Prologue

A Postulant Anthropologist

> The novel by David Garnett, *A Man in the Zoo* … tells the story of a young man who quarrels with his girlfriend during a visit to a zoo and, in despair, writes to the director of the zoo to offer him a mammal missing from his collection, man—himself. He is then put in a cage, next to the chimpanzee, with a sign saying: "Homo sapiens. MAN. This specimen, born in Scotland, was presented to the Society by John Cromartie, Esq. Visitors are requested not to irritate the man by personal remarks."
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> —Pierre Bourdieu, Huxley Memorial Lecture 2002[1]

Cloistered life in contemporary European Catholicism is generally studied on the basis of the writings and recollections of those who live inside that world but do not allow others to enter.[2] Texts offer quantitative data, descriptions, and economic information, while recollections tell us about conversions and faith experiences. However, little can be learned about practical living, the little things of daily life, and experiential aspects, through inductive reasoning. Cloistered life, an extreme expression of monastic lifestyle (i.e., a total institution), prohibits, or limits, community members from leaving the monastery and bars the layperson from entering. Thus, both physically and symbolically, one is separated from the outside world.[3] These limitations have often produced studies in which fieldwork is either entirely absent or evidently deformed, since fieldwork entails both meeting and communicating.[4] Daily life ends up being funneled through specific locations, such as the visiting room or parlor,[5] the library, or some rooms on the outer limits of the cloister. Both social actors and the anthropologist are thereby delocalized, and the anthropologist does not experience the community, except through intermediaries. It is by *being inside* that one sees the actions of others alongside one's own actions.[6] Being inside is the key to directly experiencing daily actions and sharing in experiential dynamics.

This work is the result of observant participation (and not merely participant observation), through which I became a full-fledged social actress inside two French Discalced Carmelite monasteries. As an ethnography, it is a direct experience of daily practices in cloistered life. But in my case, being admitted to the cloister for research meant I was allowed to enter *as though* I were a postulant. As specified in the 1917 Code of Canon Law, and in the *Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns* (1991) (hereafter referred to as *Constitutions*), a postulant is a woman who, having expressed the desire to join a religious Order, enters a trial period called postulancy.[7] This phase allows the person to experience life in the monastery for a brief period of time, one or two months, before the decision is made to proceed with admission into the novitiate. This status allowed me to take upon myself the rights and regulations that apply to a postulant and be part of the process through which a woman draws near to cloistered life and, acting upon herself, constructs what it means for her to be a nun. The first phase begins with the deconstruction of the social representation of the female person, which is gradually replaced with a new representation deemed more functional and better suited to the *status* and *habitus* of cloistered life. I will attempt to detail the elements—practices, actions, and gestures, as well as mental attitudes and thoughts—that allow for such a deconstruction and, thereby, create a different woman. This may be interpreted as an anthropopoietic process and entails not only a willing acceptance of forms provided by society but also personal creativity and innovation as well.[8] I was immediately provided with a so-called *ange gardien*, a term used in French monastic life—maintaining the often debated distinction between emic and etic[9] is useful here—to refer to the nun charged with teaching a postulant appropriate behavior, both in practical matters and in devotions, and to assist with integration. It was by entering as a postulant that I was able to directly experience community life from *within*. My focus was not so much on the intimate and entirely personal motives that lead one to choose cloistered life, rather it was on the minor habits that are part of life every day. Those minute details of daily living that often elude scholars and yet shape processes within the community[10] and, over time, construct the nun. This research fits within the anthropological studies that, over the past fifteen years, have compared monastic life in the various religious traditions focusing on the hidden details found in closed groups, applying the model of the initiation society.[11]

Being part of daily life helps us understand how the devotional drive, typical of cloistered religious groups, develops into behavioral strategies, from small gestures to habitual actions. By investigating some Carmelite

experiences, I will highlight how aspiring to the presumed divinity, insofar as it is a social practice, is both a group experience and a state of the mind and body considered functional to that end. In keeping with the advice given by Marcel Mauss,[12] I will attempt to demonstrate that the mystical experience, here considered to be the direct contemplation of the so-called "sacred" rather than logical and narrative thinking, is primarily based on the precise disposition of the body in "effective traditional actions."[13] Traditional insofar as these are part of the individual's cultural baggage and can be learned and passed on; effective because they are accepted, by the individuals who employ them, as functional to the desired end. This is why *being inside* the religious community and sharing in their life experiences is necessary. Being inside allows one to observe how the religious person is constructed within the group and how the subjects themselves live out this reality, as well as how the anthropologist is affected; the anthropologist is forced to redefine herself as well. The restraints the researcher is subjected to stem from the environment itself, limitations on moving about and talking freely, and the need to comply with rules and schedules.

Given the very sensitive nature of some of the topics discussed and the invasion of personal space, I was required to guarantee anonymity both for the two Carmelite cloisters and for the individual nuns. I have changed the names of the nuns and will refer to the monasteries simply as Monastery A and Monastery B.[14] I chose to use personal names for the nuns, rather than a progressive numbering system, to preserve the illusion of subjectivity. It is worth noting that each woman who enters the cloister chooses a religious name for herself. These assumed names build the community itself and give it a spiritual direction. They are indicators of the journey of personal construction and of the group's story. Avoiding the use of real names, though it guards the anonymity of the two monasteries, has kept me as an author from detailing the political dynamics that helped create and characterize the monasteries and that helped me obtain access. It also prevents the reader from having a full picture of the devotional identity of the monasteries, as some of their priorities and symbolic decisions remain secret. I was also forced to avoid delving into most of the problems that stem from local religious policies and from interactions between the cloisters and the higher ecclesiastical authorities. This work focuses instead on the dynamics that rise within the group itself. Besides three extended (one month) visits, I was also fortunate enough to visit the monasteries several times over these past years, allowing for greater continuity and familiarity. My first stay proved very fruitful. Few people in Monastery A knew that I was a researcher at the beginning of my stay. In fact,

the only people who knew were the prioress, the vice prioress, and the other nuns in the Council.[15] I was required to act *as though* I were *really* a postulant and had to make a real effort to learn the practices and spirituality of the Carmelites.

I feel compelled to point out that my observations, as provided in this text, refer to two specific monasteries in France and are not meant as generalizations. First, though there is a significant degree of exchange with other religious groups in France and elsewhere, speaking of the catholic cloister as a category would be inaccurate—these observations relate to specific catholic cloisters. We should also avoid associating these observations with the territory, to the extent that certain cultural forms are considered typical of a given cultural environment or to a specific geographic area—which would be even more inaccurate.[16] There are so many vastly diverse experiences and situations within the French Carmelite context that speaking about the "French Carmelite cloister" as a single, uniform reality is practically impossible. Even the two monasteries where I carried out my research, though they share a similar history and are interconnected—to the point that I was able to analyze them together—are actually quite different from one another. As we will see later, each monastery has a certain degree of autonomy in episcopal functions within the framework of catholic tradition, which can make for daily habits and practices that are quite diverse and not easily compared.

On the analytical level, we need to recognize three different filters: prescriptions, how the group was created and regulated by current laws and/or specific regulations; actions, how daily experiences are lived out; ideals, how the group represents itself and the model it aspires to. Ideals are not exclusively spelled out in the texts that define the ideal. Practice plays a fundamental role; it creates its own model, which stems from application itself. We will see the rule applied as practice and how orthodoxy and orthopraxy are different one from the other. It is worth reflecting on William Robertson Smith's perspective. Though his work is far from recent, he saw the need for a distinction between the value of practice in and of itself and the beliefs that rest upon it in the religious realm. The value of the religious experience is primarily practical rather than theoretical, and practice often justifies the experience itself.[17] I have chosen to view the Carmelite experience through daily practice, observing habits, gestures, movements, and actions.

I will use three different narrative voices in the text. I have deliberately kept them separate and attempted to create a dialogue between them. These are: my voice as an author, being both the anthropologist and an actor in the field, the voice of the nuns who experience the Carmelite

cloister on a daily basis, and the voice of some of the founding texts (rules, constitutions, writings) and ecclesiastical documents (decrees, descriptions, and policies). I felt it was important to allow the nuns to speak for themselves and provide *their* explanations and *their* anecdotes, aside from my own observations and interpretation. The volume, therefore, includes lengthy portions of conversations we shared. Due to the rule of silence, I was only able to produce these after my stay inside the cloister; I was later allowed to meet with the nuns by appointment in the visiting room, with or without the separator—this is the cloister's border, a place set aside for meetings and conversations (e.g., see Figure A.7). The time shift immediately affected my research, channeling it along two parallel path: the experiential component, which was silent, and the conversations, marked by dialogue of a descriptive nature, narrated by the actors a long time after the fact, far from the daily routine and noticeably subject to theoretical readjustments. In traditional fieldwork these two paths are, of course, inseparable. This situation was, at times, difficult to manage, given the extended time that separated the two experiences—the annoying absence of words while in the field itself and, consequently, the excessive theoretical adjustments evident in the later conversations. The nuns' words describe what they consider to be *their* world. At times, they seem to describe a reality entirely different from the one I describe. The dialogues included in the text helped me capture the spontaneity, the resistance, and the contradictions without filters—something I would never have succeeded in doing through my own writing. It was difficult for me to get the nuns to talk outside of the framework of their creed; this often created a wall between us, which my questions were unable to pierce, evidence of the strength of that strict and binding (religious) field outlined by Pierre Bourdieu.[18] The nuns move about daily within that field of meaning and application before suddenly elaborating the whole in an entirely personal and creative manner.[19] Moreover, it was fundamental to interact with written words, (i.e., the founding documents of the Order), which lie at the basis of monastic education and are repeatedly used and commented on by the nuns; at times, these are the archetype of the discourse and practices experienced daily, but in other cases there is absolutely no correlation. I must specify that the quotes I have selected stem entirely from common practice in the field. I decided to provide the quotes that the nuns referred to during our conversations or that were, for some reason or other, part of the experience, thereby offering a cross-section of daily life in the cloister. They are of interest not so much for their historical value—other authors have provided ample debate to that end—rather for the ways in which they have become

part of practical daily living. The quotes are often separated from their historical context and from philological exegesis. I interacted with the "*primitive*" *Rule* from the thirteenth century (I will refer to it simply as the *Rule*)[20] and the *Constitutions* (1991), as well as two works attributed to the founder Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582): the "*primitive*" *Constitutions* (1567) and the *Alcalá Constitutions* (1581).[21] Other works cited by the nuns include: *Walk of Perfection, Interior Castle, Thoughts on the Love of God*, *Relations, The Life of Teresa of Jesus: An Autobiography*. I soon realized that some portions of these writings are part and parcel of daily life in the cloister and of the way the nuns communicate. It is interesting to observe which passages the nuns use in their conversations, which ones inspire behavior within the community and which, on the other hand, they doubt, refute, or ignore. They are constantly forming their *own* images, creating functional representations of what they consider to be *their* perspective on life. It is a selective process by which they construct themselves as individuals. I will, in some cases, also provide sections from the community logbook, which outlines events within the cloister and provides another cross-section of daily life. It is quite surprising that the nuns hardly ever refer to any of the documents known for their historic impact on post-Vatican II monasticism: *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965), *Contemplation in Religious Life* (1980), *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988), and *Verbi Sponsa* (1999). As an author, I have referred to these documents at times to provide clarity, but, as we will see, the nuns only cited them in one instance. They seem to prefer books of interest to their Order over works of ecclesiastical history. I deliberately maintained distinct narrative styles to help the reader recognize diverse approaches. For example, in my conversations with the nuns, I maintained their writing habits, using capital letters for pronouns, such as He or Him, when referring to the divinity, as well as for Bishop and Prioress; these capitalizations then disappear in my own writing, only to reappear when quoting written documents. Whereas the nuns speak of God, I prefer the expressions the divinity and the god. By weaving the different voices together, perspectives and motivations are highlighted, contradictions and mutual influence are pointed out, and linguistic and writing habits are preserved.

The strong personal experience and full (unmediated) immersion in the field have unavoidably affected my writing, in terms of both style and narrating person. This book attempts to offer the reader a narrative account of *my* experience in the cloister, which is a first step toward a more detailed theoretical study of the techniques of the body in the religious environment and to their application within a community. I realized that I needed to work on my personal experience first,

narrating the moments I shared with the nuns, the mistakes I made and my gaffes, the moments of exhaustion, enjoyment, calm, and frustration I experienced. These are generally overlooked in scholarly work, but proved extremely useful in this case, as I got to know the field.[22] I am convinced that a significant relationship with the Other is developed when events are narrated; it is narration that builds personal relationships.[23] It is only by looking at "little" tangible events that we can study and understand monastic life and practice. The narration is framed by some sections providing further explanation on specific topics. The work closes with a chapter on theoretical analysis.

The reader will notice a fourth narrator in the book, i.e., photographer Franco Zecchin, who welcomed the challenge of entering Monastery B for a few hours—the time allotted by the nuns—and capturing images of the spaces I lived in for an extended period of time. The photographic interpretation offered here was developed after I had completed my fieldwork and with most of the writing already complete. It was added to the book as an *outside* narrator. At times it reinforces my statements, at other times it inspires them, and at times it questions them. This alternative interpretation inevitably raises the issue of representation as a fiction and something controlled by the researcher, anthropologist, historian, or photographer.[24] Franco Zecchin's photographs serve, more than words, to describe the fixed, empty, minimalist spaces that construct the nun's bodies and influence their behavior. In closing, I gave the photographer room to discuss his photographs (he thus entered the field) and share his experiences and his perspective. The fact that Franco Zecchin was authorized to enter is also a testament to the benefits of the long-term study of the field. I believe that allowing a photographer, a man, to enter a monastery—something not easily obtained—was a result of the sense of trust I have worked to foster with the nuns over the past ten years. The positive—but also dangerous—aspect of fieldwork that lasts several years is that the level of participation and the inevitable familiarity developed day after day can create dangerous emotional ties but also, as was the case here, open unexpected doors for further study.

The Door

Entering the Carmelite cloister introduced me to what the nuns themselves consider one of the most rigorous and ascetic realities of the female monastic lifestyle. Since it was founded, the Carmelite Order has been a world of hermits closed to the outside world, and this still is a distinguishing feature.[25] The Female Carmelite Order,[26] first recognized in the 1452 bull *Cum nulla* (Nicholas V),[27] is now separated

into two branches: the so-called "calced" Carmelites, also known as the Carmelite Order of the Ancient Observance, who are faithful to the founder of the French Carmelites, Françoise d'Amboise (1427–1485), and the "discalced" Carmelites,[28] a result of the reform work carried out in 1593 by Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross (1542–1591). The first group is no longer present in France and is a minority within the Order.[29] Françoise d'Amboise, wife of Pierre II and Duchess of Britain, became a widow soon after marrying and decided to devote herself to rigorous religious observance. The first monasteries in France are attributed to her along with a series of regulations that anticipated legislation by Pius V for over a century.[30] Beloved of hagiographers, she was called the "bonne duchesse"[31] and remembered for her surprising spiritual fervor and severe interior discipline. Teresa's reform a century later, in the spirit of the Council of Trent (1545–1563), worked to restore the rigor that the Order was originally known for, with special attention to silence and solitude: these remain central features of contemporary Carmelite monasteries.

Entering the cloister for me was both a physical and a symbolic journey at the same time. If for no other reason than that, either by force of habit or out of the desire to help me experience that moment as though I were a postulant, the nuns always ritualized my arrival. I entered through the official wooden door that marks entry into the cloister itself and is only opened when a postulant decides to enter that world or chooses to abandon the cloister. Though there are several means of access to the monastic structures, and these are used for ordinary movements in and out of the cloister (visits to the doctor, visiting relatives, receiving groceries), only one door, usually located within the monastery itself and quite imposing visually, marks entry in religious terms and it can only be opened by the prioress. In fact, the image of the gateway, which is very dear to the nuns, is drawn from the "*primitive*" *Constitutions*. And, while it is not included in the *Constitutions* of 1991, the nuns continue to refer to the text of the *Primitive Constitutions* and use it as a model for their behavior.

> The Prioress is to have the key to the separator and to the gateway. When a doctor or a surgeon and other necessary persons or the confessor need to enter, they must always be accompanied by two nuns.[32]

The exclusive act of opening the official wooden door underscores the symbolic value with which it is imbued. It speaks of the choice to live a certain life and is a visual reminder of the separation from the surrounding context.[33] The door is a kind of threshold connecting the inside with

the outside, but also connecting one dimension with another one.[34] Interestingly, the only time the nuns quoted from an ecclesiastical document, *Verbi Sponsa* (1999), was when they described the door as guarding from the outside world, a key element for their Order.

> From the beginning and in a unique way, monasteries devoted to the contemplative life have found the enclosure a proven help in the fulfilment of their vocation. The particular demands of separation from the world have thus been received by the Church and canonically ordered for the benefit of the contemplative life itself. The discipline of enclosure is therefore a gift, for it protects the foundational charisma of monasteries. Every contemplative Institute must faithfully maintain its form of separation from the world. Such fidelity is fundamental for the life of an Institute, which really endures only as long as it remains rooted in its original charism.[35]

It is worth remembering that we are dealing with a "closed relationship," using Weber's classic scheme: a group relationship in which "a set of characteristics valid for the group" exclude or limit, under certain conditions, an extended participation. By closing and monopolizing the group's (material and symbolic) heritage one expects an improvement in the measure, form, or value of one's possibilities.[36] Hence access must be difficult to guarantee the continued existence of the group. In the Carmelite world, participating in cloistered life must first be approved by the Council of the nuns and then by the bishop as well. While participating in a trial period is encouraged for those women who intend to join the cloister, and they are readily admitted, it is nearly impossible for a researcher from the outside to be allowed to enter. As the *Verbi Sponsa* states forcefully, access to the enclosure is forbidden (be it the choir, rooms, or common spaces).

> The participation of the faithful in the liturgy is not a reason for the nuns to leave the enclosure, nor for the faithful to enter the nuns' choir. Guests cannot be allowed to enter the monastery enclosure.[37]

After years of negotiations and several failed attempts, I was finally admitted to the cloister in 2006. Fortuitous circumstances in ecclesiastical politics led a French bishop, who was open to dialoguing with the lay world, to authorize my admission to a Carmelite monastery. I was eager to learn about life within the enclosure after having studied the relics of Françoise d'Amboise for years. I had often met with nuns and visited monasteries over those years but had never been allowed to enter and spend some time inside. I had developed excellent contacts in

the monasteries and with ecclesiastical authorities both in Italy and in France. I received help from an Italian Carmelite (now deceased) who had become a trusted friend. Thanks to the intervention of some French monks, I was able to make contact with the prioress of Monastery A. It is curious that after years of failed attempts, a few phone calls opened the doors that had, until then, remained officially closed. Minor coincidences and key individuals often develop the field. It is equally worth noting that my being admitted to a monastery stemmed, first and foremost, from the male component of the Carmelite Order and not from the female one. Nor was the diocese influential (which I had contacted previously, since the monasteries are directly subject to bishops and not to the male component of their own Order). Four years after I was first admitted to Monastery A, which I returned to for a second stay, I was finally admitted to another French monastery in 2010. Once again this monastery was more open to the outside world and was set in a favorable ecclesiastical context. I had visited Monastery B several times in the past and, though I was initially barred from entering, they had always shown interest in and support for my research.

Each time I entered the cloister I was led before the main door and, once it was open, in compliance with the "*primitive*" *Constitutions*, I was accompanied to my cell (Figure A.9) by the prioress and vice prioress. The first time I walked that path it seemed a long and winding road—this was true for the corridors and passageways in both monasteries. When repeating the route, I was able to recognize statues, corners, and stairs. I was immediately impacted by the absence of sound, of voices, and by emptiness. In compliance with the instructions provided by the nuns, I brought a suitcase with very little clothing: personal items, some tracksuits, some t-shirts, one sweater. I left everything else behind (books, make-up, gold items, my mobile phone). The only object I brought with me was my computer, foolishly thinking I would have plenty of time to work and to write. The cell was very similar in both monasteries: a bed, one piece of furniture, a cast iron radiator for heating. The walls were completely blank except for a single crucifix. The cabinet contained some blankets, towels, a bedpan and, in Monastery B, a small pocket mirror. I had my own small bathroom in Monastery B but Monastery A still had a shared bathroom when I stayed there (this has recently changed and each room now has its own bathroom). The bathroom had a sink with a small shelf, a toilet, and a shower but no mirrors. I remember that when I entered Monastery A for the first time I sat on the edge of my bed with my suitcase on the floor beside me; there were no chairs, the room seemed empty. Each time I was given

my cell, I felt the need to leave my stuff scattered about, to fill the room and give it some life.

I was never able to have any time to myself during any of my stays. There was no personal time nor time for me to study. I joined in all aspects of cloistered life: liturgy and prayers, maintenance, kitchen duty, and cleaning assignments. I had no time to focus on myself, on my body, on my interests, or even observe what was happening all around. I was not free to move about in the monastery. I complied with the schedule and the chores I was assigned. I barely touched the computer; I only wrote a few pages over the many months of fieldwork, scattered notes, personal observations, nothing more. I was unable to keep up my field diary, and I had to invest time and energy in learning some of the behaviors and approaches to prayer.[38] I had to learn to stay inside.

This book would never have been possible were it not for the nuns who welcomed me and were willing to talk to me, sharing their vision of who they are and who they wish to become. The years and years spent waiting to be admitted and to conduct my interviews stretched my fieldwork out excessively, but this also helped me experience time as it is felt within the enclosure. Time is stretched out to the point that it is non-existent in the cloister, repetition and continuity eventually alter the perception of time. The way time is experienced shapes relations with the outside. After some twenty days inside, one is completely immersed in those rhythms and the perception of external social time becomes more and more distant. On the other hand, when working with the nuns from the outside, the differences in the way time is experienced become evident, making appointments difficult to schedule and changing one's view of priorities. I must, therefore, thank the nuns who have engaged with my work over all these years, not only for having welcomed me into their place of residence, but also for having often adapted to my research needs. Those needs seem easy to manage from the outside, but they can negatively affect the silent balance of daily life from the inside—a balance each nun works to construct and maintain on a daily basis.

The advice I received from friends and colleagues was invaluable. They helped shape this text despite all the contradictions and methodological issues. Special thanks goes to Daniel Fabre, who believed in the project right from the start and who, with his natural enthusiasm, suggested several paths my research could take; Sofia Boesch Gajano, who as a friend and a scholar patiently read and re-read the various drafts; Gian Luca D'Errico, Lorenza Lullini, Cristiana Natali, Paolo Pirillo, and Mario Turci, who also read the text several times and offered advice; Ester Bianchi, Giovanni Filoramo, Maria Chiara Giorda, Stefania

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Notes

1. Revised text of the Huxley Memorial Lecture, as delivered by Pierre Bourdieu at the Royal Anthropological Institute on December 6, 2000. The final version was prepared and translated from French by Loïc Wacquant in April 2002: https://rai.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467–9655.00150 (retrieved 24 July 2025).
2. Giorda, *La campana e l'orologio*; Hervieu-Léger, "Tenersi fuori dal mondo;" Filoramo, *Il nuovo monachesimo in Italia*; Pace, "Monasteri virtuali;" Palmisano, "Contemporary Evolution in Monasticism in Italy;" Palmisano, *Exploring New Monastic Communities*; Palmisano, *The Paradoxes of New Monasticism in Consumer Society*; Séguy, "Une sociologie des sociétés imaginées;" Jonveaux, Pace, and Palmisano, *Sociology of Monasticism*; also consider Fisher, *Clausura*, a journalistic approach offering interviews, confessions and diary entries by cloistered nuns, and Reese, *Dedicated to God*, narratives and stories from cloistered life.
3. Goffman, *Asylums*, see in particular the first chapter, 1–124; Leclercq, "Le cloître est-il une prison?," 407. Further interesting references on both ancient and modern Christian monasticism are: Alciati and Giorda, "Legami carnali e spirituali nel monachesimo cristiano antico;" Giorda, "Discipline et règles monastiques;" Giorda, "Oikonomia domestica e oikonomia monastica;" Giorda, "Il Regno di Dio in terra;" Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative*; Valantasis, *The Making of the Self*; Zarri, *Recinti*.
4. Cevarolo's work, *I monaci di clausura,* offers an overview of the history of cloistered life and addresses some of the key features of monastic life (time, places, objects, prayers).
5. A place within community buildings (monasteries, prisons, dormitories, barracks, etc.) set aside for meeting with outside visitors.
6. The classic work by Tedlock, *From Participant Observation to the Observation of Participation,* remains a key text when discussing the relationship between observation and participation in ethnography.

7. 1917. Code of Canon Law (CIC), cann. 539–41; *Constitutions,* 141. Whereas in the Carmelite *Constitutions* and in the old Code of Canon Law postulancy is described as a trial period preceding the novitiate, the 1983 Code of Canon Law does not mention a trial period and immediately discusses the novitiate (cann. 641–53). The requirements governing postulancy in the 1917 Code of Canon Law and in the *Constitutions* are mentioned in the Code of 1983 as prerequisites for admission to the novitiate. For a definition of the postulant/postulancy see Jombart, *s.v.* "Postulant" and "Postulat," 67–70 and Gauthier, *s.v.* "Postulato," 138–41.
8. Remotti, *Forme di umanità*, 10.
9. The terms emic and etic refer to two different analytical perspectives, and two different approaches to interpretation. The emic prefers categories available "within" the culture being studied, while the etic prefers the scientific theories used by the observer. Geertz challenges the distinction between emic and etic, raising the issue of presumed "objectivity" and lack of criteria ("From the Native's Point of View," 56).
10. On the theoretical importance of analyzing small objects of everyday life, see the foreword to Miller's volume, *The Comfort of Things*, 1–7.
11. Andlauer, *Le blanc-manger*; Andlauer, *Modeler des corps*; González, "Disciplina, contingenza, flessibilità;" Hejazi, *Ahl al bayt: Maometto e la "gente della casa;"* Herrou, *La communauté des moines taoïstes en Chine*; Herrou, *La vie entre soi*; Herrou, *Quand les moines taoïstes en Chine.* For comparison and interdisciplinary study Giorda and Sbardella, *Famiglia monastica*; Herrou and Krauskopff, *Moines et moniales de par le monde*; Bernat, Chrystel, and Puccio-Den, *Religion, secret et autorité*; Herrou and Poujeau, *Savoirs monastiques.*
12. Mauss, "Les techniques du corps," 386.
13. My translation of "acts traditionnel et efficace," *Ivi*, 371.
14. There were 12 nuns in Monastery A and only 9 in Monastery B, when I stayed there. The situation has remained the same in Monastery B, while Monastery A welcomed some ten other nuns, from another monastery that had been closed in 2008. In both cases the average age was over sixty, with a few cases of nuns in their forties or fifties. There were no other postulants or novitiates during my stay. A nun asked to leave Monastery B in 2013.
15. Three nuns (*les conseillères*) make up the Council. They are elected from among those who have taken the community's solemn vows and assist the prioress (*Constitutions,* 217). The first of the three is the vice prioress, referred to as sub-prioress (*sous-prieure*) in the *Constitutions* (*Constitutions*, 220).
16. Fardon*, Localizing Strategies*, 357–8. For a theoretical discussion on the topic see Fabietti, *Antropologia culturale*, 4–78.
17. Robertson Smith, *Lectures*, 14–15.
18. Alciati and Urciuoli, *Pierre Bourdieu. Il campo religioso*, 74.
19. Regarding the personal processing of the religious phenomenon, filtered by the single cultural subject, see Durkheim's study "De la définition des phénomènes religieux."
20. The rule was provided for Carmelites by Saint Albert of Jerusalem between 1206 and 1214. It was first approved by Honorius III in 1226, followed by Gregory IX in 1229 and Innocent IV in 1245, with further confirmation in 1247. The latest revision and approval by the Apostolic See dates back to 1991.
21. The first Carmelite constitutions are attributed to Teresa of Ávila, who seems to have drafted them in 1567 in Spanish ("*primitive*" *Constitutions*), followed by a second, revised and expanded, version approved by the local Chapter in Alcalá, 1581 (*Constitutions of Alcalá*). The *Constitutions* currently applicable to Carmelites were

drafted, on the basis of those attributed to Teresa of Ávila, by the Congregation for the Institutions of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life and approved by the Apostolic See in 1991. For quotes from and references to the *Rule*, the *Constitutions*, and the *Constitutions of Alcalá*, I used the 1991 edition of the Order of Discalced Fathers (both the Spanish and the English versions).

22. On the relationship between personal experience and scientific thought see the article by Leiris, "Le sacré dans la vie quotidienne" and theoretical discussion by Jamin, "Quand le sacré devint gauche."
23. On the use of narrative as an investigative tool see Miller, *The Comfort of Things* and White, *Metahistory*.
24. On the postmodern debate about the anthropological text as representative fiction see Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* and Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*, which includes a precious introduction by Clifford, *Partial Truths*.
25. Catena, *Le Carmelitane*, 34–5 and 412–14. For the historical background to Carmel see Peltier, *Histoire du Carmel*.
26. For focused discussion of the female Orders see Wilderink, *Les premiers Monastères*; Wilderink, *Les constitutions*; Martínez Carretero, *Los Carmelitas*; Prou, *Les Carmélites de l'Ancienne observance*; Abiven, *De Françoise d'Amboise à Thérèse d'Avila.*
27. Catena, *Le Carmelitane*, LXII–LXIV.
28. "Discalced" Carmelites are officially referred to as *Moniales Ordinis Carmelitarum Discalceatorum*. For a study of their origins see the series Catena, *Le Carmelitane* and Macca, "Carmelitane scalze."
29. There are fourteen monasteries of the Ancient Observance in Italy: *Monastero Mater Carmeli* in Biella (BI), *Monastero S. Maria del Carmine* in Camerino (MC), *Carmelo S. Anna* in Carpineto Romano (RM), *Carmelo Juana Coeli* in Cerreto di Sorano (GR), *Carmelo S. Maria de' Pazzi* in Florence, *Monastero delle Carmelitane San Giuseppe* in Fisciano (SA), *Monastero della Ss.ma Trinità* in Jesi (AN), *Carmelo Gesù di Nazareth* in Montegnacco di Cassacco (UD), *Monastero S. M. Maddalena de' Pazzi* in Ostuni (BR), *Monastero di Santo Stefano* in Ravenna, *Monastero S. Giuseppe al Carmine* in S. Giovanni La Punta (CT), *Carmelo Santa Maria della Vita* in Sogliano Al Rubicone (FC), *Monastero Monte Carmelo* in Sutri (VT), *Monastero Monte Carmelo* in Vetralla (VT).
30. Sbalchiero, *Profil spirituel d'une sainte méconnue*, 69.
31. Trochu, *Françoise d'Amboise*, 43.
32. *"Primitive" Constitutions*, 15.
33. Pastore, Prosperi, and Terpstra, *Brotherhood and Boundaries*, XI.
34. Coppo, Girelli, *Schiudere soglie*, 19.
35. *Verbi Sponsa*, 9.
36. Weber, "Soziologische Grundbegriffe," 23.
37. *Verbi Sponsa*, 14, §2.
38. On challenges to carrying out fieldwork in the traditional sense see Favret-Saada, "Être affecté," 5–6 and Pétonnet, "L'observation flottante."