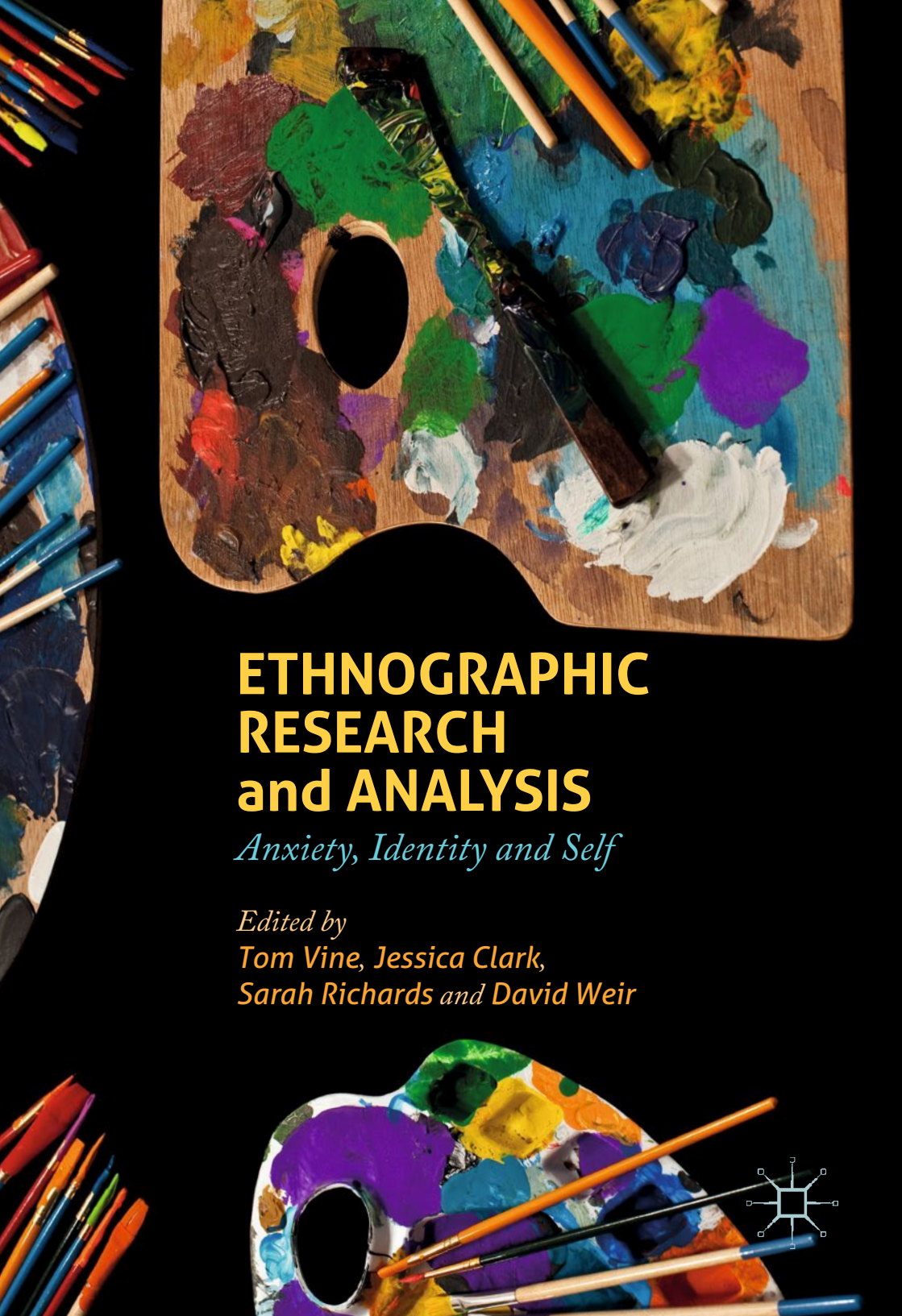

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH and ANALYSIS

Anxiety, Identity and Self

Edited by
Tom Vine, Jessica Clark, Sarah Richards and David Weir

Ethnographic Research and Analysis

"I read the ground-breaking anthology with great interest. It captures a suspicion of mine. You cannot understand Being-in-the-world of doing organizational ethnography without also going deep into the inner space-time of your own autoethnographic journey. It takes a double journey (inward and outward), otherwise it's just creating more duality, avoidance of our own life of anxiety. Somehow the outer story-telling and the untold inner story must come into relationship in our qualitative methods."

—David Boje, *New Mexico State University, USA*

"This book derives from a multidisciplinary conference whose contributors applied ethnographic methods in widely different venues. We gain insights from sociology, social psychology, social policy management and philosophy—in both normative and commercial contexts.

The book therefore offers rich bases for comparison allowing an editorial focus on established practices and accepted problems in some disciplines and facilitating application to others. It is thus well set to present the personal dilemmas that ethnography inevitably presents—(hence the book's subtitle) and to offer mutual learning from divergent experience.

The result is a rich collection of variations that could easily have produced an uncoordinated mishmash. This has been avoided by the skilful editing of its disparate inputs—all united by a demonstrated regard for ethnography. The result is a contribution to social science that should rightfully set ethnography at the centre of social science endeavour."

—Gerald Mars, *UCL, UK*

"Tom Vine and colleagues have produced a genuinely thought-provoking contribution to the literature on contemporary ethnographic research. This innovative analysis of the varied uses of ethnography in social research is highly recommended for students and academics alike. Rich in concepts and intellectual reflection, this is an engaging book that those interested in the "ethnographic turn" will love."

—John Hassard, *University of Manchester, UK*

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Ethnographic Research and Analysis

Anxiety, Identity and Self

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Tom Vine, Jessica Clark, Sarah Richards, and David Weir

The ideas for this book originated from a 2012 conference held at the University of Suffolk. What emerged from this conference was recognition that although our disciplinary backgrounds varied, there was significant value in establishing a shared platform for our ethnographic experiences, not least in the interests of mutual scholarship and reciprocal learning. Notably, and in spite of our disparate subject areas, it became clear that as ethnographers we were encountering similar challenges and epistemological anxieties. Moreover, there appeared to be mutual recognition in terms of the potential for advancing the ethnographic method in the future. In capturing the essence of this conference, this book is not intended as a 'how to guide', of which there are many, but rather a space to bring together and share the experiential aspects of ethnographic work. As such, this edited book presents these experiences from a wide range of disciplines including work and organisation studies, sociology, social policy, philosophy, management, health and human sciences, family studies, education, disability studies, and childhood studies.

This book seeks to devolve methodological themes and practices which are established in some subject areas but not in others. These

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include, for example, the rise of autoethnography and the role of storytelling. Additionally, the chapters contained within interrogate and reframe long-standing ethnographic discussions including those concerning reflexivity, while exploring evolving themes such as the experiential use of technologies. This book thus demonstrates the value and versatility of ethnography as a method in a diverse range of rarely combined disciplines. In further emphasising our transdisciplinary objectives, each chapter includes a brief biographical preamble in which the author reflects on the existing character and impact of ethnographic research within their native discipline.

Ethnography is widely considered to have emerged as part of anthropology and is considered both its trademark (e.g. Schwartzman, 1993) and textual product (e.g. Atkinson, 1990). However, in this book we acknowledge that the practice of ethnography long predates its formal canonisation in anthropology and reflect on this significance. This historical precedent notwithstanding, ethnography has traversed changing dynamics of how and why research is conducted across the social sciences and remains a pivotal method through which the rich context and complexity of the human condition is revealed. As such, ethnography remains as relevant to contemporary social science as it did to historical anthropology. In this book, we explore ethnography as a research tool in online endeavours, visual methods, autoethnography, performance theory, and collaborative techniques. However, from the diversity of perspectives presented, commonalities are revealed in respect of both the challenges of ethnographic encounters and the opportunities these bring. The recurring narratives of ethnography thus remain among the contemporary topics explored. Each writer rediscovers these themes and wrestles with their implications. These include positionality, the researcher–researched relationship, identity, liminality, subjectivity, presentation of self, and the role of storytelling. This historical 'baggage' of ethnography remains acutely relevant and topical to contemporary conversations. To this end we urge the reader to consider an alternate history of ethnography; one that *predates* anthropology. Here the concept of a 'proto-ethnographer' is pertinent, both noted (e.g. Herodotus) and lay (since ethnographic research can be considered instinctive as well as schooled; this is because schooling invariably involves social construction and so can *constrain* as well as enable creativity). Second, the relationship between teaching and learning is to some degree characterised by contradiction and paradox; see, for example, Ackoff and Greenberg (2008). We therefore suggest that eth-

nography can be usefully conceptualised as pre-formal and intuitive. Furthermore, given that ethnography seeks not to distil human behaviour into abstract or schematised models, the parameters and preferences for which vary from academic discipline to academic discipline, but to prioritise experiential data collection and analysis, ethnography is here conceptualised as a relevant research tool which *transcends* the normative and expected parameters of social science.

At this point, it is worth noting the difference between qualitative methods and ethnography. While numerous social scientific projects lay claim to using one or more qualitative methods (such as interviewing, photography, discourse analysis, etc.), far fewer are representative of ethnography per se. In its purest (anthropological) sense, ethnography is only achieved where the researcher immerses herself in a participatory observational context in the proposed environs for as long a period as possible. For Moeran (2009, p. 150), 'ethnographic fieldwork should last between six months and one year'. The advantages of a full year's research—or perhaps even several years'—are relatively obvious: it affords the researcher experience of both annual rituals and seasonal variations in environmental conditions and associated behaviour. Studies of this nature are less numerous, not because the method is inappropriate or ineffective; rather they require commitment and time which is off-putting for many academics who today work in an environment where there exists an emphasis on quantity with regard to publications (Schwartzman, 1993). It is hoped, therefore, that the ethnographies presented in this book go some way to redressing the balance.

We take the position that collections of ethnographic work are better presented as transdisciplinary bricolage than as discipline-specific series. As such this volume provides a space where the plurality of ethnographic approaches is illustrated through the varied ways that researchers apply its principles to diverse disciplinary contexts. This book therefore delineates (1) the continued relevance of ethnography in contemporary research, (2) the opportunities to apply ethnographic approaches across diverse spaces, and (3) open and honest accounts in which the perennial questions ethnographic research produces can be re-examined. The importance of the 'ethical subject' notwithstanding, we note that the pressure to conform to 'sanitised' methods is pervasive—even in ethnography—and this presents myriad challenges. Indeed, although ethics does not constitute an explicit theme for this book, many of the chapters reveal subtleties, complexities, and paradoxes associated with 'ethical research'.

Transdisciplinarity

Under the guise of social anthropology, ethnography was 'linked to the spread of colonial empire and its administrative, missionary and commercial needs' (Evans-Pritchard, 1969, p. x). It fell out of favour in the wake of the decline of colonial rule across the globe and became a niche method and methodology, largely limited to anthropologists and a few quirky sociologists. However, it regained popularity in the UK and elsewhere in the 1960s and 1970s. As part of this resurgence, serious attempts were made to listen to the voices and view the worlds of those considered marginalised. These included the fields of poverty (Wilson & Aponte, 1985), sexuality (Sonenschein, 1968), crime and deviance (Hamm, Ferrell, Adler, & Adler, 1998), and latterly children (Montgomery, 2007). While retaining its niche status, its resurgence has in many ways seen it transformed beyond its original applications of anthropology and marginalised groups. Ethnographic approaches are now a relatively common site in disciplines as diverse as management, radiography, childhood studies, education, and disability studies. This suggests that ethnography is a flexible and reflexive methodological tool that can be effectively applied in many research contexts regardless of topic, participants, or indeed discipline. This book is a response to these developments whereby authors present ethnographic tales of their diverse research experiences and the application of such methodologies in their respective fields. The extent to which ethnography retains its original features and characteristics through such diverse applications is a debate that this book opens rather than closes. Many of the authors reflect explicitly on the place of ethnographic methodologies in their native discipline and the role they play in unsettling the extant knowledges of that subject area. This is particularly interesting when such disciplines are traditionally associated with the natural sciences, such as radiography, and are therefore built upon different epistemological assumptions.

Although this is a transdisciplinary book, it does not include a contribution from the field of anthropology. Is this significant in any way? Does it indicate that ethnography has successfully made the transition into other areas of social science? The fact remains that, as editors, we would have certainly considered contributions from anthropologists, but received none. Perhaps this implies a reticence on the part of anthropologists to publish in applied areas? We can conclude with more confidence that this underlines the point that ethnography has spread beyond its origin. However, this gives our book discernible direction. It is this very dispersal

that interests us foremost since, inevitably, the methodology has developed in divergent ways in each discipline; the specific ethnographic techniques and preferences vary between contributors, and we reflect on this as part of the concluding chapter.

And why transdisciplinarity? Why not interdisciplinarity? Or multidisciplinarity? We considered these alternate terms but decided ultimately that our endeavour did not sit 'between' different disciplines nor was it simply about lending voice to a 'multiplicity' of different disciplines. Rather, we wanted to demonstrate the ways in which ethnography can and does transcend disciplinary boundaries and, more importantly, how its application in each differs. Ultimately, since practice does vary, this is configured as a pedagogical venture whereby disciplines are able to learn from one another. You are very much encouraged to read the ethnographic accounts from disciplines different to your own and reflect on them from the perspective of your native world. Where do analytical emphases differ? Is language used differently? How might the insights cross-pollinate your own research? Is there scope for further collaborative, cross-disciplinary work in the future?

Finally, the book was led by a team from the University of Suffolk. In many respects young universities in the UK are at extraordinary disadvantages, not least in terms of reputation and—by implication—their ability to recruit students. However, one clear advantage of universities such as Suffolk is their small size. Unlike most established institutions in which exist clear architectural and cultural divides between academic departments, at Suffolk scholars from different disciplines sit cheek by jowl in open-plan offices. Although this certainly brings its own challenges, it creates an environment which readily enables collaborative, transdisciplinary dialogues.

The 'Researcher Self'

In each chapter of this book regardless of discipline, topic, and subject matter, what emerges—almost subconsciously—is the 'ethnographer'. The ethnographer, it would seem, is inseparable from the ethnography. Part of the reason for this is the way in which ethnography is regulated. The expectation for reflexivity and the recognition of positionality within the research process are key tenets within ethnographic work whereby compliance produces the 'ethical subject' (Danaher et al. 2006, p. 131). What the chapters in this book reveal is a variance in the continuum of this revealing of self. This revelation extends from the full and confident

immersion of the researcher in their subject matter and respective fields to tentative and often overt anxiety about finding oneself in one's own research. Perhaps because of the continued pressure to conform to sanitised methods across all social research, we are reluctant to engage in the explicit 'revealing of self'. However, what these chapters do reveal is that ethnography inevitably contributes to the construction of the researcher. They constitute a reflection that reveals who we are. Regardless of whether or not the researcher actively self-discloses, what emerges in each chapter is a recognisable researcher role and identity. Arguably, this is an integral part of knowledge construction in *any* method, irrespective of ontological position. The critical difference is that ethnographers, it seems, are more attentive to it.

The First-Person Pronoun

Drawing on novelist, Ursula Le Guin's (1989) reference to the third-person voice as 'the father tongue', Bochner and Ellis (2016, p. 82) suggest that the conventional use of the third person denotes a high-minded mode of expression that seeks and embraces objectivity. 'Spoken from above', they say, 'the father tongue distances the writer from the reader, creating a gap between self and other'. They suggest that 'autoethnographic writing resists this kind of emotional distancing'. This is certainly a persuasive argument, but it feels rather one sided.

For others, the first-person pronoun can be construed as a discernibly modern construct. The concept of the individual's self-identity (and, by implication, the use of the first-person pronoun) has been a key concern for Giddens. He writes, '[s]elf-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is the self as *reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography*' (Giddens, 1991, p. 53, original emphasis). Important here is the notion of biography. Giddens suggests that in contemporary society the continuity, predictability, and security associated with premodern life have had to be substituted. In Giddens' eyes, this substitution is provided by the self in terms of establishing and maintaining a sense of personal history. This particular theorisation is justified in terms of an internalisation of scientific reflexivity. By way of clarification, Giddens continues:

> in the context of a post-traditional order, the self becomes a reflexive project. Transitions in individuals' lives have always demanded psychic reorgani-

> zation. … But in some cultures, where things stayed more or less the same from generation to generation *on the level of the collectivity*, the changed identity was clearly staked out—as when an individual moved from adolescence to adulthood. In the settings of modernity, by contrast, the altered self has to be explored and constructed as part of a reflexive process of connecting personal and social change. (ibid. 32–33, emphasis added)

We are reminded here that the notion of the 'individual' is a modern invention: 'the 'individual', in a certain sense, did not exist in traditional cultures, and individuality was not revered as it is today. Only with the emergence of modern societies and, particularly, with the differentiation of the division of labour, did the individual as a distinct entity become a focus of attention (Durkheim, as cited in Giddens, 1991, p. 75). Ironically, perhaps, the external institutionalisation of reflexivity is mirrored internally at the level of the individual. Giddens identifies 'the lifespan as a distinctive and *enclosed* trajectory' (ibid., p. 146: emphasis added). He goes on to suggest that the individual is reified by 'turning his back' on external sources of meaning such as the life cycle of generations, the ties of kinship, other pre-existing relationships, and the permanence of physical place. For Giddens, then, the 'self as reflexive project' is understood as the means by which we are each compelled to 'narrativise' our own life so as to sustain some semblance of meaning and existential security in an uncertain world.

In the field of critical psychology too, there is an overriding concern that in the fold of free market economics, western history has systematically prioritised the analytical category of the individual over and above that of the collective (Carrette, 2007). In this way, 'knowledge framed in terms of individualism is prioritised over and above that framed in social or communal terms'. (Vine, 2011, p. 185). An emphasis on the first-person pronoun might therefore reinforce this bias.

So where does this leave us as ethnographers? On the one hand, ethnography—particularly when configured as autoethnography—is about the effective articulation of subjective, individual experience. In this way, its use of the first-person pronoun appears to be perfectly justified. On the other, and as we have seen, the use of the first-person pronoun reflects a specific linguistic tradition, emergent in some (but not all) cultures and languages in which the concept of the individual is lent primacy over that of the collective. Finally, an added complication arises when autoethnography is co-produced, ostensibly as a 'single voice'. Is it appropriate to use

the first-person pronoun in these cases? These are certainly interesting questions, and we very much hope they will generate discussion beyond the confines of the text. Ultimately, we decided to leave the manner in which the first-person pronoun was used—if indeed at all—to each of our contributors. However, as editors we were sure to point out that in going to significant lengths to avoid the fallacy of misplaced concreteness (Whitehead 1967 [1925]), authors should be mindful not to fall prey to the ethnographic fallacy (Duneier, 1999) in which observation is overly subject centred and taken at face value. Inevitably, ethnography is a balancing act.

Anxiety and Uncertainty (of Self)

The final theme that connects the chapters of this book is that of anxiety and uncertainty. Indeed, during the aforementioned 2012 conference, one of the overriding experiences of the research discussed was that of uncertainty. Some of those presenting (and many more in the audience) were early career researchers and the sense of anxiety that comes with that most likely compounded the issue further. Ethnography is investigative (Fetterman, 1988). Ethnography is messy (Crang & Cook, 2007). Ethnography is problematising (Schwartzman, 1993). And ethnography is largely boundaryless and non-linear; it involves 'flying by the seat of your pants' (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 120). For all these reasons, it is no surprise that ethnography invokes anxiety and uncertainty. But rather than focus on means of mitigation, the chapters in this book explore—and celebrate—these experiences for their own sake. It is here that existential doubts in respect of our honesty, empathy, culture, sexuality, competence, and intellect are brought into the open and explored. A generation ago, Rose speculated on the implications of what he called 'multigenre ethnography':

> a new sort of enculturated student will be formed who will conceptualize fieldwork differently from now. *Above all, their inquiry might well have a narrative sort of quality, that is, students will seek to place themselves in unfolding situations, to live through complex ongoing events—the stuff of stories*—rather than looking for the meaning of gestures, the presentation of selves, class relations, the meaning of rituals, or other abstract, analytical category phenomena on which we have historically relied. (Rose, 1990, p. 58, original emphasis)

This advice has come of age. Our book is dedicated to exploring the ramifications of conducting research immersed within the complex, unfolding situations Rose contemplates. Unsurprisingly, then, most of the ethnographies presented in this book are inevitably multi-sited and, in some cases, collaborative.

Chapter Outlines

This book begins with chapters most akin to traditional ethnography but as it unfolds we transition into autoethnographic work and the emerging field of collaborative ethnography.

In Chap. 2, Tom Vine recounts his experience of living and working in a New Age commune. The appeal of such communities is typically presented in terms of the unfamiliar or 'exotic'. Ironically, upon closer investigation, Tom concludes that the appeal is very much in the mundane: Findhorn provides for its participants a palpable sense of organisational and familial belonging. Reflecting these findings back on the macrosociological shifts of the past generation, Tom notes that this sense of belonging has been surrendered in the mainstream as our work lives have become increasingly contingent and domestic living arrangements continue to depart from the nuclear 'norm'.

In Chap. 3, Paul Driscoll-Evans, a nursing clinician-academic, reflects on a decade working in the field of sexual health and HIV care. As part of this experience, he undertook ethnographic fieldwork among men who have sex with men (MSM) in Norfolk. He explores, in particular, the effects of the internet in facilitating homosexual encounters and the challenge they present to traditional concepts of personhood and psychosocial geography.

In Chap. 4, Sarah Richards explores the consumption of 'authentic' identities among intercountry adoption families. Reflecting on the experiences of her subjects, together with her own as an adoptive mother, she explores the imperative for English adoptive parents of Chinese children to provide them with mediated cultural experiences. In one sense, it is a well-intentioned response to policies, but a response that inevitably leads to tensions and challenges regarding the performance of 'authentic' identities.

In Chap. 5, Allison Boggis reflects on her experience using ethnography to assist in the researcher's ability to identify and interpret the voices, experiences, and opinions of disabled children. Disabled children have,

traditionally, been voiceless; their voices are proxied by their parents and mediating professionals. With the assistance of high-tech Augmentative and Alternative Communication Systems (AACS), Alison demonstrates one of the myriad advantages of adopting an ethnographic approach in her native field.

In Chap. 6, clinical radiographer, Ruth Strudwick, departs from the methodological norms of her field and engages in participant observation of other radiographers working in the National Health Service. On the one hand, her work reveals the mundanity of a clinical environment. On the other, like that of Van Maanen (1973, 1975) in respect of US Police Departments, her data reveal the salience of socialisation in respect of mastering the profession.

In Chap. 7, Steve Barnes grapples with existential angst. He comes from a background in positivist methods where uncertainty is mitigated by means of reassuring boundaries. He discovers that no such boundaries exist in ethnography. His five-year journey through his doctoral thesis is presented as a series of anxieties about himself, his abilities, the methodological shortcomings, and the fact that nothing seems to happen. In this sense, Steve's experience is a narrative of two selves, from 'who I was' to 'who I am', demonstrating 'how a life course can be reimagined or transformed by crisis' (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 213). However, as you will see, Steve still remains to be convinced of the validity of this journey.

In Chap. 8, David Weir and Daniel Clarke wrestle with the authenticity of autoethnographic analysis. By way of a response to Delamont's (2007) infamous critique, they each present a personal retrospective to lend empirics to their defence of the method.

In Chap. 9, Katie Best reflects on the schizophrenic nature of working in a 'for-profit' university. As a scholar accustomed to Marx (at least from the relative comfort of a leather-clad armchair) and more contemporary critical accounts of management, she finds herself having to play the corporate game. Strangely, she quite enjoys it. But this serves only to further aggravate her sense of intellectual integrity and personal narrative. The chapter taps into the insecurities, doubts, dualities, and endemic frustrations many of us in the world of academia—and beyond—share.

In Chap. 10, David Weir reminisces about his experiences working as an impressionable teenager in a commercial laundry in the 1950s. Gendered workflow patterns, backroom coitus, and flying turds come together to form a truly evocative account of post-war work life in northern England.

In Chap. 11, Ilaria Boncori argues that, in spite of its influence elsewhere in the academy, emotional content continues to take a back seat in ethnographies set in the worlds of business and management. For Ilaria, this is a source of perennial frustration. Determined to address this shortcoming, she presents a model from which future scholarship may take precedence.

In Chap. 12, John Hadlow renders explicit his own experiences as an informal sperm donor to a lesbian couple and the unusual conceptualisation of fatherhood this constructs. As part of this passage, he reveals anxiety about his use of autoethnography, not least because of the lasting effects the printed word has on those involved, irrespective of procedural anonymity. In this way, a significant complexity in respect of ethnographic ethics is revealed.

In Chap. 13, Will Thomas and Mirjam Southwell recount for us a painful experience of rejection in the world of commercial research. As befitted their remit, they conducted qualitative research. Presented with the unanticipated results of their research, the client reacted by rejecting the findings on the basis of their non-quantitative methods. Their narrative explores their journey of reflection to try to understand where, if anywhere, they went wrong.

In a truly collaborative venture, for Chap. 14, Ngaire Bissett, Sharon Saunders, and Carolina Bouten Pinto present personal vignettes reflecting on their experiences both in academia and in industry. Although decidedly different, they forge a pattern from which they are able to learn from one another and hone their pedagogical skills accordingly. Indeed, given the focus on mutual learning from one another's divergent experience, this chapter echoes in microcosm, the guise of this book in its entirety.

In Chap. 15, in the final contribution to this volume—'Methodology: From Paradigms to Paradox'—Tom Vine explores the ontological tensions inherent to the research process, including the rarely challenged claim that empirics must be underpinned by a supposedly sublime honesty. This chapter reflects on ethnography by recourse to paradox as a means of reinterpreting the experiences presented by the preceding contributors.

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CHAPTER 2

Home-Grown Exoticism? Identity Tales from a New Age Intentional Community

Tom Vine

I like to describe myself as a 'work and organisation academic'. However, when networking on behalf of the University or liaising with a prospective MBA student, I present myself as a 'business and management lecturer'. Circumstances determine which label I use. Sometimes, however, my selection is motivated by a desire to challenge preconceptions. For example, a school friend of mine recently died and, at the funeral, I got cornered by our old headmaster, a profoundly conservative Oxbridge graduate. 'Vine', he said, 'what are you doing these days?' 'I'm a lecturer', I responded. 'Which university?' he said, most likely hoping that I would proclaim affiliation to a prestigious Russell Group institution. 'Suffolk', I responded. He scoffed. 'What do you lecture?' 'Work and organisation', I said. 'What? That sounds suspiciously like sociology'. 'Well, yes, it's a multidisciplinary subject area, a key component of most management degrees'. 'Ah! So you work in a business school?' 'Yes'. 'Why didn't you say so? You don't want to give people the impression you're a bloody sociologist!' That was, of course, precisely what I was trying to do.

Ethnography is reasonably well received in the domain of work and organisation, but finds rather less traction in the commercially oriented world of business and management. However, it's worth noting that to

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some extent the practice of management consultancy (which is as commercially oriented as it gets!) involves ethnography. The parameters in management consultancy are very different and we're probably some way off seeing 'participant observation' itemised on an invoice. A very different vocabulary is deployed too: 'on-site specialist research', for example, or 'leveraged professional advice'. Nevertheless, there is an underexplored kinship between the two approaches.

In one sense, the research presented in this chapter runs contrary to the turning tide of ethnography. Twentieth-century ethnography sought to distance itself from the imperialist anthropology of the Victorian era. Whereas British adventurers of the 1800s lavished us with accounts of life from 'exotic' corners of the earth, the twentieth century witnessed a shift in empirical focus—to 'ordinary' life: street corners, police departments, prisons, amusement parks, and so on. However, the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland, the focus of this chapter, apparently represents a New Age way of life at odds with the 'ordinary' cultures in which it is embedded and might legitimately be considered 'exotic'. Others have concluded the same of comparable sites. Prince and Riches (2000, p. 9) suggest that 'for most New Agers in Glastonbury, the existential experience is departure from the mainstream'. Ironically, and at least in the case of Findhorn, the purpose of this chapter is to persuade you otherwise. I follow a strategy delineated by Silverman (2007): to reveal the mundane in the remarkable. However, here I focus on a particular mundanity, one which the mainstream has surrendered.

The Findhorn Foundation, as it is known today, is sometimes described as a commune. Its members, however, prefer the term 'community' or 'intentional community'. The Findhorn community was established in 1962 by Eileen and Peter Caddy, with Dorothy Maclean. Five years previously, working as hoteliers, the Caddys had been entrusted with the management of the Cluny Hill Hotel in the nearby town of Forres. Eileen allegedly received guidance in her meditations from an inner divine source she called 'the still small voice within', and Peter ran the hotel according to this guidance and his own intuition. Cluny Hill which had up until this point been relatively unsuccessful won the praise of the inspectorate and was awarded four-star accreditation. Impressed at the speed at which they had improved the profitability of the hotel, the owners of the hotel chain decided to relocate the Caddys to another of their failing hotels in the hope that they would do the same there. Following identical spiritual

techniques, the two were unable to replicate success in this new setting. They were sacked a few years later. With no immediate source of income and no permanent lodgings, they moved with their three young sons and Dorothy to a caravan on a plot of wasteland adjacent to the village of Findhorn on the Morayshire coast. The community was born.

Although modest in its inception, the community has grown steadily. The founders cultivated a vision which, though subject to both contestation and controversy, retains a central theme: a life premised on an apparently synergetic blend of spiritual and ecological sensitivity. Today, the community is spread over two main sites (*Park Campus*, the original site, and *Cluny Campus*, the site of what was the Cluny hotel, acquired by the Foundation in the 1970s). Additionally, the community includes settlements on two smaller island outposts located off the west coast of Scotland. Collectively, it is home to approximately 300 people, most of whom work for the community either directly or in the form of related business ventures providing both conventional and esoteric products and services for the thousands of visitors to the Foundation each year.

The Foundation is the largest intentional community in Europe and is a powerful 'brand' within New Age circles (for an extensive discussion of the New Age, see Heelas, 1996). Typically, visitors to the community enrol on focussed group-based residential programmes. These include 'Experience Week' (which offers participants a taste of community living and is a prerequisite for other courses); 'Ecovillage training' (a practical sustainability course for planning and constructing settlements); and 'Spiritual Practice' (for meditative and related techniques). In addition, Findhorn also offers residential workweeks where participants work alongside community members on dedicated cleaning, maintenance, building, and horticultural projects. Of my six residential visits to Findhorn, three were on such programmes. These included Experience Week, a workweek for the housekeeping department, and a workweek for the maintenance department.

During my ethnography, I experienced a life far removed from conventional society: sweet-smelling homes fashioned from old whisky barrels; a widely shared belief that work at Findhorn is 'love in action'; ritualised mourning prior to the felling of trees; decision-making via 'attunement' (feeling internally drawn to a particular outcome); a system of servant leadership in which stewards (described as 'focalisers') practise 'responsibility without authority'; hot tub bathing in the nude; the exchange of fairy stories between like-minded adults; and monastic-style singing sessions in Tolkienesque woodland lodgings. All constitute interesting

phenomena, but in this chapter I explore Findhorn's appeal by recourse to participant biographies.

My approach has afforded conclusions which non-immersive research methods are unlikely to have yielded. What appears to be 'exotic' is, in practice, both organised and formalised. Findhorn's attraction is *not* its exoticism (which is the presumed appeal when invoking 'escapist' interpretations). Its appeal is better understood in terms of more prosaic desires, particularly *familial belonging* and *organisational security*, qualities which participants have been unable to realise satisfactorily in mainstream society. The stories conveyed represent a corollary of the New Capitalism in which and by contrast to the relative stability of the post-war period—life in the neo-liberal West is experienced as precarious, itinerant, fragmented, solitary, and economically insecure (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2006; Giddens, 1991; Sennett, 1998). Gradually, our experience of organisations is increasingly characterised by 'an array of short-term arrangements including part-time work, temporary employment, self-employment, contracting, outsourcing, and home-based work' (Barley & Kunda, 2004, p. 9). Therefore, identifying with an employer, let alone securing a sense of job security, has been dealt a serious blow. Of the nuclear family, Weigert and Hastings (1977, p. 1172) described it as a device which harbours:

> a socially and personally defined reality with a unique history, a recognizable collective identity, and mutual claims projected into the future. In a word, a family is a 'world', albeit a little one, in which selves emerge, act, and acquire a stable sense of identity and reality.

However, by 1988 Popenoe had concluded that the institution of the nuclear family was now in permanent decline and with it came significant ramifications in respect of identity and stability. Although my intention is certainly not to reify the nuclear iteration of family, the perception of the existential security once afforded to many by the nuclear family has—like that of the traditional workplace—undoubtedly shifted.

Why Ethnography?

My research is framed around generating a more nuanced understanding of identity. Glynn (1998) theorised people's 'need for organisational identification' ('nOID'). Having established that we are predisposed to identify

with organisations, she asked: 'How can we operationalize and measure nOID?' (ibid., p. 243). However, Glynn was unable to offer an appropriate means of undertaking this venture. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003, p. 1165) suggest that 'identity lacks sufficient substance and discreteness to be captured in questionnaires or single interviews'. Glynn's inability to answer her own question was due to identity being ill suited to quantitative methodologies. For Van Maanen, such pursuits are better paired with ethnography:

> Studies of organizational identity and change are often—perhaps most often—ethnographic in character. Because symbolic meaning and unfolding history are critical to any account of collective identity, there is perhaps no other substantive area for which ethnography is more suitable as a method of study. (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 244)

Identity and change were fundamental concerns for my investigation, not least because New Age discourses are typically characterised by changing lifestyles, identity (re)formation, and maintenance (see Heelas, 1996). Furthermore, there is an interesting relativist dynamic to ethnography which offers additional justification for its choice here as appropriate method: 'Ethnographies are as much about the culture of the student as they are of the studied' (Herbert, 2000, p. 563). Auto-ethnography requires us to *intentionally* blur the boundary between the researcher and the researched. I chose to orient my study at the juncture where studies of organisation engage with the social scientific rendering of family, religion, and spirituality. The latter has constituted an interest dating back to my conservative education at a Jesuit school where any attempts to develop skills of critical thinking were rapidly quashed. More recently, my mother had embraced the New Age culture with gusto, and I was fascinated if somewhat concerned by this turn of events. Burrell has commented that as scholars we are 'predisposed to study our insecurities' (personal communication, 2001). In line with the rationale proffered by Herbert (ibid.), this ethnography probably imparts as much about me as it does of my subjects.

Although full immersion is impractical (and, given the potential for institutionalisation, not always advantageous), I was able to dedicate a full year to my ethnographic endeavours. Over the course of this period, I stayed with the community on six different occasions (ranging in duration from four nights to two weeks) and maintained regular contact with

participants on email forums throughout the entire period. Significantly, with the exception of the long-term residents (who constitute a minority), this sporadic participation is not dissimilar to how the majority of participants experience Findhorn.

Findhorn: Exploring the Appeal

On 16 February 2009, I sent an email to Findhorn introducing myself as a doctoral student interested in studying their community. I received the following response:

> Dear Tom. Thank you for your enquiry. The best start here is to participate in Experience Week. It is the basic building block upon which our other programmes and explorations are built. You will find much about us on our website www.findhorn.org. I hope this is helpful. Donald (For Findhorn Foundation Enquiries)

I was struck at the apparent modularity and formality of involvement: 'Experience Week … is the basic building block upon which the other programmes and explorations are built'. This sounded light years away from my preconceptions: communes were supposed to be *informal* counter-cultural collectives! But unlike the vast majority of communes established in the 1960s and 1970s, of which very few survived, Findhorn *had* survived.

The formality, however, did necessitate a financial outlay on my part. Even with a discount for those on low income (including students, such as myself), the fee for 'Experience Week' was £395, paid online. The whole transaction was comparable to booking a hotel or flight. For Carrette and King (2005, p. 15) this would undoubtedly constitute evidence of the 'commodification of religion'; for me, however, it was my first taste of the formalisation of New Age spirituality. All particulars (full name, date of birth, address, nationality, contact details, and so on) were required before the transaction was complete. I was also required to submit a personal statement which described my 'spiritual background' and rationale for enrolling on Experience Week. Suffice to say, as a doctoral researcher, I had plenty to declare.

Upon arrival in Scotland for Experience Week there was continued evidence of this formalised approach to organisational life, as recorded in my field notes:

> I arrived at the Visitors Centre at the Findhorn Foundation (Park Campus) at the time stipulated. I introduced myself to the woman at the desk. Her appearance was entirely conventional; I think I had been expecting tie-dye attire and facial piercings. With an air of no nonsense professionalism, any remaining prejudice began to fade. Without prompting, she asked me if I was Tom Vine. I was, apparently, the last to arrive. They were expecting me. 'Before proceeding any further', she said, 'I must ask you to verify [and, it transpired, sign off] the personal details you supplied online'.

Her insistence that the details for next of kin must be accurate made me feel a little uneasy; my private prejudices momentarily resurfaced as I contemplated the grisly fate of Howie in *The Wicker Man*.

Over the course of my research, I met—and in some cases got to know very well—many different people. As my relationship with participants grew stronger, and where circumstances permitted, I oriented our conversations to get a feel for their lives prior to and beyond Findhorn. This was relatively straightforward: most were more than happy to talk about themselves. Indeed, in one case, conversation appeared to double as a form of therapy. I collected life historical data for 31 subjects in total. I focus on three of these as case studies and draw upon data from the other subjects where relevant in the subsequent analysis. Emma is a self-employed divorcee; Andy is an unmarried single man on indefinite leave from work; and Sofie is in full-time employment and is in a committed relationship.

Emma

I first met Emma on Experience Week, at which point we were both new to the community. She had just turned 50. She has one adult son and is separated from his father. She said to me early on in our acquaintance:

> Tom, you really remind me of my son.

She laughed raucously. I learned that this sort of affectionate familiarity was typical of participants. Emma was from London, like me, and apparently her son and I 'sound alike'. Emma adopted a maternal demeanour when I was present and didn't seem to tire of telling the other participants how much she enjoyed 'mothering Tom'. I could have probably allowed this to piss me off, but I actually got quite used to it. Emma's cheeriness was, however, punctuated with periods of negativity. Emma suffers from

migraines and they seemed to plague her most days, so much so that she was unable to participate in some of the scheduled activities during Experience Week. Following our Experience Week, however, Emma and I stayed in touch online (as did the entire of the group). When I next returned to Findhorn, in October 2009, Emma had arranged her second visit too. I got to know her very well because it was just the two of us this time. As we walked through the community gardens, I asked Emma what constitutes the attraction for her:

> It's two-pronged. First … well, I see the community as a forum which allows me to [she pauses] … *objectify* my spirituality … it is an opportunity to relax with like-minded people. Second, I am looking to buy a home here.

She looks at me awkwardly as if to convey a sense of concession; is it appropriate to speak of conformist matters such as property acquisition, at Findhorn? Later, Emma takes a call on her mobile phone from a woman trying to sell her a small two-bed house on the 'Field of Dreams' (a development of privately owned eco-houses on Park Campus). Her earlier concerns at whether or not such materialist intentions are appropriate give way to pecuniary practicalities. Emma comments, '£190,000 is outrageous!' Having ended the phone call, she says to me:

> You know, I thought my money would go much further up here. But property here is almost as expensive as it is at home!

Home, of course, is London. Emma is not the first participant to mention to me a desire to purchase property in the Findhorn area, but with Emma I am able to witness first hand her unfolding plans to move.

Two days later, we arrange to meet for lunch again. We spend a further two hours together, over which I learn more about her past and motivation for visiting Findhorn, as well as her plans to settle here.

> When I was 17 I won a recording contract. But then shortly afterwards I fell pregnant with my son. This really rocked me and of course I had to put my singing ambitions on the backburner.

'You know, you remind me of my son', she says, again lending voice to her maternal convictions. Emma was a single parent, but beyond this she didn't go into details. She tells me that with her 'singing on the backburner', she trained as a Shiatsu healer and has fashioned a career in this

mould. With her son now long 'flown the nest', her Shiatsu work beginning to 'exhaust' her, and her 'migraines getting worse', she has decided she would like to resurrect her music career. Findhorn it seems is the perfect home in this regard since it has its own recording studios, and, apparently, 'offers *real* artistic inspiration'. Such was its inspirational appeal, Emma explained that the lead singer of the Waterboys recorded an album here. Emma then showed me an enormous collection of her photographs, many of which were shot in the gardens when we were here in the summer for Experience Week. Singling out the images she wanted to incorporate as part of her album sleeve artwork and promotional material, she said again:

> You know, I would *really* love to live here.

Our conversation was interrupted by another phone call. It was another estate agent. Emma's reflective and considered tone once again gave way to business-like decorum. She was offered a three-bedroom house in Findhorn village (which is outside the geographical remit of the Foundation) for £175,000 which was, apparently, 'more reasonable' than what was quoted on Sunday. She planned to take some time to ponder the offer. Following the phone call, she appeared contemplative. Thinking through the finances, she then said:

> My London flat requires some work but even at these prices I would be able to sell it, pay off the rest of my mortgage, buy the Findhorn place, and have some leftover to live on.

Andy

I met Andy for the first time on a housekeeping workweek. Over the years, this particular workweek has affectionately become known as 'Sprinklings of Light'. At 48 Andy is an ex-nuclear engineer. He was required to take indeterminate leave from work because of illness. He suffers from mental health problems and is unmarried. Early on, Andy and I discover that we are both without girlfriends and this opens up a mutual likeness:

> I'm always on the lookout, Tom!

He chuckles with a sense of bravado. The next day we sit next to each other on the minibus that shuttles between the two campuses and resume