

## **Oscar Hemer**

Writing Ethnography:

*The ethnography of literary writing, or a writer's approach to anthropology*

There is surprisingly little research done on *writing*, as a practice, or method. In academia, the form of presentation is completely subordinated the content and constrained by strict formalia. "Good writing" is even met with suspicion in some of the social sciences. In Literary studies, (literary) writing is studied as text, and analyzed as aesthetics or poetics, in relation to other artefacts – but rarely in relation to processes of social and cultural change.

In my artistic research project *Writing Transition : Fiction and Truth in South Africa and Argentina*, I have done a comparative exploration of fiction's role in the transitional processes of the two countries, with a focus on the dealing with memories of a traumatic near-past.

One of the premises for the investigation has been to adopt the perspective of the author, rather than that of the academic researcher. Fifteen writers are interviewed extensively; more than "informants", they are participants in a collaborative venture. But what does the writer's perspective imply?

Attempting, in praxis, to answer the question of fiction's truth confronted me with the dilemma of finding a *single* form that may, in some sense, be congenial with the content of the investigation.

In the process I rediscovered a tradition of writing and reflection on writing, in the barren borderland between Literature and Ethnography. My experimental compromise inscribes itself in that tradition: a basically discursive (ethnographic) text that borders on both journalism and literature, incorporating reportage, essay and memoir.

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