
Review Article

Whatever Happened to Organizational Anthropology? A Review of the Field of Organizational Ethnography and Anthropological Studies

S. P. Bate^{1,2}

An organization theorist friend of mine told me how she had recently paid a friendly visit to an anthropological meeting, only to find everyone there insisting on speaking to her v-e-r-y, v-e-r-y, s-l-o-w-l-y, so there might be some chance of her following what they were saying. It was as though she were a 4-year-old with learning difficulties, she said. I begin with this anecdote because it highlights the divide that currently exists between organization behavior (OB) and anthropology.³ Although changes are afoot, most noticeably in the U.S., the situation today is generally characterized by OB people who know and care little about anthropology, and anthropologists who take possibly even less interest in organizations.

It has not always been like this. OB, as Baba (1986) and Morey and Morey (1994) point out, is a comparatively young field which, surprisingly

¹School of Management, University of Bath, Claverton Down BA2 7AY, U.K.

²Requests for reprints should be addressed to S. P. Bate, School of Management, University of Bath, Claverton Down BA2 7AY, U.K.

³Following Geertz (1988), the term "anthropology" is used in this article mainly as equivalent to "ethnography." Although this is inexact, the subtleties of the difference need not greatly concern us in a broad review like this. In any case, imprecision has always gone with the territory: "The term 'ethnography' is not clearly defined in common usage," writes Hammersley (1990, p. 1), "and there is some disagreement about what count and do not count as examples of it." However, for the purposes of this article I take Hammersley and Atkinson's definition as my starting point: "In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions—in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research" (1995, p. 1). For a specific definition of *organizational* ethnography and a recent review of the field see Mouly and Sankaran's recent book (1995, Chap. 1). Another recent collection by Linstead et al. (1996) also deals with the neglected topic of the social anthropology of *management*.

to many perhaps, was originally created by anthropologists by way of the pioneering Hawthorne studies. It was they who also gave OB its first journal (*Human Organization*), and it was a social anthropologist, W. F. Whyte (1969), who wrote the first textbook in organizational behavior. Somewhere along the way, however, the two fields got separated, and organization studies gradually lost touch with the essential qualities of anthropology.

The purpose of the article is to speculate on the nature of the “ethnographic quest,” and on what might be gained from trying to put organization studies and anthropology back together again in some form or other.⁴ Some at least are in no doubt on this score:

Organization theory has an important topic; anthropology has a promising method. If the two can be put together more systematically and consistently, maybe the result would help us understand what we experience during the major part of our adult lives. (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992, p. 4)

Can social anthropology contribute to OB and management research, and in what way might it offer it some new energies and directions for the field? The question is deliberately one-sided. I am not assuming that all is rosy in the anthropology garden, indeed it has been receiving its own share of criticism in recent times (cf. Hammersley, 1992), but to consider it the other way round would require a different kind of article.

Unlike Czarniawska-Joerges (1992), who did a similar exercise to this one but in a full-length book, I have chosen not to see the problem in terms of a Robert Johnson-like journey back to the crossroads where anthropology and organization theory parted company so many years ago—this would be beyond the scope of this article and has been brilliantly done by her anyway. If there is a journey in this article, it is not so much one of history as of perspective, for as Marcel Proust observed, “The real voyage of discovery begins not with visiting new places but in seeing familiar landscapes with new eyes.”

PUTTING HUMPTY TOGETHER AGAIN

After so many years of separation, the prospect of a possible reconciliation between OB and anthropology is arousing considerable interest. In the United States, courses on organizational anthropology have been springing up everywhere, and the number of ethnographic studies of organizations has “grown dramatically” in recent years (cf. Editors’ introduction to Schwartzman, 1993). There have also been numerous unconfirmed sightings of anthropologists (apparently quite happily) grubbing around in organizations, even emerging from

⁴I am not the only one to consider the prospects of a reunification of the fields of anthropology and organization studies. See also Rosen (1991), Czarniawska-Joerges (1992), and most recently Linstead (1997). Significant, but clearly not a critical mass as yet!

time to time to press the case for “more consulting on organizational culture” (Kogod, 1994) and more of an “anthropological approach to managing organizations” (Jordan, 1994). The “business anthropologist,” it would seem, is now firmly in residence in corporate America.

As they say, it takes two to tango, and organization researchers, for their part, have been making their own friendly gestures toward anthropology, with increasingly frequent forays into ethnographic-type methodologies and language. They have a new journal, *Studies of Cultures, Organizations and Societies*, which provides a forum for debate on the culture and symbolism of everyday life in organizations—ethnographic in intention, if not yet in deed, and have even begun to suggest the possibility of not just academics but also *practitioners* benefiting from a greater “ethnographic consciousness” in their work (Linstead, 1997). One of the more generous gestures in recent times has been their adoption of a 25-year-old anthropology book (*The Interpretation of Cultures*) as their bible. So for Gideon now read Geertz.

And yet it is easy to get carried away by all this, to see the summer in a single swallow. Truth is that there are few signs of a similar resurgence in Europe or Scandinavia. With the exception of Watson (1994), Collinson (1992), and Wright (1994)—and I have doubts about whether any but the middle one strictly qualify—Britain has not seen a field-based organizational anthropology book since Jaques (1951) and Turner (1971). What is surprising is that it was British anthropologists whose “outstanding ethnographies” led the whole field for half a century up to this time (D’Andrade, 1995, p. 5; Stocking, 1983). Even in the wider international context, people accept that anthropology continues to remain on the “outskirts” of research on organizations (Schwartzman, 1993, p. 2), and it still has the stigma of being labeled “the forgotten science” of behavioral studies (Morey & Luthans, 1987).

And we have after all seen false dawns before. For example, many felt that when the best selling business writers got hold of “culture” in the early 1980s (Pascale & Athos, 1981; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Kanter, 1983), OB was in the process of being born again as Anthropology. They were to be disappointed. While the god was the same, OB’s concept of culture was very different (cf. Alvesson, 1993, Chap. 2 for details of the contrasts), altogether more corporeal and profit-driven than the sylphen, will-o’-the-wisp character glimpsed in the jungles of anthropology. The final blow came in the 1990s, with the culture evangelists turning against their god and benefactor, and spurning him in a remarkable display of public hypocrisy. The Billy Grahams of business denied him thrice. Tom Peters, for example, the man who 15 years before had declared that “culture” was the “essential quality” (1982, p. 75) of excellent companies, was now saying: “We didn’t know what culture was then, and sure as hell we don’t know what it is now,” adding for the benefit of those who

like it in hard figures: "About 90 percent of the training and consulting money that has been spent on culture change and customer care programmes has been thrown down the drain" (BBC video, 1995). As we now look back on this period, what is perhaps most striking is that all the management work that went into promoting the culture concept, so far as we can tell, did nothing to promote the discipline that had invented it.

Even the increase in the number of publications may not be as healthy as it appears, because now, for the first time, there are probably more people writing about organizational ethnography than actually doing it. Moreover, it is all too easy to wrongly equate "qualitative" research (which is on the increase) with anthropological or ethnographic research (which organizationally speaking is not). Almost all anthropological research is qualitative but the reverse rarely seems to apply in practice. What we have to be clear about is that ethnographic research is a particular form of qualitative research (Wolcott, 1995, p. 82)—self-immersed, longitudinal, reflexive, participant observational, etc.—and it is not being practiced in an organizational context anything like as frequently as people are claiming it to be. "Quasi-anthropological" may be a better word to describe the rather half-hearted ethnographic studies that have been emerging in recent years.⁵

That is to say, there is actually *less* to "organizational ethnography" than meets the eye. On closer examination "thick description" invariably turns out to be "quick description" (Wolcott, 1995, p. 90), yet another business case study or company history, a pale reflection of the "experientially rich social science" envisaged by early writers like Agar (1980, p. 6). "Prolonged contact with the field" means a series of flying visits rather than a long-term stay (jet-plane ethnography). Organization anthropologists rarely take a toothbrush with them these days. A journey into the organizational bush is often little more than a safe and closely chaperoned form of anthropological tourism. "Organizational" often turns out to be yet another marginal group: football hooligans, Greenham Common protestors, divorce court personnel, cocktail waitresses, Olympic organizing committees, funeral directors, girl scouts, dance companies, or LA punks; I mean where *are* the ethnographies of the health service, or modern ethnographies of the shop floor?⁶ This may

⁵There are some exceptions here, notably the rich fields of educational anthropology, policing and crime, and medical and healthcare anthropology (cf. Atkinson, 1981, 1990; Fox, 1992; Hammersley, 1990; Mouly & Sankaran, 1995; Young, 1991, for extensive bibliographies of these fields).

⁶It would be unfair not to mention some important exceptions to the rule: D. Collinson's (1992) *Managing the shop floor*; see also Young's (1989) and Parker's (1995) shorter shopfloor studies. See also Linstead's (1985) earlier ethnographic vignettes of workplace sabotage. For a review of U.S. shop floor and occupational culture studies see Schwartzman (1993, Chap. 4). Molstad (1986, 1988, 1996) has also done some very interesting ethnographic research among industrial brewery workers in Los Angeles which is very reminiscent of Roy and Burowoy.

sound harsh, but it is driven by the present author's frustration with ethnographic pastiche.

The reasons for the above are not hard to find. Anthropology is a hazardous sport. It takes time, it is not journal friendly ("too long"), and it takes you away from the scene of the action ("When *did* we last see that bloke?"). One full-length published ethnography every 3 years (which is quite good going) is not likely to satisfy the "ratings" merchants or one's head of school; and sabbaticals that used to permit a full-time period in the field are no longer available to the majority. In the present climate, Rule 1 for aspiring organization researchers surely has to be: keep away from organizations; fieldwork takes too long! Many are indeed coming round to this: witness the recent spate of publications of the "As discussed by a group of clever friends over a Danish pastry during a break in the conference" or "Overheard in a Palo Alto bar" variety. Since anthropology is a field sport (no fieldwork, no anthropology), there is not the same range of short cuts that other kinds of OB research may be able to offer. So perhaps it is a case of "Put up or shut up," or at best some kind of mild protest like a T-shirt bearing the words "Anthropology can seriously damage your career."

DIFFERENT CONCEPTIONS OF ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnography can be defined in a variety of different ways: as a particular type of method or fieldwork activity (the "doing" of ethnography), a kind of intellectual effort or paradigm (the "thinking"), and a narrative or rhetorical style (the "writing"). In all three, there are new ideas that OB might wish to consider if it were to take an anthropological turn.

Ethnography as Method

Ethnography is about doing fieldwork, an activity that involves pitching in and "getting one's hands dirty" (Hobbs & May, 1993, p. xviii). The broad methodological challenge is to "penetrate another form of life" (some feel to be penetrated *by* is more accurate), to "capture the richness of local cultural worlds," and above all to "grasp the native's point of view." A variety of methods may be employed to this end, including in-depth interviewing, attending and recording meetings, documentary investigation of records, and participant observation. The latter is the invention of anthropologists and involves holding the role of "participant" and "observer," insider and outsider, in tension so as to ensure that one is close enough to see what is going on, but not so close as to miss the wood for the trees. The role has been variously described as the "marginal native," "professional stranger," "self-reliant loner," and "detached participant" (cf. Ham-

mersley, 1990 for a bibliographical overview and critique of ethnographic method). We can pass rapidly over this particular conception of ethnography, because it is not this that distinguishes it from the broader field of qualitative research. The methods it uses are basically the same, and offer few new ideas or directions for the field.

If there is any difference, however, it is one of *attitude*: whereas qualitative researchers seem to have an insatiable appetite for “how to” methods books, ethnographers are much less fussy, preferring instead to “suck it and see,” keeping their plans roomy and adaptive, perhaps occasionally offering the odd aphorism or piece of “advice” to would-be researchers—like: “I suggest you buy a notebook and pencil” (Kroeber to graduate student), “Get yourself a decent hamper from Fortnum and Mason’s and keep away from the native women” (Evans-Pritchard), and “Make your will, buy yourself some shorts with locust-proof pocket flaps, and be sure you have a good stock of nail varnish for the local dandies” (Barley)! Obviously, the desire to preserve some of the mystique of anthropology is a factor in this, but the main point here (and very un-OB) is that many ethnographers believe there are no rules as such, and the only way to do ethnography is to just get out and do it.

Ethnography is not so much method in the madness, as madness in the method, the reality being “four thousand pages of hurried fieldnotes and vast stockpiles of scattered memory” (Geertz, 1995, p. 88). Hardly a “method” at all really. However, qualitative researchers and writers might still do well to consider this alternative, and ask what may be learned from it. Robert Merton says somewhere that finding the right question to ask is more difficult than answering it, and certainly the view of ethnographers is that the place to find the “right question” is not in a textbook but out in the field, by following your nose. Geertz’s advice after years of doing fieldwork is simple but powerful: “I learn by going” (Ibid, p. 133). Perhaps what qualitative research in general needs at this time are fewer detailed methods and more broad *strategems*. If the idea of grounded research is so popular, how about the notion of grounded methodology?

Ethnography as Paradigm

“When all is said and done,” writes Czarniawska-Joerges, “anthropology might, after all, be seen as a frame of mind” (1992, p. 195). It is not so much about doing and technique as about thinking, about looking at the world and oneself in a particular kind of way; in short a paradigm (Sanday, 1979). The core notion is one of culture-as-text, in which the primary tool of understanding is an interpretive *reading* of that text (Geertz, 1973; Schneider, 1987).

The key to the ethnographic frame of mind is to learn to “think culturally” about a society or organization, and this, I would argue, reveals many things that present approaches, especially the “managementcentric” ones, are missing: that cultures cannot be “created” by leaders, that assumptions about “strong cultures” and a consensus of meanings are fatally flawed, that organizations are not “pyramids” but multicultural milieux that have little respect for traditional concepts of hierarchy and authority, and many more (Bate, 1994; Parker, 1995). Perhaps the greatest contribution the ethnographic paradigm can make to organization and management studies is to challenge the highly influential “KISS” (Keep it simple stupid) paradigm found in the best-selling business books. Cultural analysis runs counter to the preference for simplification that is prevalent in social science research (LeVine, 1984); it stubbornly denies the obviousness of the obvious, and it is deeply suspicious about whether common sense is, as the best sellers love to tell us, always good sense. In short, it challenges every pedestal upon which the popular business texts have been constructed, and to this extent offers management studies a *radical* perspective, and indeed perhaps *the* radical perspective that the field currently lacks. Central to ethnography is criticality (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993): the way in which authors challenge their readers to question and re-examine their taken-for-granted beliefs. Contrast this with the best-selling business authors who are always claiming that what they say is so simple, so obvious, and so commonsensical that it is beyond question.

Ethnography as a Way of Writing

Ethnography is art, science, and craft rolled into one. As artists we seek to capture experiences in images and representations which symbolize reality; in this regard, expression is more important than precision. As scientists, we are data hunter-gatherers who go out and collect information, analyze it, and forge it into testable hypotheses and theories. And as craftsmen and women we are writers who write; issues of style and a pride in good writing are paramount, not because of any misplaced literary ambition, but because the very materials of theory making are words, phrases, and sentences. Forms of theory and forms of discourse are inseparable. Or as Van Maanen puts it: “Theory is a matter of words not worlds; of maps not territories; or representations not realities” (1995b, p. 134).

With regard to the last point, a lot of OB writing is just plain bad! This is not surprising in a discipline where writing is seen as a secondary or mop-up activity. Ethnography, on the other hand, puts literary qualities and ambitions back on the agenda, takes the textuality of theories more seriously, explores the terra incognita of literary practices (*ibid*), and begins

to think of the author as a performer within the theatre of language. As the comic says, it really is “how you tell ’em”—how you recount your fieldwork, your narrative style—that determines whether people smile, are engaged or persuaded by what they hear. “Proof,” “truth,” “validity” are as much an issue of style as of content.

OB, as ethnography, has to be considered as performance, as a form of intertextual and polyvocal representation, as a discipline whose theories and concepts are as much created by the writing as by the reality itself, that creates and constitutes the reality of organizations as much as it captures it. Of course, not all anthropology is good writing; it is the commitment to it that is important. That commitment must also stretch to experimentation with different styles. This again is where OB might gain from taking a look at ethnography, since in recent years there has been an explosion of styles, and a richness and variety that perhaps no other social science can match: fictional, poetic, critical, co-constructed, multicultural, feminist, autobiographical, and postmodern. The influence of post-structuralism and deconstructionism has been particularly marked, their main role being to undermine the distinctions between different genres of writing: between those of “writers” and critics, between fiction and nonfiction, indeed between literary and technical writing generally (Clifford, 1988; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 14).

What ethnography offers OB is the prospect of casting off some of the bonds of realism and positivism in which it has been wrapped for so long, of expanding the realms of scientific discourse into literary discourse. This is Paul Atkinson’s (1990) concept of the “ethnographic imagination,” which approaches social research and writing almost in the manner of the literary critic, and puts the exciting idea of “a poetics of organizations” firmly onto the agenda. The process may already be quite advanced in some quarters: Rose (1990), for example, suggests that the novel is invading and transforming the scientific monograph, not through the use of fiction particularly, but through the descriptive setting of the scene, the narration of the local people’s own stories, the use of dialogue, and the notation by the author of emotions, subjective reactions, and involvement in ongoing activities. Watson (1995) claims this is an exaggeration, but, farfetched or not, it cannot be ignored. OB must not get left behind.

THE TEXTURE OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Another way to look at the contrasts between anthropology and OB is in terms of broad texture and weave. However, any generalization here will need to be made with some caution, since anthropology is a coat of many colors, and prides itself upon its rich mix of the traditional with the

avant-garde, and the middle of the road with the faddish—even at times outlandish. It also embraces a wealth of different styles: ethnographic realism, confessional ethnography, dramatic ethnography, critical ethnography, self- or auto-ethnography, sociopoetics, reflexive ethnography, and many more (Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Van Maanen, 1995a).

In his book, *The Awakening Giant*, Pettigrew attacks research on organization theory and behavior for being *ahistorical*, *acontextual*, and *aprocessual* in its approach and outlook (1985, p. xix, Chap. 2; repeated 1995, p. 93). He is probably right on all three counts. Anthropology, on the other hand, is very much the opposite in each of these respects, and to this extent presents management research with some real alternatives for future development.

Historical

Management sciences do not on the whole tend to be historically-minded, hence their preference for forward-looking concepts such as “vision,” “forecast,” “plan,” and so on. Anthropology puts the past back on to the agenda, giving it the weight conventional organizational and management models lack (Bate, 1994). The reason is that the present (and future) only becomes meaningful when it is set in the context of its past—remember Rabinow’s observation (cited in Linstead, 1997, p. 90) that thought is “nothing more and nothing less than a historically locatable set of practices.”

The anthropologists’ interest is not in the past as such, but in the “living history” (Malinowski, 1945) of the society or organization, the ways of thinking and behavior that continue to “live on” in, and mould and shape, the present—in other words, culture. An example of this would be the “isms” or cultural schema that I found in my own 4-year study of British Rail. These “habits of thought,” many of them more than a century old but still very much alive and kicking in the organization, were playing havoc with its day-to-day management processes. It was these mentalities that lay behind the decline and stagnation of the organization (Bate, 1990). Other research conducted in manufacturing companies revealed similar debilitating cultural hangovers from the past (Bate, 1984).

A recent example of good historical contextualization is Georgina Born’s (1995) ethnography of IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et de Coordination Acoustique/Musique), Pierre Boulez’s computer music research and production institute in Paris, which skillfully (and at great length!) reveals how long-standing contradictions between modernism and postmodernism in music, mediated by Boulez up until his retirement in 1992 and subsequently by his successors, found constant expression in IRCAM’s “liv-

ing” culture and the everyday processes through which meanings were negotiated and renegotiated by the members.

History should not actually be studied historically, however. It is in the everyday that the anthropologist searches for the past, in such things as rites and rituals, myths, stories and sagas, ballads, and anecdotes. This kind of activity is one which a small number of organization writers *have* picked up on, albeit at times tediously deconstructively (Boje, 1995; Boje et al., 1982; Martin, 1982; Tommerup & Loubier, 1996; Trice & Beyer, 1991; Young, 1989; the latter being an interesting analysis of the significance to a group of shop floor “girls” in a Northern British rainwear factory of wearing a St. George’s Day lapel rose). The function of such myths and rituals has been to bring the past forward, and ensure its continued contemporary relevance.

Contextual

One of the root notions of anthropology is that thought and behavior cannot be properly understood outside the context in which they are situated; it is knowledge of context that renders them intelligible. “Context” here can refer to temporal (Gell, 1992), physical, or institutional context (Dennis, Henriques, & Slaughter, 1956). For example, a recent ethnography of a hospital conducted by my colleagues and myself (Bate et al., 1997) revealed how the problems of the hospital—weaknesses in the top team, failings in the clinical directorate structure, low morale, stress, IT problems, and poor relationships between the management and senior clinicians—far from being exclusively “local” (as many believed), were the result of the complex interplay of different organizational, professional, Trust, NHS, and political contexts within which they were embedded. A different conception of context in health care is found in Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) study of the “awareness contexts” of dying, which ranged from departments where patients’ awareness of death was high (cancer wards) to those where it was low to nonexistent (premature baby service and neurology).

One of the strengths of anthropology is that it involves putting the individual back in his social setting, back into the contexts in which the action takes place, and observing him in his daily activities. By establishing links between the “individual” and the “social,” the micro and the macro, it reaches, or at least claims that it can reach, parts other disciplines cannot reach:

Our theory is our strength. Management theory is driven by sociology and psychology and has difficulty bridging the gap between the macro and micro levels of behaviour. We have the ability to bridge that gap. We can see patterns. We see ways to understand the behaviour of the individuals as part of the pattern of behaviour as a whole. (Jordan, 1994, p. 9)

It is nevertheless becoming abundantly clear as time goes on that anthropologists are coming under increasing pressure to radically revise their concept of “wholes” and “contexts” to take account of the postmodern age and the growth and emergence of the new globally-engaged, postindustrial organization. As Hatch and Schultz explain:

Studying culture in a postindustrial context demands that we leave behind the notion of isolated, socialized, organizational tribes. In postindustrial times, tribes become fragmented, their coherence shattered and replaced by multiplicity and the pluralism of meaning and interpretation. In this framing of culture, meaning is carried by texts rather than tribes and these texts travel through electronic space where they are open to numerous readings by limitless anonymous interpreters whose interpretations produce other texts in an endless and open-ended hermeneutic. (1995, pp. 2–3)

People are saying it is time for anthropologists to stop seeing wholes that are not there, to check out of the “Grand Hotel” (Collins, 1989), where everything was, as it were, under the one roof, and to embrace virtual contexts and the concept of organizations in hyperspace. It is time, they say, to stop talking about “in the round” and to replace it with a concept of the great wide open, not so much holistic as boundaryless and infinite.

This is part of a wider trend in anthropology, in which the earlier emphasis on stability, wholeness, harmony, and continuity (the “unified corpus”) is increasingly giving way to the concept of culture as contested, fragmented, temporal, and emergent (Clifford, 1986, p. 19); as a loosely-coupled, pluralistic system, consisting of a multiplicity of human communities, of a mix of similarity and difference, convergence and divergence (Bate, 1994, p. 71; Geertz, 1984; Paul, Miller, & Paul, 1994). “Corporate culture” writers need to take note: their concept of culture is, and always has been, very different from that of the anthropologist, with much more emphasis on similarity, convergence, sharedness, and normative consensus (Parker, 1995). As Parker showed, in one of the few organization studies on this issue (a medium-sized manufacturing company called “Vulcan”), these writers have got it seriously wrong. Even a single occupational culture within an organization, in this case the management culture, is characterized by fragmentation of outlook and perspective, a feeling of “family,” yet at other times a feeling of “nonfamily.” Young’s study (1989) is another example, similar in many ways to Parker’s.

This debate and the attempt to reconceptualize and redefine “context” is part of an even bigger issue of devising new systems of discourse in anthropology (a challenge that must apply equally to organization studies) that can keep up, more or less, with what is going on in the world “out there.” Geertz is far from clear what these may be, but is convinced (as I am) that they will have to be more *ad hoc* and imperfect than anything we have seen before:

One works *ad hoc* and *ad interim*, piecing together thousand-year histories with three-week massacres, international conflicts with municipal ecologies. The economics of rice or olives, the politics of ethnicity or religion, the workings of language or war, must, to some extent, be soldered into the final construction . . . The result, inevitably, is unsatisfactory, lumbering, shaky, and badly formed: a grand contraption. (Geertz, 1995, p. 20)

The other thing Geertz is sure about is that anthropology will have to become even more process-oriented than it has been in the past, and it is to this issue that we now turn.

Processual

Organizations are “formal” in the sense of having explicit tasks to accomplish and “informal” in the sense of the way members continually negotiate with one another in the interpretation and carrying out of such tasks. The promise of ethnography is the presentation of the work culture that emerges from the interplay between these so-called formal and informal aspects of organizational life. (Van Maanen et al., in Schwartzman, 1993, p. vii)

While being careful to maintain this dual emphasis, anthropology’s main contribution lies on the informal side of the equation. This is not surprising: anthropology did after all invent the concept of the “informal system” and the informal organization. Hawthorne and the Bank Wiring Observation Room was about informality and informal relationships, as was Roy’s (1952, 1954, 1959), and 30 years later, Burowoy’s (1979) classic research in a Chicago machine shop (quota restrictions, goldbricking). In similar vein was Melville Dalton’s (1959) participant observer study of “the schisms and ties between official and unofficial action” among managers in four companies.

Studying the informal process is very much a question of focusing on the “contested terrain” upon which different subcultures or native view paradigms (Gregory, 1983) fight it out and establish the terms of their fragile coexistence. Gouldner (1954) coined the term “indulgency pattern” to describe the informal, and always taut and dynamic, give-and-take system between management and worker which functioned as a cushion or lubricant to the relationship. This involved managers refraining from enforcing “obedience obligations” in return for worker cooperation, for example, waiving the formal rule to allow workers to borrow company tools and equipment, which extended to letting them take dynamite home for use when they went fishing in the local lake. Very effective!

It was Gouldner and Burowoy’s studies that first drew attention to the wide range of “games” workers played, by no means all of them hostile to management interests. In fact, the interesting dynamic was that of *collusion* between managers and workers in the maintenance of the game—workers played games *with* management not always *against* it; playing the game es-

established a common interest. Industrial relations was therefore not just about conflict, it was also about subtle forms of collaboration, in which terms of interdependence were agreed between the parties on the basis of agreed informal rules. (See also Morey & Luthans, 1991, in this journal, for a discussion of dyadic alliances in informal organizations.) The game was always unstable, with each side always pushing for that little bit more.

The anthropologists' view of culture is therefore different again, altogether more dynamic than that of the "corporate culture" writers in management and organization studies. As we have already said, culture, to them, is not the static or fixed entity conceived by the latter (and given away by their constant reference to "the" culture of the organization), but a process—essentially a political process—in which existing meanings are constantly being contested in rough-and-tumble fashion, renegotiated, and redefined by the parties (Wolf, 1982, p. 387). The task is to track, describe, and explain that process.

There is therefore a good deal more to "process" than studying informality, in fact it suggests a wholly different outlook on organization, one which is wider and which picks up the social, non job-related aspects of organizational life:

The jumping off point for this [informal, expressive] approach is the mundane observation that more things are going on in organizations than getting the job done. People do get the job done ... but people in organizations also gossip, joke, knife one another, initiate romantic involvements, cue new employees on ways of doing the least amount of work that still avoids hassles from a supervisor, talk sports and arrange picnics. Now it seems to us quite a presumption that work activities should have some kind of ascendant hold on our attention, whereas picnic arranging should not. (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982, pp. 116-117)

It has to be said that OB is still a long way off giving picnics the weight they deserve! It also needs generally to get better at understanding "change," not as a single line or "parade that can be watched as it passes" (Geertz, 1995, p. 4), but as "swirls, confluxions, and inconstant connections; clouds collecting, clouds dispersing . . . larger and smaller streams, twisting and turning and now and then crossing, running together, separating again" (p. 2). Anything, in fact, that captures the "connectedness" of things that happen. Clearly the traditional concept of "informality," and the interplay of formal and informal, does not have all the answers to change, but it does have some of them.

Anthropology differs fundamentally from OB in one more important respect not alluded to in Pettigrew's phrase, namely that it is "actor-centered," insider-out rather than outsider-in in its approach. Arguably, this is an area that offers OB the greatest scope for moving in some new directions.

Actor-Centered

Anthropology's central task is representing the lives of others, and in particular conveying a "flavor" of what it looks and feels like from the "native's point of view" (Malinowski, 1922)—"What is it like to work here?" "Why is it this way?" "What happens, or does not happen, because of this?" (Jones, Moore, & Snyder, 1988, p. 45) are the questions from which one pieces together "how participants made sense of it themselves" (Gregory, 1983, p. 366). Although a number of disciplines have since adopted the "actor-centered" approach, it should not be forgotten that it was anthropology that first invented it. The new inflection it put on research was subtle but profound: "Instead of asking, 'What do I see these people doing?' we must ask, 'What do these people see themselves doing?'" (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972, p. 9). And also extremely challenging. For what is obvious and "commonsense" to the natives often presents itself defiantly as "no sense" or "nonsense" to the researcher: "The anthropologist's problem is to discover how other people create order out of what appears to him to be utter chaos" (Tyler, 1969 quoted in Spradley & McCurdy). Some prefer to regard "actor-centered" as an ambition rather than something actually attainable—a quest, even an heroic gesture. After all, the cautionaries argue, we may get close to the native's point of view but ultimately we have to reconstruct it through our own frame of reference. The story will never be a telling but a retelling, never a transcription but a translation. There really is no such thing as "insider out," only an ambition to get closer to the natives, and a commitment to *learning* something about their world and what *they* make of it all.

There are other reasons for the shortage of genuinely actor-centered studies available. Nigel Barley, "The Innocent Anthropologist," jokingly (but part-truthfully) informs us that most anthropologists do not go out on fieldwork to hear about other people's problems—perish the thought—but more often to find a way of working through their own personal problems, be they a broken marriage or a lack of promotion back home. "Fieldwork will give you something else to worry about," he counsels. Remember also, he adds, that many never accepted this part of their credo in the first place, always believing that they had a faculty of shrewd insight far superior to that of the "natives" themselves! (1989, p. 9).

Another problem is that today, in the overstudied world of organizations, it is actually quite difficult to find a "real" native among the swirling hoards of cosmopolitans and intellectual half-casts (part-time MBAs, Open University students, etc.), as I found to my cost when I was doing my doctoral research in the London docks. Being close to so many universities, the docks were always teeming with researchers, all fighting among themselves for a small clearing in the jungle in which to complete their 10-month

fieldwork “sentence.” After chasing around the docks like a madman for several weeks I finally got my first “volunteer.” He sat down in the caravan (which served as the stewards’ office) and I produced my questionnaire. He looked down at it, and then up at me: “Christ, not Herzberg again, is it?” After that I had difficulty believing there was any such thing as the “native’s point of view.”

If there are all these difficulties, the question must be asked, why bother? The answer can only be found by reading those ethnographies that have actually succeeded in breaking through into the natives’ world: Gamst’s (1980) study of “hoggers,” in which he uses his 6.5 years of railroad engine service employment to develop an ethnography of the rail world, from the perspective of the engineman on the Central City and Urbana railroad; Kathleen Gregory’s (1983) investigation into the “native view paradigms” of computer technical professionals in Silicon Valley computer companies; and Christine McCourt Perring’s (1994) ethnography of mental patients moving from hospital into the community (cited later). The words “rich” and “real-life” come to mind, but there is more to it than this. In so many of these studies there is a powerful and exciting sense of genuine and often surprising discovery, of a way of life, paradigm or world view that the outsider-centered approach would surely have missed. Such studies lend support to my own personal aphorism that “insight always comes from the inside.”

Although most management and organizational research is qualitative, very little of it is in fact anthropologically actor-centered. Harvard-type case studies abound, indeed are the preferred form for research and teaching, but only a small proportion of them set out to tell the story “from the inside,” as it is lived by those who live it.

An obvious advantage of actor-centered research is that it reduces the risk of your getting it wrong, of mistaking or substituting your own meanings for those of the people actually involved. We know how easy it is to do this. Take Jean-Pierre Brun’s wonderful study (1995) of the linemen of Quebec. These are the people who daily operate many feet above the ground on high voltage cables carrying anything between 120 and 34,500 volts. The apparent image to the outsider is of a group of high-wire, macho daredevils flagrantly taking risks with their own lives:

They do not bother to install all the protective devices required by safety standards, and some electrified equipment remains exposed and unprotected . . . Practices such as these contravene the safety code and are condemned by management, which accuses employees of being reckless, incompetent and offhand in the face of danger. (p. 7)

However, the reality viewed through the eyes of the linemen could not have been more different:

They explained that covering every possible risk of accidental contact is not the best solution. The working environment becomes too cluttered and cramped; the number of actions, gestures and movements increases tenfold, which lengthens production time and creates an added risk of accidental contact when the protective devices are being installed or removed "If you're too protected, you end up not seeing what you're doing. It's like wearing three pairs of safety goggles because the thing might explode! In fact, it's worse, because with three pairs of goggles you can't see at all and so the thing will almost certainly explode!" [lineman]. (p. 8)

What is interesting here is not just the behavioral split between the formal system and the informal system (see earlier), but the separation at a deeper cognitive and cultural level of the "expert theory" from the "folk theory." This fundamental distinction has come to form the backbone of the relatively new field of "cognitive anthropology" (cf. Bate, 1997; D'Andrade, 1995; Holland & Quinn, 1987), but it does not, however, appear in any frameworks of OB theory, not even organizational cognition. This is a pity, since not only is this research beginning to reveal many new things about the relationship between mind, culture, and action, it is also getting to grips with the most important theory of all: the theory that drives everyday behavior, the mundane theory, the "theory in use" that we still know precious little about.

And what of the future generally for the concepts of "actor-centered" and "representation?" In a recent television interview, Michael Buerk, the BBC reporter who first broke the news of the Ethiopian famine to a shocked world some 15 years ago, was asked what he thought would be the differences if that same event were reported today. He replied that the natives would, indeed must, be given much greater opportunity to speak for themselves, instead of having to stand there pathetically, as a silent backdrop to their own tragedy. Just as he felt increasing unease with all forms of mediated representation, so too are anthropologists having similar feelings. As Geertz has so eloquently put it, "Depiction is power. The representation of others is not easily separable from the manipulation of them" (1995, p. 130).

Anthropology carries the taint of what Deleuze has called "the indignity of speaking for others" (cited in Khan, 1996, p. 3), and although this may be a bit extreme, most people now accept that the text "can no longer speak with an unquestioned and automatic authority for an "other" defined as unable to speak for itself" (ibid). The search in future must therefore be for more "direct to camera" ways of getting at the native's point of view, more native anthropology for example (Bernard & Pedraza, 1989), more in-culture researchers, and more equivalents of the "home movie." Social scientists must begin to think about substituting "delegation" for "representation," and abandoning at least some of the excesses of ventriloquism and the cursed autocue.

THE QUALITIES OF GOOD ETHNOGRAPHY

I should now like to focus on what I see as the distinctive “qualities” of ethnographic research, those that might conceivably add to organization research if they were to be more widely adopted.

The “Being There” Quality

Good ethnography is about communicating the impression of having truly “been there,” of having had “close-in contact with far-out lives” (Geertz, 1988, p. 6), while at the same time making the reader feel he or she has been there too.⁷ We can feel it, taste it, smell it. It is “experience-near” (Geertz, 1984). Like all art it has an expressive quality, such as one finds in a poem by Lorca or Wilfred Owen, a piece of simple prose by Azorin, an exotic novel by Ben Okri (*The Famished Road* being a good example of the blurring of the real and imaginary one now finds in post-modern ethnography), a piece of travel writing by Gerald Brenan, Henry Swinburne, or Somerset Maugham.

“Being there” is about conveying qualities of intense familiarity with the subjects and their ways, of “knowing,” of having a “street cred” of which even the natives themselves would approve. The successful account drips with authenticity and plausibility (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993), and it leaves one in no doubt that one is getting it straight and in the raw as the result of the authors’ lengthy personal contact with the people they are writing about. In the very best of ethnographic accounts, the text becomes a window rather than a page.

It is art that has the monopoly of the being-there quality, not anthropology, and as in art the “truth-value” of the text is more important than its “fact-value.” As an account it is not “good” because it has discovered the “facts,” but because it has succeeded in creating its own truth: it has expressive power regardless of its factual accuracy, and “stands” independently of its factual content. As Geertz (1984, p. 10) states, to be moved by someone like Macbeth, you do not have to ask whether there really was a man like that. Some things move us whether or not they are actually real. The created illusion substitutes for, ultimately becomes more powerful than, reality itself (Bate, 1994, p. 248). No wonder scientists get uncomfortable with anthropology! And so they should: anthropology was, after all, born out of the “romantic rebellion” against science (Schweder, 1984),

⁷As Hobbs and May (1993, p. ix) observe we may in fact be talking about two qualities not one, namely “being there” and “being here”: the author is able to write the report because he has been “there;” we are able to read it because he is “here.” To be an ethnographer is to be in two places at the same time.

and the conviction that one could “know” the world through things other than evidence and reason, most notably the senses and the imagination.

However, for lesser mortals, the best guide to “being there” is still the photographer’s aphorism, “If you’re not good enough, you’re not close enough.” For example, only a really close-in anthropologist would know that you can tell the plainclothes “undercover” police from the thousands of ordinary football fans by the fact that they wear ear-muffs with collars up to conceal the ear-pieces and radio wire (Armstrong, 1993, p. 4). Now that is close up, so close in fact that there is something approaching complete removal of the “me-anthropologist–you-native” framework, and a major blurring of roles. Thus, John Van Maanen (1988) *becomes*, for a time at least, a “sort of police officer” with the Los Angeles Police Department, and Armstrong (1993) a “sort of football hooligan” with Sheffield United supporters. As to the readers, we are also “sort of” there with them, in the thick of it, in the back seat of a police car, or running wild with the mob.

Some of my favorite “being there’s” range from the tragic to the comic: Nicky James’s (1993) moving account of the exquisite emotional control of a young cancer patient and his family; our own “boy scientists” encounter with Big Harold in the “So I like being a monkey” incident in a chemical plant (Bate & Mangham, 1981, pp. 20-21); the frightening journey into the “heart of darkness” of a London police station (Cheshyre, 1989); Nigel Barley’s “bleeding chunks of raw reality” as he encounters malaria, drunken missionaries and chiefs, devious informants, and problems with the language of the Dowayos of Cameroon (“Excuse me,” I said, “I am cooking some meat.” At least that was what I had intended to say; owing to tonal error I declared to an astonished audience, “Excuse me. I am copulating with the blacksmith” (1986, p. 57), but (talking of bleeding chunks of raw reality) thankfully he missed the circumcision ceremony (1987); Kunda’s creepy account of Dave Carpenter’s presentation “Tech’s Strategy for the Nineties” (1992, pp. 95-106); and Tracy Kidder’s (1982) gripping story of the making of the 32-bit mini-computer Eagle (his Prologue offers a dramatic sampler), brilliantly summed up by *Playboy* as having been written with “a reporter’s eye, a novelist’s heart and a technician’s understanding.” Perhaps that is the secret to Being There—and the reason why there are so few works that succeed in capturing this glittering, but elusive, quality.

Mundaneity and Everydayness

Detail, meticulous detail. (Gardner & Moore, 1964, p. 96)

Anthropology is about the everyday experience of a society or organization, the everyday things that people get up to in the course of their everyday lives. If OB ever needed a model for a “phenomenology of or-

ganizations” this would surely be it, because the whole thrust of anthropology is towards accessing “mundane systems of reason and behaviour” (Pollner, 1987), and “penetrating the intimacy of life” (Latour & Woolgar, 1979, p. 17).

But why would anyone want to get “intimate” in this way? The first answer is that there is no other way to study “process” and change:

. . . it is precisely at this level of the everyday, at the level of the detailed social processes informing relationships between organizational interests, that the content of organizational culture is continuously formed and reaffirmed The mundaneness of the everyday is an illusion, for it is within these details that the dynamics of organizational culture come into being and use. (Young, 1989, p. 201)

The second answer is that it produces a quality in a research account that no other method gives, and provides a unique way of illustrating and explaining theoretical issues in everyday, experiential terms. See, for example, Putnam and Mumby’s (1993) account of the *real-life* stresses of having to work in and follow the “emotional rules” of a strong culture organization.

The quality in question is not easy to define, but has something to do with telling it like it is, unreconstructed, and naturalistically. Material that would otherwise end up as out-takes on the cutting room floor is retained, so as to “ground” the study, and give it *vérité* or verisimilitude. For example, Dubinskas’s (1988) book of readings on high-technology organizations is bursting with detail about particle accelerators, “switchyards” and detectors, polarized electron beam sources, and specialized machines and processes. There is a meticulous attention to detail: there are maps, diagrams, and minute-by-minute “activity charts.”

But to what end? The answer is to reveal things we did not know already, that surprise, even stun us. On the “mild surprise” end of the scale is the revelation that scientific laboratories are not at all like most of us imagine them to be. Even in high risk environments, like a particle accelerator laboratory, life is conducted in a relaxed, even sloppy way, much as one might find in any old run-down manufacturing plant producing fertilizers or blotting paper. For example, after reading Traweek’s (1988, pp. 46-47) description of the research yard at SLAC, one is unlikely ever again to see science in terms of little men in white coats silently working in sterile “white” environments.

Even more surprising discoveries come when we dig deeper into the everyday life of the scientist. Mundane naturalistic research has revealed that “scientific method” is largely a myth! The processes through which scientists build the facticity of their “real” world are in the fundamentals no different from anyone else’s. I am drawing here on the seminal, 2-year study by Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar (1979) in the Roger Guillemin laboratory at the Salk Institute, in which they examined the everyday scientific

work involved in establishing a “fact.” What they found was that “fact” was constructed from talk, and that is basically what scientists did all day: they talked. (The “doing” of science was left to the technicians.) From their analysis of the microprocesses in laboratory conversations and everyday activities the authors showed that hard data, purely scientific and technical considerations, and objectivity were only part of the story of scientific discovery—and the winning of Nobel prizes! The remainder was provided by a kind of “social” knowledge and subjectivity one would have thought unacceptable to science.

Other personal favorites of mine that capture the mundane quality of organizational life are Gary Fine’s (1988) study of the daily ups and downs of kitchen restaurant workers, and Stephen Barley’s (1983) study of the everyday lives (and deaths!) of funeral directors.

Polyphony and Rich Description

Polyphony is all the talk in anthropology at the moment (though sadly once again we find a lot more talk than action in the organizational arena). And if not polyphony then “multivocality” (Martin, 1992, 1995), “polyvocality” (Clifford, 1986, p. 104), and “the plurality of subjectivities” (Collinson, 1992, p. 44), all very similar so far as one can tell, and all relating back to the linguistic and rhetorical version of social constructionism found in the “dialogical” work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Volosinov (Clifford, 1983, 1986; Shotter, 1993, p. 14). So what is this magic ingredient? At a simple level, polyphony is about “people speaking for themselves” (Kanter, 1977, p. 5)—the polyphony, though more usually cacophony, of voices. It is a *method* of representation, usually captured in some way by extensive *verbatim* quotation and close scripting and *reportage* of everyday events. At a more complex level it concerns the whole nature of the relationship between author and text (author-ity), and suggests a rhetorical or writing *strategy* (scrapbook, collage) for establishing authorial presence and textual authority.

Interest in polyphony has partly come about as the result of ethnographers’ growing concern about speaking *for* others (see Michael Buerk earlier), and the desire to find some way round this:

The developing “critical turn” within the discipline has thrown into question the assumption that the ethnographer can “translate” or converge upon the reality of her subjects The ethnographic account is seen instead as a mediation of voices through the text: a translation that does not translate. And having rejected the idea of “speaking for,” the issue instead becomes one of polyphony, of voices in the text, of developing “a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices and positioned utterances” (Clifford, 1986), a writing that is driven by the recognition, rather than the suppression or integration, of otherness and difference. (Khan, 1996, p. 3)

Polyphony is ideally suited to organizations, which are by their very nature pluralistic and multivocal, and made up of a rich diversity of intersecting dialects, idioms and professional jargons (the “heteroglossia”). There is a world riven by multiculturalism and destructive tribalism, paradox and contradiction, competing values and contests of meaning (Alvesson & Sandkull, 1988; Bate et al., 1997; Darmer, 1991; Dent, 1990; Duenas, 1991; Quinn & McGrath, 1985; Young, 1989). What better way, then, of capturing this quality than through the medium of the polyphonic novel:

The polyphonic novel is . . . a carnivalesque arena of diversity . . . a utopian textual space where discursive complexity, the dialogical interplay of voices, can be accommodated. In the novels of Dostoyevsky or Dickens he [Clifford] values precisely their resistance to totality, and his ideal novelist is a ventriloquist—in nineteenth-century parlance a “polyphonist.” “He do the police in different voices,” a listener exclaims admiringly of the boy Sloppy, who reads publicly from the newspaper in *Our Mutual Friend*. (Rabinow, 1986, pp. 246-247, summarizing the views of James Clifford)

Hence, we have “Sloppy” Kanter (1977) doing the men and women of the corporation in different voices, as we have “Sloppy” Martin (1992) doing the voices of OZCO employees in “a rather unbeautiful mosaic of quotations” (1995, p. 231), and all jolly good stuff, too. What both studies underline, however, is the fact that “lots of quotations” and enormous chunks of organizational reality, neat, are not the be all and end all of polyphonic ethnography. The main issue is where the author chooses to position himself or herself in relation to the actors, text, and audience. Czarniawska-Joerges (1992) is in no doubt that this is where Kanter’s work (and I would add a lot of qualitative work in general) falls down:

The book is constituted like a television programme with Kanter as hostess, giving air now to the “people of the corporation,” then to the researchers. There is nothing wrong with this kind of formula, in fact, it is very popular and highly legitimate. Still, it goes against the feeling of “how the life is over there” produced by thick description; it is a projection of slides rather than a film. (p. 101)

“Hostess” is clearly not polyphonist: polyphonist is back room boy not principal actor, orchestrator not conductor. The quality of polyphony is achieved by actually weakening the author role, by standing back, and spreading authorship around (Martin, 1995, p. 231).

The next step is taking the “middle man,” the author, out completely. This is virtually what we did in our ethnography of a pharmaceuticals company (Bate & Mangham, 1981), where for a lot of the time we left it to real life and the natives to “speak it” for themselves. See in particular Chapter 7: the dreaded microwave affair!

This must be done carefully, however, as there are limits to which authorship can be abandoned to “free market” polyphony (note how a lot of modern music has lost touch with the listener). The fact is that data does not

always speak for itself. Anything does *not* go. Reality in the raw can be a pretty formless and meaningless thing: there will always be the need for an interlocutor, someone prepared to take on the job of constructing the rough assemblage into what Frank Kermode (1967) has called “fictions of relation,” the process whereby puzzling events are woven into a broader fabric that makes sense of them as some kind of whole. There is a need to steer some kind of middle ground between overstaging it and copping out entirely.

What is certain, however, is that polyphony will take on a much wider, more experimental form in the future, as postmodernists press for more intertextual practice in anthropology and attempt to transcend the limitations of any one kind of discourse. For example, whereas in the past it has been limited to real people and real situations, polyphony will involve more juxtaposition of real and fictitious events, such as in Fox’s (1995) work, where a “real” fieldwork study of an orthopedic surgical event was combined with Douglas’s narrative fiction *Bleeders Come First*, in order to evoke aspects of the experience that might have been missed if only the “true” event had been recounted. (The fictional patient had a cardiac arrest on the operating table, whereas Fox’s did not.) A polyphony of the real and the imaginary actually serves to enhance the “realness” of the real—the blood, the smells, and the tragedy of individual cases that sometimes go badly. Anthropologists are also beginning to move in another direction, from looking at the polyphony *between* people to the polyphony *within* people, their fragmented cognitions and divergent schema, and the ongoing inner struggles between their various multiple selves (Strauss & Quinn, forthcoming 1997). Wherever it ends up, polyphony seems destined to become more polyphonic in the future!

A Point and a Punch Line

And so we come to the message in the bottle, that something that makes one feel the long journey and the discomfort were really worth it. The point about anthropology is it is not just storytelling—we should leave that to the professional storytellers—nor is it just a travelogue of what I saw and did—that is the job of the travel writer. Escapism and entertainment may come into it, but the best ethnographies must offer something more, be it a theory, model, or form of insight, what Langer (1953, p. 50) refers to as a “a new sort of truth,” a reframing in today’s parlance. Hammersley takes a similar view: he uses the term “insightful descriptions,” stating that the aim of ethnographic description is “to present phenomena in new and revealing ways” (1992, p. 13).

Me, I prefer the notion of a point and a punch line, a metaphor that links well with the notion of ethnography as text and the concept of the

“theatre of language.” A good punch line in ethnography is like a good tune, one that you can’t stop humming once you’ve heard it (and when did you last feel *that* about an *Academy of Management Journal* article?!) The punch line gives the research a point, but it also synthesizes, synopsisizes, or simplifies a complex story, and effects some kind of closure for the reader, which can be deeply satisfying, even bewitching at times. The best punch lines are often the ones that come out of the blue, that surprise us or challenge our taken for granted, commonsensical view of the world. This is Langer’s “significant form” (1953), an idea or image which through symbols enables people to realize something that was previously unrealized, and comprehend something that was previously not comprehended.

The following are some organizational examples of ethnography which offer the reader a particularly noteworthy “insightful description” or punch line:

John Brewer and Kathleen Magee’s (1991) ethnography of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) revealed that RUC officers were able to tolerate conditions of extreme personal danger and stress by using different kinds of discourse: the “*skills discourse*” focused on survival skills, e.g., hang around kids, buy them ice pops—“If it keeps me alive, I’ll do it.” The “*fatalism discourse*” took the line that “If they’re going to get you, they’re going to get you,” and “If you were to worry about it, you’d be a nervous wreck.” The “*routinization discourse*” highlighted the everydayness of the risks: “You get used to it,” “It’s a way of life for us” (pp. 163-168). It was through the use of such standard scripts that they were able to “normalize” the threat of danger and thus reduce stress levels.

Still on the subject of language, McCourt Perring’s (1994) study of the impact of care in the community legislation on mental health patients showed that the transfer of these people from hospital to group homes resulted in some improvement in their lives, but the overall success of the project was significantly reduced as a result of the *metaphors* chosen for social relations in the new organization. For example, the use of the term “family” homes, intended to evoke an image of caring, actually also implied hierarchy, by gender and age, and through the use of this metaphor the disempowerment and infantilization of clients were in fact maintained.

Gideon Kunda’s ethnography of a large American high-tech organization revisits that age-old OB concept of “burnout.” One of the new insights it provided was that burnout actually had a positive side to it. The study from the actor’s view showed that it was a way of communicating one’s commitment to the company:

Displaying symptoms of burnout is one way of sending signals to one’s superiors. It is a sign that one is heavily invested in work, proof that one is allowing one’s experience to be dominated by the requirements of the member role, evidence of commitment and self-sacrifice, and from this perspective, a call for some respect, a declaration that one has become a casualty. (1992, pp. 202-203)

It was of course demeaning but it could be uplifting, too. "Many members feel some pride in surviving burnout or living with its threat. It is a battle scar, a purple heart . . . an indication that one's heart is in the right place" (p. 204).

Clark Molstad's ethnographic research among industrial brewery workers in Los Angeles resonates with Kunda. He showed that feelings of alienation and powerlessness are lessened as the result of workers taking pride and satisfaction in their ability to endure hardship—the "pride of endurance." This pride gives them back some of the self-confidence they lose when encountering situations which they cannot control. "Like the early Christians being fed to the lions, these workers presume their suffering counts for something" (1996, p. 1).

And finally, another police study by Malcolm Young (1991) looked at the different ways people were treated by the police when they were taken into custody. There appeared to be two distinct types of treatment: some people were subject to "hard" enforcement, like aggressive verbal directives and no blankets for sleeping on. The gaolers would go down to "feed and water" them, as they would a zoo animal; any kind of breakfast, no matter how awful, was "too good for them," the "scum," the "dross," the "dregs of society." Other people, some of whom had committed much more serious crimes, were subject to a much "softer" régime. The significant insight on Young's part was that there appeared to be a constant pressure within the police culture to pull all "clients" into a black and white binary, and the decision one way or the other was likely to be made without consciously setting out to do so, usually within twenty seconds of arrival! This is an exemplification of a bigger human issue around social labeling:

The polarities and oppositions revealed in this case study exemplify the logic of basic police modes of thought, echoing the Lévi-Straussian contention that a universalistic metaphoric concern in man is to use his own cultural identity and set it auspiciously against the others, who are to be despised and cast with inhuman or animal qualities. (p. 150)

A good punch line should evoke an intellectual or emotional response. The whole point and punch line about anthropology itself, which I have tried to convey in this review article, is that it is research from the mind and the heart, which relies upon the practice of both reflexivity and subjectivity to guard against the excesses of either. The whole endeavor smacks of the child rushing frenetically around trying to capture bubbles before they disappear for ever into the ether, random, opportunistic, partial and unsystematic, and probably, to scientists at least, quite pathetic. But why? For what reason? Simply because these "bubbles" contain the essence of human life as it is experienced. And in a world of decaffeinated coffee, fat-free foods, alcohol-free lager, and

pain-free video games, surely it can't be bad that there is one subject at least that is "leaving it in" rather than "taking it out."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to my colleague Raza Khan for contributing some of the ideas to this paper and helping with the literature search.

REFERENCES

- AGAR, M. H. *The professional stranger. An informal introduction to ethnography*. New York: Academic Press, 1980.
- ALVESSON, M. *Cultural perspectives on organizations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- ALVESSON, M., & SANDKULL, B. The organizational melting-pot. An arena for different cultures. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 1988, 4, 135-145.
- ARMSTRONG, G. Like that Desmond Morris? In D. Hobbs and T. May (Eds.), *Interpreting the field. Accounts of ethnography*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, pp. 1-35.
- ATKINSON, P. *The clinical experience*. London: Gower, 1981.
- ATKINSON, P. *The ethnographic imagination. Textual constructions of reality*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- BABA, M. L. Business and Industrial Anthropology: An Overview. NAPA Bulletin, 2, American Anthropological Association, Washington, 1986.
- BARLEY, N. *The innocent anthropologist. Notes from a mud hut*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986.
- BARLEY, N. *A plague of caterpillars. A return to the African bush*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987.
- BARLEY, N. *Not a hazardous sport*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989.
- BARLEY, S. R. Semiotics and the study of occupational and organizational culture. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1983, 23, 393-413.
- BATE, S. P. The impact of organizational culture on approaches to organizational problem-solving. *Organization Studies*, 1984, 5, 43-66.
- BATE, S. P. Using the culture concept in an organization development setting. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 1990, 26, 83-106.
- BATE, S. P. *Strategies for cultural change*. Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann, 1994.
- BATE, S. P. Folk Theories of Organization and Management. Manuscript in preparation, 1997.
- BATE, S. P., & MANGHAM, I. L. *Exploring participation*. Chichester: Wiley, 1981.
- BATE, S. P., PYE, A. J., PURCELL, J., & KHAN, R. *Changing the Culture of a Hospital*. Working Paper, School of Management, University of Bath, 1997.
- BERNARD, H. R., & PEDRAZA, J. S. *Native ethnography: A Mexican Indian describes his culture*. London: Sage, 1989.
- BOJE, D. M. Stories of the storytelling organization: A postmodern analysis of Disney as "Tamara-Land." *The Academy of Management Journal*, 1995, 38, 997-1035.
- BOJE, D. M., FEDOR, D. B., & ROWLAND, K. M. Myth making: A qualitative step in interventions. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 1982, 18, 17-28.
- BORN, G. *Rationalizing culture. IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the musical avant-garde*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- BREWER, J. D., & MAGEE, K. *Inside the RUC. Routine policing in a divided society*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.
- BRUN, J. P. Behind the Scenes at Work, or Emotion in Action. Paper presented at the 12th EGOS Symposium, Istanbul, 1995.
- BURAWOY, M. *Manufacturing consent*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979.
- CHESSHIRE, R. *The force. Inside the police*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1989.

- CLIFFORD, J. Power and dialogue in ethnography: Marcel Griaule's initiation. In G. W. Stocking (Ed.), *Observers observed. Essays on ethnographic fieldwork*. London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983, pp. 121-156.
- CLIFFORD, J. Introduction: partial truths. In J. Clifford and G. E. Marcus (Eds.), *Writing culture. The poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, pp. 1-26.
- CLIFFORD, J. *The predicament of culture. Twentieth-century ethnography, literature and art*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- COLLINS, J. *Uncommon cultures. Popular culture and post-modernism*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- COLLINSON, D. L. *Managing the shopfloor. Subjectivity, masculinity and workplace culture*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992.
- CZARNIAWSKA-JOERGES, B. *Exploring complex organizations. A cultural perspective*. London: Sage, 1992.
- DALTON, M. *Men who manage*. New York: Wiley, 1959.
- D'ANDRADE, R. *The development of cognitive anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- DARMER, P. Paradoxes—the Stuff that Culture Thrives on. Paper presented at the SCOS Conference on organizational symbolism and corporate culture, Copenhagen, Denmark, 1991.
- DEAL, T. E., & KENNEDY, A. A. *Corporate cultures. The rites and rituals of corporate life*. Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1982.
- DENNIS, N., HENRIQUES, F., & SLAUGHTER, C. *Coal is our life. An analysis of a Yorkshire mining community*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1956.
- DENT, J. F. Reality in the Making: A Study of Organizational Transformation. Paper presented at the Workshop on Strategy, Accounting, and Control, Venice, 1990.
- DUBINSKAS, F. A. (Ed.). *Making time. Ethnographies of high-technology organizations*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988.
- DUENAS, G. Fractured Organizational Cultures. Paper presented at the SCOS Conference on Organizational Symbolism and Corporate Culture, Copenhagen, Denmark, 1991.
- ELLIS, C., & BOCHNER, A. P. (Eds.). *Composing ethnography. Alternative forms of qualitative writing*. London: Sage, 1996.
- FINE, G. A. Letting off steam? Redefining a restaurant's work environment. In M. O. Jones, M. D. Moore, and R. C. Snyder (Eds.), *Inside organizations. Understanding the human dimension*. London: Sage, 1988, pp. 119-127.
- FOX, N. J. *The social meaning of surgery*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992.
- FOX, N. J. Intertextuality and the writing of social research. *Electronic Journal of Sociology*, 1995 (N.J.Fox@sheffield.ac.uk), 1-12.
- GAMST, F. C. *The hoghead: An industrial ethnology of the locomotive engineer*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1980.
- GARDNER, B., & MOORE, D. G. *Human relations in industry*. Chicago: Irwin, 1964.
- GEERTZ, C. *The interpretation of cultures. Selected essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
- GEERTZ, C. Preview: A colloquy of culture theorists. In R. A. Shweder and R. A. LeVine (Eds.), *Culture theory. Essays on mind, self, and emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 1-24.
- GEERTZ, C. *Work and lives. The anthropologist as author*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988.
- GEERTZ, C. *After the fact. Two countries, four decades, one anthropologist*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- GELL, A. *The anthropology of time. Cultural construction of temporal maps and images*. Oxford: Berg, 1992.
- GLASER, B., & STRAUSS, A. *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Aldine, 1967.
- GOLDEN-BIDDLE, K., & LOCKE, K. Appealing work: An investigation of how ethnographic texts convince. *Organization Science*, 1993, 4, 595-616.
- GOULDNER, A. *Wildcat Strike*. New York: Antioch, 1954.
- GREGORY, K. Native-view paradigms: Multiple cultures and culture conflicts in organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1983, 28, 359-376.

- HAMMERSLEY, M. *Reading ethnographic research. A critical guide*. London: Longman, 1990.
- HAMMERSLEY, M. *What's wrong with ethnography? Methodological explorations*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- HAMMERSLEY, M., & ATKINSON, P. *Ethnography. Principles in practice*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- HATCH, M. J., & SCHULTZ, M. From Tribes to Texts: Cultural Impressions of Image and Identity. Paper presented at the SCOS Conference on Self and Identity in Organizations, Turku, Finland, 1995.
- HOBBS, D., & MAY, T. (Eds.). *Interpreting the field. Accounts of ethnography*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- HOLLAND, D., & QUINN, N. (Eds.). *Cultural models in language and thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- JAMES, N. Divisions of emotional labour: Disclosure and cancer. In S. Fineman (Ed.), *Emotion in organizations*. London: Sage, 1993, pp. 94-117.
- JAQUES, E. *The changing culture of a factory*. London: Tavistock, 1951.
- JONES, M. O., MOORE, M. D., & SNYDER, R. C. (Eds.). *Inside organizations. Understanding the human dimension*. London: Sage, 1988.
- JORDAN, A. T. (Ed.). *Practising Anthropology in Corporate America: Consulting on Organizational Culture*. NAPA Bulletin, 14, American Anthropological Association, Washington, 1994.
- KANTER, R. M. *Men and women of the corporation*. New York: Basic Books, 1977.
- KANTER, R. M. *The change masters: Corporate entrepreneurs at work*. London: Unwin, 1983.
- KERMODE, F. *The sense of an ending*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- KHAN, R. *Defining Social Research: A Critique of Interpretivist Approaches*. Working Paper, School of Management, University of Bath, 1996.
- KIDDER, T. *The soul of a new machine*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982.
- KOGOD, S. K. The bridges process: Enhancing organizational cultures to support diversity. In A. T. Jordan (Ed.), *Practising Anthropology in Corporate America: Consulting on Organizational Culture*. NAPA Bulletin, 14, American Anthropological Association, Washington, 1994, pp. 27-47.
- KUNDA, G. *Engineering culture. Control and commitment in a high-tech corporation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.
- LANGER, S. K. *Feeling and form*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953.
- LATOUR, B., & WOOLGAR, S. *Laboratory life: The construction of scientific facts*. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979.
- LEVINE, R. A. Properties of culture. An ethnographic view. In R. A. Shweder and R. A. LeVine (Eds.), *Culture theory. Essays on mind, self, and emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 67-87.
- LINSTEAD, S. Breaking the "purity rule": Industrial sabotage and the symbolic process. *Personnel Review*, 1985, 14, 12-19.
- LINSTEAD, S. The social anthropology of management. *British Journal of Management*, 1997, 8, 85-98.
- LINSTEAD, S., GRAFTON SMALL, R., & JEFFCUTT, P. (Eds.). *Understanding management*. London: Sage, 1996.
- MCCOURT PERRING, C. Community care as de-institutionalization? Continuity and change in the transition from hospital to community-based care. In S. Wright (Ed.), *Anthropology of organizations*. London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 168-180.
- MALINOWSKI, B. *Argonauts of the western Pacific*. London: Routledge, 1922.
- MALINOWSKI, B. *The dynamics of culture change*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945.
- MARTIN, J. Stories and scripts in organizational settings. In A. H. Hastorf and A. M. Isen (Eds.), *Cognitive social psychology*. New York: Elsevier-North Holland, 1982, pp. 255-305.
- MARTIN, J. *Cultures in organizations. Three perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- MARTIN, J. The style and structure of "Cultures in organizations: Three Perspectives." *Organization Science*, 1995, 6, 230-232.
- MOLSTAD, C. Choosing and coping with boring work. *Urban Life*, 1986, 15, 215-236.

- MOLSTAD, C. Control strategies used by industrial brewery workers: Work avoidance, impression management and solidarity. *Human Organization*, 1988, 47, 354-360.
- MOLSTAD, C. Work Endurance and Worker Pride: Neglected Aspects of Working Subcultures. Paper presented at the SCOS Conference on Exploring the Post-Industrial Subculture. Los Angeles, 1996.
- MOREY, N. C., & LUTHANS, F. Anthropology: The forgotten behavioral science in management history. In F. Hoy (Ed.), *Best paper proceedings of the 47th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management*. Athens: University of Georgia, 1987, pp. 128-132.
- MOREY, N. C., & LUTHANS, F. The use of dyadic alliances in informal organization: An ethnographic study. *Human Relations*, 1991, 44, 597-618.
- MOREY, N. C., & MOREY, R. V. Organizational culture: The management approach. In A. T. Jordan (Ed.), *Practising anthropology in corporate America*. Washington: American Anthropological Association, 1994, pp. 17-26.
- MOULY, V. S., & SANKARAN, J. K. *Organizational ethnography. An illustrative application in the study of Indian R & D settings*. London: Sage, 1995.
- PACANOWSKY, M. E., & O'DONNELL-TRUJILLO, N. Communication and organizational culture. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 1982, 46, 115-130.
- PARKER, M. Working together, working apart: Management culture in a manufacturing firm. *Sociological Review*, 1995, 43, 518-447.
- PASCALE, R. T., & ATHOS, A. G. *The art of Japanese management*. New York: Warner Books, 1981.
- PAUL, E. F., MILLER, F. D., & PAUL, J. (Eds.). *Cultural pluralism and moral knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- PETERS, T. J., & WATERMAN, R. H. *In search of excellence*. New York: Harper & Row, 1982.
- PETTIGREW, A. M. *The awakening giant. Continuity and change in Imperial Chemical Industries*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1985.
- PETTIGREW, A. M. Longitudinal field research on change. In G. P. Huber and A. H. Van de Ven (Eds.), *Longitudinal field research methods. Studying processes of organizational change*. London: Sage, 1995, pp. 91-125.
- POLLNER, M. *Mundane reason. Reality in everyday and sociological discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- PUTNAM, L. L., & MUMBY, D. K. Organizations, emotion and the myth of rationality. In S. Fineman (Ed.), *Emotion in organizations*. London: Sage, 1993, pp. 38-57.
- QUINN, R. E., & McGRATH, M. R. The transformation of organizational cultures. A competing values perspective. In P. J. Frost, L. F. Moore, M. R. Louis et al. (Eds.), *Organizational culture*. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1985, pp. 315-334.
- RABINOW, P. Representations are social facts: Modernity and post-modernity in anthropology. In J. Clifford and G. E. Marcus (Eds.), *Writing culture. The poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, pp. 234-261.
- ROSE, D. *Living the ethnographic life*. London: Sage, 1990.
- ROSEN, M. Coming to terms with the field: Understanding and doing organizational ethnography. *Journal of Management Studies*, 1991, 28, 1-24.
- ROY, D. Quota restrictions and goldbricking in a machine shop. *American Journal of Sociology*, 1952, 57, 427-442.
- ROY, D. Efficiency and the fix: Informal intergroup relations in a piece-work machine shop. *American Journal of Sociology*, 1954, 60, 255-266.
- ROY, D. Banana time: Job satisfaction and informal interaction. *Human Organization*, 1959, 18, 158-168.
- SANDAY, P. R. The ethnographic paradigm. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1979, 24, 527-538.
- SCHNEIDER, M. A. Culture-as-text in the work of Clifford Geertz. *Theory and Society*, 1987, 16, 809-839.
- SCHWARTZMAN, H. B. *Ethnography in organizations*. Qualitative research methods series 27. London: Sage, 1993.

- SHOTTER, J. *Cultural politics of everyday life. Social constructionism, rhetoric and knowing of the third kind*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993.
- SHWEDER, R. A. Anthropology's romantic rebellion against the enlightenment, or there's more to thinking than reason and evidence. In R. A. Shweder and R. A. LeVine (Eds.), *Culture theory. Essays on mind, self, and emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 27-66.
- SPRADLEY, J. P., & MCCURDY, D. W. *The cultural experience. Ethnography in complex society*. Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1972.
- STOCKING, G. W. The ethnographer's magic: Fieldwork in British anthropology from Tylor to Malinowski. In G. W. Stocking (Ed.), *Observers observed. Essays on ethnographic fieldwork*. London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983, pp. 70-120.
- STRAUSS, C., & QUINN, N. *Culture rethought: A cognitive theory of cultural meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 (forthcoming).
- TOMMERUP, P., & LOUBIER, C. Who Creates Organizational Rites, with What Effects, and Why? New Insights from the Field. Paper presented at the SCOS Conference on Exploring the Post-Industrial Subculture, Los Angeles, 1996.
- TRAWEEK, S. Discovering machines: Nature in the age of its mechanical reproduction. In F. Dubinskas (Ed.), *Making time. Ethnographies of high-technology organizations*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988, pp. 39-91.
- TRICE, H. M., & BEYER, J. *The cultures of work organizations*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1991.
- TURNER, B. A. *Exploring the industrial subculture*. London: Macmillan, 1971.
- VAN MAANEN, J. *Tales of the field. On writing ethnography*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- VAN MAANEN, J. (Ed.). *Representation in ethnography*. London: Sage, 1995. (a)
- VAN MAANEN, J. Style as theory. *Organization Science*, 1995, 6, 133-143. (b)
- WATSON, T. J. *In search of management*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- WATSON, T. J. Shaping the story: Rhetoric, persuasion and creative writing in organizational ethnography. *Studies in Cultures, Organizations and Societies*, 1995, 1, 301-311.
- WHYTE, W. F. *Organizational behaviour: Theory and application*. Homewood: Richard D. Irwin, 1969.
- WOLCOTT, H. F. Making a study "more" ethnographic. In J. Van Maanen (Ed.), *Representation in ethnography*. London: Sage, 1995, pp. 57-73.
- WOLF, E. R. *Europe and the people without history*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.
- WRIGHT, S. (Ed.). *Anthropology of organizations*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- YOUNG, E. On the naming of the rose: Interests and multiple meanings as elements of organizational culture. *Organization Studies*, 1989, 10, 187-206.
- YOUNG, M. *An inside job. Policing and police culture in Britain*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

PAUL BATE is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Management at the University of Bath, working primarily on the theory and practice of change within public and private sector organizations. He was until recently the Director of the Centre for the Study of Organizational Change (C-SOC), which is internationally known for its anthropological and qualitative studies of the management process. He has extensive research and consulting experience with major organizations in Britain and abroad, and has published widely in the field of cultural change. His latest book, *Strategies for Cultural Change (1994)*, was shortlisted for the MCA Best Management Book of the Year award. He also lectures widely in the U.S., Far East, Scandinavia, and Europe and has recently been international guest speaker at a number of academic conferences. He is currently immersed in an ethnographic study of a hospital which is attempting to fundamentally reconfigure its culture in order to provide a different and better kind of "patient focused care" for the future. Paul holds a PhD from the London School of Economics.