

**What is “legitimate” knowledge? What is “illegitimate” knowledge?**

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**Pete “Did you read it in the original?”**

**Dud “Er...no, but I read it in précis form in the vernacular on a packet of Swan Vestas”**

**Peter Cook and Dudley Moore: Not Only But Also**

**“The machine threatens all we have gained, so long as it dare  
become the tyrant of spirit, rather than its servant.**

**Rather than let us linger to savour a master's deft care,  
it rigidly cuts the stone for structures ever more adamant.**

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**Be, in this immensity of night,  
the magic force at your sense's crossroad;  
the purpose of their mysterious plan.**

**And though you fade from earthly sight,  
declare to the silent earth: I flow.**

**To the rushing water say: I am.”**

**R.M. Rilke: Sonnets to Orpheus**

**“Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we  
have lost in information?”**

**T.S Eliot: The Rock**

**“if you know yo’ history, then you know where (who?) yo’ comin’ from!”**

**Bob Marley: Buffalo Soldier**



## **Preamble**

### **What is “legitimate” knowledge? What is “illegitimate” knowledge?**

Experience of life and events that have actually occurred to an individual have a mixed welcome in the field of social science research. Reading some apparently highly-regarded articles in highly-rated journals often evokes strongly negative emotions among skilled practitioners. Most social scientists in management and business have suffered adverse feedback from skilled practitioners who complain “I don’t know what you are talking about” and “why do you put it in that way” when they are exposed to presentations on their field of experience by social science “experts”.

The prevailing modes of explanation in the core social sciences like economics, sociology and psychology favour in-group jargon and specialised vocabularies that make sense only within a narrow group of like-minded scholarly professionals, while the originators and originals of these claims to knowledge are neglected, even patronised as “folk” experts only. To speak of “critical fluctuations in the M1 Money Supply impacting on longer-term planning horizons” is legitimate, while “the bastards stole my pension” is in some senses illegitimate when raised in academic discourse. But arguably the sense could be the same when uttered to practised observers.

This polarisation of types of knowledge regarded as “legitimate” and its converse is not confined to knowledge derived from positivistic or quantitative studies but infests ethnographic work also. None of Levi-Strauss’s (1964) informants ever used the terms “Cru” or “Cuit” in the explicit analytical sense in which these terms have entered the ethnographic lexicon. For one thing none of them spoke French so they could not have used those words nor formed those concepts. Was Levi-Strauss using these terms in a “legitimate” or an “illegitimate” way?

To some extent Schutz (1973) attempts an answer to these questions by offering an explanation in terms of “consociation” that creates an inter-subjectivity that generates common-sense constructs for organising the world and behaving as social actors in it and diminishes atomised anonymity and transcends merely conventional recipes of

action, permitting us to understand consociates in face-to-face relationships and to engage in common projects.

For Schutz then, the answer is something like “if the two parties can agree that this is what they understand the other to be saying and if they can agree to act together on such shared “understandings” then they can make this knowledge legitimate because it is shared by the fiat of agreement.”

But is that enough? Is it ever “legitimate” to talk about experiences one has not in fact had even though others may genuinely believe or be made to believe that these experiences have in fact happened?

Gingrich-Philbrook (1998) refers to the double bind between the epistemic and aesthetic demands of auto-ethnography and auto-ethnographic performance. Duncan (2004) explicates the need to “externalize my inner dialogue of decision” and offers six criteria for this process relating to study boundaries, instrumental utility, construct validity, external validity, reliability, and scholarship. But none of these represent unambiguous criteria of legitimacy and all are subject to processes of internal and external judgement.

It seems as if the more central to the lived experience of individual people and the more significant in some canon of centrality do the experiences lie that the more these questions are evaded by a shared professional style of politeness and a kind of scientific courtesy that shies away from direct confrontation with the claims of entitlement to knowledge in favour of a slick evasion that implies “we know what you mean, really but we are too polite to ask what your warrant is”.

Recently the author was quite shocked when these un-explicated taboo rituals of overt respect were attacked when a colleague reviewing a paper of mine asked “how do you know that?” The shock was that my best answer was “because I was there...I was that person...I did that thing...I recall how that experience felt” and the greater shock was to understand that this precisely strong warrant, acceptable at the dinner table and in a court of law was apparently a point of vulnerability in my analysis. Yet this was the

thing I knew, these were the experiences that had sparked my questioning interest in a broader, more general sociological analysis, this was the truth my body and mind had experienced, understood and wished to share.

But sources of knowledge that are intensely personal have not always been so suspect. Descartes was sufficiently aware of the possibility of dream-based knowledge to reflect that “every sensory experience I have ever thought I was having while awake I can also think of myself as sometimes having while asleep” (Descartes, Med. 6, AT 7:77). Recently Case and Gosling have proposed a re-examination of dreams as a source of knowledge despite the fact that “dreams are now more likely to be taken as epiphenomenal by-products by a scientific psychology increasingly preoccupied neuroscientific forms of explanation.”(Case and Gosling, 2010)

In this paper we examine a series of problems about legitimacy in auto-ethnography, illustrating problems of ownership of experience, partial recall, identity and wish-fulfilment in areas like sex, work and music that are too important to be left to the creative artists, fiction writers and musicians (but if we were not both scientists and yet still decidedly sexy and creative people and wannabee musicians who had learned how to “pass”, how would we know that?)

## **Autoethnography as a basis for legitimacy claims**

Autoethnography has been defined as a process by which “the investigator creates an ethnographic description and analysis of his/her own behaviour, attempting to develop an objective understanding of the behaviours and work context under consideration by casting the investigator as both the informant 'insider' and the analyst outsider”(Cunningham and Jones, 2005). It has been claimed as especially valuable for research in inter-cultural settings (Butz and Besio, 2004) and as meeting the need for studies that can be more time-intensive than conventional ethnographic or survey-based research (Cunningham and Jones, 2005). Ellis and Bochner (2000) overview the method quite comprehensively.

Beebe identifies the three bases of ethnographic research as a system approach, repeated observation over a specific time period and triangulation by more than one research method (Beebe, 1995). Clearly much autoethnographic work finds it hard to meet these requirements. These concerns are greater when significant time has elapsed since the initial period of experience and before the analysis and writing up, in what we may classify as “informal retrospective autoethnography”. With time, processes of selective recall and lack of cross-validation are all too obviously even more central to the legitimacy issues.

Spry (2007) offers alternative justifications of autoethnography as “emancipatory” claiming that “autoethnographic performance is the convergence of the “autobiographic impulse” and the “ethnographic moment” is represented through movement and critical self-reflexive discourse in performance, articulating the intersections of peoples and culture through the innersanctions of the always migratory identity.” She speaks of the opportunities for autoethnography to reconcile “the body as a site of scholarly awareness and corporeal literacy.”

Duncan (2004 ) points out that a concern for autoethnography is associated with a change from the narrative approaches formerly typical of ethnography in an attempt to incorporate a more personal point of view by emphasizing reflexivity and personal voice (Mykhalovskiy, 1996; Tierney & Lincoln, 1997) and the recognition of the

researcher as representative of a multilayered lifeworld, that is itself worthy of expression.

Mykhalovskiy notes the need to reconcile privileged access and a personal narrative voice and the necessity to avoid self-indulgence in expression or claiming privilege for what may be partial knowledge. But why should these be greater dangers for this kind of “knowledge” than for any other knowledge-claim, say on the basis of statistical data or reliance on a time-honoured source?

Indeed Duncan for example claims superior legitimacy for the knowledge claims of her own research because “Only someone actively involved in working with new technologies within an academic context during the time of their introduction and rapid development could have the opportunity to reflect on the task of design and record those influences from which theories of design might emerge”. (Duncan, 2004)

But Duncan is severe in her criticisms of unscientific approaches to autoethnography because as she says, quoting Parks in support “Autoethnographic accounts can suffer from several shortcomings resulting in an unscholarly representation of the research experience. These shortcomings include overreliance on the potential of a personal writing style to evoke direct emotional responses in readers but offer no deeper levels of reflection or analytic scholarship; lack of self-honesty and disclosure about the motivation for doing the research, resulting in the misuse of the role of author to justify actions or advocate the interests of a particular group; failure on the part of the researcher to see the relationship between personal experience and broader theoretical concepts; and his or her inability to defend against reasoned critique while still making claims to knowledge (Parks, 1997). Duncan’s recommendations, based on her own research are very relevant to prospective autoethnographic approaches where the researcher has decided that this approach is for various reasons the preferred one.

In many contexts these anxieties are exacerbated by the possibility of emotion or affect implicating the analysis. Nonetheless in for example theological studies and in many non-western cultural contexts such knowledge claims can be accepted as legitimate. In theology “heart knowledge” claims can be treated seriously, and legitimated by tradition and testimony for “*For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.*”

(Proverbs 23:7 NKJV). But in management research circles such aspects can contribute to a devaluing of legitimacy because of the accusation that one is sentimentalizing the object of research.

But in the opposite sense, David Good's experience of studying, living in and finally falling in love and marrying the object of his scientific curiosity has become a compelling testimony to the need to reconcile "head" and "heart" knowledge (Good and Chanoff, 1997). This book and the TV documentaries it has spawned have opened up ethnography in dramatic and potentially life-changing ways, certainly for students.

The kind of knowledge made public by autoethnographic accounts is clearly "personal" in the sense used by Polanyi (1958) and its interest and significance to other observers or listeners may be that it is also "tacit" (Polanyi, 1967). There is considerable current interest in tacit knowledge and its study has come to constitute an important subset of our disciplines.

Many organisations have come to recognise the importance of tacit knowledge in their diurnal operations and the damaging potential impact of its loss to their systems when knowledge workers leave especially on retirement or to join competitors (Lampl, Squires and Johnsrud, 2004)

So the legitimacy question is a complex one. For those who have "been there, done that, got the T shirt", is it the case that only the T shirt is admissible as evidence? Or can claims to even partial knowledge be acceptable as legitimised by personal experience for subsequent analysis? Can personal experience ever be screened out for its emotional/affective content? Should it be? What is gained in clarity where emotion is distilled away?

At the very least we should recognise that there are considerable issues surrounding the use of autoethnography as a research tool of first resort or as a planned substitute for other methods of enquiry, if one wishes to satisfy the exacting demands of one's scholarly peers. But what if what one knows is known by few others or by no living survivors, or when the subject matter is of compelling perhaps unique historical importance? If Hitler's Diaries were really to be discovered, would their contents' be

disavowed because of their evident failure to survive any one of Beebe's criteria? One suspects that historians would jump on the "evidence".

In the recent past, I have returned to previous experience in other contexts to create fragments of what we could call a retrospective autoethnography and in the next section I shall draw on one such experience and offer some reflections and ask for your collegial feedback on what it is I can legitimately "know" from this exercise and how such "knowledge" can be validated.

I worked as a porter at a main line station in the 1950s and this case is based on that period of continuous employment of a year and of vacation work for the three years thereafter while I was a University student. So this paper is based on that experience and as much comparative material as I have been able to come across. It represents very much a work in progress and feedback and critique are very welcome.

## **Case Study: Work on the Railway in the 1950s**

In the late 1950s I worked as a porter on a main line railway station for nine months continuously and then for shorter periods thereafter. The establishment of the station in terms of “platform staff” in the 1950s was considerable. There were three station inspectors, who worked a three shift day, and had operational control of the station under the Station Master, who worked an 8:30 to 5:30 day. There were around twenty guards and porter-guards and around the same number of porters. Porters were divided into those who had passed guards rules, who were identified as “passed porters” and the rest. I was hired as a temporary porter. All platform staff were identified by their blue uniform Porter-guards were porters who had passed guards rules, entitling them to act as guards on passenger or freight trains, but for whom there was no established position as a guard, though the increased traffic during the summer months meant that they could spend on average up to half their working week undertaking guards duties during the summer months. There were also four parcel porters and four ticket collectors. These were supplemented by a “travelling man” who was based at Leeds City station but worked a train up from Leeds half way through his shift and then undertook a half shift on the barriers at Harrogate before working a train back to Leeds later. He was a self-consciously cheeky chappy, and affected an urban, cosmopolitan air as befitted someone from the metropolis of Leeds and was quick with the double entendres and the latest smutty joke. There was also a complement of three shunters who worked an overlapping three shift day so as to always have one available for shunting duties in the station.

The assigned shifts for porters were First Shift 4:00AM to 12:00 Noon, Second Shift 6:00 AM to 2:00PM, Third Shift 2:00 PM to 10:00 PM, Fourth Shift 3:50 PM to 11:50 PM. Six shifts were worked in a normal week. Days off were known as “Spiv Days” and days worked in Lieu of planned holidays or days off were known as “Lieu Days”.

This last shift was so designed that there should normally be no need for any platform staff to be on duty after midnight after which overtime payment of time and a quarter would have to be paid.

On the day I joined the station staff it was evident that it was not expected that my stay would be long, but my intention was to work until I had to go to University. Another boy started on the same day as me: he was late twice in his first week and was dismissed on the Thursday morning. I was told that my first task was that of sweeping the station and that if I was in any doubt about how my other tasks would occur, I would be told if not by the inspector, then by the other porters, in particular my platform partner, Harold Brunton. Harold was an old sweat who duly put me through my induction paces. I was never sent for a glass hammer or a pint of red lamp oil but Harold got in an early blow on my second afternoon by enquiring if I had done my windows? I had a shrewd suspicion that window cleaning was not on the list of duties and I asked for proof, so Harold walked me down to an apparently disused office at the far end of the platform and pointed to a yellowing typed sheet that indeed listed “cleaning waiting room windows” as a rostered duty of the no 2 downside porter.

I fetched my bucket, chammy leather and got to work. The waiting room was full and I caused serious nuisance. Passengers were inconvenienced. I noticed trains coming in and going out but I rubbed and slurped and spilled water confident that I was doing my duty to the great British railway machine. Suddenly the door burst open and the staff clerk Jack Mann who had set me on the day before, burst in, his features suffused with rage. “What the blazes are you up to lad? There’s passengers going mad out here! Mr Longbottom and t’inspectors are carrying bags!” Mr Longbottom was the station master. Ours was not a “Top Hat” station but he had all the bodily presence of the Reverend Awdry’s Fat Controller. The thought of him carrying bags was evidently an intolerable insult to his authority.

I stutteringly explained that Harold had defined my duties to prioritise window cleaning at this time and that this was why I had missed the two Queen of Scots Pullman trains. The retort was immediate “that bloody Harold! I’ll murder him. In future lad, take no notice of him. He’s allus up to stuff!” I knew better than to point out that only the day before it was to Harold’s instructional skills that I had been

entrusted by Jack Mann himself. Oddly Harold was not to be found until rather later I caught up with him waddling from the Railway Club, having found ready purchases in the bar for his hard-earned tips...my hard-earned potential tips.

When it was quiet I perused the yellowing list of duties in the old office and noted the date on them was 1937. I gave Harold a verbal kicking that day but soon learned enough to be able to see him coming, but he continued to be a great source of information on the organisational life of the station. We became acceptable working partners and looked out for each other but he always wanted watching as he was indeed “always up to stuff.”

The porters worked on the platform and one porter at least was expected to be visible on each of the main platform complexes at all times. It was a disciplinary offence not to be available for a passenger who needed assistance, and it paid to be visible and not to run the risk of hearing the Inspector’s stentorian voice asking “who’s on this platform? There’s passengers’ bags wants liftin.”

The station masters office, the ticket office and the office of the staff clerk who acted as no 2 to the Station Master were on the main down platform side, which opened on to the main access for passengers, and housed a taxi rank, and faced the main shopping streets of the town. The station inspectors’ office was on the up platform, where there was also a secondary waiting room and a carriage and car access that was in use only in the midmorning and late afternoon when the Pullman trains departed.

The porters’ room was on the down platform, and it was from here that we emerged to work trains and to which we retired for a brew when there was an opportunity.

The work of the porter was by no means restricted to carrying passengers’ bags and finding them seats on trains. There was a comprehensive roster of tasks to be accomplished on each shift and the first and continuing core tasks were concerned with cleaning, sweeping platforms, washing windows, and attending to the physical appearance of the station. If there was muck, dust or litter on the platform, it was the porter’s fault. If any of this had been swept onto the line or “t’pit” as it was known, this was a disciplinary offence.

Anything that had been delivered to the platform by train was the responsibility of the porters. Anything that had to be dispatched from that platform was likewise the responsibility of that side's porters. Sometimes this caused potential for conflicting expectations because in the eyes of passengers a porter who appeared to be unoccupied was available for them, but that person could well have been waiting to put a specific item on a specific train. Although Harrogate was primarily a passenger station, every train that arrived had a pretty full guards van of items that had to be unloaded and conversely loaded on to the train. This work had to be done under time pressure because trains that were stopping at the station had only two or three minutes at the platform and everything had to be done in that time window.

The first task on the morning shift starting at 4:00 AM was to unload the first train of the day which carried three sorts of consignment, the day's Mail, heavy parcels, items of equipment and a day's consignment of train parcels and fish. These were carried in three separate vans and had to be transferred to three separate wagons and then went to three different destinations. The Mail was collected by postmen from the Royal Mail and taken to their sorting office, the fish was collected by the fishmongers and the rest went into the Parcel Office. It was next to a capital offence to mix the Mail with the fish for obvious reasons. The Post four wheeled trollies and the fish four wheelers were strictly segregated.

There was a clear expectation that all porters would learn and know the implications of the working timetable and would be able to understand the special complex of duties that attended each particular train. For example "The Fish" was the first train of the day, it was a heavy job and unloading could take up to an hour. After the Fish you could have time for a wash and then time in the porter's room for your breakfast, a brew, a smoke and a glance at the newspaper. You never bought newspapers because from the first trains of the day they were left by passengers as litter.

You had to know your routes. If a passenger missed a train it was by no means clear that their best alternative was simply to wait for the next train of the same sort. The railway system was complex and the built-in redundancy meant that there was usually more than one way of getting from A to B. From Harrogate to London for example there were some direct trains like the mid morning GN, direct to Kings Cross. But you could go to York through Starbeck and pick up a main liner there or go to Leeds

where you could go via Doncaster to Kings Cross, via Sheffield and Nottingham to St Pancras or via Bradford to change stations and go down the Great Central Route to Marylebone. Likewise to Glasgow you could go through Edinburgh either direct or by changing at York or Darlington (but don't make the mistake of getting the Newcastle that goes off through Yarm and Eaglescliffe) or to Leeds and up the Settle-Carlisle on the Thames-Clyde (but change at Carlisle for the quicker run over Beattock to avoid Dumfries and Kilmarnock). You could also change at Carlisle for the Midlands "Border Route" but you knew that usually changing at Glasgow could still be a quicker option for Edinburgh. You had to know your routes. You had to know your routes because passengers expected you to know how to get to places.

The two busiest trains of the day in terms of volume of passengers were a train out at 07:20 every morning and back at 5:40 in the afternoon to and from the Government Munitions factory at Thorp Arch. But these trains were no trouble because they carried only the munitions workers and there were no bags to be carried and no parcels to be unloaded. These trains did not figure on the Public Timetable but only on the Working Timetable or WTT.

You could and did cross the line across the tracks, in the pit, but you had to know your trains. The really dangerous ones were those that went straight through without stopping at a platform. These normally came through at a circumspect pace and would give a precautionary whistle as they entered the station. But some came straight through on the middle tracks. Of these the most dangerous and unsettling was "The Fitted" which came through at 22:40 each night. The name derived from the fact that this goods train had continuous brakes (fitted) enabling a much higher average speed while other goods trains at this time had brakes only on the engine or brake-van. The Fitted swept through like an Angel of Death through the dark station. If you had been caught in the pit the first time you experienced the smooth passage of the Fitted you never were again. There were "urban myths" about the Fitted ... "there were a lad worked here once, thought 'e could jump for it, but he got 'is leg caught fast in't rail' E wor 'it and they 'ad to cut his legs off, both on 'em."...

The prestigious trains of the day were the Pullmans. There was a Yorkshire Pullman that left for Leeds and London at 10:00 and returned at 21:50. And there was "The Queen of Scots" that ran from London to Edinburgh via Leeds and Harrogate, the up

train and down train coming through Harrogate at ten to and ten past four in the afternoon.

The Queens were usually pulled by Gresley A3 Pacifics of the Flying Scotsman class. These were elegant powerful beasts, named after classic race winners. We regularly saw 60084 Trigo named after the 1929 Derby and St. Leger winner and 60053 Sansovino named after the 1924 Derby winner.

These Pullman trains were eagerly anticipated as the opportunity for good tips. Wealthy and business passengers used these trains and gave good tips. You could easily double your salary in tips. My weekly wage was £7: 7 Shillings and on good weeks you could earn £10 worth of tips. Most tips were a shilling or even sixpence but some passengers tipped you five or ten shillings. If you cleared paying jobs and found taxis for your passengers on the first Queen of Scots Pullman you were entitled to get over to the other side for the chance of lucre on the other. The best passengers were those who let you drop their bags in the taxi queue, tipped you well and advised “thank you, I shall be all right now.”

The Yorkshire Pullman left in the morning from the short platform on the up side. It stood for at least half an hour before departure and during that half hour all porters from both sides would converge on the carriage entrance queueing for jobs. There was a strict rotation but sometimes one porter would recognize a particular passenger and claim to have the right to that job on grounds of prior acquaintance or long-standing service. Usually this was my “oppo” Harold Brunton whose mercenary demands were fuelled by an insatiable thirst.

Bitter beer was one and threepence in the station refreshment room (mild was one shilling) but you were not allowed to drink on duty. But the Railwaymans Club was in the next street and Harold, who was a corpulent man, could often be seen waddling from that direction. I once asked him how many pints he could get down in an hour. Quick as a flash he retorted “sixty”. I expressed disbelief.. Harold’s unassailable response was “tha’ buys ‘em, an’ I’ll sup em!”

Harold’s company was excellent learning experience. He was expert on the formal and informal organisation. He taught me how to evade work and still be apparently

available for it, how to appear helpful and supportive to authority while subtly undermining it, how to pursue personal advantage in the guise of collective concern, how to appear to be manfully hastening towards duty while slip-sliding unobtrusively away. All of these skills have been invaluable in organisational life thereafter. Harold Brunton was our station's equivalent of McAuslan, the dirtiest soldier in our regiment (Fraser, 1996). For a regiment we were, and we were often reminded by the station inspectors semi-seriously that we were a "uniformed organisation".

Most of the station staff had of course served in the armed forces and much of our vocabulary and many of our organisational practices were based on service experience. Our labels for the opposite sex included "tarts" but also "bints" a term brought back by the Eighth Army from Egypt and North Africa. Our respect for authority was that of the private soldier and our dodges and wheezes likewise.

After I had worked for a month I was asked one Friday if "I were on for t'Royal Hall tomorrow". Innocently I asked who was performing, but it turned out that the Royal Hall job was that of clearing the chairs after the afternoon concert performance in preparation for the evening dance. They had to be put back again the following morning. These chairs were made of wrought iron and linked together in groups of four. The method of carrying them was with an eight foot length of two by four wood slotted under the hooks at the back of the chairs. The chairs were in rows of sixteen to twenty and there were twenty-five to thirty rows. Like many manual jobs it was a question of getting into a rhythm but it was not easy work and some of the older porters acknowledge frankly that they were "ovver old for t'Royal Hall job". But the pay, cash in hand, was good. The station had two existences, that of the day and the night. These were different lifeworlds, inhabited by different creatures and subject to different rules of organisation. During the day between six in the morning and six in the evening the station was under authority and discipline and a hierarchy was in place. Decisions could be taken at the appropriate level or referred upwards. In practice the highest point of operating responsibility was Jack Mann, the Staff Clerk who functioned as the deputy stationmaster.

From four in the morning until the busy period the station was run by the platform staff. No authority above passed porter existed until the first inspector came on at six o'clock. Likewise in the evening, after 6:00PM although there was notionally an

inspector on until the Pullman came back up around ten pm, to all intents and purposes, the porters were in charge. This sometimes created situations in which quite important decisions had to be taken on the spot by quite junior staff, even including me.

The zone of discretionary authority was in practice quite large and permitted many opportunities for informal practices and illicit activity. For example, at this time off-course gambling and betting was illegal in the United Kingdom. Of course betting was widespread, so the station in common with every other place where manual workers were employed, had staff whose regular duties had to be adjusted to enable their illicit occupation of “bookies’ runner”. Ours was a sharply dressed man if you met up with in the town off-duty who had good contacts with the stable lads at the Middleham yard of Captain Bill Elsey. We got quite good tips from him, but amazingly the odds he quoted us in the porters room always seemed to be that little bit weaker when he got to the bookies. “Sorry, lads, the odds had gone off a bit. Someone must have talked....”

Likewise the proximity of the Railway Club and of several pubs meant that between trains you could nip out for a swift half, although drinking on duty was a sacking offence. You always knew where your colleagues were, but it could be a dicey business if they were away when something unusual or unexpected came up. But you learned to judge the limits of discretion.

One night I went too far in exercising my discretion. My partner that evening was a worried man and confided in me that he had suspicions that his “missus was playing away”. The guilty couple had apparently made plans to meet at the fair that evening and my partner asked me to cover for him while he popped out to the fairground to see what was up. I assented but of course my partner let me down and never came back. I did relatively well as there were jobs aplenty on the two evening Pullmans and only me to clean up but as passengers shouted “Porter! Porter” “What’s going on?” and gesticulated their dissatisfaction I felt uneasily exposed.

Sure enough next morning on clocking in, one of the older men told me that “Jack Mann’s been in. He’s after you. What went on last night? Your oppo Jack Corbett’s gone sick.”

I decided to go immediately to Jack Mann's office. I knew it was a serious situation and I could be fired. Jack was sitting at his desk. As I came in he rose as if to leap the desk and exact physical retribution. Instead he restricted himself to verbal assault. The verbal events were memorable. It was a one note symphony on the theme of "F\*\*K"

"Ah, its David F\*\*\*\*\*G Weir" he observed "David F\*\*\*\*\*G cleverclogs F\*\*\*\*\*G Weir" "David F\*\*\*\*\*G Weir that thinks he's running this F\*\*\*\*\*G station!"

"Now Mr F\*\*\*\*\*G cleverclogs that thinks he knows it F\*\*\*\*\*G all, who's running this F\*\*\*\*\*G station? Is it F\*\*\*\*\*G David Weir or is it me?"

My preference for the witty punchline undid me (as many times since) and I had no alternative but to retort "its f\*\*\*\*\*g you, Jack".

Jack burst out laughing. "Aye" he said "too f\*\*\*\*\*G true. And don't you F\*\*\*\*\*G forget it lad"

He saw the funny side and later advised me when I was taking my leave prior to going up to Oxford University that "I should forget college, if I were you, lad....with your brains and hard work you could go all t'way to York!" York was our Headquarters office. Jack gave me a holiday job several times after that. He was a good manager who had worked his way up from platform staff through porter guard to guard and was entitled to his view. Maybe he was right. I live near York now. If I had never moved away I would be where I am now. Plus ca change.Tout change; tout reste.

There were extra jobs too that had to be fitted in. The railway in those days was designated a common carrier and was obliged by law to carry virtually any traffic offered it. This was the back end of the great era of pigeon racing. Regularly from working class towns over the North, baskets of pigeons arrived. In peak periods special pigeon vans were attached to mainline trains to carry racing pigeons to far off destinations. There, they would be released by the station staff at the appropriate time to race home. Pigeon racing was a very popular pastime before the war especially in mining districts. There was so much pigeon traffic that the LNER also built bogie pigeon vans to carry them. During and after the war when pigeon traffic declined these vehicles were used as general parcels and mail vans. Ours often came in rec

tangular baskets carried in regular guards vans. The guards hated them. So did we. They had to be stored usually for an hour or two, sometimes longer, on one of the quiet platforms until the due time for simultaneous release. Pigeons are manky creatures and not especially clean in their habits. The freed birds would celebrate their freedom by whirling round the station, crapping vigorously before winging their way back to Spennymoor or Aspatria. Not infrequently one cage might be forgotten and on discovery released surreptitiously later, usually after dark. “Where’s them f\*\*\*\*\*g pigeons come from? Lad! LAD!!”.

The evening shift was qualitatively different from the day. There was more discretion available to the platform staff. And the nature of the work changed too. Other kinds of business became available. Non –travelling drunks demanded to use the toilets: one old man called over the barrier one evening when I was alone on the down side “T’stone, lad, where’s t’stone?”. Ladies of the night likewise asked to use the ladies to “freshen up.” You had to use your discretion, but some of the older lads exacted a price. One of them advised me “If you want a jump, you’re on.” I didn’t take this second-hand offer.

Later that first summer, I was told of the annual cricket match between the platform staff and footplate. “Footplate” were a cut above us and let us know it. Platform had never won this annual encounter but George Rawlings, junior parcel porter and would be Bob Appleyard style all round bowler, persuaded me that this year could be our chance. We all knew that footplatemen gave themselves airs. We practised every evening out of sight of the evening inspector on the Long Platform, the old platform 1, unused since the Nidd valley line closed down. On the day itself, George took four wickets and I hit 50 and footplate, (some of whose players were “eligible” in the words of their coach, a local legend from Railway Athletic who played in the Yorkshire Council) were routed. The Long Platform earned its corn that year. My father came to watch. Within a year he was dead from the lung cancer induced by 20 years in the RAF and cheap Naafi ciggies..

After I had worked on the station for several months I was told that for the next few weeks I would take the job of “lampman.” This was in fact a slight promotion and my basic rate went up marginally. But the nature of the duties meant a decrease in earnings because the opportunity for lucrative “jobs” carrying passengers’ bags was

much diminished. But the lampman job gave definite responsibility and conversely opened up prospects of occupational risk because I soon learned that there were explicit reasons for the lamping job and that it played an important role in the station.

The central task was related to the rear lights on each passenger and goods train that passed through the station. This responsibility for lights extended to the carriage lights on trains that started and terminated at the station. But the rear lights were the important responsibility. Every train that left the station had to have a lit red light at its rear, clearly visible. All this was laid down in Guards Rules. The protection of the rear of a train is the basic tenet of lamping. The lampman worked from a lamphouse that contained shelves of paraffin lamps and large cans of paraffin. The trick, I soon learned, was not to check each lamp on an incoming train but to assume that whatever its state, to replace it immediately with a cleaned, full, trimmed and lit lamp. But as I checked each lamp I found of course that most of them were adequately lit and trimmed and had adequate reserves of paraffin in their tanks. After a few more days I realised that at each station up the line other lampmen must be doing exactly the same thing.

The lampman also had responsibility for the signal lamps within the station area. Some of these were very high and climbing up was a rather unnerving prospect. But there was worse. One evening I was escaping the wind whistling through the pitch dark station, poring over the dying embers of the fire in the porters room. There was a figure at the door. It was Inspector Harrison. "Lampman? Get a lamp. An engine's coming up from Starbeck Shed. You go on it. T'Signal light's out on Crimple viaduct."

A few minutes later a Hunt class 4-4-0 puffed steadily down the platform. I got on. The footplate jiggled beneath my feet. I knew the loco: it normally took the 8:20 to Bradford via the Arthington and Otley loop. "You' t' lampman? Rather thee than me" observed the fireman. We chugged up on the facing line to Crimple Viaduct. (This was of course the Crimple High viaduct. The Crimple low viaduct was closed in 1951.) As we drew level with the signal, I hopped out on to the viaduct, and trying not to look down, clambered up the signal tower that stretched out over the valley 120 feet above the valley floor. I tried to concentrate only on lifting the old, dead lamp out with one hand while lifting the replacement lamp in with the other. Only a thin iron

band kept me on the steps as the wind howled. As I jumped back on to the footplate the fireman muttered again “rather thee than me, lad.”

I had another night-time life of course outside the railway. My weekends and some evenings were taken up with my girl friend in Shipley and the Terry Moran Skiffle Group, in which I featured on Banjo and Vocals. We played many venues in the Bradford area and my local fame and eligibility were secured by appearances at the Grand Hotel, Harrogate, where we did two sets to give the resident band, the White Eagles Jazz Band, a fag break. The White Eagles clarinettist and leader was a Hunslet rugby star called Martin Boland.

## **Discussion**

I have presented some of this material once before, at the Critical Management Studies conference at Warwick in 2009 and in that presentation, I spent some time presenting an analysis based on the trope of Liminality and the station as an interstitial place between the contrary positioning of Light and Dark spaces. The framework seemed to me to be useful and the presentation seemed to “make sense” to the listeners and an interesting discussion took place. But really, the fact that it is possible to use these frameworks as a basis for presentation does not affect the *legitimacy* of the analysis very much. Certainly when I underwent these experiences I did not even know of the notion of liminality or of the conceptual frameworks in which that notion is embedded.

Why should performances of this kind be treated as interesting or important and why should they be treated with caution or even discounted as non-legitimate bases for knowledge? Retelling these kinds of experiences obviously qualifies as “storytelling” in the terms made acceptable by Boje (2001), Gabriel (2000) and Czarniawska (1997, 1998), but in what lies their special place or specific weakness as scholarly or pedagogic material? Must they be only regarded as “ante-narrative” in Boje’s term, as

“non-linear, incoherent, collective, unplotted and pre-narrative speculation, a bet, (out of which) a proper retrospective narrative with Beginning, Middle, and End (BME) can be constituted” (Boje, 2001: 1)?

But if it is “ante”, what is it before? And on what are the bets placed?

For these experiences are undoubtedly real if only to me because I *know* that they happened. Most of the conventional cross-checks, even between the alternative methods of data-collection are no longer viable or appropriate? What kind of cross-validation can encompass corporeal experiences, or explain why the smell of an engine in steam or of fish seeping from leaking ice-packed boxes brings back the lived experience of the station?

Is not all exposure to experience equally questionable? Is not all recall, even of interviews undertaken yesterday or last week, equally challengeable? Have these experiences been lying dormant for fifty years awaiting just the correct and most current theoretical enframing to make them important to others? Have they always been just below the surface of my conscious mind awaiting the emancipator opportunity?

Why is retelling this particular set of experiences in the way I have done today likely to be of value?

I suggest a number of justifications, none of them either hegemonic or exclusive. The first is that I have benefited from the accretion of knowledge, certainly but more specifically of experience, understanding, what we might call “accumulated wisdom” if that is not too fancy and self-interested a term. In my academic as well as my practical lives since that time, I have read many books and articles and have reflected pretty much continuously on my professional praxis so that I now feel more clearly what it is exactly that I want to say about that time and what sense it might make to others. I have worked as a sociologist, as an organisational researcher and in a variety of practical life-worlds so that I now can frame these experiences more appropriately.

So my take on what all this is about is likely I suggest to be better, not worse for the opportunity to recollect it in some tranquillity.

Secondly, I now find myself a member of a diminishing band of once-active but still practising social scientists who has endured and survived several collective epiphanies of a methodological kind and has tried more than one research style from multivariate analysis of complex data-sets to post-modernist critique, from survey research to poetry and music as insights into the organisational worlds. At the end, or nearing the end of all this, I can perhaps reflect more coherently on the knowledge gained from those methodological essays and on what might be likely to endure. This is the way I want to present this material. But I have reflected on what these experiences were teaching me and what might have been other ways to study them. But I did not have those tools then and by now these experiences are literally incorrigible.

Thirdly, *I* was there, I know stuff that those who were not alive then have not had the chance to experience. *I was* there. *I was there*. This is the story of Harrogate station as I experienced it. Challenge my knowledge base as you will. It inhabits my dreams. These at least it appears are coming back in as legitimate sources of knowledge (Case and Gosling, 2010).

Fourthly, and this is the warrant that I chiefly prefer, I present my story, heavily edited and ellipsed by memory and unsubstantiated by anything except my version of truth, as an attempt at what Schutz defined as Consociation, an attempt to make more shared what is at present only privately owned, and more comprehensive what is at present only partial, so that we can understand our possibly collective histories better. As Bob Marley declaimed “if you know yo’ history you know where (who?) yo’ comin’ from!”

Life is work in progress. Train still comin’.



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