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## Witnessing: Testimony of Linguistic Memory. The case of Victor Klemperer

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**Abstract:** In view of the tremendous success of Victor Klemperer's diaries testifying his personal experience as a Jew in Nazi Germany, this article discusses the specific contribution of witness literature to the knowledge of history. During the Holocaust period, in the face of death, true historical knowledge was essentially reduced to personal experience. Klemperer's clandestine journal exposes how the collective trauma affected everybody through the daily speech patterns, dictated by the Nazis' appropriation of the German language. In this memory of *Alltagsgeschichte* as a critical history of language can be seen the specific contribution of literature of testimony. The function of Klemperer's chronicle of *Lingua Tertii Imperii* is to develop the readers' linguistic sensitivity, in order to enable them to reappropriate their language.

**Keywords:** History and memory; Literature of testimony; Language criticism; Nazi Germany; Holocaust; Victor Klemperer

**Resumo:** Diante da enorme repercussão pública, nos anos 1990, dos diários de Victor Klemperer sobre sua experiência pessoal como judeu na Alemanha nazista, este artigo discute o tipo específico de conhecimento da história proporcionado pela literatura de testemunho. Durante o período do holocausto, no confronto diário com a morte, o conhecimento histórico verdadeiro se aguçou nas experiências pessoais. O jornal clandestino de Klemperer expõe como o trauma coletivo afetou a todos por meio dos padrões cotidianos de fala, ditados pela apropriação nazista da língua alemã.

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Nessa memória da história do cotidiano enquanto história crítica da linguagem pode ser visto o valor específico da literatura de testemunho. A função da crônica de Klemperer da *lingua Tertii Imperii* consiste em desenvolver nos leitores a sensibilidade lingüística, no sentido de poderem se reapropriar de sua língua.

**Palavras-chave:** História e memória; Literatura de testemunho; Crítica da linguagem; Nacional-socialismo; Holocausto; Victor Klemperer.

**Stichwörter:** Geschichte und Gedächtnis; Zeugnis-Literatur; Sprachkritik; Nationalsozialismus; Holocaust; Victor Klemperer.

The tremendous posthumous success of Victor Klemperer's diaries during the last few years raises some fundamental questions not the least of which are the following: Why would the reading public in Germany take the memory of one Jewish professor, who was stripped of his position, his dignity, his safety and almost his life, for a singular lesson in history? Why would his language criticism, for which he became known first, gain on the side of 'memory' what it may be lacking, in the view of some critics, on the side of 'history'? What could the readers learn from his testimony they would not already know from the abundance of historical treatises on the same subject?

Memory and history, as Fritz STERN recently pointed out in his review of Saul FRIEDLANDER's latest book on the Holocaust<sup>1</sup>, are "distant yet often confused cousins." While individual memories, often magnified by the impact of disturbing images, have entered the collective memory, they remain unhistorical, Stern argues, when they are deprived of their context, i.e. when they are not placed in a detached framework of sequence and chronology "to make as precise a reconstruction of the past as possible."<sup>2</sup> Such attempts to hold on to the Rankean ideal of historical inquiry without personal intervention are challenged by an increasing blending of the (auto-)biographical and the investigative genres of historical discourse. Increasingly, the "eigentlich" in RANKE's famous formula of historical reconstruction "wie es eigentlich gewesen"<sup>3</sup> is understood to mean, it seems, not the Platonic essence of what happened but its authentication by those to whom it happened.

But the time-honored rules of investigation do not vanish easily. If we use memory, our own or that of others, to support historical accounts, we still feel com-

<sup>1</sup> FRIEDLANDER 1997. For the distinction of memory and history cf. FRIEDLANDER 1993.

<sup>2</sup> STERN 1997.

<sup>3</sup> RANKE 1874: VII.

pelled to qualify this as "anecdotal evidence", as if the local particularity of memory in its rhetorical aesthetic would resist the kind of generalization which is believed to be the standard of scientific objectivity. In fact, the recent surge in personal accounts of historical experience seems to have put the very principle of history, the explanatory contextualization of singular data, into question – so much so that the skepticism it generated among historians begins to reach beyond academic circles. As historians like Fritz STERN are puzzled by the conceptual confusion of memory and history, critics like Ulrich RAULFF, an editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, also seem to tire of the frequent references to *Gedächtnis*. Symptomatically, it was on the occasion of a visit to Leopold von RANKE's gravesite in Berlin's former Jewish quarter, the *Scheunenviertel*, that RAULFF recently lamented memory as a mere fad: "Die Geschichte hat Konkurrenz bekommen. Alle reden jetzt vom Gedächtnis. Vor zwanzig Jahren, denkt man, mußte sich alles auf Gesellschaft reimen, heute buchstabiert sich alles auf Gedächtnis." RAULFF seemed pleased to predict its demise with an ironic twist: "Aber auch das geht vorbei, auch an das Gedächtnis wird sich irgendwann niemand mehr erinnern."<sup>4</sup> But is memory, this presumably private variant of the vanishing sense of history, really nothing but a trend, a commercialized critical fashion doomed to be forgotten and disappear like the sociological commitment of twenty years ago? Or will it be seen, at least in retrospect, as a constitutive part of autobiography for which DILTHEY and his son-in-law Georg MISCH once provided the philosophical framework?<sup>5</sup>

Forgetting memory altogether in the face of Rankean historiography, as RAULFF suggests, may indeed be a threat posed by testimonial if they are nothing but interchangeable, arbitrary sets of rote experience, mere instances of tiresome saturation with insignificant biographical detail. While history may eventually reclaim the territory, relegating memory to the two decades of New Subjectivity which had fostered it, the ensuing cultural relativism has already provoked a debate on its own limits, with two exceptions to the presumed danger of trendy insignificance, an obvious one and the other more subtle.

The first, obvious exception is the testimony which bears witness to the traumatic horrors of this century no-one else could recount but each victim in his or her solitude of memories, which are absolute and absolutely beyond comparison: "If someone else could have written my stories," says Elie WIESEL, "I would not have written them. I have written them in order to testify. My role is the role of the witness. [...]"

<sup>4</sup> The comment is signed only with "ur". "ur", 1997.

<sup>5</sup> MISCH 1949-1967.

Not to tell another story, is [...] to commit perjury.”<sup>6</sup> Bearing witness, i.e. telling one’s own story, as if there were no vicarious narrative, has become a responsibility in the metaphorical trial of history. This responsibility for the memory of the Holocaust cannot be cast off in the name of scientific objectivity, only because it may have inspired all kinds of autobiographical nostalgia on the flourishing book market as if they, too, could be exempt from the scientific scrutiny reserved for historical documents.

The other, more subtle exception to the danger of memorial overkill is remembering not as much the unprocessed bulk of experience itself as the textual matrix which facilitated, accompanied, interpreted, covered up and suppressed this experience. If any experience, as language philosophers would have us believe, is bound to – and even constructed by – language in which it is conceived, understood and communicated, the memory of an experience as incomprehensible as the Holocaust requires a new language to grasp what cannot be grasped and to express what is unspeakable. If we look at the memory of events rather than the events themselves, we look at both the fractured language of this memory and the memory of the deceptive language involved in shaping the events remembered. If the corruption of the minds is achieved through language, the ensuing corruption of language itself, as it is remembered by those who were most affected by it, deserves much more attention than it has already received. For it is in the area of linguistic memory that we may be able to find an answer to the question posed here at the beginning or to the question Shoshana FELMAN formulated in her book on the crisis of witnessing the Shoah, *Testimony* (1992): “what and how can testimony teach us [...] in the larger areas of the interactions [...] between the literary and the pedagogical?”<sup>7</sup> It is the memory of language, rather than the language of memory, where testimony raises the issue of its pedagogical implications. The question is whether the personal memory of how language individually affected the collective trauma can indeed be more instructive than an historical analysis of tainted, corrupted and instrumentalized language. For the latter, there have been a good number of critical studies on the language of fascism.<sup>8</sup> For the former, the classic witness has remained Victor Klemperer. Obviously, a critical observer like Klemperer, who wanted to become “gar zu gern der Kulturgeschichtsschreiber der gegenwärtigen Katastrophe,”<sup>9</sup> would be of special interest to German

<sup>6</sup> Elie WIESEL, “The Loneliness of God”, published by *Dvar Hashavu’a*, Tel Aviv, 1984; translated by – and here quoted from – Shoshana Felman. FELMAN 1992: 204.

<sup>7</sup> FELMAN 1992: 1.

<sup>8</sup> For a typical stylistic study of the 1950’s cf. STERNBERGER et alii, 1957; and for a typical sociological study of the 1970’s cf. WINCKLER 1970.

<sup>9</sup> KLEMPERER <sup>1</sup>1996: 12.

Studies. Whoever tries to combine the cultural turn with the concept of positionality, may want to look toward Jewish critics in exile, whose special brand of criticism is largely based on their experience of linguistic expropriation and cultural dislocation.<sup>10</sup>

Characteristically, it is only Klemperer’s very personal account in his recently published diaries, *Curriculum vitae* (1989), *Ich will Zeugnis ablegen bis zum letzten* (1995, with six editions within one year) and *Und so ist alles schwankend* (1996),<sup>11</sup> which have put him onto central stage of memory, gaining him in Germany today the status of a cultural icon he hardly enjoyed when he first published in 1947 his clandestine journal on the Nazis’ appropriation of the German language, *LTI. Notizbuch eines Philologen*. Not surprisingly, it is not in Klemperer’s classic study, which has reached already 15 editions,<sup>12</sup> but in his recently published diaries that clever publishers have prepared an answer to Shoshana FELMAN’s question. They published “Eine Auswahl für junge Leser. Mit Anregungen für den Unterricht”.<sup>13</sup> Curiously, in the often pedestrian pedagogical suggestions, which are clearly meant to further exploit the present fashion of memory, there is no single reference to what Klemperer himself wanted to teach the next generation the most: sensitivity to the eventually deadly pitfalls of language.

Coily calling himself a “Schulmeister” whom he finds hidden in every philologist, Klemperer had insisted in *LTI* that he “mit dem wissenschaftlichen Zweck zugleich einen erzicherischen verfolge”,<sup>14</sup> claiming that re-education so vigorously pursued by the Americans right after World War II would have little effect if the language were exempt from the moral scrutiny. The need for such training in linguistic sensitivity is implicit in Klemperer’s repeated lament: “Es ist im deutschen Volk soviel Lethargie und soviel Unsittlichkeit und vor allem soviel Dummheit.”<sup>15</sup> and in another entry: “Und das Volk ist so dumm, daß es alles glaubt.”<sup>16</sup> Since political gullability is the result of linguistic insensitivity, the *Schulmeister* can act only philologically, i.e. with the moral gesture of the philological indictment.

Such indictment of linguistic complicity, however, was introduced already in 1933 (but not published before 1952) when Karl KRAUS wrote his *Dritte*

<sup>10</sup> SEEBÄ 1997.

<sup>11</sup> KLEMPERER 1989; 1995; 1996.

<sup>12</sup> KLEMPERER <sup>15</sup>1996.

<sup>13</sup> KLEMPERER 1997.

<sup>14</sup> KLEMPERER <sup>15</sup>1996: 20.

<sup>15</sup> KLEMPERER 1995: 340; 1997: 65.

<sup>16</sup> KLEMPERER 1995: 378. 1997: 67.

*Walpurgisnacht* to put the linguistic terror of the still infant Third *Reich* on trial by relentlessly tracing the “Aufbruch der Phrase zur Tat.”<sup>17</sup> But Karl KRAUS’s often brilliant polemic rage lacks the severity of the struggle for personal survival which gives Klemperer’s philological chronicle an existential edge: “Ist es Kalthertigkeit von mir und enge Schulmeisterei, daß ich mich immer wieder und immer mehr an die Philologie dieses Elends halte? Ich prüfe wirklich mein Gewissen. Nein; es ist Selbstbewahrung.”<sup>18</sup> If historical accounts of persecution of Jews such as Klemperer may be the academic genre, heroic testimony in the face of death is the existential mode of writing for the sake of survival: “ich schreibe weiter,” Klemperer writes after another humiliating house search did not produce the manuscripts which he had hidden in a Greek lexicon. “Das ist **mein** Heldentum. Ich will Zeugnis ablegen, und exaktes Zeugnis!”<sup>19</sup> A Greek lexicon, of all books, proved to be the safe place for the philological testimony encoded in Latin as *lingua tertii imperii*, in short LTI, which, of course, parodied the Nazi predilection for acronyms like SA, SS, HJ, BDM, KdF.<sup>20</sup>

Cleverly concealed in the languages of classical education, Greek and Latin, Klemperer’s humanist resistance to linguistic *Gleichschaltung* constituted a glimmer of hope, an answer for writers like Ernst BEUTLER, who grimly asked his audience of Goethe devotees in August 1945: “Was kann, was darf, was soll heute ein Deutscher zu einem Deutschen sagen? Welche Sprache soll er sprechen? Wo gibt es noch Prägungen und Sätze, die nicht schmäählich mißbraucht und geschändet sind? Ist nicht jedes Wort eine falsche Münze geworden?”<sup>21</sup> To Klemperer such indiscriminate questions would probably indicate a linguistic despair as totalizing as the terror against which they railed. Critical of exiled writers who like Klaus MANN in 1942 would ask: “can it be that Hitler has polluted the language of Nietzsche and Hölderlin?”<sup>22</sup> Klemperer would venture to trace the suspected ‘pollution’ in precise detail in order not to subscribe to some critics’ understandable conclusion which is best summed up in Theodor W. ADORNO’s famous dictum of 1951 “nach Auschwitz

<sup>17</sup> KRAUS 1967: 123.

<sup>18</sup> KLEMPERER <sup>1</sup>1996: 42.

<sup>19</sup> KLEMPERER <sup>2</sup>1996: 99.

<sup>20</sup> On Nazi acronyms cf. Karl KRAUS: “Seitdem es aber SA und SS gibt, bleibt uns nichts übrig als ein SOS bis nach USA. Das sind Formen der Ausschaltung einer Sprache, die, solange sie sich nicht vollends auf Zeichendeutung reduziert, hinreichend Spielraum für Gleichschaltung gewährt.” KRAUS 1967: 114.

<sup>21</sup> BEUTLER 1980: 801.

<sup>22</sup> MANN: entry to his diary on July 5, 1942.

ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch,”<sup>23</sup> because the language of the murderers would no longer lend itself to poetic innocence. Instead, Klemperer would try to define and expose the murderous phraseology he barely escaped, with his linguistic chronicle serving a kathartic function in the post-war period of re-education.

*LTI* thus became a teacher’s manual for separating the “falsche Münze”, the fake, from the genuine, in order to rescue those areas of language which were not totally corrupted by totalitarianism. While many advocates of literature such as BEUTLER took refuge in the classical language of Goethe and thus avoided dealing seriously with the misappropriation of language, in which they may have been unwilling participants, Klemperer’s linguistic chronicle confronted the lamented abuse head-on: “Wann werde ich in der Sprache dieses Regimes einmal ein wirklich ehrliches Wort entdecken?”<sup>24</sup> Even in this rhetorical gesture of giving the Nazi language the benefit of the doubt, Klemperer dealt with lying only for the sake of its logical opposite, the ‘truly true word’ which, however tenuous, deserved to be rescued as ‘actual truth’ for the time after. His question evoked the words of KLEIST’s existential ‘Kant crisis’ which, after all, was more a crisis of language than a crisis of knowledge: “Wir können nicht entscheiden, ob das, was wir Wahrheit nennen, wahrhaft Wahrheit ist, oder ob sie es uns nur so scheint.”<sup>25</sup> Klemperer, too, may have been plagued by the doubt whether abstract truth could be gleaned from its verbal signifier. During his first incarceration in June 1941 he, too, was overwhelmed by what he calls “die triviale Erkenntnis [...], daß wir gar nichts wissen außerhalb des unmittelbar selbst Erlebten.”<sup>26</sup> As a gauge of truth, at least in the face of death, historical knowledge would be reduced to personal experience. But in contrast to KLEIST, Klemperer was confident enough to discern the “falsche Münze” and to decide which coin was a counterfeit and which was not. Throughout the crisis of language he maintained his pedagogical impetus, calling after the war, when the use of corrupted language would still persist, for “ein antifaschistisches Sprachamt.”<sup>27</sup> For his exposure of the “Falschmünzer” was not satisfied, as some of his later critics claimed, with reducing fascism to a small group of scheming propagandists; instead, he wanted to expose the pervasive nature of *LTI* long after the end of its celebrated perpetrators.

Klemperer is only one of many survivors who had to confront one of the more painful paradoxes in the experience of the Holocaust. Unable to abandon the lan-

<sup>23</sup> ADORNO 1963: 26.

<sup>24</sup> KLEMPERER <sup>1</sup>1996: 41.

<sup>25</sup> KLEIST 1984: 634.

<sup>26</sup> KLEMPERER 1995: 607; 1997: 118.

<sup>27</sup> KLEMPERER 1996: 63.

guage of his potential executioners, he, too, struggled to reappropriate the language of his own expropriation, to explore a language which seems totally incommensurate with horrors committed in its very name. Like Paul CELAN who refused to write poems in any other language but German, and like Theodor W. ADORNO, who returned to Germany from exile because he could not bring himself to thinking in English,<sup>28</sup> Klemperer had paradoxically to strike a balance between two extremes: At one end of the scale there was one of the first Nazi pronouncements of his university, as Klemperer recalls it from his diary of March 21, 1933: “Wenn der Jude deutsch schreibt, lügt er,” suggesting that Jews who publish in German be forced to mark their articles and books as “Übersetzungen aus dem Hebräischen.”<sup>29</sup> Here the cynical expropriation of language has come full circle: Whereas the Prussian *Emanzipations-Edikt* of 1812 had robbed Jews, who wanted to become citizens, of their Jewish names and their language, the Nazi ruling of 1933 determined that the German which Jews had been forced to adopt as their own language was nothing but a translation from the Hebrew they no longer knew. Only Karl KRAUS, from the safety of Vienna, had the audacity to tell the *Westdeutscher Rundfunk* in Cologne in a letter of April 21, 1933, that they should not review, as they planned to do, his German rendering of *Shakespeares Sonette* since it lacked the proviso then required in Germany, “daß es sich eigentlich um eine Übersetzung aus dem Hebräischen handelt” but they should turn, instead, to “eine unmittelbare Übertragung ins Deutsche” by Stefan GEORGE, if they would not find it entirely inappropriate, he sarcastically added, to still deal with an English author.<sup>30</sup> And at the other end of the scale Paul CELAN, when asked why he continued to publish in the language of the murderers of his parents, would answer: “Nur in der Muttersprache kann man die eigene Wahrheit aussagen, in der Fremdsprache lügt der Dichter.”<sup>31</sup>

Now, who is ‘lying’: the ‘un-German’ Jew who writes in German, as the nazis would have it, or the German Jew who does not write in German, as CELAN claims? Whatever is the answer, in both cases an essentialist view of language is at work, a

<sup>28</sup> ADORNO 1978: 344. “Der Entschluß zur Rückkehr nach Deutschland war kaum einfach vom subjektiven Bedürfnis, vom Heimweh motiviert, sowenig ich es verleugne. Auch ein Objektives machte sich geltend. Das ist die Sprache. Nicht nur, weil man in der neu erworbenen niemals, mit allen Nuancen und mit dem Rhythmus der Gedankenführung, das Gemeinte so genau treffen kann, wie in der eigenen. Vielmehr hat die deutsche Sprache offenbar eine besondere Wahlverwandschaft zur Philosophie, und zwar zu deren spekulativem Moment, das im Westen so leicht als gefährlich unklar – keineswegs ohne allen Grund – gergewöhnt wird.”

<sup>29</sup> KLEMPERER <sup>15</sup>1996: 18; 1997: 18.

<sup>30</sup> KRAUS 1967: 139.

<sup>31</sup> quoted from CHALFEN 1983: 148.

national language in the sense of de SAUSSURE’s “langue” which is part and parcel of the individual’s ‘true’ identity. CELAN, who does not refer to the first statement, and Klemperer, who as a Romanist philologist would not subscribe to the second, both acted as if they had drawn the same conclusion: In order to resist the linguistic expropriation decreed by the Nazis, they had to reappropriate the German language rather than abandon it.

Klemperer was no participant in the grueling modernist language crisis which started long before the unspeakable horrors of this century. Two names come to mind: KLEIST, who wished he could literally put his physical heart into his letter thus substituting the signified for the signifier, because “die Sprache [...] kann die Seele nicht malen,”<sup>32</sup> and HOFMANNSTHAL, for whom “die abstrakten Worte [...] zerfielen mir im Munde wie modrige Pilze”<sup>33</sup> and whose Kari Bühl, in *Der Schwierige* (1919), “durchdrungen ist von einer Sache auf der Welt: daß es unmöglich ist, den Mund aufzumachen, ohne die heillossten Konfusionen anzurichten!”<sup>34</sup> What to KLEIST and HOFMANNSTHAL was an epistemological issue of existential proportions, namely the fundamental inability to attain or express any truth through language, became a moral question for Klemperer. Not subscribing to HEIDEGGER’s famous dictum “Die Sprache spricht”,<sup>35</sup> Klemperer would also not answer in the affirmative the famous question “Kann Sprache die Gedanken verbergen?” posed by the *Deutsche Akademie der Dichtung* in 1964. Instead, he would hold the speakers responsible if their assertions would not accurately reflect their intentions. Against the background of German language philosophy, which had claimed the primacy and autonomy of language, Klemperer tried to restore the subject position of the speaker by holding him or her responsible: “Was jemand willentlich verbergen will [...], die Sprache bringt es an den Tag.”<sup>36</sup> For Klemperer, there is no escape from the truth of language even if it is temporarily used as a means of deceit; for him – not unlike KLEIST in *Der zerbrochne Krug* – the truth of language puts those on trial who corrupt language to raise their stakes in the power game. It is this unrelenting belief in the revelatory character of language which helped him cope with the humiliations so he could “Zeugnis ablegen bis zum letzten.”<sup>37</sup> Like

<sup>32</sup> KLEIST 1984: 626.

<sup>33</sup> HOFMANNSTHAL 1951: 12.

<sup>34</sup> HOFMANNSTHAL 1956: 103.

<sup>35</sup> HEIDEGGER 1959: 12.

<sup>36</sup> KLEMPERER <sup>15</sup>1996: 16.

<sup>37</sup> KLEMPERER <sup>2</sup>1996: 12, “Beobachten will ich bis zum letzten, notieren, ohne zu fragen, ob die Ausnutzung der Notizen noch einmal glückt.” and Klemperer <sup>2</sup>1996: 146, “Ich will Zeugnis ablegen, und exaktes Zeugnis!”

Harald WEINRICH, who won the prize of the *Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung* with his famous essay *Linguistik der Lüge* (1966), Klemperer did not mean to say that language reigns supreme, robbing all speakers of the freedom to choose right and wrong; instead, he saw language as an eventual corrective to its ill-intended misuse, thus meeting the linguistic standard WEINRICH tried to establish for defining a lie when he saw it not as “*duplex cogitatio*”, but as “*duplex oratio*”,<sup>38</sup> as the duplicity of language when a lyer says one thing and means another.

With this moral reminder as it was shared by Klemperer and Weinrich, let's return to the presumed lesson we can draw from Klemperer's linguistic memory. It is a personal document, a testimonial rather than a historical analysis, and as such reflects the personal dilemma he was confronted with: On the one hand, Klemperer had to show that the social fabric is increasingly shaped by the tainted language, that language, as adopted and instrumentalized by the Nazis, became pervasive and inescapable; and on the other, he was engaged in the moral mission of pinpointing the failures of linguistic responsibility. When coupled with the philologist's linguistic watch, Klemperer's recollection of the daily terror, as it is recorded in the diaries, helps correct the basic argument of the classic totalitarianism theory that it was only the abstract and impersonal bureaucracy of total power (represented by *apparatschiks* like, for instance, Adolf Eichmann) that made the Holocaust possible. Looking into the patterns of daily life, history from below, or *Alltagsgeschichte*, could be an even more effective corrective if it were based on the critical memory of daily speech patterns, as Klemperer never tired to emphasize. Hannah ARENDT's “banality of evil” would have been impossible without the banality of verbal exclusion, i.e. the low resistance of the average German to linguistic victimization or what Karl KRAUS called the “Aufbruch der Phrase zur Tat.” Thus, Klemperer has opened an entire field of investigation, language criticism as the genuine domain of German Studies which would take into account the positionality of any historical, literary, or philological exploration. As a witness who himself suffered the effect of corrupted language every day, he has given the call for linguistic sensitivity a special urgency. Remembering his call, we may find it indicative that the historian Ranke's grave is preserved in Berlin's former *Scheunenviertel* where no graves of the Jewish population are left but the words of their memory.

<sup>38</sup> WEINRICH 1966: 48.

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## Etnografia e Etnopoesia Estudos sobre a *Casa das Minas*\*

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**Abstract:** This paper, written by an anthropologist, describes his fieldwork experience in the Afro-Brazilian temple *Casa das Minas*, São Luis do Maranhão, in 1981-1982, done with the German writer Hubert Fichte. Although correcting some statements in Fichte's book on the same subject and criticizing his indiscretion towards several of his informants, the article emphasizes the learning process with the German "ethnopoet": his skillful interview technique, the priority given to subjects of general interest, the importance of card files, the sought for beauty in the statements... As to the methodological differences between ethnography and ethnopoetry, the latter is free from the conventions of anthropological work, being able to concentrate on the beauty of the text and to conceive ethnography as a literary form. On the other hand, the advantages of ethnography, especially in Malinowski's tradition, are in the commitment with true facts and the precision of details. – See also, in this number of *Pandemonium Germanicum*, Willi Bolle's complementary article on "Ethnopoetry and Ethnography".

**Keywords:** Anthropology; Ethnography; Ethnopoetics; Afro-Brazilian religions; Hubert Fichte.

**Zusammenfassung:** Dies ist der Erfahrungsbericht eines brasilianischen Anthropologen über seine Feldforschung in Zusammenarbeit mit dem deutschen Schriftsteller Hubert Fichte in der *Casa das Minas*, in São Luis do Maranhão, 1981-1982. Wenngleich einige Fehlinformationen Fichtes berichtigt sowie seine Indiskretion gegenüber Informanten kritisiert werden, stellt dieser Aufsatz die mit dem deutschen

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