

To Be a Diplomat

IVER B. NEUMANN

Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

How do diplomats experience the world? Drawing mainly on fieldwork in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I argue that being a diplomat involves juggling three scripts of self against one another. The bureaucratic script tells the diplomat to focus squarely on quotidian concerns and to follow previously established routines. The heroic script tells him or her to focus squarely on a specific task in order to make a difference in the world, or at least to rove about the world, preferably involved in trouble-shooting. A third script is the self-effacing one of “the mediator,” of the diplomat as a specialist in making what happens at the outside of a political entity seem to dovetail as smoothly as possible with what happens at its inside. These scripts cannot be reconciled, only juggled. The uncertain predicament in which this places the diplomat is aggravated not only by tensions between professional and private life but also by the nomadic lifestyle of trekking between a home base in the ministry and sundry postings abroad. I conclude that being a diplomat is a never-ending and self-effacing technique of self, in the sense that the end product of diplomatic work is to let processes that are already in motion either go on or to have them stopped.

Keywords: diplomacy, bureaucracy, identity

When tracking down the self, an anthropologist is bound to be a philosopher too.
(Hollis, 1985:232).

What does it mean to be a diplomat? Historically, diplomatic discourse emerged from and is hence embedded in overall Western discourse. It is a “third culture” in the sense that it is a locus for mediation between political entities with diverse cultures, and it is true that it is forever changing as this diversity increases. Like other cultures, diplomacy does not stand still for its portrait (see Clifford, 1986:10, Der Derian 1996). Still, it is also true that it carries with it the memory of its history, and that history is a Western history. When I begin by associating diplomacy with “the West,” it is not only because the site of my work is the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and that Norway is known as a Western country, but because diplomacy has a Western history. One place to begin unpacking what it is to be a diplomat is, therefore, to begin at a highly aggregated level and ask what it is to be a Westerner. I begin by looking at discourse as a set of preconditions for the formation of statements about the self. Believing with my fellow social anthropologists that no analysis of social interaction is complete if it does not incorporate the meanings that permeate people’s actions, I then draw on concrete interaction gar-

Author’s note: Previous drafts of this paper were presented at the Department for Social Anthropology, Oslo University, January 21, 2004, at the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, March 18, 2004 in Montreal, and at Georgetown University, March 22, 2004. In addition to the participants at these occasions and the ISP referees, I would like to thank Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Daniel Nexon, Knut Nustad, Vincent Pouliot, and Geoffrey Wiseman for useful comments.

nered through participant observation. In accordance with standard anthropological procedure, which among other things has evolved with a view to authenticity and falsification, key concepts and phrases used by informants are given in the original spoken form, while long conversational quotes are given in translation. The data-collecting technique used has its own practical and ethical problems, which have been subject to a century of anthropological debates.¹ A central issue concerns how one's status is declared and handled during fieldwork. In my case, I was on two occasions offered regular jobs, which I accepted on the express condition that I would draw on my experiences for research purposes. This demand sparked no conditionality from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). I also kept my colleagues apprised about this on a regular basis. Observation was thus open, not hidden. Subsequent dissemination of results has not sparked controversy, despite the rather limited size and reclusive traits of the universe studied.

The Bureaucratic Script and the Hero Script

In a celebrated work, Charles Taylor (1989) identifies two scripts that offer themselves to Western human beings in general. One concerns decency of everyday life, by which he means doing all the little things that are being expected of you in a wide range of different contexts—being a “good man,” “a nice woman,” and the like. This script celebrates low-key, monotonous laboring life. It has no place for heroics in the sense of exceptionalism; its merits concern the fact that you go on going on. This script seems to be present in most professions (Abbott, 1988). Even in typical prima donna professions like modeling and opera singing, individuals who refuse to follow this script are generally disliked by their colleagues and co-workers (vide Naomi Campbell and Maria Callas). Conversely, however, anyone who masters *only* this script will also come up a bit short. Perhaps the best novelistic treatment of diplomacy is William Boyd's (1981) *A Good Man in Africa*, where the key point about the protagonist is exactly that he masters the script of everyday life while being wholly in the dark about any other script that may pertain to the status of “diplomat.” He comes to work regularly, is a social presence, does not complain about his position and does not complicate his colleagues' existence by forcing them to face new ideas. Still, he has no feel for the social and political context in which he is supposed to work and no presence that singles him out as anything else other than an incidental presence. Outside the most concrete office settings, he therefore seems to be a bit anomic. In our context, we may see the everyday script as the script of the clerk or the scribe—let us call it the bureaucratic script.

The other script that Taylor sees as particularly relevant for Western human beings in general is the script of the deed. This is a hero script, involving exceptional individual braggadocio and/or leadership of men (and, increasingly, women). This is the script of the hero with a 1000 faces, and like Taylor's other script, it is easy to spot its presence in diplomatic circles. In this context, the script is a career script where two of these faces seem to be particularly relevant. First, there is the adviser, the robust, prudent, and seemingly indefatigable analytical force who can muster a wide-ranging and high-powered network that guarantees access to as many sources of information and as high-placed decision makers as possible. In Norwegian as well as in English, serving diplomats are often referred to as “career diplomats,” as if to underline the importance of this script. Advisers aim to be as close to the action as possible, which means that they thrive in secretariats and tend to complement their strictly diplomatic work with political work that may extend their interface with politicians. Indeed, the full-grown face of a diplomatic adviser is the face of a politician; since the position of state secretary of the foreign ministry

¹The American Anthropological Association has drawn up a code of ethics; see <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm>. I found this code to be useful.

was established in 1947 (Stoltenberg, 1983:64), most individuals holding that position have been career diplomats, as were three of Norway's foreign ministers. If the face of the hero "at home" (*hjemme*, that is, in the Ministry's Oslo buildings in Victoria Terrasse, or, for a French diplomat, at the Quai d'Orsay) is that of the adviser, the face of the abroad (*ute*) is the one of the field-working diplomat. The deed may be to found a new station in conditions of particular hardship, to undertake a particularly arduous fact-finding mission, or to mastermind and stage a *fait accompli* in a political setting such as a conference.²

He who seeketh shall find. It is not hard to excavate these two scripts either in historical writings on diplomacy or in my material from the present. In the standard work on the administrative history of the Danish composite state, on which Norway was a part in the eighteenth century, the Danish historian Ole Feldbæk (2000:331) sums up the life of the scribe in the following way:

The administration's and management's everyday life was characterised by its standard working routines. They had sedimented through generations, and it was usually only the younger secretaries who had to look up in the office's Book of Wisdom in order to find out what was to be done in the case at hand. The older secretaries had the procedures and the decisions in their marrow since donkey's years. They had learnt that old laws were good laws, and that uniformity and predictability were the very foundations of the management of the absolute state.

The scribes copied out letters, copied the budgets, and updated the protocols in what must have been mind-numbing detail. Feldbæk (2000:330) offers the hindsight generalization that "everyone who has worked with eighteenth century archivalia has felt how the scribe has been fast asleep with eyes wide open while he was copying his document piles." "My first ambassador always said that the best case work (*saksbehandling*) is to go to the dossiers," one head of department reminisced during a seminar. And indeed, when I myself was assigned my first task at Norway's Moscow embassy and asked a secretary for advice about how to go about it, her response was "you should look in the dossiers."³

Invariably, when Norwegian newspapers comment on diplomatic work, which they do at regular intervals, the stories seem to follow two variants of the hero script. The root metaphor of the former story is the pin-striped suit (with the champagne glass as an accoutrement), and of the other, the casual attire (the point being that the diplomat does *not* wear his usual pin-stripes). The leading Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* runs regular anniversary interviews with successful career diplomats when they round 60 (and, in some cases, 50), where the angle is always the biographical one of recounting their postings and where comments are regularly made about dapper suits, immaculate eating habits, etc. I once heard a diplomat torpedoed in a political meeting by another participant who wanted to get across that he had not really grasped the issue at hand. He did it by charging that

²See Constantinou (1996). The diplomatic career is a variant on a theme of semi-nomadic rotation in the context of a sedentary society. Ideally, following a practice year and a year at the in-house diplomatic academy, there follow two 3-year postings abroad. Then there is a period at home (usually somewhere between 3 and 5 years), followed by a 2-4-year stint abroad, and so on. If you are considered good, you will be a head of section in your early 40s, then something like number two at a large embassy, then deputy head of department and head of department, then an ambassador at a creampuff station or two, and perhaps even permanent undersecretary (the top bureaucratic job). If you do nothing wrong, your career peaks when you are somewhere around 60, as Norwegian ambassador to Costa Rica or a variant thereof. Since there are much fewer top jobs at home than abroad, the end usually comes in the form of a final stint as special advisor on the Arctics or declassification of secret documents or the like.

³The reason why memory work is warranted in this particular case is that in Norwegian, the advice "*du får se etter på doss*" is ambiguous, inasmuch as it may also mean "You will have to look in the loo." This ambiguity caused a certain ambiguity at the time, and this story has become a stock-in-trade of my self-presentation in diplomatic circles. Since such memories cannot be trusted, I recently checked this story with the secretary in question. She told me that when asked, she *always* told people to look in the dossiers.

“he seemed to have a firm grasp of his champagne glass.” However, the champagne glass does not only play a role in alter-casting, but also in the presentation of self in everyday diplomatic life. Before I took up work with the Ministry, I once arrived at a drinks reception that was slated to begin immediately after a conference, only to find that I had been beaten to it by two diplomats. “So,” I said, “you are here already”. “Yes,” one of them responded, smiling and raising his champagne glass to his lips, “you know, we are the ones who know how to do this.”

Conversely, when in December 2001 Norwegian newspapers covered the Norwegian exploratory mission to set up a Norwegian mission to Kabul, much was made of how the key diplomat had considerable previous experience from a number of rough spots, and how his attire did not give him away as a diplomat. When the mission was set up in the same building that harbored the NGO Norwegian Church Aid, footage typically showed the diplomat at work in everyday clothes, in unornamented rooms (for example, *Verdens gang*, January 10, 2001). When, in the autumn of 2002, the leading Norwegian daily, *Aftenposten*, ran a story on how the diplomatic academy had introduced a new course in leadership as a kick-off, the angle was that the training included challenges that could not be tackled in a pin-striped suit.⁴

As seen from outside, then, diplomatic discourse may be meaningfully read through the lenses of Taylor’s general scripts for the Western self. It is a key point for Taylor that these two scripts are at loggerheads, in the sense that there are a number of contexts where it may not be clear where one should adhere to one and not to the other, but also in the sense that if a certain individual aims to make one the grand narrative of her life, then that will necessarily happen at the cost of the other. Both tensions run through diplomatic life. I will begin with the latter and proceed to the former.⁵

Overfulfillment of Scripts

Seemingly, the Ministry secretaries tend to know rather more about their bosses than the other way around. I once had dinner with a retired diplomat who had for 3 years worked with a secretary who was then arrested and given a steep sentence for spying for the Soviets. The whole thing was a *cause célèbre* at the time, and it is still important enough to be known to Scandinavians and Brits working in the field of intelligence. Although this was almost 30 years ago at the time, Harold was still besotted by the story, the key point of which was that he had really liked the woman and had not had the least inkling of an idea that she could have been a spy. When I started to ask him about her private life, however, it turned out that he did not know very much about her, except for her tastes in books and clothes. The relationship between bosses and their secretaries has changed in a number of ways since then, but it is my impression that, even allowing for the obvious fact that a secretary spy is likely to be rather more reticent than her colleagues, and that MFA bosses may be better informed in this regard now than they were then, secretaries still know more about their bosses than vice versa. But I need not press that point. The only thing that must be granted for my argument to hold is that secretaries are more prone to *talk about* the private lives of their bosses than the other way around. I had secretaries telling me no end of stories, and the ones that were delivered with the greatest panache tended to revolve around people who had made the hero script their load star. “Did you hear about X,” one told me, “while he was away, his daughter caught on with some bad eggs, and next week she is a key defendant in a drug case.” X was a diplomat who had also been a politician, and who was known as

⁴*Aftenposten*, September 22, 2002.

⁵I will only incidentally focus on how a feel for these two scripts impinges on individual career planning, however. Suffice it to say that the key risk of the hero script is to draw too much attention from colleagues and politicians, and of the bureaucratic script, too little.

a bit of a pompous ass. “Well Y came home from his posting and said to his family ‘pack up! we are going to London,’” Trine told me, “and they said no, you could have told us first, and then they refused to go. Guess he did not watch his back, ha ha.”

Secretaries were not, however, the only ones to come up with these stories. “That [same] Y,” a colleague told me during a tram ride home to the part of town where both she and I lived, “he went over my head once. He would stop at nothing (*gå over lik*, literally to step over corpses) if it would enhance his career.” “Did you hear that Z had a heart attack?” I was asked by another colleague upon returning from my summer vacation. “And when he came to, the first thing he had said was that no-one at the MFA must know.” “Why so?” I asked her. “So that it should not get in the way of his career,” came the answer. In the ministry, I had frequently heard Z, who was always close to the political scene, referred to as “the climber.” But the story that really drove home to me when the fine line that makes you appear as an overachiever of the hero script appears to have been crossed in the eyes of your colleagues concerned a man who had word that he had been promoted. For senior personnel, promotions have to be confirmed by the King, which in practice means that they are read during Friday cabinet meetings and then made public. The expression for this is *å gå i statsråd*—to be handled by (and presumably pass muster in) Cabinet—and it is used in such a way that your suggested promotion and you as a person are seen as interchangeable entities, as in “When will you be handled by Cabinet?” (*Når går du i statsråd?*), “I hear you were handled by Cabinet on Friday, congratulations” (*Jeg hører du gikk i statsråd på fredag, gratulerer*). The point is that the verb used here literally means “to walk” or “to go to,” hence to the uninitiated, the seemingly perfectly clear meaning of these expressions is that the person has actually been to the cabinet meeting in the flesh. Not so—but as it were, his career has. Now, Friday announcements are made when the cabinet sitting is over and in this particular case, this happened relatively late in the afternoon. This being a Friday, most people had already left, but the one who was being “handled by Cabinet” was still at his post, sitting in his office behind his door, waiting for the verdict. This was in the early 1990s, when beside each door there was still a little rectangular glass case, inside which there was a wavy pillow of fake velvet to which there were attached little white plastic digits giving your room number and little white plastic letters giving your name and your rank. The point of the story was that when this man had finally received the message that he had passed Cabinet and been promoted, he immediately went on a scavenging rampage in his corridor, nicking letters here and there so as to be able to give his own little glass case the appropriate update. When his colleagues arrived on Monday morning, there was no need to ask if he had handled by cabinet—his new rank was already proudly announced beside his door. Of course, the operation had involved a bit of trespassing on other people’s plastic self-presentations; thus, the story immediately made the rounds. I had it recounted to me at two different occasions, by two different people, and alluded to once.

Not surprisingly, stories about people overfulfilling their career script tend to be told by others, usually their underlings. Stories about people overfulfilling the bureaucracy script are rarer. There are several more or less sad stories about people who have basically gone to sleep on the job and, true to outside stereotype, dipsomania is frequently part of these stories. For example, when ambassadors who are not considered high flyers come home, they may not be assigned a new position immediately. Rather, they are given the status *til disposisjon*—literally at (your) service—meaning that they are there to lend a hand in sundry running business while being between specific jobs. Until recently, the fifth floor corridor where these people had their office was known as the drying-loft (*tørkeloftet*, with the reference being that what was dried up was diplomat dipsomaniacs rather than linen).

These cases are not ones of overfulfilling a specific script, however, but rather of losing your grip on all the scripts that are available. A better example of reflection

about overfulfillment of the bureaucratic script seemed to emerge over lunch one day, when Birger was reminiscing about his previous post as follows: “When I was legal adviser, my Finnish colleague and I used to refer to one another as *Pi-lkunnussija*, comma-fucker (*komma-knuller*).” “Well,” I said, “I suppose those exist in all MFAs.” “Indeed” responded a third party, “that is the job (*det er jo det som er jobben*).” Some months later, this third party told me that he had just returned from a course in leadership. “I now know that I am not a comma-fucker” he said with a relieved beam; “I’m a semi-colon-fucker.”

Clash of Scripts

If either one of these scripts may be said to be upmost in the life of a specific diplomat, either by her colleagues or by herself, it is perhaps more instructive to attempt a reading of how they clash in terms of specific and varying contexts. There are particularly two types of context change that may cause a switch in which script is seen as relevant. These are what diplomats refer to as *hjemme\jobb*—that is, “at home” and “at work,” and *hjemme\ute*—“at home” and “abroad.” There are two different but connected homes in play here: the home that is defined as the opposite of the job is the private home (as in “home and hearth”), whereas the home that is the opposite of abroad is the national home (as in “my home country”).⁶

The tension between home and job assumes a number of forms that will be familiar from a whole gamut of studies of Western everyday life. In a Department seminar, a Head of Section by the name of Gunnar took the floor during a debate on ministry life in general and charged that, as a mid-level leader, he was stuck between a rock and a hard place. Above him, there were elderly men who no longer had small children, while below him, there were desk officers with little kids to look after. The fact that his underlings were family people, he charged, could not have been acknowledged by the leadership, for

if one had understood this, I would not have received new tasks at 3.45 pm, for example. Small wonder that day after day, people who do an excellent job still have to go home with a feeling that they are not really up to covering all their bases.

The choice of 3:45 PM is significant, because it implies the end of the so-called “core hours” (*kjernetid*)—the time you are expected to be in the ministry as an employee. Like the other Ministries, the Foreign Ministry has an electronic punching clock where all employees have to register in the morning and the afternoon. This kind of surveillance, which was once typical of industrial society, now seems to survive mainly in the few factories that are left—as well as in bureaucratic organizations. At the beginning of every month, each employee will receive a full yellow-colored printout of his or her comings and goings. Crucially, in addition to measuring total working time and holidays, surveillance is trained on whether you have or have not been present during core hours. The time that you have not been present during core hours is prominently displayed, and has to be made up for. The point that Gunnar was making was that, given this system, employees should reasonably expect to be able to leave with a clean conscience around 4 PM if they so desired. Given the actual working routine as he was describing it, however, it may formally be possible to leave, but informally, a number of people could not do so with a clear conscience.

The Head of Department did not miss a beat. He shot right back that “My day is spent in meetings, and when I come back to my office, half the day is gone. [. . .] Every day is a landslide of tasks, and I spend it digging myself out of it all. And when I get back to my office, it is often 3:45 PM, Gunnar. [. . .] The leadership role has changed, but the leadership responsibility has not.”

⁶For a study of the nation as an extended family and a new home for uprooted peasants living in the city, or indeed in the trenches, see Weber (1977).

Until some 30 years ago, I was told that the Ministry norm was that you stayed in your office until the boss went home. This norm still seems to lead a patchy life in pockets of the Ministry. Another Head of Department, a man in his late 50s who lived alone, once told me over dinner that “I keep my door open and expect people to pop their head in and say goodbye before they leave, and there is no *rush* of people before around 6:30”—and then he laughed heartily. The exigencies of the bureaucratic script are not equally tough in every department, and there has been an upgrade of the home sphere. As of recently, female trainees may leave their academy year and join the cohort coming in the year after a spell of maternal leave. In the late 1980s, young male diplomats fought a brief but victorious campaign for informal confirmation of their formal right to take a month-long paternity leave against the older males who formally outranked them. The bureaucratic script may make itself felt less and may be relevant in fewer specific contexts than before. Still, the basic contradiction lingers on. “There are other things that a man may do,” Lars responded when I sympathized with how he had been slotted into an office that was really a walk-through to an archive and that was indicative of a certain sidelining of his career, “like spending time with one’s kids.”

Whereas there is probably nothing specifically diplomatic about any of the examples of contextual clashes of scripts just given, it does happen that the tension between home life and job life has aspects that are specific. On my way to work one morning, I had just popped by my local cafe and ordered the usual when my colleague Ludvig popped in. I had met him and his Serbian wife at a party some months before, and we had discussed the situation in the Balkans, where president Milosevic had just launched yet another campaign in Kosovo. We chatted amiably, and he mentioned offhandedly that he was now in charge of the Balkan portfolio at the Prime Minister’s Office. Since job rotation is one of the key talking points in the Ministry, I happened to know this already. I smiled and said that, given his situation, I was not quite certain whether that was such a good idea. He immediately rounded on me and asked in a rather imperious tone of voice what I meant by that? Well, I said, given that you are married to a Serb, I take it that you will be predisposed to seeing this conflict from the Serbian side. At this he raised his index finger and wagged it in my face and said, emphasizing every word, “That’s not it at all. I make it a point of honour to be neutral. If I am not, I am finished (*Sånn er det ikke, altså. Jeg setter min ære i å være nøytral. Er jeg ikke det, er jeg ferdig*).” Diplomats are famously indirect in their manner of communicating, and I cannot remember ever having interacted with one in this manner either before or after. That in itself demonstrates that, to Ludvig, the tension between his job responsibilities and his home life was tangible, and that he was very alive indeed to the possible repercussions of that tension. For these reasons, it is more interesting that his reaction to the tension was to deny its existence altogether. To Ludvig, managing the self in this case simply seemed to imply compartmentalizing the two scripts for how to behave at home and how to behave on the job in a proper and decisive manner, and to force the possibility of and probable success of such compartmentalization onto any skeptical interlocuters that may come in his way, as I had apparently done.

If the tension between life at home and life on the job is not usually marked as typical of diplomacy, the tension between life at home and life abroad certainly is. There do, however, exist similarities and overlaps between the types of tension. At one point, my friend Miro had been appointed to a job in a particularly difficult mission abroad, where there was no school that could cater to the varied needs of his five children. Miro was going nonetheless, opting to let his wife Petra stay behind and take care of the kids. I mentioned this to a mutual friend in the service, a man in his 50s, who told me in no uncertain terms that “I think Petra will do just fine, Iver, just fine” (*jeg tror Petra vil greie seg helt fint jeg, Iver*). The message was clear: this was how things were, and it was none of my business to worry about it. A

man is a man, and a job is a job. If the two do not go together, it is nobody's business but your own.

Similarly, and this was one of the few times when I had the feeling that one of my interlocutors strove not to let his temper flare, at one point I met the Norwegian consul general to Murmansk, the Russian border town close to Norway, of which the general perception in the Ministry seemed to be that life revolved around working during the day and drinking during the night. As we walked down the corridors, a mutual friend by the name of Finn greeted him and remarked to me, in a stage whisper, "he comes home every month for his detoxic (*avrusning*)."⁷ I could see that the taunt had its effect, but he shot right back: "did you say delousing or detoxing" (*sa du avrusning eller avlusning*)? We trundled on together, and in an attempt at being sympathetic, I offered a comment to the effect that it must be a lonely existence working up there. "We are 20 people up there," he retorted. "Yes," said Finn, "but the work of the other 19 is to extend visas." The conversation had now definitely deteriorated. Finn took off, and the two of us continued on our way to lunch. In yet another attempt at being sympathetic, I remarked that "I am impressed by the work that is done up there, I bet it is tough going." This rather seemed to aggravate him further: "There are so many misunderstandings about Murmansk. The tasks are very interesting indeed (*arbeidsoppgavene er kjempeinteressante*)."⁷ "Yes," I said, "but there are no schools and all that?" "That's exactly it. You cannot be there with a family, that is true, but if you can separate your private life from your professional one, it is excellent. That is of course an artificial divide, but then again, it is only 2 years . . ." (*Men kan du dele mellom privatliv og jobb, er det flott. Det er selvfølgelig kunstig. Men for to år . . .*) We split up in order to lunch with our respective dates (lunch in the MFA canteen is the key networking event of the day), and the conversation turned to a colleague who had taken up a house loan that proved to be a bit much. "Well, then he will have to make the trip to Murmansk for a few years," one of my interlocutors remarked. Being consul general to Murmansk is the best-paid job in the Norwegian civil service overall. In order to find staff who want to take on the double kind of compartmentalization of life that usually happens at this station, where the diplomat has to be away from her home country as well as from home and hearth, the Norwegian state offers substantial material compensations. Here we arrive at a point where the bureaucratic script deconstructs itself, for the suggestion that you go to Murmansk to provide materially for your family suggests that, in order to fulfill your everyday responsibility at home, you have to be away from that home, and so cannot fulfill another part of the script, which is simply to *be at home*.

Inasmuch as this is an oft-observed paradox in the literature on the family and the work place, I will not pursue it further here. I should rather like to pursue the job/home split as an entrance into a question that is more specific to the question of being a diplomat, namely how this split is imbricated with the question of the relative weight of the two scripts. Diplomats are highly reflective about this clash of scripts (although it is not of course couched in the analytical terms used here). For example, since the mid-1990s, a Norwegian diplomat has been liaised to the Norwegian mission to the country that holds the chairmanship of the EU. Since the chairmanship rotates every 6 months, this liaison is particularly nomadic even for a diplomat. One of the correlates is that one ends up living in hotels even more often and for even longer periods than the average diplomat. When one of my superiors,

⁷A year later, I found myself at lunch with him and a group of apprentices. In order to find out exactly what he held to be so interesting, I steered the conversation in the direction of Murmansk. He immediately repeated that it had been the most interesting of his three postings. "Why so", one apprentice asked, "you are alone up there?" "You are not going abroad to meet other diplomats, are you? Since you are alone, it means you have easier access to people in the local administration. [. . .] And one more thing: you have good *rapport* with the local officials on the Norwegian side". The opportunities for mediation are therefore ample, direct and, as it were, unmediated.

Klara, held the job in Lisbon during the Portuguese presidency, she ended up in a hotel for the entire stay, with her husband and fellow diplomat Gustav staying behind in Oslo. “I came home and I said to Gustav ‘why haven’t the bathroom towels been changed’ ” she once told me over luncheon. Where Ludvig insisted on the possibility of keeping home away from work and the consulate general tried to celebrate the importance of work abroad even when it took him away from home, Klara conceded that she had caught herself trespassing the boundary by taking work home. What is at issue here is not the (extremely easily executed) deconstruction of these boundaries, however, but the fact that their conceded existence and the need to uphold them make for tensions that structure the life of a diplomat.

Klara’s reflections on her homecoming from Lisbon exemplified not only the tension between home and job but was also to throw light on the other tension between the bureaucratic and the hero scripts mentioned above. This tension, it turned out, was also imbricated with the division home/abroad. A little more than a year later, I was having lunch with Klara and two other colleagues when the question of Kaliningrad came up. I mentioned that I had a research colleague who had followed the situation there for 6 years, and suggested that we invite him for lunch to get an informal briefing. When Klara hesitated, I remarked that it was a paradox to me that diplomats were always on the look-out for information and contacts when abroad, indeed that they actually saw it as a key part of the job to network and swap information, but that at home they almost seemed to be allergic to external contact. “You have a much freer position when you are abroad (*ute*),” came the answer. “When you come home you make umpteen mistakes, you send faxes here and you forget to obtain a signature there. You get a bureaucracy shock (*Du får byråkratsjokk*), at least that was what happened to me when I came home from Lisbon.”

Unwilling Bureaucrats

This generalization reproduces a general theme in research on scripts for everyday life in a number of other “Western” locations, namely that there is a hierarchical order between the scripts, in the sense that the hero script is dominant and the bureaucracy script is subdued. It is of interest to the business at hand for at least two reasons. First, diplomats acknowledge that aspects of their work are bureaucratic and accept the factual correctness of being termed bureaucrats. Desk officers are referred to, formally and informally, as *saksbehandlere*, and this is also a term of self-description. Furthermore, it happens that tasks carried out by senior civil servants are also referred to by the term referring to what a *saksbehandler* does, namely *saksbehandling*, “handling.” For example, when the Head of Department had to cancel a meeting with our section without giving a specific reason, the Head of Section announced that “he won’t come, supposedly he had to handle (*saksbehandle*) something.” When the Deputy head said that actually, he had to change to winter tires on his car, the Head’s response was “handle the car, ha ha” (*saksbehandle bilen, he he*). When I started my second stint in the MFA and met my first boss again, one of his first questions was whether I had been able to get away from handling cases (“*du slipper vel saksbehandling?*”). A *saksbehandler* is definitely a bureaucrat. This term is used not only in other Ministries but also about executive officers in other bureaucratic organizations such as social aid offices and regulatory bodies.⁸ In a Norwegian setting, Herzfeld’s (1992) study of Greek bureaucrats would first and foremost be relevant to the study of the subset of bureaucrats known exactly as *saksbehandlere*. Nonetheless, whereas *saksbehandler* is a ubiquitous term among diplomats, I never heard the terms *byråkrat* (bureaucrat) and *byråkrati* (bureaucracy)

⁸The standard Norwegian-English dictionary has the following: *saksbehandler* [official responsible for dealing with applications, etc.]; executive officer; [...] official in charge, officer in charge; (*mil* & U.S.) action officer; [...] (social) caseworker; *jeg er ikke Deres* ~ I am not the one who is in charge of your case; *være* ~ *for noe (ofte)* handle something (fix who handles this?) (Kirkeby, 1993).

used as positive and non-ironic self-referencing terms, the fact that they are both everyday Norwegian terms notwithstanding. They would be used frequently, but always as in the example just given, in ways that implied distance.

Two examples. The first formal task set for those who have been accepted into the diplomatic academy is to entertain at the Ministry's annual Christmas Party. This is done by the team-building exercise of staging a variety show. If a sketch is held to be of extraordinary quality, it may make it into the house organ, which is distributed to all employees four times a year. In *Opprykkstelefonen* (The promotion phonenumber) (2000), one may read one example of this, as follows:

“The promotion phonenumber”

Sketch from the variety show 1999

Author: Torunn Viste

Setting: A gray bureaucrat is sitting at his desk amidst huge piles of document and a telephone. He looks desolate.

(Ringing. The answering machine is activated)

-You have reached the Department of Administration's promotion phonenumber. All lines are occupied. Please hold.

(Beep)

-We are sorry that you will have to wait, but all lines are still busy . . .

-In order to hear the Foreign Minister's brief in anticipation of the WTO summit in Seattle, press 1

-For a pep talk from the Secretary General of the MFA, press 2

-For the Minister of Development's favourite speeches, press 3

-For declamation of the Directive for Norwegian Foreign Service employees [*Utenriksinstruksen*] by [well-known Norwegian actor] Kyrre Haugen Bakke, press 4

[. . .]

(Fill-in music—Beethoven's Fifth [in Norwegian *Skjebnesymfonien*, literally “Fate Symphony”])

-We are sorry that you will have to wait. You are not moving up . . .

(Beep)

-In order to move up the queue, you may choose the following available positions:

-For Chancellor to Bogotá, press 1

-For Embassy Secretary to Bujumbura, press 2

-For Minister to Ulan Bator, press 3

(Beep)

-We should like to remind you that if you hang up, you will move down three salary brackets

(Engaged tone)

-We should like to remind you that the price of this call is one hour's salary a minute. Your debt will be deducted from . . . (finally a normal signal breaks in, there is a sign of optimism in the bureaucrat's face)

(The answering machine is activated)

-This is the Department of Administration. Our office hours are from 12. 30 pm to 1 pm. Please call back tomorrow.

(The call is disconnected. Long dialing tone).

A second example, during banter at a weekly section meeting, the recurring question of how to guide a case through “the system” (*systemet*, that is, the MFA understood as a formal, line-based, hierarchical organization) came up. “What is the rule in this case?” I asked. “Let's just take it straight to the political leadership, that's

the easiest way to do it” said Wanda, who had good political connections and always tried to get a piece of the action. The chair immediately exclaimed “No no!” “At least in practice,” Wanda offered. “No, as many levels as possible,” the chair said wryly, and a third colleague immediately added “Standard bureaucratic fashion.” Indeed, referring to the MFA as “the system” already invites this kind of response, for it is seen as a vaguely negatively loaded term, to be distinguished from, for example, the frequently used term “in-house” (*her i huset* and *her på huset*), or again “home” (*hjemme*). Heroic pitching of memos and ideas outside of “the line” (that is, by bypassing parts of the formal chain of command) is to be kept down in favor of what is acknowledged as a bureaucratic script, but identification with this script is nonetheless kept at bay.

In keeping their distance from the terms bureaucrat and bureaucracies, diplomats are different from, for example, employees in the Norwegian Ministry of Defence (MoD). During my stay there, I once approached the head of another section than my own on the issue of money. The two sections, which were in different departments, had a vague history of enmity that largely seemed to be due to the fact that the other section had their hands on the purse strings in a number of cases where “my” section had the professional responsibility. I presented my request, and the man with the money asked to see the paper that empowered me to make it. When I did not produce a paper and simply referred to a conversation with the political leadership, he lost his temper and burst out: “No paper? What’s that? We are bureaucrats, don’t you forget!” The loss of temper, his appearance (touseled hair, shirt trailing over his trousers, tie askance) and his message all contrasted sharply with norms in the MFA. The internalization of the Weberian reading of what a bureaucrat should be that was on display here may serve as a reminder that, although diplomats as civil servants are keenly aware that a subject position as bureaucrat is held out for them to fill and also that they may be seen as actually filling it, they nonetheless keep their distance from it by refusing to adopt it as a self-description. Identification with “the system,” understood as state bureaucracy, is simply weaker in the MFA.

A second example concerns internal control. In keeping with the principles of New Public Management and other ploys to heighten the level of governmentality throughout the public sector, there is ever-increased pressure on each and every public servant to report on his or her activities. This self-administration has come to take up a sizable part of the working day, in average perhaps around 20%. There are detailed sets of recommendations for a whole gamut of working operations that has to be followed, and there are controllers so that self-control is conducted according to these recommendations. For example, tea and coffee, mineral water, and food may be provided only

- (a) At meetings and conferences where representatives for other public or private institutions participate.
- (b) At steering, council, board, and similar meetings where other than internals participate.
- (c) At the end of committee work that has had a long duration (Utenriksdepartementets kontoplan, 2002:40).

If you decide to go ahead and serve something, you need to fill in a special form beforehand, and have it stamped by the Department leadership. Then you have to order the food, and to check that the order has been registered. After the meeting, you have to write up a report on who actually participated. I went through this in the MoD once, and complained bitterly about the amount of time it all took (I’d say all in all about half a working day), only to be told that this was how things were, and how things should be. After this experience, I made it one of my goals never to administer food and drink inside a Ministry again. This ambition was thwarted at

the end of my second stay in the MFA, however. Sure enough, 6 weeks after my submission of the report, it was returned to my section from Internal Control (*Regnskapsenheten*) with the note: "To be defended in the light of tariffs on food and drink, cf. the MFA's conto plan page 41." It turned out that "For meetings within regular working hours where it seems natural to serve food and drink," the tariff was NOK 65 per person, and I had spent somewhat more. My Head of Section wanted me to write a new memo, apologizing, and so I did, offering to pay the trifling sum in question (NOK 600) out of pocket. This, however, was summarily dismissed; I had to apologize, and promise to be good from now on (*love bot og bedring*). So I did. I should have thought that, between the three of us and the Section's secretary, we spent some 4 or 5 hours at the operation. The interesting thing, though, was that both the Head of Section, my other collaborators, as well as casual MFA interlocutors to whom I wryly slipped the story were totally po-faced about it. Whereas in the MoD, these matters were treated as serious and matter-of-fact, the only one who seemed to take it seriously in the MFA was the chap in Internal Control. Typical bureaucratic chores like this one were seen to by expert skill, but they were never talked about, rather they seemed to be tolerated as a necessary evil, never to be considered as constitutive of the diplomat's work.

A comparison with the MoD may also be instructive more generally. In the MoD, the implicit baseline for luncheon debates about general policy question was that, once the Ministry had taken an official stance, loyalty demanded that this stance was binding on each specific employee. This was internalized, so that there was also an expectation that questions of the type "don't you agree that . . ." should be answered in the affirmative. In the MFA, on the other hand, while there was also an expectation that a dissenting point of view should not be brought up, it nonetheless often emerged in conversation (but then always in characteristically understated terms). Furthermore, I never overheard anybody demanding an active cheer for a specific policy, as I frequently did in the MoD.

Discourse to Practice: Negotiation

He who seeketh shall find. I began by culling two scripted selves from Taylor, and of course I found these two scripts in the self-presentations of Norwegian diplomats. But something is missing. There is little in what I have written so far that is specific to diplomacy understood as a *practice*. What happens if, instead of investigating how scripts of selves that have been extracted from a broad "Western" discourse appear in the discourse of diplomacy, one begins by asking how diplomats present what they do? More specifically, one may ask how the presentation of self looks by looking for the specific instances when diplomats present what they themselves think are the practices that form the key or even core of diplomacy.⁹

The one time that I felt something that would begin to approach intimacy with one of my bosses occurred at the end of an exhausting day of planning the Department's work schedule for the upcoming year. We were tucked away in a lovely retreat at the edge of town and had just finished a rather good three-course meal. Some of the other participants had drifted off, and the three of us who were left were deep into our generous French brandies. The third person mentioned a meeting he had just been to on development aid. Mmm, the boss ruminated, and proceeded to recall how he had scuttled between his in-house job in Oslo and a particularly intricate and long-lasting United Nations Committee for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) negotiating game in Geneva concerning the afterglow of the New Economic World Order in the 1970s. "Those were the days. We negotiated around the clock, for months and months. I remember we once held a parenthesis

⁹I do not suggest that I am performing a shift here from etic to emic presentations of diplomatic selves, for as I have demonstrated above, diplomats are reflective about the bureaucratic and hero scripts.

for hours, way into the night (*En gang holdt vi en parentes til langt ut på natta*).” There was a pause, and then he looked up from his snifter and added that, of course, being away so much had actually cost him his marriage.

In light of the above, what stands out here is the clash of the everyday script of the homebound good husband and the hero script of the nomadic diplomat. In terms of practices, however, what stands out is that the happy memory is encapsulated in the holding of a parenthesis. In negotiations, particularly in multilateral negotiations, it is common for the outcome to take the textual shape of an end communique. Following initial rounds, where positions are taken up, alliances formed and tactics employed, one arrives at a stage when drafts are presented. Eventually, these drafts will be melded together, with the more or less explicit goal being a document that may lend itself to everybody’s signature. Inevitably, there will be divergences over what shall be excluded and what shall be included, how points included should be formulated, how strongly they should be presented and in what order, how binding they should appear to be, etc. If initial negotiations over these textual points do not result in immediate consensus, stuff may be literally bracketed, for example in the sense that a roundabout formulation will be agreed upon, and a more specific reading will be put in parentheses behind it. This is a dangerous moment for the side that is being bracketed, for everybody knows that there will be no end document if the bracketed issues are not settled, and the expectation all around will be that the final settlement will involve doing away with the parentheses. There is no guarantee that any part of what has been bracketed will actually survive in the finished text. “To hold a bracket,” then, means that you are holding out for what is (at least for the time being) a specific minority position. Inevitably, the heat will be on for you not to hold on, which implies that you will (again at least temporarily) be in the thick of things. “To hold a bracket” is to be in the thick of the practice of negotiation. The memory that was so dear to my boss that he was able to put it across with uncharacteristic warmth was the one of being a negotiator in full flight. And that memory was dear enough to be dear regardless of the steep and still remembered personal price at which it had been acquired.

All five editions of *Satow’s Guide to Diplomatic Practice*, the work that has been the ubiquitous standard reference work for diplomats since the appearance of “Satow II” (the general term used for the second edition) in 1919, begins with the same definition: “Diplomacy is the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states, extending sometimes also to their relations with vassal states” (Satow, [1917] 1979:3). This is to say that the authoritative handbook definition of diplomacy singles out one particular kind of negotiation—those that form part of the conduct of official relations between the governments—as being at the heart of diplomacy. This definition may be re-traced in the lived experience of diplomats, as when my boss looked back at what was for him a (the?) high point of his career. To give but two additional examples, during an open staff meeting (*allmøte*) called by the Foreign Minister, Ole took the floor to plug the work of his Department, describing an upcoming negotiation sequence as follows:

Those tasks are always the most interesting ones in the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs when you are at home, and this is something that we really know how to do. We excel at it. [. . .] We will negotiate it tactically, [think about] how to time it correctly, how to square off a linkage deal . . .

My boss and Ole both celebrated negotiation as a practice they have lived. However, stories about negotiation are so strong that they also leave an imprint on people who have not yet participated in this practice, but who would like to do so and who may act not upon lived practice, but upon *stories* they have picked up about those

practices. One day when the administration was in the midst of doing their final interviews with applicants, I ran into Hattie, who had just finished her interview. We chatted, and she volunteered that

The psychologist asked if I had been in any conflicts at the work place, and I said no, but to give him something I told him about the conflict in the family. I said that it passed quickly, though, no need for him to think I come from this trouble-ridden family. He asked me how I related to that, and I said I took up the position of mediator (*mæglerrolle*).

An interview with a psychologist whose job is to clear you or not clear you for prospective diplomatic work may be seen as an act of interpellation into a diplomatic subject position. Hattie, who knew the Ministry from jobs in adjacent organizations, responded by “giving” the psychologist who interviewed her a presentation of herself as a mediator, that is, as an active facilitator of negotiations.

One defining trait of a negotiator is that he or she is in the thick of a negotiation game, that they incorporate a position in a game. Given this structural situation two things stand out as particularly important where the question of self-management is concerned. The first is what kinds of positions are available to diplomats. The second is how diplomats mediate their performance in those positions with their overall narrative of self.

Mediation as Diplomacy

A key thing about the diplomats as negotiators is that they do not experience negotiation as taking place on behalf of themselves. They see their role as being that of incorporating their Minister, their Ministry, their government, their state.¹⁰ This explains a luncheon conversation I had, when Sam, who had just organized a large meeting, said “The MFA does not know how to negotiate price” (*UD kan ikke forhandle om pris*). “Do you mean formally, or do you mean that we are not really up to it?” I asked. “The latter. We get a 400 kroner discount at the Radisson SAS Hotel, and we use it a lot. My wife gets a group discount at 1000 kroner, even though she does not really use it that much.” “Isn’t that a bit embarrassing,” I ventured, “aren’t the people of this house supposed to be expert negotiators?” (*Ekke dette litt pinlig, skakke folk her i huset være spesialister på forhandlinger?*) At this stage my boss said, in the understated style that I had learnt to recognize as typical of the diplomat, “We are diplomats, you know.” The implication seemed to be that this kind of negotiation was not really for the diplomat. There is a tension here, however, for like any organization, the MFA has an administration for whom it is a key task to run things at the lowest cost possible. Furthermore, they take pride in doing so. “I am just back from Singapore—got the rent [for the office building] down by 25%,” one of their number bragged over lunch one day. There is a tension here between an organizational necessity to haggle on behalf of your own organization on the one hand, and the idea that diplomacy should be about negotiation on behalf of something else on the other, and it may be easier for somebody who is (always temporarily) based in the Administration to solve that tension by bracketing the exigencies of diplomacy (again temporarily). In a widely quoted work, Raymond Aron tries to consecrate the diplomat’s quality of being the representative of something else (as he sees it, typically and exclusively of the state) as the essence of what is often (if misleadingly) called “international relations,” when he states that

Inter-state relations are expressed in and by specific action, those of individuals whom I shall call symbolic, the *diplomat* and the *soldier*. Two men, and only two, no

¹⁰There are a range of other possibilities here, including the ones of representing a class, an ethnic group, an NGO, or humanity as such, but for this textual moment, I do not want to hold this parenthesis.

longer function as individual members but as *representatives* of the collectives to which they belong: the *ambassador*, in the exercise of his duties, *is* the political unit in whose name he speaks; the *soldier* on the battlefield *is* the political unit in whose name he kills his opposite number. (Aron, [1962] 1966:5)

In the days of corporeal communication, when ambassadors were physically far removed from their Kings, being his representative often involved a high number of degrees of freedom, for orders were short and few, and the scope for running consultation was next to non-existent. Ambassadors were quite literally governed from afar. Where the scope for direct methods of governance is small, indirect governance becomes more important. Put differently, if conduct cannot be governed directly, an alternative governing strategy is to resort to the conduct of conduct. One way to do this is to foster a mentality of being governed and a code of behaviour based on loyalty and standardized action. Michel Foucault (2000) theorizes this kind of governance under the banner of governmentality, and sees its historical emergence as tied up with the emergence of society, which placed itself as a dense layer between the King and the subjects and increased the need for indirect governance. I should like to add that, given the available means and media of communication in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, the fact that the ambassador was far removed physically as well as outside of the King's immediate sovereign grasp politically (being as he was on the soil of another sovereign) made for a structurally similar relation between the King and his ambassador as that which would emerge centuries later between the King and his subjects in general. Historically, diplomatic practice may be read as an early example of governmentality, with geographical distance and foreign sovereignty taking the place of intruding factors later taken up by society. In light of this, diplomatic practice may be read as an early example of governmentality. Perhaps the time dimension of this may be captured by using a parallel to a kind of translation other than the cultural translation of diplomacy, namely the translation of a text from one language to the other. At the inception of modern diplomacy, the diplomat was akin to the translator of a novel. He could sit in his study poring over the text, consulting other texts, and even other translators before he made his move and translated this sentence or that paragraph. Today, the diplomat seems to be closer to the simultaneous translator. She travels from place to place, each time picking up something in one language through her ear and letting it come out in another through her mouth, but with infinitely less time to shape it, and perhaps not even catching it all because of the speed of the transaction.¹¹

How relevant is this observation of historical change for today's situation? Today's diplomats may be more keenly aware of direct governance weighing in on their negotiating role, for in cases where the political interest of their superiors is high, direct interaction may be very dense indeed. Furthermore, inasmuch as general communications have become denser, the diplomat has a whole range of (potential) competitors as the local incarnation of the foreign state that he represents. There are more journalists, traders, aid workers, tourists, military advisers, students, Presidential representatives, emigrés, etc. around than there used to be. This does not necessarily mean that the ability of diplomats to represent states has dwindled, but it means that more work will have to be spent on marking it in more contexts than what used to be the case. A Norwegian diplomat in Argentina still "is" Norway, but she probably "is" Norway in fewer contexts and maybe also in a lesser degree than what could be said about her predecessor on the post 90 years ago.

¹¹At a conference in Costa Rica, I once asked a simultaneous translator from the Spanish to English to clarify a point for me. She smiled and said that she never remembered anything of what she translated, that it just passed through her. For an excellent fictional account, see Brooke-Rose (1975).

There still is one sphere where she may “be” Norway without expending many resources on it, however, and that is in negotiations. True, she may sometimes, and in an increasing degree, have to vie with other state representatives (particularly bureaucrats from other ministries) for the role of key state representative, but this is a fight that she routinely wins. Historical comparison suggests that, of the key diplomatic functions, the function of “representation” may be less important than it was, as may the function of “gathering information” (because here, too, there are an increasing number of competitors with access to an increasingly varied and fast-operating gamut of media through which they may channel the information gathered). It stands to reason that the third textbook function, negotiation, comes to carry more weight in determining what it is to be a diplomat.

However, the negotiator does not stand still for his portrait, either. The meaning of what it is to negotiate also seems to be changing. For the diplomat, the *mediating* aspect of negotiation seems to be of increasing importance. Already three decades ago, my boss shuttled between Oslo and negotiations, always with fresh positions in his portfolio. To him, negotiation was no longer strategic, that is, a question of long-term give and take where he himself could change a number of parameters on a running basis, but tactical, that is, variations on a theme already given. “Holding a bracket” is, after all, not a terribly varied activity. Neither is it to do with sizing up the overall picture in order to plan for efficient ways in which to go about your business. When celebrating this activity as the most interesting part of the home-based diplomat’s work, Ole stressed the *tactics* of negotiation, not its strategic aspects. Hattie presented herself as a *mediator*, that is a third party to a negotiation, not as a fully fledged negotiator. It is the negotiating itself, the *doing* that is seen as being of key importance, not the *planning* of the doing. “Analysis seems to be a foul word around here,” said a colleague offhandedly during a telephone conversation on which terms to use and which not to use for a White Paper. This particular colleague happened to hold a doctorate in anthropology, and had once been warned by the Ministry administration against taking a leave of absence in order to accept an offer to be an assistant university professor for a year or so. The two of us had discussed the lack of a conceptual approach to policy-making in the ministry at an earlier juncture, and now this colleague had just been told squarely that “analysis” was not a word that need appear in a Ministry document. This attitude was strong enough for the Planning unit, which was supposed to be the place in the organization for strategic planning, to be unceremoniously scrapped in 1999.

This willful situating in the immediate here and now, epitomized in the role of the mediator, seems to be a trait of the diplomat overall. In the Norwegian case, it ties in with overall foreign policy orientation. On the level of overall Norwegian foreign policy debate, one key debate that ran through most of the 1990s and that is still alive at the time of this writing concerns to what extent Norwegian diplomacy should be about incarnating state interest on the one hand, and of being a *fredsmegler*—a mediator or facilitator of peace—on the other. A jump between the level of diplomatic self-identification, where the stress is increasingly on the mediating aspect of negotiation, and the level of the diplomatic practice of a small state with a self-image as rich and secure, where the stress is increasingly on the mediating aspects of achieving world peace, is not wholly warranted. The differences as to what is being mediated make for vast differences in context, in some respects too vast for the purely structural similarities to be very instructive. Still, when the question is what it means to be a diplomat, the structural point is that the third-party role, where you are more and more immediately tied up with the mediating aspect of diplomacy, is on the up. “How does the [diplomatic] academy agree with you?” I asked Rudy during a drive up north of Oslo to fetch a newly slaughtered elk that he had gotten hold of through his cousin and that we were going to split and use as winter provisions. “There are a lot of simulations and all that.” “How so?”

“You know, you have 20 minutes to prepare this position or the other.” “You mean during language training?” “Yes.” Sure enough. The academy’s obligatory French course even stages a 2-day simulation conference on a topical topic every autumn, complete with a wrap-up reception where the simulated offerings are tea and biscuits. Before the October 2002 event, the language instructor circulated a long and richly annotated *Le Monde* article about the various positions of key states. Attached was the following message:

A l'attention des participants à la simulation (mardi, mercredi). Thème: Irak—quelle résolution adopter? Document intéressant—chacun pourra y trouver "ses" arguments. Nicole. [For participants at the simulation (Tuesday, Wednesday). Theme: Which resolution to adopt on Iraq? You should each be able to find "your" position in this interesting document. Nicole]

Seemingly as a sideshow to language training, Rudy and the other trainees are taught to simulate positions in order to simulate diplomacy as part of their language training. As trained diplomats, part of their work will be to simulate the positions of the Ministry and the state that they and their Ministry represent, mediating between that state and some other political entity. The substantial point is that diplomacy is about easing communication by turning yourself into an optimally functioning membrane. One may see this at the level of negotiation itself, but one may also see it in the extreme degree in which diplomats make themselves available. One Friday evening, my wife and I had a centrally based diplomat and that diplomat’s partner over for a quiet dinner. In the middle of the dinner, the diplomat’s cell phone rang, and it took almost half an hour before order was restored at table. It turned out that the Minister had wanted some telephone numbers in order to set up a meeting. It was business as usual that the Minister interrupted after hours about something like this, and it was a matter of course that the diplomat interrupted a private dinner in order to see to the matter. “It is part of the job to be available 24 hours a day,” was the only comment made. Of course, in a neo-liberal economy, such a degree of readiness is getting to be a prerequisite in order to meet the rising standards that characterize more and more jobs. I should think, however, that the apparent ease with which diplomats accept the increased degree of encroachment into their spare time that the advent of the (invariably active) cell phone has brought, is at least partially because of an already established habitus as a mediator.

Methodologically, the key point here may be that, as seen from the point of view of the feedback loop between diplomatic practices and diplomatic discourse (exemplified by Satow), there emerges a script of self that is different from both the bureaucratic script and the hero script. When seen in the light of “Western” discourse in general, negotiation and negotiation skills may simply appear as variants of bureaucratic activity, or simply a face of the diplomat hero. Viewed up close, it looks like something else, namely a script fastened on mediation, a mediation where the role of the diplomat is to be self-effacing. In a famous discussion of how prescribed management of self varies culturally, Clifford Geertz (1983) evokes a recently widowed Javanese man whose wife had “been his life.” We are offered a description of the widower as he hosts his wife’s funeral service, smiling and making formal apologies for his wife’s absence. Geertz quotes him as describing how he is in turmoil internally, and how he tries to smooth out the waves in order for there to be calm both internally and externally. Geertz then comments that we have here what is to the Westerner a very foreign way of going about the management of self. At the generalized cultural level on which Charles Taylor discusses the formation of the self, very much so. Still, as a role, the self-effacing host who sets aside his personal travails in order to put his guests at maximum ease is a stock-in-trade, so much so that this kind of behavior is a widely held ideal of corporate man and routinely

described as “acting professionally” not only when hosting, but for “going on” after or in the midst of private turmoil generally. In the case of diplomacy, furthermore, I would argue that this kind of behavior is more than a “role.” “Roles” according to a much-used definition like Boudon’s (1979:40) are “the group of norms to which the holder of a role is supposed to subscribe.” The key point here is that roles are context specific. The self-effacement that we are talking about in the case of diplomacy transcends to, in the sense that it is relevant in so many contexts and seems to be internalized in such a degree that I feel warranted in using the more pervasive term of “script” for it.

The self-effacement and passivity exist on the reflective level. In a vain attempt to get a somewhat critical memo on the turn of Euro-Atlantic relations “through the system” in the autumn of 2001, I once had an exchange with my deputy head of department, who was stonewalling what I and my head of section had “handed up” (*lagt opp*) to him. “You know,” he pointed out, presumably as an explanation of why he was against forwarding the memo to the political leadership “old [ambassador] Johansen once told me that when [sometime Norwegian Foreign Minister] John Lyng took over, he said, ‘I see you have a Political Department here. Why? I am supposed to make the policy’. And he was right!” There is a fundamental tension between diplomat and statesman here, for politicians also have their moments of wanting advice. For example, as part of a study of the relationship between the Norwegian state and society regarding the issue of landmines, I asked former Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg what the diplomats had thought about his hiring a man from “the third sector” (that is, an NGO) to work on this in the Ministry. His response was,

You know you are asking the wrong man. If there were any negative reactions, I would rarely hear them, and then only after a long stretch of time. I understood that there were reactions to new ways of doing things, but that was one of the reasons I had asked him to come in the first place (*det var jo blant annet derfor jeg hadde bedt ham om å komme*; see Neumann, 2002:127).

If statesmen do not get advice from diplomats when they feel they need it, their response may be to bypass them in favor of some other adviser. Indeed, the complaint is routinely made by politicians in other countries, sometimes in a generalized form, that diplomats cannot give advice of a strategic kind, as when John F. Kennedy complained about “foggy bottom” (that is, the U.S. State Department) that “they never have any ideas over there [...] never come up with anything new [...] the State Department is a bowl of jelly” (Kennedy, quoted in Schlesinger, 1967:406). There is a tension here between the politician wanting the hero diplomat’s advice (and the script suggesting that the diplomat should hang around the secretariat and the party organizations eagerly trying to offer it), and the politician wanting the self-effacing script. Furthermore, it is obvious that diplomats actively bandy around these scripts in their relations with one another in order to maximize their leeway in the organization. In this sense, the question of what it means to be a diplomat is also imbricated with the question of what it means to be at the dominant or the subordinate end of a set of strategic relationships inside “the system.” This, however, does not amount to much more than to argue that relationships inside hierarchical organizations are themselves hierarchical, and this is a highly trivial and somewhat 1970-ish finding that takes us no further in the direction of answering the question of what it is to be a diplomat. For this, let us return to the level of self-descriptions.

Harold Nicolson (1963:117), a British diplomat who by general consent is the native who has written most incisively about being a diplomat, makes a point that is akin to the one I have just made albeit potentially more far-reaching when he writes that “the impassivity which characterizes the ideal diplomatist must render him

much disliked by his friends.” “You may only have one stone to throw,” said my (frequently irritating) friend Miro, “and what you do is you try to make damn sure that you throw it so that it will make a maximum of difference.” And warming to the same theme in a later conversation: “I do not think the public realizes just how cynical we are [. . .] If two governments seem to be on a reasonably good footing, then the best thing to do is to let them get on with it.” “Let those who have a god take care of worrying about what we do,” an elderly and respected colleague commented when our polite conversation turned to what was to him the subordinated role of analysis in diplomatic work as opposed to the need to know the specific context and the specific state of play of a specific question. Hedley Bull has compared the *modus operandi* of diplomat posted abroad with those of the journalist and the scholar, and noted how the diplomat loses out on speed to the former and depth to the latter, but that he is

uniquely skilled in gathering a particular kind of information that is essential to the conduct of international relations. This is information about the views and policies of a country’s political leadership, now and in the near future. It is knowledge of personalities rather than of the forces and conditions which shape a country’s policy over the long term. It is knowledge of the current situation and how it is likely to develop rather than of the pattern of past regularities. It derives from day-to-day personal dealings with the leading political *stivata* in the country to which a diplomatist is accredited, sometimes to the detriment of his understanding of society at large in that country. (Bull, 1977:181; Neumann, 2004),

On this account, the trick to being a diplomat is not to worry too much about what will come, and not to think too much about the consequences of your actions, but to concentrate on the here and now, on keeping the wheels turning, and to intervene if and only if they seem to be in the process of slowing down. This may be summed up as the attitude of *festina lente*—hurry slowly. The key concepts used when debating this in the Ministry, however, is whether and to what extent one should be reactive, as opposed to pro-active. The paradoxical, and indeed seemingly impossible, self-description that usually surfaces in conclusion of such debates is that one should be *aktivt avventende*—literally “actively awaiting.” Summing up meetings, the chair will often say about some process that is outside of the Ministry’s grasp that it will have to be actively awaited. “You will have to be actively awaiting” I said, tongue in cheek, to a trainee who was fretting about a delayed piece of business for which she was responsible but that she was not in a position to speed up. “Yes,” she said, “That is something I am getting really good at.”

Conclusion

The analysis so far has thrown up three fairly tightly scripted answers to the question of what it is to be a diplomat. It is to do what is expected of you according to what is acknowledged to be a bureaucratic script but not actually called that. It is to manage alternate nomadic treks known as postings with stints at home in such a way that your superiors promote you and you appear to be a hero, a career diplomat worthy of the name. It is to incorporate a mediating function in such a degree that you do not spring to action unless it is deemed to be necessary by those on behalf of which you mediate. Since the bureaucratic and the hero scripts are culled from what it is to manage the self in a broad “Western” tradition, whereas the third script seems to be specific to diplomacy (at least in degree), in one sense the conclusion is invited that to be a diplomat is to be a self-effacing mediator. This, however, would be to privilege one script for managing the self over two other equally valid scripts simply on the grounds that the two former scripts may be found in other loci as well. That would be poor reasoning, for what is at issue is the specific

question of what it is to be a specific kind of human being, and not, as it were, only what it is to be specific. The answer to the question must be sought in how these three scripts are juggled in relation to one another, and not in any one of them.

One clue to how this is done emerged at a press conference at the Norwegian Atlantic Committee, a key interface between diplomats and others who take a professional interest in international affairs.¹² A newly pensioned successful career diplomat had done what a number of newly pensioned successful diplomats do, namely published his autobiography, increasing the number of such autobiographies to 32. His was primarily a tale of the end of the cold war, and it was subtitled "A personal account." I had found no personal accounts whatsoever in the book, only reports on corridor asides to his ambassador colleagues during pauses in negotiations and the like. So in the Q&A, I thought I should grasp the opportunity offered by the subtitle to get him to tell us a bit about how he himself had actually experienced what was going on, and what his personal views on the course of events actually were. So I asked about that. "I have not written about that," came the answer. "That's it," I said, "that's why I am asking you about it here." "No," he said, "I have written what I have to say." At this, the chair weighed in and said that it would indeed be nice to hear his own assessments, and that we could make it an off the record thing. "I called it a personal account, not a private one," came the answer, and the case was closed.

This was an intriguing move, for in the book, personal was used as a binary opposition with official, and a reader would easily jump to the conclusion that this opposition was a spin on the private\public theme. But here he was, indicating that his division of the social was indeed a tripartite one, going private\personal\public. "Personal" simply meant that part of business that was not specifically representative of official state policy, with "public" ostensibly being that official state policy. The clear implication is that, in the case of diplomats, the personal is indeed the public, but then again there exists a third realm that does not come into play at all. Put differently, the diplomat, who prides himself on his negotiating skills, needs that personal touch in his work, and so his front stage has two parts: the scene itself and the wings. Then there is the back stage (Goffman, 1959).

Indeed, as judged by people in the Norwegian foreign milieu generally, if a diplomat does not master such a tripartite presentation of self, he or she is not a fully fledged diplomat and so not a fully operational *interlocuteur valable*. One of the favorite stories of a foreign policy analyst who was married to a top-rank Norwegian politician and had spent a lifetime around diplomats was the one of how he had been sought out by a Chinese diplomat in the late 1960s. This is standard procedure; one type of information waterhole that a good diplomat posted to a certain capital will tend to seek out is the foreign policy think-tanks. The way the foreign policy analyst told the story, after two visits, the lack of exchange began to gnaw on him, and he insisted that if the Chinese diplomat came back, it would be for them to have an *exchange* of views. No problem, the Chinese diplomat retorted, and added that he would just lug along some brochures explaining the Chinese "line" on the questions in point. At this, the foreign policy analyst opined that this was not what he had in mind, and that he wanted the diplomat's *own* views. Bewildered, the diplomat asked, "Do I have to have my own opinions?" (*Må jeg ha egne meninger?*) This story, which always drew gales of laughter, may serve as a parable of aloof democratic self-understanding, but this is not the aspect that I want to stress here. Another (and related) reason that this story sparked so much mirth was that it exposed the Chinese diplomat as not living up to Norwegian doxic ideas of how a

¹²In an anthropological context, it probably needs pointing out that "international affairs" is a discursive field of which diplomacy and warfighting are key practices (c. quote from Aron given above). It is a separate discursive field among other things because it tends to be discreetly organized in relation to other discourses on global politics, such as the developmentalist or the economic ones, comp. Shore, 2000.

diplomat should act. Since that is indeed the relevant measure with which to measure cultural competence in this setting, the Chinese diplomat may be read as confirming what a standard diplomatic presentation of self should be in this setting by blatantly breaching it. When asked about “private” views, the diplomat is *expected* to offer what he himself may describe as his “personal” views. Knocks at the door to the back stage are expected to be answered by a reception not back stage, but in the wings.

In light of this, it suddenly makes sense why *only one* of the 32 autobiographies by Norwegian diplomats that have been published actually talks about anything “private,” and why the one exception is the privately published autobiography of a diplomat who, quite extraordinarily, lost her status in a court case and so parted with diplomacy formally before she did so informally, by writing about the private. It also makes sense why newspaper columns written by pensioned diplomats invariably come across as elaborations of official positions. Of course, diplomats still have a back stage. That back stage, however, seems to be tucked further back and presumably visited less often and by fewer people than what is the case for many non-diplomats in the same society. One implied theme that comes up frequently in conversation in the Ministry is the uneasiness with which diplomats watch how pensioned diplomats take up menial jobs in the Ministry that pay a fraction of what they themselves earn. If you are posted at home, you may stay in the job until you are 70, if you are abroad, you will have to step down on the very day when you round 68. So, you may have to give up your ambassadorship on the day of your 68th birthday and go straight to a backroom job where the only script that counts is the bureaucratic one. “That’s what happens to many people who have no network in Norway after all their time spent abroad” said Gordon and shuddered visibly, “they are happy to hang around here doing that kind of thing.” Why the shudder? Presumably because the pensioner–diplomat has no career and no standing as an adviser, and so has lost access to the hero script. The negotiation script no longer applies, either. The pensioner–diplomat is therefore left with the bureaucratic script only, and in the eyes of diplomats, to be a diplomat should be something *more* than being a bureaucrat. The pensioner–bureaucrat thus appears as a living reminder of what any diplomat may be reduced to. The bureaucracy script, after all, is already the master script: it weaves itself into the other scripts, it is used as a key resource when senior diplomats set out to dominate junior diplomats; it dominates what the diplomat refers to as the “personal” sphere of life and looms over what she refers to as her “private” sphere.

At the risk of over-interpretation, I should like to suggest that there is a home and hearth penchant to this on-the-job story of alienation. Gordon’s shudder could not be in response to what happens to the pensioner on the job only, for on the job, the pensioner still does have a network. Indeed, that is why he is there. The shudder must, therefore, also have to do with the diplomat-pensioner’s situation in his private life. My guess would be that the scary prospect is that, having been denied access to the scene as a pensioner, and after 40 years or more of cordoning off your back stage, some diplomat-pensioners may have lost their way there altogether. In that case, with no front stage available, the wings are the only place left to go. Perhaps old diplomats never die; they just fade into the wings.

In his lectures on governmentality, Foucault (2000) stresses that governance is a form of power where the king’s head is chopped off, by which he means that there is no one cerebral center from which there emanates a master plan and a master’s voice. Rather, it is the practices that hold out subject positions into which individuals are interpellated, as well as scripts about what to do. To be a diplomat is to incorporate a set of practices (such as how to write a text that looks personal but that does not break with state policy). If socialization is about incorporation in the sense of mastering the scripts that go in a procession before diplomatic discourse so that one may gain fluency of practice, then governmentality is about acting out those

scripts fluently, which is to say in such a way that they confirm discourse. To be a diplomat is indeed to be self-effacing, but not only in the sense that the subject position of mediator effaces the diplomat as a third party between two agents. The self-effacing also takes the form that, if you overfulfill your scripts, you may experience anxiety about losing your entry pass to your own backstage.

References

- ABBOTT, A. (1988) *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- ARON, R. ([1962] 1966) *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*. Fox Garden City, NY: Doubleday. Trans. Richard Howard and Anette Baker.
- BOUDON, R. (1979) *The Logic of Social Action: An Introduction to Sociological Analysis*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- BOYD, W. (1981) *A Good Man in Africa*. London: Hamilton.
- BROOKE-ROSE, C. (1975) *Thru*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- BULL, H. (1977) *The Anarchical Society. A Study of Order in World Politics*. London: Macmillan.
- CLIFFORD, J. (1986) "Introduction." In *Writing Culture—The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by J. Clifford and G. E. Marcus. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- CONSTANTINO, C. (1996) *On the Way to Diplomacy*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- DER DERIAN, J. (1996) "Hedley Bull and the Idea of Diplomatic Culture." In *International Society after the Cold War. Anarchy and Order Reconsidered*, edited by R. Fawn and J. Larkins, pp. 84–100. Houndsmills: Macmillan.
- FELDBÆK, O. (2000) "Vækst og reformer—dansk forvaltning 1720–1814." In *Dansk forvaltningshistorie I. Stat, forvaltning og samfund. Fra middelalderen til 1901*, edited by L. E. Jespersen, E.L Petersen and D. Tamm, pp. 227–340. København: Jurist- og økonomforbundets forlag. ["Growth and Reforms—Danish Government 1720–1814." In *Danish History of Government, Vol. I: State, Government and Society from the Middle Ages to 1901*].
- FOUCAULT, M., ed. (2000) "Governmentality." In *Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984. Volume 3: Power*, edited by J. D. Faubion, pp. 201–222. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- GEERTZ, C. (1983) "From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding." In *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, pp. 55–70. London: Fontana.
- GOFFMAN, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- HERZFELD, M. (1992) *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy*. New York: Berg.
- HOLLIS, M. (1985) "Of Masks and Men." In *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, edited by M. Carrithers, S. Collins and S. Lukes, pp. 215–233. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- KIRKEBY (1993) *Norsk-engelsk ordbok, stor utgave*. Oslo: Kunnskapsforlaget. [Norwegian–English Dictionary, Comprehensive ed.].
- NEUMANN, I. B. (2002) "Harnessing Social Power: State Diplomacy and the Land-Mines Issue." In *Enhancing Global Governance: Towards a New Diplomacy?*, edited by A. F. Cooper, J. English and R. Thakur, pp. 106–132. Tokyo: United Nations University Press.
- NEUMANN, I. B. (2004) "The English School on Diplomacy." In *Diplomacy. Sage Library of International Relations*, Vol. 1., edited by C. Jönsson and R. Langhorne, pp. 92–116. London: Sage.
- NICOLSON, H. (1963) *Diplomacy*, 3. London: Oxford University Press.
- OPPRYKKSTELEFONEN 2000 UD-Posten, no. 1. p. 17. ["The Promotion Phone" The Norwegian MFA's Bulletin].
- SATOW, S. E. (Lord Gore-Booth, ed.) ([1917] 1979) *Satow's Guide to Diplomatic Practice*, 5. London: Longman.
- SCHLESINGER, A. M. (1967) *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy at the White House*. London: Mayflower-Dell.
- SHORE, C. (2000) *Building Europe. The Cultural Policies of European Integration*. London: Routledge.
- STOLTENBERG, T. (1983) "Statssekretær i Utenriksdepartementet." In *Fra diplomatiets verden*, edited by I. Galtung and A. R. Bjerke, pp. 63–65. Oslo: Atheneum. ["Undersecretary in the Norwegian MFA", From the World of Diplomacy].
- TAYLOR, C. (1989) *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- WEBER, E. (1977) *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914*. London: Chatto & Windus.