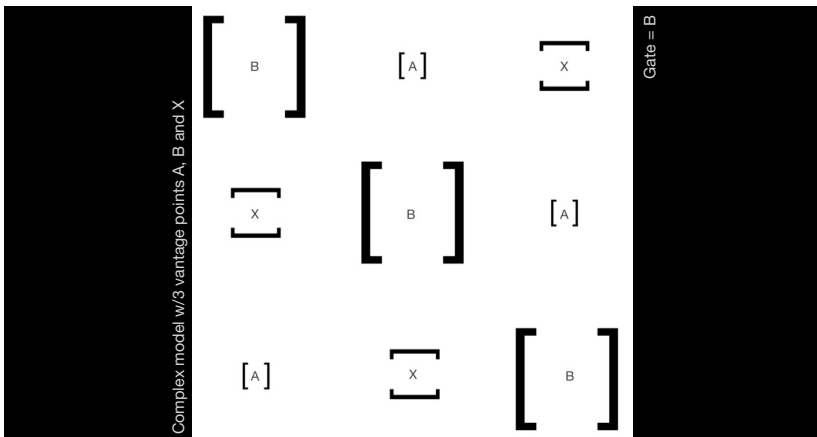


When as a student I read Prof. Barth's [Models of Social Organization](#) I was struck by his comparison of his idea of transaction with Plato's dialogues: bargaining, as it were, for the better argument. As student with some knowledge of philosophy the statement appeared blatantly simplistic.

Over the years, as I came to better know his works, I discovered that his patient step-by-step approach of reaping empirical insights from the great variety of his fieldworks, was guided by the intuition that if there are *cultural depths* to be assessed, the chance is that you will find them in *transactions*.

I considered my study of his work—despite the fact of coming from a quite different theoretical background—and the discussions with him, as part of my *apprenticeship* as a fieldworker. His way of including me into his sphere of living knowledge, later became a model for me in my work as a teacher.



A number of early discussions with Prof. Barth were on whether/not—or, in what sense—the [Pathans of Swat](#) were truly an [acephalic](#) society, made up of allegiances between chieftains across non-adjoining lands, where allegiances were non-segmentary owing to land-inheritance customs.

Or, whether the customs were in fact a *legal structure* with a head of state, as his book [The Last Wali of Swat](#) seems to suggest. However, the cast of Saints to which the Wali belonged, of whom he wrote in the early Pathan studies, partook of what later became the Taliban, are largely acephalic.

Though, dealing with matters of state in their own way. Of course, as part of the North Western Territories at the frontier between Pakistani and the Afghan territories, Swat was not only a stronghold of transactional allegiances, but of complex *border-crossings*, diverse *ecologies* and *cosmologies*.

Thus, from quite early on, Prof. Barth's work was complexly *layered*, and not *one-dimensional* as his Marxist critics claimed in the 70s. His approach reminded me of a *painter's* whose method is to work on many parts of the canvas at the same time: and complexly layered as they meet.

This was particularly evident from his article on [scale](#), which was deemed overly complex and extremely difficult at the time. Today, it appears almost as plain reading. In sum, it appears that Prof. Barth—despite the contingencies of his nomadic fieldwork—had a *plan*: that is, for his *whole* career.

Or, perhaps it is better to say that he was moved by an *intention* that appeared as a plan, which a life-long scope, once his choice of fieldwork settled at 3 levels: **1)** selecting the site and *preparing* for it; **2)** *doing* the actual fieldwork; **3)** letting it sink in through *writing*; publishing, reviews...

What is the connection between his fieldwork among the [Bakhtaman of New Guinea](#), and his work on [Balinese worlds](#)? The connection surfaced in comparative works such as the [Guru and the Conjurer](#). While the *comparative analysis* came out in his work on *cultural encounters*.

The latter, featuring his interest in tasks and occasions at the backdrop of the social organisation of cultural encounter, [Analytical dimensions in the analysis of social organization](#), I felt was one of his major contributions, because it also featured the *morphology/grammar* of his own *fieldworks*.

The point being that Prof. Barth *never* lined up his systematic approach to fieldwork, in an *abstract* notion of system (say, Wallerstein's world system, which he too abandoned for more [complex studies](#)). From the point of view of his theoretical fragments, there seems almost to be a lack of system.

However, some works clearly play the role of *programmes* for later studies: for instance, [Cosmologies in the making](#) would pitch his later writings on establishing the dimensions of comparison, following the loops (Bateson) of fieldwork, featuring his ethnographic focus on [transactions in knowledge](#).