

Keynote Address: Thoughts on Representation

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I have a great job! I feel privileged to do it. In fact, my kids think my job is so great they think I go on vacation whenever I travel. Maybe it's because I send home photos like this.



I'd like to start with a rather personal story to which I will return at the end (and, since you're going to wonder why I have told this story, it will provide a handy distraction if what I say in the middle of this talk is not to your interest...)

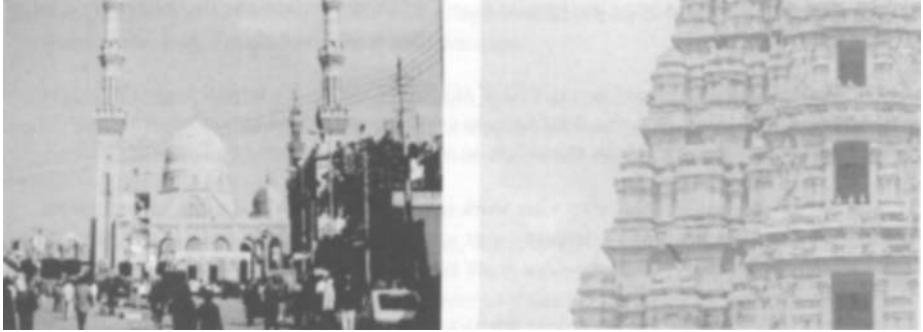
Five years ago, I had an opportunity to walk a two week portion of the Camino de Santiago. It's an ancient Catholic pilgrimage route starting in southwestern France and ending in Santiago de Compostela, on Spain's western coast.

As I walked, the simple rhythms of each day – rising in the morning, walking through the day, settling in the evening -- immersed me deeper and deeper into the wholeness of the journey. It became less and less about making progress and more and more about being aware and present in that moment. Gradually, the journey took on a “lightness of being”; gradually, the journey was not just about me and what I wanted - it was about something bigger than I could ever be. There was a calmness, a tranquility, a quietude injected with vibrancy and light that grew day to day. It was, I’ve thought since, a glimpse of real peace.

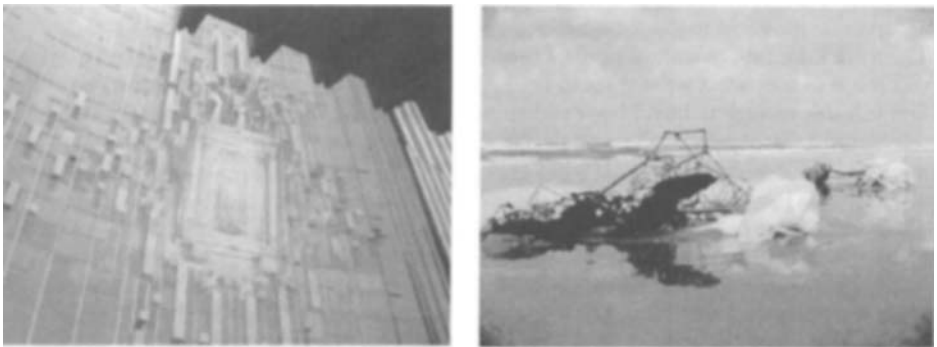
Through one thing and another, through my work, I’ve had the opportunity to visit many living pilgrimage sites around the world. The Chamundiswari Temple in Mysore, in Southern India, the Ahmad al-Badawi Mosque in Tanta, the Swayambhunath Buddhist temple in Nepal, The Shrine to the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico, the Bahai’i Lotus temple in New Delhi - and even the sea in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the destination for many folks offering to Imanja, the Candomble goddess of the sea. They are Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Bahai’i, Buddhist, Candomble.



In all of these places I’ve felt a little bit of that same tranquil energy, that same feeling of connectedness, of being outside myself; of all of us there outside ourselves. People have love for each other. They’re calm. They are receptive to being blessed. We are calm. We are receptive. For that moment, I feel we are at peace.



And it's a bit scary to tell this story, because, skeptical though I know many of you, and even perhaps a tad embarrassed for me sharing something so personal and perhaps corny, there is it.



Hold this thought. I will return to this at the end.

I've had some occasion of late to consider what I do in my work and why I do it. And, as the hour last night was late, and it is becoming clear that I have nothing particularly useful to say to all of you today, I thought I would share some of these considerations.

I've always said that I've had the best job on the planet. In this, I know I am privileged.

So one question I've had occasion to ask of myself is: what is the responsibility that comes with my privilege? And how does this help me in my work?

I feel that my responsibility is to do exactly what I say I am going to do and try to produce products – in my case, computing products – that are indeed useful – that are as

useful as the cell phones in your pockets, as the computers you use, the Plasma screen TVs on your walls.

Nevertheless, it's very hard work. VERY HARD WORK. It's intellectually challenging and emotionally draining. We, the minorities in our companies and consultancies – and for the anthropologists among us, the minorities in our disciplines – we can feel vulnerable.

But we should not feel this way! Our work relies on the work and thought and theory and practice from a myriad of disciplines – not just anthropology. Or work is synthetic, not descriptive – or at least it should be. Our work is generative, creative, expanding.

And not just that, the work we do – when we do it well -- extends those same theories and practices on which we rely -- to create new sciences, new endeavors, new adventures, things, new possibilities, new lives.

The work we do also can and often does change the practice of business. It opens eyes and ears. It shows possibility. It creates the opportunity for fair, meaningful exchange. Again, this is what I think we ought to be doing.

As someone said to me the other day...if there's an elephant in the room, introduce it. The work I do, I do to make a profit. I'm up front about it. I tell the people we work with that this is exactly what we're there to do. I am here to make a product that I hope they will find valuable enough to buy. I hope and strive to ensure that the products we make are relevant and meaningful to all parties in the exchange and that everyone understands the meaning of the exchange.

Lately, we've been working very hard on something called the Classmate PC. It's a small computer for kids in primary school. Now: do I believe computing power, in general, can be helpful, useful, beneficial to kids and teachers? You bet I do. A *prima facie* case could not suggest otherwise. Computing, writ large, has been stunningly beneficial to billions of people. Has it been done right in schools in the past. No. Is it right now, probably not. Do I have hope that we – or someone – can get it right, pretty soon? I do. Do I believe we should make an honorable profit? Yes. Do I believe we are trying to offer a fair exchange? You bet.

I have no qualms about profit, *per se*. Exchange drives societies. Whether it's cash or tenure, it's an exchange. In my work, in my travels, people understand me perfectly when I tell them that I am here to make a product to sell to them that I hope they will like and find useful. We have been nothing if not honest about that. We tell people we work for Intel. We tell them what we're doing. In fact, people have been most suspicious when there's no sense of exchange. When it's all one way.

We do – most of our companies do -- have certain capabilities. We at Intel have an extraordinary capability to make a very complex bit of technology; the technologies we make

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have shaped the global economy. The technologies we make *can* help people do good things for themselves, their families and their communities.

I certainly have qualms about unfair advantages. I do have qualms about usurpation of power and privilege. In any institution there is iniquity and malicious intent. I am not wholesale defending business in all its manifestations. I am saying that business is a perfectly honorable way to get things done. Period.

Thus, to answer my first question, for me, the responsibility that comes with my privilege is to make the best possible products I can – those that have the most meaning, the most impact, the most value and that contribute to a fair exchange. It's fun. It's stimulating. It's intellectually challenging. It's fair. And it's profitable. And I am at peace with this.

So, the first issue is resolved:

We are privileged with honorable, if difficult, jobs modulated by a deeply felt sense of responsibility to both our employers and the people we work with. Let us be done with this nonsense. And to those who think otherwise, I would say they can go self-reflect.

The second question then is fantastically practical: How do we live up to our responsibilities.

Let's see what we do have:

We have a lot of tools in the tool shed. We have field work methods. Our interview techniques. Our cameras, our recorders, our notebooks. We know how to be a shadow when we have to. We know how to accept the generosity of others -- even when it's a piece of pig-skin with the hair still on it. We have our ever so dear theories. We have our colleagues. We have comparative projects & multisided projects. We have all this. We're very fond of all this. We're pretty darn good at what we do at this point.

Then why is what we do so hard?

There are probably lots of answers, but here's today's:

We are woefully incapable of representing our work – our experiences, analyses, syntheses, etc., convincingly and understandably to those who are not us. That is, we are unable to translate, transform, transmogrify our work in to frameworks and structures and arguments amenable to inspection, criticism, collaboration and collegiality.

We need to create ways to communicate what we know and transform the reigning arguments from that based on one set of assumptions – e.g., that everyone in the world lives like and wants the same thing that everyone in Los Angeles has – to another set of assumptions that represents and honest and fair basis of mutual shared experience between

our potential customers and our companies or clients. Finally, we must invite everyone – everyone -- to participate in this “space” to create mutually beneficial possibilities.

We almost always fail on all of these. We fail to make arguments. We fail to address the root assumptions in an argument. We don’t recognize them. We don’t strive to create new ones.

We totally fall down on creating a mutual shared experience. I have been immensely fortunate in the last few years with a boss who was our general manager and an Intel vice president, who took the time and energy to experience “the field” for himself. In this case, to schools. In various countries and situations all around the world. He read, he studied, he listened, he inquired. He felt. He also kept his head about him and strove to create that mutual shared experience.

Obviously, not everyone has as boss like this. Not everyone wants a boss like this. None-the-less, this does not absolve us from striving to create the shared experiences.

I argue that it’s in this mutual shared experience that we can invite everyone to participate. If we cannot get fairly representative space, then the only thing people have is what they know. When people understand each other, and each others’ circumstances -- emically – there’s the possibility of transforming what we know, into something else. Something of value we can make and sell honorably.

I would challenge us to continue to extend our tools and techniques, our theories and structures to meet these demands. It is in this way of having mutual shared experiences, that I have glimpsed from my boss, that I believe we are heard.

I opened with a story about a sense of peace that I’ve felt at many pilgrimage sites around the world. You might well have thought it corny, or inadequate. And, in fact, I’ve only told this story once before, in a very different setting, because I’ve never been able to create that mutual sense of shared experience that I feel.

Imagine if I could.
Imagine if we could.
Thank you.