micropopulations identified with entirely new aesthetic niches [8]. Some anthropologists have also shown that these aesthetic niches and new forms of shared communities can give rise to debates with the wider political community, especially if the latter is already a minority or in a fragile state [9]. Despite this, superdiverse contexts create a profusion of new opportunities for expression, which cannot ignore the remarkable diversification of artistic practices and, more recently, approaches to research-creation [10]. In line with Bateson's thinking, the fields of symbols, words and ideas are also benefiting from this intercultural effervescence. Artists inevitably draw inspiration from these super-diverse contexts, fostering the development of intercultural research and research-creation methodologies that transcend the boundaries of artistic disciplines. We are now encountering approaches to the transmission of the arts that make it possible to compensate for identity gaps among Indigenous populations by combining orality and accounts of practice [11]. Superdiverse contexts pave the way for creative research rooted in these "differences that make a difference", through culturally situated artistic explorations [12,13], with approaches to creation that encourage intercultural encounters [14–18], and through practices that take a critical look at a given culture [19]. Diversification in research and creation involves marginalised groups in the co-construction of the world of ideas [20,21], and this integrative diversification is only possible in the context of "[l]ate Modernity—the stage of Modernity in which the emergence of superdiversity is to be situated—[…] described as an era of hybridized, fragmented and polymorph identities" [22] (p. 2).

The subjectivity of creative research draws on the superdiversity of human identities by developing participatory and relational art projects that create spaces for dialogue and exchange in the context of growing socio-economic inequalities and population movements [23]. The current complexity and displacement of populations require tools such as systemic triangulation to theorise performative practices [24], demonstrating the adaptation of research-creation methodologies to the superdiversity of the cultural world. Methodological "bricolages" [25,26] or so-called "creative" methodologies [27] are more in tune with current artistic practices and have a positive influence on the methodological approaches of certain sciences [28]. The superdiversity observable in research-creation increases the potential for contamination between art and other disciplines, giving rise to an effervescent form of "disciplinary cannibalism" [29], which has already begun. "Over the past twenty years or so, the "disciplinary cannibalism" of art history and anthropology has produced convergences and fruitful research perspectives. It has become increasingly clear that aesthetic perspective and [anthropologic] exploration, far from being mutually exclusive, are now linked by a reciprocal involvement" [30] (p. 15).

This article takes advantage of this context of superdiversifity in research-creation to develop new exploratory narratives and define the knowledge that results from interactions between North American anthropology and research-creation. The problem raised by Bateson, of the imperative of integrating a "second glance" into the scientific approach, remains a complex issue. Systems thinking emerges as an ideal tool for theorising the changes applicable to artistic practice, offering the possibility of unprecedented learning. Through two heuristic cycles, the research-creation presented here could exemplify the "unity" sought by Bateson. It is essential to emphasise that research-creation is rooted in artistic practices, from which intersections between the arts and sciences can emerge. From a holistic point of view, the knowledge produced cannot be reduced to one or the other of these fields. It is also imperative to maintain an analogy between the observable world of superdiversity and the realm of ideas. This analogy allows for the application of a system built on the model of observable changes in biology to suggest sensible forms of adaptation of the "mind".

To develop convergent and cross-disciplinary research, it is crucial not to look for what might be shared between the respective results of creative and scientific approaches because, at this level, they show significant opposition. Instead, we need to explore what they have in common in their research processes and situate them within definitions of anthropology and creative research that encourage this transdisciplinary openness. The points of convergence between these disciplines can be seen in the use of epistemic objects and in the construction of experimental systems [31]. However, these are not technological systems that are determined by their characteristics, nor are they obvious and available objects for everyday use. The epistemic objects and experimental systems in question are distinguished by their systemic configuration, which is deliberately precarious from the moment they are set up, and by a type of object with a certain intrinsic under-determination [31]. The entanglement of theory and practice in the form of a system organised around an epistemic object makes it possible to identify correspondences between the territories of artistic practice and scientific research. My research-creation ventures into this entanglement to experiment with a transdisciplinary approach, revitalising anthropological research by integrating the poetic, the sensitive, and the imaginary, while simultaneously broadening the reflexivity of artistic practices centred on clay. It is essential to note that in this reflexive article, clay is consciously identified as the central material that integrates various ceramic practices and forms, while broader categories also manifest themselves in other human cultures [32].

The research-creation briefly outlined here proposes to make clay the central object of this epistemic investigation. It sets out to develop an experimental system emulating the following two types of change observable in living organisms: static change and schismatic change [33]. The modification of this system generates a new identity, to be defined in the context of the "change of change" [34] and the introduction of the researcher's creativity into anthropology. It is in today's complex and superdiverse context that the complementarity between the sensitive and the scientific can be explored. The conclusion of this article will seek to name and define the identity of this hybrid heuristic approach [31]. It is first necessary to situate this research within a succinct definition of anthropology that allows for flexibility and openness and to take a position on the place of artistic practice in this research-creation.

2. What Is the Anthropological Position?

For Bateson, only anthropology can operate a transdisciplinary arts–sciences entanglement [35]. To understand the researcher's point of view, it is necessary to situate the practice of anthropology in line with his holistic vision of the discipline and to look for correspondences with some current research in this field. For Bateson, positivist science lacks poetry: "If there had been no poets, there would have been no problems, because it is certain that the illiterate man of science of today would never have found them" [36] (p. 7). It is clear that his position on the subject fluctuated over the course of his career if we think of the frantic archiving he did in New Guinea or the application of theories from biology to the world of human culture [37]. He was nevertheless a fervent critic of Cartesian thought and quoted the Old Testament to blame his predecessors: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" [38] (Jeremiah 31: 29–34). Bateson was outspoken about the epistemic obstacles that the Cartesian approach had placed before us:

> "The schooling which we all come out of is quite monstrous. It goes back in fact to Locke and Newton and to Descartes and dualism. It is not an accident and it is a very curious juxtaposition that this same man around 1700, Descartes, created three of the major tools of our contemporary thinking. One: the split between mind and matter. Two: the Cartesian coordinates, the graph—you put time on the bottom and you make a variable. And, three: the cogito—'I think, therefore I am.' Those three things go together and have simply torn the concept of the universe in which we live into rags." [1] (p. 305)

The positivist sciences, in the contingencies of their historical development, have an advantage in producing specialists. Recent history has enshrined true knowledge as the result of the Cartesian approach, and this has discarded the traditional partnerships between the physical world and the spiritual world, or between observed facts and constructed fables. These propositions of Cartesian philosophy defined that the default inquiry would be that of the scientific approach [39]. "For those of us who have been educated in the values of a society in which the authority of scientific knowledge reigns unchallenged, the division of reality into two mutually exclusive realms, that of fact and that of fable, is so ingrained that it has become self-evident" [39] (p. 453). This also coloured, not to say constrained, the historical developments of anthropological research in the first half of the twentieth century. For those trained (as I am) in the tradition of North American anthropology, specialisation in one of the four subdivisions is compulsory and necessary for acquiring the "right" research method. It is not my intention to examine the methodology of the Boasian school, as this has already been amply performed by other more "specialist" authors, and we can find in the literature opinions "talked out of both sides of the mouth". On the one hand, the holistic vision of the Boasian system is defended by showing that Boas himself was more interested in the systems that define objects in their cultural contexts than in the collection of sporadic data [40]. On the other hand, the Boasian system has also been described as an atomistic approach that neglects the historicity of human cultures by using ethnographic description in the manner of a Linnaean natural history [41].

It is still important to mention that what has been criticized about the divisional tree proposed by Boas has raised a long-standing opposition between two modes of research as follows: the idiographic mode refers to the study of particular cases and the collection of data; the nomothetic mode refers to objects and methods used to establish general or universal laws, as represented by constant relationships between the phenomena observed. The idiographic mode naturally corresponds to the field methods of ethnography (widely employed by Boasian anthropology), whereas the nomothetic mode corresponds to anthropology whose reflexivity is at a level of abstraction similar to that of philosophy. The nomothetic mode is certainly closer to Bateson's definition of anthropology when he evoked the possibilities of collaboration between the arts and sciences. Anthropology is at a higher level of abstraction than the ethnographic method. This level of abstraction operates at the philosophical level to produce meaning from the data collected. It is also at

this level of abstraction that creative research is situated, in which the data are constructed through artistic practice. In anthropology, as in creative research, "[t]he theoretician operating in a nomothetic mode imagines a world that is, by its nature, particulate" [39] (p. 418) and seeks new ways of inhabiting it.

This degree of abstraction was already apparent in the mid-twentieth century in the structuralist–functionalism of Alfred Radcliffe-Brown [42], which displaced the absolute functionalism of Malinowski [43] to human society and its institutions, understood as a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts and capable of self-organisation and self-reproduction. Radcliffe-Brown's successor, Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, opposed the positivism that sought to make anthropology a "natural science", seeing it as a comprehensive rather than explanatory science. For him and his colleague Eva Gillies, anthropology studies societies as moral systems and thus seeks arguments rather than specific laws. It is interesting to note that during field studies among the Azande populations of Central Africa, their research highlighted the fact that logical and spiritual (magical/sensitive) registers coexist in the conception of the reality of these human groups [44]. Thus, over the last century, several anthropological practices, oscillating to varying degrees between the empirical method and philosophical anthropology, have observed the inseparability of facts and fables in human cultural constructs. This can be seen in the mythical thinking mapped out by Lévi-Strauss [45–47] because art and myth, being both "languages" and sensitive views of a particular world, maintain close links to express the unity of human phenomena [48,49].

A nomothetic approach to anthropology needs to be separated from the ethnographic method because "[…] through its conflation with ethnography, anthropology has become an interrogation of its own ways of working" [39] (p. 445). This break with data collection should, however, allow for a reflexivity that includes the poetic and the sensitive and that lingers on working within phenomena, with people, or with materials (in the case of a material art practice). Data are constructed when the researcher is active and takes part in the world. Research then becomes a participatory activity that enables comparisons to be made between different sensibilities, between different perceptions of reality. "To do anthropology, I venture, is to dream like an *Ojibwa*. As in a dream, it is continually to open up the world, rather than to seek closure. The endeavour is essentially comparative, but what it compares are not bounded objects or entities but ways of being" [50] (p. 84).

A constant "opening up" of the world is certainly less possible in an arborescent system that produces specialists than in a philosophical abstraction that includes poetic and sensitive perceptions. The division into subdivisions obviously has several advantages, the main one being that it facilitates interdisciplinarity. But I fear that the hyperspecialisation of researchers will produce a degree of disciplinary hermeticism. Indeed, interdisciplinarity between the subdivisions of Boasian anthropology has practically never taken place. In any case, it has been very rare in the last century, since "[o]f the 3264 articles in American Anthropologist (AA) from 1899 to 1998, only perhaps 311 substantially draw on more than one anthropological sub-field in the analysis of their data. That is to say, over a 100-year period, only 9.5 percent of the articles in AA bring the discipline's subfields together in significant ways" [51] (p. 463).

A holistic approach to practice requires us to cross the boundaries of Boasian subdivisions and encourage interdisciplinarity or, even better, transdisciplinarity. "Interdisciplinarity is about transferring methods from one discipline to another. It transcends disciplines, but its purpose also remains rooted in disciplinary research. Transdisciplinarity, on the other hand, as the prefix "trans" indicates, is concerned with what is simultaneously between disciplines, across disciplines and beyond any discipline. Its purpose is to understand the present world, one of the imperatives of which is the unity of knowledge" [52] (p. 27). The unity of knowledge (to recall the unity sought by Bateson) requires that the authority of knowledge is not solely that of the scientific approach. We need to move from the observation of an object to a subject participating in research and from participatory observation to participatory practice because it is through the knowing subject who experi-

ences research that the various levels of reality, observed through transdisciplinarity, can be incorporated. "The unity linking all the levels of Reality, if it exists, must necessarily be an open unity" [52] (p. 32). An open unit corresponds to the complex systems observable in living organisms. We therefore need to find a way to bridge the gap between creation and anthropology by redefining research as a responsibility for the living [53]. Research as correspondence with the living is a form of experience, and it is through experience that things mingle with us, with our thoughts, our dreams, and our imagination [54].

In the quotation at the beginning of this article, Bateson emphasises "his knowledge". Being himself involved in the search for knowledge between the empirical and the nomothetic. The researcher positions himself within his object of study, participates in it, and includes his own reflexivity in the experiential data. Research from within that does not neglect the imaginary or the poetic is something quite rare in an idiographic approach, but it is a frequent, even obligatory, position in research-creation.

3. What Research-Creation?

In the case of an entanglement of art and anthropology in the field of artistic practice, art (in this article, all definitions of art are valid) as defined by research-creation approaches cannot find complementarity in an idiographic approach to anthropology. To paraphrase Tim Ingold, an art that is meant to be speculative and experimental, that explores the possibilities of being (and becoming) in comparisons and in open conversations, cannot satisfy the standards of precision and descriptive depth of detail demanded by ethnographic enquiry [55]. According to Ingold, artistic practices that can be confused with an anthropological approach as defined above must meet certain criteria. Art perceived as anthropological does not elevate itself above others or impose itself as a supreme truth; it pays attention to the world rather than imposing its primary intentions; it is critical, but it does not abandon itself to criticism; it is curious and allows knowledge to emerge from within (in order to take part in life); it conceives without being conceptual; it raises questions, without proposing answers; and its practice is closer to the spectrum of material practices (crafts, decorative arts, studio arts, design, etc.) [53,55].

Research-creation is a dynamic approach that integrates theoretical reflection and artistic practice in a continuous process of exploration and discovery. Research and creation remain inseparable, but the links between research and artistic practice can take different forms. According to Borgdorff [56], artistic practice and research can be differentially entangled in the following three ways: research "on" the arts, where the object of research is artistic practice (art history, art anthropology, etc.); research "for" the arts, where art is not only the object of research but also its objective (technical development, new aesthetic territory, etc.); research "in" the arts, where artistic practice is the means of research (inseparability of subject and object of research, theory–practice tangle, embodied knowledge is articulated in the creative process and in the artistic results). The research-creation presented at the end of this article falls into the third category. Artistic practice is a means of producing transversal and recursive knowledge between the Boasian subdivisions through the contribution of the researcher's sensitive experience.

We need to explain the researcher's position in this research-creation. The first heuristic cycle that makes up the experimental system presented here proposes a decentring of the subject towards artistic practice, based on a performative approach to the objects, codes, and vocabulary specific to clay practices. Performative research is research in which creation is mobilised, on the one hand, to overcome the expressive limitations of qualitative methodologies when it comes to studying phenomena of the "sensitive" order, and the limitations of academic language in giving an account of them, and, on the other hand, to allow the person performing the research to include their subjectivity, to realise themselves, and even to transform themselves [57]. The performative approach makes it possible to relegate objects to the background and consider creative processes, contexts, and activities as key. Performative research instrumentalizes artistic creation as a complement

to qualitative research in which the researcher remains in the foreground, running the risk of being confined to an anthropocentric reading of creative activities:

> "When the stable, rational and coherent subject is the focus of attention, the objects become secondary. Only the objects perceived and experienced by the subjects are secondary. recognised as important. This anthropocentric approach has the subject, the being human experience, as an indisputable starting point, making human experience the fundamental condition for research." [58] (p. 450)

This is what the second heuristic cycle attempts to achieve, by proposing research that is not focused on the human being, in order to "create research in a different way" [57]. This decentring is necessary to develop artistic activities that operate within the subdivision of anthropology concerned with the biological and the comparative, i.e., comparative primatology. This part of research-creation is positioned as a post-qualitative approach, blurring the boundary between the person carrying out the research and the data. There is an entanglement, and the data are fabricated rather than collected. The post-qualitative approach challenges performative research, but it is much closer to system thinking. It abandons the modernist ideal of simplicity and reductionist methods to apprehend the world in all its complexity. Post-qualitative research appears to be the approach that makes it possible to introduce creativity into the social sciences through the construction of innovative models, the fabrication of data and their potential agency [59], and by borrowing from performative research:

> "If the world is complex and disorderly, we will at least sometimes have to renounce simplicity. But one thing is certain: if we want to think about the messiness of reality, we will have to learn to think, to practise, to relate and to know in new ways. We will have to learn to know certain realities of the world using methods that are unusual or unknown in the social sciences." [60] (p. 3)

The post-qualitative approach makes extensive use of writing to research and extract data (accounts of practice have been produced following the artistic experiments presented here; this article does not repeat the exercise of introspection and explicitation [61] but briefly presents the reflective avenues that have emerged). Writing in the first person "moves away from conventional academic language, to incorporate the feelings and affects accompanying the key moments in the research-creation process" [57] (p. 7). This is a way of bringing out the diffractions between the phenomena observed and the researcher's perceptions, aiming to "liberate reflexivity from postpositivist and realist demands in terms of the validity or fidelity of research, contributing to a non-reductive, diffractive and transformative understanding of knowledge" [62] (p. 3). The post-qualitative approach positions itself in a "beyond" qualitative method and opens up new avenues of research.

> "The knowledge that they have to develop must be: constructed; unfinished; plausible, appropriate and contingent; oriented by ends; dependent on the actions and experiences made by the knowing subjects; structured by the knowledge process while also structuring it; forged in and through the interaction of the knowing subject with the world." [63] (p. 7)

My research-creation is based on these epistemological and methodological positions in order to propose a form of research in the anthropology of the arts, the aims of which are "to go beyond current knowledge, to reject a dominant interpretation that no longer contributes anything, apart from glosses incessant and infinite" [63] (p. 17). The use of constructed knowledge can make "that the aim of the research will be to resolve, in innovative terms, a new concrete problem posed by the evolution of the social world" [63] (p. 17), referring here to the problem of the loss of the sense of aesthetic unity evoked by Bateson. Knowledge becomes a product co-constructed by the creative process, by its results, and by changes in the system because "truth is to be made, not discovered" [64] (p. 84). In this sense, the use of epistemic objects and an experimental system enable the articulation and co-construction of cross-disciplinary knowledge. They leave a great deal

of room for the researcher's inventiveness and incorporate the recursive nature of knowledge, leading the experimental system to self-organise, self-reproduce, and offer new learning opportunities.

> "The first results obtained give ideas for other questions and other observations to be made in the field of study, this new collection of data opens up new results, which lead to new investigations... We rediscover the fundamental ideas of knowledge that inform the means of its ongoing improvement." [63] (p. 26)

4. Epistemic Object: Mind and Clay in Co-Construction

In light of the research carried out by Hans-Jörg Rheinberger [65], it appears that an epistemic object marks a kind of tension towards the solution of a problem beyond the reach of current understanding, which lies on the horizon of a domain of knowledge. Drawing a trajectory of hypotheses, epistemic objects are at the same time historically rooted in known data and practices. In other words, they guide successive conceptualisations and experimentation, enabling the orientation of knowledge that will be identified later [65,66]. It is now important "to no longer separate the formation of concepts and theories from the flow of experimentation" [31] (p. 237) and epistemic objects appear, not as research results, but rather "as the driving forces, as the germinating powers of the research process" [31] (p. 240).

The impressive amount of data uncovered by anthropology over the last century has highlighted an increasing diversity of uses for clay in human cultures. The distribution of practices goes back to the Upper Palaeolithic (according to archaeological evidence) and the ubiquity of the material throughout the inhabited world (with the exception of the Arctic and sub-Arctic zones) means that clay can be proposed as an invariant of human cultures. As an epistemic object, clay is therefore "historically rooted" in the "data" observed by anthropology and in the "known practices" of crafts and ceramic art. It is a material that has played a vital role in the development of architecture, the processing and preservation of food, the manufacture of alcoholic beverages, the development of the first forms of writing on clay tablets, the improvement in sanitary conditions, the irrigation of agricultural land, funerary rites, artistic productions, the development of symbolic thought, and in the advances of modern science right up to the developments of ceramic engineering today [67].

Although the presence of clay in human societies is extremely diverse in time and space, the fact remains that it is the physical and spiritual relationships of the human body and its representation by the material that make it possible to propose its epistemic use. These relationships appear as much in distant times, in the construction of founding narratives throughout the world, as in current research into cognitive archaeology. The unity between humanity and the biosphere could be glimpsed by following the trail of representations of the body in Upper Palaeolithic ceramic figurines, or by the metaphors with living organisms applied to ceramic objects or combustion structures by certain human cultures. Also, the terms used by craftsmen and archaeologists in describing traditional pottery forms, referring to parts of the human body and the use of clay to test the concept of material agentivity by cognitive archaeology [68,69], led me to consider clay as the ideal tool for blurring the boundaries between the human mind (as considered in the Cartesian philosophical tradition) and its material engagement. The perspective of the theory of material engagement makes it possible to study the co-construction of humans and "things", proposing a theory of mind analogous to Bateson's ambition. "A distinctive feature of [this theory] lies in its conviction that minds and things are continuous and inter-definable processes rather than isolated and independent entities" [70] (p. 13). This theory offers us part of the answer as to the distribution of the "human mind" in the ceramic evidence and in the uses of clay.

> "There is no deficiency of higher intelligence in pottery making. Quite the contrary, pottery making, like the rest of human arts and crafts, bring forth, enact, and re-create precisely the form of intelligence that drives human cognitive evolution. It is not the movement of clay that is lacking creative consciousness, memory, or imagination. It is we, as modern observers that often lack the ability or the appropriate methodologies to follow that movement and to understand the cognitive life it entails. If we cannot see the mind in clay, it is because of our deeply entrenched assumptions about the location and ontology of mind stuff." [70] (p. 12)

By passing the Cartesian assumption of a mind locked in a skull and considering clay as a mirror in which cognition is distributed, we need to look at a few links that might evoke the co-construction of human societies and the working of clay. In the field of archaeology, but also in that of craftsmanship, the fact that the parts of a vase are defined by terminology analogous to the human body (mouth, lip, neck, shoulder, body, foot, as seen in Figure 1 below) is not insignificant and allows us to consider an ancient link between the manipulation of clay, ceramic artefacts, and the representation of the body.

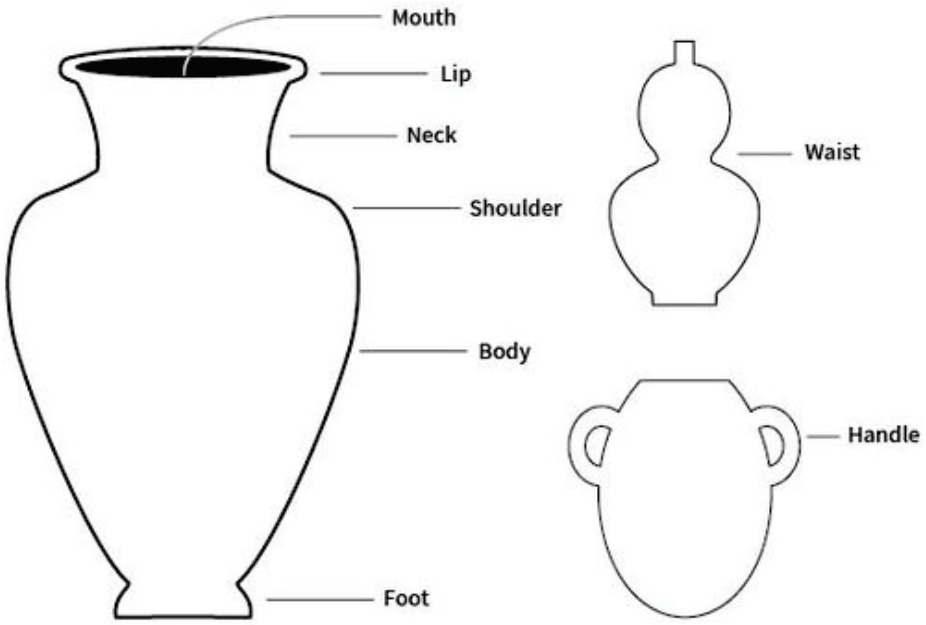

Figure 1. Example of the anatomy of a clay vessel.

This metaphor between the parts of the human body and the parts of a vase is an old one. Several examples can be found in the descriptions of pottery shapes by archaeologists or craftsmen, see also [71] (Figure 5, p. 397). It can also be seen in the utensils needed for the tea ceremony in Japan (chanoyu 茶の湯, or sadō 茶道, or even chadō 茶道 for "way of tea"). These objects are considered living organisms when they are "born" out of the kiln. From the perspective of a tea bowl as a living organism, it is appropriate to consider firing defects as being personality or character traits. The practice of kintsugi [72,73] is also important in this respect, as gluing a broken object back together and decorating the fracture lines with gold dust imbues it with a tragic beauty, highlighting the accidental nature of its journey as "a formative life experience". In the samurai tradition, it is also mentioned that the human spirit (mind) is constantly floating and seeks objects to land on; ceramic objects are a place of attachment or rest for the samurai spirit (which is not enclosed in the skull) [74]. Moreover, the object that is analogous to human bodies, living organisms or the "mind" is not a separable result of its manufacturing process or its "embryogenesis". The traces of the firing process are aesthetic elements that can be spotted on the object, and each has a particular name [75]. These aesthetic qualifiers make it possible to reconstruct

the lost process of anagama firing, used in the production of tea ceremony utensils and also to describe the process of firing of this type of kiln, presented as analogous to the digestive system of the human body [76].

The body analogies observable in the parts of a ceramic object or in the manufacturing process demonstrate a close and ancient link between clay and the human organism. Clay is found in many of the world's founding myths. For example, the Bible explains that God made man (and woman) in his own image from the dust of the ground ("red earth" from the Hebrew *adamah*); Jewish folklore describes the *golem* as an anthropomorphic being generally created from mud or clay; in Sumerian mythology, the gods *Enki* or *Enlil* create humans from clay and blood; in Egyptian mythology, the god *Khnum* creates human children from clay; in the epic of *Gilgamesh*, *Enkidu* is created by the goddess *Aruru* from clay to be *Gilgamesh*'s partner; *Yoruba* culture maintains that the god *Obatala* created mankind from clay; the *Maori* people believe that *Tāne Mahuta*, god of the forest, created the first woman from clay; in the Korean story *Seng-gut*, humans are created from red clay; and so on.

Many of these stories evoke the making of humanity or its representation through the material of clay. Human representations in the form of figurines are also the oldest ceramic artefacts discovered by archaeologists. The oldest ceramic known to date is the *Dolni Vestonice* Venus (see Figure 2 below), found in Moravia in the Czech Republic (for further information about this Venus, see [77]).

Figure 2. *Cont.*

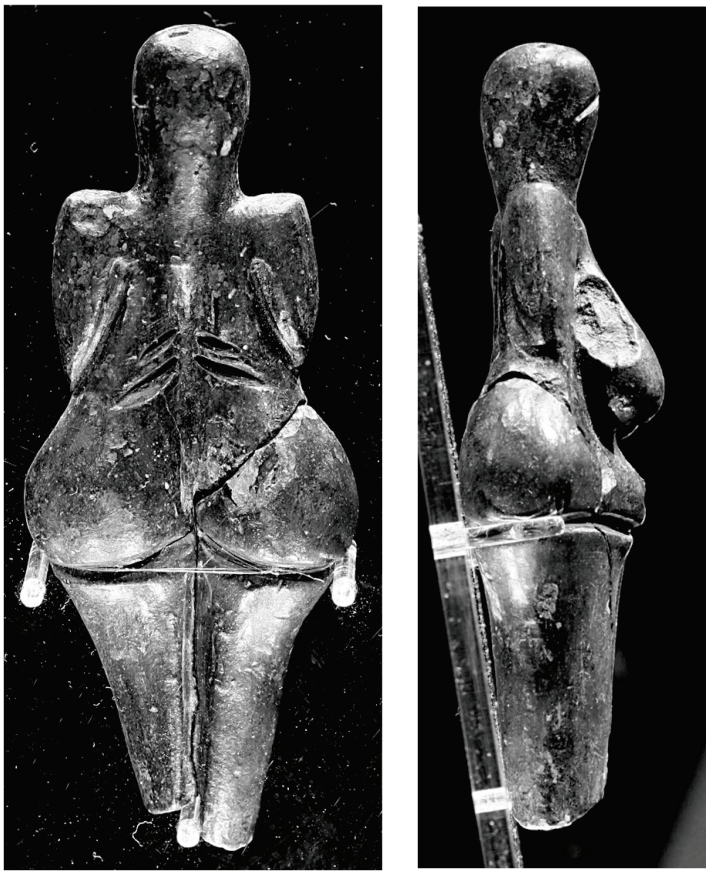

Figure 2. Venus from *Dolni Vestonice*, 29,000 to 22,000 years BP. Source: Petr Novák, Wikipedia.

The ceramic remains at the *Dolni Vestonice* site in the Czech Republic offer an important insight into the knowledge held and passed on by humans from one generation to the next. Most of the ceramic artefacts found on the site (over 10,000) "and the existence of kilns argues that the relevant cultural practices over time involved repetition and both transmission and learning of a specific, patterned behavior of ceramic technology" [78] (p. 1007). The fractures observed on the artefacts seem to have been intentionally produced by the thermal shock of the loess and strongly suggest that the interest of these human groups was not in the objects produced but rather in the processes of making and firing the clay figurines. These processual experiments from the Upper Palaeolithic and the discovery of built combustion structures suggest that clay working was probably more widespread at this time than is known from archaeological evidence. Combustion structures "located a considerable distance upslope from the settlement area, suggests that activities involving figurines were carried out by only a small number of people. The separation of the locus of this behavior, away from yet near the settlement, may imply the special and nonutilitarian nature of this behavior as well as the control of this behavior by just some individuals in the community" [78] (p. 1008). For more details on the firing structures excavated in 1951 and in 1979 at Dolni Vestonice, the horseshoe-shaped kiln, and the pitched-vault kiln (which contains 2300 ceramic fragments), see also [78] (Figure 7, p. 1007). The fact that, in the Upper Palaeolithic, clay and ceramic technology appear in archaeological contexts attributable to non-utilitarian specialised behaviour representing human (female) bodies, and that the firing process seems to have been the central interest of these activities, testifies to an early spiritual and symbolic relationship between human groups and ceramic technology.

What is also surprising is the fact that these artefacts are non-utilitarian and that they predate by around 8000 years the first utilitarian ceramics discovered in southern China [79]. Anthropomorphic representations in ceramics were extremely diverse until the European Neolithic period [80], and they could be considered as transitional, with utilitarian forms containing either reminiscences of anthropomorphic parts or stylistic decorations with an identity character [81]. This is also what archaeology points out when it uses ceramic decoration as a cultural identifier. The discipline considers that the diversity of ceramic decorations bears witness to the diversity of ancient human cultures (e.g., the Neolithic Rubane culture in Central Europe, which owes its name to the ribbons that frequently decorated its pottery).

It is these analogies between objects, firing structures, and living organisms that make clay an ideal reflexive material and an object of knowledge that may enable us to rediscover "the lost unity between the biosphere and humanity". At the very least, the material offers rich avenues for reflection, as its resistance to the passage of time demonstrates its long-standing implications in the development of human societies. It appears to be a mirror of the human mind, also incorporating a co-construction of scientific thought through its interpretations of ceramic evidence.

By producing reflections on human cultures and their relationship with their environment, and by representing the human body symbolically or physically, the material intuitively appears to me to be self-reflexive. This self-reflexivity of the ceramic medium has been central to the definition of ceramic art since the mid-twentieth century. Artists who used clay for artistic rather than craft purposes were quick to realise that ceramics was a medium in its own right and that a ceramic art practice had to draw on its own history, contexts, processes, and codes. Several examples of contemporary practice work in this direction, and the reflexivity of ceramics has become the conceptual and theoretical framework for artistic practice. This reflexivity should be extended to the production processes and contexts of ceramic practice.

My artistic practice and the research-creation presented here are also based on references to ceramics, and in the long term, observed through artefacts and in the variety of cultural approaches documented by anthropology. It is worth mentioning that the oppositions internal to the medium (clay/ceramic, raw/fired, craft/art, utilitarian/decorative, solid/liquid, material/immaterial, individual/collective, perennial/temporary, contemporary/ancient, object/subject, individual/environment, etc.) are self-reflexive driving forces that build structures, suggest function, and stimulate the evolution of my experimental system. The aesthetic oppositions and self-reflexivity seen in the clay practices produce movement between iterations, developing a knowledge that will have to be defined later.

5. Experimental System: Static and Schismatic Changes Applied to Research-Creation "in" Clay

The use of question-generating material oppositions, together with intuitions derived from the field of ceramics (the analogies between the body and clay, or the self-reflexivity observed in modern and contemporary artistic practices) form the basis for the construction of an experimental system based on assemblages of so-called "loose" concepts [63]. These concepts remain precarious, and this precariousness is important because it allows for these "assemblages" to be disintegrated in new iterations of the system, constantly proposing new research procedures [31]. New problems arise with each new solution, and the system thus produces differential iterations. This is what Gaston Bachelard was referring to when he wrote about "knowledge in progression", emphasising a process of mutual instruction between procedure and object [82]. This reciprocity between object and procedure (or method) requires a solidarity that produces a reification. The object is then capable of transforming the method, and, in this case, the concepts and theories that emerge from the iterations of the system cannot be separated from the flow of experimentation [31]. My experimental system has two iterations that emulate the following types of changes observable in living organisms: static changes that occur within the sys-

tem and schismatic changes, which affect and modify the system itself [33]. The theory of change [34], which allows the system to self-reproduce and suggest new ways of learning, has been instrumentalized after the artistic experiments. It is in the flow of these experiments that the changes made to the "loose" concepts observed in praxis enable new analogies to be sought. The knowledge built up by experimentation in the non-human world is fed back into the human world, and this feedback makes it possible to delimit a new territory; a hybrid heuristic makes it possible to reflect on the unity of the "mind" and the environment and to work from their co-construction in the production of new artistic experiments, because the system becomes the means of its permanent learning.

5.1. Static Changes: The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same!

I start from the intuition that current practices seem to rely on the codes of the medium to position themselves autonomously in the fields of art (its vocabulary, materiality, history, etc.). This self-reflexivity seems to define a conceptual territory specific to ceramic practices, preventing them from "[…] lowering ceramics from an art (an intellectual approach) to a mere material and physical practice" [83] (p. 48). These oppositions between art and craft or between concept and material seemed to me to be important, but also restrictive, because they focus on the object as the result of praxis. What we observe in terms of human behaviour over time does not seem to focus solely on objects, but above all on the processes and contexts in which matter is transformed. What is more, archaeology and anthropology see objects as revealing contexts and behaviours that have disappeared, so they are not the reflexive outcomes, but rather the beginnings. I felt it necessary to propose a decentring by extending the notion of self-reflexivity to the processes and contexts of production. Attempting to do this means moving away from traditional forms of ceramic creation to include performativity and the contexts of praxis. As author and collaborator Paul Kawczak said to me at the start of my cycle of experiment "How far can you move away from it and still talk about it [ceramics]?". This remark sparked my interest in searching anthropological documents for information that would enable me to relate contexts and processes to objects in a self-reflexive way. The creative project lasted just under two months, and an experiential book was published as a reflexive report [84].

The reflections were built up from the media archives resulting from the praxis. The creative activities have been extremely rich and diverse but have not led to any profound changes in my artistic practice. They have remained within the aesthetic questioning specific to the world of ceramics and interdisciplinary research within the arts. It was the transdisciplinary reflections with the author Paul Kawczak and the archaeologist Manek Kolhatkar that destabilised the system. As Kolhatkar wrote, quoting Bateson [85] "[...] it takes two eyes to be able to reproduce an impression of depth, and it is by joining two durations that we will attempt to bring out something else, to proceed with a double description of real" [84] (p. 41). The impression of depth can be restored using a macro-concept as a coherent amalgam [65] that oversees and encompasses all the archives indiscriminately and links the artefacts to the contexts and processes of production. The macro-concept of "behavioural artefact" [86,87] is then borrowed from behavioural archaeology [88] and enables internal changes to my system. It includes objects, gestures, traces, sounds, actions, handwritten notes, and instruction lists in a metacategory called "artefact". Following these activities of indifferentiation, the artefacts underline a permanence (service responsible for ensuring the uninterrupted functioning of an organism) and solutions giving them meaning can easily be envisaged from the theoretical framework of archaeology.

The coherent amalgam of "behavioural artefacts" reorganises and expands what can be considered ceramic reflexivity by undistinguishing the objects produced from the contexts or performativity associated with working with clay, but it resists the shock and remains a solution that makes sense within material production. These changes produce movement by proposing a larger category, but they are insufficient to bring about a real transformation in my practice that would define this "place of passage" between creation and anthropology. In order to mutate, the system requires a real imbalance, which seemed

possible to me if analogies are sought in the "behavioural" part of the macro-concept. Behaviours analogous to those archived in this first heuristic cycle can easily be perceived in the ceramic traditions of other human groups. I was initially interested in the craft traditions recorded by ethnography and reinforced by archaeological evidence in human groups that are both present and dispersed over time. The archetypes of craft pottery and the chain of operations involved in its transformation can certainly allow for increased self-reflexivity. This led me to experiment with other subdivisions of Boasian anthropology, namely, ethnology and ethnolinguistics.

Several of these experiments were carried out (they will not be unfolded here), but once again, they remained rooted in a performative approach to my research-creation, and this placed the actor-human at the centre of the activities. But does anthropology exist without anthropos? And research-creation? How do you keep to self-reflexive experiments while avoiding anthropocentrism? We needed to look not at organisms of a completely different nature, but at living things with which we share certain characteristics. Since primates are phylogenetically related to humans, they differ in degree, but not in kind. Comparative primatology is, therefore, a Boasian subdivision that is rarely related to archaeology or ethnology, and even less to creative research.

5.2. Schismatic Changes: Decentring to the Point of Losing Control!

Schismatic changes led to transformations in the rules that govern my practice. This was brought about by external input and a sudden change in context brought about by the primatoscopy-01 project (the project is still active, primatoscopy-02 is due to start in 2024). This project was developed in four distinct phases, each adjusting its protocol according to the constraints encountered in the phase that preceded it. Primatoscopy-01 is a long research cycle involving activities with clay with the following two species of primates in captivity: Japanese macaques (*macaca fuscata*) and gelada baboons (*theropithecus gelada*). For reasons of accessibility to the enclosures and because of their highly hierarchical social organisation, the *Gelada* baboons had to be removed from the experiment after the first phase. And that was not the least of my worries.

The experiments began systematically (see Figure 3 below): blocks of clay of equivalent size and weight were placed in the enclosures at equal distances from each other and at an equal distance from any furniture or devices required for captivity. The aim of this initial arrangement was to delimit certain characteristics of the non-human primates (physical strength, hierarchization, prehension, movement, etc.) and also to maximise the relationship between individuals and clay. This first phase was decisive, but also disappointing, as it completely reoriented my expectations. As Japanese macaques are usually carriers of the herpes B virus (*Herpesvirus simiae*), it was difficult for me to have access to the artefacts left after their handling of the clay. The protocol prevented me from intervening in the enclosures after their passage and obliged me to isolate the clay fragments recovered until they had been fired. What is more, as the conditions in captivity could not be recorded, it was impossible for me to film the primates in my absence and observe their behaviour. I had to work with the residues I saw in the enclosures and try to make sense of these behavioural artefacts. The results immediately seemed disastrous; the clay was scattered throughout the food and excrement; there were few traces imprinted in the clay; there was little handling of the blocks; and the primates seemed disturbed by these material "intrusions" into their enclosure.

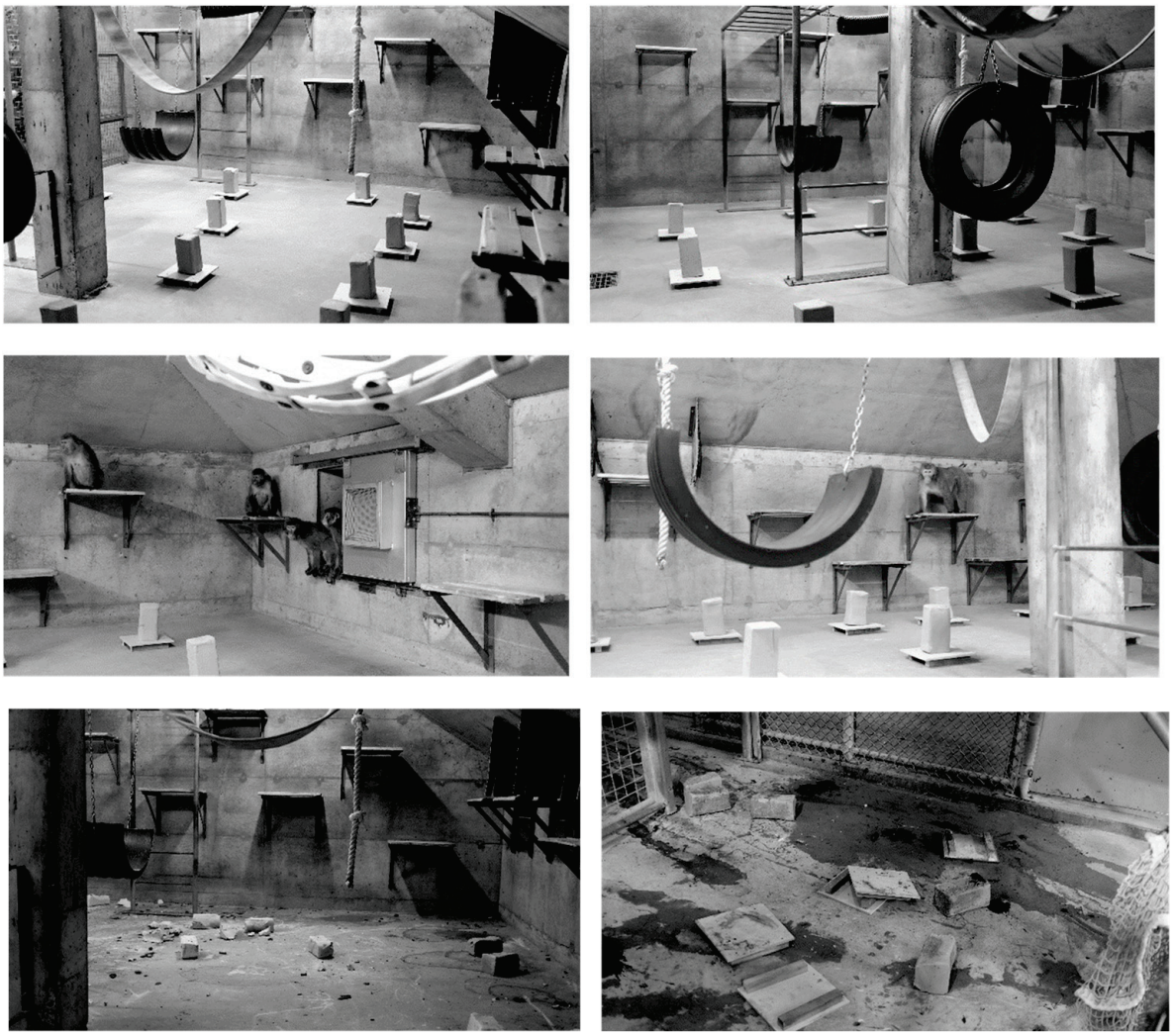

Figure 3. Japanese macaque enclosure at the start of phase 1. Photos: Patrick Moisan.

Subsequent phases varied the shapes displayed in the enclosures to encourage the primates to handle the clay. Traditional pottery wheel shapes were used to contain the food and encourage the primates to manipulate the objects (see Figure 4 below). It was not until the end of phase 02 that I realised that their activities are divided according to the functions of the enclosures; primates in captivity do not play where they eat. From then on, I was able to arrange the clay forms in such a way as to obtain artefacts (mainly torn forms, fragments, and residues). Fortunately, I was archiving the results of each phase, and an invariable pattern was emerging through them: the clay was drying rapidly through the ventilation of the enclosures, and the primates were fragmenting the clay once it was dry. This was visible in the shape of the fractures that could be seen on the fragments and in the marks left on the ground; the macaques seemed more interested in using the fragments of dried clay to trace the ground than in handling the raw clay. I was familiar with these behaviours, having observed them in primates in the wild when they break stones to lick off the salt. These gestures seemed to me to be culturally constructed behaviours [89]. I could make them happen in this context and reflect on them through the materiality of clay.

Figure 4. Handling traditional clay forms. Phases 02 to 04. Photos: Yanik Potvin.

This aroused my interest in archives showing the use of dried fragments to draw lines on the ground. At all stages of the project, the macaques were tracing the ground using clay as if it were chalk (see Figure 5 below). These multitudes of tangled lines were astonishing because they were constant and repetitive. They seemed to be the main interest suggested by the materiality of the clay. As a "good archaeologist", I was able to divide the lines into two meta-categories: transport lines (linear, isolated, and intersecting) and relentless lines (localised, circular superimposed, and demonstrating a back-and-forth gesture).

Figure 5. Examples of lines produced by Japanese macaques, phases 01 to 04. Photos: Yanik Potvin.

The relentlessness lines have become comparative tools. I compared them with lines produced by chimpanzees (*pan troglodytes*). Several examples of pictorial creation with non-human primates have been carried out over the last century. The chimpanzee named "Congo" has produced artefacts with paint, as well as a series of experimental drawings [90]. The comparative interest of the experimental drawings produced by Congo lies not in their definition as "works of art", but rather in the repetition of lines, their superimposition, and in the transposition of the results to the specific world of these primates. The mistake has always been to attempt to observe creative possibilities in non-human primates and to compare them with the drawings of human children, with the signs observed in the human world using a semiotic approach [91], or to reflect on them in comparison with the artistic artefacts of the human art world. For me, the interest does not lie in knowing whether other species can produce "art" according to the characteristics that define this institution at a given moment in its history. It is more a question of trying to compare the lines produced by non-human primates with their environment and to reflect on the co-construction of these lines with what they perceive, recognise, and express. To this end, I had to think similar to a macaque, if I can put it that way, put myself in their shoes, and not bring the observations back to the human world, not just yet. Through these comparisons, the lines quickly evoked a "natural" environment, as perceived and constructed in primate cognition. This inspired me enormously because, in a bid to avoid the anthropocentrism

central to the performative approach to static change in my research-creation, I thought I had found a way to observe constructed behaviour in a species phylogenetically related to our own. These intuitions were only made possible by the knowledge and observations surrounding clay and its changes in state. It was through clay that primates expressed this co-construction of their culture and their environment. A co-construction that I had glimpsed in their choice of activities according to the divisions of their inner enclosure.

I also compared the lines drawn on the ground by macaques with the lines produced by primatologists in their perceptions of great ape nesting. A study by primatologist Izawa Kohsei, trained at Kyoto University by the founder of Japanese primatology Junichiro Itani (1926–2001), shows schematic representations of six chimpanzee nests [92,93]. These diagrams evoke superimposed, intertwined lines representing the trees used in nesting activities by these primates. These recordings, schematised by the primatologists, and the lines produced with dried clay by the Japanese macaques, make an important schematic link in this cycle of research: the observation and recording of elements of the natural environment ("natural" in contrast to a captive environment) of certain primates by primatologists evokes the lines produced by the primates themselves in their state of captivity. Obviously, this hypothesis will need to be further explored and repeated in greater depth as I continue my research-creation, by obtaining more empirical data for comparison. Already, inspiring leads, shared between human and non-human primates, appear in the formation of certain parts of primate family brains, and the possibility of a co-construction between mind and perceived environment has been highlighted by cognitive archaeology [94] and also in literary works. It is interesting to note that the brains of the primate family contain two fusiform gyri under the occipital lobes. These gyri function in a mirror image, with one gyrus recognising the lines of the environment (horizon line, trees, etc.), while the other gyrus applies this line recognition to the faces of the individuals around it that make up its group [95,96]. This intuition would need to be explored in greater depth, but it does allow us to glimpse, through the field of my artistic practice, at the links between the "mind" and the environment. It was the writings of Anne Michaels [97] that brought my observation back to the specifically human world, demonstrating another use of lines as a co-construction of culture and environment. A poetic, sensitive, and symbolic lead was found in the comparison between the lines of macaques and the manufacture of the pigments used in the parietal drawings in the Lascaux and Chauvet caves. To paraphrase Michaels, the black pigment used to paint the animals at Lascaux was made from manganese dioxide and quartz, and almost half of the mixture was calcium phosphate. Calcium phosphate is produced by heating bone to four hundred degrees Celsius and then grinding it. We made our paintings from the bones of the animals we were painting.

6. Opening Breaches: Creative Anthropology's Hybrid Heuristics

Several reflexive avenues arising from these heuristic cycles enabled my system to generate new problems, in a recursive manner. Although they have very succinctly unfolded (see: https://yanikpotvin.com/experiences/, https://yanikpotvin.com/artefacts/, accessed on 10 January 2024), the two changes in my practice were guided in their experimentations and in their conceptualisations by the characteristics of my epistemic object, historically rooted in known data and practices [66]. The static changes, which decenter the "loose" concepts applied to clay and ceramics, allow for the creation of larger categories, more encompassing concepts that simultaneously straddle artistic practice and anthropological theory. This initial decentring is possible based on data rooted in history and brought to reality by the disciplines of anthropology. The schismatic changes have led to an intense decentring of my ceramic practice, caused by a loss of control over the creative process. The new context and the first results I saw appeared to me to be brutal, and I had to renegotiate my initial premises in the course of my work. These new premises drew on the theoretical framework of anthropology and attempted to maintain a link, albeit a very distant one, with the broadening of self-reflexivity brought about by the static changes. At this point, my practice is so far removed from ceramic reflexivity that I wonder if it

still speaks of it. And the trajectory of hypotheses provoked by my epistemic object seeks reflexive connections that make no more sense in the world of creation than in that of anthropological research. For every human system, this reveals itself as the reconstruction of a new reality; this new reality corresponds to level 3 learning. It is defined neither totally by my practice nor totally by my theoretical framework; it is a "place of passage" between the two. It is a new identity that can be defined by the "change of change" and a hybrid heuristic approach that I call "creative anthropology".

I believe that this hybrid approach still has no equivalent in arts anthropology research. It produces a new kind of learning by combining knowledge and practice [98]. Creative anthropology can be distinguished from approaches that document cultural facts in the media [99]; from representations of anthropological data through artistic practices [100,101]; from interdisciplinary collaborations between an anthropologist and artists [102–104]; and from proposals from the artist as an anthropologist [105,106] or archaeology as an art form [107]. All these innovative approaches have defined several possibilities for interdisciplinary relations [108], but in contrast to existing research, creative anthropology takes the stick from the end of research-creation [52]. Its results are not disciplinary, but transdisciplinary. The hypotheses, results, and forms of dissemination belong indiscriminately to the fields of anthropology and creative research. By using an epistemic object such as clay, which is rooted in material practices, and a systemic construction that functions by analogy with the living, creative anthropology presents itself as an innovative and creative articulation of the ideal and the material [49,109].

If the "unity of knowledge" so much sought after by Bateson can be glimpsed, it is this articulation between object and system that will enable it to be put into practice and reflected upon. Nor should we forget the current context of cultural superdiversity, which makes it possible to develop research in the interstices between existing disciplines. But the current superdiversity of the human world appears to be inversely proportional to the diversification of non-humans, threatening their habitats, which are their "mind" (and ours, by the same token). Creative anthropology does not set out to demonstrate "truths" or to catalogue our cultural particularities as descriptions frozen and dried up in time or space. Nor does it dwell on "separating the chaff from the wheat" [38] (Matthew 13: 24–30) or on delimiting who, from the schema and the content, is responsible for what comes first in our perceptions of the world [110]. It is active in the field of research-creation and works to improve the world's habitability, being accountable only to the moral and ethical levels of human society. It is situated in a "beyond" anthropology, a "post-anthropology" if you like. It is a form of research that engages human creativity in the defence of heuristic thinking.

For me, this free thought is essential to defend. Similar to all forms of life, it is organic, it tends towards increasing complexity, and it puts forward proposals and sets its own goals, but it places the artist–researcher in a risky, even uncomfortable position. His practice becomes difficult to recognise in current trends in art or anthropology. It is a research position that shakes disciplinary boundaries and proposes ways of going beyond the self-reflexivity or autonomy of art. This is why the heteronomy of research-creation is more conducive to the development of these "lieux de passage". Research-creation offers methodological and conceptual openings that cannot be reduced to institutions or art historical developments and even less to art that can only be explained by itself. This is the position of the reflexive practitioner [111], who operates from within his or her artistic practice and seeks to make meaning in an equivocal way. This position complements the ecology of the mind of Bateson, who was interested in artistic creativity from the outside and did not, strictly speaking, have an artistic practice. Through the field of creative practice, the researcher can open up several "levels of reality". This is what creative anthropology is all about, creating "breaches" to "something", to an "elsewhere". Creative anthropology does not set concepts, it continually "opens up the world" by raising questions rather than "closing it up" by proposing answers. Comparisons between different epistemologies and between different "ways of being" are possible from within, in our engagement with the

world, with the environment, and with materials [112]. This makes it possible to observe "things" in movement, in the processes and relations that give them form. It is through movement, through "mise-en-action" and through participatory practices that we must strive to describe the world and to perceive "new possibilities" in it [112].

Creative anthropology has been briefly introduced here, and it was important to explain how it works by coupling an epistemic object with system thinking. Obviously, each cycle of this creative research will be the subject of a more detailed description in the near future. For the moment, the "breaches opened up" by this approach remain difficult to name or circumscribe in the current state of our language, and the forms of diffusion specific to research-creation can complement these deficiencies. This complementarity evokes different levels of perception "enabling an increasingly general, unifying, all-encompassing vision of [r]eality, without ever exhausting it entirely" [52] (p. 33). Creative anthropology thus appears as an "open unit" that transgresses traditional binary dichotomies. The knowledge that emerges from its activities is committed to developing new narratives proposing a posthumanism [113–115] integrated with anthropology through research-creation. It is by hybridizing material knowledge rooted in the long term with creativity geared towards a future accessible to all forms of life that we will be able to improve the conditions under which the world is habitable. Because "the ultimate, hidden truth of the world is that it is something that we make, and could just as easily make differently" [116] (p. 54).

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Article

A Systems Thinking Approach to Political Polarization and Encounters of Dysrecognition

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Abstract: In this article, we employ a Batesonian systems thinking approach to analyze politically polarized and politically polarizing encounters in the contemporary United States. We bring together Bateson's concepts of schismogenesis, double binds, metacommunication, and transcontextualism with recent work on recognition and resonance in order to show how these encounters create moments of transcontextual double binds that produce mutual dysrecognition. We show how these moments of mutual dysrecognition become both animating forces of political polarization in the moment while also becoming constitutive poetic resonances for making sense of future events. When these moments of dysrecognition are considered alongside the removal of mechanisms that restrain schismogenesis, the United States body politic is becoming increasingly schizophrenic—split in two with both parts incommunicado with the other such that the whole system is veering towards collapse. We close by briefly considering the kind of deutero-learning, to use Bateson's term, that might help to stave off such a collapse.

Keywords: political polarization; schismogenesis; recognition; political interaction; poetic resonances; Bateson; Donald Trump

1. Introduction

> *A clip of White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany came to my (Thompson's) attention in a neighbor's Instagram post. In it, a reporter asked McEnany to state "without ambiguity or deflection" that then-President Trump disavows White supremacy. McEnany quoted numerous statements by President Trump disavowing White supremacy. Yet she did not make a definitive statement of this in the present tense, despite the reporter's insistence that she do so. My neighbor's post had a caption to the effect: "Great to see a powerful woman standing up to the bullying media!" I was confused. Where she saw a woman standing up against a powerful and manipulative man, I saw a woman carrying water for a different powerful and manipulative man, her White supremacist boss.*

We offer this example to introduce the phenomenon of interest: political polarization in the United States as it is realized by and through mass-mediated encounters. In what follows, we combine a Batesonian systems thinking approach with recent theorizing of constitutive resonances in order to analyze these encounters. We show how people who are differently politically aligned understand these encounters in radically different ways that both presuppose and produce radical political polarization. We show how this is accomplished, in part, through different constitutive poetic resonances that produce a transcontextual interactional double bind that has a Necker cube-like quality in which each side sees a very different image of the same encounter. Moreover, each of the images

entails a moment of dysrecognition of each party by the other party. Finally, in the fashion of Bateson's feedback loops, we show how these moments of dysrecognition become constitutive resonances for future encounters, furthering a relationship of disdain and distrust between political opponents. The end result of all of this is a dysfunctional and schizophrenic body politic.

To illustrate the nature of politically polarized and polarizing encounters, we employ a discourse analysis approach to analyze a handful of examples of such encounters and illustrate their highly creative, semiotically rich, and affectively charged nature. We apply four key concepts from Bateson's systems thinking, namely *schismogenesis*, *double binds*, *metacommunication*, and *transcontextualism* (Bateson, 1972). We add to this the concept of constitutive poetic resonances that constitute the human (political) reals that we inhabit (Thompson & Chase, 2024; Chase & Thompson, 2025; Lepselter, 2016; Sloterdijk, 2011), along with the notion of recognition (Taylor, 1994; Markell, 2009). The result is a dynamic approach for understanding the mechanisms that drive and even constitute political polarization in the United States today. In closing, we briefly consider how Bateson's concept of deutero-learning might help the American body politic to overcome this schismogenic transcontextual syndrome.

2. A Caveat: Doing Anthropology of/with 'Deplorables'

Given reviewers' comments on an earlier draft of this article and in light of the further intensification of the very political polarization that this article seeks to understand, we want to clarify that the analysis below is not a political defense of Trump, of anything he said, or of any of his policy positions. Nor is it a critique of any of those things. Rather, it is our effort to provide insight into the contexts that have produced the political hyper-polarization in the United States today among the American body politic. Those on the political left might find it useful to think of the analysis below as an attempt to understand the context that made it possible for Donald J. Trump to become the democratically elected President of the United States of America—twice.

An important component of our analysis involves presenting the perspectives of both sides of these politically polarized and polarizing encounters. We recognize that, in the current morally and affectively charged climate, it can be especially difficult to take the perspective of one's political opponents. At the same time, the affectively charged nature of one's experience of these encounters is central to the very processes that we describe below—indeed, as we describe below it is one of the engines of political schismogenesis. We thus encourage you, the reader, to closely attend to the affect produced in you as you read about these encounters and our analyses below.

3. A Systems Thinking Approach to Political Polarization in Trumpian Times

Here we should clarify that by "political polarization" we do not simply refer to differences in voting decisions, but also to the dramatically differing interpretations, perceptions, and affective charges of understandings of events in the world, especially as they are construed by the media. As Revers (2023) notes, social scientists have an unfortunate tendency to see political polarization in very static terms, literally as "states" of affairs rather than as processes always in the making. Rather than studying the processes and practices by which political polarization is made, social scientists often fixate on simply characterizing the type and intensity of political polarization. Although this can be informative, it does little to help us understand the mechanisms, processes, and practices by which political polarization is ongoingly being made.

In what follows, we take up this task. In this effort, we draw upon Bateson's systems thinking approach and his notions of schismogenesis, metacommunication, double binds, and transcontextualism. We then add to this the conception of constitutive poetic resonances and dysrecognition to help explain the ongoing constitution of political polarization in the United States today.

3.1. Schismogenesis

Political polarization can be understood as a type of what Bateson termed schismogenesis (Bateson, 1935), a process of group differentiation within a given community. In schismogenesis, groups are differentiated from each other by ritual and other practices such that different subgroups can co-exist within a singular community. Yet, if left unchecked, these schismogenic processes could lead to the division of a single group into two distinct and separate groups. Thus, Bateson argues, restraining mechanisms are necessary to hold together different subgroups as a single unified community.

This concept originated in an article that Bateson wrote in response to a 1935 memorandum by the Committee of the Social Sciences Research Council (CCSRC) regarding "cultural contact" or what Bateson refers to as "the problem" of "acculturation" (Bateson, 1972, p. 179). Writing with an eye toward some rather ominous developments in Europe at the time, Bateson's darker concern with schismogenesis (particularly symmetrical schismogenesis) was that, left unrestrained, schismogenic processes can aggravate existing tensions and lead to "hostility and the breakdown of the whole system." (Bateson, 1972, p. 181).

In contrast to the CCSRC's focus on "those cases in which the [cultural] contact occurs between two communities with different cultures," Bateson suggested that we should be investigating "the conditions of differentiation inside a single culture" (Bateson, 1935, p. 179). In other words, Bateson's task is to describe the factors that restrain the schismogenic processes and produce a dynamic equilibrium such that different groups can quiescently co-exist in a single stable community. Without these restraining factors, schismogenesis could lead to pathological developments in which the groups move towards mutual hostility and, eventually, the fissure of the community.

Bateson describes two primary forms of schismogenesis: complementary and symmetrical. Complementary schismogenesis refers to those cases of differentiation in which the behavior and aspirations of the members of the two groups are fundamentally different such that the members of one group treat the members of the other group in fundamentally different ways. For example, the relationship of a squire to his villagers in which the former lords over the latter. In contrast, symmetrical schismogenesis refers to cases of differentiation in which the individuals in two groups have the same aspirations and behavior patterns such that each behaves toward the other in roughly the same manner that the other behaves toward them. Examples include relationships of competition, rivalry, or boasting (Bateson, 1970). Bateson notes the potentially serious consequences of symmetrical schismogenesis: "if boasting is the reply to boasting, then each group will drive the other into excessive emphasis of the pattern, a process which if not restrained can only lead to more and more extreme rivalry and ultimately to hostility and the breakdown of the whole system" (Bateson, 1972, p. 181).

Each of these types of differentiation contain certain restraining factors that can produce a relatively stable co-existence. Some of the restraining factors that Bateson identifies include the following: patterns of reciprocity that produce mutual dependence; outside individuals, organizations, or circumstances that serve to unite the groups; or the admixture of one form of schismogenesis in a situation that is predominately the other form—e.g., a squire (complementary) plays in an annual game of cricket (symmetrical) with his villagers.

Bateson proposes that by studying the internal arrangements that produce the stable co-existence of different groups within a single community, we might be able to better understand how to produce this state of affairs in disequilibrated cases. In other words, Bateson is studying the sturdy forms of incorporating difference in order to suggest how we might be able to apply these principles to less sturdy forms. Our analysis below takes as its object what has become a less sturdy form—namely political parties in the United States today. Whereas Bateson was primarily interested in studying the processes that hold differentiated groups together, we are interested in studying these processes in groups that appear to be falling apart.

3.2. Metacommunication

Bateson's notion of metacommunication refers to communication about communication. Bateson discusses two key aspects of metacommunication: interactional framing and relationality. An avid naturalist and student of animal behavior, Bateson illustrated the former through an observation of otters at the Fleishhacker Zoo in San Francisco (Bateson, 1972) and the latter through his own research with octopuses (Guddemi, 2020).

In "A theory of Play and Fantasy", Bateson described how otters would employ signals such as playful biting that would modify the meaning of subsequent signals such that what might otherwise have been interpreted as "fighting," e.g., biting and wrestling, came to be understood by their fellow otters as "play." He surmised that the otters were able to communicate the message "this is play." More than being a simple communication of some kind of action to other otters, this was a communication about the nature of communication, that is, *metacommunication*.

A related insight into metacommunication came from the study of the behavior of pairs of octopuses placed in an aquarium (Guddemi, 2020). Using octopuses that he and his family had collected from the ocean, Bateson found that when an octopus was introduced into an aquarium tank that already had an octopus, the two would usually fight to the death. Yet when two octopuses were introduced into the aquarium at the same time, they would usually find a way to peacefully co-exist. As they worked out their relationship, they would display different behaviors indicating different possibilities of relationality until the relationship settled into a sustainable one of what we might call "friendship." Flipping around the "Games Theory" approach that studies how rules determine behavior, Bateson's goal was to understand "how behavior determines rules [for future interaction]" (Guddemi, 2020, p. 141).

3.3. Double Binds, Transcontextual Syndromes, and Deutero-Learning

Given the two levels of communication and metacommunication, double binds occur when the messages being communicated at one level contradict those being communicated on another. Such communicational events are like the optical illusion of the Necker cube since a single image can be seen in two very different ways. In the case of double binds, each image of the encounter contradicts the other, leaving the recipient of the message in a bind as to which one to follow. Here, Bateson offers the example of a parent who insists that a child must both do something or be punished and who is at a metacommunicational level told something contradictory such as "do not see this as punishment" (Bateson, 1972, p. 211).

Bateson further proposes that schizophrenic behavior is one dysfunctional way that people who repeatedly find themselves in double bind situations adapt to those situations. We use the term "schizophrenic behavior" to refer to behavior that is characterized by disorganization and contradiction rather than to refer to the psychiatric diagnosis per se. Bateson thus refers to schizophrenia as a *transcontextual syndrome* since it is produced by multiple contradictory contexts (Bateson, 1972, p. 281). Transcontextual syndromes can

arise when the person caught in the double bind is unable to articulate the nature of the contradiction and, as a result, develops habits that reproduce a negative feedback loop of repeating the same maladaptive patterns of behavior. Such persons are, Bateson notes, "impoverished by transcontextual confusions." (Bateson, 1972, p. 277). In this case, the confusion resulting from a person being "in the wrong regarding [their] rules for making sense of an important relationship with another [person]" can result in "severe pain and maladjustment" (Bateson, 1972, p. 282).

Yet transcontextual syndromes are not always negative. As Bateson puts it: "if this pathology can be warded off or resisted, the total experience [of transcontextual syndrome] may promote creativity" (Bateson, 1972, p. 282). Similarly, whereas some people, such as schizophrenics, are "impoverished by transcontextual confusions," there are others, such as clowns, artists, and poets, who are "enriched by transcontextual gifts" (Bateson, 1972, p. 277). Entire fields—such as humor, art, and poetry—are enriched by transcontextualism.

Furthermore, there is an important type of learning that Bateson calls deutero-learning, or learning about learning, which can result from transcontextual double binds (Bateson, 1972, p. 166). As an example of this, Bateson tells of a dolphin who learned to produce novel behaviors through the refusal of rewards for existing behaviors. By contradicting the previous communication of providing a reward for a singular behavior and instead withholding that reward, the dolphin's trainers were able to train the dolphin to produce multiple "novel" behaviors or what Bateson calls *deutero-learning* or learning about learning. In a human example, Bateson describes how a therapist treating an alcoholic is able to create a productive double bind that helps the alcoholic to see the nonsensical nature of their behavior and to thus stop doing it. In these cases, transcontextual syndromes can be productive and creative (Bateson, 1972).

3.4. Constitutive Poetic Resonances

To help further make sense of the Necker cube-like character of the politically polarized encounters that we analyze below, we draw on the concept of constitutive poetic resonances (Thompson & Chase, 2024). Following on the work of many others on poetics and poiesis (e.g., Austin, 1975; Fleming & Lempert, 2014; Lepselter, 2016; Mazzarella, 2017), Thompson and Chase (2024) show how different arrays of constitutive poetic resonances enable different observers to see the same image in a Chicago underpass either as the Virgin Mary or as merely a salt stain. Constitutive poetic resonances are historically, culturally, and socially particular forms that function in multiple semiotic modalities and across multiple timescales to make a given seeing possible. Constitutive poetic resonances are the constituents of the seeing of some thing as a particular kind of thing. They are poetically resonant in the sense that, in addition to being constitutive (as in poiesis), they also involve a recognizable matching of the qualia of formal features in some semiotic modality or other.

In their work, Thompson and Chase (2024) focused heavily on tracing out the historical resonances that constituted that seeing while giving less attention to the actual encounter of seeing. In contrast, the present project focuses less on documenting the histories of the constitutive poetic resonances that go into making these politically polarized encounters visible as one or another kind of happening and more on the dynamics of the encounters themselves, especially the affects of these encounters.

3.5. (Dys)Recognition

To understand the affectively charged nature of these politically polarized and polarizing encounters, we introduce the term "dysrecognition" based on the concept of recognition elaborated by Taylor (1994). Drawing on G. W. F. Hegel's notion of recognition, Taylor articulates recognition in the more specified sense of what we might call interpersonal

recognition (perhaps not so different from seeing the Virgin Mary in an underpass salt stain). Taylor describes recognition as a process fundamental to the constitution of modern selves. Recognition is "fundamentally *dialogical*" in character, involving how one is perceived by others (Taylor, 1994, p. 32). Recognition might be understood simply as an answer to the question posed to one's interactional partner: "Who do you think I am?" Yet in most encounters, this question is not explicitly addressed but is instead answered implicitly by the sayings and doings of the participants in the encounter.

Taylor points out how one of the important consequences of the modern preoccupation with recognition is that there are moments in which one is recognized as something other than who one *really* is. Instances such as racism and sexism provide examples of this kind of recognition that Tayler terms *misrecognition*. In this connection, Taylor notes that since recognition is formative of the modern subject, "misrecognition has now graduated to the rank of a harm that can be hardheadedly enumerated along with [inequality, exploitation, and injustice]" (Taylor, 1994, p. 64). To be seen as something less than who one is has come to be understood as a grave injustice.

Yet, as Markell (2003) has pointed out, this way of characterizing misrecognition begs the question: prior to any moment of recognition, who is one *really*? This presumes an ontologically prior "always already there" subject that exists prior to and outside of recognition—a conception that, in his other work, Taylor had been trying to avoid. As Markell further notes, this way of thinking of misrecognition misses a critical aspect of recognition, namely its creative and constitutive force (Markell, 2003). Similar to Bateson's octopuses, whose relational being is constituted by their behavior in encounters with one another, so too are human subjects constituted by and through recognition.

To avoid this problem of a presupposed always-already-there-subject and to instead enable us to see subjects *in the making*, we introduce the term *dysrecognition*. Instead of referring to a pre-existing metaphysical subject, dysrecognition occurs when a subject is recognized in a manner that is undesirable, displeasing, or discomfiting to them. This affective conception of dysrecognition allows us to focus on the processes by which persons are constituted as particular kinds of persons who are understood to be doing particular kinds of things in encounters that have particular kinds of consequences (esp. affects). Additionally, dysrecognition itself can become a particularly powerful constitutive poetic resonance for making sense of what transpired in the event and for how one will understand subsequent encounters and one's relationship to others.

4. Schismogenesis, Double Binds, Transcontextualism, and the Constitutive Poetic Resonances of Dysrecognition in Politically Polarized and Polarizing Encounters

4.1. Schismogenesis in U.S. Politics

Bringing these theoretical tools to the study of political polarization in the United States, first, schismogenesis offers a way of conceptualizing political polarization processually (Bateson, 1935). More importantly, it helps us see the nature of this relationship as well as the restraining factors that keep the schismogenic processes of political polarization in check.

U.S. political parties are, firstly, a symmetrical schismogenic system in which each party competes against the other, roughly as equals. The symmetrical nature of this relationship can be seen in the competitive ritual of the "debate" between competing candidates, in which numerous measures are taken to ensure that the candidates are on an equal playing field, down to the number of seconds that each candidate is allowed to speak. Yet, the result of this competition is that the winning party is politically empowered over the other—a complementary schismogenic relationship. As Bateson noted, this kind

of periodic admixture of complementary schismogenesis into a symmetrical schismogenic relationship is itself a restraining mechanism on symmetrical schismogenesis that can help to stabilize the system.

A further restraining mechanism on the two party schismogenic system in the United States is a third entity that functions to mediate this relationship, namely, the media (note that we use "media" and "press" interchangeably to reflect widespread attitudes toward information channels regardless of medium). The media is supposed to have an antagonistic relationship to whichever party is in power and thus is expected to serve as a check on the party in power through critical engagement (Karadimitriou et al., 2022). Ideally, this relationship is supposed to be symmetrical in as much as the press and the president are presumed to be on equal footing in their encounters with each other. However, this relationship between the press and the president is often complementary since the press asks the questions and the White House answers them. The White House's ability to determine the format of the conversation further contributes to the complementarity of this relationship.

One restraint on the complementary schismogenesis of the relationship between the press and the president is the annual ritual known as the White House Correspondents' Association's Dinner (WHCAD). This ritual is one of ritual insulting, typically with the press insulting the president. As with Bateson's squire playing competitive games with the townspeople, this ritual effectively, even if only temporarily, lowers the position of the party in power—thus releasing some of the schismogenic tension by temporarily inverting the hierarchy.

U.S. politics can thus be characterized by a schismogenic triangle with the political left, the political right, and the press occupying the three points of the triangle. Schismogenesis can operate along all three sides of the triangle, depending on which party is in power. This schismogenic triangle is a further restraining mechanism on the schismogenic processes between any two points of the triangle since the third entity, the press, is supposed to restrain whichever party is in power. You might say that, historically in U.S. politics, the press mediates the schismogenesis between the two dominant political parties.

Yet, all of these restraining mechanisms have been undermined in various ways in recent years. Conservative critics have pointed to an imbalance in this schismogenic triangle, suggesting that the press is no longer a check on the political left (Goodwin, 2025; Mitchell, 2017). U.S. politics has long had critiques of the political biases of the press, particularly by conservatives (e.g., during the McCarthy era of the 1940's and 1950's (Hemmer, 2014; Lane, 2021)). By undermining an important restraining device of schismogenesis, the perception and/or reality of the liberal bias of the press furthers political polarization in America today. As we will see below, this perception of liberal bias in the press is a frequent constitutive poetic resonance of these encounters.

At the same time, it is worth noting that the Trump administration has refused or undermined two of the restraining mechanisms mentioned above. By refusing to acknowledge then-President Biden's electoral victory, current-President Trump undermined the stabilizing work of the admixture of complementary and schismogenic relations. Notably, one of the most common aspects of the "stop the steal" movement was a concern that the biased coverage of the press had influenced the election in favor of Biden (most notably in what has been called "the Hunter Biden laptop scandal" (Flood & Cuebas-Fantauzzi, 2024). Regarding the WHCAD, Trump refused to participate in this event of ritual insulting during his first term in office, arguing that these events had become too politically biased, not to mention that Trump himself had been roasted by then President Barack Obama in the 2011 WHCAD (Taddonio, 2016). Trump's failure to participate in this event similarly

removed an important restraining mechanism that historically had helped to maintain the stability of the American political system.

4.2. Double Binds and Transcontextualism in U.S. Politics

Bateson's theory of double binds and transcontextualism can help us understand politically polarized and polarizing encounters themselves. Only whereas Bateson used these concepts to characterize individual behavior, we apply these concepts to encounters between people. For example, we describe how, through differences in constitutive poetic resonances, the encounters themselves can be characterized as "schizophrenic" in as much as they produce a double bind of mutual dysrecognition in which participants on both sides feel as if they have been seen in a manner that is undesirable, displeasing, or discomfiting.

The concepts of constitutive poetic resonances help us to understand how these politically polarized double images of the encounter are produced in the first place and how these encounters themselves further produce political polarization. Just as the salt stain in the underpass is for some an image of the Virgin Mary and for others a mere salt stain, so too can the very same politically polarized encounter be seen by some as evidence of the monstrous behavior of the one side and at the same time seen by others as evidence of the monstrous behavior of the other side. These radically different political seeings depend on the constitutive poetic resonances that make either seeing possible. This is because, similar to illusions such as the Necker cube that involve inferring a three-dimensional object from a two-dimensional image, so too in social life we must, from the two-dimensional image of the sayings and doings of the persons involved, infer a three-dimensional image of who the participants are and what was being done in the encounter. This inference-dependent activity that Bateson called informational "transforms" (what linguistic anthropologists call metapragmatics) means that human encounters are multistable regarding the images that can emerge out of our encounters with others. These inferences are made based upon constitutive poetic resonances. Thus, depending on one's background and exposure to various arguments and histories, including the various "bubbles" (Cf. Sloterdijk, 2011) in which one resides, one will bring with them constitutive resonances that will reveal a particular image of the encounter.

To illustrate this, we conduct a close analysis of an example of a politically polarized and polarizing encounter regarding the size of Trump's inauguration crowd, along with a few other encounters, in order to map out an interactional structure that we believe has been and continues to be reproduced—to great effect (and affect). Our argument is that this oft-repeated interactional structure produces a transcontextual double bind due to differences in constitutive poetic resonances that results in at least two countervailing understandings of what happened. The outcome of these countervailing images is a moment of mutual dysrecognition and a schizophrenic body politic.

5. Methods and Analysis of Schismogenic Encounters

The methods employed in our analysis below are discourse analysis in the tradition of interactional sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2008; Silverstein, 1998). This approach involves the analysis of talk in particular interactions with the goal being to document the interactional-text(s)-in-context(s) that emerges by considering what happens in, before, and after the interaction itself (Silverstein, 2011).

The empirical data that we will use to explore these processes are publicly available recordings of encounters between Donald Trump or members of his administration and the media. Through these examples, we point to the patterned structure of these encounters and show how this structure produces political polarization through an affectively charged moment of dysrecognition. Because these data are publicly available on the Internet, we

would encourage readers to access these data on their own to check our analysis. As noted above, we encourage the readers to actively consider their own reactions, affective and otherwise, to our descriptions and analyses of these encounters.

As both of us are on the left side of the political spectrum, we are familiar with the perspectives and contexts of liberals. When the politically polarizing events described below happened, we were immediately able to see them as a liberal would see them (and our social media feeds reinscribed those understandings). In contrast, making sense of the right and conservative constitutive poetic resonances took quite a bit more work. One aid in this regard is the fact that both of us have lived in strongly conservative places for the past fifteen or so years. In interacting with neighbors, co-workers, friends, and even family members, we have developed a basic understanding of both the understandings of these events as well as some of the constitutive poetic resonances circulating among conservatives. Of further assistance for understanding right and conservative positions was the fact that, for the past five years, we have been conducting research on political polarization with both liberal and conservative students and their extended families while also actively engaging with conservative media.

We should also mention here that in these conversations we have been active participants, often seeing only one perspective and arguing, sometimes heatedly, for that perspective. These first-hand experiences have provided us with insight into the animating power of the interactional structure that we describe here. Put slightly differently, as with Favret-Saada's suggestion that you must be bewitched in order to understand witchcraft (Favret-Saada, 1980), the experience of having participated in these kinds of encounters and having felt their animating power has been important for understanding how these encounters accomplish the (bewitching) work that they do (Clifford, 1983; Geertz, 1989). Of course, as noted above, the reader will be engaged in their own seeing of the encounters described below, and surely these will be accompanied by their own (bewitched) affects.

6. Analyses of Politically Polarized and Polarizing Encounters

Here we analyze an encounter and show how it actively produces political polarization. We attend closely to this encounter and the events following it in order to show the transcontextual nature of these encounters and how they produce a double image of the encounter itself that results in a double bind of dysrecognition due to the different constitutive poetic resonances of the encounter's participants and observers. But first, before considering our focal case, we briefly consider a different encounter to illustrate the general structure of these politically polarized and polarizing encounters.

6.1. The Politically Polarizing Nature of These Encounters: Megyn Kelly and Donald Trump (6 August 2015)

This event happened during one of the Republican primary debates in the lead up to the 2016 election in which then-FoxNews reporter Megyn Kelly asks then-candidate Donald Trump the following question:

> "Mr. Trump, one of the things people love about you is you speak your mind and you don't use a politician's filter. However, that is not without its downsides; in particular, when it comes to women. You've called women you don't like, fat pigs, dogs, slobs, and disgusting animals. Your Twitter account—"

Audible laughter can be heard from the audience as Kelly says "pigs, dogs," and "disgusting animals." Before Kelly can continue, Trump interrupts, holding one finger in the air as if to be precise and says, "Only Rosie O'Donnell." The audience erupts in raucous laughter—accompanied by cheering, clapping, and whistling—that lasts for a full six seconds.

Kelly presses ahead, stating that this issue was "well beyond Rosie O'Donnell," to which Trump concedes, "Yes, I'm sure it was" (CBS News, 2015). Kelly continues:

> "Your Twitter account has several disparaging comments about women's looks. You once told a contestant on *Celebrity Apprentice* it would be a pretty picture to see her on her knees. Does that sound to you like the temperament of a man we should elect as president? And how will you answer the charge from Hillary Clinton who is likely to be the democratic nominee, that you are part of the war on women?"

Trump responds:

> "I've been challenged by so many people and I don't frankly have time for total political correctness. And to be honest with you this country doesn't have time either. This country is in big trouble; we don't win anymore. We lose to China, we lose to Mexico—both in trade and at the border—we lose to everybody. And frankly what I say, and oftentimes it's fun, it's kidding, we have a good time. And honestly, Megyn, if you don't like it, I'm sorry. I've been very nice to you although I could probably not be based on the way you have treated me but I wouldn't do that. But you know what? We need strength, we need energy, we need quickness, and we need brain in this country to turn it around. That I can tell you right now". (CBS News, 2015)

This clip came to the attention of one of us (Thompson) when a linguistic anthropologist had presented it as an example of what they were referring to as Trump's "metapragmatic gaslighting" of the American public. The idea being proposed was that whenever someone would call Trump out for saying something that was inappropriate, he would respond by basically saying "I never said that," or more to the metapragmatic point, "I never *meant* that.".

Yet one thing that did not quite make sense was the reaction of the audience to Kelly's question. The loud laughter and guffaws that members of the audience made as soon as Kelly got to the point of her question seemed to us to be, at best, despicable and indecent and, at worst, monstrous—evidence of out-and-out misogyny. Since I (Thompson) was teaching a linguistic anthropology class at the time, in the interest of trying to make sense of this laughter I played this example for the class and described the argument about metapragmatic gaslighting. In response to this query, a female student offered that the laughter could be equally understood as a response to *the media gaslighting Trump* by insisting that he is a sexist misogynist. For those who do not believe Trump is a sexist/misogynist and/or who feel that it is not an important issue for a presidential debate, Kelly's question was further evidence of a mainstream media that was not able to treat Trump fairly and without bias. From this perspective, Kelly's question was laughable.

Although people on either side will likely find it difficult to see the perspective of the other side, here we simply point to the fact of two directly contradictory images, what we are calling an interactional double bind. For those who already knew Trump to be a sexist misogynist, the image of despicable and monstrous Trump supporters was apparent in that encounter. For those who knew the "mainstream media" to have been unfair and biased against Trump and overly concerned with "political correctness," Kelly's question was evidence of a despicable and monstrous mainstream media.

In addition to illustrating the double image nature of these encounters, this example also shows the structure of mutual dysrecognition in such encounters. Each side sees the other as morally reprehensible. Furthermore, this moment of dysrecognition became a poetic resonance for observers. This can be seen in comments on a YouTube video of the Kelly-Trump encounter showing that many people (especially Trump supporters) revisited

it with increasing frequency leading up to the 2024 election (KTVU FOX 2, 2015). In other words, these encounters of mutual dysrecognition can become part of a schismogenic feedback loop in which the contradictory constitutive poetic resonances that are presupposable for each side are reinforced by the same singular encounter such that this encounter becomes a constitutive poetic resonance for making sense of future political encounters.

6.2. The Size of Trump's. . . Inauguration Crowd (21 January 2017)

We next jump ahead a year and a few months to right after Trump's inauguration in January of 2017 to a consideration of our main example. On the day after his inauguration, a press conference was called to address concerns about the inaugural coverage by the media. White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer expressed frustration with the media regarding how they had presented images and numbers that made Trump's crowd appear smaller than it actually was, calling this "misrepresentation" "shameful and wrong." Although both of us had initially seen images comparing Trump's 2017 inauguration with Obama's 2009 inauguration and showing the latter's much larger audience, as we investigated this issue further, we were surprised to discover that, when taken as originally stated, Spicer's claim is not a demonstrable lie.

During this press conference, Spicer made the following statement about the size of Trump's inauguration crowd:

> "This is the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration, period, both in person and around the globe". (CBS News, 2017)

This statement became the basis for a media narrative asserting that Spicer lied. To this point, some media outlets only reported the quote up to Spicer's "period," leaving off the statement that further specifies the remit of the claim "in person and around the globe" and stating unequivocally that this was a falsehood based on the obvious deficiency of Trump's in-person crowd (e.g., Swaine, 2018). Here we should mention that some of Spicer's initial numbers about the in-person crowd were factually incorrect, but he corrected these in a follow-up briefing a few days later (more on this below). Importantly, these wrongly reported numbers received less media attention than Spicer's claim that this was the largest audience ever, a claim that in liberal media feeds was widely circulated as a claim about the in-person audience. This could be seen in Facebook posts at the time (that appeared in Thompson's Facebook feed) that showed images from the top of the Washington Monument of Trump's 2017 inauguration alongside the same image of Obama's 2009 inauguration. These images demonstrably showed that there were many more people on the Washington Mall for Obama's election than for Trump's. This same presumption of falsity has been circulated by journalism scholars who have written on the subject and unequivocally refer to Spicer's claim as a "lie" (Carpini, 2018; Murguía, 2019).

In a follow-up meeting a few days later, after a mea culpe for presenting numbers that were wrong, Spicer doubled down on his initial statement:

> "I have a right to say if you add up the network streaming numbers, Facebook, YouTube, all of the various live streaming that we have information on so far, I don't think there's any question it was the largest watched inauguration, ever". (CBS News, 2017)

Among the few media outlets that evaluated Spicer's original argument that this was the largest inauguration crowd "both in person and around the globe," FactCheck.org concluded that "On that point, Spicer *may* be correct" (Robertson & Farley, 2017). They further noted that livestreaming had become much easier in the years between 2009 and 2017 (thus enabling many more people to watch) and at that time it was difficult to get good estimates of how many people livestreamed the inauguration. Politico drew a similar conclusion, noting that the claim was "plausible," while stating that "it is essentially

impossible to know whether enough people watched Trump's inauguration online to overtake Obama's in 2009" (Weprin, 2017). Nonetheless, Spicer's statement had been widely circulated in liberal circles as a bald-faced lie about the in-person audience.

Here again we have two radically different images of the encounter itself. On the one (shall we say left?) hand are those who believe that Spicer's repeated insistence that Trump's inauguration crowd (typically understood as the "in-person audience") was larger than Obama's was a lie. From this perspective, Spicer's statements were evidence of the Trump administration's willingness to ignore the facts, particularly when President Trump's ego was involved. On the other hand, there are those who believe that this was an example of a media hell-bent on destroying President Trump—also regardless of the facts. Each side's perspective on the encounter creates a moment of dysrecognition for those on the other side: Trump's supporters are seen as megalomaniacal liars, and the mainstream media are seen as liars who disregard the facts.

Further evidence of the nature and consequences of the double image of this encounter can be seen in two subsequent encounters. The first is between Kellyann Conway and NBC's Chuck Todd and the second is between Trump himself and ABC's John Muir. Both point to the robustness of these double images that result in mutual dysrecognition. The two following examples also help to illustrate how it is that these mass-mediated encounters can become consequential for others who are not directly participating in these encounters. Two points are salient here, one about metacommunication and the nature of the relationship between the media and the Trump administration and the other helps to explain Trump's supporters' strong affective identification with him.

Regarding the first, in each of these examples, Trump and the Trump administration engaged in a metacommunicative strategy that, like Bateson's octopuses, thematizes the nature of the relationship. In these cases, Trump and his administration suggest that the media are not trustworthy conversational partners. Recall that with Kelly, Trump noted "I've been very nice to you although I could probably not be based on the way you have treated me, but I wouldn't do that," or recall Spicer's calling the media's coverage "shameful and wrong." This metacommunicational thematization of the antagonistic nature of the press' relationship to the Trump Administration was an ongoing motif of the Trump administration's encounters with the press.

This can be seen in an interview the day after Spicer's initial press briefing between NBC's Chuck Todd and Kellyanne Conway, then Trump's Senior Counselor to the President. This is a fascinating and highly polarizing encounter in its own right since it is the baptismal moment of the now infamous phrase "alternative facts." For our purposes, though, what is important about this encounter is that Conway repeatedly points to the media's bias against the Trump Administration (NBC News, 2017). Moreover, this encounter results in Todd producing audible evidence of that very bias.

Regarding this thematizing of the antagonistic nature of their relationship, when Todd asks Conway why the press secretary was sent out for his very first briefing to "utter a provable falsehood," Conway responds, "Chuck, I mean if we're going to keep referring to our press secretary in those types of terms I think that *we're going to have to rethink our relationship* here" (emphasis added). She then mentions a "falsehood" that the press had reported the day prior that suggested that President Trump had removed the bust of Martin Luther King, Jr. from the Oval Office (which turned out to be untrue), itself another constitutive poetic resonance for many Trump supporters for whom this demonstrated the media's antagonism to Trump (Gibbs, 2017; Miller, 2017).

A few minutes later in the interview, Todd can be heard audibly laughing at Conway when she, somewhat hesitantly, suggests that Spicer simply was using "alternative facts." Then a few minutes later when she notes that "there is no way to really quantify crowds,"

Todd can again be again heard audibly laughing at Conway. This time Conway calls attention to Todd's laughter saying "you can laugh at me all you want but. . . the way that you just laughed at me is actually symbolic of the way, very representative of the way we're treated by the press. I'll just ignore it, I'm bigger than that, I'm a kind and gracious person." Here Conway thematizes the biased nature of their relationship.

For those who have previously seen the constitutive poetic resonances of a press that has a liberal anti-Trump bias (a fact which is a common theme in most conservative media outlets), it is easy to see this encounter as yet another example of liberal media bias against Trump and, by extension, conservatives themselves. On the other hand, those who are convinced that the Trump administration is full of egomaniacs and liars would find it easy to see this as an example of the Trump administration's obfuscation and duplicity in the interests of "bigly" self-aggrandizement.

Taken together, these contradictory images illustrate the mutual dysrecognition produced in this encounter. Whereas Spicer, Conway, and the Trump administration are portrayed by Todd and the media as laughably ignorant and inattentive to the facts (as noted by Todd's comment "alternative facts are not facts"), those who accept the anti-Trump bias of the media would note that Todd is engaged in his own (laughable) biases and ignorance and inattention to the "facts." In other words, the doubled image of the encounter produces a moment of mutual dysrecognition in which each side sees and is seen by the other as highly problematic, perhaps even monstrous, in near-mirror image of each other.

A similarly structured encounter occurred a few days later in an interview of President Trump by ABC News reporter David Muir that was held at the White House. This example further illustrates the double image nature and the ongoing thematization of the relationship between the media and the Trump administration. This example also suggests a second way that these encounters are consequential for non-participants to the encounter, namely as a means of creating a strong affective identification between Trump and his followers. As we will see, the double-imaged nature of these encounters and the resulting mutual dysrecognition are necessary ingredients to this identification.

After asking the president about his decision to go to the CIA a few days earlier to talk about the size of his crowd—implying that Trump was being prideful and selfish by doing so—Muir then asks President Trump a very similar question to the one that Chuck Todd asked of Kellyanne Conway, "Does that [sending Spicer out in the first White House press briefing to talk about inaugural crowd size] send a message that that's more important than some of the very pressing issues. . .?".

Trump responds:

> "Part of my whole victory was that the men and women of this country who have been forgotten *will never be forgotten again*. Part of that is when they try and *demean me unfairly*, because we had a massive crowd of people. We had a crowd—I looked over that sea of people and I said to myself, 'Wow.' And I've seen crowds before. Big, big crowds. That was some crowd. When I looked at the numbers that happened to come in *from all of the various sources*, we had the biggest audience in the history of inaugural speeches. I said the men and women that I was talking to who came out and voted *will never be forgotten again*. Therefore I won't allow you or other people like you *to demean that crowd and to demean the people* that came to Washington D.C. from faraway places because they like me. But more importantly they like what I'm saying". (ABC News, 2017, emphasis added)

There are a few items of note in Trump's response. First, to the earlier point, when describing his inaugural crowd size as the largest, he is clear that it is "from all of the

various sources." Later in this same interview when Trump and Muir walk in front of a picture of the inauguration, Trump again notes how big the audience was while again qualifying his statement, "including television and everything else".

Second, and more importantly, President Trump deftly shifts from "demean me unfairly" to "demean that crowd and demean the people" as if to suggest that this is the same action. This implies a metonymic relation between Trump himself and his supporters, "the people" (Cf. Mazzarella, 2019). Instead of this being about Trump's outsized ego, as Muir seems to be suggesting, seemingly unbeknownst to Muir, Trump turns Muir's criticism of Trump into a criticism, even erasure, of Trump's supporters. As with Spicer and Conway, Trump reminds the audience that these attempts to diminish the size of his crowd are actually attempts to diminish the people in that crowd.

Anecdotal evidence of this metonymic relationship can be found in the words of an early Trump supporter from Colorado, interviewed by Peter Hessler of The New Yorker, who said "I've never been this emotionally invested in a political leader in my life. . .. The more they hate him, the more I want him to succeed. Because what they hate about him is what they hate about me" (Hessler, 2017). This suggests that when Trump supporters see Trump being wrongly (to them) dysrecognized by the media, they can relate since they have often had the same experience themselves in their conversations with neighbors, friends, and acquaintances.

Summing up, on the one hand those on the political left who saw the images comparing Trump's and Obama's first inaugurations or who had determined that Trump is an egomaniac might have, as was hinted at by Todd's and Muir's lines of questioning, seen this as a situation of a self-interested and self-aggrandizing President who can't see past the size of his inauguration crowd. On the other hand, those who were supporters of Trump and who believed the media to have an anti-conservative bias would have likely seen this as an instance of the press once again belittling and demeaning both Trump and Trump supporters like themselves. Here, the moment of mutual dysrecognition takes on another dimension since, as was hinted at by the quote from the Colorado man, it is not merely that Trump is being demeaned, it is his supporters who are being demeaned by members of the media diminishing the size of his crowds.

We next consider a further example that illustrates how this act of demeaning functioned as an important engine of the Trump movement.

6.3. Les Deplorables (9 & 16 September 2016)

In the heat of the 2016 election between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, while addressing a group of donors known as LGBT for Hillary, Clinton said the following:

> "I know there are only 60 days left to make our case—and don't get complacent, don't see the latest outrageous, offensive, inappropriate comment and think well he's done this time. We are living in a volatile political environment. *You know, to just be grossly generalistic, you could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables. Right?* The racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic—you name it. And unfortunately there are people like that. And he has lifted them up. He has given voice to their websites that used to only have 11,000 people—now 11 million. He tweets and retweets their offensive hateful mean-spirited rhetoric. Now, some of those folks—*they are irredeemable*, but thankfully they are not America". (Reilly, 2016, emphasis added)

Here Clinton engages in a characterization of Trump's supporters as "deplorables" and as "irredeemable," an obvious moment of *dysrecognition* as we have defined it. In this utterance, Clinton put to words what many conservatives and Trump supporters felt the mainstream media and the political left felt about them, namely, that they were deplorable.

The animating force of this moment of dysrecognition can be seen in a Trump rally that was held just one week after Clinton's deplorables comment. There, after a number of preliminary speakers and with much anticipation from the audience, the song "Do You Hear the People Sing?" from the musical *Les Misérables* played in the background as then candidate Trump took the stage. The screen displayed an image after the fashion of a *Les Misérables* poster of a barricade only with a Trump flag and an American flag mounted on top. Above the barricade was the phrase "*Les Deplorables*" (notably without the accent on the first é in "deplorables" as would be standard in French).

As candidate Trump slowly walked onto the stage, the crowd burst into exuberant chants and cheers. Trump smiled and clapped in apparent appreciation, briefly standing back and stage left as their cheers and chants continue to build. The audience spontaneously erupted in synchronized chants of "U - S - A!" and "Trump, Trump, Trump." Once the audience's cheers began to subside, Trump walked up to the microphone center stage, briefly hesitated to ensure the crowd was quiet, and said, slowly and deliberately: "Welcome. . . to all. . . of you. . . DEPLORABLES." As he said this, he gestured with hands outstretched in front of him and then spreads them to either side as if christening the audience with the term "deplorables." The crowd went wild (Bloomberg Television, 2016).

In this moment, Trump seizes on this critical and, for our purposes, exemplary moment of dysrecognition, turning this experience of recognition as "deplorable" and "irredeemable" into an experience for "all" of his supporters to ironically enjoy. And enjoy it they did. "Deplorables" merchandise began popping up in online and in-person sites with t-shirts and mugs saying things like "Proud Member of the Basket of Deplorables" and "Deplorables Unite for Trump"—items can still be found for sale online to this day. Additionally, a sold out "DeploraBall" inaugural event was held at the National Press Club to celebrate the first inauguration of President Trump.

These examples illustrate how this moment of dysrecognition unleashed affectively charged infra-political energies. This must have been especially true for anyone who had the experience of themselves being seen as deplorable. Despite Clinton's clarification that she was only referring to a small subset of Trump supporters, Trump, in his christening gesture, extended this moment of dysrecognition to all of his supporters.

Whereas in the Muir interview, Trump implicitly makes the case that Trump's supporters stand for Trump such that to demean him is to demean them, in this case the reverse is true: Trump stands (up) for his supporters such that to demean them is to demean him. Trump's grand entrance playfully keeps the powerful affective identification of these infra-political energies alive. These same infra-political energies are reanimated each time he is demeaned or belittled or recognized as deplorable, that is, racist, sexist, homophobic, etc.

6.4. Further Examples of "Deplorable" Politics

Beyond the aforementioned examples, there have been many more moments where Trump engaged in talk that was taken by others to be deplorable in precisely these ways. To mention just a few such events, consider the following (incomplete) list: describing immigrants as criminals, drug dealers, and rapists (Lee, 2015); the Access Hollywood recordings (NBC News, 2016); Trump's claims that Obama was not born in the United States (CNN, 2011); Trump stating that undocumented immigrants are "poisoning the blood of our country" (Tapper, 2023); Trump's proposed "Muslim ban" (Wang, 2017); Trump's statement following the killing of Heather Hyer in Charlottesville at a protest of a White supremacist rally saying there were "very fine people" on both sides (CNBC, 2017); Trump calling Haiti and African nations "shit-hole countries" (Fram & Lemire, 2018); Trump referring to the coronavirus as "Kung flu" or "the Chinese virus" (LA Times, 2020); Trump's White House Press Secretary refusing to disavow White supremacy, insisting that

he had already done so many times (The White House, 2020); Trump questioning whether Vice President Kamala Harris is Black (PBS NewsHour, 2024); Trump stating (without any evidence) that Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio are eating peoples' pets (Thomas & Wendling, 2024); or Trump stating that the crash between a plane and a helicopter over the Potomac happened because of the FAA's 'woke DEI' policies (Licon, 2025).

From the very beginning, those on the political left (and some on the right) were convinced each time candidate Trump said something shocking or offensive, "deplorable" in Clinton's terms, that it would be the end of Trump's political career (recall Clinton's injunction to her supporters not to be complacent and think, "well he's done this time"). And yet, as Clinton warned, none of these "deplorable" moments ended his political career. Instead, each time he made such statements, his supporters seemed to rally behind him.

As with the laughter at the Megyn Kelly question mentioned earlier, the joy of Trump supporters in each of these moments, as well as in the "Les Deplorables" moment, is difficult for those on the left to understand. The most common explanation by the political left has been the approach that Clinton took, namely, to suggest that Trump's supporters are racist, sexist, homophobic, etc. Although this certainly may be part of the problem in a country where racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. are still built into the fabric of social life, this hardly seems a sufficient explanation for the surprisingly widespread tolerance and support of Trump's statements by Trump voters which included a not-insignificant number of African American and Latino voters. Importantly, here again is a feedback loop that only makes the problem worse by enacting the very moment of dysrecognition that produces political polarization. What is needed is some way to break out of this feedback loop of mutual dysrecognition.

Those on the political right would point to something quite different as the reason for the joyfulness in the Trump rally. It is the same reason given by the student regarding the laughter at Megyn Kelly's question to Trump. The problem, from this perspective, is the liberal bias of the mainstream media. As one woman, also interviewed in the article by Hessler, noted: "For those of us who believe that the media has been corrupt for a lot of years, it's [supporting Trump is] a way of poking at the jellyfish. . .. Just to make them mad" (Hessler, 2017). This offers a much different explanation for the uptake of Trump's comments by his supporters while also explaining the jouissance of the audience when they were christened by Trump as "deplorables"—a deeply ironic inhabitance that highlights the hypocrisy of those who wield the term.

This further helps to explain a statement that many on the political have left found baffling. In a "not-officially-off-record" interview with Robert Kuttner, Steve Bannon, then Trump's Chief Strategist and Senior Counsel, said, "[t]he Democrats. . . the longer they talk about identity politics, I got them. I want them to talk about racism every day" (Henderson, 2017). Considering the inflammatory statements that Trump makes around race and ethnicity, this might seem to most liberals to be a bad idea. And yet if one considers the outcomes of these schismogenic encounters of dysrecognition that we have described above, one can begin to see how this strategy makes sense. These encounters in which Trump is being called racist, sexist, or homophobic animate his supporters' opposition to the liberal bias of the media and to liberal's dysrecognition of Trump supporters. These moments furnish the infra-political energies needed to help sustain a powerful political movement such as the one that has fueled Trump's rise to power. Every time Trump makes a statement that is interpreted by the mainstream media as, for example, racist, sexist, or homophobic, Trump reminds his supporters that he is a "deplorable," just like them.

7. Conclusions: Schismogenic Encounters of Mutual Dysrecognition

With these various examples at hand, we can see the overarching and commonly repeating structure of encounters that produce and reproduce political polarization in the United States today. These encounters typically start with an ambiguous communication (e.g., Spicer's "period" in the middle of his sentence or McEnany's simultaneous assertion/refusal of Trump's non-supremacist views). Then, depending on the context of participants, different constitutive poetic resonances contribute to the realization of two, typically contradictory, images of what just happened. These differing images of what just happened produce a moment of mutual dysrecognition in which each side feels as if they have been recognized in a belittling or demeaning manner, with these dysrecognitions often appearing as near mirror images of each other. These different images of what just happened can also contain very different metacommunicative messages about the nature of the relationship between the participants. Both the dysrecognitions and the messages about the nature of the relationship can then serve as constitutive poetic resonances for future encounters in a "remember when X did Y" kind of way, furthering the feedback loop of polarization. As they accumulate over time, these encounters produce a schizophrenic body politic in which each side can observe the very same encounter and see something entirely different from the other.

One of our hopes in writing this article has been to help readers better understand the structure of these transcontextual schismogenic encounters so that they might be able to move beyond the "pain and maladjustment" that has typified these encounters. As mentioned at the outset, what is particularly troubling in U.S. politics today is that many of the *restraining* factors that would have helped create a stable system are no longer functioning. As we have shown through a number of examples, at the small-scale level of interactions, political encounters themselves frequently devolve into moments of misunderstanding and mutual dysrecognition that actively produce further political schismogenesis. Thus, in addition to the fact that the restraining mechanisms are no longer functioning, the proliferation of encounters like the ones we have documented here suggests that schismogenesis is also accelerating. To put it in Bateson's terms, the steam engine of political polarization is barreling forward with increasing speed and with no governor to control it—a runaway train.

This Batesonian framing of the problem of political polarization in the United States today raises a few simple questions. Will political encounters continue to be characterized by transcontextual double binds and mutual dysrecognition thus leaving Americans unable to communicate across political lines? Or, will Americans be able to deutero-learn to, like Bateson's dolphin mentioned above, thus creating new and novel responses to encounters of mutual dysrecognition in ways that can produce a different outcome? It is worth noting here that the current state of transcontextual double binds and schismogenesis seems to be (financially) beneficial to both of the existing political parties and to the media even though they are antithetical to a healthy democracy.

The Batesonian hope of deutero-learning, like Bateson's aforementioned alcoholic, would require an understanding of the transcontextual nature of these encounters so that we can avoid continuing to engage in interactional habits that constantly (re)constitute the negative feedback loops of the double bind. This deutero-learning requires stepping back from these everyday encounters and understanding how the structure of these encounters produces misunderstanding, mutual dysrecognition, and demonization.

The task here is to come up with ways of responding to the transcontextual double binds of mutual dysrecognition in a manner that once again stably incorporates into the U.S. body politic the very contradictions that are supposed to be foundational to our democracy. As Bateson noted of schismogenic processes, failure to engage in this kind of

deutero-learning will likely lead to further hostility and, eventually, the total breakdown of the system.

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Essay

Systems Theory and Intercultural Communication: Methods for Heuristic Model Design

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Abstract: This article focuses on methods for designing heuristic models within the paradigm of systems theory and in the disciplinary context of intercultural communication. The main question arises from the striking observation that common language is insufficient to develop knowledge about human communication, especially when many factors of complexity (such as ambiguity, paradoxes, or uncertainty) are involved in the composition of an abstract research object. This epistemological, theoretical, and methodological problem is one of the main challenges to the scientificity of anthropological theories and concepts on culture. Moreover, these questions lie at the heart of research on intercultural communication. Authors and theorists in the complexity sciences have already stressed the need, in such cases, to think in terms of models or semiotic representations, since these tools of thought can mediate much more effectively than unformalized language between the heterogeneous set of perceptions arising from the field of experience, on the one hand, and the philosophical principles that organize speculative thought, on the other. This sets the scene for a reflection on the need to master the theory of heuristic models when it comes to developing scientific knowledge in the field of intercultural communication. In this essay, my first aim is to make explicit the conditions likely to ensure the heuristic value of a model, while my second aim is to clarify the operational function and required level of abstraction of certain terms, such as heading, concept, category, model, and system that are among the most commonly used by academics in their descriptive accounts or explanatory hypotheses. To achieve this second objective, I propose to create cognitive meta-categories to identify the three (nominal, cardinal, or ordinal) roles of words in the reference grids that we use to classify our ideas and to specify how to use these meta-categories in the construction of our heuristic models. Alongside the theoretical presentation, examples of application are provided, almost all of which are drawn from my own research into the increased cultural vigilance of the majority population in Québec since the reasonable accommodation crisis in this French-speaking province of Canada. The typology I propose will perhaps help to avoid the confusion regularly committed by authors who attribute only cosmetic functions to words that nevertheless have a highly heuristic value and who forget to consider the logical leaps of their theoretical thinking in the construction of heuristic models.

Keywords: heuristic model; system; complexity; method; intercultural communication studies; Gregory Bateson; anthropology; informational realism; Québec

1. Introduction

1.1. The Inadequacy of Language for Understanding Human Communication

One of the main problems of cultural anthropology is to describe cultures *in words*, a difficulty that is almost impossible to avoid due to the unquestionable privilege accorded to linguistic modes of representation in humanities and communication research. I became aware of this problematic aspect of the discipline when I studied ethnomusicology several years ago. I had noted on the first page of my notebook Charles Seeger's recommendation, quoted here by Bruno Nettl, that scholars should be "constantly on guard against unknown and imponderable factors introduced into their works as a result of dealing with one form of communication in the mode of another, that is, talking about music" [1].

Long before Seeger became concerned with this epistemological and methodological difficulty (1970s) and thereby highlighted the problem of "horizontal" transposition or translation in cultural research (from one mode or one code of communication to another), researchers of the previous generation (1950s) were also concerned with the role played by the theoretical language of academics in proceeding to "convert indigenous categories into scientific concepts [i.e.,] into intellectual tools with a heuristic vocation and transcultural scope" [2]. In the course of this "vertical" process (from one level of communication to another), the Māori notion of *tapu*, for example, became a concept referring to moral prohibitions after a conversion requiring its "deculturation" in order to "confer on it descriptive and heuristic faculties that can be transposed to other contexts". According to Obadia, the debate is, in this case, "examining the relationship between the emic (indigenous) and etic (scientific) categories" of culture [2].

By taking an even broader view of this central problem of metacommunication in cultural behavior studies, the anthropologist Gregory Bateson sent out a much more serious and concise warning when he asserted that "words are dangerous things" threatening the scientificity of our theoretical endeavors [3]. His most acerbic comment on this topic was aimed at the "commonly used" behavioral science terminology of his day, such as

> "ego," "anxiety," "instinct," "purpose," "mind," "self," "fixed action pattern," "intelligence," "stupidity," "maturity," and the like. For the sake of politeness, I call these "heuristic" concepts; but, in truth, most of them are so loosely derived and so mutually irrelevant that they mix together to make a sort of conceptual fog which does much to delay the progress of science. [3]

Clearly, Bateson had in mind a much more fundamental aspect of the problem of developing knowledge through language, one whose consequences go far beyond the difficulties of changing the code (*translation*), mode (*transposition*), or perspective (*interpretation*). Although Bateson did not underestimate the importance of the last one—he said, for example, that "to try to construct a machine to translate the art of one culture into the art of another would be [...] silly" [3]—he was nevertheless more concerned with the fundamental cognitive problem of *representation*, in general and specific scientific contexts, as also discussed by Immanuel Kant before him in terms of "understanding", "reason", and "judgments" (both synthetic and analytic) in his *Critique of Pure Reason* [4].

It would take several pages, even several articles, to demonstrate the profound link between Bateson's epistemological and methodological thinking in his domain of "culture contact" studies, on the one hand [3], and Kant's "general method of imagination", on the other [4]. While using a different vocabulary, Bateson nevertheless remained very close to Kant's ideas on "methods of representation", particularly on the "schematism of the pure understanding", the introduction of intuition into the development of knowledge, the intermediate place occupied by the heuristic procedures of research—i.e., between "principles" and "experimentation", in Kant's terms [4], and between the "foundations of science" and the "data of experience", in Bateson's [3]—and above all, architectonics, which, in Kant's philosophical terminology, is none other than "the art of constructing systems" [5]. Kant's and Bateson's respective pleas for what we might ultimately call systems theory are not only eloquent but also logical and convincing. To go straight to their common conclusion, we could say that all knowledge of the phenomenological environment depends on our capacity for designing heuristic models, which are "mediating representations" or, even more simply, a kind of "third thing" that goes between pure concepts of understanding and empirical intuitions.

Insofar as we consider that any model can be this "third thing" capable of playing the role of mediating representation, the notion becomes, therefore, crucial in scientific thinking. For this reason, we should resist the temptation to confuse the abstract idea of a "model" with any other concept that might be easier to grasp but, at the same time, dangerously misleading. If, however, we absolutely had to choose one, we would have to imagine a template rather than a mold, as I underlined in a previous publication [6], drawing on a

reflection by Simone Weil [7]. But it is still best to refer directly to the definitions proposed by Kant and Bateson respectively.

In a chapter on the schematism of "pure conceptions of the understanding", Kant [4] gave his philosophical definition of what a model is, which he called a "transcendental schema" [4]:

> Now it is quite clear that there must be some third thing, which on the one side is homogeneous with the category, and with the phenomenon on the other, and so makes the application of the former to the latter possible. This mediating representation must be pure (without any empirical content), and yet must on the one side be intellectual, on the other sensuous. Such a representation is the transcendental schema. [4]

In *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity,* Bateson also gave his definition of what a model is, which he called a "pattern which connects" [8]. The purpose of this metastructure is to preserve the organizational coherence and functional maintenance of the ecological unit involved, which might otherwise be dismembered by analysis processes. This is, in fact, Bateson's central thesis:

> The *pattern which connects is a metapattern*. It is a pattern of patterns. It is that metapattern which defines the vast generalization that, indeed, *it is patterns which connect*. [8]

While the concept of model seems clear to Kant and Bateson (as well as to other systems thinkers such as Norbert Wiener, Simone Weil, Nicolas Luhmann, Jean-Louis Le Moigne, Edgar Morin and Robert Estivals, among them), the often inappropriate use of it in the context of humanities research is nonetheless perplexing, and considerably hampers the integration of heuristic model methods into cultural anthropology. As a contemporary example of the conceptual fog that results from deficient formalism in scientific discourse, I could cite the one that Lionel Obadia helps to thicken in a chapter devoted to "questions of method" raised by anthropology of religions [2]: knowing that his object of research (beliefs) is highly abstract and therefore requires the support of words, Obadia could have done better than to assert that the singular religions studied by anthropologists are classifiable by "major models" forming a list of "headings" or "concepts" to which other "categories" are sometimes added, all of these "models" reflecting different religious "systems" [2]. From a literary point of view, Obadia's text seems enriched by the procession of synonyms he uses. From a methodologic point of view, however, it should be noted that the terms Obadia equates—heading, concept, category, model, and system —are not synonyms, nor substitutable with one another, nor are they at the same level of abstraction, nor should they appear other than in a certain order corresponding to the modalities (inductive or deductive) of the reasoning supported in the thesis being put forward. In confusing these terms—in particular, by making a model the equivalent of a system—Obadia commits a logical error that leads me to believe that his words are formulated with poetic rather than scientific intent.

A *model* and a *system* are two different things. A model "is a theorization of reality or a preparation for action on reality [whereas] the system is a general theory" [9]. In other words, "a model is such because of its direct relation to reality. A system is such because of its general theorization of models" [9]. According to Estivals, whose perspective was that of the information sciences, the construction of a model (modelization) and the construction of a system (systemization) are two distinct and orderly stages in the process of theoretical abstraction, either inductive or deductive. While modelization consists in building "a conceptual whole directly derived from a limited category of phenomena, and linked to them by analogy", systematization "involves comparing models that have already been established and verified, to derive a general explanation valid for a much wider field of study" [9].

In systems thinking, then, the whole explanation process—which originates in lived experience—is "based on two stages, the second of which is the construction of *systems*

through systematization, i.e., the comparison of models" [9]. In terms of organizing ideas, heuristic models are cognitive tools conceived to bridge the intellectual gap between what we perceive as a complex reality to be studied, on the one hand, and the abstract architectonics of general systems theory, on the other. Several authors have made general systems theory explicit [10], notably Jean-Louis Le Moigne [11–13]. For this reason, I will not go into it here. Instead, I will focus on heuristic models, as they make up the first half of the whole explanation process.

1.2. The Need for Model-Based Thinking

Before embarking on the long process of representing reality by building a heuristic model, any researcher may be inclined to ask whether this modeling phase is really necessary. The answer is quite simple: the more abstract and complex the object of research, the more urgent and inevitable the need to build heuristic models to reflect on it. There is no doubt in my mind that the anthropology of intercultural communication has to deal with an object that is both abstract and complex, which justifies a commitment to the construction of models. But it is not enough to say so: it has to be argued.

Firstly, *abstraction*. From a disciplinary point of view, the task of an anthropologist of intercultural communication is to observe the "relation of difference", which is an element of reality that cannot be considered a *fact*, i.e., that it has no "real existence" or "real occurrence". Indeed, the very nature of data in the inquiry of intercultural anthropology is conceived as information about relations and, as such, can never be presented "as having objective reality". Bateson insisted on this point, modifying an idea of Kant and drawing on advances in cybernetics, theories of perception (Gestalt), and other sciences of his time:

> Kant argued long ago that this piece of chalk contains a million potential facts (*Tatsachen*) but that only a very few of these become truly facts by affecting the behavior of entities capable of responding to facts. For Kant's *Tatsachen*, I would substitute *differences* and point out that the number of *potential* differences in this chalk is infinite but that very few of them become *effective* differences (i.e., items of information) in the mental process of any larger entity. [8]

This conception of human communication as a continual tracking of "differences that make a difference" (which means *information*) takes shape in the contemporary hypothesis of reality as a world of informational objects, which includes the mind, ideas, difference, change, information, command, and communication:

> Informational Realism argues that, as far as we can tell, the ultimate nature of reality is informational, that is, it makes sense to adopt a Level of Abstraction at which our mind-independent reality is constituted by relata that are neither substantial nor material (they might well be, but we have no reasons to suppose them to be so) but informational. [14]

Considering what has just been stated, there is no doubt that the object of the anthropology of intercultural communication is highly abstract, essentially informational, and requires the support of a heuristic model in order to develop valid and scientific knowledge.

Then, *complexity*. Uncertainty, like ambiguity, hazard, and other factors of complexity, make the cultural behaviors studied by anthropologists a domain of human experience that "never could become knowledge" if we cannot grasp "the synthetical unity of phenomena", that is, if we cannot synthesize our cultural experiences "according to conceptions of the object of phenomena in general" [4]. Without such a capacity for synthesis, Kant asserted, experience "would be merely a rhapsody of perceptions, never fitting together into any connected text, according to rules of a thoroughly united (possible) consciousness, and therefore never subjected to the transcendental and necessary unity of apperception":

> Experience has therefore for a foundation, a priori principles of its form, that is to say, general rules of unity in the synthesis of phenomena, the objective reality of which rules, as necessary conditions—even of the possibility of experience—can always be shown in experience. But apart from this relation, a priori synthetical

> propositions are absolutely impossible, because they have no third term, that is, no pure object, in which the synthetical unity can exhibit the objective reality of its conceptions. [4]

As an abstract object of research, intercultural communication is clearly characterized by a complexity that can take many forms, such as "fuzziness and imprecision, hazard and instability, ambiguity, uncertainty and unpredictability" [15]. Sometimes, complexity means "random incidents, chance, initiative, decision, crisis, the unexpected, the unforeseen, and awareness of deviations and transformations" [16]. Some other times, it means antagonism, emergence, dialogical loops, and multidimensionality [17] or difference, change, paradoxes, entropy, threshold, and probability [8].

Ambiguity is a particularly interesting complexity factor for researchers working on cultural behaviors. Pop-Flanja and Gâz, for example, ask, "to what extent can we regard ambiguity as being constructive or destructive in building inter or cross-cultural interactions and to what extent does communication need to be clear in order to be effective" [18]. Paradox is a second variable of complexity that deserves considerable attention from researchers working on immigration policies that have an impact on the cultural ecology of the host countries. I am thinking in particular of immigration policies that have both legal and economic legitimacy but nevertheless seem cruel from a moral point of view. In Québec's and Canada's immigration policies, the closure of Roxham Road is a case in point. In April 2023, when the Trudeau federal government announced, apparently "without any warning, the closure to asylum seekers of Roxham Road"—a rural road that constituted an "irregular" border crossing between New York State (USA) and the province of Québec (Canada)—many people denounced the law, lamenting that "hundreds or even thousands of migrants [. . .] will suffer from this decision in the coming months" [19]. This case perfectly illustrates the anthropological complexity of situations where a double bind is difficult to overcome. Uncertainty and unpredictability are also omnipresent factors of complexity in the field of intercultural communication, both from methodological and theoretical points of view and from the point of view of people observed in the research field. For Instance, it is clear that the agreement between Canada and the United States that now applies to illegal migrants venturing onto Roxham Road means that individuals already weakened by difficult living conditions will now have to face the "uncertain ends of harrowing journeys", which is unacceptable, cruel, and inhuman: "They're nervous, they're scared [. . .] They want a roof over their heads. They want their kids to be educated. They want to be able to put food on their table. They want to work. It's like, why wouldn't we be more open to that?" [20].

And yet, ambiguity, paradoxes, uncertainty, and unpredictability are features of human life that are not just reserved for people exposed to such extreme future conditions [16]. In fact, in terms of human culture, all of these factors of complexity can be observed in all spheres of activity (work, health, family, housing, security, education, culture, spiritual life) and, furthermore, at all scales of observation (individuals, groups, societies, the world). From a methodological point of view, this complexity presents intercultural studies "with the permanent challenge of reasoning in terms of models" [21]. As Floridi puts it,

> Instrumentally and predictively successful models (especially, but not only, those propounded by scientific theories) at a given level of abstraction can be, in the best circumstances, increasingly informative about the relations that obtain between the (possibly unobservable) informational objects that constitute the system under investigation (through the observable phenomena). [14]

As a corollary, I would say that heuristic models in the anthropology of intercultural communication only find their real usefulness when they reach a sufficient level of abstraction to inform us about the links that exist between the unobservable objects of communication. Put another way, the aim of heuristic models in our discipline is not to define essences or states of a cultural matter "at a given time and in a given space", as classical physicists would do in the world of certainty, but rather to capture intersections

of meaning at a given level of abstraction and according to a given protocol, as quantum physicists would do in the world of uncertainty. Within the framework of systems thinking methods, models are "artificial intelligible representations" [11]. Rarely do the models proposed by researchers have predictive, decision-making, or normative functions [5]. Their value is more often descriptive than explanatory [22] and consequently, they are "hypothetical rather than considered a valid expression" [5]. It may be added that the models constructed by systemic theorists result from operations of "schematization of a complex reality, of which they offer an immediately legible image" [5].

For someone willing to acknowledge the striking insufficiency of non-formalized language for developing knowledge about cultural and intercultural communication, the need to think in terms of heuristic models or semiotic representations should now seem fully justified. It is from this premise that I now intend to take charge of the two objectives I have set for this essay. The first objective is to make explicit the conditions likely to ensure the heuristic value of a model built with words (rather than numbers, images, graphs, or diagrams) (Section 2), while the second aim (Section 3) is to clarify the operational function and level of abstraction required for certain terms necessary for the construction of heuristic models such as heading, concept, and category, which are among the words most commonly used by academics in their descriptive or explanatory hypotheses.

2. Heuristic Model Validation Requirements

2.1. Two Principles to Be Observed

In anthropology, a theoretical model acquires heuristic value when it makes it possible to describe, explain, and sometimes even anticipate relational behaviors that escape human perception in the field of experience by detecting informational redundancies, extrapolating relational trends from observable processes or behaviors, and postulating possible changes in a niche of ideas. Bateson identified two conditions likely to ensure the heuristic value of such a model: compliance with the principle of triadic comparability, on the one hand, and compliance with the principle of domain compatibility, on the other.

The first principle, triadic comparability, is satisfied when a theory is developed thoroughly and consistently at each of the three levels of artificial systems: the formal level, functional level, and processual level. Systemic theorists should always consider these three "sorts of comparability" to establish links between experiential reality as perceived and the models under construction [3]. In this respect, Bateson's method of triadic comparison seems to be inspired by psychologist Kenneth Craik's hypothesis on *The Nature of Explanation* [23], according to which the human mind elaborates mental representations in order to understand the structure or anticipate the functioning and processes that take place in the reality of the world. Bateson's triadic method of reasoning is even more closely aligned with the "trialectic of Being, Doing and Becoming" referred to by Le Moigne in his compendium of systems thinking [13]. The triadic mode of comparison and reasoning is based on the principle that any definition elaborated within the systems paradigm must include "a functional definition (what the object does) [definition by its function], an ontological definition (what the object is) [definition by its form and structure] and a genetic definition (what the object becomes) [definition by its processes]" [13]. Correlation is therefore the result of a triple (not a simple) comparison. In line with a sound constructivist epistemology, this is what we might call perspective triangulation modeling [24].

The second condition to ensure the heuristic value of scientific theories and concepts is compliance with the principle of domain compatibility. This principle has something to do with the prior distinction of three major phenomenological domains that science set itself the task of elucidating: (1) the domain of inanimate matter; (2) the domain of the animate or "adaptive" world of organic or biological life; and (3) the domain of information, ideas, differences, and communication, which is dependent on the structure, functioning, and processes of human cognition. We could perhaps use the terminology of the three spheres (geo, bio, noo) coined by Vladimir Vernadsky [25] to refer to these three domains, but this would entail a lengthy discussion that is beyond my scope here. Instead, I suggest we

speak of these three spheres as being at distinct and increasingly higher levels of abstraction (levels 1, 2, and 3) while focusing on another aspect of their distinction that has major epistemological and methodological implications. Indeed, what is most important to recognize about these three domains of human experience is the fundamental differences in the laws that govern their organization, cohesion, functioning, and processes. The laws governing their evolution, first and foremost, could not be more radical: whereas the transformation of matter in the "geosphere" (domain 1) can be explained by a certain set of physical and chemical laws, it is a completely different set of laws that must be mobilized to explain the evolution of the adaptive and sensitive entities that animate the "biosphere" (domain 2), not to mention the fact that, since the advent of cybernetics and its major discoveries in the 1940s and 1950s, scientists have demonstrated that it is yet another set of laws—such as those of "order, negative entropy, and information" [3]—that are needed to explain processes in the sphere of human communication (domain 3). (Note, however, that my critique of analogies and metaphors built on the example of the physical sciences (domain 1) is limited to those inspired by the laws of classical mechanics, as developed by Newton, and not to those inspired by the laws of quantum physics, which provides theoretical models of uncertainty and chaos that are fully compatible with those of human communication).

The principle of domain compatibility is therefore the one that must guide our work when we develop a theory by abduction, i.e., when we structure our understanding of a phenomenon by borrowing a theory rooted in another domain of human experience. For example, to pose a problem of intercultural communication (domain 3) in terms of collision mechanics (domain 1) is to transgress the principle of domain compatibility, which necessarily leads to "pathologies of epistemology" and to the emergence of paradoxes from which it is not easy to escape later on [3]. Bateson forcefully and persistently defended the original intellectual conviction of his own, now shared by many academics in the humanities and social sciences, that neither the foundations of Newtonian physics nor those of chemistry could be used to describe human behavior or the human mind, or to test heuristic hypotheses about it, or to confront, in all their breadth and complexity, the cultural problems debated by anthropologists [3].

The two principles of heuristic model theory that have just been outlined should not only be respected by anthropologists in the construction phase of their models but also be used to assess the heuristic value or potential of existing models. The following section presents an example of this application of the heuristic model validation requirements for evaluation purposes.

2.2. Assessing the Heuristic Value of Culture Shock Theory

In the field of intercultural communication studies, one of the predominant theories is that of culture shock, which I will use as an example in the methodological discussion that follows. My aim here is to see how we can methodologically argue that it is a misleading theory that has undermined anthropological research on intercultural communication [26]. My opinion here is not based on the fact that it is "old-fashioned and therefore wrong", as Dutton bitterly reproaches all those who disavow this theory [27], but rather because it escapes the domain compatibility criteria of scientificity identified above.

Culture shock theories are based on one or other of the following three metaphorical constructions—physical (used by Choueiri [28]), medical (developed by Oberg [29]), and moral (denounced by Dutton [27])—none of which is consistent with the informational and cultural nature of the phenomenon. For instance, the physical science metaphor (domain 1) evokes the physical impact of a collision between two concrete entities. This formal level of comparison gives force to the false impression that cultures are concrete objects. This may well have very little impact on the advancement of knowledge in the field, were it not for the propensity of each and every thinker—from academics to politicians, to citizens, and so on—to spin this kind of expressive metaphor beyond its first expression. By shifting from a formal to a functional level of comparison, the physical metaphor was able to instill the

idea that head-on intercultural encounters could cause psychic wounds, and that it was smart to guard against them. Obviously, this type of reasoning based on an inadequate metaphor cannot be qualified as scientifically admissible, even if it can be appreciated for its expressive potential in a literary context.

We could also look at the procedural level of comparison between the idea of shock and that of an intercultural encounter by quoting Choueiri, who wrote in an almost poetic construction (originally in French) that "cultures polish each other like pebbles on the shore and this operation is called culture shock" («*Les cultures se polissent les unes les autres comme les galets sur la grève et cette opération porte le nom de choc culturel*») [28]. In this case, interpreting the metaphor gives a representation of cultural groups and people as a kind of "shore pebbles" tossed about by the movement of the waves and experiencing the constraint of their mixing in a giant "melting pot"—an expression that has long described the politics of cultural integration in the United States—while showing little resistance to the polishing of their behaviors and the process of eroding their differences. Despite its genuine literary interest, this homonomy based on incongruous metaphor does not provide any honest explanation of how people react, interact, or simply relate in a context of superdiversity. We could repeat the same exercise by examining the heuristic value of this concept seen under the angle of the medical metaphor or the moral metaphor to illustrate the type of epistemological errors of which Bateson spoke in connection with the ill-formulated concepts. A corrective would be to reconstruct our representation of the difficult experience of sudden cultural uncertainty (hitherto referred to as culture shock) by seeking a new analogy rising to an "equally abstract level" [3], i.e., using, for this specific purpose, a metaphor drawn from the field of communication and information (domain 3).

2.3. Relying on Our Experience of the Information World

Among the various possibilities open to the intercultural communication researcher looking for an inspiring and heuristic metaphor drawn from the field of information (domain 3), that of the computer analogy often comes first. Geert Hofstede is one of the renowned scientists who envisioned culture through this perspective: "with a computer metaphor [he said], culture is the software of our minds. We need shared software in order to communicate. So, culture is about what we share with those around us" [30]. Although this computational metaphor is at the same level of abstraction as the intercultural experience that we are trying to theorize as anthropologists (domain 3), it would be problematic to see it as a solid foundation for a theory of intercultural experience since it eliminates from the equation some data of human behavior and psychology, in particular, those that are of an emotional nature. The task of replacing the metaphor of "shock" with one drawn from the "world of sense, organization, and communication" [8], to return to our example, does not mean ignoring the emotional intensity of the experience of cultural disorientation, insecurity, or uncertainty that it sought to express. Nor is this to deny the quality of the empirical work carried out to date on this phenomenon, nor to cast doubt on the complexity of the adaptation process that this research has observed [31,32].

It is for these reasons that, in my own work, I have turned to another informational metaphor, also drawn from the sphere of communication (domain 3), but considering the effects of uncertainty, anxiety, or insecurity that any new encounter can induce in the human experience: that of the emergency alert system. It has great heuristic potential, as it provides a comprehensive source domain for the construction of formal, functional, and process comparisons, as well as models relating to the sources, conditions, degrees, functioning, movements or evolution, management, causes, and effects of uncertainty in information circuits, without forgetting to examine the methods for estimating the risks and the intervention protocols. Interestingly, this metaphor was partially used by Mr. Frederico Mayor, Director-General of the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (UNESCO), at the opening of the Eighteenth Congress of the *International Federation for Parent Education* (IFPE) in Paris on 25 May 1994. The specific theme of the congress was "the family amid current upheaval". In a context of uncertainty, Mayor said

that "to remain true to its mission, [UNESCO] must, above all, be on the watch, sound the alarm and help people to make a diagnosis and prescribe treatment in good time" [33].

As part of my own research into the cultural vigilance behavior adopted by a majority of long-established French-speaking Quebecers (for historical reasons, among others), I modified all of my wording to adapt it to this new metaphor of the emergency alert system. Rather than talking about xenophobic behavior or ideas, for example, I prefer to talk about a psychological and emotional alarm that is triggered in the "mind" of a subsystem (an individual, a group, an organization) when factors of complexity (such as ambiguity, paradoxes, and uncertainty) influence the ecology of its environment without it being possible to estimate the consequences in the short, medium and long term. This led me to draw the following conclusion:

> Situating the concept of "culture shock" within the broader context of theories of change [. . .] seems to offer [a new formulation of its theory]. This formulation is part of a theory of logic-type changes that occur in human cognition when a paradoxical communication situation disrupts its adaptive functions [. . .] This path of theoretical development, based on systems thinking, makes it possible to elaborate an explanation that does not presume the positive or negative outcome of the "shock" experience, that can be used at different scales of analysis (individual, group, human), that transcends the specialized vocabulary of psychology and remains close to the concerns of anthropology. [26]

Having achieved my first objective, which was to make explicit the conditions likely to ensure the heuristic value of a model built with words, I now propose to take on the second, which consists in clarifying the operational function and the level of abstraction required for certain terms necessary for the construction of heuristic models.

3. Systemic Formalization Method for Heuristic Model Design

The second aim of this essay is to clarify the operational functions and required levels of abstraction of certain terms, such as heading, concept, category, model, and system, (and even theory), that are among the most commonly used by academics in their descriptive or explanatory hypotheses. To achieve this second objective, I propose to create cognitive meta-categories to identify their roles in the reference grid that we use to classify our ideas while designing our representations of the world and to specify the place we give them in the construction of our heuristic models. To illustrate my point, I will use a mathematical metaphor, which is at the same level of abstraction as the intellectual phenomenon I want to represent so as to respect the principle of domain compatibility, on the one hand, and which I intend to develop in terms of form, function, and process to respect the principle of triadic comparability, on the other.

3.1. Three Functions of Abstractions in Heuristic Model Design

Just as mathematics is made up of numbers, the anthropology of intercultural communication is mainly made up of words, which makes language, labeling, and wording essential elements and procedures in the progression of knowledge in the human and social sciences, despite the difficulties that this can represent. To help, the following terminology is based on the congruence I propose to build between numbers and words or, more precisely, between numbers and scientific wording. According to its lexicographic definition, the idea of a number is the "basic concept of mathematics, one of the fundamental notions of understanding that can be related to other ideas (plurality, set, correspondences) but cannot be defined" [34]. I suggest considering the concept of wording to be a conceptual equivalence that would be specific to the field of the human sciences, that is, as a fundamental notion of understanding that is necessary for the engendering of several disciplines, including philosophy, languages, literature, history, the arts, psychology, geography, political and legal sciences, communication, management, and no doubt, anthropology. This intuition that the concept of wording can congruently echo the mathematical concept of number must be reinforced by the establishment of a contiguity of functions, which implies

the possibility that each of them can be used in three different ways: the nominal way, the cardinal way, and the ordinal way. In mathematics, these three qualifiers are defined as follows:

> Nominal numbers name or identify something (e.g., a zip code or a player on a team.) They do not show quantity or rank. Cardinal numbers, known as the "counting numbers," indicate quantity. Ordinal numbers indicate the order or rank of things in a set (e.g., sixth in line; fourth place). [35]

My proposal is to enrich the terminology of the heuristic model method with these three qualifiers and to consider the possibility that theoretical words in anthropology may also be of a nominal, cardinal, or ordinal type, depending on the function attributed to them by a researcher in the process of constructing a heuristic model. I suggest reserving the use of the nominal meta-category for the classification of words used to relay information, reserving the cardinal meta-category for the classification of words used to grid the territory of ideas under study, and reserving the ordinal meta-category for the classification of words used *to* map thresholds of systemic change. In what follows, each of these three meta-categories of words is examined and illustrated by examples of their application in the field of intercultural communication research.

3.2. Relaying Information with Nominal Wording

In the context of my proposal, nominal words are comparable to nominal numbers: they are labels used to identify objects in a more or less arbitrary way for the convenience of exchange between those who use them. From this perspective, we could compare nominal words to the digits of a telephone number: their actual numerical values are irrelevant, as they do not indicate a quantity, a rank, or any other measure. Similarly, the actual meanings of nominal words are irrelevant to the scientific study of informational reality within a niche of ideas since their role within communication is the same as that of a stick in a relay race: each participant can develop a personal running style and take part in the tournament as long as he or she is in possession of the stick.

When we begin to study a certain niche of intercultural communication, collecting the main nominal words consists in noting the recurrences that characterize the communication process. The verb "to collect" is to be understood here both in the anthropological sense of collecting ethnographic data and in the more trivial sense in which a collector of foreign currency might understand it, that is, as the act of bringing together objects that are more or less disparate in terms of spatial or historical affiliation, form, or value but that play the same role as a means of exchange in the course of human activity. In such a collection, objects are assembled but not necessarily classified in any other way than by the collector's motivation. In my study of cultural vigilance behaviors in Québec, the disordered collection of nominal words includes the following expressions: "conspicuous religious symbols", "reasonable accommodation", "charter of values", "ban on religious symbols", "discrimination based on religion", and "equality of women and men".

It is tempting to think of these words with nominal functions as keywords of the kind we use in research. However, this is not the case. While keywords have a functional value insofar as their meaning is restricted and indisputable (which makes the word "relation" an unusable keyword in the context of academic research), words with a nominal function should be considered more like hashtags on today's social media: they are useful for relaying information on similar subjects. In this frame of reference, "culture shock" is an example of an expression with no other function than nominal, which has not prevented it from being incorporated into numerous scientific theories.

3.3. Squaring the Territory of Ideas with Cardinal Wording

Understood in the philosophical sense of the term, the adjective "cardinal" attributes to a concept the "role of hinge, which serves as a pivot, thus forming, figuratively speaking, the essential part around which everything revolves" [5]. Plato, for example, identified "justice, wisdom, temperance and courage" as the four cardinal virtues of his time (428–347 BC).

Pascal spoke instead of "three orders of things: the flesh, the spirit, the will" [36]. As for the French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, he asserted, in his most important work, *Being and Nothingness*, that "having, doing, and being are the cardinal categories of human reality. Under them are subsumed all types of human conduct" («*Avoir, faire et être sont les catégories cardinales de la réalité humaine. Elles subsument sous elles toutes les conduites de l'homme*») [37]). Apart from a slight displacement effect, Sartre's categories are echoed in Jean-Louis Le Moigne's compendium of systemic thought, in which he claimed that the "trialectic of being, doing and becoming [. . .] is undoubtedly the key to the representation, if not to the very knowledge of the object" [13]. Finally, in his book *God and Golem, Inc* [38], the well-known father of Cybernetics [39] Norbert Wiener structured his thoughts on the "theme of creative activity [...] under a single set of concepts" that retain the properties of cardinal categories: knowledge, power, and worship [38]. This set of cardinal categories enabled him to create a term-by-term equivalence between what he identified as the three pillars of human thought, on the one hand, and the three pillars of cybernetics, on the other: "knowledge is inextricably linked to communication, power to control, and the evaluation of human objectives to ethics and to the whole normative aspect of religion" [38]. Considering the usefulness of having a stabilized and concordant list of cardinal categories in mind to grid the territory of informational objects when studying a complex and abstract niche of ideas, I will propose four in the next section, specifically chosen for the construction of a heuristic model for research in the anthropology of intercultural communication.

3.3.1. A List of Four General Headings to Start With

Among the pertinent suggestions made by anthropologists and philosophers, the list of principal headings that seems to me to be the most comprehensive, explicit, and best suited to the human behavior sciences is set out by André Comte-Sponville in a publication in which he attempts to answer the question *Is capitalism moral*? [40]. What Comte-Sponville calls orders—in the philosophical sense in which Blaise Pascal [41] defined them in his theory of orders—are presented in the table of contents of his book in the form of the following numbered headings:

(1) The economic, techno-scientific order;
(2) The legal–political order;
(3) The moral order;
(4) The ethical order.

Comte-Sponville's four orders can easily be likened to four of the headings used by cultural anthropologists to subdivide their fields of expertise, as shown in Table 1. However, at this early stage in the construction of a heuristic model, it is important to remember that the headings we have chosen as a point of departure are not yet cardinal categories, since, to become so, they will eventually have to be integrated into a complete system of representation and put to the test of informational reality. For the time being, this is still just a vague guideline useful for grasping the complexity of cultural experiences. As Bateson reminds us,

Table 1. A first list of headings to describe culture in words.

Four Orders of Human Existence	Corresponding Disciplinary Specialties
Econo-techno-scientific Order	Anthropology of Technology and Science
Legal-political Order	Anthropology of Laws, Politics, and Governance
Moral-ethical Order (merged)	Anthropology of Moralities, Religions, and Ethics
Epistemological Order (added)	Anthropology of Arts, Magic, and Love

> Our categories 'religious,' 'economic,' etc., are not *real* subdivisions which are present in the cultures which we study, but are merely *abstractions* which we make for our own convenience when we set out to describe cultures in words. They are not phenomena present in culture, but are labels for various points of

> view which we adopt in our studies. In handling such abstractions we must be careful to avoid Whitehead's "fallacy of misplaced concreteness". [3]

Now, if we consider the list from the point of view of informational realism, it is clear to me that it lacks something that could correspond to a whole area of anthropology classified under the heading of communications. This includes the study of the experience of art, symbols, information, magic, drugs, dreams, lies, and, why not, schizophrenia, difference, and change. It is true, however, that Comte-Sponville remains dubious about his fourth heading, not least because there is an ambiguity between the moral order and the ethical order that he needs to clear up (which he does briefly by proposing that "moral" means everything we do out of duty, and "ethical" is everything we do out of love). His reflections on this problem ultimately led him to "envisage a fifth order" under the heading of the divine or supernatural [40].

For my part, I have decided to combine the moral and ethical orders into a single heading and to complete the list with a new heading revolving around epistemological questions, which seems to me sufficiently broad and abstract "to oversee the whole and ensure its cohesion" [40].

3.3.2. From a List of Headings to a Grid Reference System

If the list presented above is interesting for its capacity to consolidate the links between our chosen headings (in the left-hand column) and the specialties of cultural anthropology (in the right-hand column), it seems unlikely to be useful for the study of intercultural communication. Not to mention that such a formulation—in the form of institutional structures, more precisely—runs the risk of confusing the names of things with the things themselves. This is problematic when you consider that the model under construction is intended to support research in a field where complexity factors are numerous, and objects are unobservable.

To avoid this pitfall and to underline my choice as a systemic theorist to study the complexity of informational and unobservable objects, I propose to apply, here again, the principle of the triadic definition of artificial systems. This involves redistributing each of the four initial headings into three cardinal categories (form, function, process), thus guaranteeing the user of the grid reference system greater conceptual agility.

In Table 2, I present my own triadic formulation of headings adapted to the study of informational objects, for illustrative purposes only, followed by a few additional remarks. At this stage in the construction process, the reader must note that the headings become a list of *orders* (rather than a list of institutions) as a result of my effort to organize and grid my thinking through these "stable or recurring structures, and therefore recognizable and identifiable as a constant and necessary disposition" for the exercise of my thinking [42]. It should also be pointed out that I work with a 12-square grid, whereas Bateson worked with "a lattice of nine squares [i.e.,] three rows of squares with three squares in each row" [3]. Apart from this difference in the number of squares, which suits the nomenclature of this grid of categories whose function is "cardinal", my reference grid is comparable to Bateson's in that, just like him:

Table 2. Triadic wording of the four orders of human existence.

	FORM	**FUNCTION**	**PROCESS**
1	Econo-techno-scientific Order	Shaping the world	Instrumental rationality
2	Legal-political Order	Ruling the world	Normative legitimacy
3	Moral-ethical Order	Sharing the world	Moral acceptability
4	Epistemological Order	Sublimating the world	Epistemic credibility

> I labeled the horizontal rows with my bits of culture and the vertical columns with my categories. Then I forced myself to see each bit as conceivably belonging to each category. I found that it could be done. [3]

Once again, it is important to stress that these are not natural but artificial divisions of the "world of ideas and communication", since any cultural behavior can belong simultaneously to either of these categories, depending on the point of view of the person interpreting its meaning. Wearing a burka in a Québec amusement park, for example, can at once be seen as a way of shaping, ruling, sharing, and sublimating the world, depending on who will interpret the meaning of this behavior, and it is precisely the possible ambiguity of interpretation that makes the situation so complex. Consequently, this set of cardinal categories should not be considered as a carbon copy of reality but as "labels for points of view voluntarily adopted by the investigator" [3], as a grid reference system for systemic theorists, similar to those used in topography or geodesy, i.e., as a mental and artificial division whose points of intersection alone are useful for composing the overall image of an information niche and for locating ideas in a mental territory. Indeed, it should be conceived as one of the tools that guide the researcher's gaze and "'give [him] to see' without destroying the complexity or ambiguity of the [observed] phenomenon" [12]. From a methodological point of view, this type of theoretical construction makes it possible to process the enormous volume of information on intercultural behavior while repressing the disorder of our perceptions [4]. From a scientific point of view, the heuristic value of this grid pattern can only be appreciated when it is used in the spirit of a systemic or ecological vision of culture, that is, when it helps to understand how pieces of information relating to cultural behavior are distributed in a particular niche, and how cultural ideas hybridize, merge, and compete in people's cultural or intercultural discourse.

Further remarks should be added. When Malinowski and other anthropologists after him (including Bateson) denounced "the weakness of this method of subdividing a culture" into major or categorical functions [3], they were highlighting the danger of purely inductive models (from perceptions to categorization), which tend to reduce the complexity of phenomena and to precipitate the "multiplication of dormitive hypotheses" [3]. This suggests that the usefulness of functional categories lies not in their heuristic potential but rather in the service they provide in terms of data organization. It also invites anthropologists to engage in deductive reasoning.

By contrast, the processual formulation seems to pave the way for increasing complexity, insofar as each "square" of this *category of categories* grid is intended to classify not differences but *differences of differences*, a famous expression coined by Bateson, referring to the cognitive transformation of a perception into an idea. This could have major implications for intercultural communication studies. This means that, if process-based categories have any heuristic value, they could provide us with a description of how a perception of an observable cultural difference (the wearing of the Islamic veil, for instance) is ultimately transformed into a xenophobic or even racist idea. From a methodological point of view, this means implementing in research a range of reasoning modalities, including induction, deduction, abduction, and transduction. To make this aspect more tangible for the reader, examples are provided in the following section.

3.3.3. Using the Grid to Classify Ideas on Religious Neutrality in Québec

In what follows, I give four examples of how I used, both inductively and deductively in circular reasoning, the model I call my Anthropological Grid Reference System to classify ideas reflecting Quebecers' cultural vigilance toward the growing religious diversity in their environment since the 1980s. Quotes are excerpts from the public hearing of citizens heard in the winter of 2014 as part of the public consultation held by the National Assembly's Committee on Institutions on Bill 60, *Charter affirming the values of State secularism and religious neutrality and of equality between women and men, and providing a framework for accommodation requests* [43]. In the context of these public hearings, citizens had the opportunity to state their reasons for supporting or opposing Bill 60, which was intended to prohibit "easily visible" religious symbols [44]. As the aim of my study was to highlight the testimonies of citizens from the majority group—who were mostly in favor of the bill—all of the quotes embedded in the following section are from Caucasian adults (men and

women), Catholics and Francophones, historically rooted in French European culture. Note that Bill 60 served as a basis for *Law 21: Act Respecting the Laicity of the State*, passed by the Québec National Assembly on 16 June 2019. The purpose of this legislation is "to confirm the province's secular status, as well as to prohibit the wearing of religious symbols by civil service employees in positions of authority and by teachers in the public sector" [43].

In the econo-techno-scientific order, the category of instrumental rationality is intended to describe the cognitive process of matching objectives and resources as closely as possible to obtain the best results. When working with this cardinal category, my task was to classify all citizen comments aimed at denouncing the instrumental irrationality of the behavior displayed by people from other cultures. Once completed, this classification highlighted the fact that members of the cultural majority in Québec generally worry about the presence of Others when a lack of congruence is found between their (extrapolated) instrumental goals and the (observable) means that they use to achieve them. The first extract provides an example of this:

> We visited a mosque. First thing, they ask us to take off your shoes. What do you mean, take off our shoes? [This has no logical connection with the current activity]. But, before we got there, we had men, women with a little carpet rolled up under their arms and then [. . .] going in the mosque. At one point, I said: What's going on? There were men on all fours on the ground. There I looked, but there they were just men. Behind the curtain, there were only women. I could not believe it. I got back on the bus, then I said: Can you go and pray, on all fours, on a carpet? . . . !!! [It is a very irrational thing to do] (Mr. Pineault's wife, 16 January 2014, 17h00). [44]

In the legal-political order, the process of normative legitimacy involves creating links between rights and obligations at the political or legal level of life in society. When working with this second cardinal category, my task was to classify all comments that aimed at denouncing the illegitimacy of the behavior displayed by people from other cultures. Once completed, this classification highlighted the fact that members of the cultural majority in Québec generally worry about the presence of Others when they notice in their behavior a lack of congruence between "our" (legitime) rules, laws, principles, policies, or long-standing practices and "their" (deviant) behavior. The second extract provides an example of this situation:

> What I think about Muslims is that they refuse to respect our rules. They ask to have their schools, their churches, and well: we have no problem with that. But they want us to be forced to respect the rules of their country. No one can decide overnight to change anything for their own good. Here, in Québec, we refuse that our children walk around with a knife, we refuse women be beaten, we refuse slavery. We refuse to allow our children and even adults to wear a wool tuque, a hat, or a baseball cap in church. Everyone must respect these rules. (Mr. Pineault's daughter, 16 January 2014, 17h00). [44]

In the moral-ethnical order, the process of moral acceptability is more concerned with the links between behaviors and the contexts in which they are interpreted or justified (for example, we could accept that it is morally acceptable to kill someone in self-defense but unacceptable in any other context). When working with this other cardinal category, my task was to classify all comments aimed at denouncing the unacceptability of the behavior displayed by people from other cultures. Once completed, this classification highlights the fact that members of the cultural majority in Québec generally worry about the presence of Others when they notice a lack of congruence between a general (overt) behavior adopted by "them" and the context that our presence provides for interpreting it (from a personal point of view). The following extract illustrates this situation:

> The Hasidic Jews in my neighborhood, when I'd say hello to them, they'd look me in the face, then turn their heads, and never answer [...] Very often, when we met them on the street, they'd change the sidewalk. So, I don't mind being open

> and trying to be nice to these people, but, at some point, you know, you say hello to them, and then they pretend you don't exist, it's rough. (Ms. Blanc, 15 January 2014, 11h30). [44]

Finally, in relation to the fourth order, the central epistemological problem of art, symbols, information, magic, psychedelic drugs, dreams, lies, schizophrenia, difference, and change is certainly one of epistemic credibility, whose processes require respect for sacred thresholds that must not be profaned if the expected sublimating effects are to occur. When working with this last cardinal category, my task was to classify all of the comments aimed at denouncing the unreliability of the behavior displayed by people from other cultures. Once completed, this classification highlighted the fact that members of the cultural majority in Québec generally worry about the presence of Others when a lack of congruence is detected between the sublimated meaning of a behavior (provided to us by the other) and its profane meaning (suddenly discovered by us). The fourth extract provides an example of this situation:

> The veil is a religious symbol that sends a message of inequality between men and women in a society that advocates equality between men and women. To accept it is to support a double discourse, to support double, troubled, ambivalent, and anxiety-provoking messages. (Ms. Robert, 2 January 2014, 16h00). [44]

As a methodological precept, a set of cardinal categories presupposes an equal probability that each will manifest itself in perceptions during field research. (Note that this was not the case for nominal concepts, which only become informative when they are recurrent.) At this stage of the modeling exercise, the principle of equal probability is an important methodological postulate: it is what constitutes the heuristic tool provided by the model on the state of the vitality of ideas in the ecological or cultural niche observed. However, in order to develop our model into an explanatory rather than a merely descriptive system, it becomes necessary to talk about the limits of each cardinal category, since in systemic or "cybernetic language, the course of events is said to be subject to *restraints*, and it is assumed that, apart from such restraints, the pathways of change would be governed only by equality of probabilities". In fact, adds Bateson, "the 'restraints' upon which cybernetic explanation depends can in all cases be regarded as factors which determine inequality of probability" [3].

3.4. Mapping the Thresholds of Change with Ordinal Wording

So far, I have identified some key elements of a methodology for building systemic models in anthropological studies of intercultural communication by giving examples of possible applications drawn from my own research work on the cultural vigilance behaviors of the majority population in Québec. After having presented the elements that seemed important to me with regard to nominal and cardinal formulations, I will now present in what follows some remarks on *ordinal wording*. This section will be shorter than the previous two, because most of what needs to be said about the "ordering" of cardinal categories—i.e., their hierarchical organization (ascending or descending, or both)—when designing a heuristic model has been set out in Comte-Sponville's book in the form of the problem of the limits of orders in philosophy, by cybernetic authors in the form of the problem of constraints in information theory, and in Bateson's intellectual work in the form of the problem of the *subjugation of the mind* by paradoxical communication (double-bind theory). Nevertheless, I can summarize the main principles underlying this new phase of heuristic systems modeling, which should lead to the development of a model that is no longer merely descriptive but also heuristic, explanatory, and systemic.

3.4.1. The Question of Limits

Each of the four general categories identified by Comte-Sponville is linked by a predicate that limits its conceptual boundaries. These four predicates are presented in the form of dialectical structures that define the limits of each cardinal category: the first

category is structured by the possible-impossible opposition, the second by the legal-illegal opposition, the third by the good-evil opposition and Comte-Sponville's fourth category (but not mine) is structured by the joy-sadness opposition. Despite the nuances expressed by their respective models, Bateson, Comte-Sponville, and others like Basarab Nicolescu nevertheless agree that two cardinal categories or orders "are different if, in passing from one to the other, there is a rupture of laws and a rupture of fundamental concepts", i.e., as soon as the threshold of the relevance of a first predicate is reached in favor of a second [45].

With these predicates in mind, the problem of limits is posed more or less in the following terms, which I take from Comte-Sponville [6,40]. To preserve the equilibrium of human organization, each order of thought has the role of limiting the authority of its (considered) lower order by imposing a new logic. Thus, the logic of "possible or impossible" is limited by the logic of "legal or illegal", which, in turn, is limited by the logic of "right and wrong", and so on. For example, we know that immigration to Canada is not limited by a logic of "possible or impossible" but by a logic of legal or illegal, while the moral logic of good and evil remains a tool of discourse aimed at limiting political powers, as we have already presented in the example of the closure of Roxham Road at the beginning of this essay.

3.4.2. The Question of Restraints

In systemic or "cybernetic" language, Bateson wrote, "the course of events is subject to restraints, and we must assume that, outside these restraints, the paths of change would be governed only by the equality of probabilities". In fact, added Bateson, "the 'restraints' on which the cybernetic explanation depends can in all cases be regarded as factors which determine the inequality of probabilities" [3]. In the context of my research, for example, this means that some restraints could prevent one of the model's orders of ideas from appearing in an environment made up of all intercultural ideas. This has to do with "the negative character of cybernetic explanation [where] 'information' is quantified in negative terms" [3]. To put it in a few words, the more information is excluded from a communication act, the more informative it becomes. However, this is only observable if we have access to the context of the communication, since "without context, there is no communication" [3]. Is another excerpt from the public hearing that will provide an example of this in the context of intercultural communication. The following is a quote from Ms. Céline Duval, provincial president of AFEAS, a women's association for education and social action in Québec. The situation described by Ms. Duval highlights the challenge that growing religious and cultural diversity poses to Québec society for this grandmother and her granddaughter. In this excerpt, Ms. Duval expresses her concern as an educator about the presence of veiled women in her four-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter's environment.

> I'll give you an example I saw this summer with my granddaughter. We were at the zoo [in the city of Granby, Québec] when, by the pool, she saw a lady who wasn't going to bathe because, in addition to the veil, she was wearing the whole big garment on [abaya]. So, my granddaughter told me: *Grandma, why isn't this lady bathing?* I gave a logical answer: *She doesn't have a bathing suit*. That was fine, until she said: *But is a bathing suit expensive, Grandma?* [As I understand it], her question was, if the lady doesn't have a bathing suit, maybe it's because she can't afford to buy one... At four and a half, she doesn't see the nuance, or the prohibition, or other aspects of the situation [...] Then the woman's children got into the water, and the lady had to go in too to get them out of the pool. [This raised another question in my granddaughter's mind]: *Grandma, did the lady remember to bring a change of clothes? She's going to get the car all wet when she boards* [...] My point is that what a child sees are not what we see [as adults]. It's certainly not what I saw. Rather, I saw something unfair. The husband and his children could go swimming, but the mother had to stay out of the pool (Duval, 16 January 2014, 16:00). [44]

This extract shows how the adult has excluded moral information in formulating her answers to the child. This suggests that a restriction of this order was imposed on information delivery by the communication context, which seems quite clear from the educational perspective announced by AFEAS. There are three more reasons why this extract is an exceptional example for my purposes. The first is that the four-and-a-half-year-old, through her questions, has set up instrumental and normative considerations in an ascending order in relation to our heuristic model. The second is that the grandmother tells us what she did not tell the granddaughter about the moral order, giving us clues about the restraints imposed by different contexts. The third is the absence of any information relating to the last order of reality (related to epistemological processes), which highlights a restriction imposed by both the context of a private conversation and that of public hearings. The interesting question that must follow is *why*?

3.4.3. The Question of Subjugation

Besides the questions of limits and restraints, there is a question of subjugation, which is called the tyranny of orders over each other [40,41]. Starting from the observation that there are different orders of reality—each having its own domain, logic, and specific mode of action—the philosopher Blaise Pascal [41] explained that human incomprehension is essentially the result of confusion and power relations between these different orders of human experience. Comte-Sponville [40] sets out Pascal's theory of tyranny, ridicule, barbarism, and angelism clearly and concisely, providing several contemporary examples of its consequences in society, so there is no need for me to return to it. There is, however, something important to highlight in the context of my remarks: despite the somewhat strange nomenclature used by Pascal and despite the fact that he was concerned with a different object of study (which is philosophy motivated by the question, *What can we know?*), his matrix of ideas on the confusion of orders of thought and their mutual subjugation is a key principle in general systems theory. For example, we can correlate this with Bertrand Russel's theory of logical types (mathematics), Gregory Bateson's double-bind theory (psychology), and Basarab Nicolescu's axiom of levels of reality (which forms the basis of his theory of transdisciplinarity). All of these theories are related, not only by their fundamental premise (the interweaving, through thought, of a priori incommensurable worlds) but also by a common objective to solve the problems of the paradoxes encountered in the all-encompassing sphere of information.

I suspect that the same principle could be used to shed light on the paradoxes of cultural appropriation in art, which consists in thinking that certain artists who choose to decolonize their imagination by introducing idioms from different cultural groups into their works are instead, and paradoxically, perpetuating forms of domination against them. I could perhaps give the example, even closer to my work on cultural vigilance in Québec, of the struggles raging in the Canadian arena of the debate between art (order 4) and public morality (order 3), which were raised by two controversial works by the internationally renowned Québec playwright Robert Lepage in 2018: *SLĀV* (in connection with slavery in the United States) and *Kanata* (in connection with the aboriginal question in Canada) [46–48]. In particular, it would be interesting to examine the Canada Council's policy statements (order 2) that identify artistic works as a potentially amplifying modality of "historical inequalities, stereotypes and exploitative relationships that have direct negative consequences on equity-seeking communities in Canada" [49]. For the time being, however, this is only one of my future directions for research.

4. Conclusions

The complete heuristic model, composed of nominal concepts, cardinal categories, and ordinal predicates, is a cognitive tool that I use as a systemic theorist to facilitate and support the denotation, description, or explanation of complex phenomena such as intercultural communication. From my point of view, these three objectives are more than sufficient, and their assignment must be understood in relation to the research questions

formulated in ecological or systemic terms by the researcher. As Bateson pointed out, it is not for academics to provide answers to "the sort of questions which administrators ask of anthropologists—'Is it a good thing to use force in culture contacts?' 'How can we make a given people accept a certain sort of trait?' and so on" [3]. In keeping with an ecological vision of culture systems inspired by Bateson's work, it is necessary to highlight that the primary aim of the heuristic model design is the schematization of complex situations in order to be able to locate the thresholds or "bifurcation points (that is, each moment of the present where the future appears unknown and many scenarios are equally probable)" where it will be necessary for these administrators to make decisions [16].

Although a systemic model can be used as an information base for crisis prevention, risk assessment, or decision making, heuristic models have none of these claims. As conceptual abstractions built from perceptions of informational reality, heuristic models do not claim to have the performative powers of other types of models, such as those used by economists, for example. The purpose of the heuristic kind of model for intercultural anthropologists is ecological because, rather than focusing on the behaviors, words, debates, opinions, arguments, or rhetoric that characterize ideas, especially xenophobic ideas, it focuses instead on relations between systems of thought and their environment. Indeed, in speaking of the ecology of mind, Bateson was referring to the "survival" of ideas:

> The questions which [my] book raises are ecological: How do ideas interact? Is there some sort of natural selection which determines the survival of some ideas and the extinction or death of others? What sort of economics limits the multiplicity of ideas in a given region of mind? What are the necessary conditions for stability (or survival) of such a system or subsystem? [3]

With these questions in mind, I have sought to demonstrate the advantages of integrating systems theory into the examination of intercultural behavior and ideas, as well as to highlight some of the elements of the methods for heuristic model design. In keeping with the theme of this issue, I have also endeavored to provide examples of the model's application to the cultural superdiversity generated by increased migration to Québec. However, the level of abstraction at which I wanted to situate the model allows it to be used for descriptive or explanatory purposes in other registers of cultural interest, thus broadening "the scope of the inquiry". I therefore endorse Bateson's following suggestion:

> We should consider under the head of "culture contact" not only those cases in which the contact occurs between two communities with different cultures and results in profound disturbance of the culture of one or both groups; but also cases of contact within a single community. In these cases the contact is between differentiated groups of individuals, e.g., between the sexes, between old and young, between aristocracy and plebs, between clans, etc., groups which live together in approximate equilibrium. I would even extend the idea of "contact" so widely as to include those processes whereby a child is molded and trained to fit the culture into which he was born. [3]

Examples of the model's application outside of contacts between groups of different nationalities include contacts between different academic cultures within an interdisciplinary research team [50] or contacts between different cultures of professional behavior within the same discipline, such as music [51].

At the end of this article and in the absolute, I agree that the heuristic value of a model is never demonstrable, and that it is up to each researcher to assume responsibility for his or her methods. As Bateson beautifully summed it up, "the point of the probe is always in the heart of the explorer" [8].

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