Losing My Religion? Risks and Rewards in an At-Home Ethnography

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Work in Progress

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the heightened 'risk' – of, for example, contamination, emotional contagion, and colonising narratives – when conducting an at-home ethnography. It suggests that these risks may be counterbalanced by the benefits accruing from the intensity of gaze brought to our home working environment, as we seek to hold a paradoxical position of simultaneously "breaking in" and "breaking out" (Alvesson 2003: 176) in pursuit of "breaking ground".

Introduction

> That's me in the corner
> That's me in the spotlight
> Losing my religion
> Trying to keep up with you
> And I don't know if I can do it
> Oh no, I've said too much
> I haven't said enough
> (from REM's 'Losing My Religion')

As aspects of this paper can be characterised as a confessional tale (Van Maanen, 1988) perhaps we should begin it with what may be the greatest confession of all: we didn't conceive of this research as 'ethnographic' from the outset. Instead, just as Van Maanen (2011) argues that an ethnographic study does not start with a clear knowledge of what – if anything – of value will emerge, the first two authors were some way into our interviews and had been logging our participant observations in our journals and recording our shared conversations for some months before the value of exploring them through the writing of an "at-home" (Alvesson, 2009) ethnography became apparent.

Alvesson (2009) coined the term "at-home ethnography" to describe an ethnography conducted in one's own field of work, where the researcher has 'natural access'. Despite what he views as the risks of such an endeavour (including: career risks; political complexities; the difficulties associated with 'breaking out' and 'being native'; and the desire not to hurt or upset colleagues), Alvesson urges academics to do more of it. We were inspired to take up the challenge, at least in part, by a desire

to explore whether the tension between 'breaking out' (from the blind spots and assumptions associated with 'being native' (and in the case of an at-home ethnography, 'staying native') and 'breaking in' ('going native'), would enable new insights and 'breaking ground'.

Our study has as its focus 'academic identity' and Watson's (2011: 204) claim that:

> To talk of someone's identity surely requires that, to a reasonable extent, we *get to know* them and the context in which they live and work. [emphasis in the original]

acts as a further spur to expose ourselves to the risks and rewards of writing our research in an ethnographic style.

Our second confession: we submitted the abstract for this paper several months ago at a point when the risks – and particularly the personal risks – associated with an at-home ethnography seemed rather more apparent than the rewards. In a paper presented to last year's 'Work, Organisation and Ethnography Symposium' (Clarke & Jarvis, 2010) we began to explore the emotional rollercoaster and consequences of undertaking an at-home ethnography, as we fell in and (more frequently) out of love with our profession and the challenges posed by the process as we were constantly prompted to reflect on our own academic identities, and ourselves positioned in the simultaneous roles of researchers and researched.

Several months on and having struggled with this a bit longer, we are perhaps a little more confident in our belief that there may also be some rewards! In this paper, we use our study amongst business school academics in our home institution and in a number of other UK universities, and the sense and interpretations we make of it, to explore the notion of an at-home ethnography and the contribution the approach may make to our understanding of "how things work" (Watson, 2011: 202) in our own field of work.

To help the reader make sense of what follows, we outline here our broader research study of which this forms a part; an interpretive study carried out in the business schools of 8 UK universities and comprising 54 interviews conducted between May

2009 and June 2010, the vast majority conducted prior to the change in Government which occurred in May 2010. We chose business schools as our specific population, and in particular organization studies departments because they are particularly concerned with notions studying other organizations using notions such as managerialism, professionalism, change, identity, gender and power and yet, do not always introspect well on their own labours in a similar way (Keenoy, 2005; Worthington & Hodgson, 2005).

Managerialism has settled into universities under a variety of different audit guises: student satisfaction surveys (NSS), quality assessment audits (QAA) and of course the research assessment exercise (RAE)/research excellence framework (REF) which competitively determines the amount of research funding that universities receive. In order to conform to this measure and achieve 'success' in this intellectual competition academics are required to publish a specified number of articles in prescribed and rated peer review journals. This mechanism has been described as an 'artefact' whose 'efficacy is widely contested' although 'its impact is undoubted' Keenoy (2005:304). The supremacy of this performance process has been all powerful in shaping both institutional and individual behaviours, commodifying those who have the greatest publication records and attaching significant market transfer rates to those people as institutions vie for a claim to their publications at the moment when RAE scores are measured. Keenoy notes that 'whilst many comply with its demands, the RAE remains a distasteful if not an alien discourse'(2005:305), which far from extending and developing knowledge is often criticised as impoverishing it where academics have become 'more concerned with output than with making a 'significant contribution to knowledge' (Worthington, 2005:106).

In this paper we focus on the findings from the 'at-home' interviews (12 in our home institution) to provide some context for our struggle with 'losing our religion', since in terms of writing ethnographically, this is the site in which we have been immersed as observing participants (Moeran, 2009). However, whilst not immersed in the everyday experience of the other institutions we have been privileged to visit, we are part of a broader academic community of organization scholars and it is often exploring the similarities and differences between the broader community and our immediate 'home' that facilitates 'breaking out'.

Our emphasis in this paper is on the methodological challenges of writing ethnography on our 'home' work environment. For example, on the tensions between notions of "at home" and "ethnography", which at first glance seem almost irreconcilable. And we go on to argue that a reflexive engagement with these tensions – between, for example, researcher/object and researched/subject; 'lived experience' and ethnography (Van Maanen, 2011; Watson, 2011); and 'breaking in' and 'breaking out' (Alvesson, 2009; Brannan et al, 2007) – facilitates a researcher stance of 'detached involvement' (Stacey and Griffin, 2005). 'Involvement' is unavoidable since participating in a joint activity or task inevitably provokes emotion but if one's thinking is too involved or emotional then it cannot qualify as research. Reflection on the experience creates the space for detaching sufficiently (though never completely) to allow this:

> In relation to human action, then, the approach and thinking called for is paradoxically detached and involved at the same time.
>
> (Stacey and Griffin, 2005: 9)

We have described the insights that can arise from holding this paradox as 'breaking ground'. Here, exposure to these tensions provokes a period of struggle and the risk of destruction (Stacey, 2000) at both a personal and professional level. Kauffman (1993) writing from an evolutionary complexity perspective, argues that successful species must risk extinction if they are to find new 'fitness peaks' Assuming, as both 'natives' and 'burglars' (Alvesson, 2009), we can emerge scorched but tempered, the experience may light sparks for new lines of enquiry.

Literature Review

Boyle and Parry (2007) propose that 'exposing the vulnerable self through autobiographical process can be fraught with personal and professional risk' and may sometimes be 'considered the most dangerous fieldwork of all' (p.186). Alvesson (2003; 2009) has written on the 'risks' and problems of at-home ethnography[i], which he describes as:

> a study and a text in which the researcher-author describes a cultural setting to which s/he has a 'natural access' and in which s/he is an active participant, more or less on equal terms with other participants.
>
> <div align="right">Alvesson (2009: 159)</div>

These include the risks to one's career; the political complexities; the difficulty of 'breaking out' from blind spots and assumptions; and the desire not to hurt or upset colleagues; difficulties associated with "being native" and with being "close-up" whilst still finding "closure". Alvesson (2003) characterises this issue of 'being native' as having difficulty "breaking out" where "the runaway researcher struggles in order to create sufficient distance in order to get perspective on lived reality" (p. 176), which is in contrast to ethnographies conducted away from one's 'home' environment where the researcher is a "burglar" struggling to "break-in".

However, we suggest these ideas are conservative and somewhat unitarist, for example focusing on the 'between' differences of settings whilst offering scant recognition to differences 'within' the same setting. We might argue that it is precisely its danger that attracts us to studying our own workplace for if academics cannot take such risks who can?

We also add to Alvesson's list, the risks of emotional contagion ('catching' the emotions of others, e.g. Hatfield et al, 2004), contamination (where the extraordinary begins to feel everyday) and colonising narratives (where the ideas and narrative accounts of others begin to overwhelm our own sense of self as academic) which are also largely overlooked in Alvesson's (2003; 2009) accounts.

Emotional contagion (Hatfield *et al*, 2004) is the idea that we can 'catch' the emotions of others, which in turn influences our own emotions. Interviews, informal conversations and observant participation (Moeran, 2009) tend to highlight imperfections and apparent contradictions, disrupting the well-ordered accounts we seek to weave. This is perhaps exacerbated as not only are we (hopefully) 'trusted insiders', but participants in the interviews are self-selecting and all have something (usually critical) to say. As we may be more prone to emotional contagion, so too may being native leave us more at risk of contamination, of being and staying too

close (Alvesson, 2009) and of failing to escape from our taken-for-granted assumptions (Schein, 1984) and/or our home theoretical base.

If contamination comes from staying too close (Alvesson, 2009), the colonising narratives may suggest an even greater intimacy, brought about by the increased intensity and frequency of tales of the extraordinary that emerge particularly during the interview process.

In this way, Stacey and Griffin (2005) suggest, traditional research methods such as interviews can distort our understanding of organizations and organizing through their tendency to emphasise the extraordinary at the expense of the everyday. They suggest that only by studying the everyday from a position of 'detached involvement' and immersion in the 'living present' can we begin to notice the patterns of interaction at play. This perhaps is another way of framing Van Maanen's (2011: 221) observation that "organizational ethnographers do not study organizations, they study in organizations", with all the implications this has for our methodological choices. Thus an at-home ethnography as described by Alvesson (2009: 160) which:

> emphasizes the careful documentation and interpretation of those social events that the researcher witnesses, and the analysis does not necessarily emphasize the personal meaning or strongly subjective aspects of the research/event/experience.

remains distinct from autoethnography and more autobiographical approaches. Yet as insiders, even taking an ethnographic stance, we are present in a different way in our 'home' workplace. For example, we cannot perform the ritual of 'joining' (e.g. Shotter, 2010; Van Maanen, 2010, 2011; Watson, 2011) when we are already there and there is no pretence attached to being unable to leave – at least no more than for our co-workers. As at-home ethnographers, nor can we deny the networks of relationships and patterns of interaction we have already formed (Stacey, 2000). We suggest that these tensions and role confusions make an important contribution to 'breaking ground'.

Methodology

As with most ethnographic research, we have employed multiple methods, combining interviews with informal conversations, self-reflexive conversations and with being

observing participants our home environment. Alvesson (2003) suggests that 'at-home ethnographies' can most accurately be described as those where the study focuses most narrowly on the researcher's own workplace. By this definition the 'at-home' element of our study comprises being present in our workplace as an 'observing participant' (Moeran, 2009), shared conversations between the authors and journal entries covering a period from May 2009 to the present, together with 12 interviews with colleagues in our home department.

In addition, we have completed, transcribed, coded (using NVIVO) and analysed a further 42 interviews with academics in other UK business schools. This approach has allowed us to locate the place of our own home in the broader community of UK business school academics. As discussed below, we believe contextualising our at-home ethnography in this way has contributed to our capacity for "breaking out" and "breaking ground", throwing into relief some at least of our taken-for-granted assumptions and ideas.

We might also suggest that none of our research team is yet truly native to our current shared home, although two of us have spent most of our working lives in UKHE (and one of these is 'at-home' in more than one institution) and this too has had a bearing on our enquiry. Van Maanen (2011) notes the scope ethnography can offer for working from different perspectives and whilst we share some common heritage in the broad church of critical poststructuralist perspectives, emotions and emotion work, we have developed through different academic traditions. Surfacing and working through these conceptual differences has sometimes been challenging, and we believe it is an important ingredient in our reflections that encourages a deepening of reflexivity (Boje and Tyler, 2009).

In the sections below we begin to explore some of the challenges of breaking out and breaking in. We have chosen to take tensions between agency (often perceived by our academic community to be limited) and autonomy (typically seen to remain high, despite the encroachment of "a managerialist agenda"), since as a topic, this certainly meets Alvesson's (2003; 2009) criterion of producing an extended set of incidents to explore.

"That's me in the corner", or the difficulty of breaking out

Van Maanen (2010: 231) proposes of ethnography:

> One might argue that it is the very marginality of the craft – being on the edge of (at least) two worlds – that makes it valuable to the field of organization and management. Much movement in either direction might well neutralize its strength.

or that "one's learning, insight, sensitivity, and eventual powers to represent are advanced by being clueless at the beginning of a study" (Van Maanen, 2011:220). So perhaps then our first challenge in undertaking an at-home ethnographic study is how far we can 'unlearn' and then 'relearn' the ropes, in an attempt to escape from our taken-for-granted assumptions.

At the core of these assumptions is that as a profession academics have a level of autonomy that may be unrivalled. In our formal interviews 'autonomy', along with 'the REF', crops up in almost every one and even many of those who were otherwise rather disillusioned, cynical and/or critical of their situation still claimed 'autonomy as something 'unique' about the profession. As observing participants we hear it scattered like confetti here, there and everywhere. And even if it is seen to be reducing:

> there is quite a long way to go before the freedoms are eviscerated, we still enjoy enormous privilege in terms of degrees of autonomy and space
>
> (Male, Reader/Professor)

> the degree to which you are in charge of your own work patterns and time is quite unbelievable really
>
> (Male, Senior Lecturer)

> I think everybody comes to work at the university because they value the fact that they don't have to comply as much with a predefined idea of what you should think
>
> (Female, Senior Lecturer)

> freedom to make those professional judgements that make a difference in the moment. Only you can know because only you are there. Twenty years ago there was time to do a lot more of that than there is now
>
> (Male, Reader/Professor)

Yet we rarely explore what we mean by 'autonomy', let alone spend time challenging the assumption.

We experienced the difficulties of breaking out and challenging such a dearly held assumption as being not only immensely challenging but also emotionally draining.

> My experience of making a conscious effort to break out was a mixed one and of course it is impossible to know whether you've been as successful as you think you have! In some respects though, it was easier than I thought – perhaps after all those years as a consultant, I've developed quite an affinity for life on the margins. But in other ways it was emotionally harder than I thought. Newness to the profession proved perhaps a double-edged sword, for whilst I don't feel I've been fully encultured into the academic life yet and still find myself getting drawn back into consultancy mode when I'm feeling discontented, in some ways that makes it feel riskier and more precarious – what if I go too far and can't make it back? And it does feel different – discomforting and troubling - when we know we want to make our findings public. That aspect of it is very different from keeping a journal that hopefully only I will ever read.
>
> <div align="right">Journal entry</div>

"That's me in the spotlight", or the risks of being and staying native

> While the conventional researcher (with an anthropological orientation) may ask, 'What in hell do *they* think they are up to?', the at-home ethnographer must ask, 'What in hell do *we* think we are up to?' [emphasis in the original]
>
> <div align="right">Alvesson (2009: 162)</div>

If the hard work of 'breaking out' is concerned with 'unlearning' the ropes then, we suggest, the experience of 'breaking in' again may be reshaped and reframed through this 'hard work' of constantly paying attention, of seeking to uncover, position and reposition themes and the influence this came to have in shaping the ways in which we feel about the profession we have chosen to join. As Van Maanen (2011) acknowledges, a feature of an ethnographic account is its ability to accommodate theorising from multiple perspectives and traditions, so Alvesson (2009) stresses the particular importance of this in an at-home ethnography, if we are to avoid the double risk of being physically and theoretically at-home.

Studying our own profession provoked deeper questions for us around agency and structure, and as a consequence we began to imagine how far our academic selves were determined, and therefore rendered powerless by, encroaching managerial structures, a notion that was often reproduced by those we interviewed who asked rhetorically 'but what can we do about it?', usually coming up with the response: nothing.

> I voice that where I can but it is very difficult to get things changed
>
> <div align="right">(Male, Reader/Professor)</div>

> there is absolutely nothing we can do about it in any concerted way

(Male, Reader/Professor

Nowhere was this more obvious than in relation to the REF. Few academics we have observed and interviewed have much that is positive to say about the value of the REF as a measure of research quality. For example:

> it really is publish or perish and I know people who are really being bent out of shape having to publish in journals they shouldn't be publishing in
> (Male, Reader/Professor)

> you can only get that [research output], if you protect you own sort of area, protect the time you have to do that it, which provides another tension with those other members of staff whose main motivation may lie in the teaching aspect
> (Female, Senior Lecturer)

A lmost without exception participants in our research have expressed strong resistance to the RAE/REF and Worthington and Hodgson (2005: 96) note the claims in the literature that "the negative impact of the RAE and teaching audits on the academy" has caused concern amongst vice-chancellors, as well among academics and trade unions. Yet, our research bears out, few of those who have any pretensions to being research active actively and explicitly resist. And where resistance does take place, the forms most often adopted "are ineffective because they are mainly covert and also *unethical* because they include practices that result in *'peer exploitation'*." (ibid: 97). And those who do chose to make a stand, may regret it:

> he gave this talk on the politics of higher education, 'I've got to do this, I've got to do that, got to get in the right journals and sleep with the right editors'...I really disliked it. It just seemed so cynical and so I ignored it and I shouldn't have...you can choose, you can find your path, you can see what you like, what suits you
> (Male, Reader/Professor)

What did emerge though, was a strong sense of identification with the 'profession' and the notion of the academy as increasingly hampered in its effectiveness by the machinations of its managerialist institutions. A strong sense of the lost vocation, of a shared purpose that is eaten away by day-to-day contingencies of working in an institution where the professional and the independence of mind (s)he embodies is seen as a threat.

This sense of the lost vocation is documented across a range of public service professions (e.g. Coupland *et al*, 2008; Davies & Thomas, 2002; Jarvis, 2004; Thomas & Davies, 2005) The difference perhaps amongst academics is the external

challenge we believe we face, including from other professions, to "keep it real" and not a "purely academic" irrelevance.

By being native the stories that others share with us constantly gnaw at our own insecurities, and the choices we make, which in turn shape and reshape our own narratives, in a constant spiral of checking and rechecking who we are and what we do. When we find ourselves exposed with increased intensity to these tales of our fellow natives that challenge carefully-constructed, airbrushed images of "successful" selves (Ybema, 2009), it forces us to confront our own carefully presented selves and confronts us with a vision of our profession we may find far from entrancing.

Thus our loyalties to the profession are challenged at the same time that our own insecurities and fragile and precarious academic selves (Collinson, 2003) are particularly exposed. As Gabriel (2010: 769) writes:

> I doubt that there are many professions whose members are so relentlessly subjected to measurement, criticism and rejection as academics, exposing them to deep insecurities regarding their worth, their identity and their standing.

Not only, we suggest, does an at-home ethnography risk amplifying these insecurities and challenging our aspirational selves (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009) but we may also find ourselves colonised by these narratives. As one of the authors writes:

> I also wonder how much of my thought is personal, how much of this have other people said to me in my 'other' role as researcher. I can no longer retrieve my thoughts before we embarked on the research – have I been unconsciously colonised by others' narratives? As both researcher and researched, object and subject, the endless reflections feel as though I am in a hall of mirrors at the fairground – where does it end and where did it start?

As well as its potential challenge to our aspirational selves, Alvesson (2009:170) points out, that at-home ethnography "is not for the mainstream, organizational person eager to conform to workplace norms and be loyal." But what makes it feel so different from deep reflective practice, which as critical scholars we would claim as our bread and butter?

Perhaps it is something to do with intent. Van Maanen (2011:224) suggests "there is simply no such thing as ethnography until it is written." And, we would clarify, written for public consumption, which brings with it risks and responsibilities.

Losing my religion

> Ethnography shines a light, sometimes a very strange one, on what people are up to and such doings are rarely if ever predictable or in line with what either 'current theory' or 'the experts' might say. In organizational worlds, ethnographic work often takes issue with managerial claims, with worker accounts, with received wisdom, with elegant models …
>
> <div align="right">Van Maanen (2011: 229)</div>

Individually, many of our shared conversations and interviews left us with a warm glow and a feeling of connection with a kindred spirit. So why do we talk about 'losing my religion'? And what do we mean by it?

As the adage goes: "speak of the devil and he will appear", the devil here being the bringing together of so many stories of the extraordinary that they began to seem ordinary. Indeed, as observing participants (Moeran, 2009) in our home environment, we started to experience them everywhere. And whilst in many cases our managers and our institutions don't come out of them well, more often than we might expect, nor do our fellow professionals. Whilst others (e.g. Sparkes, 2007; Worthington & Hodgson, 2005) have written of peer exploitation, these accounts run counter to received wisdom and can take us by surprise.

Many participants tell extreme, and typically unfavourable, stories and accounts of their experience of working as an academic in UKHE, with the notion of a loss of autonomy in the face of encroaching managerialism particularly rife amongst colleagues in the post-1992 sector (including our own home) and the distorting demands of the REF an almost universal concern. Whilst the risk of research participants painting their organizations in a more favourable light is recognized as a potential peril in much organizational research, we found no such problems with our fellow academics. Remembering that most of them work from a critical management perspective, this is perhaps not surprising! Instead participants were all too happy to recount tales that painted their organizations (and sometimes our colleagues) as increasingly hellish, whilst at the same time acknowledging and valorising the heavenly and 'unique' autonomy we perceive academics have in relation to our work.

Perhaps our research participants were falling prey to that other scourge of the qualitative researcher: the tendency to tell the researcher what one thinks (s)he wants to hear. Or maybe our combined role confusion (colleagues we interviewed often commented on the strange experience of sitting on the other side of the microphone as the subject of research, just as we found it disconcerting researching in our own home), created a more open and accommodating interview 'space of possibility' (McMaster, 1996). A proportion of the content has nonetheless taken us (unpleasantly) by surprise.

Many of the narratives tell tales of gendered practices that are validated by observations and by document searches. Linked to this, for even our citizenship practices are often gendered, are narratives suggesting the erosion of collegial practices and of working such long hours that even sleep, let alone leisure time, becomes a luxury:

> I find it very disappointing when other people won't even think about doing something because they know they're not getting rewarded...supporting that quite prominent idea of academic identity...to get anywhere you need to be, you need to say 'no' and be very protective and strategic about what you do.
>
> (Female, Senior Lecturer)

> the one thing I was quite surprised about is about how very much this job is about self-interest; and some people are far more self-interested than others – don't get me wrong – I don't think it's true for everybody, but how you have to really look after your own interests otherwise you get those of us who are more collectivist mind who get put upon. And those who are not collectivist don't get put upon; they just do what they want to do.
>
> (Male, Senior Lecturer)

In the pre-1992 sector, we hear narratives describing teaching as "a necessary evil" and other participants describing how they disguise the time and effort they put into their teaching in case they are not seen to be taking their research seriously enough. Whilst even in our own home where institutional rhetoric places the student experience above all else, those who do more of it feel it is undervalued and unrewarded.

The stories have such intensity and resonance that we struggle not to find ourselves overwhelmed by them and notice that our own emotions are sensitised and heightened. During the interview phase in particular, we fear we are "losing our

religion" as these extreme stories reach a crescendo of intensity and our faith in our profession comes under severe challenge; in a piece of "counter-intuitive learning" (Watson, 2011:212), we begin to recognize that in spite of the enjoyment of our individual interviews, the overall experience of researching our own profession has more often felt like a cold shower of passivity and inaction.

> I've spent the last few days immersed in our research transcripts and am struggling to make sense of my emotions. My memory [borne out by field notes] of conducting the interviews is that it didn't feel like work! Indeed it did feel rather self-indulgent, more like an extended set of 'corridor conversions', many of them with people I wouldn't run into on our corridor. But now I've got them altogether in one place and am trying to make sense of them, there is as much irritation as empathy. Why do so many of us, in our day-to-day behaviour seem to just keep our heads down and get on with it?
>
> Journal entry

The entry ends at this point as its author would like to continue working in the profession and recognizes that she also does not want to hurt or upset colleagues by succumbing to two of the risks of at-home ethnography (Alvesson, 2009). It does indeed feel a very vulnerable place to be.

We suggest that it is this vulnerability – both personal and professional – that comes with losing our religion that is an essential part of 'breaking out', for without it would we be able to dissociate or unaffiliate sufficiently to make any claims for detached involvement (Stacey & Griffin, 2005)?

Conclusion: *Oh no, I've said too much, I haven't said enough*

However, we have also found another side to this experience; in challenging our idealised, aspirational selves (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009), the intensity of gaze that accompanied the interviews threw the differences between our 'fantasies' and the 'realities' we experienced into sharp relief, making it difficult to 'turn a blind eye' (Steiner, 1979) to the contradictions. We suggest, therefore, a third and paradoxical position where we propose at-home ethnography makes a real contribution: "breaking ground". We characterise 'breaking ground' as accepting our status as insiders whilst digging around to try to unearth something more of the "taken for granted assumptions, blind spots, taboos" (Alvesson, 2003: 183) of our home environment.

Stacey and Griffin (2005) describe this researcher position as "detached involvement" and seek it in deep reflection on everyday experience. And whilst we would regard ourselves as reflexive practitioners who ordinarily pay attention to the cultures and sub cultures of our own working environment, we have still experienced something of the "culture shock" that Agar (1996: 100, cited Cunliffe, 2010: 235) suggests for ethnographers "comes from the sudden immersion in the lifeways of a group different from yourself. Suddenly you do not know the rules anymore." Or in this case, questioning whether we really do know the rules as well as we thought.

What additional ground do we feel we have broken through writing this at-home ethnography that we might not have unearthed through our study anyway? Or are we simply telling the story in a different way? We suggest the tensions associated with being simultaneously 'burglar' and 'native' have perhaps heightened our sensitivity to the contradictions inherent in out home work environment, and to some of the ironies of the way as critical management scholars our resistance to encroaching managerialism in our own workplace has been so weak.

In addition to providing us with accounts of academics responding to organizational and managerial transformations, the observing participant stance of the at-home ethnographer has further highlighted the contribution that narratives of the extraordinary or extreme may make to our own understanding of the place we call home, by placing them in the context of everyday experience.

And the personal rewards? T S Eliot expresses it eloquently in his poem 'The Four Quartets':

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.
> Little Gidding (the Fourth Quartet) V

This then may be the true value of writing an at-home ethnography.

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[i] In his earlier (2003) paper, Alvesson uses the term "self ethnography" to describe what he later names "at-home ethnography". He suggests that the term "self ethnography" is open to misinterpretation and can promote confusion. For the purposes of this paper, therefore, we have stuck with the later term: "at-home ethnography".

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