APPEALING WORK: AN INVESTIGATION OF HOW ETHNOGRAPHIC TEXTS CONVINCE*

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This paper examines how written research accounts based on ethnography appeal to readers to find them convincing. In particular, it highlights the role of rhetoric in the readers' interaction with and interpretation of the accounts. Extending relevant work in the literatures of organization studies, anthropology and literary criticism, the paper develops three dimensions—authenticity, plausibility and criticality—central to the process of convincing. Further, through the analysis of a sample of ethnographic articles, it discloses the particular writing practices and more general strategies that make claims on readers to engage the texts and to accept that these three dimensions have been achieved. Through authenticity, ethnographic texts appeal to readers to accept that the researcher was indeed present in the field and grasped how the members understood their world. Strategies to achieve authenticity include: particularizing everyday life, delineating the relationship between the researcher and organization members, depicting the disciplined pursuit and analysis of data, and qualifying personal biases. Through plausibility, ethnographic texts make claims on readers to accept that the findings make a distinctive contribution to issues of common concern. Plausibility is accomplished by strategies that normalize unorthodox methodologies, recruit the reader, legitimate atypical situations, smooth contestable assertions, build dramatic anticipation, and differentiate the findings. Finally, through criticality, ethnographic texts endeavor to probe readers to re-examine the taken-for-granted assumptions that underly their work. Strategies to achieve criticality include: carving out room to reflect, provoking the recognition and examination of differences, and enabling readers to imagine new possibilities. The empirical analyses, which highlight both the rhetorical and substantive aspects of convincing, suggest that at a minimum ethnographic texts must achieve both authenticity and plausibility—that is, they must convey the vitality and uniqueness of the field situation and also build their case for the particular contribution of the findings to a disciplinary area of common interest. These analyses also suggest that the most provocative task and promising potential of ethnography is the use of richly-grounded data to not only reflect on the members' world, but more importantly to provoke an examination of the readers' prevailing assumptions and beliefs.
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As in the social sciences generally, in the field of organization studies, accepted standards and practices exist for writing and for assessing the convincingness of written work which falls within the purview of normal science; that is work which adopts the positivist perspective and employs quantitative methodology (cf. Campbell and Stanley 1963, Cook and Campbell 1979, Kerlinger 1973). Some researchers using qualitative data have integrated their work into this perspective and have adopted these generally-accepted standards and practices. Specifically, they argue that qualitative data can be "triangulated" with quantitative data (Jick 1984, Mintzberg 1979) in order to generate theory which can later be tested more rigorously by quantitative approaches. However, when the interpretive perspective of science is adopted, as in much of the work based on ethnography, the generally-accepted standards and practices for writing and assessing the convincingness of this work become increasingly difficult to apply.

Relying on an interpretive perspective of social science, this paper examines how ethnographic works convince.[1] The discussion is informed by a long tradition of scholarship in the humanities, especially literature and the discipline of literary criticism (cf. Booth 1961, 1967; Iser 1989), which rhetorically analyzes written work as "texts" to be constructed and interpreted. In the last decade, a growing number of theorists in different fields such as philosophy (Rorty 1982), anthropology (Clifford 1983; Geertz 1973, 1988; Marcus and Fischer 1986), psychology (Bruner 1990) and organization studies (Van Maanen 1988a, 1988b) are embracing the work in literary criticism to explore the rhetorical dimension of convincing in the written texts of their respective fields. That is, they examine how convincing emerges not only as a result of what message the text conveys, but also of how the text conveys that message.

Viewing the written work as "text" highlights how rhetoric and the interactive researcher-text and reader-text relationships are inseparable from the discussion of convincing. For example, through this metaphor, research products become texts which researchers develop and readers interpret. Ethnographers develop texts by entering the field setting and converting the stream of field experiences into their written form, initially through fieldnotes and later through manuscripts which are read by colleagues (including journal reviewers) and others (Bruner 1986, Rorty 1982).[2] Readers interpret texts actively by disclosing meanings in the text in light of their own background and experiences (Berger and Luckmann 1966, Geertz 1973). In this respect, meaning created by the author does not reside "out there"—objectively and independently in the text waiting for readers to understand it—but rather is disclosed in the reading process.

The fact that readers interpret texts actively creates a fundamental asymmetry between the reader and the text. That is, once produced, the text intervenes between the author and reader, creating a level of independence from the author.[3] Readers do not necessarily disclose the same meanings in the text that the author intended (Ricoeur, 1976). Asymmetry comes into play, then, in the dissimilarity of individual experiences brought to the reading by different readers. The intended readers, steeped in their own personal and intellectual contexts, engage and interpret the text by relating their reading to these contexts.[4] While there may be some overlap between the experience-base of the text and that of the readers, some nonalignment always remains.

[1] The interpretive perspective is based on the assumption that individuals use symbolic forms such as ideas and concepts to give meaning to and to structure their social experiences. Researchers focus on understanding the meaning of these contextually-grounded social experiences from the viewpoints of the actors (Berger and Luckmann 1966, Burrell and Morgan 1979). That is, they interpret the ways in which actors make sense of their experiences by examining the meanings constructed in light of the situation (Schutz 1976a). As such, this perspective accords greater importance to the ideas, concepts, beliefs, etc.—the language which actors use to convey meaning—than does traditional research which focuses primarily on behavior (Agar 1980, Bruner 1990, Rabinow and Sullivan 1987).

[2] Ricoeur (1976, 1981) examines how social action assumes the properties of a text and suggests that researchers analyze human action, "read" it to disclose the meanings, just as interpreters have analyzed texts for centuries.

[3] Theorists differ with regard to the level of independence that they accord between the author and text. Indeed for some whom Rorty (1982) has termed "strong textualists," the author, including his or her intentions for the written work, disappears altogether (Foucault 1979, Derrida 1981). While we by no means take the opposite position that the text is a perfect proxy for the intentions and interpretation of the author, we position ourselves as "weak textualists," acknowledging a degree of independence but preserving some role for the author who, however disguised, is always present (Booth 1961).

[4] It should be noted that for the "strong textualists" the historical and cultural milieu so dominates, that it will result in the reader unilaterally imposing a meaning onto the text, a "grid" in Foucault's terminology (Foucault 1973).

Finally, the metaphor of the text suggests that because all texts are addressed to an audience, that is, are intended to communicate, they are rhetorical (Burke 1950, Booth 1961, Iser 1978). A potential public is created within the language and organization of the text by the "relation that the writing adopts to its possible reception" (Conroy 1985, p. 1) as a part of the rhetorical process of mutual intellectual assertion and argument mediated through the written word (Booth 1961, 1967; Burke 1967). Whatever the audience, the text becomes rhetorical as soon as its subject matter is thought of and crafted as something that can be made public (Booth 1961).

The above discussion emphasizes that reading is an interactive process in which readers not only receive the text and its appeals to engage it and find it convincing, but also act on the text to create interpretations. Furthermore, these challenges of convincingness cannot be separated from the writing practices which bear on the readers' interaction with and interpretation of the research product. These facts raise two general questions for understanding how ethnographic texts convince. First, how do *researchers* in their ethnographic texts convince readers that the findings are credible? Second, how do *readers* convince themselves that the interpretations are credible and worth paying attention to, especially when multiple interpretations are possible? These are the questions addressed in the remaining sections of this paper. The next section explores convincing and its strong rhetorical component. Then, extending the existing literature, we develop three major dimensions of convincing for ethnographic work: authenticity, plausibility and criticality. In the following section we conduct an analysis of three empirical articles based on ethnography to examine how they convince as texts; that is, what are the particular strategies employed to make appeals to readers to accept that authenticity, plausibility and criticality have been achieved.

Convincing

Whether or not readers consider an account convincing depends to a great extent on whether researchers can persuade their audiences that their findings are worth paying attention to, worth taking into account (Lincoln and Guba 1985). In the positivist tradition of science, it is assumed that adherence to the established standards of methodological rigor that promote accuracy, universality, and researcher independence will yield results of facts that are true and able to speak for themselves.

A number of researchers have begun to identify ways in which writing practices convey to readers a sense of methodological correctness and make appeals to the truth of their findings. For example, methodological correctness is intimated in scientific manuscripts through the organization of the text into distinct progressive categories (e.g., "introduction," "methods," "results," and "discussion") which create the image of a linear research process that was carefully conceived, ordered and flawlessly executed (Knorr-Cetina 1981). Appeals to accept the achievement of researcher independence are made through methodological descriptions which offer residual accounts of the research process, deliberately forgetting much of the negotiations an socially constructed interpretations that are interwoven throughout the research process (Knorr-Cetina 1981). This is also achieved through the use of the quasi-passive voice which omits the agent and which standardizes and externalizes procedures (Gephart 1986). McClosky (1985) points out that models generated by the research of several noted economists are really "nonornamental" metaphors whose linguistic economy gives the air of presenting the plain, unvarnished truth.

Writing practices thus demonstrate consistency with the audience's expectations regarding method and findings, implying that convincing is achieved when the text is

isomorphic with readers' assumptions. However, other work suggests different criteria for convincing and a more active role for the readers in their interaction with the text. For example, Gephart (1986) indicates in the presentation of numerical findings that some "varnishing" is always present in their portrayal; he points out that the creation of quantitative significance is rhetorical and involves active reader participation. Specifically, adjectives and adverbs are used to engage readers to make particular meaning of the achieved numerical values as being, for example, "substantial" or "remarkably high." Similarly, Davis (1971) suggests that to be worth paying attention to, research findings must exercise a particular effect on the assumption-ground of their audience. The latter must come to see it as rebutting, to a degree, accepted thinking on a topic. This is rhetorically achieved through statements such as "it has long been thought ..." and "we have seen instead that ...." Convincing is achieved by generating a particular balance of novelty and familiarity. Similarly, Gephart (1988, 1986) points to the writing practices of creating lacunae and "next stepping" to portray the findings as adding to accepted thinking.

In the last decade, the rhetorical component of ethnographic research has received growing attention in the fields of anthropology and organization studies (Clifford 1983, Geertz 1988, Marcus 1980, Marcus and Cushman 1982, Van Maanen 1988b). For these and other researchers working in the interpretive tradition, the issue of convincing raises some intriguing challenges. How does one convince readers that knowledge or a "finding" is worth paying attention to when it is (a) developed from a field-dependent situation incorporating a particular social-historical context and the personal realities of the researchers as well as those actors they study (Rabinow and Sullivan 1987), (b) when it is offered as an interpretation rather than "absolute knowledge" that seeks the accurate and definitive account of a particular system (Diesing 1971, Marcus and Fischer 1986, Ricoeur 1981, Van Maanen 1988b) and (c) when it provides readers with a reality portrayed through description and conceptually-mediated analysis of social experiences rather than a depiction of reality itself (Fox Keller 1985, Geertz 1988, Marcus and Fischer 1986, Van Maanen 1988b). From those examining ethnography's rhetorical component emerges the conclusion that ethnographic writing garners its ability to convince by building authorial authority (cf. Geertz 1988), but in a manner different from that associated with discovering and portraying facts that are true. Instead, the ethnographic written account persuades readers that the researcher has studied in a particular group or organization and has established such a rapport with its members that the readers can accept the world portrayed in the text as representing the native perspective (Clifford 1983, Geertz 1988, Marcus and Cushman 1982, Marcus 1980, Van Maanen 1988b). The writing accomplishes this in a variety of ways. Geertz (1988) points to the use of highly personalized styles, one of which is Evans-Pritchard's highly visual "slide show" style of writing conveying that the anthropologist enables readers to clearly see what he saw. And Van Maanen (1988b) indicates that in "realist tales" (the dominant form of ethnographic writing to date) the writing systematically removes references to the researcher. This implied anonymity suggests that is it not the researchers' perspective of events that are being offered.[5]

Dimensions of Convincing

In developing authenticity, plausibility and criticality as dimensions of convincing, we used the literature just referenced as a starting point. For example, we embrace

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[5]However, of late in anthropology there has been a move to experiment with alternate forms of writing in which the researcher is given a different role from that of dispassionate observer (Marcus and Fisher 1986).

the idea of "being there," the researcher's attempts to not only study about, but study in the field setting, as one aspect of the dimension of "authenticity." We draw on Davis' (1971) ideas of familiarity and novelty, echoed in Marcus and Cushman's (1982) adumbration of the problem of cultural strangeness, to develop our ideas of the relationship between the readers' experiences and assumptions and the text. We use the latter's term, "plausibility," and the focus on this reader-text relationship to develop the second dimension of convincing. Finally, Marcus and Fischer (1986) address the concern of developing ethnographies which not only describe the world of those researchers study, but which use that description to critically reflect back on the researcher's world. We build on their notion of cultural critique to develop "critical-ity," the third dimension of convincing.

1. *Authenticity*

Authenticity concerns the ability of the text to convey the vitality of everyday life encountered by the researcher in the field setting. Authenticity means being genuine to the field experience as a result of having "been there." Thus, the text makes appeals of authenticity on readers when two conditions are met: assurance that the researcher was there, and was genuine to the experience in writing up the account.

The text first needs to portray that the researchers were there and have had sufficient first-hand experience with the members' world. "Having been there," the researchers employ their acquired familiarity with everday life in all of its cognitive and affective fullness to vividly convey the members' experience to readers through the written account. In this respect, authenticity incorporates the prevailing view in anthropology and organization studies which suggests that ethnographic writing garners in authority and ability to convince by the writers conveying their first-hand access to a particular world (Marcus and Fischer 1986, Clifford 1983, Marcus and Cushman 1982, Marcus 1980, Van Maanen 1988b).

However, authenticity as used here denotes more than the importance of having had first-hand experience; it emphasizes being genuine to that experience. That is, the text conveys that the researchers grasped and understood the members' world as much as possible according to the members' constructions of it. To be genuine to the members' views is a difficult task because it requires that the researchers not only learn about the members and their world, but also allow their personal and intellec-tual perspectives to be challenged by the field experience. In this way, they enhance their understandings of reality rather than impose their biases and taken-for-granted assumptions onto the field experience (Ricoeur 1981).[6]

Note that we chose the word authenticity and not, for example, accuracy, as a descriptor of this dimension. Because accuracy denotes preciseness and correctness, it implies the possibility of creating the one definitive account of the members' world. However, as previously mentioned, the one definitive account based on certainty and methodological precision (e.g., an "absolute" or universal type of knowledge about the members' world) is impossible to obtain and undesirable to seek. Consequently, at the ground level, the ability to convince through ethnographic texts rests on the assurance of conviction based in authenticity, rather than on the assurance of certainty based in an absolute truth.

[6]This process of confrontation with differences in ethnography has been vividly described by Schutz (1976b) in his article titled, "The Stranger." However, as noted by Marcus and Fischer (1986), even in anthropology, the critical dimension of ethnographic accounts has been ignored or has not been fully developed. Until very recently, primary attention was placed on describing the actors' worlds and not on critically reflecting back on the researchers' worlds.

2. *Plausibility*

The focus of plausibility, the second dimension of convincing, is on the ability of the text to connect two worlds that are put in play in the reading of the written account. These are the worlds which are depicted descriptively and conceptually in the text and which comprise the readers' personal and professional experience. Whereas the dimension of authenticity focuses on the setting studied, including the researchers' relationship to it, that of plausibility is centered on the community of readers and on their relationship to the subject matter of the text. In this respect, it highlights most clearly the readers' active role (Iser 1989).

Plausibility is addressed by the question, colloquially put, "Does the story make sense to me as a reader...given where I am coming from?" There are two interconnected components. To "make sense," the work must deal with common concerns, establishing its connection to the personal and disciplinary backgrounds and experiences of its readers. At the same time, it must affirm its distinctive research contribution to a disciplinary area—where, as members of the academic community, the audience is "coming from." Echoing David (1971) and Iser (1989), failure to achieve plausibility can come in two ways. Either the contribution offered will seem to be fantastic or irrelevant because the asymmetry between the readers' worlds and that of the text is so great. Or, the something new will appear trivial because the gap is so small that the text appears to merely confirm what is known. In either case, the work fails to be convincing to its intended audience.

Consequently, the dimension of plausibility suggests that in order for a work to convince, it must establish some distance between its subject matter and the readers' knowledge and experiences, yet it must also offer ways for readers to bridge this gap. From a rhetorical perspective it emphasizes the importance of the text's ability to convey to readers a sense of familiarity and relevance as well as a sense of distinction and innovation.

3. *Criticality*

The focus of criticality is on the ability of the text to actively probe readers to reconsider their taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs. It addresses the question, "Does the text activate the readers to re-examine assumptions that underly their work?" A text achieves criticality by disrupting readers' common sense and enabling them to step back and to reflect on and question the personal and intellectual assumptions underlying their work. In doing so, readers are positioned to conduct a meta-analysis of their own work as juxtaposed against the possibilities offered by the text. One result of this meta-analysis is for readers to imagine different potentialities for their rhetorical work and intellectual discourse than they had imagined previously.

Perhaps more clearly than in the other dimensions of convincing, a text achieves criticality not only through the substance of its message, but through its form and rhetorical style. The way the text delivers its message is vital in establishing the breaks or surprises which activate readers to re-examine their assumptions.

The criticality dimension of convincing, then, offers the greatest potential for ethnography to become provocative to its readers. By explicitly incorporating criticality into their work, researchers develop written accounts that not only convey a rich and complex understanding of the members' world, and add to existing knowledge in the field, but which also provides a cultural critique (Marcus and Fischer 1986) of the assumptions underlying the prevailing theories and lines of thought in organization studies. The dimension of criticality, then, positions ethnographers to challenge conventional thought and to reframe the way in which organizational phenomena are perceived and studied.

Strategies of Convincing in Ethnographic Work

This section examines in detail a sample of ethnographic articles (Adler and Adler 1988, Barley 1983, Bartunek 1984) for the way in which the writing practices and strategies make appeals to authenticity, plausibility and criticality. These articles are selected from *Administrative Science Quarterly* as it is a well-established and highly regarded journal in the field of organization studies which has a reputation for publishing only selective ethnographic work. We reasoned that this selectivity would emphasize the demands made on writing practices. Since its 1979 special issue on qualitative research in organization studies through 1990, *Administrative Science Quarterly* has published 14 articles based on ethnography. The particular articles analyzed in this paper were chosen from among this larger group because their authors are ethnographic researchers who have published a stream of work that is frequently cited—Barley and Bartunek in organization theory and the Adlers in sociology.

Since the focus of the analyses was to understand how ethnographic texts make appeals to readers to find them convincing, our analyses began by scouring the three articles chosen for specific writing practices the authors employed. After developing an extensive list of practices, we noticed that no one practice could be associated with exclusively one dimension of convincing. For example, the authors used personal pronouns to make appeals to authenticity (was the author "there"?) and to plausibility (can readers make sense of the findings?). Accordingly, we examined the intent of each writing practice. As we aggregated these practices, several general strategies specific to each dimension began to appear. For example, "legitimating the atypical," a strategy to achieve plausibility, emerged as a result of examining the various practices used to legitimize the study of what might be considered in organization studies to be nontypical organizations (e.g basketball team, religious order, funeral home). As general strategies began to emerge, we reread the articles closely for the similarities and differences among the practices in order to further develop, refine, discard, and combine these specific practices into strategies. Finally, we used this process of categorizing to refine our understanding and distinctions among the dimensions of authenticity, plausibility and criticality. Thus, the development of the three dimensions of convincing occurred through an iterative process in which we first culled out ideas from the literature and then greatly refined them through the empirical analyses.

1. *Authenticity*

(a) Has the author been "there"—in the field?

Particularizing Everyday Life. This strategy concerns the ability of the text to provide enough detail of the specific organization and its members to assure the readers that the author was indeed "there." In the three articles examined, the authors detail the members' language, their everyday action and innermost thoughts to convey their understanding of daily life in a basketball team, funeral home and religious order. In each example, the presentation of highly particular detail appeals to readers to acknowledge that the author was in the field and had acquired an intimate, "local"-based knowledge about life in the organization portrayed.

All three authors demonstrated their familiarity with the members' language in the organizations through the use of commonly-used and often colloquial words and phrases (identified by quotation marks) which they translated for the readers. For example, Bartunek clarifies the meaning of what she refers to as "General Chapters"; they are the meetings of order heads, provincials and elected delegates. Barley discusses the language associated with the work of funeral directors (e..g, "laid out"

for a wake, "viewing," "prepares the remains"). In one example, he details the directors' attempts to make the funeral "normal and natural." He translates natural-ness for the reader by suggesting that,

> When funeral directors speak of 'naturalness' as a quality to be attained in a particular funeral scene, they refer to the desirability of arranging cues or creating a set of signs to mitigate those perceptions of death they believe might disturb participants. (Barley 1983, p. 402)

The Adlers refer to the basketball players' language, and especially the use of colloquialisms, through their description of the team. For example, they comment that,

> No players, even the 'candyasses,' were immune from these tirades [from the coach]. (Adler and Adler 1988, p. 407).

> They were no longer high school stars...Instead, they were freshmen 'riding the bench,' waiting their turn. (Adler and Adler 1988, p. 407).

> ...the coach drilled the individualistic 'hot dog' qualities out of them and shaped them into team players...(Adler and Adler 1988, p. 407).

In addition to appealing to readers to accept that they were in the field by their high faculty with the language, all three authors conveyed their intimate familiarity with the members' actions, what they do every day. The Adlers, for example, examined the importance of the coach's actions (e.g. suspending players, embarrass-ing or shaming individual members in front of the team) in generating intense loyalty in the basketball team. Further, they showed how the players usually acceded to his rule or left the program (1988, p. 405). Barley details how the funeral staff remove the body of an individual who dies suddenly at home, a situation usually occurring "when an individual dies in bed during sleep or after being confined to bed by an illness" (1983, p. 407).

> In making a home removal, the funeral directors' primary objective is to get the body from the house as quickly as possible, without attracting undue attention to the work, and to limit the survivor's awareness of what has happened. Upon arriving at the scene, the funeral director finds out where the body is located and then persuades one member of the family or friend to gather the rest of the onlookers in a room away from the scene of the death...(Barley 1988, p. 407).

Finally, all three authors portrayed to greater or lesser degrees, what the members think about their lives in the particular organizations. The text written by Barley is especially rich in detailing the members' perceptions and thoughts. Continuing with the description of the body removal from a private home, Barley explains,

> Having positioned the onlookers away from the scene, the funeral staff moves whatever furniture is necessary to provide open access for the litter, but the path is also cleared to assure that no unwanted noise might be caused by bumping the stretcher into pieces of furniture. Noises are avoided in order to guard against, among other things, the perception that the staff has dropped the body (Barley, 1983, p. 407).

Here the text reveals the funeral home staff's innermost thoughts and deepest fears about their work: They do not want to drop the body. Or, if the staff do happen to drop the body, (and as readers we get the impression that mistakes are sometimes made and bodies are dropped), they certainly do not want the family members to hear it.

Delineating the Relationship in the Field. Another way in which a text portrays its authenticity is by delineating the relationship which the author developed with organization members while conducting the field research. In doing so, the text invites readers to visualize how the author navigated while in the field, including how close the author got to the members as they experienced everyday life. All three texts delineated this relationship early in the methodology section, in two cases (Barley 1983 and Adler and Adler 1988) in the very first sentence of this section. Consider these descriptions:

> The study extended over a three-month period, during which I observed and conducted multiple interviews in a community-oriented funeral home in a metropolitan neighborhood of an eastern-seaboard city (Barley 1983, p. 399).

> My interpretation is based in part on my experience as a member of the order since 1966 and as a consultant for the restructuring after the decision was made to do it (Bartunek 1984, p. 357).

> Over a five-year period (1980–1985), we conducted a participant-observation study of a major basketball program...we followed several classes of student athletes through their college years (Adler and Adler 1988, p. 402).

In these brief excerpts, the authors identify the length of stay, role and context of their fieldwork, all of which work together to convey a sense of closeness between the researcher and organization members. Both the length of stay and role construction are of particular relevance in showing how delineating the field relationship makes claims of authenticity on the reader.

By identifying the lengths of stay of an "extended" three months, five years and eighteen years, the readers learn that the authors spent a considerable amount of time in the field. The fact of length and the accompanying impression that the researchers stayed a long time in the field provides assurance that the authors got close to the members.

Regarding the construction of roles in the fieldwork, of the three texts examined, Barley portrays the most traditional research role for ethnography. He entered the field as a known researcher, with no other ties to the organization or its members, to collect observational and interview data about a particular topic. Bartunek depicts the least traditional research role—that of member and consultant. In revealing that she is a member of the order, she conveys the "first hand" experience of the researcher in a particularly vivid sense. Although she uses just one sentence to describe her role as an insider, she highlights her membership role by employing the personal pronoun, "my" twice. Indeed, this sentence is the only time in the entire body of the text in which she uses personal pronouns. (She does use the personal pronoun, "I" in one footnote.) Following Van Maanen (1988b), Bartunek constructs a realist tale in that she disappears as author almost entirely and only the organization members remain visible. As a result, the text implies that any researcher, given similar circumstances and training, would observe "more or less" what Bartunek did. By deleting explicit reference to herself, then, Bartunek conveys that although she was very close to the other order members, she was not so close to them to miss the theoretical understanding of everday life in this religious order. Finally, the Adlers (using the greatest amount of text space, some 18 lines) detail how they used the differentiated roles of traditional ethnographer and a more clinical, "active membership" to gain the perspective of everday life as both an insider and outsider.

> ...Peter initially gained access to the team because the coaches perceived him as an "expert" who could provide valuable counsel on interpersonal, organizational, and academic matters...he gradually gained the trust of significant gatekeepers, particularly the head coach, and was granted the status and privilege of an assistant coach...Through this "active membership role" he became

> especially close to the athletes, whom he counseled when they came to him with their problems, worries or disgruntlements. ...Patti assumed a more peripheral membership role, interacting with participants as both a coach's wife and as a professor in the school. She "debriefed" Peter when he returned from the setting... (Adler and Adler 1988, p. 402).

b. Has the author been genuine to the field experience?

Depicting the Disciplined Pursuit and Analysis of Data. All three articles discuss the ways in which the authors collected and analyzed the field data, thereby implying that they have employed their research expertise to conduct the study. Accordingly, the texts suggest that the authors have been genuine to their field experiences by adopting a disciplined approach and paying careful attention to the data. In this respect, the authors are taking their acquaintance and familiarity with the members' world and transforming it, through conscious thought processes, into knowledge about that world (James 1918). The three texts examined revealed particular practices used to convey that this was accomplished: identifying the types of data collected, examining the detailed processes of data collection, and explicating the systematic and iterative movement between data collection and data analysis.

The text by Bartunek provides the least amount of information (one paragraph and one footnote) about her approach to data collection and analysis. She explains that the order's archival documents and interviews "with order members involved in the restructuring" (Bartunek 1984, p. 357) formed the basis of the case study. In contrast, the texts by the Adlers and Barley provide one and one-half and two and one-half pages, respectively, to a discussion of their approaches to data collection and analysis. The text by the Adlers conveys their approach to data collection and analysis in great detail, emphasizing the systematic and disciplined aspects of this approach. For example,

> Throughout the research, we carefully made field notes at the end of each day, based on our observations. We recorded the events of the day, the reactions and comments of each participant as close as possible... Often, we tape-recorded those sessions to preserve our exact memories as freshly as possible... We then analyzed the data...by generating categories and their properties through clustering respondents' observations around particular themes...Once patterns had emerged, we began to ask about them more routinely in our interviews...As some of them yielded more fruitful data we began to delve into them further and to center our thinking around them as analytical concepts...These careful and rigorous means of data collection and analysis were designed to maximize both the reliability and validity of our findings. (Adler and Adler 1988, p. 402–403).

Note their use of their descriptor words such as "carefully," "as close as possible," "exact," "as freshly as possible," "careful and rigorous means," and "maximize...the reliability and validity." In each case, the words depict a systematic and disciplined approach to their collection and analysis of data. Barley also conveys a systematic approach, but does so more through the act of taking readers step by step through the research process. Consider this excerpt, in which he details chronologically how the research process unfolded in the field.

> The data collection progressed through...analytically distinct, but overlapping, phases. During the earliest weeks of the research, I familiarized myself with the funeral home and funeral work by combining observation...with interviews...All interviews were taped and transcribed...lengthy interview became the central tactic of data collection, and observation became less and less important...After the first several weeks of interviews, the transcripts were analyzed to discover domains...During the second phase of the research, I used the analysis of previous transcripts to formulate interview schedules...Thus, interviews became more structured...[and] commonalities among particular domains emerged. These...recurring interpretations were mapped during the third and final phase of the research... (Barley 1983, pp. 399–401).

By depicting their systematic and persistent efforts over time to collect and analyze data, these texts convey the impression that the authors were able to step back from their close relationship with organization members in order to transform the familiar understanding into more generalized knowledge about organizations.

Qualifying Personal Biases. When anthropologists go to far-off, exotic lands, much of what they encounter is likely unfamiliar to them initially. They rely on their understanding of the unfamiliar to inform or challenge the personal biases they bring with them into the field, thereby facilitating their genuine understanding of the members' world they are studying by qualifying these biases. However, for management scholars using ethnography to study work organizations in their own culture, the task of unearthing the unfamiliar becomes more difficult. Although going into the field provides the opportunity to encounter the unfamiliar that other, more distant methods do not capture, perceiving the unfamiliar in one's own culture is difficult because researchers are already very familiar with everyday life. How then, without the unfamiliar to challenge thinking, do management researchers doing ethnography convey that they were genuine to their field experience; that they have not imposed personal biases onto the data?

This strategy, then, concerns how the text conveys that the authors qualified their personal biases. Did the authors allow the data to inform their personal and theoretical perspectives, or did they impose their own perspectives onto the data? The Adlers and Barley conveyed, albeit very briefly, how they qualified personal biases. The Adlers note that the idea of intense loyalty "emerged" from the data during their analysis of it, conveying that they found something different from their original expectations. Barley reveals his personal awareness of and attempts to not impose his own biases onto the data, explaining that,

> By allowing the flow of the early interviews to be directed by the informant, I strove to minimize the effect of my own conceptions on the structuring of the talk in order to capture the funeral director's own interpretations as they organized his accounts of funeral work (Barley 1983, p. 400).

Given the conventions established in writing up qualitative research, it is not surprising that the explicit discussion of qualifying personal biases is not fully displayed in the text. Writers most typically discuss the data collection and analysis of data but do not delve into the process of personal discovery associated with the fieldwork, with the notable exception of the texts called "confessional tales" by Van Maanen (1988b).

2. Plausibility

a. Does this make sense to me?

Normalizing Unorthodox Methodologies. Writing makes claims on the readers to see the ethnographic approach to research as sensible in terms of more orthodox research standards by adopting the latter's form and devices. In this way an attempt is made to establish a connection between what may be an unfamiliar research strategy and the generally accepted methodological practices to which the majority of the work's audience is accustomed. For example, the Adlers and Bartunek organize their articles in a manner generally consistent with that of a scientific manuscript; abstract, introduction, methods, presentation and interpretation of data, and conclusions. While the presence of "introduction" and "methods" before the findings can be seen as merely following convention, it, in and of itself, invokes a sense of familiarity in readers. This is also accomplished by the use of schematics such as Barley's diagrams

of codes and Bartunek's diagram of the relationship between changing interpretive schemes, member reactions and restructuring, which convey findings in a standardized, reductionistic form, consistent with accepted scientific practice.

Drafting the Reader. This strategy is about inviting readers to see themselves in solidarity with the text's assertions. This is accomplished by bringing the readers into the text when contentions are made in various ways. One way is the use of the first person plural pronoun. Consider its use in this sentence in the introduction of the Adler's article on loyalty.

> While these researchers have shed light on some aspects of loyalty, we still know very little about the development of intense loyalty in organizations (Adler and Adler 1988, p. 401).

The word "we" is used throughout this article; however, except for this occasion, it refers exclusively to the paper's authors. Here, the word "we" denotes those interested in the phenomenon, including the work's audience. Its use actually writes the readers into the text and portrays them as conjoined with the authors in seeing previous work on the phenomenon as incomplete. In so doing, the writing practice drafts readers to see the assertion as "making sense." This practice also appears in the article by Barley. "We" and "us" are frequently used, for example, to induce readers to see the posing of a corpse's features as contributing to the perception that a deceased person is sleeping. He writes, "In everyday life we have all had occasion to wonder if someone is asleep" (1983, p. 403). The writing invites readers to see themselves as aligned with the author in perceiving a common image of a person asleep. Indeed, throughout this article are scattered such appeals to solidarity, e.g. "...invites us to see similarities..." (1983, p. 397) and "Let us consider the distinction..." (1983, p. 397). Barley takes this practice one step further by writing both the readers and himself directly and personally into the text through an example designed to explicate the arbitrary relationship in semiotics between the sign-vehicle (its expression) and the signified (its content). The example begins, "As you drive towards me in our speeding car..." (1983, p. 396). This direct address to readers to take part in the illustration is more than an invitation, it is a summons to participate in the text, including its assertions.

Legitimating the Atypical. As indicated by the three articles, it is not uncommon for the stuff of which organizational ethnography is made, whether it be the organizations studied, viz. a funeral home, a women's Roman Catholic religious order, a college basketball team, or the particularistic data that emerges from them, viz. the positioning of a corpse's lips, the activities of vicariate heads, and an intense form of loyalty, to appear different at best and at worst as queer as Dick's hatband. How then does the text help to mitigate against the possibility of being dismissed as irrelevant to organization studies because its subject matter is overly peculiar and therefore too distant from the readers? A potent strategy is to write into the text common experiences and broader categories which the text appeals to readers to "hold in mind."

Turning to the Adler's article, the organization studied is a college basketball team. Given its location in a university setting, its members who are for the most part young adults, and work that involves playing a game, both the organization and the findings emanating from it run the danger of appearing remote from and atypical of most organizations. The text appeals to the readers to legitimate this atypical organization by having them hold in mind a widely shared and vivid experience, and a particular family of organizations of which the college basketball team is a member. The

following excerpt illustrates this:

> ...we still know very little about the development of intense loyalty towards organizations (such as Jonestown) or as might be expected for organizations in which members are highly interdependent and in which performance might require unswerving commitments from members. Examples of such organization might be combat units, complex and intensive surgical teams, astronaut work groups and high-performing athletic teams, to name but a few (Adler and Adler 1988, p. 401–402).

By putting the example of Jonestown in parentheses, the article activates that particular "intense" experience in the reader, likely evoking memories of newsreels. The phenomenon of intense loyalty that will be presented later in the text then makes sense and seems reasonable to the reader at two levels. First, readers are familiar with the intense loyalty in the members of Jonestown, and so the phenomenon becomes real and relevant; and second, understanding this phenomenon is now of general importance since it might prevent a similar tragedy. Having activated the readers' personal experience with regard to the phenomenon, the text then invites readers to think about a number of organizations, "but a few are named," when thinking about the particular college basketball team studied. Consequently, this organization and the findings derived from it can no longer be seen as isolated and peculiar. The text has made a direct attempt to shape the readers to see the article as plausible by appealing to them to bring to their reading of the text particular experiences, and a broad set of relevant organizations.

Barley uses some variations on the above described writing practices to legitimate his atypical organization and to demonstrate the broader relevance of semiotics for explicating organizational cultures. One is to embed what may be to a number of readers the exotic details of semiotics within very mundane and commonplace experiences. For example, Barley creates in the text a mini play of everyday life between a motorist and a pedestrian who comes to a hapless end (1983, pp. 395–396). The activities that comprise the experience created here for the readers to hold in mind, crossing the street and signalling to a driver, are mundane, ordinary and universally familiar. They make claims for semiotics to be perceived as operative and ubiquitous in everyday life and, as a consequence, broadly relevant. Similarly, in the illustration of the "sleeping corpse" discussed in the previous section, Barley (1983, p. 403) explicitly claims that wondering about the status of a supine person is routine in "everyday life." In this way, the stuff of which he is speaking, whether it be the details of semiotics or of funeral conventions, is located in the commonplace through the writing practices, thereby mitigating against its being perceived as obscure and irrelevant.

Barley also engages in a more direct attack on the reader's possible misgivings about broader relevance for the use of semiotics in studying culture in more "mundane" organizations. At the conclusion of the paper, as he summarizes his arguments for the general adoption of semiotic analysis, Barley first plays the role of his own devil's advocate writing into the text the specific objections that might be raised. Then, he dares readers to succumb to them by suggesting that to do so would be a consequence of their having been "beguiled by the research setting" (1983, p. 410) of a funeral home in which symbols abound. In this way he makes explicit claims on the readers to accept the broad applicability of semiotics. To support his claim, he briefly illustrates the use of semiotics in studying two traditional organizations, a marketing department and a major American manufacturer of aircraft. Thus, having directly challenged the readers, the writing practice makes appeals to legitimate this atypical funeral home organization at two levels. First, it contests the

readers' possible reservations. Second, as did the loyalty article, it asks readers to hold in mind other typical organizations.

In contrast to the other two authors whose writing makes appeals for legitimacy for their atypical organizations and findings by offering readers ways to regularize them, Bartunek, at first pass, appears to concede to her readers the idiosyncracies of her Roman Catholic religious orders. The following statements appear in the conclusion, "Religious orders differ from other organizations in some ways," and "These differences limit to some extent the generalizability of the order's experience" (Bartunek 1984, p. 370). Whereas Barley's writing engaged in a rather direct offensive on the readers, Bartunek's encroachment on them is more subtle at two levels. First, through the use of the qualifiers "some" and "to some extent" the writing appeals to the readers to put explicit limits on the concessions to generalizability being made. And second, again using qualifiers, having made her limited concession, she appeals to the readers for a show of reciprocity, calling upon them to accept the comparative advantage to understanding the phenomenon offered by this particular organization, which "allows certain features of the process of change in interpretive schemes to stand out more sharply than they otherwise might" (1984, p. 370).

Smoothing the Contestable. A different way in which a text attempts to manage its plausibility, that is its sensibleness to readers, is by what it does when it makes assertions that are potentially problematic. When it does this, the text runs the risk of being rejected by readers as uninformed or downright wrong because its contentions are at odds with readers existing knowledge. This strategy is not evident in either Bartunek or the Adlers; however, it is in Barley with respect to his presentation of semiotics as a self-evident unified theory. The text appeals to readers to tolerate this contestable assertion through subtle commentary on the divisions in the discipline. This following excerpt dealing with the debate in anthropology illustrates:

> In addition to the camp of "thick description" championed by Geertz (1973) and the linguistically oriented ethnosemanticists (see Tyler 1969, Spradley 1972, Goodenough 1981) whose squabbles have been cogently documented by Sanday (1979), one should also consider the structural anthropologists to be semioticians (Barley 1983, p. 395).

This excerpt begins the preparation of readers to accept the contestable claim for a general theory of semiotics made at the end of the following paragraph. In its description of some of the different groups in anthropology, the straightforward expository style is interrupted by the word, "squabbles," a word which invites readers to see the differences in a particular light. They are petty brawls. Having thus called upon the readers to see these differences as trivial, this word choice suggests they can minimize the importance of the differing contentions and be more receptive to the assertion of a single unified theory.

Next, the writing practices turn to building up the case for asserting a unified theory. First, others are called in as supporting witnesses, "In fact, Levi-Strauss repeatedly claimed an intellectual debt to Saussure's work..." (1983, p. 395). If Levi-Strauss (a structural anthropologist) who is a contestant in the debate acknowledges a common ancestor, then so can the text call for thinking of the theory in unified terms. A second way in which the text builds its case is to assert the expert status of the author. Readers are called upon to see the author as an expert through the commentary that appears as the author outlines the substance of the debate and suggests it is "a subject worthy of a book" (Barley 1983, p. 395). This comment solicits from the readers the presumption that the author could write that very book, and so is eminently qualified to answer the commonality of the theory.

Within the space of a paragraph, the writing practices have appealed to the readers to accept the contestable assertion by minimizing the importance of the divisions, by demonstrating that highly regarded others see commonalities, and by presenting the author as one sufficiently knowledgeable to make this proposition. However, within the same paragraph there is yet one more minimizing tactic. While some specific details about the nature of the division are offered, they are done so in footnotes outside of the body of the text which cast their significance as marginal. Thus, the textual practices have worked diligently to appeal to readers to be accepting of the treatment of semiotics as a single unified theory, rendering this assertion more sensible and plausible.

b. Does it offer something distinctive?

Differentiating Findings—A Singular Contribution. All three articles systematically create lacunae or gaps in the existing literature on the topic of concern, thereby suggesting that to fill them in will offer something new in an area of generally shared importance (Gephart 1986). Consider these examples:

> While these researchers have shed some light...we still know...little about...(Adler and Adler 1988, p. 401).

> While Ranson, Hinings and Greenwood make general statements about...they do not discuss in detail (1984, p. 356)...The case study supports the Ranson, Hinings and Greenwood proposal, but also indicates issues it does not address (Bartunek 1984, p. 364).

> Hence we find discourses on...but relatively few investigations that... (Barley, 1983 p. 394).

Additionally, each of the three articles juxtapositions in the organization of the text the "old" that "traditionally portrayed" (Adler and Adler 1988, p. 401) with the "new," a practice which highlights the contrast between what has been done before and what is offered by the current study.

In addition to creating lacunae and sharpening the contrast between the past and present work, some different tactics for highlighting the singularity of their contribution and claiming the distinctness criterion of plausibility are used. In the abstract of the Adler's article, use of specific adjectives in their comparative form, "more profound" as compared to the "rather mild attachment" (1988, p. 410) appeal to readers to see the difference between (and of course the superiority of) the substantive intense loyalty uncovered in this study and the pallid form addressed in previous work. Not only does the writing attempt to sharpen the contrast between the two, thereby heightening the sense that the present study offers something distinctive, this choice of adjectives and qualifiers solicits from readers a particular meaning, the one robust the other vapid, of the present and previous findings, respectively.

The writing in Bartunek's lacunae, quoted above, is more subtle in its comparative criticism of the previous work and present study. It invites readers to view the present study as, on the one hand, one that "supports" former work, and, on the other hand, as filling in some "issues" the latter "does not address." The implied criticism of previous work is accomplished through the use of rhetorical questioning. By raising questions of previous research which the readers cannot answer, the writing helps to shape a sense that it deals with hitherto unaddressed issues of shared importance: "[the other theory] does not explain, for example, why the change in the order's understanding of its educational mission took the shape it did or why" (1984, p. 364). Barley elaborates on this tactic to emphasize omissions in culture research when he suggests that, "theorists have been conspicuously silent on the matter...Where, then, does one turn if one seeks to build a theory of culture..."(1983, p. 394).

An examination of what Barley decides to put outside of the body of the text indicates a different tactic used to heighten the sense of a work's distinction. Barley claims that there are "relatively few" studies of culture that focus directly on the nature of the system's contextually generated meaning. Certainly, this particular adverb-adjective combination calls on readers to see this stream of inquiry into culture as sparsely populated. However, the sense that a singular contribution will be made by this work is enhanced by the removal to a footnote of some five studies that "come immediately to mind" (1983, p. 394). Even though Barley is able to easily call up five studies, their location on the text's sidelines invites readers to pay them only passing attention, thereby minimizing the possibility of their diluting the text's assertion of distinction.

Building Dramatic Anticipation. The Adlers are noteworthy when compared to the other authors in that they devote two full pages of text to descriptions of how they analyzed and formulated findings on loyalty. To what purpose? The comparatively lengthy and detailed description of data analysis in the methods section builds a sense of dramatic anticipation into the text. This conditions readers to expect something new from the study's results. Specifically, the devotion of the text to creating an image of the researchers excavating the findings lends to the readers' sense that something not seen before will surface. Their use of language also serves to heighten the sense of discovery by reinforcing the image of the researchers on a quest: thus, the words, "searching," "looked," and "seeking" are used in the space of two sentences. In this third sentence (all in the same paragraph) the sense of a quest is identified with the use of the word, "delve." And an appeal is made to see the quest as productive through the use of the metaphorical adjective "fruitful" (1988, p. 403). These words achieve a cumulative effect by their close proximity. Consequently, the use of language that shapes this image of researchers on a quest anticipates the expectation in readers that something new has been discovered. Thus, the use of evocative language to build dramatic anticipation helps the text to succeed at asserting to offer something new, thereby achieving the second component of plausibility.

3. Criticality

a. Does the text activate readers to re-examine assumptions underlying their work?

Carving Out Room to Reflect. This strategy concerns the ability of the text to provide opportunities for readers to take time out in order to reflect on the ideas and thoughts disclosed in reading the text. The strategy of carving out room to reflect seeks to develop places in the text at which readers stop their reading process midstream so they may ponder the points developed, as they have discerned them. In the third paragraph of the introduction, the text by Barley provides a "time out" which prompts readers to reflect on culture research done to date.

> That so many organizational theorists suddenly have begun to bandy about what suspiciously appears to resemble an interest in contextually shared meaning should give one pause...[for] organizational theorists have been conspicuously silent on the matter until quite recently (Barley 1983, p. 393).

By stating that the increased interest in shared meaning "should give one pause," the text provides a place for readers to stop and to reflect, in this case, skeptically on the recent interest in culture as shared meaning. Presumably the "one" is the reader who "should pause."

Provoking the Recognition and Examination of Differences. The focus of this strategy is to provoke readers into examining the differences between prevailing views on

a particular subject (which they may hold) and the ones articulated in the text. In this respect, the strategy involves overt probing designed to challenge readers' views, but does so in a way that enables them to re-examine their views without dismissing those presented in the text. In the same paragraph as above, Barley uses questioning posed to the reader to set up the contrast between the two types of culture research.

> ...If culture is an interpretive framework, what course should we take in ascribing ontological status to culture? By what principles do systems of meaning operate? Should cultures be studied sui genris, as systems of meaning in and of themselves? Or, is it better to study culture as a set of discrete symbolic entities that can be used as variables to explain other properties of organizations? Or, should we do both?...(Barley 1983, pp. 393–394).

Barley establishes the differences in perspective by asking two sets of questions, separated by the word "or." The first grouping of questions (e.g, What course should we take in ascribing ontological status to culture? By what principles do systems of meaning operate?) represent the alternative, sui generis approach to culture research whereas the second grouping of questions (e.g., Is it better to study culture as a discrete set of symbolic entities that can be used as variables to explain other properties of organizations?) represent the variable-based culture research. Questions, unlike statements, invite readers to recognize and to more actively ponder the differences in perspective. Furthermore, the cumulative effect of asking question after question (five in a row in this excerpt) highlights the differences to an even greater extent and more actively prods readers to think about them.

Additionally, to frame the differences in perspective in this excerpt, Barley combines the use of questioning with the words "should" and "better." In this way, the text prods readers into viewing these differences in light of their own assumptions about how one "should" study culture and asks them to consider which approach is best. In contrast, then, to the use of questioning to achieve plausibility which seeks to have readers understand the omissions in previous work that the present work addresses, the use of questioning to achieve criticality uses the differences between the previous and present work to provoke readers into examining the personal and intellectual assumptions that ground their own work.

Imagining New Possibilities. The intent of this strategy is to enable readers to imagine different possibilities than they had previously for the way they frame and conduct their work. For the text to accomplish the opening up of unknown possibilities to readers, its rhetoric assumes center stage. The use of the subjunctive mode (e.g., "as if") and poetic mode (e.g, metaphors) are two ways in which specific rhetoric asks readers to make connections and to imagine ways of thinking and acting that are not readily apparent. Barley's text is rich for the analysis of this strategy because he uses clear rhetorical practices to engage readers in the imagining process. For example, he suggests that culture researchers need to study more than overtly symbolic indicators of culture such as stories or rituals in order to fully grasp the depth and complexity of culture. Such overtly symbolic phenomena, like "terms, tales and totems are but lit candles hovering above both the icing and cake of culture" (1983, p. 397). Through this metaphor, readers are guided to see the connection between two separate realms of experience—"terms, tales and totems," which represent the overtly symbolic phenomena in organizations, and the image of "lit candles" on a cake. Note in his comparison that these phenomena are *but* lit candles, the word "but" denoting here a minimization of the value of candles; overtly symbolic phenomena are merely lit candles. The readers are also invited to see the relationship between the overtly symbolic phenomena and culture through the image of the candles hovering about the cake and icing. Although the candles as symbolic phenom-

ena are lit and therefore do illuminate the cake and icing of culture, they do not rest in, but hover above; they are abstracted from the essential components of culture. Thus, readers can see more vividly the depth of culture and how, in the study of overt symbols, the depth eludes the researcher.

In his last paragraph, Barley once again directs readers to consider the need for a new direction in culture research and offers up semiotics as a possibility by declaring that,

> ...Semiotics offers a set of concepts and methods for directly confronting the nature of culture as a system of meaning and encourages the creation of theory and analysis congruent with the nature of the beast itself...By attending to signs and codes, the researcher takes meaning out of the closet and sets it center stage for all to see. The sight may be more than a little unnerving (Barley, 1983, p. 411).

At one level, by stating that "semiotics encourages theory...congruent with the nature of the beast itself," Barley suggests explicitly that semiotics is a more appropriate approach for the study of culture when conceptualized as a system of meaning to be studied in and of itself (versus as a variable to explain other organizational phenomena). Once again, however, Barley does not rest with stating his position, but rather moves into criticality through the use of rhetorical practices to further probe readers to consider the implications of studying semiotics for themselves and for organization studies. In so doing, Barley invites readers to actively disclose the meanings in the text by imagining the connections (which are not laid out for them explicitly). In this instance, Barley uses the metaphor, "take(s) the meaning out of the closet and set(s) it center stage for all to see" to accomplish this. Literally, closets contain things such as clothes which are meant to remain out of sight, away from public viewing. In this sense, meaning—the constitution of culture—has remained out of sight in organizational research. Metaphorically, closets contain secrets, or more so, skeletons which are experiences or things purposely kept hidden from others. (It is interesting to note the link here between skeletons and the Barley's object of study—the funeral home!) Through this metaphorical association, meaning takes on a somewhat more frightening character. Culture researchers may not want to let meaning out of the closet for fear of what they might find. Indeed, Barley suggests this idea in the very last sentence of the article when he suggests the sight of meaning taken out of the closet may be "more than a little unnerving." Of course, this ending to the article represents the ultimate rhetorical challenge to readers to do precisely that, or at a minimum, to ponder a bit longer after setting the article aside.

Conclusion

This paper developed three dimensions—authenticity, plausibility and criticality—central to understanding how ethnographic texts convince. Further, through the analysis of three ethnographic articles, it disclosed particular writing practices and more general strategies which these texts employ to appeal to readers to accept that these dimensions have been achieved. Texts construct appeals of authenticity by conveying the vitality of the field setting in a genuine way. Strategies to achieve authenticity in the specific texts examined included: particularizing everyday life, delineating the relationship between the researcher and organization members, depicting the disciplined pursuit and analysis of data, and qualifying personal biases. Texts construct appeals of plausibility by depicting the general relevance and specific contribution of the work in a manner which connects with the personal and/or professional worlds of the readers. All three texts examined utilized strategies consistent with plausibility, which included: normalizing unorthodox methodologies,

drafting the reader, legitimating the atypical, smoothing the contextable, differentiating findings from previous work, and building dramatic anticipation. Finally, texts construct appeals of criticality by actively probing and challenging readers to re-examine the personal and intellectual assumptions that underly their work. Barley's text (1983) provided the single example of a critical text which employed strategies of: carving out room to reflect, provoking the recognition and examination of differences and imagining new possibilities.

One conclusion which emerges from the analyses is that although the three ethnographic texts used many of the same writing practices to appeal to authenticity, plausibility and criticality, there were three notable variations. First, regarding the dimension of authenticity, although all three authors used similar writing practices to persuade readers that they had indeed "been there," they differed in how they assured the reader they were genuine to the field experience. While both the Adlers and Barley referenced themselves in the text as systematically collecting and analyzing data and as recognizing the potential for personal biases to enter the process, Bartunek here was salient through her silence. Hers is a "realist" appeal to authenticity—that is to say her textual absence creates the sense that her data gathering and analysis were unbiased. One possible explanation for this difference is that, perhaps the more the authors reference themselves explicitly in the text, the more they need to demonstrate through the writing that they qualified the subjectivity associated with their personal involvement in the field. Second, as will be discussed below, only the text by Barley employs strategies that achieve criticality. Finally, when comparing the texts on the basis of their overall rhetorical construction, the text by Barley is the most active, whereas the one by Bartunek the least active. Given our analyses, Bartunek appears very little in a direct and overt manner in the text. That is, she does not use writing practices which would increase her presence as author (e.g., the use of personal pronouns or rhetorical devices such as metaphors). This is not to suggest that Bartunek's text is devoid of rhetoric. Rather, it suggests that in contrast to the other two texts, Bartunek's rhetoric presents itself in terms of what she leaves out of the text rather than what she inserts. As a result, the text asks readers to take it at face value, a practice more consistent with the premises of accepted practices associated with positivist research and the "realist" tale of ethnography (Van Maanen, 1988b).

Another conclusion for how ethnographic texts convince that emerges from these analyses is that, at a minimum, an ethnographic text needs to achieve (as did the sample of three texts examined here) both authenticity and plausibility. That is, the text must convey not only the vitality and uniqueness of the field situations but also build a case for the particular contribution of the findings to a disciplinary area of common interest. This conclusion implies that for ethnographic work to be convincing to academic journal reviewers, it is not sufficient to richly describe the field site or to tell a good story. Although the "good story" may be what readers remember long after their reading (Van Maanen 1988a), to convince journal reviewers, the rich description needs to be connected to the theoretical world of the readers. Once the work has been published, there likely will be different responses from the increased variety of readers now introduced to the text. For example, for those readers specifically interested in the occupation or type of organization studied, satisfying the dimension of authenticity would be central. Alternatively, for those interested in the theoretical implications of the research for their own work, plausibility assumes greater significance.

More generally, this paper represents an effort to deconstruct the defense of ethnography in organization studies. That is, by analyzing the appeals which ethnographic texts make to engage and convince readers, the paper highlights how authors

seek to persuade readers of the value of their account. Thus, all of the texts sought to persuade readers of their value by making appeals to the authenticity of the work portrayed. Beyond this basic foundation, the texts by Bartunek and the Adlers rested their appeals primarily in achieving plausibility. For example, Bartunek's work can be considered as a "next stepper" (Gephart 1986, 1988) in that she places her work within the stream of research on ideology and change and then seeks to answer questions not yet addressed in this previous work. The Adlers adopt what we term a "variation on a theme" stance in that they also place their work into an existing stream of work on loyalty, but differentiate it on the basis of the "variation" of loyalty which emerged from the fieldwork. They insert a new element (e.g., a conceptualization of loyalty) into an existing way of thinking about loyalty. By contrast, the text by Barley sought to convince readers through its critical stance. It advocates a different line of thinking by redirecting the focus of research, in this case on organizational culture.

Given in part the purpose of redirecting culture research, the text by Barley moves into the dimension of criticality whereas the other two texts do not. That is, instead of placing this work into a stream of past work, it contrasts two different approaches to culture research and asks the readers to decide which they will adopt. Along the way, the text actively seeks to influence readers' beliefs and conceptions about the way culture research "should" be conducted and the approach which Barley advocates "should" be adopted. It delivers this message through explicit rhetorical practices (e.g., metaphors) designed to provoke readers to reconsider their assumptions. In this respect, the more the text has intentions of criticality, the more actively the rhetoric needs to be formulated. Thus, this text achieves criticality by using the semiotics of a funeral home not only to reflect on the world of funeral homes, but to provoke readers into reflecting on their world as well—specifically on how they will conduct culture research.

While our investigation demonstrated writing practices and strategies in ethnographic texts, the articles chosen, because they have been published, are assumed to have convinced some readers (presumably journal reviewers) that the findings were worth taking into account. However, this selection did not provide the opportunity to explicitly assess the kind of practices which would result in texts failing to convince readers. Interesting additions to the present study would be to examine ethnographic manuscripts that had been rejected, or the various iterations that a single article undergoes from the initial draft until publication.

Finally, to conceive of convincing in the view portrayed in this paper suggests that for ethnographers, the research task is not one of discovering a truth that lays waiting at some place prepared in advance of their arrival (Rorty 1982), or lays waiting for more sophisticated methodology to be developed. Rather, the most provocative task and promising potential of ethnography is the use of the data to reflect not only on the members' world but more importantly on the world of the researcher. The contribution to this world, then, would be not only the elaboration and refinement of theories and concepts, but also probing readers to re-examine prevailing assumptions and beliefs underlying their work. In this way, as ethnographers we position ourselves as human researchers to understand others and to understand ourselves differently and better; to become more effective readers of the lives of others and of ourselves.

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