SENSEMAKING IN THE THIRD SPACE
ESSAYS ON FRENCH-FINNISH BICULTURAL EXPERIENCES IN ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR NARRATIVES

Helsingfors 2005
Sensemaking in the Third Space - Essays on French-Finnish Bicultural Experiences in Organizations and Their Narratives

Key words: bicultural interactions, expatriates, cross-cultural / intercultural, sensemaking, self-narratives, identity construction, third space, hybridity

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‘It’s not the destination, it’s the journey’
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If so many of the wise people on the mighty worldwide web say so, there must be some truth to it. I may add that ‘there is no rewarding journey without exceptional journey companions’ (no need to googlize this, it’s not there yet). The end of the journey is now in sight, and it is time to thank some of the people whom I have met along the way and who have travelled with me, at the risk of getting lost in space.

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Helsinki, February 22nd 2005

Martin Fougère
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1. Introduction

The ‘third space’ is where I have elected to live – and travel - for the past eight years of my life. Although I have not always conceptualized my research project in these terms, from the very beginning of the doctoral research process I was willing to point to the bicultural interaction as a situation full of promises, and that stemmed from my own learning experience while immersed in a bicultural environment. I have articulated this in different ways over time, as I will try to show later, but this idea of an ‘in-between’, third space has seduced me more than other conceptualizations because of its more insightful rendering of the possibility of an opening, a movement between orders – perhaps an escape. The idea is that by evolving between two cultures, one can learn to negotiate and translate between them, and acknowledge cultural difference not as some burden imposed on her/him but as some position to live in and speak from, as Stuart Hall would have it.

The present thesis thus has a lot to do with my personal experience, as the opportunity to explore the in-between of different cultures has certainly been a central motivating factor for me continue to live abroad. Interestingly, the most common question I have been asked for all these years spent in Finland has unavoidably been ‘Why did you come to Finland?’ – I guess all foreigners in Finland are especially used to this question. There is no one answer – that is why I usually try to come up with a new one each time I am asked this question. But one of the most sincere answers would precisely be that ‘exploring the in-between’ and ‘speaking from difference’ are important ways in which I have sought to construct my identity, and that living abroad has offered this opportunity to me. However, nobody wants to hear that. When I was interviewed with a couple of French friends for an article about ‘the French in Helsinki’ in a daily newspaper, none of us claimed that a Finnish partner was the main reason why s/he was living in Finland; the journalist briefly mentioned our unusual answers to her question about the reason why but wrote nonetheless that ‘according to the statistics, most French people in Finland have come because they have a Finnish partner’. That must be the difference between qualitative accounts and quantitative data: many of my French friends, even those who are married with children in Finland, would rather claim that they came to Finland out of their own interest than because of their partner - probably a
matter of expressing their independence, of claiming agency. Yet the statistics tell a totally different story. I bet they are based on the information filled in on residence permit applications, where you must have ‘a reason’ why you are in Finland (it is either work, a partner, or studies).

You guessed it, I am not very fond of quantitative data, especially if what is quantified is the answer to a ‘why...?’ question. Actually, my contention is that, when you deal with human matters, the ‘why...?’ questions cannot usually be answered satisfactorily. I would argue that the questions to be asked are more of the ‘how come...?’ kind. Why ‘how come...?’? Because people do not do things ‘because’ of something, they rather do things ‘as a result’ of a process. The answer to a ‘how come...?’ question will describe a process, and it will be in the form of a narrative. This is why I have opted here for a narrative methodological approach: I would rather have people tell me ‘how come...?’ than ‘why...?’\(^1\). And this is also why I present this dissertation as a narrative, seeking as much as possible to do justice to the research process, not only to what this thesis is about but also how come it has ended up being about it.

A few introductory words about that research process – and the initial process that led me to research – are in order: I have to go back to the time when I first came to Finland as an exchange student. That was the first time that I was abroad for such a prolonged period (one year): a fascinating intercultural experience. In addition, I had many opportunities to work in bicultural (usually French-Finnish) or multicultural work groups for MBA course assignments. That raised an interest in intercultural matters, broadly speaking. It is also then that I got acquainted with the field of ‘cross-cultural management’. Having such an interest in intercultural issues in organizations, and seeing that there was a more and more established academic field dealing with these issues, I saw an opportunity for me to move into a research area with more human concerns than most other business-related disciplines. I thus was genuinely interested in ‘cross-cultural management’ early on, and that is why my problematic has remained quite connected to the mainstream conceptualization of ‘culture’ and ‘cultural differences’ in that field, although that connection has turned to being of a rather critical nature.

\(^1\) Actually, I would rather have them first tell me about their experience without the constraints of even a ‘how come...?’; let alone a ‘why...?’ question.
1.1 Problem setting

In order to introduce my work, I first need to make clear how it is problematized in connection to how the field of cross-cultural management - and the closely connected subfield of expatriation studies - treats notions such as ‘culture’, ‘cultural identity’ and ‘expatriation’. I also need to explain why I have been interested in studying the experiences of French coopérants – not the average expatriates. In addition, I will try to show how my positioning can be seen at the same time as ‘critical’ while not remaining wholly within the stream of ‘critical management studies’ (CMS).

1.1.1 Culture, the individual and the bicultural interaction

Culture is obviously a central concept in cross-cultural and intercultural studies in organizations. The following two definitions of culture are among the most frequently quoted by scholars in the field:

1. Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups [...] the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values [...]. (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952, 181)

2. Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another [...]. (Hofstede, 1980, 25)

Culture, how it is conceived of above and in most mainstream cross-cultural and intercultural studies, is thus supposed to be, on the one hand, something that is shared by nearly all members of a given social group, and, on the other hand, something that shapes the individual’s thinking and behaviour (Adler, 1997, 15). This is perhaps the most significant problematic connected to the concept of culture: how to maintain that members of a social group share a common culture while acknowledging individual behaviour as specific to each individual? Another problem is that if each individual’s thinking is supposed to be shaped by her/his social group’s culture, how can any individual discuss cultures and cultural differences in an objective manner? Isn’t one a sort of prisoner of her/his ‘belonging’ to a culture?

These important questions are certainly not dealt with satisfactorily in cross-cultural management and comparative organizational behaviour studies. After reviewing and
analyzing the main traditional approaches to comparative research, Cray and Mallory (1998, 142) claim that when these approaches do address ‘the linkage between culture at the societal level and individual behaviour’, it is ‘as a methodological but not a theoretical issue’. Elaborating on this statement, they call for, in the spirit of Weick’s (1979; 1995) works, ‘studies that illustrate how managers and other employees adapt their cognitive frameworks, their sense-making abilities [...] to cope with a world that is increasingly multinational, multicultural and dynamic’ (Cray & Mallory, 1998, 4). In another significant criticism, Holden (2002) underlines what he calls the ‘grand lacunae’ of cross-cultural management literature in its failure to acknowledge that the field should embrace ‘collaborative learning, knowledge-sharing and networking’, and mainly blames this on ‘the dominance of essentialist culture’ represented by the overreliance on authors such as Hofstede and Edward Hall (ibid., 51-53).

In short, traditional approaches to cross-cultural management and comparative organizational behaviour seem not to do justice to the complexity of ‘culture’ in three main ways. First, culture is made far too static by its systematic use as the independent variable. Second, cultures are presented as much more homogeneous than they are: there is not enough stress on how a given culture may vary between individuals and groups of individuals that are supposed to belong to it. Third, the ambition to set universal frameworks allowing for a comparison of all cultures in an objective way suggests a view of cultures as all having a similar basic structure, with their general characteristics easily recognizable – if not measurable: a very simplistic view indeed. If one understands culture, as in Hofstede’s (1980, 25) theorizing, as that ‘which distinguishes the members of one human group from another’, then why should a given ‘culture A’ be described in absolute terms according to a few universal dimensions, rather than in relative terms and according to dimensions that may vary depending on the ‘culture B’ that ‘culture A’ is being distinguished from?

If we are to discuss how culture is supposed to shape the individual behaviour, then we should maybe seek to have a more subjectivist understanding of it. I believe that the following definition of culture – which I would not particularly claim as more universally valid than any other - may succeed in doing justice to culture seen as a ‘software of the mind’ (Hofstede, 1991) that seems to be shared by the other individuals from the same social group. As Keesing (1974, 58) puts it:
Culture, conceived as a system of competence shared in its broad design and deeper principles, and varying between individuals in its specificities, is [...] not all of what an individual knows and thinks and feels about his world. It is his theory of what his fellows know, believe and mean, his theory of the code being followed, the game being played, in the society into which he was born.

If culture is to be understood as defined above, I would like to point out three major reasons why we are then unable to describe a given culture as a whole. First, each different member of a social group may hold a different ‘theory’ of what her/his fellows know, believe and mean. Culture is thus not really shared by the members of the social group, although it is strongly perceived as being shared by them. Second, a given person may be in large measure unconscious of this ‘theory’, i.e. of the beliefs and assumptions that are at the core of her/his (cultural) identity. Third, this ‘theory’, i.e. the individual’s cultural identity, is to be constructed and reconstructed over time, especially through the interactions with others. I would thus argue that, in order to do justice to the dynamics of cultural identity construction, we would need an approach of cross-cultural management that focuses on interaction rather than comparison. Especially, I will argue that the bicultural interaction as experienced by the involved individuals is a particularly interesting phenomenon to study.

Why is the bicultural interaction so interesting? First of all, because it is extremely common in the business world of today, as a result of mergers, acquisitions, joint-ventures, or, simply, foreign subsidiaries being set up. But most importantly, the bicultural interaction can be seen as distinctive, that is, different from other intercultural situations – those involving more than two cultures. This distinctiveness is before all connected to the situation of ‘absolute relativity’ it gives birth to: what becomes salient is the differences between the two cultures, and thus each culture becomes the criterion for comparison with the other culture. As a result, each culture involved comes to be defined according to the other culture, relatively to it. This potentially causes fascinating bicultural dynamics: on the one hand, much conflict may arise as a result of such direct opposition, but on the other hand, opportunities for learning arise, both about the other culture and one’s own, which is seen in the new light of its comparison with otherness.

2 This does not mean, however, that these beliefs and assumptions are bound to remain totally unconscious: as I will later argue, certain situations provide excellent opportunities to become aware of some deep cultural values and make sense of one’s cultural identity.
This combination of opportunity and threat makes the study of the individuals involved in bicultural interactions especially interesting. Especially, I would argue that these involved individuals are themselves given an opportunity to position themselves in-between, to feel like ‘diaspora people’ (cf. Hall, 1995, 206) - especially if they are the ones who are expatriates.

1.1.2 Expatriation, sensemaking and reflexive identity construction

In the present thesis, the bicultural interactions that will be focused on involve expatriates – a special kind of expatriates, as will be explained in the next section. In studies dealing with expatriation, the overwhelming majority of works has been adopting a view of culture consistent with that of the cross-cultural management mainstream, and that of international business in general: a fairly static view, in which one can talk of such a concept as ‘cultural distance’, implying that, the more distant the culture, the harder to communicate with and to adapt to it. The idea is that expatriates will have a hard time adjusting to the new culture that they are going to encounter, and that, in their acculturation process, they will face a ‘culture shock’ (see e.g. Adler, 1997, 237-238). This process will be characterized, supposedly in virtually all cases, by a first phase of excitement while discovering the new culture, then a second phase of disillusionment leading to the culture shock itself, and finally, a real adaptation to the new culture, without either the ‘highs’ or the ‘lows’ of the previous phases. More and more, however, this highly simplistic view of the expatriate’s acculturation process has been questioned, and focus has been shifting towards new interesting avenues, some of which still relate much to culture, although not necessarily directly.

The most interesting of these new trends, from my point of view, is that which has introduced sensemaking and narrative analysis into the expatriation literature. Peltonen’s (1998a, 17) approach calls for an ‘anti-dualist’ view, where ‘the micro-actions of employee career narratives and accounts’ are considered as equally relevant to international management as ‘the macro-actions of human resource managers’. Focusing on the former in some studies may thus be a good way to balance the general international HRM view, with not only macro-aspects but also micro-aspects. Similarly, acknowledging that there is some tension between the two dominant clusters of expatriation research, i.e. the macrostrategic and micropractice levels, Glanz and her
colleagues (2003; Glanz et al., 2001) introduce a ‘sensemaking’ (see especially Weick, 1995) approach to expatriation, which, they believe, can help reorienting acculturation studies of expatriates. Lindgren’s and Wählin’s (2001; 2002) works, dealing with ‘boundary-crossing individuals’ and now (see Wählin, 2002) especially with those who cross cultural boundaries through expatriation, are a good recent example of the way towards an intercultural view that would be chiefly interested in the expatriate’s experience, as narrated and made sense of by her/him.

As I have written above, a central argument I wish to make here is that the bicultural interaction may offer a great opportunity for an individual, not only to learn about others, but also to make sense of her/his own identity thanks to the reflexive possibility provided by the encounter with otherness. In more of a constructivist perspective, one can further argue that it is not merely a matter of making sense of one’s identity as something that would emanate from oneself only, but that it is, quite simply, a matter of constructing and reconstructing one’s own identity in an ongoing process of social interaction, a process of ‘reflexive identity construction’ (Lindgren & Wählin 2001).

However, organizational settings of most expatriate assignments do not represent the ideal context for the development of such a reflexive (re)construction of one’s identity. Indeed, expatriates, who find themselves in ambiguous and confusing foreign environments, are likely to experience more anxiety, in addition to the time pressure and stress that are to be found in modern workplaces. Among the strategies they will need to use in order to cope with such difficult, if not hostile, contexts, they may tend to reinforce their ‘belonging’ to their original culture, and build the inner belief that their identity is fixed and solid, so as to feel safer in adverse circumstances.

Another interesting reason why the opportunity to explore one’s identity may not be so often taken advantage of is the fact that nowadays, the expatriation period is more and more subject to ‘ordering’, as it is ‘monitored as an element in logical chains of posts and as a place to develop the skills needed to get ahead’ (Peltonen, 1998a, 21), within the framework of a well planned career. According to Peltonen (ibid., 20), this stems from the existence of a ‘dominant order, imposed by authorities such as psychologists or human resource development specialists’. He (Peltonen, 1998b) thus finds it worthwhile to try and identify the discursive patterns found in some expatriate engineers’ narratives, and comes up with a typology of three main types of discourses: ‘bureaucratic
discourse’ (identifying the career development as going through clear levels and areas of competence), ‘occupational discourse’ (stressing those aspects of the engineering work that really matter to the organization and the society, and describing oneself according to an idea of what a good engineer should be like) and ‘enterprising discourse’ (in which the individual is autonomous and makes her/his own choices so as to get to the achievement and self-actualization levels s/he is after).

Among the few similar typologies that have been outlined, let me mention Lindgren’s and Wåhlin’s (2001) analysis of narratives from ‘boundary-crossing individuals’, which are less focused on career ordering as such. By combining an identity construction dimension (whether the identity is seen as multiple or integrated) with a cultural dimension (whether the person adheres to or is emancipated from cultural traditions), they propose the distinction between ‘rationalistic’ (multiple, adhering), ‘idealistic’ (integrated, adhering), ‘relativistic’ (multiple, emancipated), and ‘voluntaristic’ (integrated, emancipated) discourses. The more emancipated discourses may not necessarily be less subject to a form of ordering, since they may express certain institutionalized ideologies nonetheless, but at least they are likely to come from a mind that accepts the possibility of a dialogue with otherness and may open the way to a true questioning of oneself.

1.1.3 Coopération as a peculiar form of expatriation and bicultural interaction

Coopération refers to a French practice that consisted in offering young graduates from universities, business or engineering schools the possibility to work for 18, and later 16 months in a company abroad instead of having their military service. It became a very widespread phenomenon in the 1990’s, but ended recently (the last coopérants finished their assignments in 2002), together with French compulsory conscription as a whole. It has now been replaced by a format called volontariat, which is in all points similar, except for the fact that, since the national service is no more compulsory, it is not a matter of avoiding the army anymore for those who wish to be volontaires. While many thought that there would be much fewer volontaires than there were coopérants, it seems that the new status attracts more people than expected, which must suggest that ‘avoiding the army’ was not the only reason for the success of coopération.
Indeed, I would argue that _coopération_ – or now _volontariat_ – might be an ideal occasion to live a unique, emancipating experience, because of mainly two specific characteristics that differentiate it from usual expatriation modes\(^3\). First, for most _coopérants_, their 16-month experience abroad was also their first relatively longer work experience, as very few had worked for more than six months in a row before. This experience is thus not only the discovery of work in another country, but also, for many, the discovery of work itself. The fact that it is a discovery is likely to make people more open to what they may learn from this experience, to make them more easily accept other ways of working and living in society, and in turn, to question more willingly what they have been thinking their career would be like based on the mix of theoretical and practical training they got from their studies and internships. Second, whether it is or not a first ‘real’ work experience, it is, in most cases, an experience that is fairly disconnected from their future career, because of the peculiar status they have as _coopérants_, working for a company yet supposed to be serving their country, with all the bureaucracy and protocol duties this may involve. It is thus possible to take this experience as fairly independent from the rest of the career, as a possible opening on alternative views of what their future life might be. In that respect, the _coopération_ experience looks very suitable as an occasion for making sense of and (re)constructing oneself in the light of a ‘once in a lifetime’ experience. Therefore, analyzing the narratives of some French _coopérants_ on their 16-month experience abroad may be interesting in order to see whether they are more of an emancipated kind and convey an idea of an opening to new alternatives so early in their working lives. If these narratives do not display such an emancipation, then it may be interesting to try and understand what process may have caused this shortcoming.

1.1.4 A critical approach?

As you can read above, I am problematizing this research project in terms of experiencing the bicultural interaction as an opportunity for a possible emancipation from institutionalized discourses. My positioning is thus reminiscent of ‘critical management studies’ (CMS). However, the ‘victims’ I am looking at are not the usual

\(^3\) _Coopération_ is actually not a form of ‘expatriation’ according to a strict definition of the term, since the _coopérants_ were not sent abroad directly by the companies for which they worked for – or at least not officially.
‘customers’ of CMS. I am not looking at people who are disfavoured by society, whether it would be because of belonging to the prolétariat, being females or immigrants – at least in the established sense of the word. I am rather studying people who are supposed to be the most favoured – and usually posited as such in critical social theory - in our Western societies, that is, educated Western white males. My contention is that not only ‘class[es] of dissatisfied actors’ (Fay, 1975, 97), but we all, are potential victims of the dominant normalizing – or ordering - discourses, even – and perhaps especially – those who are supposed to be part of the ruling class. In that respect, the present research work is not a typical CMS piece.

In addition, although this thesis is broadly problematized in a critical manner – seeking to challenge dominant essentializing discourses within cross-cultural management and expatriation studies especially – it does not take for granted that the people studied are victims; in that sense, it does not impose stereotypical CMS subject positions on its respondents (see especially Wray-Bliss, 2003). Here again, my approach is in-between, as it certainly is critical to some extent, but it is mainly descriptive and seeks to do justice to the voices of the interviewees. Perhaps most importantly, it anticipates a happy occurrence of emancipation no less than it expects excessive ordering, since it looks at the bicultural interaction and expatriation as at once an opportunity and a possible source of conflict worsening the fixing of positions. It thus not only stresses the threats of alienation, but also optimistically celebrates the possibilities of liberation. My endeavour here is political, seeking to subvert the dominant discursive space(s), but it does not necessarily mean that I intend to criticize the established order and prescribe ways to escape it; rather, by looking at how certain involved individuals deal with their own experiences of displacement, I will try to point to their own identity politics, which may involve a reproduction of the dominant order, some emancipation from it, or, most likely, both at once.

1.2 Aims and limitations

I will write here of aims rather than objectives, since I see ‘aim’ as a softer term, better suited for qualitative research. In addition, since my research is, for a large part, inductive, the initial objectives were not really firm and as a result they came to be refined as ‘aims’ during the research process. Limitations have also had to be much
reassessed in retrospect – a case in point of how sensemaking works I guess -, since the eventual empirical conditions ended up differing quite a bit from the original plan.

1.2.1 Overall aims

The founding aim of this thesis is to address the research gap described above (see subsection 1.1.1), i.e., the need for more subjectivist research on bicultural interactions in organizations, and especially on their relationships with the dynamics of cultural identity construction.

More specifically, a first overall aim of the study is to reach an understanding of the dynamics of bicultural interactions in organizations; an understanding not only of the potential for learning and emancipatory sensemaking, but also of the possibility of conflict and alienatory ordering. (This theoretical aim is mainly addressed in the first two essays)

Further, a second overall aim of the study is to analyze the reflexive identity construction of four French coopérants involved in such bicultural interactions in organizations in Finland, in order to examine the extent to which their coopération experiences have allowed for an emancipatory opportunity in their cases. (This is addressed in the third and fourth essays)

1.2.2 Central research questions

In connection with these overall aims, I have formulated the following research questions:

- What makes the bicultural interaction such a distinctive phenomenon? How? What makes it a desirable situation for individual learning and development? For organizational learning and development? (addressed in the first two essays)

- Why is it that, in organizational settings, negative bicultural dynamics are more common than not? How could more constructive dynamics be favoured? (second essay especially, but also first essay)

- In the four coopérants experiences more specifically studied, have the interviewees taken advantage of the emancipatory opportunities offered by their coopération experience? How come they have or have not done so? (third and fourth essays)
- How do the coopérants narrate their experiences? Especially, how is ‘national culture’ used in their narratives, as a concept potentially carrying both a sense of belonging and a room for questioning? What views of ‘national culture’ as a source of cultural differences may constitute alternatives to the dominant understanding of it as a barrier to co-operation? (third essay)

- How is their identity politics expressed, in relation with the otherness they encounter? (third and fourth essays)

- How can a spatial / geographical perspective be applied to these political questions? How can it represent ideas of alienation by or emancipation from dominant discourses and orders? (fourth essay)

1.2.3 Theoretical scope and empirical limitations

The purely theoretical developments of this project owe a great deal to some classic philosophical works, especially dealing with dialectics (starting with Hegel, 1910), hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1975; Ricoeur, 1981), and dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981; Holquist, 1990). However, more broadly speaking, the project involves using literature from many disciplines – some of them explicitly applied to organization studies (as in Weick, 1995), some not -, such as social psychology (Bruner, 1987), postcolonial theory (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1993), cultural anthropology (Bateson, 1994; Rosaldo, 1989), linguistics (Austin, 1962), or, last but not least, human geography (e.g. Buttimer, 1976, 1980; Tuan, 1977, 1996; Massey & Jess, 1995; Pile & Thrift, 1995). It is a transdisciplinary study by nature, drawing on a variety of so-called ‘cultural studies’ – the only label that can suit a number of thinkers whose works are drawn on in the present study and who have themselves avoided easy categorization (such as Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991; Hall, 1995).

Let me now turn to the four most significant limitations I would point out in the empirical study. First, only four coopérants ended up being involved in it. This situation, which was not exactly wanted (I will develop this aspect in 3.2.2), ended up having its advantages, enabling me to ‘own’ each self-narrative in a fairly insightful manner, which has made it possible to keep the interviewees’ voices as present as possible in the text. In addition, analyzing such a limited amount of long narrative interviews has allowed me to also pay attention to the more mundane aspects contained
in the narratives, making it possible to discover otherwise probably unnoticed topics of interest. Finally, it has encouraged me to think more of interesting ways of analyzing the material, leading to some fruitful experimenting, which has brought about some of the main contributions of the present thesis.

Second, all the interviewees were based in Finland, and cultural distance may have been more of a factor in another, more ‘culturally distant’ country. I felt my work would be more coherent if concentrating on those people with whom contact was easy in all respects: having experienced similar things as them, I could relate to their stories well.

Third, the experiences were narrated only at the very end of the coopérants’ stays, and the findings would surely have differed with a longitudinal study. I opted for such an approach because I only aimed to look at the coopérants’ retrospective narration of their experiences; interviewing them after repatriation would have provided additional interesting retrospective accounts, but, for various reasons (see 3.2.2), this was not possible.

Fourth, coopérants cannot exactly be considered as the average expatriates – they are actually not expatriates in the strict sense of the word, since they have not been sent abroad directly by a company, at least not officially. Their situation is thus quite specific. I would still argue that there are many pros in interviewing coopérants – connected to the openness that their situation entails in many ways -, and that these may outweigh the cons, as I will try to discuss in subsection 3.2.1. I thus believe that all the above mentioned limitations are not such major shortcomings here, since the main aim of the present work is to ‘open up’ towards alternative ways of making sense of bicultural interactions and expatriation rather than ‘close down’ by testing already existing hypotheses.

1.3 Some key concepts

A number of concepts are used in this thesis in a perhaps fairly unusual way. Here are some brief clarifications on some of them.

The Bicultural Interaction: I need to make clear that I do not assume there may be an objectively ‘bicultural situation’ where two cultures, and only two, would be involved. To me, a situation can be described as ‘bicultural’ insofar as a large majority of the individuals involved in that situation perceive it as such, i.e. they feel that the situation
is characterized by the presence of two and only two clear-cut social groups (representing e.g. different nations, and/or different former organizations, and/or different professions, etc.) and that they clearly belong to one of these two groups – and do not belong to the other group. However, at the individual level, which is the main focus in this thesis, the fact that the individual her/himself experiences the situation as bicultural may be considered as enough to make it one. Since I focus on the dynamics of bicultural work situations in organizations, I use the term ‘interaction’, implying not only that the two groups work together, but also that they affect each other, and the whole situation. Besides, it is important to note that in this thesis, I am only writing about bicultural interactions involving different national cultures; this does not mean that I consider these to be more significant or interesting than other types of bicultural interactions (for instance between professions) but I certainly see them as raising a distinctive problematic which means that the dynamics of cultural identity construction in these conditions could not be generalized to all types of work interaction between two clearly different social groups. I do not think I am falling into the trap of a too essentialist view of national culture, since the reason why I look at national culture is that it happens to represent something meaningful and important to people, both generally speaking in the international business world and more specifically in my Finnish-French cases, where the difference in nationality is bound to be what cultural difference will be blamed on.

**Thirdness:** this concept was originally introduced by Russian philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (see especially Holquist, 1990), in his *dialogic* theory (a theory of dialogue), as the third element connecting the utterance to the reply, the relation between them. In the context of a bicultural interaction between two social groups identified as having different cultural backgrounds, I use ‘thirdness’ to refer to the in-between, the relational element between the two parties. It especially relies on *addressivity* (another connected Bakhtinian term), that is, the quality of addressing the other.

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4 Interestingly, the ‘international business’ environment is still widely defined in terms of the crossing of national boundaries, even though within societies and in ‘everyday life’ – at least if we believe the accounts that the field of ‘cultural studies’ is providing us –, issues of national cultural identity seem to become less significant.

5 See also subsection 2.3 for more discussion on Bakhtinian dialogism.
The Third Space: closely connected to Bakhtin’s thirdness, and originally articulated by Homi Bhabha (1994), the concept of the ‘third space’ is supposed to represent the fact that communicating with someone from another culture requires a translation from one perspective to the other; the third space is created by the bicultural encounter and keeps both perspectives in the same field of vision - it is thus characterized by transgredience, another Bakhtinian term. Here, the third space refers more specifically to the space of hybridity that is established by an interaction between two social groups in one workplace: the work behaviour is bound to be affected on both sides and to thus become hybridized⁶.

Place and Space: in this thesis, ‘place and space’ form a sort of dialectic, in a way reminiscent of the original conceptualization in humanistic geography (see e.g. Buttimer, 1976; Tuan, 1977). In short, place refers to something (somewhere) fixed and familiar, something that bears a meaning and that one can get to know intimately, while space is something that one can explore, seemingly for ever, representing, on the one hand, promises of new exciting experiences, and, on the other hand, the potential danger of the unknown and the not yet meaningful.

Spatial practices: this notion mostly draws on two French thinkers, Henri Lefebvre (1991) and Michel de Certeau (1984). For the former, ‘spatial practices’ are the third element through which individuals can mediate between ‘representations of space’ (conceptualized space imposed by the dominant order) and ‘representational space’ (the space of everyday experience), while the latter has a singular interest in narratives as ‘spatial practices’. Here, these two approaches are somehow combined, with a focus on ‘narrative practices of the third space’ as mediating between the space imposed by the – organizational and cultural - order and the more uncontrolled, ever hybridizing third space⁷.

Narrative: simply put, people organize their experiences and memories of them mainly in the form of narratives – as opposed to, for instance, lists or deductions. There can be no very satisfactory strict definition of narrative, but narrative is usually assumed to involve the retrospective telling of events how they occurred over time, focusing on

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⁶ See also subsection 2.3 for a discussion of Bhabha’s third space in connection to Bakhtin’s dialogism and subsection 2.5 for a figure specifically on different third space / thirdsplace approaches.

⁷ See also subsection 2.5 for more discussion on this notion of ‘spatial practices’.
human action and having to do with its author’s identity construction (especially in the case of **self-narratives**, which I am focusing on here).

**Sensemaking**: connected in many ways to narrative, the notion of sensemaking – literally, making things sensible – has been especially theorized by Karl Weick (1995) within the context of organization studies. The main idea is that when intentional agents are confronted with something ambivalent or surprising, they need to make sense of what is happening / has happened; the two most important properties of sensemaking are probably that it is grounded in identity construction and bound to be retrospective. It is thus clear that narrative is one privileged way for people to make sense – that is, to indulge in sensemaking.

**Performative use**: the concept of ‘the performative’ has been introduced by philosopher of language John Austin (1962). The basic idea is that, when a person uses certain words or concepts in language, s/he *does* something with them, s/he uses them for some purpose. Here, I will especially look at how the notion of national culture was performatively *used* by my interviewees, what they *did* with it.

### 1.4 Structure of the thesis

After this introduction, I will move on to the second section, which will deal in a chronological way with the various theoretical bases that have helped me approach bicultural interactions and expatriation. It will start with my initial interest in cross-cultural management (2.1), then go through discussions of the dialectical and hermeneutical inspirations guiding my initial criticism (2.2), the more dynamic dialogic perspective drawn from Bakhtin and Bhabha (2.3), and the connection between a sensemaking approach and narrative analysis (2.4), and end up with a (re)turn to my supposed – at least institutional – home, geography (2.5). The description of this process will allow me to conclude by describing my positioning – or perhaps lack of it (2.6)?

The third section will be devoted to methodology and methods. How the writing process(es) occurred will be described first (3.1), then descriptions of the *coopérants* (3.2.1), the interviews (3.2.2), the narrative approach that characterized them (3.2.3), and the performative (3.2.4) and spatial analyses (3.2.5) they were subject to, will follow.
The fourth section will consist of summaries of the four essays (in 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 respectively). The fifth section will include a discussion of the main contributions (5.1), an imaginary trial confronting the author with the questions of his equally imaginary contradictors (5.2), some implications of the present work for individuals and careers (5.3.1) and for management (5.3.2), and, finally, some suggestions for further research (5.4). The full essays will be found in the appendices’ section. I hope you will enjoy your reading as much as I have, on my good days, enjoyed my writing.
2. Theoretical journeys in bicultural interactions and expatriation

This section will be a sort of narrative, in order to account better for how the present study has evolved over time to become the way it is now. At the very beginning, there was, on my part, a singular, highly personal interest in the intercultural issues at hand. The process through which my theoretical thinking about them has evolved has been one of constant dialogue between my personal life as a Frenchman living in Finland and the frames of analysis provided by different theories and schools of thought within business studies originally, and then the social sciences and humanities at large. At first, my belief was that cross-cultural studies in business in general and management in particular were promising and worth contributing to, but then I found out that the mainstream cross-cultural management approach did not do justice to individual bicultural experiences in their complexity. Therefore, I looked for other disciplines from which to start my argument. I had to go all the way to dialectical and hermeneutical philosophy, since it was, at the time, the main theoretical basis which I felt I related to regarding my bicultural experience(s). Then, after discussing these views with other scholars interested in these issues, I moved on to other, more dynamic theoretical grounds, which started to shape my own worldview, and the way I see my experience and myself. I believe that the ‘journey’ metaphor, often called upon when dealing with any kind of qualitative study (see e.g. Kvale, 19968) but also appropriate for the description of any process involving a deep change in an individual’s worldview (see e.g. Wåhlin, 2002, on ‘cross-cultural encounters’ as ‘reflexive journey[s] inwards and outwards’), is quite well suited in order to represent these movements between different theoretical bases for understanding bicultural interactions and expatriation.

2.1 The starting point: cross-cultural management research

To discuss the genesis of this project, I have to go back to my first longer experience abroad (already in Finland), as an exchange student for one year. I then found myself immersed in a situation where national cultures and the interaction between people of different national origins came to be significant. Cross-cultural management, which has

8 Kvale’s (1996, 4) ‘traveler metaphor understands the interviewer as a traveler on a journey that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home’. This metaphor is claimed to refer to ‘a postmodern constructive understanding that involves a conversational approach to social research’ (ibid., 5).
national cultures as its main subject matter, and their presumably problematic interaction as its claimed *raison d’être*, thus became a discipline of interest to me. Unfortunately, while this discipline is supposed to be rooted in a call for more awareness of cultural relativity, the overwhelming majority of works within it has been characterized by a contradictory universalizing ambition (see Redding, 1994; Roberts & Boyacigiller, 1996). Especially, these works seem to assume that some universal cultural dimensions can be determined through empirical means that can be ‘objective, value-free and culture-neutral’ (Kwek, 2003, 123).

In cross-cultural management, the framework that is most frequently called upon is certainly Hofstede’s model made up of four (later five) cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980; 1991; 2001): ‘Power Distance’, ‘Uncertainty Avoidance’, ‘Individualism vs. Collectivism’ and ‘Masculinity vs. Femininity’ (and later ‘Confucian Dynamism’). These dimensions were identified by Hofstede as a result of statistical analyses of surveys involving people from more than 50 countries – but only one multinational company. Each of the national cultures involved was assigned a score on each of the four original dimensions: that has allowed many researchers to compare national cultures and make claims about cultural differences on the basis of such supposedly objective measures. The validity of the dimensions has been claimed to be ensured by numerous replications that roughly confirmed the original scores (Søndergaard, 1994). But the main reason for this framework’s popularity is probably its very simplicity: it is easily understandable to researchers and laypersons alike, and most followers are seduced by the implicit claim to explain and predict cross-cultural behaviour. Because of its great success, Hofstede’s model has inspired other similar grand categorizations of national cultures along universal cultural dimensions, the most widely known of which is probably Hampden-Turner’s and Trompenaars’s (1996, 277) seven ‘cultural bifurcations’. Other much referred to authors within the cross-cultural management discipline include Edward Hall (1959; 1969; 1977; 1983) and his discussions of cross-cultural differences in terms of communication (especially the ‘high/low context’ notion), time (e.g. ‘monochronism vs. polychronism’) or space.

Before I turn to some of the most significant critiques that have been objected to these most used cross-cultural approaches, I have to acknowledge that I remain quite indebted to the discipline. I did find many of Edward Hall’s insights fascinating, they certainly
strengthened my interest in intercultural interactions. Similarly, Hofstede’s discussions about national cultures could be quite interesting as such – albeit simplistic -, if it was not for the underlying claim of universality that all his work entails. If one is interested in comparing or contrasting two national cultures of organizing, starting off with a look at their respective scores on the four dimensions can even prove a good basis for critical discussion. For instance, when my prime endeavour was to look at ‘Finnish-French cultural antagonisms’, the fact that Finland and France seemed to both be considered on the feminine side of the Masculinity dimension led me to try and understand what remained fundamentally different between Finnish and French ‘femininities’ (in Hofstede’s sense): my conclusion (Fougère, 1998; Fougère & Johansson, 2000) was that, although the two national cultures scored very similarly on that dimension, the two types of ‘femininity’ were actually more incompatible between them than either would be with e.g. a typical Anglo-Saxon type of ‘masculinity’. While I ended up seriously questioning Hofstede’s framework, it was this very framework that allowed for this critical discussion in the first place, hence a sort of debt towards it on my part. More generally, I have to be grateful to cross-cultural management for providing me with a theoretical place to start my critical analysis from.

The main, and most obvious shortcoming of the cross-cultural management approach is connected to its essentializing of national cultures, which presents them as far too static and homogeneous (as said in subsection 1.1.1 and suggested by e.g. Cray & Mallory, 1998; Tayeb, 2001; Holden, 2002; Kwek, 2003) while they should be more seen as applying to ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1983); culture would need to be made a more ‘contested concept’ (Hall, 1995, 186), or at least, for the purpose of studying behaviour in organizations, a more dynamic one (Cray & Mallory, 1998). A criticism that is directly connected to this static conception of culture stresses the fact that most cross-cultural management research deals with behaviour that is observed within the context of the national cultures as a basis for comparison: focusing directly on interactions would be more relevant (Bartholomew & Adler, 1996; Holden, 2002) because ‘observations about how individuals interact with one another in their home country may not provide useful guidance for how the same people behave towards foreign visitors’ (Cray & Mallory, 1998, 90), nor does it tell how they will cope abroad if they come to be expatriates. Another main shortcoming of the cross-cultural
management discipline (connected to the first one above) is that, even though some studies do adopt alternative ‘ethnographic’ approaches (Usunier, 1998), most research remains strongly functionalist and quantitative, even in the substreams more specifically concerned with acculturation (drawing on Berry, 1980) or the idea of ‘value in diversity’ - which has been reified as simply one more hypothesis to test by quantitative means in an overwhelming majority of research claiming to deal with it (see for example Watson et al., 1993; Jehn et al., 1999; Ely et al., 2001). Other significant criticisms include the ‘time-worn’ nature (Holden, 2002, 50) of the main schemes used – considering, for instance, that Edward Hall’s high/low context notion dates back to 1959 and that Hofstede’s original data were gathered during 1968 and 1972 -, the fact that the underlying theory is either non-existent or ‘vague and contradictory’ (Cray & Mallory, 1998, 57) and the observation that ‘the main justification for the methods appears to be that the results make sense’ (ibid., 60). In addition, it has been reproached that, instead of mitigating (especially American) ethnocentrism and parochialism (see Adler, 1997), cross-cultural management may actually contribute to reproducing or worsening that ethnocentrism: Holden (2002, 46) explains how a certain use of Hall’s high/low context notion ‘permits Americans to see themselves, at least in business, as rational and transparent, though that may not fit with how their foreign business partners see them’, and Kwek (2003, 138), while acknowledging that Hofstede ‘questions the ethnocentric tendencies of researchers who utilize his dimensions’, points out that the same Hofstede fails to question ‘the ethnocentric origins of his own dimensions or methodology, [or] the implications of such tools for marginalizing other knowledges’. Kwek thus considers that Western cross-cultural management can be seen and criticized as a ‘colonial discourse’.

However, the main reason why cross-cultural management does not suit the way I elect to understand intercultural issues is probably its dominant problem-solving approach – the argument that cultural differences are bound to create problems in the organization, leading to a ‘cultural distance ideology’ (Vaara, 2000, 85). It is not only because the discipline treats culture \textit{a priori} as a problem but also because it aims to solve or mitigate the problems solely in the management’s favour, while my concern would chiefly be to help the people involved – however naive and wishful-thinking-esque an
enterprise that may seem - , to make them take advantage of the emancipatory opportunities to be found in the bicultural interaction.

2.2 Some help from philosophy: dialectics and hermeneutics

Having critiques to formulate about existing approaches within an established – or establishing - academic field is not necessarily unconstructive, but as far as I was concerned in the present case, my main purpose remained to describe the individuals’ bicultural experiences, seeking to do justice to the dynamics of bicultural interactions. Since I was not finding much support in cross-cultural management, I had to turn to some other theoretical basis that I would be at least slightly aware of and that would help render the type of dynamics involved in bicultural situations. The first essay included in this dissertation was written as a result of this attempt to go deeper and find a satisfactory theoretical basis for the discussion of the bicultural interaction as a distinctive phenomenon and an opportunity for learning – both about the other and oneself. Even though my theoretical understanding has evolved since this essay was written (originally for a conference in 2001) then edited (for publication in an anthology in 2002), I believe it is important to have it here in order to account for this evolution and show where I come from, theoretically and epistemologically speaking.

The theoretical basis that I initially found most appropriate to drive my point through was, broadly speaking, dialectics. As a starting point, I felt that the initial discussion in Hegel’s (1910) ‘master and slave dialectic’ could be a good basis for describing the way identities are dialectically constructed: the way that, as Sartre (1969, 235) expresses it, ‘the appearance of the Other is indispensable [...] to the very existence of my consciousness as self-consciousness’. Similarly to the self / other dialectic outlined there, I have suggested that one could point out an ‘own culture / other culture’ dialectic that can explain how cultural identities are constructed reflexively, relatively to other cultural identities.

This dialectical starting point led me to the hermeneutics of Gadamer (1975; 1976) and Ricoeur (1971; 1974; 1981), which are both centrally concerned with cross-cultural understanding. Both are quite clearly rooted in dialectics, as is hermeneutics, broadly

9 However, my discussion of Hegel remained on quite a superficial level, and the main claim I used it for – the fact that identities get to be defined according to each other in the dialectic - will probably seem rather trivial to readers deeply engaged with Hegelian thinking.
speaking – it can be understood as involving the dialectic of part to whole. Gadamer’s hermeneutics is particularly interesting in connection with intercultural considerations. It gives an important role to the prejudices of the person seeking to understand: they are argued to be a precondition for the possibility of understanding, since understanding – and human existence itself - entails ‘having an attitude towards the world’ (Ulin, 2001, 111). Prejudgments are thus needed in order to get the hermeneutic circle of interpretation started, because we could not formulate a meaningful question without an anticipation of some knowledge of the issue at hand. That is why Gadamer contends that one has to accept being ‘dominated by prejudices’ in order to see ‘what is shown by their light’ (Gadamer, 1975, 324). It suggests that interpretation as a process starts when the difference between this anticipation inferred from our prejudices and the asserted otherness of the object of study becomes salient. This dialectical movement of consciousness, which Gadamer calls ‘effective-historical consciousness’, operates through the principle of the ‘fusion of horizons’, considered by Gadamer as representative of the process of hermeneutical understanding in general. The fusion of horizons may be described as ‘a dialectical process through which, as I come to know the cultural object in its radical otherness, I also come to know myself as a historically finite being’ (Ulin, 2001, 114). This process works according to a sort of ‘dialectic of question and answer’, reminiscent of the form of a dialogue – Gadamer’s hermeneutics could clearly be described as dialogic. It is indeed a matter of establishing mutual understanding between interlocutors who exchange questions and answers for that purpose. As Ulin (ibid., 115) puts it:

Each question or anticipation elicits a response from the cultural object which in turn leads to new questions and the reformulation or retracting of anticipations, until the meaning or sense of the whole discloses itself.

I feel that this way of describing the engaging with cultural otherness does justice to my own experiences of attempts at cross-cultural understanding, except perhaps for the idea of ending up with an actual ‘meaning of the whole’. What I have found out is that, as a result of going through such processes of cross-cultural interpretation, my relation to my own national culture changed, which I realized when going back to France. This realization in turn allowed for re-interpreting – and re-starting a hermeneutic process
towards - some of my own original cultural assumptions, as if from the outside. But this realization also allowed for more appreciation and opening towards the other culture, a more liberated engaging in the fusion of horizons. Thus, going back and forth – which I have kept doing for all the years I have been a resident in Finland – has brought another level of hermeneutic process, through a sort of dialogue between the two cultural environments. This has been all the more rewarding, and has led me to share the emancipatory interest found in the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer.

Ricoeur’s ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ bears a number of affinities with Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics – including an interest in understanding ‘the other’ and oneself -, but differs significantly in its claim that symbols are not only grounded in language (in Ricoeur’s terminology, *logos*), but also life itself (what he calls *bios*). A special interest that I find in Ricoeur’s view lies in his contention that meaningful human action can be studied and interpreted in the same way as a text can. As he expresses it (Ricoeur, 1971, 538):

> My claim is that action itself, action as meaningful, may become an object of science, without losing its character of meaningfulness, through a kind of objectification similar to the fixation which occurs in writing.

His main contribution may be his setting up of a hermeneutical method that ‘unfolds through a dialectic of understanding, explanation and comprehension’ (Ulin, 2001, 128). The idea is that, on the way to comprehension, there is a need to operate a movement from understanding to explanation (connected to the hermeneutic circle), that is, from the inside to the outside – in a way that transcends emics and etics. Going ‘back and forth’ between a position as an outsider and an insider, may be useful, in order to reach a third position. I can relate to that aim, and the necessity of the ‘third element’. We now turn to Bakhtinian dialogism, which precisely introduces a third element, one that makes us conceive of dialogue – and interaction – in a more dynamic way.

### 2.3 A more dynamic view: dialogism, thirdness, the third space

When I presented the first essay of this thesis (or rather a preliminary version of it) at a conference in 2001, one constructive comment that I got was that a third element was missing in my rendering of the bicultural interaction. I was thus advised to engage in
Bakhtin’s (1981; 1984; 1986; Holquist, 1990; Morson & Emerson, 1990) works on dialogism. The reason why I came to go further into Bakhtin’s perspective, despite its complexity and what some would consider to be an excessive vagueness, is that it offers a view of dialogue and interaction that is more dynamic than dialectics. As Bakhtin is claimed to have said (as cited in Janssens & Steyaert, 1999, 134-135):

Dialogue and dialectics. Take a dialogue and remove the voices... remove the intonations... carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness – and that’s how you get dialectics.

Bakhtin was thus not too fond of the more classical dialectical approaches, and his dialogism was set up as a response to the shortcomings that he saw in – especially Hegelian - dialectics. Although there surely are similarities between Bakhtin’s dialogism and Gadamer’s hermeneutics, the stress on ‘thirdness’ is an element that distinguishes Bakhtin’s thinking from Gadamer’s. This notion of ‘thirdness’ was immediately interesting to me, since it potentially provided a more dynamic understanding of interaction, thus possibly accounting for what might be missing or not satisfactory, for a number of reasons, in organizations. But what is ‘thirdness’, or ‘the third’?

The third is, in Bakhtin’s theorizing, the most important element of the self-other dyad, it is the very fact that ‘the one individual does not exist, has no meaning, cannot define him/herself without the other’ (Kramsch, 1999, 45). It is thus the relation between the self and the other in dialogue – or interaction. Dialogism, thus, is a differential relation: in short, we are what others are not\footnote{As Stuart Hall (1991, 21) puts it, identity always ‘only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative’}. perceiving the world ‘through the time/space of the self [...] but also through the time/space of the other’ (ibid.). But dialogism does not only involve a relation; more precisely, it involves a response to the other. It is through this response that identity is reflexively constructed. In addition, without thirdness and the possibility for the relation with another to be configurated differently in another place and time, there would be no possibility to reflect on oneself and thus achieve ‘transgredience’ towards oneself (Holquist, 1990, 38), that is, to see one’s self as if from outside of it. For example, in my movements back and forth between Finland and
France, I have learnt to reflect on myself, and thus be aware of the different ways in which my identity has been reflexively constructed.

Following the way suggested by Janssens & Steyaert (1999), I have sought to use the notion of ‘thirdness’ not only in the context of a dialogue between two individuals, but also in social interactions involving two groups of people: what I call ‘bicultural interactions’. It has thus come to represent the relation – or lack of it – between the two parties. I find Bakhtinian dialogism useful in that context because of some notions that can be used in order to represent the bicultural dynamics. Especially, thirdness relies on the notion of ‘addressivity’, that is, the quality of addressing the other (or ‘of turning to someone else’, see Wertsch, 1991, 52). Since addressivity heavily depends on how the actor ‘senses and imagines his addressees’ (see Bakhtin, 1986, 95), the combination of projected similarity and stereotyping, in addition to some adverse organizational dynamics, will tend to have a distorting effect on addressivity, and affect thirdness negatively. If the individuals involved in the bicultural interaction, however, manage to achieve fairly satisfactory addressivity, then the virtuous process feeding on thirdness and leading to transgredience can take place: welcome to the ‘third space’.

What is the ‘third space’? Originally, the concept was introduced by Bhabha (1994); it deals with the idea that the encounter between two cultures – two individuals or groups of individuals from different cultures – is bound to set up a new space of communication that manages to keep both perspectives in the same field of vision in order to make it possible for either side to translate the other perspective. This third space is hybrid, contradictory and ambivalent, which may allow for ‘third perspectives [to] grow in the margins of dominant ways of seeing’ (Kramsch, 1999, 47). There is thus an emancipatory change possibility in such a hybrid space. As Bhabha (1994, 37) himself expresses it:

It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.

It is quite clear that ‘the genealogy of Bhabha’s Third Space can be traced to Bakhtin’s dialogic’ (Lucas, 1997, 3). It has also been argued that Bakhtinian dialogism could be used to discuss ‘the hybridity of identities and places’, potentially stressing ‘the multiple
constitution of cultural identity through the figure of the migrant or exile, who falls between two worlds’ (Holloway & Kneale, 2000, 83). Both Bhabha’s third space and a use of Bakhtin in connection with ‘diaspora’ types of identities are reminiscent of other thinkers of ‘the in-between’, in particular Certeau (1984) and Stuart Hall (e.g. 1995). However, when I was first acquainted with Bakhtin and Bhabha, I did not immediately connect their works to other, more explicitly spatial works. Rather, I just straightforwardly took the third space to be that environment set up by the bicultural interaction in an organization, as a hybrid context is bound to emerge from the process of communication, translation and negotiation between the two parties. The second essay of the present dissertation had, in its first versions, no reference to the third space in its title – unlike now – but only to thirdness. A more spatial problematizing was to come later though, and I will discuss that in subsection 2.5 (including a focus on alternative notions of third space / thirdspace).

2.4 Theory and empirical approach: sensemaking and narrative analysis

Although it was not called upon in my problem-setting early on, the notion of ‘sensemaking’ became central in every essay included in the present thesis: one of the strengths I find in it is that it can be used both in theoretical and empirical contexts, so I feel it makes it easier to establish a connection between my theory and my empirical part in a meaningful way. Besides, as Weick (1995, 16) himself points out, it is particularly easy to grasp, since it is to be understood literally, not metaphorically: ‘sensemaking is what it says it is, namely, making something sensible’. In addition to the above two characteristics of sensemaking, what attracted me to the use of the notion is the idea of ‘occasions for sensemaking’ (Weick, 1995) being brought about by ‘incongruous events that do not make sense within [people’s] perceptual frameworks’ and thus provide them with ‘opportunities to discover their blind spots’ (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988, 52). The role of ‘surprise’ is thus important: in Louis’s (1980) view, sensemaking can be described as ‘a thinking process that uses retrospection to explain surprise’ (Glanz et al., 2001, 103). To me, the bicultural interaction as I have experienced it is an excellent example of an occasion for sensemaking, or perhaps rather, of a context pregnant with many such occasions, since unexpected events may
arise all the time because of misunderstandings and more generally the dynamics of the interaction.

That is how sensemaking has imposed itself as a way of framing my understanding of individual experiences in bicultural interactions. A sensemaking approach allows for looking at the way in which individuals retrospectively make sense of their experience, and also at how this sensemaking is grounded in identity construction: a doubly appropriate way to problematize my study, which deals to a large extent with the (cultural) identity construction of individuals reflecting on their bicultural experiences in retrospect. Other properties of sensemaking, as listed by Weick (1995), include the fact that sensemaking contributes to create the sensemaker’s environment (its ‘enactive’ function) which in turn constrains her/his actions, the social and always ongoing nature of the sensemaking process, as well as its stress on plausibility rather than accuracy. Sensemaking is indeed not a matter of rationally finding out why something has happened, for instance; it is more concerned with accounting for how come this thing has happened, while maintaining a self-conception that is as consistent and positive as possible – the identity construction stake involved in sensemaking being probably its most significant property, as suggested in the citation from Ring and Van de Ven (1989, 180; cited by Weick, 1995, 22) below:

Sensemaking processes derive from [...] the need within individuals to have a sense of identity – that is, a general orientation to situations that maintain esteem and consistency of one’s self-conceptions. Sensemaking processes have a strong influence on the manner by which individuals within organizations begin processes of transacting with others. If confirmation of one’s own enacted “self” is not realized, however, sensemaking processes recur and a reenactment and representment of self follows.

Sensemaking will thus usually take on the form of a narrative. Or ‘a good story’, as Weick (1995, 60-61) puts it:

[...] something that preserves plausibility and coherence, something that is reasonable and memorable, something that embodies past experience and expectations, something which resonates with other people, something that can be constructed retrospectively, but also can be used prospectively; something that captures both feeling and thought, something that allows for embellishment to fit current oddities, something that is fun to construct. In short, what is necessary in sensemaking is a good story.
Narrative and story are often used interchangeably, even though most theorists of narrative wish to establish a distinction: according to Boje (2001, 2), ‘story resists narrative; story is antenarrative and on occasion even antinarrative (a refusal to be coherent)’. What he means is that in his view a story does not comprise a plot as such: it is when it is ‘emplotted’ that it becomes narrative. Czarniawska’s (1997) understanding of the relation between events and a narrative is in line with this understanding: plot, to her, is ‘the basic means by which specific events, otherwise represented as lists or chronicles, are brought into one meaningful whole’ (ibid., 18), thus producing a narrative.

Narrative analysis was understood to be most appropriate to the aims of the present study for many reasons. First, as suggested above, a sensemaking perspective fits very well with a narrative approach. Indeed, narrative analysis has been understood as not only the best way to understand the individuals’ ‘lived time’ (Ricoeur, 1984) and identity matters, but the very context in which individual identities are constructed, as in the citations below:

Our present identity is not a sudden and mysterious event but a sensible result of a life story […] Such creations of narrative order may be essential in giving life a sense of meaning and direction. (Gergen, 1994, 187)

How individuals recount their histories – what they emphasize and omit, their stance as protagonists or victims, the relationship the story establishes between teller and audience – all shape what individuals can claim of their own lives. Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one’s life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned. (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992, 1)

[…] eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very “events” of a life. In the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we “tell about” our lives. (Bruner, 1987, 15)

This is why narrative analysis is all the more relevant here, since my broad initial aim was precisely to study the (re)construction of identities as expressed in the self-narratives on the coopérants’ expatriate experiences. Their narratives certainly ‘imitate’
their experiences, but in turn their experiences come to imitate their narratives\textsuperscript{11}. The narrative for them is thus a way to *construct* themselves (Bruner, 1987, 24).

Second, the idea of letting people tell their stories – in the form of emplotted narratives - as they wish allows for a sort of spontaneity which enables the interviewees to bring up relevant matters more naturally, more freely – although they are bound to be affected by the context of the interview, included what their encounter with a researcher may mean in terms of their reflexive identity construction. It thus makes a quite inductive approach possible, and offers a potential for opening up towards new possibilities through narratives that may resist or subvert the institutionalized discourses of cross-cultural management or expatriation.

Moreover, the object of narrative can be seen as a matter of ‘demistify[ing] deviations’ (Bruner, 2001, 30). It is easier for people to tell about such ‘deviations’ because they have time to give long accounts of the processes that led to them. In a more ordered interview setting, it is much more unlikely to encounter deviant answers: the more structured interview methods thus contribute to bringing about yet more ordering, more closing down. In the context of an interview that only asks for an individual to tell about her/his experience and thus produce a self-narrative, it is possible for that individual to develop a way of examining closely the exceptional in relation to the ordinary, and connecting them together by finding ‘an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern’ (Bruner, 1990, 49-50).

Now, it is precisely the way in which the bicultural work interaction can be seen as an occasion for such a deviation that is of interest here: how the encounter with the other culture may lead one to produce narratives emancipated from the dominant order imposed by established discourses of, for instance, cross-cultural management or expatriation.

2.5 *Coming home* to geography and spatial conceptualizations

Due to my long-term interest in geography and my institutional affiliation in a department of corporate geography, I have been somewhat aware of relevant approaches from human and cultural geography for a long time; however, during most of my doctoral research process, I was not sure whether – and how - I could actually use them.

\textsuperscript{11} Rephrasing slightly Bruner’s (1987, 13) sentence: ‘Narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative’.
I finally gave it a go fairly late on, thus (re)turning to what is supposed to be my core discipline: a ‘coming home’ of sorts. There were several reasons why I felt this could prove fruitful. First, I was already using – although in a more limited manner than I do now - the concept of ‘third space’ drawn from postcolonial theory, and I knew that this field relied heavily on other potentially insightful spatial metaphors. Second, in phenomenological geography’s understanding of space and place, I was aware of certain developments that hinted at the possibility of intercultural learning and some other central concerns in my work. Especially, I was much interested in Buttimer’s (1976, 285-286) ideas of the relation to the new place as allowing for questioning ‘the “givens” of social life’ – which could be rephrased as providing an occasion for sensemaking - and thus learning about oneself and one’s relation to the original place. Tuan’s (1976; 1977) graceful prose and his insightful dialectic of ‘cosmos and hearth’ (Tuan, 1996) leading the individual to a cosmopolitan experience that makes her/him feel ‘at home in the cosmos’ (ibid., 187) were also inspiring. Another humanistic geographer who significantly influenced my understanding of being ‘in place’ or ‘out of place’ is Relph (1976), who articulated relations to places as characterized by ‘insideness’ or ‘outsideness’.

While getting more engaged into applying approaches from human geography to concerns typically more connected with organization theory, I then found out that it was indeed promising to seek to contribute to organization studies in a spatial way. For instance, the dialectic of place and space, which has been central in human geography, may provide a novel way to represent and reconcile some of the most significant dialectical tensions in social theory at large – such as for instance ‘structure and agency’, ‘stability and change’ - or in organization studies in particular – e.g. March’s (1991) ‘exploitation and exploration’ view of organizational learning. Although a spatial understanding of organization has not been a central concern for long, it now seems that it is becoming obvious to organization researchers that space matters. The most significant step towards a spatial conceptualizing of organization so far has certainly been Hernes’s (2004) volume on *The Spatial Construction of Organization*. As Hernes (ibid., 65) explains, the basic reason why ‘a spatial view of organization’ may provide valuable insight is that ‘just about everything that needs representation may be represented spatially’. In particular, I would argue that spatial representations can be
considered especially fruitful for social and political phenomena, where notions of division, fragmentation or exclusion, to name but a few examples, all involve a spatial understanding. But the most interesting way in which a spatial representation can contribute to social – and thus organization - theory is probably through the possibilities of rendering the dynamics of social interaction – and indeed, organization - that it offers. Lefebvre (1991, 74) contends that ‘itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others’, which Hernes (ibid., 68) rephrases by considering space as ‘continually produced, while also forming the basis for construction’. A spatial theorizing can thus be another way to account for the dynamic phenomena that the so-called “third-pole” theories’ (see e.g. Hernes, 2003, 269) seek to deal with around ideas of circularity (Latour) or recursivity (Luhmann, Giddens). This is why, also, the idea of ‘third space’ as perhaps a ‘spatial third-pole theory’, seems promising for an understanding of the dynamics of bicultural work interactions in organizations – and the recursivity, or circularity that characterizes them.

One of the problems with the notion of ‘third space’ is that there can be confusions between different authors who have referred to it in different contexts. At the same time, this confusion may provide an interesting polysemy. As I have explained above (see subsections 1.4 and 2.3), for Bhabha, the third space is the space that is set up by an encounter with an other, the space in which communication with that other, and thus negotiation and translation from one perspective to the other, take place. Soja (1996), on the other hand, uses ‘thirdspace’ (in one word) to elaborate on the ‘trialectics of space’ articulated in Lefebvre’s (1991) *The Production of Space*: Soja’s thirdspace is claimed to roughly correspond to Lefebvre’s ‘lived space’ and is supposed to be at once ‘perceived and conceived’, ‘real and imagined’. To Soja (1996, 56-57), it is thirdspace that should be the privileged space of analysis in geographical inquiry, because:

Everything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, stucture and agency, mind and body, consciousness and unconsciousness, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history.
This notion of ‘thirddspace’, used as a way to reconcile all these dialectical tensions – or at least to keep them in the same space, thus allowing for addressing them -, certainly refers to one of the most significant legacies of Lefebvre’s thought, but other geographers engaged with Lefebvrian conceptualization have stressed other important implications – and had alternative readings – of the trialectics of space. Especially, Merrifield (2000) chooses to present the three ‘moments’ involved in a different order. He starts off with ‘representations of space’ (which Soja associates with his ‘secondspace’), also called ‘conceived space’ or ‘conceptualized space’, that is, the space constructed by the dominant order, represented by ‘assorted professionals and technocrats’ (ibid., 174). He goes on with ‘representational space’ (corresponding to Soja’s thirddspace), considered as ‘directly lived space, the space of everyday experience’. And he ends up with ‘spatial practices’, tightly connected to ‘perceived space’ (and Soja’s ‘firstspace’), i.e. ‘people’s perceptions of the world, of their world, particularly with respect to their everyday world and its space’ (ibid., 175). This difference in the ordering is significant because it shows that Lefebvre’s trialectics can be understood in different ways, indeed, that the one spatial dimension that is supposed to mediate between the other two is not necessarily representational space. Although Lefebvre remains fairly vague about how such a mediation takes place, it is possible to conceive of spatial practices as being the third element that gives sense to the other two: spatial dynamics is characterized by a ‘triple determination’, in which ‘each instance internalizes and takes on meaning through other instances’ (ibid.).

As I have briefly explained in subsection 1.4, the notion of ‘spatial practices’ that I use here does draw on Lefebvre’s trialectics. I can indeed see the spatial practices of individuals involved in bicultural interactions as mediating between the space imposed by the – organizational and cultural - order (which can be associated with representations of space or conceived space) and the more uncontrolled, ever hybridizing third space (which then can be considered as corresponding to representational space or lived space). I will argue that the function of these ‘spatial practices’ in the present case is not only to ‘constitute continuity’ (Hernes, 2004, 73) and contribute to ‘societal cohesion’ (Merrifield, 2000, 175) since the third space where the individuals are involved may also carry negative dynamics that may in turn favour
more divisive practices, which may entail, for instance, a perception of the space as fragmented.

As for Bhabha’s third space, it bears strong affinities with notions from so-called ‘border studies’, such as the concepts of ‘borderlands’ (see especially Anzaldúa, 1987; Rosaldo, 1989) or the ‘contact zone’ (Pratt, 1992). The hybridity that these in-between spaces entail and how it translates at the level of individuals has also been articulated by Trinh (e.g. 1994). Here, however, I will limit my brief discussion to two other authors whose conceptualizations of the in-between present highly interesting similarities with – and yet are complementary to - Bhabha’s approach: Michel de Certeau and Stuart Hall. Certeau (1984) has a special interest in how individuals who are outsiders - or not favoured - in the society manage to ‘make do’ with what they have. For instance, he gives the example of how certain immigrants living in the suburbs of France’s big cities ‘insinuate into the system imposed on [them] [...] the ways of “dwelling” (in a house or a language) peculiar to [their] native [places]’; by superimposing the two perspectives, they can create for themselves ‘a space in which [they] can find ways of using the constraining order of the place or of the language’, through ‘an art of being in between’ (ibid., 30). Stuart Hall (1995) has also discussed this in-between position, which he claims seems to be not only that of ‘ex-colonized or marginalized people’ nowadays: ‘more and more people [...] are beginning to think of themselves, of their identities and their relationship to culture and to place, in these more ‘open’ ways’ (ibid., 206-207). In both Certeau’s and Hall’s articulations of the in-between space though, it is a matter of the individuals’ practices or ‘tactics’ (to use terminology typical of Certeau) how they explore that space. The third space as I understand it here is thus not only considered as that which is intersubjectively set up by the encounter between two distinct groups within an organization, but also as that which can be explored (or not) by individuals, depending on their individual spatial practices (although they remain very much a result of social interactions, spatial practices are to be found at the individual level). This suggests that, in Figure 1 below (where I seek to represent some different yet connected views of the third space / thirdspace), spatial practices could instead be placed in the central circle delimiting the in-between third space: as written above, it is not necessarily lived space that constitutes the in-between dimension in Lefebvre’s
theorizing, any of the dimensions can be potentially understood as mediating between
the other two.

**Figure 1: The third space / thirdspace**

Putting together notions from different thinkers in order to describe one concept is quite
an adventurous exercise. While there certainly remain some differences between their
perspectives, these authors can still be considered as belonging to a broad ‘family of
thought’ engaged with the poststructuralist tradition without being as inflexible as those
poststructuralists whose approaches are often blamed for being too deterministic.
Especially, Lefebvre, Soja, Bhabha, Certeau and Stuart Hall all share a belief in the
potential for resistance and subversion found in individual and social action.

This polysemy of the third space / thirdspace may be understood as making things rather
too complex or vague. The fact is, the third space is bound to be a vague concept, since
it accounts for an environment that is hybrid(izing) and by definition ambivalent, and
since it can only be experienced – but not necessarily clearly described - by individuals
who are involved in this environment. The third space may thus take on many different
faces, actually a different one for every individual, depending on her/his ‘practices of
the third space’, that is, her/his ways of dwelling and moving in this in-between.

I mentioned above some of the factors that encouraged me to adopt a more spatial
perspective. Another significant one was Jerome Bruner pointing out in his *Life as
Narrative (1987) article that spatial metaphors were omnipresent in self-narratives. That served as an interesting connection between a spatial theorizing and the methodology that I had adopted. From that point on, I tried to look for possible theorizing on this spatial dimension of narrative. I had already come across Certeau’s (1984) contention that narratives can be understood as ‘spatial practices’ but was not sure how to understand that. I then found an article by Regard (2002) that seemed to connect all the dots. In it, the author discusses the autobiography (or, more broadly, the self-narrative) as a spatial practice, that is, a process of generating meaningful spaces for oneself to inhabit. While this article had previously been used mostly in connection with literary works – especially in an anthology (Regard, 2003) on ‘British auto/biography’ where it serves as the theoretical foundation -, I immediately felt that its spatial visions could easily hold for any kind of self-narratives, especially those narratives of displacement and exile contained and discussed in many cultural geography studies - for instance, in the anthology Travellers’ Tales (Robertson et al., 1994). Re-reading Certeau in the light of these works certainly helped me to make sense of ‘narrative practices of the space’ as mediating between the dominant space imposed institutionally and lived space (the third space as a hybrid environment surrounding the people involved). I have not left space ever since.

2.6 In the end: a disciplinary third space

So, after all these journeys, where do I stand now? Before discussing what my positioning today may look like, I will, again, go back into the past: representing how I have felt about positioning during the doctoral process can be useful in order to understand how I make sense of it now.

2.6.1 An awkward position?

At a point quite far into the doctoral process – certainly more than halfway through -, I felt the need to try and visualize, if not where I belonged, where I would position my study. I came up with the following drawing (Figure 2) of a human body (supposedly

12 In that article, while analyzing four self-narratives, Bruner (1987, 25) finds out that the language of ‘place’, articulated around an opposition between ‘home’ and ‘the real world’, dominates the sensemaking of the four narrators, by shaping and constraining the stories that they tell.
mine) in very awkward balance, seemingly torn as a result of being pulled in different directions by various potentially contradictory academic connections.

**Figure 2: An awkward position(ing)**

![Diagram](image)

What I needed then was to try and represent how, despite being pulled in these four different directions, I was ‘grounded’ somewhere. What was Figure 2 became Figure 3 (some of the in-between labels there have changed over time, but I have kept the original shape of the drawing):

**Figure 3: An awkward – but grounded – position(ing)**

![Diagram](image)
The position above certainly does not look very comfortable, but somehow I have been learning to appreciate it. In there, I am grounded through the critical stance that I have towards international business-related discourses, which takes me close to scholars within so-called ‘critical management studies’. I first got the sense of belonging to this research community by attending a conference track dealing with critical approaches to ‘diversity management’, then went on to take part in an anthology – with the first essay in the present thesis - published by the organizers of this track. I also attended a conference that the same people organized, which contributed to my feeling at home in that sort of research family.

The different disciplines I draw on are filling the in-between spaces that separate my different academic affiliations. Here, my formal belonging to a department most involved in marketing has been only made significant through my co-organizing of a cross-disciplinary course on ‘international marketing and the cultural environment’. The marketing discipline has had no influence on my doctoral research, as shown on Figure 3. On the other hand, my two most important formal academic affiliations - in corporate geography as for my subject and sub-department, and in international business (IB) as for my graduate school (that is, my prime connection to the Finnish academic community and main financing institution) - have obviously affected my work considerably, through a sort of game that involved addressing different audiences, moving between them: when presenting papers to IB researchers, I was connecting them more to the IB-related discourses of cross-cultural management and expatriation studies, while, when presenting to geographers, I was focusing my discussion on the spatial articulation of the issues studied. In order to develop these two seemingly quite distinct approaches – and to bring them together into a meaningful whole -, I have drawn on a variety of in-between disciplines (some closer to geography, some closer to IB, as shown in Figure 3) that have connected the spatial perspective to the interest in bicultural issues in organizations, with an ultimate audience being scholars interested in, broadly speaking, critical views of business studies.

2.6.2 An in-between approach

The question of positioning is one that is often asked to researchers: ‘in what capacity do you speak? What is your specialty? Where are you coming from?’ Michel Foucault
was asked these questions in Belo Horizonte, ‘in the course of a speaking tour in Brazil’ (Certeau, 1988, 193); that led him to write in *L’archéologie du savoir* (1969, 28):

No, no, I’m not where you are lying in wait for me, but over here, laughing at you. What, do you imagine that I would take so much trouble and so much pleasure in writing, do you think that I would keep so persistently to my task, if I were not preparing – with a rather shaky hand – a labyrinth into which I can venture, in which I can move my discourse, opening up underground passages, forcing it to go far from itself, finding overhangs that reduce and deform its itinerary, in which I can lose myself and appear at last to eyes that I will never have to meet again. I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write. (translated version cited from Certeau, 1988, 193)

Although, out of mere decency and respect for the great thinker Foucault was, I would not claim to share with him much more than initials and the next two letters of our last names (*Fou*, which, by the way, means ‘mad’, but let’s not stretch this meaningless comparison too far), I nevertheless feel a strong community of spirit with him on this issue. When I first read this delightful passage – with what delectation at each new deviation Foucault constructs in his labyrinth in order to ensure his escape -, I immediately felt that what is expressed in it bears strong resemblance to my own reluctance to be fixedly positioned somewhere. In order to try to justify this apparently irrational reluctance, I would argue that if one is to be categorized in a fully spelled out way, if one is to be essentialized as one of the many established ‘-ists’, then that is bound to constrain her/his work irrevocably, resulting in the loss of a sense of freedom – freedom of thought, what many of us claim to believe is most important. I do not mean to reject the need for any sort of positioning; having some foundation, some place from which to start speaking or writing is necessary. As Stuart Hall (1996, 347) puts it in the context of his discussion of ethnicity:

There is no way, it seems to me, in which people of the world can act, can speak, can create, can come in from the margins and talk, can begin to reflect on their own experience unless they come from some *place*, they come from some history, they inherit certain cultural traditions. What we’ve learned about the theory of enunciation is that there’s no enunciation without positionality. You have to position yourself *somewhere* in order to say anything at all.
Now, my point is that while it is important to keep in mind that one comes from somewhere, from some original place, it does not mean that one has to be a prisoner of that place, forever fixed in it. In the speaking and the writing, one leaves this place for a journey into space, in my case a third space between different disciplines, by both drawing on them and looking upon them critically. There is a whole play of identity and difference involved, of not forgetting about ‘the place and the ground from which we can speak’, while no longer accepting that the positioning may be ‘contained within that place as an essence’ (ibid., 349). What I have called, in Figure 2, ‘Critical (Diversity) Management’, has become my ground (and is indeed what I stand on in that figure), that is, my research family of origin – the advantage being that, unlike in the case of people’s ethnicities, it is possible to set the ground anew in the academic world. However, as Figure 3 shows, I have moved a lot between this grounding discipline and other fields, taking up different research identities that have allowed me to speak from difference in a variety of different ways.

As I have written in the first words of my introduction, nowadays, I see myself as moving always in the third space, in the in-between, where I feel very much at ease. I did not find this room for movement within my society of origin, I needed to have two orders between which to move in order to take advantage of it and feel more free. Also academically speaking, I find myself in the in-between (mainly between geography and organization studies, but there are several other in-betweens), and that is a way of positioning oneself, one that may actually be better defined or refined than many positions within established fields; but that is also a space where I can move and, like Foucault, within which I can find ways to escape. The in-between constitutes a sort of marginality (cf. hooks, 1990), but not one imposed by oppressive structures, rather, one that is chosen as a site from which it is possible to criticize and subvert the dominant order, a ‘site of resistance – as location for radical openness and possibility’ (ibid., 153), because it is possible to move within the in-between space and escape essentialization: neither ordered nor naively opposed to ordering. In addition to the geography – organization in-between, I find myself between a postmodern and what Tuan (1996) calls ‘high-modern’ sensibility: there is in my approach an importance given to human agency that sometimes takes me quite close to humanism – and away from a more radical (e.g. Foucauldian) criticism of rationality. As I have pointed out in
1.1.4, I would also situate my study between a descriptive approach and a more openly critical problematization: another significant in-between.

If I summarize my position in a less confusing way, I can say that 1) I am addressing the subject matter of the established (sub)streams of cross-cultural management and expatriation studies, but that I am doing so 2) in a critical way that draws on a variety of fields of social inquiry in which spatial representations are central, and that, however, 3) this critical way does not entirely accept itself as critical either – or at least not with the label ‘critical management studies’. The reason behind that third twist is that ‘any classification scheme, any labelling device, [is] itself part of a field of power-knowledge in which the speaker as well as the one who [is] spoken about [becomes] subject to disciplining’, as Burrell (1997, 23) puts it while describing Foucault’s argument against being categorized as anything (e.g. ‘postmodern’). For instance, Wray-Bliss (2003, 307), as I have briefly discussed in 1.1.4, has shown that ‘normal and well-intentioned CMS research’ could nonetheless construct ‘the researched’s ‘subordinate’ and researcher’s ‘superior’ subject positions’. For my empirical study, I have tried to keep in mind that in order to be as inductive as possible, it is important not to be overproblematizing the not yet gathered interview material.

To sum up this long discussion on my flexible in-between positioning, and provide the reader still in search of some framing with some clearer hint, I will answer the question: for what audience do I write first and foremost? I would say I write for those connected to what is broadly called organization studies and who have a particular interest in critical, cultural, and the emergent spatial approaches within this diverse body of work. Ideally, I would be writing for imaginary scholars of a still unestablished field that I may call ‘organizational geography’, an academic space in which the more humanistic corporate geographers would meet the more spatial-minded organization researchers and work with them, translating each other’s perspectives in the process.

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13 Interestingly, one could say that a ‘real postmodern’ (itself an essentializing expression, and thus an oxymoron) cannot her/himself claim to be one, which would be accepting being essentialized.
3. Methodology and methods

I will be writing here about methodology and method connected to the empirical study, but I will start by describing how the writing occurred, through what process the essays came into being.

3.1 Writing process(es)

In order to write all the essays, I have tried to establish a dynamic relationship between reading, writing, presenting, and getting feedback. What I mean here is that each of these actions have been steps in a process that has had to be repeated several times in order to come up with a satisfactory outcome. My way to proceed has been to first develop my ideas on paper by using some theoretical sources I was aware of and could digest early on, then I presented this first outcome on a seminar, got feedback, which sent me back to reading and editing the original text – or re-writing it altogether -, presenting the paper in its new form preferably on a conference, getting feedback again, etc. In principle, this could have lasted forever, but one has to stop at some point and fix the paper as an essay or article. In the present thesis, I am trying to show how my thinking has been evolving over time, but also I wish to give a sense of how each essay itself has been inscribed in a process – that is what I have tried to represent in my ‘theoretical journeys’ section. It is very much the way I have sought to organize myself regarding all the essays, with each essay elaborating on the previous one(s). As I have pointed out in 2.2, it should be interesting to read this first essay not only as a published – and thus supposedly finished – paper for its own sake, but also as merely a step in the research process, from which my theoretical thinking evolved on to new developments. This holds also for the second essay, although it has been edited and updated more than the first one since it has never been totally fixed by a publication.

3.2 Empirical methodology and methods

I will start by writing about the coopérants and what has made me think that their experiences would be interesting to study, then I will discuss the interviews (briefly describe their settings, but also including which interviews were left out, and for what
reasons). Thereafter I will move on to how the interviews were organized with a narrative approach. I will then write a bit more on the ‘performative’ analysis, and finally on the ‘spatial’ analysis.

3.2.1 The *coopérants*

As I have written in 1.1.3, what we called in France ‘*coopérants*’ used to be young graduates from universities, engineering or business schools going to work for 16 months in an organization abroad instead of doing their military service. Some of these *coopérants* worked for services related to the French embassies (with ‘CSNA’ status), and others were employed for this 16-month period by companies (with ‘CSNE’ status). The people whose experiences I have studied have all been CSNEs - they were the last CSNEs in Finland, to be precise. I interviewed them at the end of their stay, between the end of 2001 and the spring of 2002. After 2002, *coopération* has ceased to exist – as a result of the end of French military conscription - and been replaced by *volontariat*, a slightly more flexible format (the duration of a *volontariat* can be much shorter than 16 months) based on voluntary applications.

While discussing my problem-setting in 1.1.3, I have stressed the characteristics of *coopération* that were promising to me: I have underlined the very distinctiveness of their situation, with its learning nature (a first relatively long work experience, and a first relatively long experience abroad), openness and disconnectedness from the rest of their careers as a unique occasion for them to make sense of the issues they have to cope with in ways that are more challenging to institutionalized discourses than accounts from more experienced expatriates would be. I have to add here that, because the main reason why they got involved in *coopération* is usually that it allows them to avoid the army, the experience as a *coopérant* is problematized in an interesting way as the lesser of two evils. It is thus something that could be seen as a waste of time if it does not exactly correspond to how the young graduate sees his career but that still is to be appreciated as enabling to escape from another, potentially much more damaging waste of time: I see that very specific problematic as potentially favouring a new view of one’s career, the realization of new possibilities for the future.

There is another significant reason why I was especially interested in *coopérants*: I knew that the generational and, more broadly speaking, cultural closeness between me
and them could make it possible to set up the interviews in a much more informal and open manner than would be possible with more senior interviewees. Especially, more senior executives (in both the senses ‘older’ and ‘higher-ranked’ in the hierarchy) would presumably be much more wary of what they should say and not say to a researcher like me, inquiring what the real objectives behind my study may actually be. They may also be more skeptical towards my research because of the way they expect research in business studies to be, and as a result more patronizing, or possibly even unwilling to indulge in the narrative game that they may see as a waste of their precious time.

3.2.2 The interviews

For my two empirical essays, I have used four long (each between 90 and 120 minutes; transcribed, between 33 and 40 pages) individual interviews of French coopérants who were in Finland in 2001 and 2002. These interviews were made in three different Finnish towns (Helsinki, Tampere and Vaasa), in various settings, provided the place was quiet: the interviewee’s home, my workplace, my hotel, the interviewee’s workplace. I had first interviewed another coopérant who had seen his coopération period exceptionally shortened because of the nearing end of the whole conscription system, but that was a fairly short interview on the phone, which I decided not to use. Originally I had also planned to use interviews with some of the Finnish employees working together with the coopérants. However, this did not work out for several reasons: whether because the French coopérant was reluctant to give me the contact information of workmates with whom not everything went well; whether because the Finnish person I was interviewing looked a bit embarrassed and was reluctant to talk of a work relationship with only one French person, presumably because he did not want to be too personal in his comments; or because the Finnish employee, just looking for definite questions that would require only quick answers, did not construct a long ‘self-narrative’. In retrospect, I have to acknowledge that this is not very surprising: the Finnish employees working together with one of the coopérants could not actually refer to that 16-month period as a particularly significant time in their life, so their self-narratives were bound to be very different, since they had, after all, been ‘at home’ all the time. In one of the cases, two Finnish interviewees did say interesting things about their experience of their bicultural Finnish-French work interaction, but I could still feel
that my position was not really perceived as a ‘third’ one: I was a Frenchman, and thus
somehow perceived as ‘on the other side’, even though I did not feel like this prior to
the interviews and thought I could be quite neutrally in-between. My subject position as,
before all, a Frenchman asking Finns about their work interaction with some of my
compatriots was set during these interviews and I could not do anything about it.
Perhaps if I had conducted these interviews in Finnish, the feeling would have been
different, but it is now clear that I would never have felt so much complicity with the
Finnish respondents as I had with the French coopérants: this is not only a matter of
nationality, but also of language, generation and, perhaps most importantly, the fact that
I shared with them similar transnational experiences. It is thus not so surprising that in
the end, the little material I got from interviews with Finnish employees turned out not
to be usable for the present study.
So I ended up with only four self-narratives. Although, as I hope I will convince you, I
found a great deal of fascinating material for analysis in these four self-narratives, I still
had ideas on extending my study, especially to the repatriation of the coopérants. Sadly,
one of them stopped all contact with me as soon as he went back to France (thus also
preventing me to meet some of his workmates, whose contact information he had
promised to send me), another one went to work in East Asia almost immediately after
his Finnish experience, and a third one went on for some time in Finland: the
conjunction of these circumstances made it impossible for me to proceed with the
repatriation self-narratives.
I will now turn to how the interviews were structured – or, actually, largely unstructured
– and especially how my interviewing approach can be understood as focusing on

3.2.3 The narrative approach

We live, David Silverman (1997, 248) tells us, in what might be called an ‘interview
society’. Interviews have become part of our everyday life, a way through which we
have learned to make sense of our experiences. In social sciences broadly speaking, so-
called ‘qualitative’ interviews are now used more than ever; their function has switched
from a focus on the information that more knowledgeable citizens (so-called
‘informants’) would provide by being interviewed (see Alasuutari, 1998, 135), to a sort
of ‘romantic impulse’ (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, 29) seeking to, through ‘open-ended’, ‘in-depth’ interviews, allow the individual subject to express her/his genuine views in her/his genuine voice, and thus provide some sort of ‘experiential truth’. Atkinson and Silverman (1997) discuss this misleading idea and explain that ‘authenticity’ is also something that is performed: people ‘do’ authenticity. This clearly poses methodological problems to the well-intentioned researcher who would like to obtain some sort of access to the voices of her/his interviewees. It is especially when analyzing the transcribed interview material that one has to be aware of these problems. When I had to collect this interview material, I pretended to look for genuine, spontaneous narrative accounts of the coopérants’ experiences, as I will explain below. I will then try to explain how I have approached the analysis of the self-narratives (dealt with in 3.2.4 and 3.2.5).

The interviews started with what proved to be two extremely significant initial questions: why or how come they came as coopérants to Finland, on the one hand, and what other experiences abroad they had had before, on the other hand. It seemed that the way they would turn out to appreciate, or not, their experience, was significantly connected, on the one hand, to whether they were happy to have been assigned to Finland in the first place, and, on the other hand, to whether they had already had beforehand the opportunity to stay abroad for relatively long periods. The story per se was the major section of the interview (lasting, depending on the case, between 35 minutes and over one hour), as an answer to a very general request (‘I would like you to freely tell me the story of your work and life experience as a coopérant in Finland’) and the conversational development of it, with no further predetermined structure for this section. Interestingly, this question positioned them as coopérants rather than anything else. One of the reasons why I opted for this was that I did not want them to focus particularly on intercultural aspects, on the culture shock, in order to preserve the inductive element that I was looking for: intercultural issues would come up if the coopérants felt they needed to bring them up, not because of my will to make them come up. It turned out that they seemed reluctant to position themselves as coopérants, not thinking this was a particularly meaningful identity. Rather, for all of them, in the

14 See the interview guides (in French for the coopérants) in the appendices’ section.
15 Translated from the French: ‘Je voudrais que vous me racontiez librement votre expérience, de travail et de vie, en tant que coopérant en Finlande.’
way they freely\textsuperscript{16} constructed their story, intercultural aspects were presented very much as focal. Now, it is quite possible that somehow, they realized that the most interesting issue for research would be intercultural issues: a matter of ‘doing’ interesting issues – especially since they got to understand that I was not so interested in the potentially confidential specifics of their work.

After this long first section, which sometimes lasted for over half of the interview, some more specific questions were asked on aspects of work and life in the Finnish context that may have surprised the coopérants. The point there was not to verify hypotheses as to Finnish-French cultural differences, but rather to examine how some of the supposedly ‘objective’ differences might be problematized in the coopérant’s identity politics, with what sort of shade of meaning – e.g. positive, neutral, or pejorative – and general attitude towards cultural otherness and the possible learning one might get from it. In order to grasp a further understanding of the problematization of culture by the interviewee, I then asked him to react to some selfclaimed ‘Finnish stereotypes’. The interview ended with two concluding questions dealing with the interviewee’s view of ‘Finnish culture’ as a whole and his assessment of the learning process he experienced during his time as a coopérant. Once more, the purpose here was to examine what the coopérant made of these two topics, how he used them in relation to his discursive identity construction at that point. The interview remained very much open-ended and conversational throughout the later stages described above, with the possibility of digressions.

Each interview took place at the end of the interviewee’s coopération period, to get only his retrospective story of his experience, what he ended up finding most important after all, his assessment of his time in Finland as a whole and how he evolved as a result of it. The purpose here was not to determine how each coopérant evolved through the period, for instance how the ‘culture shock’ manifested itself - there could have been some access to such information only through a longitudinal study -, but rather to assess what critical events structured the recollection of it and how these had shaped the interviewee’s identity construction, at the time of the interview.

\textsuperscript{16} Although I do not believe that it would be possible to tell a story completely freely, if only because of their expectation of what the researcher might be expecting from them, I tried to influence them as little as possible: the conversation was a matter of following the course of their narrative, by reacting without directing too much the evolution of the speech, except in occasional cases of ‘re-directing’ back to the point that the interviewee was discussing before in case of longer and not very relevant digressions.
I am well aware that these narratives were produced in interaction with the researcher that I am and that their reflexivity was articulated in these interactive situations. Although I tried to create an atmosphere as informal as possible, through usually starting with a chat around a coffee and setting up the tutoiement (i.e. saying tu instead of vous) mode of relating thanks to the natural complicity bonding us, I have to acknowledge that their expectations of what my research should be must have influenced their answers a lot and presumably made them much more ‘neutral’ than they would be if discussing the same matters with one of their acquaintances. In any case, their narratives would have been different for each different interviewer, as they are bound to be rooted in the dialogic nature of enunciation, in that they depend greatly on the relation that might be created between interviewer and interviewee.

How to analyze these self-narratives, then? The main requirement I had for myself was to try and bear in mind that any type of interview-collected material will always itself be the product of a social interaction, a construction, a performance of sorts – in this case of a ‘free’ narrative, a performance of authenticity. I was aware of this when I first analyzed the interviews. I started my analysis by reading each transcribed self-narrative, as well as my related field notes, several times. Since I focused on the transcriptions of only four long interviews, I could afford to try and ‘own’ them well, in the sense that I would remember virtually all the events depicted, and have a good general grasp – although not necessarily formulated – of each interviewee’s identity construction connected to his experience as a coopérant. I did not use any specific qualitative research software, which would have put additional mediation and thus a sort of distance that would have been detrimental to my aim of ‘owning’ the material as much as possible.

My first analysis of the narratives was made for a paper titled Always a Different Story that I presented at a conference in the summer of 2002. When analyzing the empirical material for the first time, I noticed that there was, in the narratives, always quite a clear distinction between those events or circumstances on which the narrator would believe having no influence, which I first called ‘extrinsic factors’, and those attitudes and actions that the narrator seemed to put down to his agency alone - ‘intrinsic factors’. I organized the paper along the contrast between these extrinsic and intrinsic factors, realizing that there was always an interplay between the two. A related pattern that was
striking was how this interplay seemed to often cause a sort of circular causality: ‘vicious circles’ and ‘virtuous circles’, because (positive or negative) ‘extrinsic’ events provoke (positive or negative) attitudinal responses, and in turn these affect the (positive or negative) sensemaking of the outside world, which is understood in new terms, so that the original extrinsic events are not the same anymore – they will not be interpreted, and narrated, the same way. Through presenting that paper first at a conference, and then at various seminars, I got a great deal of interesting feedback suggesting new directions to move into. After additional reading, two distinct approaches emerged as potentially insightful and complementary ways to analyze the narratives as some sorts of constructions – in order to avoid, as much as possible, the romanticism of the ‘genuine voice’ view: a ‘performative’ analysis and a ‘spatial’ analysis. These two distinct approaches were focused on in such a way that I opted for not using – at least, not systematically - alternative ways of analysis - for instance, along the lines, suggested by Bruner (1987, 17) after the Russian formalists, of fabula (theme), sjuzet (discourse) and forma (genre). In addition, I did not seek to systematically analyze the rhetorical tropes used by the interviewees, because of my fear that this could lead my two studies away from their central focus. For instance, emphasizing too much the metaphorical use of spatial vocabulary could give the impression that, in the narratives, space is only rhetorics, whereas one of my points is that references to space are usually both metaphorical and literal: as Soja (1996) suggests, it is the combination of these two layers of imagined and real space that makes up for the spatial experience. However, even though I haven’t formally focused on the tropes, I have tried to point out the rhetorics of, for instance, irony or metaphor, when I felt this could be relevant to the analysis.

3.2.4 The performative analysis

I realized it could be a good idea to analyze what it is that my interviewees have been talking about when they were talking about national culture, or, more precisely, what they have made of it, what they, to quote Barinaga’s (2002, 180) use of Austin’s (1962) works, ‘have done with it’: what purpose they have used it for. My purpose has thus been to study the ‘performative view of culture’, which Barinaga (2002, 179-180) introduces in her Wittgensteinian (Wittgenstein, 1953) analysis of a multicultural group
of researchers collaborating on one project. However, beyond that, I have also gone further and studied not only how national culture has been used in language as a rhetorical tool would be, but also, more broadly, how the encounter with another culture has been made sense of in the interviewees’ narratives, for their identity construction. I have chosen to focus on national culture because it is the cultural layer that has proved to be significant in the narratives, which is no surprise since what makes the situations studied bicultural is the fact that they are encounters between French and Finnish people - and organizations.

This performative analysis, as presented in essay 3, is not linear, in the sense that it does not follow each narrative one by one. Rather, the treatment is thematic, organized according to the various ways in which the other national culture is made use of: whether as a scapegoat, as representing a potential for complementarity, as a source of humour, as a reflexive pointer to one’s own culture, or as an occasion for new ways of self-sensemaking and changing.

3.2.5 The spatial analysis

As explained in 2.5, the idea of a spatial analysis of the narratives came from a variety of inspirations. Bruner’s (1987) observation of the importance of the language of ‘place’ in self-narratives was one of the most significant ones, as was the common problematization of identity with the help of spatial metaphors that is found in postcolonial and border studies (e.g. Bhabha, 1994; Anzaldúa, 1987; Rosaldo, 1989; Pratt, 1992). I also was strongly encouraged to try and adopt a more spatial approach by some of my colleagues, and most significantly my supervisors. Regard’s (2002) article on the connection between autobiography and geography and various works dealing with narratives of displacement from the cultural geography literature (e.g. Robertson et al., 1994) constituted more comprehensive bases for a possible theorizing of a spatial representation of self-narrative. But I would never have gone for it if the self-narratives themselves had not proved fertile ground for such a focus on ‘spatial’ issues.

Each self-narrative relied heavily on spatial vocabulary, sometimes used metaphorically, sometimes literally, but most of the time both at once. Especially, Bruner’s (1987) noticed dichotomy between ‘home’ and ‘the real world’ became one between ‘home’ in the sense of ‘the home country’ and ‘Finland’ acting as ‘the foreign
country’. However, the interviewees did not all come from the same place, did not all have the same ‘home’. Their initial positioning, dependent on their previous experiences as well as their own understanding of how come they came to Finland as coopérants, was thus the first aspect that was subject to my spatial analysis: what was the original place from which the narrative started. Then, using Relph’s framework describing the various feelings of ‘insideness’ or ‘outsideness’ towards places became interesting, since each narrator was supposed to be made an outsider by his living in a foreign place.

The third aspect that I systematically tried to analyze was the ‘work space’ of each narrator as sketched by him in the narrative: a hybrid environment in which people become themselves more hybrid or a compartmentalized whole leaving everyone in isolated places, for instance. In my analysis, I tried to enhance the ‘spatial flavour’ by using spatial metaphors: playing on the words, surely, but after all the material I based the analysis on is also ‘words’, and the use of spatial vocabulary has such a value of representation in everyday discourse that it is not so easy to tell what is purely metaphorical from what is grounded in ‘reality’. We know from Lefebvre (1991) that the experience of space is the product of both perceptions and conceptions of it, and thus it can be understood as a meaningless endeavour to seek to tell a ‘real space’ apart from a ‘conceived space’, at least when discussing how people experience space.

The final step in this fairly experimental spatial analysis has been to try and map the narrative practices of the (third) space that were expressed in the interviewees’ accounts. I am not totally satisfied with the results, as these mappings suffer from a lack of dynamics. They may account fairly well for the territories involved, but not so much for the trajectories expressed in the self-narratives: for instance, how one narrator has constructed his story as a struggle to get from the wrong place to his real place. While the language of space can provide insight, it does not mean that what it expresses can be visualized so easily.
4. Summaries of the essays

This thesis consists of four autonomous essays. Each has been, in a previous form and under another title, presented at one international conference, leading to feedback and further editing. The first essay is at present the only of the four that has been published (except for previous versions of the other three in conference proceedings), in the anthology *Reflecting Diversity – Viewpoints from Scandinavia*.

4.1 Essay 1: The Bicultural Interaction as a Distinctive Phenomenon – A Learning Implication

A significant part of the literature on intercultural and cross-cultural matters in business and management aims to introduce or confirm generalizable frameworks or universal dimensions along which cultures worldwide can be compared and contrasted. This claim for universality seems to be driven by a need to simplify a global reality that is too complex to be addressed as such. Business stakes, which call for ready-to-use tools, are certainly not foreign to such a simplification, which can be criticized on many grounds.

In this conceptual paper, I reflect on the nature of the bicultural interaction, which I believe is a privileged situation to study: first, bicultural interactions are increasingly frequent in the globalized business environment (through mergers, alliances, joint-ventures, etc.) and second, they are situations in which intercultural complexity is minimized, insofar as they theoretically involve only two cultures.

I argue that ‘universal dimensions’ should not be taken as pre-existent to the bicultural interactions, but that rather, fields of relevance in intercultural studies are revealed by these bicultural interactions themselves and that they are specific to these. Indeed, in situations of bicultural interaction, each culture will tend to define itself – at least in people’s perceptions – relatively to the other, the most salient aspects being those of most conspicuous opposition. This will create a situation of ‘absolute relativity’, which will be quite disconnected from the simplified accounts of cultural realities that universal dimensions are supposed to provide us with.

Among the many implications of this relative nature of the bicultural interaction, let me mention its ‘intransitivity’: if the outcome of the interaction between cultures A and B is
similar to that of the interaction between cultures A and C in a given field, there is no deducing that no intercultural conflict will arise between cultures B and C in that field. Rather, this possible conflict may reveal another interesting category of analysis, one that may be specific to the B-C interaction (e.g. with A, B and C being French, Finnish and Swedish cultures, looking at the three bicultural dynamics in work meeting situations).

Another implication is that there may be fields of analysis in which considering larger cultural groups (such as introducing a Nordic-Latin dichotomy in Europe) may be relevant, in that the bicultural interactions would tend to reveal similar outcomes with different subcultures from these larger groups (e.g. similar outcomes in Danish-Spanish or Finnish-French interactions as to attitudes toward time), without meaning uniformity within these groups, even regarding the fields of analysis at stake (e.g. conflicting Spanish vs. French attitudes towards time).

This idea of relativity suggests that the bicultural interaction, while enabling the deeper discovery of another culture, may chiefly be a great opportunity to learn about one’s own cultural values. Indeed, learning from the other culture also will provide tools for understanding oneself even better, that is, as if from the outside, which will, in turn, allow for better cross-cultural understanding abilities, etc... in a never-ending back and forth process somewhat reminiscent of the hermeneutic spiral: at each step, one’s understanding of either culture is illuminated by the better-suited new frames of analysis provided by the progress in understanding that has occurred during the previous steps. This process involving what Gadamer describes as ‘fusions of horizons’ obviously makes one change as a person, as one’s ‘horizon’ is consistently transformed and illuminated by another ‘horizon’. However, the potentially negative bicultural dynamics found in organizations, added to a stressful business environment, may prevent the person from taking advantage of this opportunity to learn and change.

4.2 Essay 2: Sensemaking in the Third Space – Individual Experiences of Bicultural Interactions in Organizations from a Dialogic Perspective

The founding statement of this essay is that individuals who are involved in bicultural work interactions in organizations are given an opportunity of making sense of their identity in relation to a cultural otherness. The nature of the bicultural experience can be
seen as dialogic, in that one’s cultural identity is revealed through the contact with another cultural identity – and affected by this encounter. As in any dialogic relation in the Bakhtinian sense, there is a third element, the in-between, the relation itself: in Bakhtin’s terminology, ‘thirdness’. Further, the bicultural interaction can be understood as setting up what Bhabha calls a ‘third space’, a dialogic space in which it is possible to translate and negotiate meanings, thanks to thirdness. This space is characterized by hybridity, and the individuals who evolve in it can be understood as becoming themselves hybridized, in that their behaviour is affected by the transculturation process.

However, in the bicultural interaction, there can be an addressivity gap: because of the lack of intimate understanding of the other culture, the relationship may suffer from the distorting combination of projected similarity and necessary stereotyping. This may be worsened by the fact that the bicultural situation is often not wanted by most people involved, who may see the encounter with otherness as bringing about more uncertainty, new forms of power relationships, and more pressure into a work environment in which they may already feel like running out of time.

In a bicultural organization, with two clear-cut cultural groups, the organization itself is what legitimates the situation and creates the relationship between the two groups. The management of such an organization would thus be expected to bring about thirdness, as it must seek to be the unifying element and deal with cultural antagonisms that are often translated into dialectical tensions. But while it is true that there are things that can be done at the collective level in order to favour thirdness, in the final analysis each individual has her/his own experience of the bicultural interaction, and whether thirdness turns out to be satisfactory is very much a matter of personal attitude and sensemaking on her/his part. To do justice to the collective – individual dynamics, one has to acknowledge that personal attitudes and sensemaking are strongly affected by collective behaviour and sensemaking and in turn strongly affect them.

Whether the individuals involved in bicultural interactions take advantage of the sensemaking opportunities provided in the third space comes down to their individual practices of that space. They may feel that they are more involved in a conflictual situation and thus be more divisive, or on the contrary they may recognize the fruitfulness of the hybrid(izing) third space and choose to enjoy dwelling and moving in
that in-between. Beyond the promise of more efficient cooperation between the two cultural groups, what is at stake, for the people who are involved in bicultural interactions in organizations, is the possibility to switch from the alienating frustrations of the confrontational situation to the emancipatory understanding and redefinition of oneself and the other.

4.3 Essay 3: National Culture and Sensemaking in Four Young French Expatriate Experiences in Finland

In much of the academic literature dealing with cross-cultural management and expatriation, culture tends to be approached from the start as a problem, a barrier to overcome; this problem has to be managed, and, at the individual level, the foreign culture should be adjusted to, after a process usually considered as involving a ‘culture shock’. In this paper, the encounter with another culture, in the ambiguity it brings about, is chiefly seen as providing ‘occasions for sensemaking’, to use Weick’s terminology. The aim is to examine how national culture is made sense of and performatively used in the self-narratives of four young French expatriates. Is it merely understood as a problem, a barrier to overcome? Or is it presented, depending on the context, as something else, in the form of which it can be ‘used’ for some purpose in the narrator’s identity construction? And, in turn, how is this identity construction – and thus, the identity itself - affected by the sensemaking of this encounter with otherness?

The first step of the analysis has consisted in separating the aspects that were presented in the narratives as ‘extrinsic’ (lying in the context, circumstances or outside events that just emerged at some point) from those that appeared to be ‘intrinsic’ (supposed to come from the narrator himself and especially his general attitude, both as described by him in the narrative and as displayed in his way of narrating). Interestingly, at the end of the day, extrinsic and intrinsic aspects only have a meaning in relation to each other: extrinsic events provoke attitudinal responses, and in turn these affect the sensemaking of the outside world, which is understood in new terms, so that the original extrinsic events are not the same anymore – they will not be interpreted, and narrated, the same way. It is thus possible to identify vicious circles (characterized by negative extrinsic and intrinsic aspects affecting each other) and virtuous circles (characterized by positive dynamics between extrinsic and intrinsic aspects). ‘National culture’ seems to be an
aspect of the environment that is actually both extrinsic and intrinsic, in that, while the four interviewees more or less agreed on the striking differences between Finnish and French (especially organizational) features, they all had, at the same time, different ways of making sense and ‘use’ of them.

The other culture has thus taken on the role of an ideal scapegoat on which to blame frustrations; it has also been considered as introducing cultural differences pregnant with a potential for complementarity; it has been the basis of an inspiration for humour; a pointer to one’s own cultural belonging; or, more generally, but also more deeply, an occasion for new self-sensemaking and changing. These findings suggest that, while national culture may be, in line with the typical international business approach, sometimes seen as a problem and thus easily used as a scapegoat, there are many other alternative – and more positive - ways of making sense and use of it: the intercultural encounter in organizations could thus be problematized as an opportunity instead of remaining, as in much of the business literature at present, merely a threat.

4.4 Essay 4: Narrative Practices of the Third Space – Insideness, Outsideness and Hybridity in Four Bicultural Work Experiences

The main theoretical aim of this paper is to try and somewhat bridge two spatial perspectives on identity construction – that of postcolonial cultural studies and that of phenomenological geographies – by studying narratives told by displaced expatriates from a sort of ‘geo-cultural’ perspective, a perspective which could be imported into those streams of organization theory that deal with mobile, ‘boundary-crossing’ individuals. A central contention here is that a spatial problematization of the narrative identity construction process of individuals may be fruitful in order to understand it better. In this paper, self-narratives from young French expatriates in Finland are studied and analyzed from a spatial perspective, using a transdisciplinary approach that draws on both geography and cultural studies. Much of what they are doing while telling the story of their working and living experience in Finland consists in constructing their identity by positioning it within discursive spaces. The way they do so is much influenced by the highly hybrid, bicultural environment in which they are immersed. This meeting space, which is here referred to as ‘third space’, provides them with ‘occasions for sensemaking’ and allows them to see and construct their identity in
a new light, reflexively. The aim is to examine what sorts of spaces the young expatriates create for themselves – one confronting with the existing foreign order or one seeking to integrate it, for instance - by making sense of their experience in their self-narratives, thereby constructing their identity.

The distinction between space and place, and the relationship between place and identity, as theorized in phenomenological geography, are discussed, in particular with regards to feelings of insideness and outsideness. Then, works from postcolonial cultural studies are used as a basis for developing an understanding of space(s) and place(s) in relation to narratives. The affinity, but also the complementarity between the two approaches are underlined; it is thus possible to combine them for a spatial analysis of the self-narratives.

Each self-narrative is analyzed independently as sketching individual ‘narrative practices of the third space’. The first narrator, whom is referred to as Antoine, is found to have experienced his expatriation as being out of place, between the centre where he should belong and the periphery where he has been sent to. Bruno, the second expatriate, has been exploring the third space and other foreign spaces a great deal, and as a result seems somewhat lost in space, a feeling he does not find unpleasant. The third interviewee, Cyril, has taken advantage of his experience as a pointer to the place where he comes from, and, to a large extent, where he feels he belongs. Finally, David, the fourth respondent, has managed to find a good balance between feeling at home in the foreign place and yet evolving by exploring new spaces.

Before concluding the paper, some ‘third places’, i.e. arenas favouring negotiation and translation processes likely to provide occasions for sensemaking, are presented: the workplaces of at least three of the narrators; institutions that are especially meant for expatriates, whether official embassy-related organizations or other independent organizations, more international in their scope; and, not so anecdotally, the Finnish sauna, the social place where people are all equal, have nothing to hide and thus speak frankly and calmly in a spirit of togetherness.

From the four self-narratives presented here, one can conclude that being in a well-defined place or in some ambivalent space is connected to whether the identity is experienced and understood as fixed or evolving, whether it is a matter of ‘being’ or ‘becoming’. The importance of third places is thus central, since they are supposed to
provide an opportunity to pass from a place to a space. The bicultural workplace should be such a third place, allowing for the negotiation of acceptable meanings and solutions, as well as offering enhanced individual and collective occasions for sensemaking, thanks to which people may create new spaces, or find their place in a third space.
5. Discussion and implications

I will now have some discussion as to how this study connects and contributes to the disciplines it draws on, and as to what its implications for ‘the real world’ may be.

5.1 Main contributions

The first theoretical contribution in this thesis lies in its new way of accounting for the dynamics of bicultural interaction in organizations. This different approach addresses the gap caused by a cross-cultural management mainstream that is overly focused on cross-cultural comparison (e.g. Hofstede, 1980; 1991; Trompenaars, 1993) and not enough on interaction (with some notable exceptions, such as Holden, 2002). A founding idea behind this approach is that the bicultural interaction is distinctive because of the absolute relativity it gives birth to, an environment that becomes hybrid and that I have labelled the ‘third space’.

Methodologically speaking, this thesis has been a site for some experimenting. The narrative interviews have been conducted with an inductive underlying spirit. It has been a matter of trying to grasp what the young expatriates themselves had to say about their experiences, with as little leading influence as possible; it was believed they would then perhaps come up with views that may be alternatives to the ordered / ordering discourses found in the mainstream international business literature. However, the main methodological contributions lie in the ways in which the empirical material was analyzed: since the expatriates’ accounts were bound to be some kind of construction, the analysis needed to be made from angles that would point to how the self-narratives construct reality. There were two such angles: a ‘performative’ one and a ‘spatial’ one. The performative approach consisted in following over a whole essay Barinaga’s (2002, 179) suggestion that ‘a performative view of culture’ could be a fruitful way to look at intercultural dynamics. The spatial approach was especially inspired by Regard’s (2002) theorizing of the connection between ‘autobiography and geography’, although there were many other influences. These two approaches certainly constitute novel ways of systematically analyzing self-narratives in organization studies and geography.
Another significant contribution in this thesis is a critical one: the suggestion that seeing, as it is common in international business studies and cross-cultural management, differences in (national) culture chiefly as problems to be solved may leave out alternative views and contribute to self-fulfilling prophecies. The idea here is that if cultural differences are posited from the start as a problem, then it makes it easy for people to blame things that do not work on them: they become a sort of scapegoat. By adopting only a problem-solving approach, many studies are guilty of perpetuating a self-fulfilling prophecy, thus missing out on other potential opportunities provided by cultural differences. The alternative view of ‘value in diversity’, while in theory more promising, also tends to be treated as merely another hypothesis to test, while remaining alienated from yet other possible alternative views. Hence the need for more inductive studies of perceptions of cultural differences in organizations.

The most important empirical findings from essay 3 are the alternative uses that the young expatriates made of national culture; they address the critical statement directed towards the mainstream international business treatment of cultural differences. These alternative uses include seeing in the encounter with another national culture a possible source of humour, a pointer to one’s own identity, or an occasion for new self-sensemaking and changing. Although the list is certainly not exhaustive, these alternative uses constitute the main contribution of that essay. As for the central contribution to be found in essay 4, it is the way in which the spatial practices of the young expatriates involved in the third space are described: their politics of escape or stabilization, their exploration of space or search for place, their emancipation from their origin or their return to home as only horizon. This allows for reaching an understanding of how people make sense of their experiences in connection to how fixed they understand or want their identities to be. There is thus a sort of coherence between the meaningful spaces they create for themselves to dwell in and the way they conceive of their inner space. In addition to the methodological experiment conducted in this paper, this finding is a significant contribution.

5.2 The trial: addressing some possible critiques

A trial has been going on in my head since the doctoral process started, the voices of my potential contradictors have been haunting me, the same questions have been asked all
the time; I have had to find answers that would convince the harshest of my critics – ultimately, me. Many of the questions included here were more or less explicitly asked by some of the reviewers of my work (including the pre-examiners); I have incorporated them in this discussion going on in my head as they have also become my obsessional interrogations. I will now try to answer some of the most important questions that I have been asked.

Isn’t it all about you, after all? Why don’t you write an autobiography, or do real anthropological work?

In a way, yes, this doctoral thesis is about me, perhaps more so than other doctoral theses – yet I suppose such a long-term individual work always has to be somehow also about its author. However, while I have been studying experiences of individuals whom I relate to, I have analyzed them with some distance thanks to the mediation of my performative and spatial approaches. Although I have expressed, in this thesis summary, how personal this work has been for me, the essays themselves do not stress that so much. And I am not enough of an exhibitionist to indulge in more navel-gazing writing exercises.

How is that geographical work?

Geography is not about physical space in a restrictive sense. Much of human geography is concerned with the human experience of space and place. Following Lefebvre (1991), many geographers see space as the product of complex dynamics involving physical, social and mental layers. Especially, radical geographers, whose endeavour is to a large extent political, are interested in ways in which hybrid, in-between spaces can be opened up for people to explore them and subvert the dominant order. I certainly share these concerns and this problematization. I have to acknowledge that this is not made explicit in essay 1 and essay 3, where I feel that too much of an emphasis on a spatial perspective would make the articulation of the performative approach more complex than it needs to be.

What would the ‘organizational geography’ discipline look like and how would it relate to organization studies?

I have described it above as ‘an academic space in which the more humanistic corporate geographers would meet the more spatial-minded organization researchers and work with them, translating each other’s perspectives in the process’. The more I think about
this academic space, the more I get to understand that it is perhaps better if it remains imaginary and does not become institutionalized. This is basically the academic space I would like to dwell in and explore, and from which it would be possible to contribute not only to organization studies through a spatial perspective applied to organization(s), but also to human geography through an organizational perspective applied to spatial issues that are usually dealt with at the societal level - such as in e.g. Lefebvre’s (1991) visions of *The Production of Space*. If it were to become an academic discipline in its own right, it would become a ‘place’ with its well-defined meanings, conventions and rules; it would thus probably lose some of its potential as a flexible space of translation between disciplines. However, I believe that at present, the most suitable disciplinary place from which such ‘organizational geography’ work can be conducted remains corporate geography, where it is thus possible for me to feel at home.

**What could postcolonial theory have to do with French expatriates in Finland?**

Many of the issues that are dealt with in postcolonial and border studies could be applied to any sort of migrants or transnational people. As Stuart Hall puts it, even people who would be generally considered as most favoured in our Western societies may feel ‘de-centred’ nowadays, and as expatriates, they could live ‘diaspora’ types of experiences.

**Why do you criticize the approaches from Hofstede and others in cross-cultural management? They don’t have the same perspective anyway.**

My starting point is a criticism of the field of cross-cultural management – and more broadly how international business tends to deal with the concept of ‘national culture’ -, because I started by studying it, and because it addresses a subject matter that I am much interested in, i.e. intercultural issues in organizations. I can only be dissatisfied when I see the extreme overreliance on Hofstede’s work, which has so many obvious flaws, and generally speaking the underlying essentialist view of culture found in international business studies.

**Isn’t the philosophical discussion to be found in the ‘journeys in bicultural interactions and expatriation’ section too much ‘on the surface’?**

I have to acknowledge that the second chapter of the present thesis does not go as deep as a philosopher would like regarding the theoretical foundations of the study. For my defense, I have to remind the reader that my purpose there was mostly to describe the
process of how my perspective evolved, with the help of which theoretical frameworks. Presenting each of these frameworks in order to do justice to the insight they provide in their complexity would certainly require several books only devoted to that endeavour. I have tried to examine the concepts that are central to this study – not least of which the ‘third space’ - more in depth than other approaches that, while they did matter in the research process, mostly did so on the way to more dynamic renderings of bicultural interactions – such as Gadamer’s and Ricoeur’s hermeneutics.

Aren’t there significant ontological and epistemological tensions between the different theories presented?

From one stage to the other in the process, there are surely significant ontological and epistemological tensions (which precisely shows that my perspective evolved during this process), but on the other hand I have tried to underline what type of link there can be from one to the other. For instance, Bakhtinian dialogism can be seen as more dynamic than Gadamerian hermeneutics, yet there certainly are affinities between these two perspectives, as both involve forms of ‘dialogue’ at their core. Regarding the discussion about the third space, although I would not argue that all authors mentioned have exactly the same stance, I still see the likes of Lefebvre, Soja, Bhabha, Certeau and Stuart Hall as belonging to a family of authors who share a general sympathy for poststructuralist thinking without being overly deterministic, since they also share an interest in individual practices and actions as possible means of resistance and subversion.

Why focus only on ‘bicultural’ interactions rather than on the multicultural environments in which all organizations are nowadays involved?

I am well aware of the fact that virtually any work environment nowadays is multicultural in some way or another – and usually in more ways than one – but my contention is precisely that, as soon as the situation is perceived to be ‘bicultural’, with two clear-cut social groups that are each supposed to share ‘a culture’ due to some form of belonging (a sense of ‘national identity’ remaining one of the most significant of these forms), the multicultural dimensions become secondary due to the straight comparison or opposition between the two groups. My argument is that the notion of ‘national culture’ actually comes into being in a particularly salient way in these bi(national)cultural situations because of the straight opposition, while it can become
virtually insignificant in a more multicultural group (meaning, with people from many nations) in which it is much easier for each individual to represent only her/himself. Because of this peculiarity that characterizes bicultural interactions, I have felt it could be particularly fruitful to focus on studying these types of situations.

Only four interviews of young expatriates who are not really expatriates? Is that a joke?

Having a fairly limited amount of qualitative material has its pros: it makes it possible to have a better general recollection of the narratives at all times, to account for them in more details and include the voices of the respondents more faithfully. It also provides an opportunity to examine more mundane aspects that are likely to be left out otherwise. In addition, focusing on only four self-narratives instead of being weighed down by a massive amount of data has allowed me to concentrate more on the different ways I could conduct the analysis, and thus to open up a space for original – and somewhat experimental - treatments of the narratives. As for the coopérants not being exactly ‘real’ expatriates – as they were theoretically sent abroad by France -, I believe that it is precisely what makes their experiences potentially different and thus mind-opening, since they find themselves in a sort of in-between situation: the beginning of their career, yet not exactly part of it. That is one of the dimensions that have made them constitute a very specific and particularly interesting laboratory for research in the present study.

So the research did not go at all as planned, since the Finnish workmates of the French expatriates were not included in the analysis. Isn’t it a failure?

It did not go exactly as planned, and it may be, in some respect, a failure, but there is a lot to learn from failures and this has been, if anything, a very telling one. I could seemingly not be totally accepted as a ‘third’, neutral person by the few Finns I interviewed. What it shows is that it is not easy to be such a third person, and that in order to be one, you should probably not be identified as belonging to one of the two groups involved – which happened in my case because of my nationality. And that brings me back down to the harsh reality: one can choose to be in-between, but it does not mean that one will be seen as being in-between by others. This points to the fact that it is not easy to spend one’s time in the in-between space, since what one may ultimately achieve is an alienation from both sides, leading to a feeling of uprootedness,
of homelessness: a feeling ‘out of place’, which many postcolonial writers (e.g. Said, 1999) and humanistic geographers (e.g. Godkin, 1980) have pointed out. It does not mean, however, that it is doomed to failure, or that it is not worth trying.

5.3 Implications

What are then the implications of this study for the ‘real world”? By that expression, I mean not only, as would perhaps be commonsensically expected, the professional facts of working life and management, but also, more broadly, the individuals themselves, who remain my central focus.

5.3.1 Implications for individuals and careers

As I have written throughout this thesis, my main interest in bicultural interactions in organizations has been the extent to which they can represent opportunities for a possible individual emancipation from institutionalized discourses of, for instance, work in organizations, expatriation, career or, more broadly speaking, culture. What I find interesting in the cases studied here is that such an ‘ordered’ format as coopération – insofar as it is connected to the national service, one of the most inflexible systems one could initially imagine - can provide such opportunities, because it is disconnected from another dominant force in society – indeed probably the ruling one, that of international companies. Ironically, coopération, instead of homogenizing, has always let coopérants live original, unlikely experiences. I can only support the format named volontariat, which is similar to coopération and even has some additional liberty into it.

However, I am well aware that this is a very special case in which one very centralized national administration can still somehow take precedence over the basic interests of companies – and in fact it could be viewed as mostly adapting to these interests. The future is not going to provide more of these strange, hybrid formats, so it is going to be up to individuals to construct these alternative experiences of displacement out of the more ordered expatriation programs. Good luck to them.

It has been my endeavour to point to deviant, strange experiences as ones to be sought for, to claim, with Mary Catherine Bateson, that ‘zigzag’ career experiences should be favoured and that 'the stories of shifting identities and interrupted paths, [...] the triumphs of adaptation’ (Bateson, 1994, 83), should be celebrated. I can only hope that
more people choose to resist the dominant discourse demanding that CVs should show a clear and coherent progression instead of many ‘new beginnings and new learning’ (ibid., 82).

5.3.2 Implications for management

In an initial version of essay 2, I more or less accidentally presented thirdness as something one could make a consultancy business out of: after a rather descriptive development, my paper did take on a more prescriptive tone, inviting professional third parties to come in. In a way, mediators or facilitators specializing in bringing thirdness back in conflictual bicultural cases could be needed. But managers themselves should act as ‘brokers’ (see e.g. Wenger, 1998, 109), taking up a neutral position between the two subgroups. However, establishing oneself as a real third person – that is, perceived by both sides as such – is not an easy task, as my unfortunate experience regarding Finnish interviewees has contributed to show. I would thus rather limit the role of management to a coordination that goes, to some extent, with the flow imposed by the hybridizing third space. This role remains, however, crucial, as it should help to somewhat mitigate the negative dynamics of vicious circles and to proactively favour the virtuous processes that the third space can provide.

I have pointed out several times that my focus is individuals, rather than management. However, the idea of alternative uses of national culture and cultural differences clearly entails implications for management. In a way, the international business discipline has all interest in institutionalizing views of the world that are contradictory or different from those that have already been institutionalized. If there are narratives that produce different discourses about national culture or expatriation, then the logic is that the dominant order should appropriate these alternative narratives and turn them into ordered and ordering discourses. Companies could especially try to organize seminars where people could talk about cultural differences and make fun of each other’s cultural values, behaviours, etc., with some third person, presented as an outside ‘expert’, playing the role of the moderator. This would present the advantages to provide an institutional legitimation that would prevent things from going out of control, while presumably having a positive impact on the motivation to work interculturally. In fact, even a discourse of ‘emancipation’ could be used by management, in these
schizophrenic times, as something that could motivate expatriates. It would then be up to people to find new ways to resist and subvert these new ordering discourses...

5.4 Suggestions for further research

A first avenue for further research that I would suggest is in seeking to provide thirdness by positioning oneself as ‘the third’ in bicultural situations where one would be perceived to be in a neutral position – especially, from a third nationality, and speaking either both languages perfectly or a mediation language with both sides. The narrative material could then be analyzed according to the principles of the ‘storytelling organization’ (see Boje, 1995) in order to do justice to the plurality of viewpoints and their associated stories.

I would also encourage more performative analyses, characterized by an inductive approach that seeks to open up alternative discursive spaces. Such analyses would have the potential to expose some of the self-fulfilling prophecies that are conveyed by the overwhelming domination of quantitative studies in international business. For this purpose, there is a need to find open-minded individuals who may come to use central notions (about which there is a certain, privileged, dominant view, like ‘national culture’ in my study) in new, alternative ways; yet one has to be careful not to impose too deviant subject positions on these individuals by being too eager to see the exceptional (cf. Wray-Bliss, 2003), which sometimes involves walking on a fine line.

While there is more and more theorizing of space in connection to organization, there are as yet not so many clear examples of empirical application. We need more spatial analyses of identity construction in organizations, but also, more broadly, of organizational / organizing processes. An idea, for instance, is to look, within one formal organization, at the different actors’ narrative spatial practices, and what kind of hybrid space may emerge as a result. Studying the potentially turbulent spaces set up by relatively short-term international projects could be interesting too. The new spatial perspectives on organization are pregnant with many promises of spaces to open up and explore.
References


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Research Project
French Coopérants in Finland
(Interview Guide for the coopérants in French)

Date, heure:
Lieu:

Questions préliminaires

• Nom de l’interviewé(e):
• Sexe:
• Nationalité:
• Langues:
• Formation:
• Autres expériences personnelles dans un milieu étranger / international:
• Autres expériences professionnelles (dont: dans un milieu étranger / international):
• Raison(s) du choix – si c’est un choix - de la Finlande:
• Souhaitez-vous avoir une carrière très internationale?

Question générale

Je voudrais que vous me racontiez librement votre expérience, de travail et de vie, en tant que Coopérant en Finlande ; après quoi je vous poserai des questions plus précises sur des aspects plus spécifiques...

Questions plus spécifiques

Avez-vous, au cours de cette expérience, été surpris par les aspects suivants, et si oui, en quoi?
• Relations avec vos supérieurs? Avec vos collaborateurs?
• Bureaucratie, procédures, règles et leur respect?
• Contrôle?
• Organisation du temps, régularité / flexibilité (durée de la journée de travail, etc.)?
• Prise de décision?
• Réunions?
• Interactions / socialisation au travail (e.g. déjeuners, etc.)?
• Autonomie vs. travail en groupe?
• Rapport au client / consommateur?
• Déontologie / sens moral?
• Communication (formalité, politesse, humour, quantité de communication, usage de certaines langues)?
Réactions à des phénomènes généralement admis comme ‘typiquement finlandais’

- Egalité des sexes
- Le consensus finlandais
- Le *sisu* – détermination, résistance, entêtement
- L’impolitesse
- La lenteur
- Le silence
- La consommation d’alcool

Questions de conclusion

- Que pensez-vous de la culture finlandaise au travers de cette expérience? Quelles différences culturelles ont été les plus problématiques? Les plus enrichissantes?
- Qu’avez-vous appris de particulièrement nouveau dans cette expérience? En quoi avez-vous changé? Sur un plan professionnel? Sur un plan personnel?
- Autres commentaires...

Merci!
Research Project

French Coopérants in Finland

(Interview Guide)

Date, time:
Place:

Preliminary questions

• Name of the interviewee:
• Sex:
• Nationality:
• Languages:
• Education:
• Other personal experiences in foreign / international settings:
• Other professional experiences (including: in foreign / international settings):
• Do you see your career as very international?

General question

I would like you to tell me about your experience of working with a French coopérant as freely as possible. I will then ask you some more precise questions on more specific aspects.

More specific questions

Have you, during your experience of working with a French Coopérant, been surprised by the following aspects, and, if so, how?
• Relationships between the Coopérant and superiors? Subordinates?
• Attitude toward rules and procedures? Attitude toward control?
• Attitude toward time, reliability / flexibility (working-day length, etc.)?
• Attitude toward decision-making? Attitude in meetings?
• Attitude toward interactions / socialisation at work (e.g. lunches)?
• Attitude toward autonomy vs. teamwork?
• Relationship to the client / consumer?
• Moral / ethical sense?
• Communication (formality, politeness, humour, quantity of communication, usage of certain languages)?
Reactions to phenomena that would be generally understood as ‘typically French’

- *Galanterie* / Cross-gender courtesy
- Arrogance
- ‘Contradiction spirit’
- Lack of organisation / reliability
- Dishonesty
- *Art de vivre*

**Concluding questions**

- What do you think of French culture through your working experience? What cultural differences have been most problematic? Most enriching?
- What have you learnt in this experience? Professionally? Personally?
- Other comments...

Thanks very much!
Interview Ethics Protocols

Bonjour, je m’appelle Martin Fougère et je suis chercheur à l’école de commerce suédophone de Helsinki (Hanken), sur le projet intitulé: *French Coopérants in Finland*. Si vous avez des questions sur ce projet, vous pouvez me contacter par e-mail à l’adresse martin.fougere@shh.fi ou par téléphone au 0407220906.
Je vous remercie de bien vouloir participer à ce projet. Avant de commencer l’interview, je voudrais vous rassurer sur le fait qu’en tant que participant à ce projet vous avez certains droits.
D’abord, votre participation est totalement volontaire.
Vous êtes libre de refuser de répondre à toute question à tout moment.
Vous êtes libre de vous retirer de l’interview à tout moment.
Cette interview restera strictement confidentielle.
Certains extraits de cette interview peuvent être inclus dans le rapport final du projet, mais votre nom ou les caractéristiques vous identifiant ne figureront pas dans ce rapport.
Je vous serais particulièrement reconnaissant si vous pouviez signer ce formulaire pour confirmer que vous avez bien lu son contenu.

A: le:

Je désire recevoir un rapport sur le projet de recherche (entourez la réponse):

Oui

Non

Si vous désirez recevoir un rapport, veuillez donner votre adresse ci-dessous:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Martin Fougère, Hanken

Research Project
French Coopérants in Finland
Interview Ethics Protocol

Date, time:
Place:

Hello, my name is Martin Fougère. I am a researcher at the Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration (Hanken), on the project entitled: French Coopérants in Finland. Should you have any questions on the project, you can contact me via e-mail (martin.fougere@shh.fi) or by phone (0407220906).

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. Just before we start the interview, I would like to reassure you that as a participant in this project you have several very definite rights.

First, your participation is entirely voluntary.
You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time.
You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time.
This interview will be kept strictly confidential.
Excerpts of this interview may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be included in this report.
I would be grateful if you would sign this form to show that you have read its contents.

Place: date:

Please send me a report on the results of this research project. (circle one)

YES
NO

If you wish to receive a report, please write your address below:

________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________


