

OHRM Seminar

Term:	Autumn 2014
Speaker:	Professor Michael Humphreys and Professor Mark Learmonth (Business School, Durham University)
Title:	Reflections on Ethnography, Autoethnography and all that Jazz
Date:	Wednesday 19 th November 2014
Venue:	Room E2.02, Social Studies Building, Warwick Business School
Time:	14.00 – 15.30 hours
Abstract:	<p>Our session is aimed at new and early career researchers and will involve sharing ideas and participation in the discussion. We will focus on ethnography, autoethnography and reflexivity and hope to show through our own work what such approaches can bring to organisational research. It will be useful if participants can bring their own current research interests to the session and be prepared to consider them in the light of an ethnographic approach.</p> <p>The session will be based on the following 3 papers, which participants might wish to read beforehand:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learmonth, M. (2009). 'Girls' working together without 'teams' how to avoid the colonization of management language. <i>Human Relations</i> 62(12): 1887-1906. 2. Humphreys, M. et al (2003). Is ethnography jazz? <i>Organization</i> 10(1): 5-31. 3. Learmonth, M. & Humphreys, M. (2012). Autoethnography and academic identity: glimpsing business school doppelgangers. <i>Organization</i> 19(1): 99-117. <p>We will present our personal approaches to ethnography and autoethnography – emphasising, in particular, ideas around reflexivity and how all research might benefit from a greater awareness of authorial presence and influence. The afternoon will be structured by us doing three inter-related presentations on the above papers – but we expect that there will be plenty of opportunities for debate and discussion – so we encourage participants to come along prepared to share their own experiences, published papers and work in progress.</p>
Contact	<p>This seminar has been organised by the OHRM Group.</p> <p>Ruth Penny, OHRM Group oboffice@wbs.ac.uk 024 7652 4962 http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/wbs/subjects/ohrm/events/seminar/</p>

Human Relations

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'Girls' working together without 'teams': How to avoid the colonization of management language

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Human Relations 2009 62: 1887 originally published online 29 October 2009

DOI: 10.1177/0018726709339097

The online version of this article can be found at:

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Mark Learmonth

ABSTRACT

Many of us increasingly experience our personal and working lives through a range of categories and classifications that have come to be strongly associated with the formal management of organizations, the effect of which has been explained as a subtle colonization of our minds and imaginations. This article presents insights from an organizational ethnography based in a UK hospital’s medical records library where participants rarely used management discourses, the only managerial terms they used at all being teams and teamwork, and then mostly by way of parody, while strongly preferring an alternative collective identity, the girls. This article therefore illustrates and analyses how these workers shunned, if not entirely avoided, management language’s colonizing incursions.

KEYWORDS

ethnography ■ hospital clerks ■ management language ■ teams ■ women in organizations

Introduction

The discourse of ‘teams’ is becoming increasingly pervasive in organizational life. ‘Team’ currently tends to be the name managers routinely give to work groups of all kinds (Sennett, 1998). Even academic organizational analysis deploys the word liberally whenever representing groups, and its use frequently seems indiscriminate. However casual and unexamined it may be,

though, the naming of practices is never innocent. Acts of naming sanction legitimate forms of discourse and knowledge whilst disqualifying or rendering invisible other possible ways of knowing and being in the world (Cooren et al., 2008; Oakes et al., 1998).

That we call things teams became particularly pertinent during an ethnographic study I conducted between May and September 2005 in a department within a National Health Service (NHS) hospital in the United Kingdom (UK). The official hospital literature was replete with such terms as teams and teamwork, which managers used in routine and unnoticed ways. The monthly meetings that all staff attended were designated 'team briefings', for example, and job advertisements typically used the description 'team player' to portray the kind of employee being sought. Indeed, *Join The Team And Make A Difference*, a slogan taken directly from a national government recruitment campaign for NHS staff, was the screensaver on all the hospital staff members' computer terminals. However, the people with whom I spent most of my time during the field work – filing clerks in the medical records department, workers who maintained the paper records of patients' clinical details – rarely used the term spontaneously. They much preferred referring to one another as 'the girls'.

A group of people in a work setting who rarely talk about teams might be particularly surprising in today's society, as the wider lexicon of terms associated with formal organizational management seems to be percolating steadily into our everyday talk (Deetz, 1992; Grey, 1999; Parker, 2002), and even into lifestyle magazines (Hancock & Tyler, 2004). This change is important because it raises the possibility of a colonization that suggests that human life itself might become, as Grey (1999) argues:

something to be managed, and [that] other forms of meaning or being in the world become marginalized, thus truncating the variety of human experience while promoting a form of experience, which, it can be argued, is disciplinary, degrading and confining.

(p. 577)

Others who have commented critically on the incursion of management language into everyday life typically follow Habermas (1987) in understanding it as a form of colonization of the life world. Thus, Hancock and Tyler argue that the use of management language outside formal work arenas is 'an ongoing managerialist colonization of the everyday life world' (2004: 619), while Deetz, also after Habermas, claims that the 'extent of the modern corporation encroachment into nonwork life . . . might properly be called a "colonizing" activity – a colonization of the life world' (1992: 17–18).

Various authors have explored the significance of executives' own use of managerial terms in a professional context (Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Faÿ, 2008; Jackall, 1988; Learmonth, 1999, 2005; Watson, 2004). However, works examining how such other people as members of the public use this language have still centred on professional people, those for whom 'management is part of our lives', as one member of a focus group put it (Hancock & Tyler, 2004: 639). Contrastingly, what this study does is to show how people who associate little with managers use management language, and, furthermore, how they use it in their own everyday settings.

The aim of this study, therefore, is to add a new dimension to the existing literature concerning the effects of management language by close engagement with the clerks' day-to-day world. As the work progressed, the study came to focus particularly on the discourse of teams and the alternatives to it. The article consequently illustrates novel ways in which those subjected to the teamwork discourse's colonizing claims circumvented them and shows one of the means by which they constructed alternative collective identities.

This second contribution is equally important. Even in studies that focus on resistance to the discourse, the concept of teams invariably remains as the central discursive starting point for debate and analysis. A risk exists, however, that such an unquestioned starting point might elide the existence of alternative collective identities, what may be called teams' other alternatives that represent ways of avoiding managerial colonization. In emphasizing 'the girls' as the preferred formulation, therefore, this article intends to construct ideas radically disengaged from conventional notions of teamwork and thereby take the debate in new directions.

The article first reviews certain literature on teams, the one managerially oriented word that the clerks did use, and which is therefore especially important to the study. The intent of this review is to show how the word teams has the power to colonize the hearts and minds of those subjected to it, but show also how it is able to be resisted. Next, the article reports on the ethnographic approach and the key findings, followed by a discussion of the significance of the virtual absence of managerial language and the preferred alternative, the girls; a discussion that emphasizes the discursive impact of the word teams and of management language more generally.

The colonization of teams

This section focuses on what teams, as a category for making sense of the world, does when we deploy it in talking and writing about organizational

realities, rather than on such more usual concerns of management writing about teams as what 'they' are and how 'they' might function. An approach that reflects the belief that representing practices as 'teamwork' is to some extent arbitrary. The label 'teams' creates a particular version of the world, a version that has political effects (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000).

What follows, therefore, makes no claim to be comprehensive in its treatment of the burgeoning literature on teams. This burgeoning reflects the new wave of managerial interest in teamwork that has gathered pace since the 1980s, when the discourse began to spread from the manufacturing sector into service industries and the public sector (Jenkins, 1994), alongside related rhetoric concerning employee involvement more generally (Proctor & Mueller, 2000). Indeed, it is now plausible to claim that 'a fundamental feature of [much] modern management theory and practice is teamworking. Human resource management (HRM), total quality management (TQM), just in time (JIT) and business process re-engineering (BPR) each share . . . a common emphasis on teams' (McCabe & Black, 1997: 110). This article's understanding of the concept of teams, however, emphasizes merely the one aspect of the literature that is most relevant to the study – the term's potential to act as a discourse of managerial colonization and domination – a discourse that is therefore also likely to attract dissent and resistance.

It has been possible to link the discourse of teams with the managerial elites' definitions of organizational realities, at least since the seminal work of Fox (1966). In setting out alternative ways of seeing organizations as unitary or pluralistic, Fox asked, '[w]hat is the closest analogy to the enterprise – is it, or ought it to be, analogous to a team, unified by a common purpose, or is it more plausibly viewed as a coalition of interests?' (1966: 2). Fox himself expressed a preference for the pluralistic frame of reference, asserting that organizations ought to be thought of as temporary coalitions of competing interest groups. He did, however, recognize that the discourse of teams 'represents a vision of what industry ought to be like which is widespread among employers, top managers and substantial sections of outside public opinion' (p. 3).

Fox (1966) can therefore be understood to suggest that talking about teams conditions us to understand organizations in ways that coincide with the interests of top managers. Indeed, its taken-for-grantedness can mean that the discourse of teams can act as a resource for top managers by bolstering their interests while giving the impression that they are merely talking neutrally about the way things are.

Furthermore, because of its unitarist resonances, routinely representing organizational life in the language of teams tends to write out other available ideas about organizations. It is, for example, a tacit denial of what

Ezzamel et al. refer to in a Marxian sense as the ‘structured antagonism between capital and labour’ (2001: 1058), because the commonsense reading of teams misleadingly implies that everyone is playing for the same side and aiming for the same goals.

Fox’s (1966) insights concerning teams as a manifestation of ideology have been supplemented by more recent work with greater emphasis on how talk of teams can be a powerful way for individuals to do identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). This means that the discourse of teams can act as a positive, if perhaps seductive, resource in the construction of individual and collective identities. Mueller et al. note that describing joint activity as teamwork often connotes ‘collaboration, conviviality, comradeship and commitment . . . [the term thus] seems to carry a nearly irresistible appeal to social, moral and individual imperatives that are difficult to deny’ (2000: 1388).

An optimistic reading of what using the term ‘teams’ does is therefore possible. For example, representing a group of people as part of the same team tends to imply reciprocity and equality. Using the term in this way could even accomplish such things as reducing traditional divisions in work places such as those based upon hierarchy or gender (Donnellon, 1996). However, internalizing the need to be a team player is also likely to encourage forms of self-surveillance that are clearly in line with traditional managerial concerns with commitment, motivation, and so on (Barker, 1993, 1999; Ezzamel & Willmott, 1998; Sewell, 1998).

Given this ambivalence, many staff members are likely to ‘engage with, respond to, imbibe but also oppose its [teamwork’s] subjective demands’ (Knights & McCabe, 2003: 1588). This simultaneous engagement with, and opposition to, teamwork can be seen, for example, in Pringle’s analysis of secretaries’ relationships with their bosses, which shows how ‘[s]ecretaries can increasingly call on the language of “team” to insist on certain rights and reciprocities’ (1988: 55); however, she immediately adds that ‘[i]t is also in the boss’s interests to talk the language of “teams” and disguise the actual workings of power’ (1988: 55).

The discourse of teams can therefore be read as potentially colonizing, both in its role as part of the naturalization of a unitary ideology concerning organizations and in the way in which it can be deployed as a part of self-narration, through such conceptualizations as, ‘I am part of a team’, ‘I am a team player’, and so on. Furthermore, it is reasonable to believe that both these colonizing aspects of the discourse are likely to coincide to at least a significant extent with the traditional interests of those in charge of organizations in the sense that an unexamined use of teams discursively naturalizes managerial interests.

Those who broadly accept this kind of analysis have elaborated two contrasting responses. Some assume that the colonizing discourse of teams dupes workers into regarding themselves as team players and thereby blinds them to the ways in which the discourse denies their interests and supports those of elites. These emphasize the tyranny of teamwork (Sinclair, 1992), teamwork being understood as a discursive socialization mechanism through which elites control employees, aligning their motivations with organizational objectives (Finn, 2008). The other response holds that since the team discourse implies inclusivity, it is the very thing that can alert those who are at risk of being colonized by the discourse. Vallas (2003), for example, views managers who talk of teams as likely to be a focus for dissent and resistance, especially if a yawning gap exists between their ritualized pronouncements and organizational realities.

Of course, which of these two alternatives is favoured is to some extent an empirical question, and, as we shall see as we turn to the empirical study, it is the latter reading of the impact of the team concept that is more consistent with the interpretation of the phenomena advanced in this article.

Medical records clerks

Employees in UK hospital medical records departments store, maintain, and retrieve the manual files, often called case notes, used to record patients' clinical details, which the professionals concerned generally still write by hand. Along with a whole range of related tasks, the clerks also make patient appointments and act as receptionists for them.¹ The volume of this work should not be underestimated. In the relatively small general hospital in the study, over 300,000 individual case notes were stored in the main library, which was administered by 35 clerks, five of whom were men.

It is also important to emphasize how others in the NHS generally regard such departments and the clerks working in them in terms of hospital hierarchy. In the particular hospital where the research for this study was conducted, almost everyone else in the hospital seemed to enjoy more esteem. In addition to professional clinical staff, secretaries and even switchboard operators regularly got clerks into trouble by complaining to their manager about relatively minor misdemeanours and omissions.

It was here, then, that I worked as one of these clerks in a hospital located within commuting distance of where I lived. As the proposals had been subjected to the normal NHS research governance arrangements, at the start of the project the hospital authorities had officially approved the work and issued me with an honorary contract and a name badge.

Each day I generally spent the mornings with another clerk, pushing trolleys of case notes from the main filing area across part of the hospital to the out-patient clinics, where people come from their homes to be treated by specialist medical staff. I spent the afternoons placing the case notes we had brought down earlier into separate trolleys for each of the following day's clinics. This gruelling routine meant that I could provide concrete help that reduced others' workloads and provide reciprocity for the many opportunities that were useful to my research. These included chatting with colleagues, listening to others' conversations, and experiencing directly the things that made up their, and at the time our, days. I spent a total of approximately 320 observation hours on site.

Originally, the study's central concern had been to observe the clerks in their natural setting in order to analyse how they used and responded to management discourses. However, as the scarcity of the use of management language started to become clear over the first few weeks of the work, the focus gradually changed to the alternatives used. This means that the basic empirical claims elaborated in this article required no formal techniques of post-fieldwork data analysis for them to start to emerge. A lack of a team or any other managerial discourse was apparent after only a few weeks in the field.

However, an initial recognition of the significance of the formulation, the girls, was slower to take shape. Indeed, I hardly noticed that the clerks used the term about themselves for about the first half of the project. Then I experienced what might have been akin to what Adler and Adler describe as a "Click!" experience – something of a sudden, though minor, epiphany as to the emotional depth or importance of an event or a phenomenon' (1998: 81), and started to realize that the clerks routinely used the term 'the girls' to talk about themselves, and that this practice might hold significance for my work.

I kept a detailed daily field notes diary throughout the field work, completed mainly during lunch breaks and hour-long homeward train journeys, as I was generally kept too busy to make field notes in situ. And, during the latter stages of the work I conducted 16 unstructured interviews. I invited every staff member for these and interviewed all who accepted. Conducting interviews enabled our talk to be recorded and transcribed in full, as well as enabling our conversations to proceed in a relatively relaxed manner and at greater length than would have been possible in the midst of work activities. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

However, I did not use the interviews to ask the respondents directly about their attitudes towards management language. This was in part because I had already learnt that the clerks were relatively indifferent

towards management discourse, making that line of questioning unlikely to elicit much of use. The consideration that the focus should be as far as possible on relatively naturally occurring language was also important, so that I also tried to minimize the imposition of my own categories and expectations on what was said. But another major consideration was that many clerks had expressed unease about the idea of being interviewed. Even though by that relatively late stage of the research I considered myself to be regarded to some extent at least as 'one of the gang' (Tope et al., 2005: 486), as others have found in researching groups who enjoy little conventional prestige (Skeggs, 1994), I encountered reluctance about the idea of one-to-one interviews. Indeed, some of those who declined an interview said they did so because they could not imagine how interviewing them might hold something of interest for others.

Therefore, although each interview started with questions about what it was like to work in the department, we often moved quickly away from work to touch upon such broader issues as our family lives, hobbies, and musical interests. This was not a problem for the conduct of the research. Since the analytical focus was on the way in which the clerks deployed language to represent their lives, ensuring that we covered a set of pre-determined topics was relatively unimportant.

Indeed, the rigour for which I aimed with both the observations and the interviews did not come from a strict adherence to preconceived procedures and protocols (Bate, 1997; Humphreys et al., 2003). It came instead from 'a constant exposure to the other' (Linstead, 1996: 14). I was attempting the reflexive model of science, embracing not detachment but engagement as the road to knowledge (Burawoy, 1998; Thomson & Hassenkamp, 2008). Over the project as a whole, I therefore came to know my medical records colleagues reasonably well and, as far as I could tell, we enjoyed friendly relations. It was pleasing, for example, to be presented with a number of cards and gifts on my last day. I was, however, constantly aware of being a middle-class man in the midst of a group largely made up of women, many of whom lived on low incomes, supplemented for some by benefit payments.

Especially given this type of relationship with the clerks, my ambition is to show what Skeggs calls a 'conscious partiality' (1994: 79) towards the clerks' own culture and lifeworlds. Clerks doing what is often called 'routine' work remain a major group in many organizations, but relatively few scholars have attempted to understand their lives.² For although Dutton emphasizes clerks' 'positively deviant' characteristics' (2003: 6), and Prasad and Prasad highlight 'routine workplace resistance' (2000: 387), these sorts of studies are far from typical. Particularly in a UK context, a managerial

perspective is typically apparent among the naturalistic studies of clerical workers within health organizations.

Therefore, although a few studies have suggested clerks' unnoticed-yet-powerful influence over such things as epidemiological statistics (Prior, 1985) or the time patients spend on waiting lists (Pope, 1991), most research agendas appear to have been guided by interests other than the clerks' own concerns. Pope, for example, interpreted clerks' overlooked influence on waiting lists as a failure in 'management practices' that needs to be understood before 'we [that is, presumably, managers] will be able to tackle the problems of waiting lists effectively' (1991: 210). In contrast, this study aims to contribute to knowledge, but with the hope that it will resist managerial appropriation.

Working without teams

On arriving in the department I started to listen for people using management language. Somewhat counter to my initial expectations, however, after several weeks in the field I noticed no spontaneous use of it. While people may have talked about attending a team briefing, for example, they did so because they were using an official name. I rarely heard clerks use the word team when speaking in any other context. During my entire time in the field I heard the spontaneous use of management-associated words on just six occasions, and the word in question was always teams or a closely associated formulation.

On four of these occasions people appeared to use the term in passing, but on another two occasions they used it spontaneously in a prominent way. The first of these latter occasions was several weeks into the study when a work experience student from a local school gave the staff members a questionnaire about their jobs. I wrote in my field notes diary:

. . . Several people were crowding round, helping Maggie [this and all subsequent names have been changed] to complete the questionnaire. Whilst looking at everyone else for help, Maggie read out the questions. One of them was: 'What are the qualities required by your job?' No one volunteered any possible responses. 'Qualities . . .' she mused, looking for help from the others. After receiving no suggestions she eventually said, 'Well, I suppose teamworking. Yeah, of course! We all need to work in a team here!' As she was saying this, she raised her eyebrows and inflected her voice with evident sarcasm . . .

The other occasion took place a few weeks later. I wrote in my field notes:

. . . Maria stormed into the office saying she was in a bad mood. She'd asked a colleague if she could borrow a trolley [a vital piece of equipment for moving case notes around], but had been told 'not really', even though her colleague had two spare. Maria protested loudly to everyone in the office: 'She had two, but she wouldn't lend me a fucking trolley! There's no fucking teamwork in this place!'

Shortly before I left, one of the clerks asked me about the study's findings. I told her the above two stories, and she replied:

. . . 'Yeah! Teamworking, my arse!' She then explained how, when taking extra case notes to clinics [those retrieved on an unplanned basis for patients arriving unexpectedly as urgent cases], the nurses would often just take them without a word of thanks [though retrieving them was highly disruptive to the clerks' other jobs], and if the case notes had not been properly checked [to see if enough forms, note paper, etc. were available in the file], the nurses would ring the medical records manager and complain. This would then get the person who had retrieved them into trouble 'for no reason', she said, 'because the nurses could easily check them themselves; in fact, it would probably be quicker to check them than ring the manager?' . . .

In contrast to the male factory workers in Ezzamel et al.'s study, who seemed to take delight in displaying their 'awkwardness' and 'bloodymindedness' (2001: 1068), the clerks appeared to be upset by each criticism they received. Individuals regularly emerged from the manager's office to tell everyone resignedly that they had just been 'told off', but I never saw them overtly challenge the deferential situation in which they found themselves.

Therefore, while I think the above teamwork incidents were important, in part because they were so unusual, it would be misleading to give the impression of a group of workers deeply concerned with the politics of resistance, or to suggest, for instance, that the virtual absence of management language stemmed from conscious avoidance. A more likely explanation would be that managerial categories were exogenous to their culture. The clerks did not use management language simply because it did not enable them to say what they wanted to say.

To illustrate this point, here is one of the four less prominent references to teams. It occurred during a taped interview when the informant was

talking about her boss in a former job within another medical records department:

. . . She was a good boss, and we used to go out drinking with her socially. But the girls, we were just like a family. Whatever anybody, you know, whatever problems they had, everybody knew about it, basically. But that's what I like about [the] records [department]. And it's the same here – we're a family, we're a team, we get on, we help each other, we go out and it's really good. We have a really good social life . . .

As with the other three less prominent uses I noticed, team was de-emphasized here, embedded and almost hidden in a discursive environment that constructed the department in terms that privileged people's social lives and personal problems. Had teams been the primary descriptor, perhaps the problems referred to would not have been personal ones, but those that the management officially acknowledged and deemed organizationally relevant. By mentioning the word team in juxtaposition with family and helping each other, it seems likely she was using it in its widest, least corporate sense of general conviviality and comradeship.

Nevertheless, and however we want to understand the word team in this excerpt, it is submitted that what is more important for understanding the excerpt as a whole is that the presence of the word team should not distract us from another term for the group that it also contains, which is 'the girls', a formulation that was particularly prominent in all the clerks' talk about one another as a collective.

'Girls' together

In much social science writing, the word 'girls' is widely seen as an unacceptable and patronizing term for referring to adult women (Acker & van Houten, 1974; Katila & Merilainen, 1999). Indeed, Halford and Leonard assert that using "girls" to describe women of whatever age, even in their fifties, reflects the powerlessness of most women and the refusal to accept mature women as equals (paralleling as it does the once common practice of white people calling black men "boys") (2001: 73). Nevertheless, 'girls' was the term the female clerks themselves used habitually to talk about themselves.³ Below are some brief excerpts chosen more or less arbitrarily from my field notes diary to show the wide variety of contexts in which the formulation was deployed:

. . . Beth was talking to Lesley about a new recruit called Linda; Lesley didn't immediately realise who Linda was, so Beth explained: 'you know, one of the new girls' . . .

. . . A grateful patient brought a gift for everyone; after he'd gone the call went out: 'there's cake, girls!' . . .

. . . Staff in neighbouring hospitals' medical-records departments were known as 'the girls over at [name of hospital]' . . .

. . . a long-serving staff member (aged about 60), who was describing how things had changed over the years told me that the department had 'got bigger; in fact I mean, when I first started, I think there was about, oh gosh, just a handful of girls' . . .

Whilst it may be true that the term 'the girls' can be used more or less unproblematically and regardless of age and hierarchical status by women who are talking about fun social groups, such as in 'a girls' nights out' for example, its routine use to refer to work groups might be more problematical. This is because women who routinely refer to their work groups as the girls seem typically to be those who enjoy little organizational prestige. However, these sorts of claims are necessarily speculative because the social science literature offers little in the way of sustained analysis of the discursive significance of the term 'the girls' when it is used by adult women who are talking of groups to which they themselves belong. Perhaps this absence from the literature reflects an assumption that the practice is merely part of the unremarkable and normal way of things. However, as Ezzamel et al. observe:

normal appearances are presented and maintained only by actively and artfully engaging [in] the routines through which such appearances are reproduced . . . The normal appearances of self-identity are routinized, but they are not given or automatically produced. Instead, they are reflexively monitored and sustained, even though the absence of any deliberate or self-conscious intervention appears to be a defining feature of such normalcy.

(2001: 1058)

In order to start to interpret the reflexive monitoring and sustaining of the term 'the girls' to constitute the clerks' group identity, it would be useful to compare two interview excerpts in which the clerks referred to one another

as girls. The first is in the context of a description of conventional work activities in office hours:

. . . I started off on fracture clinic, just doing fracture clinic, and then when, you know, the clinics were over, I'd go back upstairs [to work the rest of the time in the records library]. And then I graduated on to reception A, then reception B. And then one of the girls that was in the main office was doing the new patients [by herself because] another girl left, [so] I've been down here ever since . . .

The second excerpt relates to the importance attached to colleagues outside working hours, especially as the interviewee was a relative newcomer in the local area:

. . . I don't know anybody. I know the girls that I work with and that's it. I don't know anybody else in [name of area]. But they made me feel really welcome. Like I stayed at Katie's house and we went out and everything. You know, she texted me last night and said, 'Do you want to come for a drink? All the girls are meeting up!' So it's nice . . .

As opposed to the term 'team', 'girls' appears to do a number of things in these contexts. It is, of course, inescapably a female term, so its prominent use seems likely to have enabled and reinforced a distinctively feminine solidarity, as opposed to the more masculine environment one might expect managers to encourage (Collinson, 1992). Indeed, the next excerpt shows how a respondent recognized the potential for conflict between being one of the girls and being a manager:

. . . She [the first-line supervisor] is one of the girls. When you're down, she's the only person that [speech trails off] – she does it to everybody. If you're upset and [name of supervisor] looks at you or comes and gives you a hug, you just burst out crying straightaway. She's just like mum, you know, 'What's wrong?' And you're just like crying, straightaway. You just start crying. Yeah, she is like one of the girls – but then, sometimes you just think she's also your boss and you can't be too girly, do you know what I mean? . . .

Taken together, then, these extracts might be understood to suggest that 'the girls' was a way of enabling speakers to assert an identity built around personal and socialized relationships (Coupland et al., 2008), as opposed to the officially approved relations that come with an acceptance of such

discourses as teams. Still, while being one of the girls might be different from anything likely to receive official sanction, it was nevertheless an identity relatively unthreatening to the bosses. Indeed, one can imagine a managerial indifference as, 'As long as they do their jobs!'

Discussion

Two central claims emerge from the empirical materials presented above. The first is that a teams discourse was more or less absent from the field in spite of the need for the clerks to work together, and where teams did get mentioned prominently the clerks treated it with cynicism or humour (Collinson, 2002; Cooper, 2008). The second claim is that what was much more important than teams in understanding the collective identity of the clerks was their talk of one another as the girls. This formulation seemed to act as an alternative to the discourse of teams, which both distanced the clerks from managerial imperatives and helped them to establish a distinctively feminine solidarity – while not attracting adverse managerial attention.

Such claims represent a counterpoint to earlier work on the impact of management language in the personal sphere. Most commentators, as already noted, follow Habermas in interpreting the incursion of management language into everyday talk as one of the 'alien forces [that have made] their way into the lifeworld from the outside – like colonial masters coming into a tribal society [they] force a process of assimilation upon it' (1987: 355). Habermas appears to believe then, that 'colonial masters' could more or less straightforwardly 'force' assimilation upon the colonized, therefore assuming that what he called the lifeworld, 'a reservoir of taken-for-granted, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation' (1987: 124) was open to unproblematic assimilation. This assumption, however, starts to appear problematical in the context of this study in which management language can hardly be said to have been a successful colonizing force.

Two readings of the empirical material therefore present themselves. The first is the vulnerability of a teamwork discourse to mimicry; the second suggests a way in which the clerks constructed and maintained an obliviousness to managerial language, an obliviousness that may be interpreted as an immunization against management's colonizing efforts.

Mimicking the discourse of teams

The clerks were routinely subjected to the discourse of teams in their day-to-day jobs – it was pervasive in the local managers' routine talk and in the

official description of the clerks' duties in job descriptions and similar management statements. Nevertheless, the only times the clerks themselves used the term in a spontaneous, self-conscious, and prominent manner was to treat it with humour and irony.

One way of interpreting such actions would be to see them as a mimicry of standard managerial pronouncements. A mimicry, according to Bhabha (2004), that can be understood as a form of disavowal that if it is hostile to official discourse is only ambiguously so, and therefore remains relatively immune from censure.

In the first excerpt, when Maggie was forced into using the language of teams by the questionnaire's conventional assumptions, her ironic disposition enabled her to produce, as Bhabha puts it, 'a form of subversion, founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention' (2004: 160). In the second, Maria similarly turned the discursive conditions of dominance to her advantage, displacing her initial anger with a colleague by parodying the sort of ritualized pronouncements about teamwork that managers commonly make. Interpreting her actions after Bhabha we might say that she enabled 'other "denied" knowledges [to] enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority' (Bhabha, 2004: 162).

As argued earlier, from a managerial perspective it is likely to be desirable that subordinate staff internalize dominant discourses – such as teams – so that these discourses become resources subordinates use to construct managerially approved workplace identities. However, Maggie and Maria's actions hardly suggest that they had internalized teamwork. Instead, perhaps their mimicry indicates that they had found a subversive source of agency. Their mimicry enabled them to make choices and impose their choices on the organization to some extent in spite of their ostensibly low place in the official hierarchy. This means that they found in their mimicry of standard teamwork pronouncements a means to disrupt and disturb conventional ideas about teams by articulating it in a manner that was almost – but not quite the same as – that which their managers articulated (Frenkel, 2008).

The girls

If the ways with which the clerks dealt with the discourse of teams suggest that they saw such discourses as a threat to their preferred sense of self, it is unsurprising that the occurrence of any management language was notably rare. Indeed, I want to suggest that their preferred formulation 'the girls' allowed them to construct a more or less separate and alternative collective identity to the one their managers preferred.

The term 'the girls' seemed to have provided a discursive resource through which the clerks were able to construct their work and wider life and through which they retained their favoured sense of self. Thus, it was one of the ways in which they achieved a personal non-involvement in the official sphere. As one clerk commented:

. . . We don't talk about work, full stop – unless we have to! When I've been to meetings where managers are talking, it takes me half an hour to tune in to what they're saying; they talk completely differently to us . . .

While the clerks were aware of the management discourses, and could go through the motions of attending such official events as team meetings, and would no doubt be wise enough to say that they were good team players during interviews, being the girls meant that they had little need for resistance, as resistance implies an involvement in the official logic, albeit a subversive one (Yurchak, 1997). Therefore, rather than using ideas drawn from such studies of resistance as disidentification (Humphreys & Brown, 2002) or Švejkism (Fleming & Sewell, 2002) to explain their relationship to the team discourse, on a day-to-day basis at least they seemed oblivious to teams or to any management term and its potential for domination.

Furthermore, their own formulation achieved distance from management without being conventionally political or consciously controversial, so it may be a somewhat different usage from more knowingly politicized deployments of formerly used terms of abuse, such as the appropriation of the word 'queer' by homosexuals (Lee et al., 2008). It seems, rather, to have been a way for the clerks to achieve what Sennett calls 'strong social ties', which are ties that explicitly contrast with the 'weak ties that are embodied in teamwork' (1998: 24). The latter ties are weak, Sennett asserts, because of teamwork's association with transient and de-personalized work-based tasks. Therefore, in spite of managerial attempts to define organizational realities in terms of teams (as well as by using such terms as strategies, leadership and so on) large groups, at least within the organization studied here, continued to live their lives as if management and its constitutive discourses were more or less irrelevant.

Conclusion

One of the purposes of this article was to provide an antidote to the received wisdom about teams, which assumes that they are an inherently good and

more or less unproblematic empirical reality, and to reveal some of teams' more opaque functions as a discursive resource. However, even if its more opaque functions have been successfully revealed, questions still remain about the impact that the absence of the discourse had on the people in the records department studied.

It is possible to remain pessimistic about the overall impact of the teams discourse, even when it was virtually absent, in that its absence could be understood as a marker of the clerks' lack of status. Perhaps below a certain level in the organization people simply do not qualify for team membership, and so it is impossible for them to make discursive use of the teams concept to advance claims to be treated with equality. Only such discursive resources implying subordination as that of the girls remain available. Understood in this way, the record clerks' responses to the discourse of teams become not so much a successful form of refusal, nor even an immunity, but merely an insidious form of marginalization. More traditional forms of managerial coercion, such as their vulnerability to complaints by other occupational groups, remained sufficient as control mechanisms.

Nevertheless, the more optimistic readings this article has advanced can still plausibly be maintained. Even though the rhetoric of belonging and membership that are the foundational allure of teamwork failed to bridge the gap between the clerks' status and influence and those of their more professional colleagues, the key addition this article makes to the teamwork literature is that it shows how the clerks were able to use other discursive resources to build a satisfying collective identity at work.

Contrary to a more pessimistic reading that sees the lack of a teamwork discourse to be a source of insidious marginalization, the discursive resources provided by the use of the term 'the girls' can instead be interpreted to have functioned to insulate the clerks from their managers and the wider organization. The position in which the clerks found themselves seems to have granted them at least some freedom to define themselves outside of the officially sanctioned discourses of managerialism. Whether that situation was exclusion or emancipation perhaps remains an open question.

Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the British Academy (Grant No: SG-40295) that made the field work for this project possible, and would especially like to thank all the staff of the medical records department, particularly in out-patients, for allowing him to spend time working with them.

Notes

- 1 I began my career working as a clerk in a hospital medical records office in the early 1980s. This factor influenced the choice of research site in a number of ways, not least because it helped me access the site.
- 2 For a classic study of clerks, see Lockwood (1958). See Beechey (1983) for a pioneering review of ethnographies exploring women's paid employment more broadly, and for a vivid portrayal of the life of one particular hospital records clerk in a United States context, see the 2003 film *American Splendor* (directors, Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini).
- 3 The five men who worked in the department did not generally call the women 'girls' and they seemed not to notice the women's use of the term.

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Organization 2003 10: 5

DOI: 10.1177/1350508403101001

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Is Ethnography Jazz?

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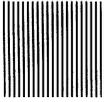
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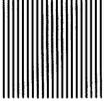
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Abstract. *In this article, we extend and refine Van Maanen's metaphorical insight that ethnographers learn interpretive skills 'more akin to learning to play a musical instrument than to solving a puzzle' by focusing on the parallels between ethnography and jazz. Our central argument is that ethnographers are engaged in a dual quest for self-identity and empathy that is improvised in ways resembling the musical 'conversation' between performing jazz musicians. We suggest several ways in which ethnography can be articulated with reference to jazz in order to address three of the central problems ethnographers face: (1) handling the delicate balance between self and other in fieldwork and in writing; (2) engaging in the everyday life of the culture being studied; and (3) choosing criteria to apply in judging the quality of ethnographic research. Drawing a parallel between the ethnographer and the jazz soloist, we deliberately implicate a very broad conception of ethnography as a fundamentally creative, exploratory and interpretive process. The three co-authors consciously produced this article using the ethnographic equivalent of improvised conversation embedded in rounds of writing and revision. These interactions carried us beyond our initial understandings of our own practices and generated new understandings that fed back into our layered, textual reworkings. Our depiction of ethnographers as jazz soloists is an attempt to grasp some of the subtleties and complexities in the working lives of ethnographers, and to*



Organization 10(1) Articles

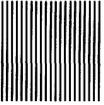
*offer them up for inspection, comment, critique, and elaboration in a continuing conversation with our readers. **Key words.** ethnography; identity; jazz; metaphor; qualitative research*



Our central argument in this article is that ethnographers are engaged in a dual quest for self-identity and empathy that is improvised in ways that resemble the 'conversation' that occurs between jazz musicians when they are playing jazz. We further argue that, as in jazz music, the improvised conversation of ethnography is best appreciated aesthetically. In this article, we will suggest several ways in which ethnography can be articulated with reference to jazz in order to address three of the central problems ethnographers face: (1) how to handle the delicate balance between the self and the other in fieldwork and in writing; (2) how to engage in the everyday life of the culture being studied; and (3) what criteria to apply in judging the quality of ethnographic research. We find that using the jazz metaphor provides new insight into these problems as well as suggesting new means of confronting them.

We are not the first to make a connection between ethnography and music. For instance, within anthropology the field of ethnomusicology involves the application of ethnography to music and its performance (for example, see Berliner [1994] for an ethnomusicological account of jazz). Within organization studies, Van Maanen (1988: 118) made the same connection in a metaphoric way when he wrote: 'What a fieldworker learns over time is an interpretive skill relative to the culture of interest. It is perhaps more akin to learning to play a musical instrument than to solving a puzzle. What the fieldworker learns is how to appreciate the world in a different key.' In this article, we extend Van Maanen's metaphorical insight into organization studies based on our own ethnographic experiences and on numerous descriptions of ethnography along the lines suggested by Watson (1994: 8), who, in declaring that ethnographic research 'involves activities such as reading signals and ambiguous messages in confusing circumstances, whilst maintaining a network of relationships', described ethnography in terms that suit jazz very well.

Our metaphorical approach draws upon the views of those many scholars who have suggested that metaphors are 'a basic structural form of experience through which human beings engage, organize and understand their world', creating meaning by helping us comprehend one phenomenon through another (Morgan, 1983: 601; see also Jakobson, 1962; Jakobson and Halle, 1956; Morgan, 1980, 1986; Palmer and Dunford, 1996). Our views have also been conditioned by the considerable (and burgeoning) organization studies literature which seeks to



Is Ethnography Jazz?

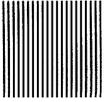
Michael Humphreys et al.

employ the jazz metaphor to understand processes of organizing (Bastien and Hostager, 1988; Crossan and Sorrenti, 1997; Hatch, 1997, 1999; Moorman and Miner, 1988; *Organization Science*, 1998; Weick 1989, 1993a). The fact that ethnography has not, so far, been subject to the same jazz-inspired critical scrutiny as have organizations is, we believe, a notable omission that our article seeks to correct. The aim of our article is to broaden and deepen our understanding of the work of ethnographers by transferring information from the base domain of jazz (also known as the vehicle of the metaphor) to the target domain of ethnography (Ortony, 1975; Tsoukas, 1991). In the next three sections of the article, we will explore the metaphoric connections between ethnography and jazz in terms of these three themes, and in the last section, discuss their implications for ethnographers and for ethnography.

The Delicate Balance of Self and Other

Playing jazz is not just a means of self-expression, but of self-discovery and self-development as well. This insight has, of course, to be balanced with an awareness that jazz is a social art (Bastien and Hostager, 1988: 582) that builds on a collective memory (Hatch, 1999: 9) learned through processes of socialization into a community of practice (Barrett, 1998: 616). Yet while these social and collective attributes of the jazz metaphor have attracted much attention from management scholars (Crossan and Sorrenti, 1997; Hatch, 1998; Weick, 1998), the scope it offers for exploration of free expression, individuation, and self-knowledge have been relatively underexplored. The importance of jazz as an individual and highly personal activity is indicated in the comments of jazz musicians themselves. For example, Max Roach claimed: 'When I play, it's like having a conversation with myself' (Berliner, 1994: 192). According to Lee Konitz, 'If you're not affected and influenced by your own notes when you improvise, then you're missing the whole essential point' (Berliner, 1994: 193). As Benny Green wrote in the sleeve notes to Miles Davis's seminal 1959 album *Kind of Blue*, 'a jazz musician is supposed to make a tune not sound like itself but like himself'.

Ethnography, too, is a means of self-discovery and creative self-authorship. As Rosen (1991b: 2) has written, 'ethnographers study others in order to find out more about themselves' as well as those they write about. The perception that ethnographers are engaged in a quest for their own identity at least as much as they are concerned with discovery of the 'other' has been, albeit most often tacitly, widely commented upon. There is, for example, a consensus among ethnographers that in ethnography the major research instrument is the researcher (Burgess, 1984: 218), and that 'it is not possible to write a text that does not bear the traces of its author' (Lincoln and Denzin, 1998: 413). The identity-constitutive nature of ethnography is implicitly recognized in Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995: 205) injunction that ethnographers should 'use the[ir] data to think



Organization 10(1)

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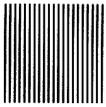
with'. It is also implied in Marshall and Rossman's (1995: 68) exhortation for ethnographers to 'think about strategies to maintain the research instrument, that is, the self'. Perhaps most palpably of all, it is suggested in the many calls for reflexivity or social scientific self-consciousness that litter critical commentaries on ethnographic works (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Chia, 1996; Delamont, 1991: 8; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 205).

Both the jazz soloist and the ethnographer are searching for an identity in the sense of a uniquely personal 'voice' or 'signature' that is characteristically theirs and which differentiates them from others engaged in similar work. There is a drive for individuation within a social group in which acceptance by others and of social norms is tempered by a need for individual self-expression and personal development. The need to possess a self-image, and a construed external image, of one's self as not just a group member, but unique within the group, was argued by Freud (1914) to be motivated by a deeply felt requirement for self-esteem. Expressed another way, ethnographers are engaged in a search for recognition by their chosen audiences, to be regarded as worthy of being 'listened' to. Less obviously, but just as importantly, both jazz musicians and ethnographers are questing for greater understanding of their social identities, that is, how they relate to 'their' and 'other' groups (Humphreys, 1999). Oliver Nelson's (1961) account of finding his own voice is one we feel that many ethnographers will be able to relate to:

It was not until the 23rd February 1961 that I finally had broken through and realised that I would have to be true to myself, to play and to write what I think is vital and, most of all, to find my own personality and identity. This does not mean that a musician should reject and shut things out. It means that he should learn, listen, absorb and grow but retain all the things that comprise the identity of the individual himself.

The jazz musician discovers himself or herself by floating ideas with peers. As Lester Young reputedly said to the teenage Max Roach after a gig: 'You can't join the throng . . . till you got your own song' (O'Meally, 1998: 389). Playing with others reveals to the musician the sort of musical identity he or she possesses, its possibilities, and their own capabilities and limitations. Meyer (1967: 116) refers to the creation of an individual 'musical style . . . a finite array of interdependent melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, timbral, textural, and formal relationships and processes . . . internalized as learned habits'. This can take considerable time as Miles Davis (1989: 80) points out in his autobiography:

I remember playing with a mute on that date so I would sound less like Dizzy. But even with the mute I still sounded like him. I was mad with myself, because I wanted to sound like myself. I still felt that I was close to getting to the place where I would have my own voice on trumpet. I was anxious to be myself even then, and I was only nineteen.



Is Ethnography Jazz?

Michael Humphreys et al.

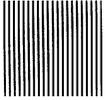
We argue that both ethnographers and jazz musicians are inevitably autobiographers, in that their publications and recordings express the process of identity creation acknowledged in Fabian's (1983: 93) notion that 'our past is present in us as a project'. John Coltrane's recorded journey from The Dizzy Gillespie Band of 1949 to *Meditations* with Pharaoh Sanders in 1966, and Clifford Geertz's publications from *The Religion of Java* in 1960 to *After the Fact* in 1993, are patently not only explorations of musical form and exotic culture, but also searches for, and constructions of, self. To an extent, this is confirmed in the writings of other ethnographers. Cohen (1992: 223), for example, remarks that 'we are accustomed to making instrumental use of the other in our self-discovery', and Watson (1994: 21) argues that 'We all work on our identities all the time: making meaning through a dialogue with the culture (or cultures, in so far as we are part of several groups), its norms, values and symbols.'

Drawing a parallel here between the jazz soloist and the ethnographer is valuable because it suggests avenues for scrutinizing the different ways in which ethnography is a performance in which the ethnographer's identity is discursively and creatively negotiated. Our suggestion is that the ethnographer, as with the jazz soloist, seeks a knowledge of life, and discovers himself or herself in the field collecting data (Humphreys, 1999) and later on during processes of analysis and narrative construction. In short, the *discovery* of the self is an integral aspect of discovering the *other*—a process described by Hastrup (1992: 119) as the 'personal adventure [that] belongs between autobiography and anthropology'.

Blending the self with the other is also imperative in jazz. A solo is only part of a tune and a good jazz player knows how to play a supporting role when his or her solo is finished. Ethnography, like jazz, is fundamentally more than merely a journey of self-exploration: it is a collective and social activity. The keys to successful jazz include individual-group rapport and collective understanding. This mutuality, which permits continuous renegotiation of ideas, is referred to by Barrett (1998: 606) as 'dynamic synchronization'. The search for convergence is facilitated by the musical structures and social practices that represent the shared knowledge of jazz musicians and condition expectations and behaviors (Bastien and Hostager, 1988).

The idea that, in jazz, the search for the self implies a search for the other, and vice versa, has been aptly described by Ellison (1972: 5, cited in O'Meally, 1998), who argued that jazz musicians need individually to be able to listen to, empathize, and simultaneously compete with others, and that they do so in ways that are identity defining:

True jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz moment (as distinct from the uninspired commercial performance) springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest; each solo flight, or improvisation, represents (like the successive



Organization 10(1)

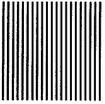
Articles

canvases of a painter) a definition of his identity: as individual, as member of the collectivity and as a link in the chain of tradition.

That ethnographers seek understanding of the 'other' is uncontroversial. It is implied in most definitions of ethnography (Rosen, 1991b: 5; Van Maanen, 1988: 14), and is explicitly acknowledged in ethnographic approaches ranging from the phenomenological and symbolic interactionist, to the hermeneutic and idiographic (McNeill, 1990). Our use of the jazz metaphor has led us to an understanding of ethnography as a brokering of the conflicting demands of a performance in which the identity of the self as well as the 'other' are jointly explored. Thus, we conceive ethnography as a balance between the competing dangers of an ultra-internal focus that can lead to narcissistic conceit, and an ultra-external focus that curtails self-insight and creative expression.

What constitutes a *good* ethnography, however, in the sense that it provides an adequate understanding of the *other*, is a vexed question to which definitive answers have proved elusive (Jeffcutt, 1994; Lincoln and Denzin, 1998; Van Maanen, 1988). At one extreme, there is a view of ethnography as rationally analytic, rigorously structured and structur-able, systematic and systematizable, and which relies on a certain distance being established between the researcher and those researched (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Eisenhardt, 1991; Miles and Huberman, 1994). As Werner and Schoepfle (1987: 23) have written, 'Only through systematization can we advance the ethnographic endeavour'. From this perspective, an ethnography might be an interpretation (rather than the *truth*), but it is an interpretation culled from 'methodological rigor' (Eisenhardt, 1991: 620), and from which specific propositions can be derived. Here, the living culture of the *other* is a quasi-scientific research site, a laboratory to which specific hypotheses are brought by rational scientists to be tested, and *culture-free* theory evolved. Clinical distance yields positivistic understanding of, not empathy with, the *other*. This type of ethnography is the least jazz-like in that it drives out self-exploration and self-expression.

At the other end of the ethnographic continuum is a view of ethnography as the product of in-depth, intuitive, and empathetic understanding of the *other*. Research instruments such as interview schedules and testable propositions are less important than acute social sensitivity and storytelling abilities (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991). There is an explicit recognition that the inquirer is 'of the data' (Butler, 1997: 933), that descriptions and theories of social situations are indistinguishable, and that the resulting 'messy texts' (Marcus, 1998a: 390) or 'impressionist tales' (Van Maanen, 1988: 25) can often constitute insightful commentaries. The ethnographer is an artist or craft-worker who shapes the ethnography, a process in which imagination and an aesthetic sense play crucial roles (Watson, 1994). The ethnographic products that emerge from this genre permit the reader to 'experience vicariously the relationships



Is Ethnography Jazz?

Michael Humphreys et al.

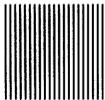
and ideas presented' (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991: 618; see also Hammersley, 1992: 22–3). While the invitation to be reflexive embraced by this approach poses dangers (in the form of narcissistic self-absorption), it also opens up the possibility for mutual and symbiotic exploration of the self and *other*. Indeed, while we concur with Bruner (1993: 6) and Lincoln and Denzin (1998: 413) that egotistical 'ethnographic self-indulgence' is to be eschewed, we believe that it is less likely to be a problem once the identity-constitutive nature of ethnography is explicitly recognized. In short, it is the fantasy that authors are able to write themselves out of the texts they produce that currently gives them license to impose their personalities on their texts so obtrusively. It is lack of reflexivity, not profound reflexivity, that leads to unchecked narcissism.

The jazz metaphor provides useful insight into these quite different approaches to ethnographic writing. At one end of the jazz spectrum we have the clinically slick execution of the formulaic swing bands such as the 1940s Glenn Miller Orchestra, described by the *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* as 'one of the most popular and best remembered dance bands of the swing era . . . [whose] success was built on the precise playing of carefully crafted arrangements, rather than propulsive swing or fine jazz solo improvisation'. Elworth (1995: 60) saw bands such as Miller's and the Dorsey brothers' as cultural appropriators, suggesting that they were 'commodified . . . never simply jazz bands, or even dance bands, but transmitters of various styles of popular music'. Elworth (1995: 61) interprets this as a dual process in which:

. . . black jazz was trivialised at the same time that real structures of feeling from black cultural experience entered the music. For the young white musicians who staffed the swing bands, African American music and dance styles were a source of what was repressed in the dominant culture.

The sense here is of experiencing the *other* at second or third hand—in ethnographic terms, an example of Wolcott's (1995: 90) 'quick description' rather than 'thick description'. This is echoed in Fardon's (1992: 29) contrasting descriptions of European structuralist anthropologists such as Lévi-Strauss as 'scientific and aloof' and Americans such as Geertz and Fernandez as 'wryly observant travellers . . . [whose] chameleon-like capacity to blend into the surroundings and fit into another culture is what gets them results'. Indeed, Geertz (1995: 62) himself acknowledged that the notion of the author's 'fashioning' of an ethnographic text continues to be problematic for those who feel that 'to acknowledge that one has put something together rather than found it glistening on a beach is to undermine its claim to true being and reality'.

At the other end of the spectrum of the reflexive search for the *other* is the free jazz described by Berliner (1994: 346) as 'improvisers experimenting with the avant garde'. Free jazz is associated with such players as Anthony Braxton, whom Saal (Radano, 1995: 189–216) portrayed as 'A



Organization 10(1)

Articles

virtuoso on the saxophone . . . he rends the fabric of conventional musical language as he reaches into himself—and back into pre-history—for some primordial means of communication.’ In ethnography, such journeys into deeply reflexive modes of expression, referred to by Denzin (1997: xvii) as the ‘sixth moment of inquiry’ and by Ellis and Bochner (1996) as ‘ethnographic alternatives’, include, for example: autoethnography (Okely and Callaway, 1992; Ronai, 1996); sociopoetics (Hamera, 1996; Marcus and Fisher, 1986); and ethnographic fictions and novels (Marcus and Fisher, 1986). This experimental work expands the range of ethnographic expression, for example, by addressing issues such as child sexual abuse (Fox, 1996), bulimia (Tillmann-Healy, 1996) and anti-Semitism (Edelman, 1996). Between the two extremes lies an infinite range of interpretive perspectives.

There are also vast differences in style and quality across the whole range of the music commonly referred to as ‘jazz’ and we must acknowledge that our use of the metaphor to interpret ethnographic processes is at its most apposite in the *middle* of the spectrum, where jazz is defined as a process of improvisation within a chord sequence or on a chosen scale. We are also taking, perhaps, a romantic view of jazz *at its best* in our notion of its resonance with the most vivid ethnography as creative, exciting, original, captivating and insightful. We are aware that only jazz at its highest levels of reflexive performance achieves the richness of expression and depth of insight which Berendt (1984: 251–2) attributes to the master tenor player Sonny Rollins who:

. . . can afford to treat the harmonic structures on which he improvises with an astonishing lack of constraint and great freedom, and often indicate melody lines only with widely spaced staccato notes, satirising and ironising them in this manner . . . Sonny Rollins fears nothin’.

We suggest that such an apparent lack of fear is an indicator of Rollins’s determination to take an inner journey in pursuit of his identity. This journey into the fearful realms of the *other*, searching for *self*, is a potent metaphorical connection between the domains of ethnography and jazz. By invoking the jazz metaphor we seek to re-emphasize aspects of the work of the ethnographer that simpler, functionalist accounts omit or marginalize. The jazz soloist, like interpretive anthropologists, ‘work[s] with the problem of representations of others’ representations’ (Rabinow, 1986: 50) which they both seek to make sense of and cohere. In neither case, however, can meaning merely be imposed. In a postmodern world, dialogue is preferred to monologue, cooperation to imposition, and mutuality and empathy to the myth of distanced *objectivity*. Our approach echoes that of Tyler (1986: 123) and his plea for a more poetic anthropology in which there is ‘the mutual dialogical production of a discourse’.

Our view of the ethnographer as jazz soloist is also indebted to Geertz’s (1988: 4–5) conception of the anthropologist as author in that both must



Is Ethnography Jazz?

Michael Humphreys et al.

seek to convince a skeptical readership ‘that what they say is as a result of having actually penetrated . . . another form of life, of having, one way or another, truly “been there”’. Geertz assists us here in answering the question of what is, within our metaphoric exploration, the equivalent in ethnography of the recurring cycle of chords which enable jazz groups to keep their bearings and enable soloists to improvise. We suggest that ethnographers in the field try to interject themselves in others’ experiences by joining in their situations and ‘jamming’ along with them until they get a feel of the *tune* that their subjects are playing. Thus, they learn to improvise life in the ways that their subjects do (or as close to it as they can get). Hence the answer to the question ‘What are ethnographers improvising on?’ is complex. We think that initially ethnographers improvise in situations they encounter while observing their subjects, then begin to improvise *like* their subjects until they can play tunes along with them convincingly. Furthermore, ethnographers must improvise within the framework/chord sequence provided by the current standards of academic publishing in order to find a way to communicate what they have learned while improvising on situations with their *others*. There is a compelling analogy here with the jazz soloist touring with a new band finally, after a period on the road, learning how to improvise with the other members of the group and completing a major performance or recording session.

Participating Interactively: Improvised Conversation

Complex and elaborate descriptions of our own and other identities are not easily achieved algorithmically. Limited repertoire prescriptions of how to play jazz or do ethnography inevitably lead to shallow and denuded concepts of the self and the other because they do not permit iterative explorative behavior outside of the narrow parameters they set. Self-insight and deep empathy require spontaneity, flair and intuition. Our understanding of other identities is enacted in improvised, not preordained, ways. Indeed, the ethnographer who has lost the ability, or who refuses to engage in processes of improvisation, in many ways has foreclosed the possibility for personal growth and learning, and arguably has seriously jeopardized his or her data-collection process.

Of all the themes that have been teased out of the jazz metaphor and re-employed in organization studies, improvisation is the most heavily worked (Tyler and Tyler, 1990; Hatch, 1997; Weick, 1998). Improvisation has variously been defined as ‘reworking precomposed material and designs’ (Berliner, 1994: 241), as ‘intuition guiding action in a spontaneous way’ (Crossan and Sorrenti, 1997: 156), and as ‘the degree to which composition and execution converge in time’ (Moorman and Miner, 1998: 698). The concept may usefully be thought of as being on a continuum of increasing imagination and concentration that starts with *interpretation*



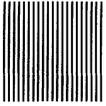
Organization 10(1)

Articles

moves through *embellishment* and *variation* and ends in the *improvisation* of 'jazz at its highest level of intensity, transforming the melody into patterns bearing little or no resemblance to the original model' (Berliner, 1994: 66–71). Alternatively, it can be conceptualized as a mixture of high intuition and high spontaneity as contrasted to other possibilities arrayed in a two-by-two matrix where high intuition and low spontaneity lead to *interpretation*, low intuition and high spontaneity to *faking*, and low intuition and low spontaneity to *copying* (Hatch, 1997). Its application as a descriptive label for processes of ethnographic inquiry has several interesting implications.

To say that ethnography is an improvised performance is to suggest that it involves skills such as flexibility, intuition, spontaneity, and creativity (Miner et al., 1996: 3–4; Weick, 1998). Just as improvisation in jazz requires familiarity with certain social norms and musical customs, effective ethnographic improvisation needs the prior absorption of considerable knowledge and conventions (Berliner, 1994). As Crossan and Sorrenti (1997: 165) make clear, 'good improvisation relies on the traditional technical skills gained through practice'. Such a view contends that ethnographic practices will most likely be 'replete with the unexpected' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 2), and that ethnographic work often involves 'serendipity' as well as hard work (Fetterman, 1989: 12). The point here is that ethnographers, like the jazz musician Buster Williams, react to circumstances on the spur of the moment, so 'When I start off, I don't know what the punch line is going to be' (Buster Williams cited in Berliner, 1994: 218). Compare this with Van Maanen's (1988: 120) view of how ethnographers working in the 'impressionist' genre operate 'flying by the seat of our pants much of the time'. For the ethnographer as for the jazz musician, as Van Maanen (1988: 120) expressed it, 'There is risk here, but there is also truth.'

Ours, then, is a view of the ethnographer as a bricoleur who is able to make do with the materials at hand to improvise competent data collection, hypotheses to account for what is going on, and all forms of proto-analysis (Lévi-Strauss, 1968: 17; Denzin, 1998: 338). Like Weick's (1993b) firefighter whose creative spur-of-the-moment bricolage led to his surviving the Mann Gulch fire, the ethnographer too must creatively and imaginatively improvise in the face of unexpected events: stonewalling interviewees, tape-recorder failure, a refusal to give an interview, and so on. It also crucially centers attention on the role of intuition. Intuition has been variously defined as 'choices made without obviously formal analysis' (Behling and Eckel, 1991: 47), 'an unconscious process based on distilled experience' (Crossan and Sorrenti, 1997: 157), and 'analysis frozen into habit and into the capacity for rapid response through recognition' (Simon 1989: 38; see also Agor, 1986; Mintzberg, 1976; Mangham and Pye, 1991). Its importance in ethnography has been referenced by Dyer and Wilkins (1991: 614–5), who referred to it as both 'contextual' and 'deep' insight. According to Crossan and Sorrenti (1997:



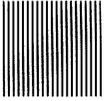
Is Ethnography Jazz?

Michael Humphreys et al.

168–9), intuition facilitates improvisation in three critical ways: (1) it assists in the identification of a range of possible creative solutions; (2) it helps in the selection of the appropriate solution from the range of possibilities; and (3) its role in the subconscious processing of ideas enables individuals to make extremely rapid responses. These, we argue, are all crucial in processes of ethnographic data collection, analysis and write-up.

The development of such intuitive skill may be a gradual one arising from the experiences of the ethnographer engaged, as Rosen (1991a: 280) describes it, in ‘recording this cultural data in field notes and consciously or unconsciously letting it settle against a tableau of meaning structures within his or her own imaginings’. The tangible outcome of such developments is likely to be a published ethnography which, as Weick (1995: 55) put it, may have been the result of an intuitive process ‘driven by plausibility rather than accuracy’. Such *sensemaking* is, for the ethnographer, the stranger, a search for a social identity, perhaps associated with an academic career, and described by Brewer (1991: 476) as ‘oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate . . . when I becomes we’. There is little doubt that intuitive qualities are essential for ethnographers and jazz players. And, indeed, for managers, as Watson (1994: 222–3) has recognized: ‘managerial competence or effectiveness is indeed a subtle, multi-faceted and context-bound thing. It does not just involve skills and attitudes, but encompasses knowledge—even if that knowledge is stored in the form of intuitions.’ We suggest that intuition and identity are for the ethnographer and the jazz player inextricably linked as part of the web of connection between subject, performer and audience—a network of interaction creating at its most productive the dazzling solos of Charlie Parker in live performance and the vivid ethnographies of, for example, Whyte (1943), Selznick (1949), Dalton (1959) and Kanter (1977).

One way of conceptualizing the processes of improvisation (both in jazz and ethnography) is as an identity-constitutive performance or conversation. The idea that identities are achieved through performances was prefigured by Goffman’s (1959) concept of self, and has more recently been elaborated upon by Gergen (1991) (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994) with the notion of the ‘saturated self’, and Davies and Harré (1991) in their discussion of ‘positioning’ of the self. In terms of our argument, ‘self-identity . . . presumes a narrative’ (Giddens, 1991: 76) and the narrative is told by the ‘Self as story teller’ (Bruner, 1990: 109). These narratives are related in the co-presence of others who do not merely spectate, but interrupt as they perform their own identity-constitutive narratives. Second-order evaluation by all parties ‘according to the (performative) criteria of the autobiographic genre’ (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994: 1) is a natural and continuous concomitant of these autobiographical acts. Jazz musicians perform their musical identities in musical *conversations*, while ethnographers literally discursively negotiate their work identities.



Organization 10(1)

Articles

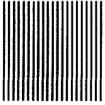
Both are parties to conversations in which their own and other identities are composed or authored.

The conversational nature of jazz has more often been recognized than the conversational nature of ethnography. Musicians often describe music as a language and jazz as a conversation (Berliner, 1994). Management scholars, too, have latched onto the conversational nature of jazz. For Weick (1998), the best jazz is a conversation involving the cross-fertilization of ideas. According to Hatch (1998: 565), jazz is a conversation within a discourse that 'refers to itself and reproduces itself over and over again'. This view is supportive of Velleman's (1978: 31) suggestion that:

Much of the enchantment of jazz results from its similarities to conventional spoken language. Although not lacking in errors and hesitations, spoken language is often more dynamic than the cautious, elaborated written form. We can compare normal conversation to jazz improvisation through its individualism, creativity, endless possibility, spontaneity, thematic continuity, and inherent imperfection.

Ethnographic work is also conversational in nature. Much ethnography is accomplished through conversations (more or less structured) with participants in the research setting. Nandhakumar and Jones (1997: 126) expressed the ethnographer's position very clearly in arguing that in selecting from these conversations, 'whatever is chosen will inevitably reflect the researcher's own biases', but at the same time support Bartunek's (1994: 40) concern that the researcher 'recognize, acknowledge and incorporate the meanings attached by the research participants to their experience'. The ethnographic narrative which is ultimately produced also fits into a conversation with other scholars who are referenced by the work, who read it, and who may then in turn cite it in their own ethnographic texts (Tyler, 1987).

The important link to identity has, however, been relatively under-examined. For us, it is key to understanding the nature of ethnographic work as a series of performance-conversations in which the identity of the ethnographer and the *other* are improvisationally co-authored via conversation. Only then is it possible to understand processes of ethnographic inquiry as a quest 'both as to the character of that which is thought and in self-knowledge' (MacIntyre, 1990: 219). Identity creation arises from conversations in the field that are carried over into conversations between the ethnographers and their data and that ultimately give way to conversations between the reader and the ethnographic text. As Richardson (1998) and Denzin (1998: 504) both noted, ethnographic texts should be 'vital . . . not boring', and thus 'invite readers to engage the author's subject matter'. As with jazz, vital texts place a burden on their audience, for their success 'depend[s] less on the willed intentions of an originating author than on the creativity of a reader' (Geertz, 1983: 141).



The Aesthetics of Ethnography as Jazz

In attempting to provide answers to such questions as 'What constitutes a good ethnography?' and 'What criteria can usefully be employed to evaluate interpretive research generally?' we are conscious of entering an arena of intense debate (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Evered and Louis, 1981; Van Maanen, 1988). Criteria of plausibility (Van Maanen, 1988; Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993), narrative coherence (Bruner, 1990), verisimilitude (Lincoln and Denzin, 1998), authority (Rabinow, 1996), authenticity and criticality (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993), among many others, have all been suggested in this context. Our understanding of jazz as a model for ethnography can, we believe, usefully inform this debate in two ways. One of these ways is in emphasizing the dynamic nature of ethnography as a practice/performance, and the other is in recognizing that the link to jazz suggests aesthetic judgment as a proven means of evaluation.

Most of those working on the problem of formulating evaluative criteria for ethnography focus on the ethnographic text. Indeed, verisimilitude is borrowed wholesale from literary criticism, where it is used to evaluate the capacity of a text to give the reader a realistic experience. The transfer to the domain of ethnography of the criterion of verisimilitude, or any other criteria from the discipline of literary criticism (including narrative coherence and authority) retains this textual focus. We believe that this focus is challenged by considering the similarities between ethnography and jazz. Although jazz may also produce a text (recorded music), the text (a recording) is always secondary to the performance that it is meant to capture. As both jazz and ethnography are performed practices, performance should be the focus of evaluation, as this is where the application of critical attention is most likely to result in improvement within the field. Thus, we argue that, as opposed to being merely text-based, the critical evaluation of ethnography, like jazz, should be focused primarily on the (ethnographic) process, and only secondarily on the text (we will return to the matter of evaluating ethnographic texts at the end of this section of the article). However, as a matter of fact the text is often the only available basis for evaluation. Harrison et al. (2000: x) note 'recordings are simply what chanced to be preserved. It is also true that the recording process acts against romantic's love of impermanence . . . but with most live performances disappearing into thin air, recordings plainly are all we have left to assess the musician's contribution'.

A second matter introduced by the importation of text-based evaluative criteria from literary criticism is the invocation of aesthetic judgment that the validity of this transfer implies. We agree with the principle that aesthetics offer the best foundation for the evaluation of cultural products such as literature, jazz or ethnography, but suggest that the proposal of what appear to be generalizable criteria for aesthetic evaluation (for



Organization 10(1)

Articles

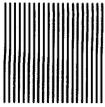
example, plausibility, verisimilitude, and narrative coherence) are misleading. Work in the field of philosophical aesthetics points to the impossibility of using reason (required to formulate generalizable criteria) to address the ephemeral phenomena of aesthetic experience. This is partly because the phenomena of interest do not lie in the domain of the intellect, but rather in the domain of the senses. What is more, ephemerality implies that what is to be considered plausible, coherent or realistic is relative and will change with developments in the field or with changes in, or of, those who are engaged in the process.

Strati (1999: 105) argued, based on the work of Italian aesthetic philosopher Bozal, that there can be no general principles which guide the application of aesthetic criteria. According to White (1996), from its inception, aesthetics has based its philosophical claims on the distinction between intellectual and sensory knowledge. Strati (1996: 216), relying on Baumgarten, who coined the term 'aesthetics', similarly argued that aesthetics is 'one of the two components of the theory of knowledge or gnoseology: on the one hand, logic, which investigates intellectual knowledge, on the other, aesthetics, as both the theory of the beautiful and of the arts, which investigate sense knowledge'. Continuing with Baumgarten's line of reasoning, Strati (1999: 108) stated: 'By virtue of their sense organs, humans have knowledge of the world which is analogous to that furnished by the reason and which is symmetrical to intellectual knowledge.' Strati (1999: 108) concluded on this basis that:

... aesthetics does not yield an understanding of the sensible world which the reason and intellect can process, refine and improve. The sensible representations are not knowable, in fact, by means of the analytical procedure of rational distinction on which the intellect is based . . . Intellectual knowledge and sensible knowledge, therefore, are entirely different matters.

In short, aesthetic judgment is not amenable to logical proof because it does not obey reason. Without logical proof, generalizable criteria are unthinkable, quite literally. But then what is to be proposed in their stead? Are aesthetic judgments nothing other than arbitrary projections of subjectivity? Strati claimed that this is decidedly not the case. Arguing that aesthetic phenomena are elusive, Strati made the case for a different, more sensory-based evaluation relative to that based on logic or reason. If aesthetic phenomena are located in subjective or intersubjective spaces, then they may well be differently experienced each time an aesthetic object or practice is encountered. Just as no two experiences are alike, no single set of criteria for evaluating such experiences is likely to be satisfactory for all. One implication of this argument is that aesthetic phenomena require appreciation rather than analysis for their effective evaluation.

In the realm of art and aesthetics, it is commonly believed that one learns criteria for evaluation along with learning an art form—whether it is jazz or ethnography or any other artistic genre. As Geertz (1983: 118)



Is Ethnography Jazz?

Michael Humphreys et al.

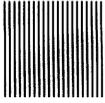
put it, 'Art and the equipment to grasp it are made in the same shop.' In Berliner's (1994: 243–85) chapter on the critical faculties of jazz musicians, entitled 'The Never-ending State of Getting There: Soloing Ability, Ideals and Evaluations', he noted that 'artists routinely evaluate each others' inventions . . . the discussion of aesthetic issues comprises an essential component of their community's intellectual life' (1994: 243). Berliner (1994: 243–4) further explained the critical function within the jazz community thus:

. . . by observing critical discussions and participating in them, learners become sensitive to wide-ranging criteria appropriate for the evaluation . . . and they gain a deep respect for the refined listening abilities that attune seasoned artists to every nuance and detail of improvised performance.

One implication of the rule that there can be no general principles to guide the application of aesthetic judgment is that this form of evaluation must be exercised case by case (Strati, 1999: 105). Consideration of jazz helps to see why this is so. Jazz carries with it a certain amount of uniqueness due to its improvisational character. Jazz works best when it challenges pre-existing frames and thus evaluation based on earlier frames will be counterproductive. Evaluative criteria must be altered as the forms of jazz evolve. Similarly, ethnography, which as we argued in previous sections is also improvisational, works best when it surprises us, when it overturns preconceived notions or exposes the limits of our prior understanding. So, as is the case with jazz, any previously defined criteria are likely to discourage good ethnography rather than encourage it. What is needed is the capacity to (re)formulate criteria in the moment of relating to a given piece of work. This is in part, as Berliner argued, because aesthetic evaluation depends upon sensitivity to wide-ranging criteria which can be construed as appropriate only in relation to a given piece of work. But it is also due to the elusiveness of aesthetic experience (Strati, 1999) which cannot be stabilized because it only occurs in the interaction with an aesthetic phenomenon.

Because of the elusiveness of aesthetic experience and the need to define criteria by their appropriateness to a given work, the methods of ethnography defy precise specification, just as do those of jazz performance or any other artistic activity. While certain forms, such as the interview and participant observation recur in methodological writings, there is a looseness to these descriptions, an inherent ambiguity about exactly how it is all done. The improvisational element of both jazz and ethnography implies that no two pieces will be the same and thus no final set of criteria will be adequate to the task of appreciating the quality of jazz or ethnography in some general way.

Lastly, to return to the text-based aspect of the evaluation of ethnography, it is important to recognize that text-based approaches are not without value. Just as a technically poor-quality audio recording can detract from the performance it records, the quality of the ethnographic



Organization 10(1)

Articles

text can interfere with appreciation of the ethnographic process on which it reports. However, to reach for more richly aesthetic criteria than, for example, plausibility or verisimilitude, we can turn again to philosophical aesthetics. For instance, White (1996: 197) discussed the concept of harmony:

From an aesthetic standpoint, harmony means the coherence of all constitutive parts of a work of art, a characteristic frequently displayed by such works. Harmony in this sense reflects the fact that the work of art is a unity binding together in a unique whole all the parts of the work. Note that this sense of harmony implies that if any one part of the work is disrupted, then the work as a whole will suffer.

Harmony emphasizes an aspect of ethnography that is well known to ethnographers—the problem of writing up the whole of their experience, of all aspects of their work. Books and monographs are well suited to ethnographic reporting, whereas journal-length articles interfere with their coherence and often fail to communicate the harmony that pervades a full ethnographic text.

Note, however, that the idea of the harmony of a work does not imply that the work contains no dissonance. What is at stake with this aesthetic judgment is the coherence of the entire text in relation to a given reading, that is, whether it works as a whole. To see this difference consider Denzin and Lincoln's (1998: 28) description of ethnography as a 'reflexive multivoiced text grounded in the experiences of oppressed peoples'. This description of ethnography could equally be applied to the blues, which Powell (1998: 193–4) regards as an aesthetically integral part of the documentation of black history:

. . . the delta of twentieth century African-American culture, [which] spawns inlets of style that color a vast and gray ocean of tradition. From the anonymous songsters of the late nineteenth century who sang about hard labor and unattainable love, to contemporary rappers blasting the airwaves with percussive and danceable testimonies, the blues is an affecting memory-induced presence that endures in every artistic overture made towards African-American peoples.

Both ethnography and jazz are 'complex, dense, reflexive, collage-like creation[s] that represent . . . images, understandings and interpretations of the world' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 4). Ethnographers and musicians seek to create 'a richness, immediacy and a graphic quality which engages the mind and imagination' (Hartley, 1994: 210). Both are engaged in producing 'the variety of insights on which creative interpretation and synthesis thrive': Morgan (1997: 372), in an acknowledgment of Denzin and Lincoln's (1998: 30) claim that 'there is no single interpretive truth'. We believe that this parallel between ethnography and the blues (the precursor and some would say the foundation of jazz) speaks to the principle of harmony of the whole without the requirement that what is produced be purely harmonious.



Is Ethnography Jazz?

Michael Humphreys et al.

There is a remarkable similarity between Bastien and Hostager's (1988: 583) statement that the aim of jazz is to 'achieve a credible and aesthetically pleasing collective outcome' and Butler's (1997: 928) description of the aim of ethnography being to 'draw an audience into a collective experience—in which a version of the true is demonstrated for that collective to judge'. Rasula (1995: 147) goes even further suggesting that jazz is explicitly ethnographic, as an 'ongoing record of an aesthetic ethos . . . autopoetic, its history is its aesthetics'.

Contemporary critical opinion presents a further point for consideration which we feel enhances the resonance between jazz and ethnography. It is clear that in jazz aesthetic judgment changes over time. For example, the genius of musician and composer Thelonius Monk is now widely accepted, yet when his first Blue Note recordings were issued, some jazz critics dismissed his work as that of an incompetent pianist. Similarly, in ethnographic scholarship, it is also clear that critical opinion changes over time and that early works are being re-evaluated. Vidich and Lyman (1998: 79) have pointed out:

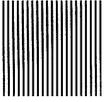
Rereading the works in the classical ethnographic canon has now become a critical task of the highest importance . . . That canon is now to be seen as a product of the age of Occidental colonialism and to have been methodologically constrained by the metropole ideologies and literary conventions that gave voice and quality to them.

We feel that the jazz metaphor can assist us in understanding the evolution, or indeed even metamorphosis, of such critical opinion over time, as Harrison et al. (2000: xii) note: 'originality in art, as perhaps in science too, often consists of a shift of attention to aspects of reality previously hidden, of discovering connections hitherto ignored and of seeing familiar objects or procedures in a new light'.

So What?¹

In drawing a parallel between the ethnographer and the jazz soloist, we are deliberately implicating a very broad conception of ethnography as a fundamentally creative, explorative and interpretive process. This is, perhaps, appropriate in a time when the confidence and certainty of a previous generation of ethnographers has been supplanted by doubt, 'a more open and speculative approach to scholarly writing' (Atkinson, 1992: 3) prevails, and our texts are widely recognized as problematic and provisional. In short, our very use of the jazz metaphor to elaborate processes of ethnography itself symptomizes a time when 'recent anthropological writing has called into question the legitimacy with which we represent the *other* in cultural written accounts' (Manganaro, 1990: 3).

John Coltrane once expressed a desire for a kind of playing that would allow for 'more plasticity, more viability, more room for improvisation in the statement of the melody itself before we go into solos' (Hentoff, 1966). Within ethnography, Glaser and Strauss (1967) responded to a similar



Organization 10(1)

Articles

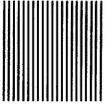
need with their method of constant comparison, which is an application of the hermeneutic circle in which two or more people in conversation, or via reading and commenting on each others' texts, mutually transform each other's ideas through continuing interaction. Geertz (1983: 69) described this as an 'intellectual movement . . . a conceptual rhythm . . . a continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure[s]'. In the previous section, we argued that a similar openness needs to be cultivated in the matters of producing and evaluating ethnography.

This is a time when far more is expected of ethnographers and their texts, and ethnographers must learn to accommodate and broker various calls for them to produce work which is, *inter alia*, polyphonic, which juxtaposes multiple styles and analyses, is self-critical, and sensitive to the problematics of representation (Marcus, 1998b). The depiction of the ethnographer as jazz soloist is an attempt to grasp some of these subtleties and complexities in the working lives of professional ethnographers, and to offer them up for inspection, comment, critique, and elaboration in a continuing conversation with our readership and in a way which, we hope, resonates with their (your) experience of the art of doing ethnography.

In conclusion to our argument for the metaphorical interplay of jazz and ethnography, it is interesting to examine the processes involved in creating this article. Like many others our article is the result of an extended jam session between three academic organizational ethnographers, each adding their own voice to the mix and layering their interpretations with those of the others. We began our jam with Billie Holiday's 1957 recording of Gershwin's 'A Foggy Day' and interpreting this as an ethnographic account. A quotation from the first draft gives a flavor of this proto-article:

She sings as if she is telling the story only to you, the listener. Her accompanists are a small group of the most talented jazz musicians including Ben Webster on tenor saxophone and Harry Edison on trumpet. They underscore her performance with their own interpretation of the story, adding atmosphere, detail, emotion and feeling, a process that Mackey (1998: 514) refers to as an 'othering of the tune.' The resultant ensemble piece is a coherent, swinging, uplifting experience which acknowledges the universality of the human condition and yet communicates the personal feelings and experiences of the singer and her accompanists. The notion of a *story* here creates a strong association between jazz performance and ethnography.

Although the original *song* may have disappeared from this final version of the article, the *chord structure* of our original argument has provided the framework for us to construct a series of improvisations around the question 'Is ethnography jazz?' In creating the final piece, we sought, as



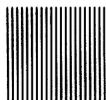
Is Ethnography Jazz?

Michael Humphreys et al.

all team players do, the synergy that comes from bouncing ideas between us in the heat of performance. However, our improvisations on the themes of this article took place over weeks, and sometimes months, whereas a jazz jam session often takes place in compressed, frantic real time with performers having to respond, in a public arena, within seconds and sometimes fractions of a second to *conversational* challenges set by their peers. Starting with the basic structure of the article, the lead was passed back and forth between the performers using e-mail to facilitate a process not unlike *trading fours* in jazz. Each performer read (listened to) the words (voices) of the others, restructuring, embellishing, commenting and adding new material before passing the manuscript on to be reworked in the next iteration. In this way, our *tune* became layered with multiple interpretations, reinterpreted and modified yet again throughout the revision process, and ultimately brought to a finish as the final article (recording) presented here for your engagement and critical appraisal.² It does not end here, of course, as more interpretations and modifications will occur with each reading of this text. Like both jazz and ethnography, this process continues, reaching beyond the particular tune played or story told.

The significant difference in time scale between academic writing and jazz performance indicates one area where our use of the jazz metaphor to explicate and highlight the processes of ethnography is problematic. There are, of course, other features of jazz and ethnography that are significantly different and which highlight failure of metaphoric connection. For example, ethnography is most often an individual activity, whereas jazz is predominantly group based. Ethnography is seen by many academics as a *black-box* single category of qualitative research, whereas jazz as a genre is highly fragmented into different camps (for example, New Orleans, Bebop, Hard Bop, Free, European and so on).³ Ethnographies are based on written language, whereas jazz, although apparently based on a system of musical symbols, is essentially unwritten and difficult to transcribe. As Martin (2001: 5) notes, 'a jazz improvisation is not normally notated by the player who performed it, its transcription is an analytical statement—an interpretation of what was played, an analytical first stage, or a *reading* of the solo'. Although we are aware of such differences between the processes of jazz and ethnography and possible potential weakness in the metaphoric connection, we feel that this is far outweighed by the creative insight provided by their juxtaposition.

In applying the jazz metaphor, as we have in this article, we are perhaps grieving for our own lack of skills as musicians while expressing what skill we have gained as ethnographers. The creation of this article, however, is more akin to the process exemplified in the 1945 Nat King Cole album *Anatomy of a Jam Session*.⁴ This album provides all the different takes for each of the five tunes: as Alun Morgan writes in the



Organization 10(1)

Articles

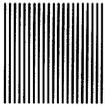
sleeve notes, 'we can hear all the music which was committed to acetate complete with alternative takes, false starts and snippets of conversation'. Perhaps, in writing this article, we are 'hiding' in the recording studio, fearful of, yet craving the adrenaline rush of live performance denied to us as contributors to scholarly journals. If, as in *Anatomy of a Jam Session*, we were to include all our takes, there would be perhaps 20 or 30 different versions of this article, but we have only put the final *cut* into the public domain. There is a crucial difference here between jazz and ethnography in that academics and ethnographers submit their 'final' manuscript for blind critical review before publication. In the jazz world, it is most unlikely that a musician would submit his or her final recorded take for critical comment by other musicians before putting a recording on the market. However, in live performance, particularly in jam sessions, informed, taxing criticism may well be the norm as musicians listen to, comment on, echo, and try to surpass each other's improvisations in the 'cutting sessions', which Berliner (1994: 44) sees as 'adding spark to an already charged atmosphere . . . provid[ing] aspiring artists with stimulus for their own growth as improvisers'. Perhaps the ever-burgeoning academic conference circuit and the accompanying proliferation of conference papers is a symptom of a desire by academics such as us to be *On the Road*⁵ with the band, playing in front of a live audience and exposing ourselves to the challenging *cutting contests* of public academic debate.

As a final thought, it seems not a little ironic that a tenor player such as Paul Gonsalves, on the road with the Duke Ellington Orchestra in 1962, developing creative 'real-time' improvisations and interpretations on a nightly basis, should feel the need to express himself as an ethnographer:

This may sound strange coming from me, but I've always wanted to write . . . You know, there are many different ways of interpreting a given situation. There's your way of looking at something and as many other points of view as there are persons involved. Everyone brings their own personality, their own experience, their own way of looking at things—they bring all this, you see, to a situation. (Tucker, 1993: 331)

Notes

- 1 'So What' is the title of the first track on the 1959 Miles Davis album *Kind of Blue*.
- 2 Reinterpretations and modifications were also made in response to the comments of the reviewers of the article.
- 3 Though, as we point out in the section entitled 'The Delicate Balance of Self and Other', ethnography comes in many different formats and styles.
- 4 The Sunset All Stars with Nat King Cole (1945) *Anatomy of a Jam Session*. Black Lion, Stereo BLP 30104.



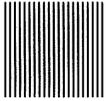
Is Ethnography Jazz?

Michael Humphreys et al.

- 5 Kerouac's seminal 1957 'stream-of-consciousness' ethnographic novel contains many references to, and descriptions of, jazz, the players and the music.

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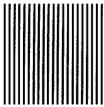
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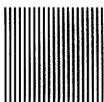
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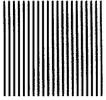
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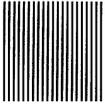
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Is Ethnography Jazz?

Michael Humphreys et al.

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Autoethnography and academic identity: glimpsing business school doppelgängers

Organization

19(1) 99–117

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DOI: 10.1177/1350508411398056

org.sagepub.com



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Abstract

Throughout our adult lives we have both been haunted by a certain sense of doubleness—a feeling of dislocation, of being in the wrong place, of playing a role. Inspired by Stevenson’s novel *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* we explore this doubleness through evocative, dual, autoethnographic accounts of academic conferences. By analysing our stories in an iterative process of writing, reading, rewriting and rereading, we seek to extend the reach of much recent autoethnographic research. Presenting ourselves as objects of research, we show how, for us, contemporary academic identity is problematic in that it necessarily involves being (at least) ‘both’ Jekyll and Hyde. In providing readings of our stories, we show how autoethnography can make two contributions to the study of identity in organizations. The first is that autoethnographic accounts may provide scholars with new forms of empirical material—case studies in identity work. The second contribution highlights the value of experimenting with unorthodox approaches—such as explicitly using novels and other literary sources to study identity.

Keywords

academic identity, autoethnography, business school, conferences, double, Jekyll and Hyde, R. L. Stevenson

when I reached years of reflection, and began to look round me and take stock on my progress and position in the world, I stood already committed to a profound duplicity of life ... Though so profound a double-dealer, I was in no sense a hypocrite; both sides of me were in dead earnest; I was no more myself when I laid aside restraint and plunged in shame, than when I laboured, in the eye of the day, at the furtherance of knowledge. *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, R. L. Stephenson (2003: 48).¹

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Robert Louis Stevenson's short novel, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, caused a sensation when it was first published in 1886. Even today, phrases like the 'Jekyll and Hyde personality' remain very much part of the vernacular, suggesting that the basic idea of the work continues to haunt our contemporary collective unconsciousness (McNally, 2007). As is surely well known, the story tells of how Dr Jekyll, a respectable medical practitioner, is able to transform himself with chemical potions into a physically different man: the unrepresentable Mr Hyde. This duality, in which the transformation of the same person meant that '*each [element of self] ... could be housed in separate identities*' (p. 49), places Stevenson's work firmly within a tradition that, by the 1880s, had become established within gothic writing: tales of the doppelgänger, the double, or literally, 'double-goer' (Miller, 2003). The term was coined by the German Romantic author Jean Paul in 1796 (Vardoulakis, 2004), and by Stevenson's time, stories featuring a doppelgänger were typically associated with 'a notion of the subject/subjectivity that is defective, disjunct, split, threatening, spectral' (Vardoulakis, 2006: 100).

Over the 125 years or so since its publication (especially perhaps with the rise of various 20th-century ideas that have complicated earlier assumptions concerning the 'self') the central idea of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* has offered fertile ground for interpretations and lines of inquiry, some distance from conventional readings of the novel. Indeed, Stevenson's tale of the relentless supplanting of a presentable side of self with an unrepresentable one (Jekyll forfeited the power of voluntary transformation into Hyde—the transformations gradually became spontaneous and finally irrevocable) has come to have a particular resonance with our individual experiences as business school academics.

During the evolution of this article, Stevenson's story inspired us to write 'doubled' tales of our own experiences of two sharply contrasting academic conferences that we both attended. One conference, the Academy of Management (AoM), New Orleans, USA in August 2004 seemed to us, at first glance at least, to exemplify all the instrumentalism and careerism that we have since come to associate with a disparaged side of self—referred to in this article as Mr Hyde. The contrasting conference, the Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (CQI), Urbana-Champaign, USA in May 2005, again at first glance, appeared to epitomize the values of knowledge for its own sake—as beloved by a preferred self, referred to in this article as Dr Jekyll. Thus, we use Stevenson's story (with due qualifications) as inspiration for exploring a certain 'doubleness' both of us have come to feel about our work and sense of self(ves) as business school faculty members—a sense of self with which neither of us has been at ease. Furthermore, for reasons elaborated later, we have come to think that our anxieties can be traced, in part at least, to the '*profound duplicity of life*' (p. 49) and double dealing (à la Jekyll and Hyde) that such an identity has come to involve for us.

In addressing these issues autobiographically we are affirming Fine's claim that 'intellectual questions are saturated in biography and politics and that they should be' (1994: 30–31). Indeed, in offering our personal stories we join an emergent practice concerned with writing about one's own self and identity in the context of organizational studies (e.g. Ford and Harding, 2008; Ford et al., 2010; Grey and Sinclair, 2006; Humphreys and Learmonth, 2010; Karra and Phillips, 2008; Keenoy and Seijo, 2010; Watson, 1995, 2008). In the broader social sciences, such writing has attracted the label 'autoethnography'; a genre of work which has made significant strides as a research strategy in recent years, but not without its conceptual controversies and practical difficulties.

Thus, our article aims to take forward some of the debates about the nature and practice of autoethnography. In doing so, we raise questions about (i) how the autoethnographic method might be enhanced beyond current debates; and (ii) how autoethnography can contribute to the literature on

academic identity. In terms of method, we show how multiple accounts of the same phenomena written over time (and therefore written by different versions of the self) can be a valuable way of doing autoethnography. Indeed, we treat our own stories as, in themselves, sources of empirical material. Second, in terms of identity theory, we show how these sorts of stories can be analysed as ‘case studies in autobiographical identity work’ (Watson 2009: 425).

But before we look at our stories, let’s look at Stevenson’s.

Seek and Hyde

What first attracted us to *Jekyll and Hyde* was a fascination with our own sense of doubleness. Some critics have seen Stevenson’s novel as a modernist-humanist tale which reinforces binary distinctions drawn from various Western philosophical traditions: good versus evil; the ego versus the id; the civilized versus the savage. However, we see in Stevenson’s work a more complex and nuanced account of self and identity, one that is arguably deconstructive. Indeed, we show, in new ways, how the story can help illustrate and enrich more poststructuralist accounts of self and identity, such as Alvesson and colleagues’ discussion of the ‘presence of multiple, shifting and competing identities even as we also question how identities may appear orderly and integrated in particular situations’ (2008: 6). Indeed, our use of a novel to inspire autoethnography, links our work with that of a number of other autoethnographers, who have taken their inspiration from poetry or other forms of literary texts (Haywood Rolling Jr, 2004; Keenoy and Seijo, 2010; Maréchal and Linstead, 2010).

However, *Jekyll and Hyde* is hardly a novel that comes immediately to mind when discussing academic identity. Perhaps novels by authors such as Kingsley Amis, Malcolm Bradbury, J. M. Coetzee, Howard Jacobson, David Lodge, or Philip Roth would be more obvious (Bell and King, 2010). Nevertheless, in agreeing with Harding et al. who assert that notions of the academic arise from ‘an historically accreted discourse, made manifest in films, fiction and all kinds of other cultural vehicles which together in part constitute received, idealized and normative images of what a “proper academic” should be ... and their traces inform the stories we tell our academic selves about our selves’ (2010: 162) we have deliberately chosen a novel ostensibly far-removed from such normative images. In doing so, we are attempting to unsettle (our own and our readers’) conceptions of what Harding et al. refer to as ‘proper’ for an academic. Indeed, in doing so, we hope to support Parker’s wish that readers of this journal should ‘respond with irritation, annoyance, excitement ... [and not] merely confirm the prejudices of the conservative’ (2010: 8).

Nevertheless, in part because of the distance between *Jekyll and Hyde* and received ideas about academic life, we need to acknowledge that our choice (or perhaps our conceit) of *Jekyll and Hyde* as an analogy has caused certain problems. For example, one noticeable feature of the novel is its unremitting masculinity. It is also significant that all its characters are elite members of the upper classes. In a sense, its upper-class masculinity might be seen as a helpful reminder of the fact that most business schools across the world remain dominated by such a male elite. But the novel’s tone, in this respect, has also led us to certain questions. For example, we wonder, as we reflect on our academic lives (as men, and as ‘full’ professors at research-intensive universities), whether we have provided accounts that are themselves caught up with the competitive and manipulative masculinity that continues to haunt the academic world (Ford and Harding, 2010; Knights, 2006; Murgia and Poggio, 2009; New and Fleetwood, 2006). Indeed, we shall return to this point in the discussion.

Also, in using *Jekyll and Hyde*, readers might naturally assume we are seeking to make similar moral judgements to Stevenson’s: that our Jekyll equals ‘the good’ and our Hyde equals ‘the evil’.

But this is not the case. We do not believe that *our* version of Dr Jekyll (i.e. in this article, the self who values knowledge for its own sake) represents what is inherently good in a moral sense; nor do we think that our adaptation of what we call Mr Hyde (i.e. in this article, the self who makes careerist calculations) is morally reprehensible, nor even inferior to a supposed love of knowledge. Nevertheless, we would still seek to emphasize how the novel evokes a subjectivity that is duplicitous, defective, disjunctive, split and threatening (Vardoulakis, 2006). These characterizations of our subjectivity, rather than ones taken directly from the novel, are helpful in that they enable us to avoid the kind of moral judgements made by Stevenson, but they still evoke how we sometimes feel about certain moral, and other aspects of our lives.

Who are we?

This article concerns academic identity—specifically *our* academic identity—and the contributions that an autoethnographic approach might make in this regard. It is appropriate, therefore, to provide some contextual autobiographical details—which, in themselves, represent forms of identity work. Indeed, throughout the article, we interpret all our ‘confessions’ as self-narratives, which we “work” on through internal soliloquies’ (Clarke et al., 2009: 324).

We worked together at Nottingham University Business School between 2004 and 2010, and soon discovered we had interests in common. Crucially, neither of us regarded ourselves as established academics—we were both late starters (receiving our PhDs aged 41 [Mark] and 52 [Mike])—and so we carry the baggage of long-term careers outside academia. Furthermore, we share similar understandings of our former jobs, in the sense that we now see them as arenas in which we were often very uncomfortable with who we were. Mark still recalls the time when he falsified health statistics to make them politically acceptable; Mike was embarrassed to find out that the cost of his business-class flight to Upper Egypt (for a consultancy in technical education) was more than the annual salary of the Egyptian college principal with whom he was working. So, just as *‘Henry Jekyll stood at times aghast before the acts of Edward Hyde’* (p. 53), the anxiety for us was that our former jobs (albeit for different reasons) were starting to turn us into Mr Hyde. In other words, we were becoming the kind of people we wished we were not.

These experiences led us both to try to change career through pursuing masters degrees. As mature students we peered into the work of university academics—to us, there seemed to be no hint of academics’ Mr Hydes. They appeared to deal with what was interesting. And, what’s more, these academics apparently worked without the complications of a desire for career progression; as Ruth puts it, they seemed to have lives ‘devoted to inquiry and education’ (2008: 106). These, in retrospect, naive observations² encouraged us to undertake PhDs and move, eventually, into academic careers—in part, with the hope of becoming ‘different’ people. We sought to be, as it were, something like our admired Dr Jekylls and escape from our Mr Hydes.

Unfortunately, things did not turn out quite this way. One of the central messages of *Jekyll and Hyde* is that Mr Hyde is always a lurking presence within Dr Jekyll. Indeed, these dual natures were, as Stevenson put it, *‘bound together ... in the agonised womb of consciousness’* (p. 49). Although we didn’t realize it at the time, simply escaping one’s former job would hardly enable escape from Mr Hyde. It wasn’t, after all, just about casting off our *jobs*—it was about remaking our *selves* within what we imagined would be a purer, intellectual environment. But, as Stevenson reminds us: *‘the doom and burthen (sic) of our life is bound forever on man’s shoulders, and when the attempt is made to cast it off, it but returns upon us with more unfamiliar and more awful pressure’* (p. 49).

Nevertheless, at the start of our different academic careers, each of us believed, at least for a time, that we had been able to get rid of Mr Hyde: just as, at one point in the novel, Jekyll reassured

a friend: *'the moment I choose, I can be rid of Mr Hyde'* (p. 20). However, as we got further in to our academic careers, we started to share Jekyll's later view: *'that I was slowly losing hold of my ... better self, and becoming slowly incorporated with my second and worse'* (p. 55). We liked to think of our selves as people who want to write and teach in ways that reflect our moral, political and aesthetic concerns. However, we had become increasingly conscious that another, more disturbing self was simultaneously trying to pursue with 'skill and courage ... the [career] game' (MacDonald and Kam, 2007: 641) often played in academia. The anxiety at this point in our lives then, was that this 'other' self, would end up only producing what Grey and Sinclair (2006) call 'routinized, professionalised "publication"' (2006: 452), and similarly, that this other self would teach merely to get good student evaluations (Burrell, 1997). And maybe there was a twist for academics—perhaps a *more awful pressure* (p. 49) to use Stevenson's words. After all, producing work which is published in places that people read (such as in high-impact journals) is exactly the same sort of behaviour one would expect whether, like Dr Jekyll, one were to pursue 'pure' knowledge, or whether, like Mr Hyde, one wanted to get paid more. Perhaps in our old jobs, at least differences between Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde were more obvious.

Autoethnography: analytic and evocative?

We now move from this reflection to discuss autoethnography more formally—a field of inquiry that has become eclectic, to say the least.³ Nevertheless, in all autoethnographic work, in some way or other, 'the self and the field become one' (Coffey, 2002: 320). As Anderson notes, self-declared autoethnographers typically publish 'especially (although not exclusively) on topics related to emotionally wrenching experiences, such as illness, death, victimization, and divorce' (2006: 377) (e.g. Boje and Tyler, 2009; Doloriert and Sambrook, 2009) but autoethnographies can also include the mundane (Humphreys and Watson, 2009). And the autoethnographic label is often also deployed in many other contexts and forms, that Richardson and St Pierre call 'creative analytical practices' (2005: 962): for example, in forms of performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003; Spry, 2001) fiction stories (Watson, 2000) and other less conventional approaches (see Denzin 2006: 420 for a list of some of these). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Charmaz comments: '[w]hat stands as autoethnography remains unclear and contested. This term lumps [together] interesting, boring and revealing memoirs, recollections, personal journals, stories and ethnographic accounts under the same name' (2006:397).

However, because of autoethnography's concern with the self, one of the central debates is around the possible relationship(s) between theories of self and identity, and methods for representing the self—our central area of interest. Indeed, the currency and intensity of the debate surrounding autoethnography is illustrated by a 2006 special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. This is devoted entirely to discussing the proposals of the special issue's first essay: Anderson's elaboration of what he calls *analytic* autoethnography, which he offered out of a concern for 'reclaiming and refining autoethnography as part of the analytic ethnographic tradition' (2006: 392).

For Anderson, the currently dominant mode of autoethnography (which he refers to as *evocative* autoethnography) is problematic, in that it typically refrains from—indeed, frequently refuses engagement with—conventional sociological analysis (even though it is often associated with scholars who are institutionally located within sociology departments). He cites the well-known work of Ellis and Bochner, who assert that 'the mode of story-telling [in autoethnography] is akin to the novel or biography and thus fractures the boundaries that normally separate social science from literature ... the narrative text [of autoethnography] refuses to abstract and explain' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; in Anderson, 2006: 377). In part, Anderson objects to evocative autoethnography on grounds that it is modelled more upon novelistic lines than upon the received conventions of

social science writing. As Denzin puts it, evocative autoethnographers ‘want to change the world by writing from the heart’ (2006: 422). It seems to us, then, that evocative autoethnographers often reject the inclusion of formal analysis because they believe that to do so would compromise their autoethnographic stories’ power to evoke—evocation being their key contribution. As Ellis and Bochner argue, ‘[i]f you turn a story told into a story analyzed ... you sacrifice the story at the altar of traditional sociological rigor’ (2006: 440).

Of course, there is an aesthetic element to this debate: which style of writing is most compelling? But Anderson’s objections also have epistemological and political implications. We ourselves would temper Anderson’s exhortation to be ‘consistent within traditional symbolic interactionist epistemological assumptions and goals’ (2006:378), but we feel it is important, nevertheless, to retain his ‘commitment to theoretical analysis’ (2006:378). One of the major reasons to be committed to analysis is that an insistence on stories being allowed to speak for themselves can dim the ethnographer’s appreciation of the multiple ways in which their stories might ‘speak’. For example, appearing to ‘just tell a story’ risks missing how doing so is also ‘the means by which identities are fashioned’ (Rosenwald and Ochberg, (1992); in Smith and Sparkes, 2008: 5). We think that the following story, which occurs at the very end of *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*, is a good illustration of such dangers. It concerns the author talking with her partner, Art, about celebrating the near-completion of her book:

‘I think I’m ready to buy that new car now’, I say, referring to the silver SLK-320 Mercedes sports car we’ve looked at and test driven several times.

‘That would be wonderful’, Art says. ‘What made you decide?’

‘Mom’s dying’, I respond. ‘... Mom loved new cars. It would be a tribute to her ...’.

Art nods. ‘Why do you think she loved new cars so much?’

‘They symbolized freedom and independence, adventure and escape, frivolity and treating oneself ...’

‘Okay, tomorrow let’s go get it’, I say. ...

We toast the decision with our champagne

The talk finished for now, feelings and bodies take over. We bask in the warmth of our love for each other, and finally, the immediacy of the relational moment.

(Ellis, 2004: 349)

This story evokes the emotions surrounding the events of that occasion—but this is not all it does, in our view. In its (apparently unexamined) celebration of conspicuous wealth, personal freedom and traditional family values, the story also seems to us to naturalize some of the ideologies associated with the political Right.

Thus, in this account, as in all evocative autoethnography, identity work gets done, versions of desirable societies get constructed, and so on. But these processes are occluded if the tales appear to be just about ‘what really happened’. And though attempts at critical analyses hardly guarantee that stories will lose their capacity to be read in divergent ways, we submit that, had there been a concern to link this text with theory, the author may have become more aware of its possible ideological dimensions. After all, if her story is open to the kind of political reading we have offered, the Left-leaning objectives often claimed for evocative autoethnography—which Denzin and Giardina see as an important challenge to what they call ‘Bush science’ (2005: xv)—risk being damaged.

On the other hand, however, an over-riding concern with analysis might risk the opposite problem—losing the evocative power of autoethnography.⁴ Denzin (2006: 419) illustrates how this could occur, with a juxtaposition of Anderson’s ambitions for analytic autoethnography against a statement from Neumann, a leading proponent of the evocative tradition:

Autoethnographic texts ... Democratize the representational sphere of culture by locating the particular experiences of individuals in tension with dominant expressions of discursive power. ([Neumann] 1996: 189)

[compared with Anderson's:]

Analytic autoethnography has five key features. It is ethnographic work in which the researcher (a) is a full member in a research group or setting; (b) uses analytic reflexivity; (c) has a visible narrative presence in the written text; (c) (*sic*) engages in dialogue with informants beyond the self; (d) is committed to an analytical research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena. (2006, 375)

Thus, we think that a refusal to abstract and explain may be politically dangerous. However, we still seek to retain those aspects of evocative autoethnography which represent a means (albeit among others) to 'move ethnography away from the gaze of the distanced and detached observer and toward the embrace of intimate involvement, engagement, and embodied participation' (Ellis and Bochner, 2006:433/434). In this 'doppelganger' article, then, we are also experimenting with the possibility of another form of doubleness (i.e. a doubleness separate to *Jekyll and Hyde*). We have constructed a double autoethnography—one that seeks to be both evocative, and to have analytic engagement with ideas about identity.⁵ In other words, we are seeing whether it is possible to use autoethnography as a means of analysing our own identity work. In order to achieve this objective we have explored our own evocative accounts, and also surfaced some of the stages we went through in iterations of the article.

AoM and CQI

We move now to telling our tales of duplicity. First, let's introduce the settings—conferences in New Orleans (AoM) and Urbana-Champaign (CQI).⁶ A juxtaposition of the officially-stated aims of the two professional meetings evokes their strikingly different political, cultural and intellectual flavours.

AoM in New Orleans

This year's theme of 'Creating Actionable Knowledge' encourages us to explore the influence and meaning of our research on management and organizations. The AoM has long been dedicated to creating and disseminating knowledge about management and organizations, and a key part of its mission requires that our science-based knowledge be relevant, responsible, and make a valuable contribution to society and its institutions. To accomplish this our knowledge must transcend purely scientific concerns and enable organizational members to make informed choices about important practical problems and to implement solutions to them effectively. (AoM Official Program, 2004: 2)

CQI in Urbana-Champaign

The theme of the First International Conference focuses on qualitative inquiry and the pursuit of social justice in a time of global uncertainty. The congress is a call to the international community of qualitative researchers to address the implications of the attempts by federal funding agencies to regulate scientific inquiry by defining what is good science. Around the globe governments are enforcing evidence-based, bio-medical models of inquiry. These regulatory activities raise fundamental philosophical, epistemological, political and pedagogical issues for scholarship and freedom of speech in the academy. (Denzin, 2005: iv)

The annual AoM conference is the world's biggest academic meeting in management and organization. In New Orleans, there were about 6,000 delegates and, though there was a relative heterogeneity in the intellectual content of the articles presented, they were overwhelmingly concerned with established managerial themes. But, *we* tended to notice more the activities outside the formal events of paper presentations. For example: it was striking how all the proceedings were conducted in expensive hotels; the way it was dominated (numerically at least—and probably *not* least) by men—who often wore business suits; how the drinks parties and similar events (provided free by publishers under the auspices of leading journals or by wealthy business schools) were an important part of the conference. Also, one could hardly escape noticing that an official aim of the conference was to provide a significant venue in which (especially young, immediately post-PhD) management academics were formally interviewed for jobs in US universities. All of which provoked considerable anxiety in us. The anxiety was caused, not just because the business suits were a reminder of former selves, but it was also the pervasive managerial ethos of the event—in what purports to be an academic conference. So, it is unsurprising to find that Burrell has described the AoM in almost nightmare-like terms. For him it 'drips power, bureaucratic hierarchy and patriarchy ... it is the modern fair in which we and our relationships are all commodified. It is a three day market in which we are all likely to be bought and sold unless we are very, very careful' (1993: 76).

If the AoM was a nightmare, then CQI seemed equally dream-like, but much less frightening. For example, it was a smaller meeting (about 600 delegates) the majority of whom were women. There was also a much greater range of lifestyle choice evident amongst the participants—which is to say (among other things) that no-one wore a business suit.⁷ Indeed, the convenor, Norman Denzin, always seemed to be wearing shorts and sandals. At CQI, ordinary university classrooms (rather than plush hotels) were used to present papers; there were no publishers' parties, and, as far as we were aware, no recruitment was carried out—certainly not in the overt, officially-sanctioned manner practised at the AoM.

Each of us became fascinated by the evident contrasts between the two events and, thinking there might be something of interest to pursue, decided to start writing about these contrasts. Thus, in June 2005, shortly after getting back from CQI, we produced the first tales. Mark wrote the first version of the tale of CQI (Urbana-Champaign) and Mike the first version of the tale of AoM (New Orleans) from which the first tales (below) were eventually derived.⁸

First tales

If each [element of self], I told myself, could be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable; the unjust might go his way, delivered from the aspirations and remorse of his more upright twin; and the just could walk steadfastly and securely on his upward path, doing the good things in which he found his pleasure ... (p.49)

Mark in Urbana-Champaign

I loved this conference: such a change from your average management event! The first afternoon consisted of special workshops—I went to one on performance ethnography. During the session we were split into groups

Mike in New Orleans

I had been looking forward to this conference: the attraction was New Orleans and the prospect of music in the birthplace of jazz! Although I had a large group of colleagues travelling with me there were only two or three

Continued

Mark in Urbana-Champaign

and asked to prepare a performance on our first experiences of racism. We decided to start by telling one another our own particular story—a fascinating experience—especially as the group was made up of people from all over the world. For instance, someone had grown up in a black township in 1960s South Africa: what, he wondered, was his *first* experience of racism? Another group member had spent her childhood in a privileged family in the southern states of America, waited on by African-American servants: she too wondered about her first experience of racism. As for me, I contributed what I had to excavate from my subconscious—an almost forgotten memory of when I was about 14 years old. Needless to say, the session was more than merely interesting—it was also challenging and personally involving. And it set the tone for the rest of the conference. Many subsequent presentations, like this first session, explored the political through the personal. The focus was very much on autoethnography and performance ethnography, though with room for more conventional papers (like mine). And my most enduring memories are of the effective performances. I particularly remember the almost unbearable accounts of child prostitutes in South America; reliving a father's funeral brought me close to tears; and hearing about someone else's adolescent angst helped me to understand a surprising amount about my own current relationships as an adult. There were very few articles on my putative interest, but then that hardly mattered because of the rich experiences many of the other presentations provided. In fact, it wasn't just the content, but the atmosphere and overall feel of the conference that was refreshingly different from any management conference I'd been to. The apparent absence of people 'networking' was novel (as was the absence of publishers' drinks parties and people job hunting). Here I felt I could appreciate the people I met for who they were, in themselves—without an eye on the position they held or what they'd written.

Mike in New Orleans

who shared my musical interests so the conversations in airports and on the plane leaned towards issues of academic life, papers, reviews and career moves. The overly-academic tone of the conversation was apparent in the stretch limousine which took us from the airport to our hotel. As we set off, the driver, an African American man in his 50s, asked in his languid southern drawl, 'you guys all been to New Orleans before?' and one of my colleagues sitting nearest to him replied 'No we're neophytes!' The driver didn't say another word. Although the August humid heat was oppressive I was soon wandering the French Quarter, sipping cold beer in bars with incredibly eclectic juke boxes. There were buskers on the street that would have been gigging session musicians at home. There were record stores where you could lose days just browsing the shelves. We found the brilliant PBS radio station: WWOZ with its output of jazz, blues, Cajun, Zydeco, and gospel music. We rode the street cars and took cab rides to the live music venues. We embraced the Satchmo Summerfest and saw Aaron Neville, Ellis Marsalis, Irving Mayfield and the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra all in one evening at the Mahalia Jackson Theater. Eating gumbo and jambalaya, we marvelled at Jason Marsalis and Kermit Ruffins on percussion and bass at the Café Brasil and we ate red beans and rice watching second-line bands competing with each other outside the Louisiana State Museum's Old US Mint. Within a couple of days my suitcase was bulging with CDs and I was beginning to worry about airline baggage regulations. Oh yes, there was also a conference to go to. Six thousand delegates attending sessions in vast corporate hotels. There were suits and ties everywhere in the icy air-conditioned rooms as young scholars vied with each other for the best faculty posts. We attended our own sessions to find that we had been given a 20-minute slot alongside a strange mix of disparate papers. So the good parts of the New Orleans experience were about the place. I felt comfortable, involved, and immersed in things that really interested me: music, people, culture, food and drink.

For a time after the initial versions were written, these tales felt like they represented how each of us *really* thought about aspects of our own jobs. Mark's tale of Urbana-Champaign was a reminder of the utopian ideals which inspired his move into an academic career in the first place. The careerism and rather stultifying academic environment Mike constructed (and escaped from) through the New Orleans tale, came to encapsulate many of his misgivings about the sort of academic work that is institutionally approved in business schools. In other words, at the time they were first written, we intended both stories to be read as tales of resistance to 'the commodification of academic work' (Willmott, 1995: 1002). Furthermore, Mark liked himself much better when he acted in the sort of ways encouraged at CQI. Mike also liked himself much better when able simply to ignore these forces of conformity—the things one is supposed to conform to—both at AoM and in our faculty.

whilst he [Jekyll] had always been known for charities, he was now no less distinguished for religion. He was busy, he was much in the open air, he did good; his face seemed to open and brighten, as if with an inward consciousness of service. (p. 29).

Second tales

Had we been working within certain traditions of evocative autoethnography, we should perhaps have stopped at this point and left the tales to speak for themselves. For example, Sparkes, in his tale of academic life (see also Pelias, 2004), evocatively suggests that the current ways in which UK academics are judged has polarized faculty staff into 'weasels' and 'scholars' (2007: 522). For him, weasels are 'only interested in themselves and getting promotion' (2007: 531); while in contrast, his preferred scholars produce 'insightful work [that] comes from investigations that have never been near a ... research grant application' (2007: 564). Using Sparkes's typology, these stories might suggest that we are scholars—pure and simple.

However, both of us have spent a fair proportion of subsequent years writing conference articles and talking to other academics about these issues. The sorts of selves and identities implicit in the above accounts are attractive, but each of us slowly came to admit that these are not the only accounts that could be written. The growing realization came to be that each of us had not only deceived others—but had also deceived himself. After all, having both been promoted in the period that this article has been under preparation, publishing this article might assist us in our further ambitions. Perhaps each of us is doing identity work—i.e. enacting our Hydes—even as we write this article. Indeed, it is entirely possible to read this article (at least up to this point) as an attempt to carve out a career (and construct an academic identity) by ostensibly writing about *not* wanting a career. Each of us may well have changed jobs to be rid of the Mr Hyde (represented by AoM) and live Dr Jekyll (CQI) lives; but Mr Hyde, we came to realize, is still part of our identity, he is alive and well and haunts us still.

At the next stage of writing this article, in an acknowledgment of these anxieties—but also with an *analytic* concern—we individually wrote rather different tales of the same conferences. In comparison, the first tales might be seen as a naive representation by (and of) Dr Jekyll. We wrote the next (doubled) tales as a way to examine and problematize our first attempts at autoethnographic identity work. In other words, we were supplying the sort of analysis that we criticized evocative autoethnography for avoiding. Thus, these second tales illustrate that a somewhat more critical interpretation is equally available—a doubled reading that made each of us question the stability of our individual academic identities.

[t]here is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked, and yet I scarce know why. (p.11)

Mike's Mr Hyde in New Orleans

In 1999, my PhD supervisor told me that 'presenting a paper at the AoM is always a good line on your c.v.'. The AoM in Washington in August 2001 was my first management conference and although I was amazed by the opportunities it gave me to meet and network with 'useful' people I was scared of presenting myself on such a stage. The most beneficial meetings were with my future colleagues at Nottingham where I had just 'netted' a faculty position to start in the November. I was so delighted by the career enhancement of the Washington experience that I'm pleased to say I wrote an influential article based on its effects (Humphreys, 2005). Once in post at Nottingham, I made sure that the AoM was an annual event. And it worked! I arrived in the 'Big Easy' as a newly promoted Associate Professor, I had several publications on the go (take a look at Humphreys and Brown, 2002a, 2002b)—now I was a 'real' academic! There were a few colleagues travelling with me and I felt embedded, and able to make my presence felt professionally and socially. And I knew that my jazz interests and expertise would be very useful. I found myself at the hub of a network of musically-enthusiastic academics and I was able to make some very positive connections with senior colleagues, many of whom were on the editorial boards of 'good' journals. (Indeed, it was because of this conference that I got invited on to one such editorial board.) Conversations which started with jazz morphed easily into discussions of current research and potential publication. Some of the best networking opportunities were at the various drinks receptions, and the finest of these was held in a huge room with a balcony overlooking Bourbon Street. Using the conference catalogue it was easy to construct an individual timetable to maximise my presence, seeing the 'stars' and chatting to the 'up-and-coming' about current and future projects, exchanging business cards and setting up visits, seminars and possible collaborations. The AoM is a great example of the maxim 'it's not *what* you know but *who* you know that counts'. Its 6,000 delegates presents the best opportunity to get access to the maximum number of the powerful and prominent, some of whom I subsequently used as referees in promotion applications.

Mark's Mr Hyde in Urbana-Champaign

Why bother with this conference? Well, admittedly it's an unconventional, somewhat scary thing to do (after all, attending it could have damaged my career in a business school) but the risks have paid off. I guessed—rightly—that it could help me develop a niche to make a name for myself in organization studies. After all, at the time of the 2005 conference I was writing a set of critiques of evidence-based management (Learmonth, 2006, 2008, 2009; Learmonth and Harding, 2006)—and criticizing the evidence-based movement was a major theme of the conference. Also, very few people in business schools are doing autoethnography, performance ethnography and other work in that kind of tradition—things I reckon I can use to get ahead of the game in organizational analysis. And I did (see Learmonth, 2007)! So it proved useful to go to the kind of workshops that you just don't get in organization and management conferences to see how I can apply these ideas to my own work. The feeling at the time that this conference would be very useful in career terms turned out to be right. For example, I sent Norman Denzin, the conference convenor, my article on evidence-based management; he liked it and used it in a high-profile way—he made it the White Paper for the 2007 conference. Attendance at the conference also highlighted some references that I probably wouldn't have seen otherwise, references that ended up in a article I wrote for *Academy of Management Review* (Learmonth, 2006). And, as everyone in business schools knows, if you get a paper in *AMR* then you're really cooking with gas! Oh, and why not look at Learmonth and Humphreys (2011)? The 2005 conference also gave me an opportunity to network with the small number of people from business schools who were there—two of whom turned out to be editors of a management journal. In fact, they asked me (and Mike) to write a short article about the 2005 CQI (Learmonth and Humphreys, 2006). It was a new journal (i.e. it doesn't count much in the career stakes), but, because it's a new journal it tried to sell itself at the 2007 CQI. So, on arrival in 2007, we noticed that our article was in the conference pack that all delegates received. It's all about getting your name known, after all! This same networking that started in 2005 also resulted in my being invited to contribute a chapter to a book, as well as to speak at two high-profile seminars—both of which are now on my c.v.—naturally!

Again, for a time after these second tales were written, we imagined that we had found a way forward for autoethnographic identity work. The second tales—by and of Mr Hyde—were (we thought) a way to analyse the first tales critically—but still evocatively. Thus, compared to Sparkes's (2007) autoethnography of academic life, work which polarized faculty members either as 'weasels' or 'scholars', we began to believe that by the addition of these doppelgänger tales, we were extending and enriching his typology. Indeed, we were (again) naive enough to think that we had pinned down our own academic identities: as *both* weasels *and* scholars, Hydes *and* Jekylls: apparently polar opposite identities that were inextricably fused together.

Discussion; or, another tale?

[when Jekyll first transformed himself into Hyde he looked in the mirror and thought:] [*t*]his, too, was myself. It seemed natural and human. (p. 51)

But, as things have turned out, the iterative process of identity work through autoethnography did not stop here. The implausibility that we might have achieved some sort of firm self-knowledge via autoethnography started to be reinforced when we came across the Nobel prize-winning novelist, J.M. Coetzee's comments about similar kinds of public confessions to ours:

the possibility we face is of a confession made via a process of relentless self-un-masking ... might yet be [concerned with] not the truth but a self-serving fiction, because the unexamined, unexamined principle behind it may not be a desire for the truth but a desire to *be a particular way* (1992: 280; emphasis in original)

Indeed, Coetzee goes on to claim that such confession 'is only a special form of bragging' (1992: 283).⁹ Coetzee's comments started to make us wonder about our own 'desire to be a particular way', and whether (even our own supposedly Jekyll-like) confessions were themselves just another 'form of bragging'. Read in this light, eventually (perhaps with the passage of time—enabling us to read our own accounts more as if they had been written by others; and perhaps with colleagues, and later, with editors and reviewers pushing us to do better) we started to consider whether the identity work implicit in *both* sets of accounts might actually be less different than we had initially thought. Brewis's insight that autobiographical vignettes 'can be read in different ways and are never comprehensive or static' (2005: 507) had become particularly resonant for us. But we hardly think it likely that we can *now* interpret our tales in ways that won't strike us as naive in the future. As Stevenson's near-contemporary, Joseph Conrad reminds us: 'no man ever understands quite his own artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge' (2007/1900: 63).

Nevertheless, today, we might ask more uncomfortable questions of the tales written by *both* our former selves than we did when we first wrote them. Don't both sets of tale suggest, for instance, that as Jekyll *and* Hyde we narrated *successful* identities—'successful' in the sense that we have published well (and therefore, as Jekylls influenced debate; or, as Hydes, climbed the promotion ladder)? If so, the selves portrayed in and enacted by our Hyde tales are hardly convincing doppelgängers of the selves in the first tales—indeed, they both might be read as similarly self-serving bragging—perhaps as aspirational narratives of identity. For Thornborrow and Brown such tales represent 'story-type[s] ... in which an individual construes him- or herself as an aspirant who is (i) earnestly desirous of being a particular kind of person and (ii) self-consciously and consistently pursuing this objective' (2009: 370).

Significantly for us, however, Thornborrow and Brown's empirical work is based upon the aspirations of a highly masculine elite—the British Parachute Regiment—a reminder, perhaps, of

the unremitting masculinity of *Jekyll and Hyde*. This being the case, as we pondered our own desires ‘to be a particular way’, we began to see other work on academic identity in new ways—especially that written from broadly feminist perspectives. For example, Harris *et al* see in academic identity a rather different kind of dichotomy to ours. Theirs is a dichotomy based on polarized views about the university system of careers and rewards, a system that turns out to be ‘profoundly gendered ... where production is privileged over reproduction and output over process’ (1998: 133). Thus, for them:

To say, for example, that the successful are ‘dedicated researchers’ while the unsuccessful are ‘cruisers’ suggests that the system is reasonable, handing out its rewards justly. Conversely, to describe the successful as ‘single-minded writing machines’ while those left behind are ‘all-rounders who care for their students’, implies that the system is flawed and unfair. (1998: 135).

But within our own accounts there is little hint that the system may be unfair in any way. We appear to take it for granted, as both Jekyll and Hyde, that our ‘success’ is what we deserve, as ‘dedicated researchers’. Indeed, analyses like Harris and colleagues, have prompted us to criticize both sets of our own tales in new ways; to glimpse, perhaps what we now see as a more convincing (Hyde-like) *doppelgänger*. We have started to realize, for instance, that our first tales (which were initially intended to signal an identity resistant to dominant ideas about academic work) were still about research and publication. We had almost entirely neglected other, conventionally less prestigious, ways of doing academic identity work, such as teaching or administration. Indeed, as Harris *et al*. go on to comment:

There are the successful academics, devoted to producing more research and undertaking less infrastructure—maintenance and teaching—work. And there is a large group of disaffected staff who question the values of the institution but keep working at it anyway. (1998: 146)

Might our Jekyll *and* our Hyde stories, then, be read, not merely as bragging, but as complicit with (indeed, actively bolstering the legitimacy of) oppressive notions of those who are, and who should be, ‘the successful’? Even the tale of avoiding the conference and having fun in New Orleans jazz clubs—a tale that we initially saw as resistance—leaves unquestioned one result of our ‘success’: the privilege of getting our expenses paid for doing so. Similarly, while the tales do draw attention to our exclusion from groups who wear suits and ties, as well as our awareness of a gender dimension in conference power relations, notably absent is any hint of possible complicity in conference practices that others may find exclusionary. For example Bell and King tell tales of:

drinking rituals which ... [f]ar from being incidental to the conference proceedings ... are ... where working partnerships are formed and renewed, ideas are discussed and joint academic projects developed [and which] ... are highly charged with the exercise of academic power. [These are] ... further reinforced by the telling of drinking stories, anecdotes or comments in formal conference sessions that typically refer to an earlier episode of heavy drinking. (2010: 436; see also Ford and Harding, 2010)

In other words, read in the light of others’ alternative stories of academic life and identity, neither our Jekyll nor our Hyde tales turn out to be politically progressive. Both were tied up, in unexamined ways, with elite discourses about what constitutes success and rules for appropriate behaviour—discourses that are likely to be institutionally approved.

Thus, even with doubled accounts (and our contrary intentions), we now feel that at least our first two sets of tales still failed to escape a trap similar to the one we criticized Ellis (2004) for falling into, with her story of expensive cars. Therefore, we argue that intimate stories of the

academic self, *must* be subjected to critique and analysis. Without it, such stories (including those written with the best motives) will inevitably reflect our cosy, middle-class professional lives and aspirations—even as they seduce their authors into thinking of themselves as radicals (Reedy, 2008). For us, then, an explicitly analytical element is always going to be essential for autoethnography to have any chance of side-stepping the trap into which both we and Ellis fell.

Conclusion

What we think we have ended up producing in this article, therefore, is more than a series of evocative stories with the ‘goal ... [of] enter[ing] and document[ing] the moment-to-moment concrete details of a life’ (Ellis, 1999: 671)—although that was certainly our original goal. In working on this article, we have often been uncomfortably confronted with (various versions of) former selves; former selves whom we have begun to treat, for analytical purposes, as ‘the other’. Although it was not our original intention, the process of writing our stories has become for us a valuable ongoing commentary upon our academic lives and career aspirations. Furthermore, we think it may have enabled us to reflect better upon some of the deep acting (Goffmann, 1959) we do as academics, as well as upon the ironies (even absurdities) that arise in the construction of our own academic identities and careers. Indeed, our use of the Jekyll and Hyde conceit (which some may think of as an absurdity) first stimulated, and then framed these reflections. Here, the radical (ab-)use of a novel we attempted, though it has resonances with some other uses of the literary in organization studies (Czarniawska, 2008; De Cock and Land, 2005; Land and Sliwa, 2009; Rhodes and Brown, 2005), was one inspired primarily by the encouragement given to autoethnographers to use novels, poems and other creative forms of writing (Denzin, 2003).

In summary then, we think that an autoethnography—which includes both evocation and analysis—can make at least two contributions to the study of identity work in organizations. The first is that evocative autoethnographic tales provide identity scholars with new forms of empirical material. Indeed, having gone through many iterations, we might be inclined in future work, to analyse our own stories more explicitly as if they were an ‘other’s’ (or, to avoid what Bell and King memorably call ‘the agonizingly familiar ‘us’’ (2010: 432) involve a third party in the analysis). However, in this article, our emergent analytical approach still echoes Rhodes’s ‘multiple reading strategies as a way to conduct research into organizational life’ (2000:7). There is a sense in which we have attempted three different (albeit implicit) readings of our own stories: two of these readings were authored by versions of former selves, the third (in the discussion section) authored by something like versions of our current selves. Furthermore, we were also forcefully struck by Rhodes’s advice at the conclusion of his piece: ‘don’t believe everything/anything that you read/write’ (2000: 25). This advice seems particularly pertinent for autoethnographers like us, who, as we have shown, have an understandable—if naive—tendency to believe their own tales.

The second contribution of our article is to highlight the value of experimenting with the sort of unorthodox approaches advocated by many autoethnographers (e.g. Doloriert and Sambrook, 2010) for identity and organization research. While it has almost become commonplace, particularly in more critical circles, to believe that experimental writing is exactly what we need as a scholarly community in organization studies, such writing has often proved difficult to publish. Perhaps, in part, this has been due to the ‘smoothing effect’ of multiple reviews and editorial comments. In this light, we see one of the achievements of a journal at the forefront of publishing autoethnography—*Qualitative Inquiry*—to be the opening up of a space for the publication of unconventional and ‘unruly’ research, while remaining peer reviewed. For example, Haywood Rolling Jr (2004) claims ‘I am a story. My intention has been to reconstitute assumptions about

my identity' (2004: 551). In the article, he reconstitutes his identity by offering a relatively lengthy autoethnographic poem about his childhood (2004: 552–555). While we have no intention of offering a blueprint for other autoethnographic work, we see an encouraging resonance between our struggle to combine the literary with evocation and analysis in the last two sentences of Haywood Rolling Jr's article: 'the Self as instrument of study is also the Self as artist. In other words, I can retune my self-images based on the writing and imagery I choose to represent them' (2004: 555).

Finally, we wonder whether the contribution of autoethnography to academic identity might ultimately be about making public some of academic life's secrets. We are struck by Michael Taussig's meditation on a seminal phrase from Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* which so obsessed him in his *Defacement* (1999):

Truth is not a matter of exposure which destroys the secret, but a revelation which does justice to it. (in De Cock and Volkmann, 2002: 364)

Perhaps our autoethnography has (to paraphrase Taussig) brought insides outside, unearthed knowledge and exposed at least a little of those secret elements of academic life about which we are not supposed to speak publicly. However, if it has done these things, at this point in time, we are unsure whether it might have destroyed the secrets or done justice to them.¹⁰

Notes

- 1 All subsequent citations from *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* are taken from this edition and are italicized.
- 2 Our naivety at this time (the first of a series of instances in this article, incidentally, where we appear to our current selves to have been naive) would probably not have been shared by the academics we observed as Masters students. Indeed, as Ruth, quoting Barnett (1994) shows, our teachers would have already experienced the shift in university life towards a situation where 'understanding is replaced by competence; insight is replaced by effectiveness; and rigour of interactive argument is replaced by communication skills' (2008: 107).
- 3 For a review of the topics covered by autoethnographers see Chang (2008) or Muncey (2010); for a review of similar work, specifically in an organizational context, see Parry and Boyle (2009).
- 4 The issue of achieving a balance between analysis and evocation has proved to be a central concern for us in this article. For example, one of the reviewers suggested we might theorize our work using thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault to improve our arguments. We have a great deal of sympathy with these sentiments, not least because we normally write within such conventions. However, for our doubled version of autoethnography to work in this article, we felt that such moves would have emphasized *analysis* to the extent of overwhelming any *evocative* potential.
- 5 We acknowledge here that what Gergen (1991) calls 'multiphrenia' (a sense of self that is multiple and radically fragmented) may be another approach to representing the self identity of an academic.
- 6 Our abbreviation, CQI, is, in itself an (accidentally) evocative formulation. Mike is a lapsed amateur radio communications enthusiast, and notes that in standard radio procedure an operator looking for response to a call would transmit the letters 'CQ' (seek you). A correspondence between this formulation and CQ-'I' is perhaps appropriate for an article concerned, in part, with searching for the self.
- 7 Not that there is anything inherently wrong with wearing a business suit; indeed at CQI there may well have been pressure *not* to wear a business suit (see Harding, 2002; Parker, 2004: 53). While we are aware that people's values cannot be read off directly from their clothing (Humphreys and Brown, 2002a), given our former backgrounds as people who used to have to wear a jacket and tie at work, it felt (however misleadingly) that we were more authentically academics in an environment so different to the conventions of our previous jobs—and to AoM.

- 8 From a methods point of view, it is worth making explicit that these texts of our stories were not derived from any kind of ethnographic field notes—none were taken because the significance of the events only became evident to us later. Thus the tales were constructed, initially from memory, and subsequently evolved through discussions with one another, and also from presentations of proto-versions at various conferences (cf. Bell and King's (2010: 432–433) discussion of their method for producing 'insider accounts' in relation to CMS conferences).
- 9 Perhaps this is a rather more sophisticated version of the type of attacks autoethnography sometimes attracts: for example, that it is self-indulgence, narcissism (Coffey, 1999), 'academic wank' (Sparkes, 2002: 212) and so on.
- 10 Thanks to a reviewer for this thought.

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