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Meaning breaking space.

Studying organizations ethnographically means contemplating how organizational members attach meaning to experiences (Ybema, Yanow, Wels and Kamsteeg, 2009: p.8). But what if this meaning is shattered and disrupted, and no more or less collective understandings arise? What if organizational members do not strive for such understandings and seem to dwell in ambiguity? Is the ex parte focus on sensemaking a structural flaw in the ethnographic approach, or can we make sense of meaning breaking as well? The purpose of this paper is to explore the meaning breaking effect of several examples of cultural practices and describe what ethnographic research could contribute to our understanding of such a process.

Meaning breaking is understood as the deliberate disruption of cultural understandings, leaving ambiguity and possibly despair, without replacing one cultural frame of reference by another. Cultural frames, like organizational culture, offer belief systems with corresponding mindsets and ruling habits, embodied by practices and artifacts that are essential for members to help making sense of experiences (Watson 2001: 20-23). Cultural practices, like organizational rituals, are infused with meaning and cannot be properly understood by simply looking at the action (Martin 2002: 65-71). It is symbolism, both actual imagery (like flags) and deeper metaphors (like mythical tales), that gives rise to a collective understanding of 'the way things are' (Gabriel 2000: 87-109). Thus cultural practices and artifacts are reproducing symbolic meanings in different contexts, with its workings far beyond organizational boundaries.

Meaning breaking takes place outside these cultural frames, in what Foucault called "heterotopia" (1970, 1998): space for difference and defiance, where there is no tendency towards homogeneity or unity. According to Kornberger and Clegg "heterotopia could be a space for experimentation and temptation, where discussions about existing orders of things and discourses can happen" and "a space for new [polyphonic] languages [...], where one can hear voices that are normally not heard, where these dissonant voices are multiplied", moreover "a space for new identities, in which we can play different roles, be what one normally wouldn't, be many persons, swap genders" (2003: pp.86-87). Understanding heterotopia as meaning breaking space can be the objective of ethnographic study, as ethnographic fieldwork, being immersed in the complexity of organizational relations, offers the opportunity to reveal different, even contradicting, understandings of the same event,

working out situational interpretations of organizational behavior from different angles (Hegelund, 2005).

Studying heterotopia means looking for cultural practices that are disrupting understandings, rather than reproducing meaning. The proposed paper builds on (participatory) experience with, and zooms in on online imagery, documents, and filmed material available on three of such practices. In the activity "Parkour" regular public space is, in the minds and movements of its practitioners, transformed into a track for acrobatic 'free-running' (Baviton 2007, Brown 2013). Similarly, in Caribbean carnivals streets are turned into a festive playground in which participants act out subjectivities that in ordinary life they would not (Riggio 2004, Nurse 1999). Finally, in Gay Pride events people can be witnessed to temporarily swap gender (while cross-dressing), and even sexual preference, as suggested by t-shirts reading: "Gay for a Day" (Goerke 2012, Hodge 2010).

These are not practices that take place within organizations; however, they deliberately disrupt the normal flow of events, having an impact on organizational life. They exemplify the experimental space of heterotopia in which different voices are made audible and in which the understanding of identity, role, and even gender is deliberately made ambiguous. This resembles using the "outsider within" (Collins 1998), reminding us of the 'bi-focality' of migrants: holding on, and at the same time piercing through, the ruling habits of both their host and home countries, not fusing them, nor replacing the one by the other (Hall 2005, Vertovec 2001).

Globalization, specifically new technologies of communication and transportation, makes us all experience such cultural shiftings in meaning making (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, Morgan 2001). In contemporary "liquid life" meaning has become something like a jigsaw puzzle shattered to pieces (Bauman 2005, 2004). A single person can derive meaning from a choice of different far-away cultural spheres. As a result, modern-day individuals are, with some agility, continuously negotiating an idiosyncratic sense of belonging and understanding. This creates space for playful meaning breaking to a much larger extend than we have seen before only in the periphery of organized life (e.g. experimental arts). Wherever we are (en)able(d) to bring into play our meaning breaking mindsets we can 'un-normalize' the slothful, lazy habits of culture frames, like in Parkour, carnival, and Gay Pride.

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