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## Fabricating Methods: Untold connections in story net work

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*Storytelling*

*Relationality*

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### Abstract

This paper responds to current interest in the ‘untold’ in organizational storytelling research. In particular the research presented here contributes to studies that consider storytelling in relational terms. In this context, untold is constructed as both a provocation and a pointer to multiplicity: innumerable relationships of story. To develop and illustrate the argument of the paper, the discussion adopts *interference* as a deliberate methodological device. To illustrate the significance of composition and fabrication in storytelling the study consider fragments from an extensive period of multi-site ethnographic fieldwork with a professional, established and award winning author involved in literary, television drama and other story projects. The developing field of relational storytelling studies is discussed and attention drawn to key research foci: specifically current concerns for intertextuality, heteroglossia, materiality and flux. A fieldwork vignette is used to examine and extend a relational sense of ‘untold stories’. Further vignettes and a selective focus on science and technology studies relational ethnographies extends this discussion by focusing on performance, fabrication and fiction. The paper concludes that a fabrication sensibility that notices and attends to story on the move necessitates a shift in both methodological and representational strategy. In terms of method the paper demonstrates the potential value of extended, multi locational and deep field ethnography. In terms of representation, if stories are innumerable than we require a number of monograph ethnographies that can reveal and attend to varieties of limitless material, mobile and heterogeneous stories. In other words, if stories are lived, we require methods that attend to social life as lived if we are to surface and reframe hitherto *untold, unseen and unheard* agency at work in organizations.

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The focus of this special is untold stories and at first glance this focus may be baffling. For, surely, one of the primary responsibilities of critical organizational studies *per se* is the examination of organised negations (see for example Alvesson et al, 2009; Parker, 2013; Delbridge, 2014). This is certainly the case for sociologists whose interest resides in

revealing hitherto obscured or untold characteristics of social domination, inequality and harm. So, why elevate the trope of the ‘untold’ when it is implied?

It is quite reasonable to question whether storytelling research needs to underscore the untold. For over three decades researchers have been pursuing organizational stories. Consider here the quite different influential contributions of Gabriel (1991, 2000, 2013); Brown (2004, 2005) and Ybema (1997, 2004, 2010). Each here has developed knowledge of the abuses, gratifications and meanings of story in organizational life by paying attention to stories that exist or have the potential to exist but have not, for one reason or other, surfaced. The recognised critical potential here is in investigating social, linguistic or psychological processes that may be working to keep a significant potential story below the surface. Contemporaneously, a different research direction was pursued by those who encountered stories in action. This is the area that is of particular interest to me and I am thinking here more of the concern for political narratives and dynamic storytelling research found in influential studies where the energy, agential potential and often the vectors of organizational stories are actively pursued such as those found in Boje (1995), Czarniawska (1998), Sims (2003), Gherardi (2000) and the collaborations between Keenoy and Oswick (2004); and Gherardi and Nicolini (2000, 2002).

So, again, why raise the untold trope?

### Pursuing the untold: interference

Well, to suggest an answer, I will follow a practice that I intend to adopt throughout this article and call upon an outside *interference* to connect with the object of the exercise: untold stories. The point here is that there is potential value in connecting the untold with interferences. However, I suspect such potential is best shown rather than told and hence it unfolds in the telling of the paper.

The first interference that I want to summon is taken from fieldwork: specifically a day with H. To provide a background to that fieldwork I now offer short methodological briefing: The fieldwork was undertaken in three forms: firstly, an eighteen month multi-site ethnography that moved in and around a story that was being made into a television series; secondly, a return three years later to work with some of the production team on another project and then finally a continuing series of work reflections with one storyteller pursuing her stories across time (identified herein as H). The research was located in science technology studies and it was never intended as such to be a study of storytelling. The study was a sociology of translation (or otherwise an actor network) ethnography attending to sociomaterial assemblages and fictional accounting of technology. The purpose was to examine potential value for understanding sociomaterial agency through attention to fictional constructions of technology. In faith with actor network approaches the fieldwork was conducted with an anthropological sensibility for time and immersion: that is deep immersion and adequate time to capture sociomaterial life as lived in the field. A further methodological assumption that in line network theory/method is that the research would demand an itinerant, multi-site strategy where the fiction-technology assemblages could be pursued in action (see Heath, 1998). The second phase of research followed two years later and focused on specific traces of genre fiction that emerged in the deep field ethnography. This research was a lighter touch – in as much as it involved periods in the field working alongside story makers but without the immersive character of ethnography: hence a qualitative approach but without the immersion. This period was again multi-site. The final period of fieldwork took a more diary/biographical approach with one of the authors that I had encountered in both periods of fieldwork.

The research discussed here is taken from the eighteen month ethnography of the fiction in the making. I had access to multiple sites of production and the positive collaboration with authors and extended worlds that they revealed. There is no auto-ethnography intent here and my access and role was to understand ‘making’ technological stories.

This interference from H occurs four months into the eighteen month period. I had at this point been working with authors, rehearsal and original scripts, characters and locations and now H and I were meeting once again in her home, in rural England. In the action below, H and I have been looking over versions of annotated scripts from a television series in production and tracing script changes made in response to annotated commentary from actors, director, set and script editor. We had a working lunch (soup) and then a pleasant walk in the village talking of the leverage that location work offered to a story and storyteller. However, the real work of the day was to look at a snippet of the script/programme that had proved controversial during making – which is identified here as Scene 430. It is the life and times of this scene that will form the backbone of the ethnographic account presented in this paper.

I had brought a bag load of materials with me from other sites of production that I had visited and after the walk we settled down to look at scripts, recordings (Video Tape VT as H did not like computers) and some notes from meetings. In

what follows H is attempting to explain why the issue is a controversy and her ‘take’ on it – and of course, as a temporary anthropologist, I was interested in ‘takes’. In summary, we are looking at annotations and script changes following rehearsal. Today, coffee, cigarettes and the comforting study are required for H to tell and we just settle down when:

H: look, hang on minute, (rising and moving to a row of floor to ceiling bookcases). let me see  
(pause one beat) (still ranging across bookcases) (pause two beats) er wait a minute (pause five beats) (moves to look through a pile of paperwork on the desk... rummages...) God,  
(frustrated) I was looking at this just (pause one beat)(looking on the desk area and around chairs) (pause one beat) just er (pause one beat) where did I (pause one beat) (moves to cupboard, down on hands and knees rummages seven beats) (stands, looks around,... quickly leaves the room for half a minute to a minute... scrabbling heard outside the room)

L: (walking toward the door collecting script and technical recording gear) Hang on H, (pause one beat) can I (rummaging noise) I’ve got (stops on seeing H)

H: (returning to meet in hall, hands raised, amused look, moving to empty handed gesture)

Both re-enter study laughing

H: Well dear, it’s here somewhere, it’s something I wrote (pause one beat) (H continues looking on desk (rummaging and speaking) (pause one beat) years ago, little project of John Peel’s got me thinking and then I did this piece (pause 5 beats) yeah, for a book. Do you know McNeice? Snow? No? Incorrigibly plural – says it all dear – where (pause one beat). Look. Let me find it for you and I’ll

Cross talk moment:

L: (amused interject) what exactly (H interject) is it

H (tailing off) send it to you.

H: walks to bookcase – well (pause hesitant) erm yes (pause one beat) it’s this (moving quickly selects a book and turns back to bookcase, toward L) (L looks confused) (pause one beat) or rather it isn’t actually but – ah this is it, yes, (long pause eight beats)

H: it’s a little piece I wrote – that’s what I can’t find - (looking around again) - where I quote this – (lifts book in hand and points at lines of text) – cos’ (coughing, pause three beats) (then quietly, with passion, urging) Listen, Linda , Listen (pause three beats) McNeice, (slowing vocally quietening) just brilliant (evaluative), it just says (looking at the page) ahhh listen

(Then H seamlessly composes herself with book in hand. Attention wholly turned to the text she recites quite calmly and beautifully):

World is sadder than we fancy it.  
World is crazier and more of it than we think,  
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion  
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel  
The drunkenness of things being various.

H: (eye contact and now evidently back in room with me – looking at me). Now (beat) isn’t that just wonderful? (satisfied tone, calm continues). (Excerpt from fieldwork transcript).

So, what can we make of this interference from H, and **her** interlocutor, the poet Louis McNeice (1935)? Firstly, it does not seem to have anything to do with the case in hand: Scene 430. But, this is H's tale and this is how she begins to tell it. Secondly, I suspect my readers here will be making up their own stories, many of which will be better than mine, but mine tries to keep faith with H, and what I came to know of controversy by being allowed to work alongside her story. H knew about heterogeneity, uncertainty and relationality. Well actually that is not quite right, indeed that is ventriloquism; H knew about fancy, craziness, incorrigibility and *things being various*. H also knew how to edit for effect. When I went home I looked for McNeice's *Snow* in my own poetry collections (absent) and then later in the week in the public library. H had edited McNeice. To be clear, she had not changed a single word or the order of the words but she had selected and 'sort-of' restructured for effect – her own effect not his. The first line that H recited was according to McNeice's structure the last line of the first verse. So, H had edited out three lines of the poem. The break between verses is also edited out in H's recitation to create a smooth uninterrupted flow between the line that is the end of verse one and verse two. Verse two is recited line-for-line and word-for-word as McNeice laid out. A final verse of the poem was left unsaid: editing again. There, by the bookcase, book in hand, H put McNeice nicely to work as a prologue – her prologue to explaining scene 430. Now, the editing of McNeice was not mischievous or deliberate, it was however graphic and specific. An externalization of editing that is a challenge to anyone interested in storytelling.

If editing is the first challenge of the untold that H indicates, the second point concerns the embodied, sociomaterial and energetic activity of making and consuming stories. Storytelling is not a flat landscape – not at all. The stumbling messiness of it all; the social, political, material and interactive editing that is being performed; the imaginary and imaginative work that is being externalized here in a few lines over coffee amongst bookshelves and papers. There is also untold scale to consider. Change scale and focus on the interference point when, over the words on a page, stood by a bookcase, book in hand, I listened and watched a women reciting. Here, in these few lines, close and complex story activity can be found. The speaker: eyes directed, heart rate slow, head tilted, body composed, voice carefully modulated. Here then, visible, the untold editor's body at work in both telling and editing her story. The listener: intent, attending to unexpected words gifted in an unknown order, frowning, a shift of seated position, puzzling for the text, making the point, navigating connections. More untold editing visible in the listener's body at work, responding to pressures from in and out of the field. Invisible still as yet is the untold editing involved in telling and listening through a melee of other places and other ways of knowing. Both scale and situation need to shift to find externalizations of such editing. On the desk, scale changes, same room, same place, same time – blue and pink scripts – other tellers calling for attention. The scripts sit there holding their breath but carrying techniques and complexities of drama making into the mix of this story. In my bag, haunting the recitation, are the corporations production guidelines and distribution projections waiting to take their role in the controversy: reminding us of responsibilities for cost, taste and decency. Maybe they will stay put today.

Finally, consider the untold settings, situations and texts that are lurking around: "years ago, little project of John Peel's"; "do you know McNeice?"; the VT; the scripts themselves. In the mess of an everyday work conversation are untold numbers of connections to other situations, other texts, other words; other epistemologies and other ontologies – story fragments carrying story potential. As the afternoon moves on we (the teller and the listener) cross cut the story and in the process, we build in her study one story of the controversy that brewed around the script. It was a good story, but more on that later.

Snap! Back to the paper - and another interference to set the scene for where I (hopefully we) can take the untold next. The brevity here is by dint of the actors I summon. Firstly, they are more conventional then H. Also, unlike H, I don't feel protective or the need to edit their identity. So, having summoned the untold in terms of the innumerable limitless character of story I edit these two in here: one to declare on storytelling and the other on audience:

Stories are always a complex production with many tellers and hearers, not all of them visible or audible. Story-telling is a serious concept, but one happily without the power to claim unique or closed readings (Haraway, 1989, p. 8)

Readers seem to be much more devious, much harder to take in, much cleverer at deconstruction, much faster in fiction-making than is assumed by those writers who, with some arrogance, believe that others believe. (Latour, 1988, p. 168)

## Quantum Leaps? From intertextuality to story-webs, assemblages and ontological-storytelling

So far, by virtue of an early interference from fieldwork, I have underscored editing and indicated a spatial, relational and embodied character to storytelling. Well, not much new there so far. We already know that organizational storytelling has a long-standing and well theorized interest in the spatial relationships between words, texts and stories although perhaps less on the embodied performance of story. In terms of spatiality, this is an active area with different researchers adopting quite different analytic tools to set up diverse narrational fields that can reveal different characteristics and behaviours of story and storytelling. The variety is productive not least as the different analytic instruments allow changes in the directions, loci and scale of study such that many forms of otherwise unknown and untold research stories have been surfaced.

Take for example those deconstruction studies that have attended to the reporting of public inquiries into organizational disasters and misbehaviours (Brown 2004, 2005). The public inquiry is a specific type of storytelling situation and has attendant and very specific forces at work in ‘making’ or ‘reporting’. In textual terms it is a genre and the genre codes are understood by those producing reports. The deconstructions take apart reports to reveal political forces at work in composing, editing and silencing meaning for public consumption. Few, as yet, in organizational studies have pursued the after-life of these reports once they are used in the messy terrain of their magnificently heterogeneous audiences: *the* public and *the* organization and the network entanglements around such inquiries (Law & Mol, 2002). Nonetheless, the deconstruction studies offer dramatic insights into public and organizational concerns.

In contrast, there are those studies that focus on tools to surface construction – story making. An example here would be empirical storying research that examines the agency of organizational actors to foreground the socially and individually constructed limits of their own storying options. Such work examines relationships between stories, political outcomes and the situations of story tellers (Yanow, 2004; Grant & Iedema, 2005; Rhodes, Pullen & Clegg, 2010). In these studies, the stories that are pursued have not been subject to a heavy closure in the form of a final account, as is the case of inquiry reports, but carry storied-politics of organizational life. Once again, the potential of any story to be something else is evident in the empirical research and consequently the politics of editing and closure are again rendered relevant (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). Here, the focus is on identity work, sense-making and agency: the verb storying. If one reviews the reading lists on just about any MBA programme in the UK that recruits middle managers the storying studies of situated identity work will be there – waiting for managers to find resonance in the tales of power (Knights and Willmott, 1999), vulnerability (Sims 2003) and life (Watson 2009).

Notwithstanding this type of variety, there is in both deconstructions and construction studies an explicit and an implicit interest in relationships within and *between* different stories, texts or words: inter-textual relationships. Intertextuality has been the concern of literary studies for some time but with an increasing turn to the textual metaphor in social science, intertextuality takes on a different guise and applicability. Indeed, theoretical antecedents and conceptual tools of intertextual studies are much deployed across critical organizational studies (McKenna 2004; Boje 2001; Hassard, Kelemen & Cox, 2008). I am thinking here of theoretical studies such Bakhtin’s dialogism and the development of his work to be found in Kristeva’s particular reframing of Bakhtin that connects directly to psychoanalytic theory through both Freud and Lacan (Kristeva, 1986a, p. 34-62). Perhaps connecting H and McNeice in intertextual terms might help me understand something of why, for H, this is part of the story of Scene 430: the untold.

## Inter- what? Untold in-betweens of texts and action

Kristeva is often said to be the first to use the term ‘intertextuality’ and the point of origin is often cited as the mid-nineteen sixties, as in Alfaro (1996) who locates the term in Kristeva’s work on *Word, Dialogue and Novel* from 1966 and also *The Bounded Text* completed the following year. At this point, Kristeva’s attention focused on words and *literary* texts and her theoretical concern was literary theory as applied to meaning and interpretation of literary texts. In pursuing these issues Kristeva provides an imagery for imagining words and texts in terms of the spatial relationships in and between words: as an “intersection”. It is this spatial imagery that offers the opportunity to examine politics of words across a textual miscellany. To demonstrate the power that this insight carries once the textual turn is made let me play with a quote from Kristeva for a moment.

Firstly, Kristeva's words:

any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double. (1980b, p. 66)

And, now appropriated with apologies:

any organization is constructed as a mosaic of quotations from other organizations; any organization is the absorption and transformation of another's organization. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and organization is read as at least double.  
(Taken from Kristeva 1980b, p. 66 and changed here)

Crucially, the shift from hybrid intersubjectivity to intertextuality can shift analytic attention from subjects and subjectivity to action, objects and relationships. Kristeva's focus on inter-textual relationships is a particular reading and psychoanalytic development of Bakhtin's dialogism that raises 'text' over 'action'. Notwithstanding the value of variety suggested by the intersecting textual surfaces imagined by Kristeva, I would like to recover a more externalized sense of action here.

In *Discourses in the Novel* from The Dialogic Imagination (1981) Bakhtin notes:

... no living word relates to its object in a singular way: between the word and the object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme, and its environment that is often difficult to penetrate. It is precisely in the process of living interaction with this specific environment that the word may be individualized and given stylistic shape (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 276)

The hitherto empty spaces around and between words has become a focus of 'living interaction', note that, interaction, not inter-text. There is more here than spatial intersections, there is agency, energy and movement. Similarly, with elasticity he suggests that there are forces stretching these living words. These are forces from other deforming words that carry possibilities to push meaning in new directions, theorized in terms of heteroglossia, in which text, utterances or objects of speech are '... entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien judgments and accents' (Bakhtin 1981, p. 276). Bakhtin's empirical work on novels led him to consider a 'work' in terms of textual power in action where he reveal how, in storytelling, the language choices made or the speech registers used are political devices (1984). In pursuing this notion of difference he is able to highlight firstly some of the particular uses of words, and then dialogic mean by which words can be appropriated, negotiated and negated in interaction. What I find in Bakhtin is an insistence on considering language as a political tool and recognition that, as a tool, it is intimately embroiled in action. Language is text, situation and interaction. Dialogue an interactive site in which politics is performed and "The word in language is half someone else's" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293)].

The complexity of submitting language to intention is theorized in terms of use. Bakhtin argues the impossibility of taking language out of its socio-political context and in developing this socio-political stance he observes that and, interestingly, that words do not always surrender readily to certain users or contexts of use. By treating words as objects in action Bakhtin argues that certain words are resilient and cannot be shifted easily and taken by a speaker for their own. In this way he suggests not only the formal aspects of language, the political nature of language in action but moral politics of words in terms of right to use and naturalness of usage. He is suggesting that, try as one might to use a word with intention; our ability to use is determined in dialogic interaction. He explains the complexity of use by noting that:

Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own. And, not all words for anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property: many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth, they cannot be assimilated into his context and fall out of it; it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker. (Bakhtin, 1981, p 294)

In Bakhtin's accounting, text is hybrid and it is in use that it acquires and carries meanings. Assuming language and words are where the action resides, close attention to language, speech registers, classifications systems, story forms and spaces will provide a valuable and subtle focus on specific untold organizational stories.

**However**, let us return for a moment to that short interference from H's study that appears earlier in this piece. If this is an instance of storytelling, intertextuality would not have been particularly helpful in helping me **see** (find/discover/surface) the storying work performed by the bodies, the rooms of H's home, the village outside her house, the soup, the coffee, the mood and movements. Undoubtedly, **once the story has been collected** the notion of intertextuality can easily be laid over what is collected but as a **theory/method sensibility** it is less potent than the more open notion of storytelling itself. There is something absent or more accurately over present in a focus on intertextuality and as Gabriel has shown us, storytelling is always more than text (Gabriel, 2000 *throughout*). Intertextuality raises the textual trope but perhaps, at times, it also overplays it. Consequently, any potential to surface untold aspects of storytelling that are at the limits of this particular metaphor are lost. Bakhtin on the other hand does seem to offer more potential; the inter active seems preferable to the inter-text. Perhaps, to steal a term from Boje, intertextuality is not 'subtle' enough (Boje, 2012).

### Quantum fragments and subtleties

So, subtlety? In pursuing storytelling and change management, Boje extends his approach to storytelling research by taking a path that involves 'very subtle processes' (2012). In pursuing this path he uses Heidegger and quantum physics to create imagery (imaginary) of storytelling with 'quantum fragments' in 'story-webs'. If intertextuality limits analytic vision then here is an attempt to extend the limits of storytelling imagery and knowledge. Over the years Boje has made significant contributions to imagery in 'storytelling organization' studies (see for examples Boje, 1982, 1995, 2001 and 2011). Indeed, the 1995 *Tamara-land* metaphor resonates with social experience and is implicit (complicit) in the effort of those researchers who track storytelling across organizational situations, events, (char) actors, sets and language registers. The basic assumption is that organizational stories are unknowable, limitless and do not stay in one place. Consequently, stories have multiple lives and take various trajectories through the organization having encounters with other characters and landscapes that transform them and change their direction of travel. Storytelling is everywhere and elsewhere and so 'the' story does not exist it is always situated and subject to a push or pull in another direction. Given this conceptualization of organization as a storytelling Tamara, attention settles on the social, political and moral work of storytelling fragments (see also Boje, 2012). A less visual imagery comes with the notion of antenarrative (see Boje, 2011; Rosile, Boje, Downs and Saylor, 2013) which nonetheless has been put to work in interesting effect (see Drevin and Dalcher, 2011; Tyler, 2011; Vaara and Tienari, 2011; Lefebvre and Blackburn, 2012).

The recent turn to a quantum metaphor may be valuable in that it may shift attention on storytelling from an epistemological concern to an ontological one (Boje, 2012) – but how would it work with H and McNeice? In distinguishing his approach and the new imagery of quantum fragments and story webs, Boje acknowledges the subtleties of two other seminal researchers that both have granularity and delicacy written into their theory/method repertoire: Gabriel and Czarniawska. I agree, both have subtle toolkits for revealing untold stories and if Gabriel would accept the interlude in H's study as the prologue of a story he would certainly have seen the embodied practices of the telling. But, I am not wholly convinced that my long drawn out ethnographic interference could count as story in Gabriel's terms: if character, action, agency, transformation and endings are story the controversy account of Scene 430 is the story that I begin in H's study but that story has a long, long telling even in my sight. Indeed, years later it still crops up in 'the industry' in odd (weird) ways. So, what can quantum physics offer me?

Well, sadly and with respect to Boje, I am not sure quantum fragments are a good source of imagery for me and I am also unsure how they would operationalize in theory/method of ethnographic practice. Nonetheless, this is a very interesting work and is continuing the storytelling physics the Boje pursues. I am reasonably confident that that the imagery and metaphor will work well for those with either a greater or weaker sense of quantum theory than I possess. As it stands, ethnographically, personally I find it hard to see the field with this metaphor. If we take the ethnographic interference again, H and I could possibly be found if storytelling was imagined in terms of tellers actively caught-in, jumping across and weaving story webs, although this feels far removed from social experience. However, Boje's discussion and the combined notions of fragments and story webs did give me a point of connection and the connections were stabilized when his literature provided some shared points of reference. So, due to my own reservations over evoking quantum fragments, to move the untold stories and ontological storytelling line forward, I have to change track and follow

those common points of reference that connected Boje with my home turf: science technology studies and in particular sociology of translation or actor network theory. Now, I am being rather literal here, as whilst in early work on the storytelling organization and onward Boje has shown a sensibility for action, movement and flow and increasingly, more recently he has shown concern for matter, materials and sociomateriality. In the quantum paper (2012) the connections are made explicit in the referencing practices and summons network studies into his definitions of story.

### STS: stories, fabrication and fictionality

For well over four decades Science Technology Studies (STS) has operated as a multidisciplinary field concerned with relationships within and between science, technology and society. Crucial to this endeavour is the close attention to fabrication. Note this – fabrication. There is something particular about how this focus on deeds impacts on theory/method in science studies. Whilst attention to social construction processes is indeed core to the critical work, so too is the very matter (material) of the reality under construction and the activity of making (see for example Rabinow, 1996; Barad, 1998; Heath, 1998 and Lampland and Star, 2009). Not only does STS attend to fabrication, it has also an overt interest in stories, however, in this case stories are a rhetorical device and act as a pointer to fabrication (Hitchin and Maksymiw, 2012). Stated directly, what “constructivist science studies suggest is the pervasiveness and relevance of *fictionality* as a routine aspect of social life.” (Knorr Cetina, 1994, p. 5, my italics)

Crucially, such empirically informed theorizing points toward organizational story as necessary and inevitable invention and action – the productive processes of organized knowledge and things: hence there are always politics being performed in storytelling. Whatever we capture, we are always handling fictions of one form or another – fictive real lives or storytelling social organizations

So, in general, laboratory science studies have provided two specific pointers to reflect on fabrication: firstly, the inevitable fictionality of sociomaterial life and secondly, complicated relationships involved in fabrication between facts of matter and fiction. A specific vantage point on both these concerns is offered by sociology of *translation* and in this instance a form of such sociology that is commonly referred to as actor network theory or ANT. ANT demands certain research sensibilities that should be stated here- namely receptivity toward sociomateriality, relationality, hybridity and translation (Callon, 1986, a and b; Mol and Law, 1994; Callon and Law, 1992; Latour, 1999, specifically p. 24-79 and p.113-144). In other words – ANT cultivates awareness of organized complexities (Law and Mol, 2002; Law, 2002; Mol, 2002).

In ANT the hybrid potential that had previously been reserved for human identity was extended to non-humans when non-humans of all kinds become active elements in net-work of social experience. Not only individuals but things could be *liberated from fixity and purity of origin* and cast into an interpretative expanse of mundane life (see Callon, 1986,a and b). The inclusion of non-human agency focuses attention on process of power and articulation of different expressions of power (Foucault, 1982) and so offers differing accounts of otherness (Lee and Brown, 1994). In ANT, non-humans became ambiguous; they could be understood as things with biographies and in processes of becoming rather than fixed in meaning - they were heterogeneous and hybrid (Latour, 1988 and 1992). Materials were entangled into the fictionality of social life in the same way humans were and, through the associations, any distinction between human, non-human and nature was blurring to the point of dissolution (Callon, 1986a). All of this was because ANT “...takes the semiotic insight, that of essential relationality, and applies it ruthlessly to all materials – and not simply those that are linguistic” (Law, 1997: 2).

To illustrate the explanatory power that ANT offers to story in terms of situations and mobility I want to draw on Mol's work on anaemia and ontological politics (1999). Mol begins her account by examining the crucial importance of performance in actor network theorizing. Mol's point being that, in accounting for social experience ANT insists that social life is lived in action and so reveals differences between an ostensive singular world of things, explanations and talk, and multiple performative worlds of doing. For Mol, theorizing action in terms of hybridity location and mobility renders performance sociologically relevant in quite particular way. Firstly, to illustrate location, Mol refers us to Latour's work on vaccination (Latour, 1988). In this classic study, Latour demonstrated that when the science of vaccination moves as an object from the laboratory to ‘medicine’ and then on to ‘clinical practice’, ‘doctor’ and ‘patient’ it carries with it new ways for experiencing reality and new ways of *doing* health care (Mol, 2002 and 2008). In this way Latour illustrate that not only is reality ‘historically culturally and materially located’ but also that such locations are multiple (Mol, 1999, p 75). Laboratory reality, surgery reality hospital ward reality and patient reality coexists whilst different. They are not

perspectives of the same unified reality. They are not world views of a complex drama enacted in front of us. They are material, social and diverse realities that we have emotional responses to, perform and examine (see Law and Singleton, 2000). In other words – ontologies:

Ontologies: Note that. Now the word needs to go into the plural. For, and this is the crucial move, if reality is done, if it is historically, culturally and materially located, then it is also multiple. Realities have become multiple (Mol, 1999, p .75)

The insistence on multiple ontologies over perspectives of reality is significant and Mol takes care to distinguish between ANT metaphors that evoke multiple ontologies and implied pluralism implicit in metaphors of world-view, perspectives or social construction that force attention on plurality and politics of position – the power of a view a stake or a perspective.

In contrast Mol illustrates how, in holding to situated performance, ANT provides a means for pursuing flux:

Rather than being seen by a diversity of watching eyes whilst itself remaining untouched in the center reality is manipulated by means of various tools in the course of diversity of practices.

Here it is being cut into with a scalpel; there it is being bombarded with ultrasound; and somewhere else, a little further along the way, it is being put in a scale in order to be weighed.  
(Mol, 1999, p. 77)

Once such notions are played out in empirical work ANT surfaces not only heterogeneity, the gift of poststructural theories, but ontological multiplicity (see Mol, 1999, 2002 and 2008). Consider for example Mol's study of anaemia during which she points to both the situational character of performances and to the limits of situations. In 'networky' description it becomes apparent that human action is not an easily plotted and steady movement from one situated performance to another – it is a fluid mixing of situations and interferences (Mol, 1999): multiplicity is revealed as situations blur and congeal to later disconnect and flow.

### Story on the move: interference, fabrication and story networks

Let us return to H's study; to the story that brought McNeice off the shelf when H could not quite find exactly what she wanted. I have already indicated that this story was on the move. I had travelled to the author's home and had come equipped with materials that belonged to other locations and other ways of doing H's story. So, let me widen the network and illustrate what happens with an attention to situated performance (Mol, 1999) and fabrication or composition (Latour, 2010).

You may remember that, as McNeice was being edited into the story, the coffee table was hosting versions of script that had been annotated during rehearsal. You may also recall the VT we had watched, and the production guidelines and distribution projections that were 'staying put' for the time being in my work bag. Well, VT, scripts and the production guidelines have their stories to tell of the controversy. The scripts in terms of how they got annotated and why; the guidelines in why they may stay in the bag and the VT in why it got erased. Each of these stories has their own biographic take on interferences in television programme production: and on questions of taste and decency.

Let me begin with those documents that stayed in the workbag. Typically, any large television (media) production company has some form of code of conduct, and in the case of the organization I was concerned with they operated a *production, consultation and referral system* that incorporated *producers' guidelines* (PGS). The PGS was routinely updated and it translated certain everyday aspects of production, procedures and techniques into 'acceptable' practice. Internally, both the overall referral system and the PGS documented responsibilities, rights and discretion in television programme making and so frame values for programme makers on issues as such as impartiality, accuracy, violence, imitative and anti-social behaviour, portrayal of children and matters of taste and decency. Typically, for larger independent companies, their guidelines are derived from their major distribution networks and commissioning companies. Most organizations will have some form of audience consultation activity when they review their guidelines.

In the television programme making organization I studied, according to the PGS all producers, managers and editors should have "a working knowledge of the principles **embodied** in the guidelines particularly where they affect their specific area" (PGS (with-held) 1; 1.3 my emphasis). In my experience, programme makers did have a working knowledge that they evidenced in their practice but were not avid readers unless a problem loomed. However, as formal

and as dogmatic as PGS may appear, when they are used in practice of programme making, even in a controversy, they proved quite amiable players.

The notion of controversy is significant. Some programmes set out to be controversial. They have specific appeal and this appeal may limit the market. In any large budget production, such as the one I was involved with, a story is inevitably translated and performed in terms of their ‘markets’ by the producers and executive producers. But, beware as this is only one of a number of ways story are performed by producers: and markets and budgets readily translate into creative concerns. In terms of markets, a “*nice little story*” (Executive Producer in personal email) that hits just the right balance between drama and risk can be distributed on a global scale. In production terms, H had a nice little story for Children and there was nothing controversial in the story as such: controversy came and was resolved in the making.

The controversy that surfaced around scene 430 suggested that at some point the PGS, specifically section taste and decency, may be summoned. In following that connection I found that the PGS may not be quite as powerful arbiter of events as might be imagined. For instance, the PGS states that programmes must not “... include anything which offends against good taste or decency or is likely to encourage or incite to crime or lead to disorder, or to be offensive to public feeling” (PGS Section 1, item 1.1). However, in the UK, in practice there is an aesthetic imperative that insists televised storytelling should reserve the right to challenge conventions. This imperative considers provocation to be a creative obligation and well known case exemplars that circulate around production companies and those involved in production – indeed, in this regard, H had her heroes.

In practice it was the programme makers who managed tensions between such creative and organizational realities. As in Mol’s study of anaemia, in practice these realities can co-exist without colliding too often. In television programme making terms it is considered as a case of knowing ‘*how to draw the line*’ (Director RGS; interview). Line drawing sounds like a political practice and it is. In case of children’s broadcasting, decisions are taken as to what can be tastefully or decently included within a particular drama. Such decisions drawn lines between what should or might be told and what cannot. In ‘drawing the line’, story is edited and characterizations, action, plot, codes of conduct and language are all subject to interference from taste and decency. However, lines are drawn around taste and decency itself by interference from audience in terms of anticipated age; from schedules in terms of whether a watershed is used by the broadcasters; and from distribution projections in terms of cultural variations in line drawing for different markets. In effect, H’s little story is busy living many lives: when it was just an outline plan it was busy at work with commissioners and then distribution; meanwhile it is busy in scheduling; and marketing; in casting; in location finding; in special effects and ... so forth. In each location the story is busy being and doing quiet specific ‘stuff’. Hence it is transformed into all sorts of different shapes and materials: from marketing information for the media to spreadsheets in planning and auditions. Indeed, taste and decency is subject to a lot of stretching where

*drawing a line is a matter of day-to-day concern and practice for us... On the one hand parents want us to be a safe baby sitter, on the other we want to provide challenging, sometimes difficult material, both for ourselves to work on and to ‘feed’ and nurture our particular audience.*  
*(Director RGS; interview).*

The directors take on taste and decency cohabits quite nicely with the PGS where on the one hand “the basic pillars of decency rest on telling the truth about the human experience, including its darker side, but we do not set out to demean or brutalize through word or deed, or to celebrate cruelty” (PGS, Sect 5, Item 5.1.5) and on the other recognizes that they produce programmes for “... a much more fragmented society than in the past; one that has divided views on what constitutes good taste...{programmes} sometimes seek to challenge existing assumptions about taste (PGS, Sect 5, Item 5.1.4).

The PGS that stayed in my workbag when I met H remained a powerful mediator even as they sat there, in the dark, quietly keeping potential organizational instabilities in check. Let me explain. Once again, and apologies for repetition but with networks the plot gets messy: We have a ‘nice little drama’, scheduled as children’s drama and enjoying a relatively big budget and with reasonable expectations of moving in international circles. To that set of connections we can add, at this point, a strong cast including experienced adult actors with well profiled stage and television drama’s to their credit. However, Scene 430 was proving awkward. Firstly, it raised the question of drawing the line over taste and decency and secondly there were different worlds that were in danger of colliding on quite where and how the line should be drawn.

Back to H's study and the annotated script where scene 430 has been modified. The modification is small but significant as one of H's directions has been crossed through. Now, this line mattered in all senses of the word. In terms of the script, the scriptwriter creates not just the dialogues but also sets the scene, tempo and affect that is then interpreted by the production team in practice. The textual directions written into the script are the authors world buffeting up into rehearsal, recording or on location.

Given that the various professionals would describe the problem differently I will simply say here that the reasons for scoring out a line in Scene 430 circulate around the risk to the wellbeing of the audience, that is to children. The scene required one of the adult actors, a benign father figure, to transform between scenes from his usual intelligent and capable self into a mindless child-like man sat on the floor banging a spoon. The implied action that occurs between scenes is that 'dad' has been subjected to a technical procedure and has lost his memory, language and all but basic skills. Initially, the problem seemed to be that in following the original script the impact was simply too frightening. In debating whether this may be the case new interferences appear such as the scene may have a particular upsetting impact on children with older relatives suffering from Alzheimer's or another form of dementia. The concern now become that the scene would work in ways other than intended. Dementia interfered.

One might initially think this is just a case of downplaying the action, so an actor's work. However, underplaying a dramatic role has risk as drama can quickly turn to comedy and the actor has his own creative sensibilities to bring forward as well as the practical concern for his curriculum vitae. Meanwhile, the director operates in world where parents complain if children cannot sleep at night. Rather quickly, this issue had started to move along different threads and new interferences cropped up to edit and befuddle. At one stage in the discussion relationships between childhood, plot and scene sequencing became embroiled in line drawing. The suggestion now shifted from dementia to a whether the children in the audience would be able to follow the plot connections. Following this thread, one logical narrative solution would be to show the technological procedure: all agreed this was well over the line.

Time ran on and budget nipped at the heels as debates ranged and cross cut situations. Interferences multiplied and shifted shape to perceptions of audience's intellectual, emotional and tele-visual capabilities; control of effects; requirement for drama and the pact between programme makers and the parents of the audience.

H was keen to maintain her responsibilities for 'creating fear'. She was confident that her audience would be able to follow the plot line through forward and backward references, or that those who could not immediately follow the plot would work it out. Later, as we watched the VT and reflected on the changes, she was just as clear:

people say 'well they'll wonder what's happening'. Well fine, let them wonder what's happening, that's exactly what you do with adults, put something in, and you think what's that and later you think ah. So, why can't children do it? Children watch things, apparently every child in the land watches Z (names adult drama), I've never watched Z, but apparently every child in the land does and if they can deal with Z, I would have thought they could have dealt with that. (Excerpt from fieldwork transcript. Author's Home. Discussing Scene 430).

The overall outcome of all this movement and line drawing was that H's direction was edited out: the aggressive spoon banging 'dad' went, replaced by a gentler mindless. For the director, the line was between a 'slight frisson of scariness' and 'scaring a child' so they are unable to move. Fear needs careful management and losing the drama from a children's drama would not be a good outcome for anyone's credibility, professional identity or career. The director handled this in his world and with the tools and techniques that he knew well. He used camera angles, setting, lighting and careful timing to make the scene dramatic and visually effective. Weeks after my day with H we returned to look at the postproduction material and H was happy with the effect.

The story of changes in scene 430 may appear small but they have significant implication for story. It was clear that for a moment, professional situations surfaced other story possibilities, darker tales that were negotiated out in practice. The various debates around the scene were displaced to come to rest on an agreement 'fear and visual effect' not 'violence for visual effect'. In this displacement, a much lighter story of technology, threat and change emerged that might have been if H's script had remain unchanged.

So, what can we make of this interlude from television programme making life? You may wish to suggest that what I observed was some form of discursive struggle and I might better focus on who won, who lost and why: as if it were a discursive event. But, that just is not rich enough. My characters are not one-dimensional monochrome figures playing

'power over' games each with their own stake in a landscape. Not a one of them is shallow, singular or immobile – not H, the director, budgets, the scripts, the script editor, PGS, the actors, the set, the schedules, the distribution plans, the audience and not even the pen that scribbled out the line and secured the final story. Every actor is full of potential and ready to move if not on the move already.

#### Fabrication – concluding remarks

In composing this paper I have taken some liberties with both order and form but in the process I have demonstrated a fabrication sensibility that attends to action and movement over talk. In the process I have revealed some of the hidden storytellers at work in one network of organizational stories. The sensibility that I took into the field came from a theory/method assemblage that owes a great deal to STS in general and to actor networks particular take on sociology of translation in particular. As with many STS studies, the approach was ethnographic and the imperative was to look at what was being done. The work traced inter-actions and focused on people and things on the move. In terms of storytelling research the overarching story here may appear to be one of 'editing' but I would like to underline ontological politics and interference as a much stronger analytic trope and more resonant with social life as lived. Ontology is the concern that Boje (2012) attends to in summoning Heidegger and quantum fragments and it is this issue that I attend to here when I show some of the multiple and material realities of H's 'nice little story'. The story moved and was transformed quite literally into different matters: matters at work in drawing a line around taste and decency. Taste and decency connections reformed around dementia and on again to drama and child audience. But, irrespective of such flux and flow, H's drama was finished. It was broadcast and has been rerun on a number of occasions. It has been watched by hundreds of thousands of children globally and each child will have made their own story up and will perhaps recall if they ever read Orwell.

The study of story as a fabrication offers one valuable route into the hidden process of organizational storytelling. But, it is a lengthy exercise. Travels with organizational stories can be arduous and the findings demand the sort of rich description that tends to overwhelm journal articles or short papers. Hence, relating back to both Bakhtin and actor network theory I would suggest the following agenda for future Fabrication research into innumerable organizational stories. The agenda is composed of six issues for reflection and debate.: **Issue one** in line with the current imperatives in storytelling studies we continue to attend to the political 'nature of stories'. In this context we trace the biographies and attend to the social life of empowering, marginalizing and dominating tales. To surface fabrication, interaction is used to operationalize elasticity, resilience and necessary otherness of stories in word, text and deeds. Speech registers, textual strategies and interaction specificities are traces across locations and scales to reveal story powers and failures.

**Issue 2** rigorously examine political interests at work in 'making stories' including those of the researcher. If all social life runs on fictionality then the processes, polities and practices of fiction should be on Fabrication research agenda. Relationships between fact and fiction are to be theorized on the basis of both theoretical and empirical work. Authenticity is to be considered as a theoretical and methodological challenge.

**Issue 3** attend to the politics of 'consuming stories' by attention to audience. If a dialogic interaction between audience and teller is a hidden editor of organizational storytelling the specificities of such interactions warrant investigation. In this context, 'audience effect' is a significant aspect of consumption and effects should be theorized and pursued within, between and outwith the site of story production. Audience research is an imperative: audiences are complex, disparate and hidden storytellers.

**Issue 4** focus on strategies of storytelling where telling, listening and retelling are taken to be complex sites of fabrication that are interactive, sociomaterial, embodied and situated in practice.

**Issue 5** pursue stories on the move. If location and situation are untold storytellers (or editors) - theoretical and methodological attention should turn to consider the implication of this for both organizational storytelling and storytelling studies. Appropriate methods and techniques are required to examine the specificity of located performances and interferences. Investigations are required that can address politics at work as a stories move to a new location or alternatively when situations travel into a location and interfere. Tracing both stories and situations on the move becomes an imperative.

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