



Original Article

# Alterity: The passion, politics, and ethics of self and scholarship

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## Abstract

I propose that the choices we make about the type of work we do as scholars are not just intellectual ones, they are intricately interwoven with who we are, made in poetic moments, in relation to others, and have political consequences in terms of our identities and career. This is particularly so for critical and reflexive scholars struggling with their sense of self in relation to the wider academy. This struggle is both personal and ethical in the sense of requiring us to be respons-able for ourselves and others. Drawing from hermeneutic phenomenology and utilizing narrative ethnography, I explore my experience of alterity and how it helped shape me, my research, and my career. My aim is to encourage scholars engaged in work that is different to mainstream “norms,” and who may be grappling with similar issues, to persevere and find a way forward.

## Keywords

Auto ethnography, hermeneutics, identity, reflexivity, scholarship

## Poetic moments



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It had been a busy day, teaching, a couple of meetings, but she'd finally got home, tired. She sat down on the chair in her study, ran her fingers lightly over the fine-grained wood of her desk, and gazed out of the window. It was dusk, that short span of time so typical of the Southwest, in between the glare of the sun and the blackness of the night, when the purple, crimson, blues and oranges of the setting sun made the moments seem almost surreal. She picked up the book—should she read now or wait until she had more energy ... she really should eat. It was the sort of book that demanded time and attention. And she wasn't sure she had that right now. The dog wandered in, jumped on her knee and settled down for a nap. "Hey Bud, looks like you're set for the night." She laughed and then sighed.

Once in a while you come across a book that draws you in. It's like a mystery, threads of ideas, fragments that don't quite make sense, you think you understand—read more—and realize it's gone from your grasp, whatever "it" was. The words curl around the corners of your mind and lie there waiting to connect. As Merleau-Ponty (1962:466) so aptly says "my eyes follow the lines on the paper, and from the moment I am caught up in their meaning, I lose sight of them." It's one of those books that challenges, frustrates and entraps: that takes you out of yourself, stimulating thoughts previously unthought, it resonates in some way with ideas or with your experience—offers possibilities for seeing life differently. The argument is so finely crafted, complicated, nuanced, a culmination of a lifetime's work ... of the life of the mind. (Arendt, 1978)

I'm envious—I wish I had the knowledge, the understanding and the ability to write in a way that captures the imagination, to offer ideas that work both in the darkness of your unconscious and in the light of reflection. Words that paradoxically leap off the page and at the same time entice you in—into which you become intricately implicated. I'm not sure why I'm so taken with this book and these ideas at this particular moment in time—I just know they're ideas I want to think about, I want to work though, to see where they take me... If anywhere.

I smile wryly. This kind of work—philosophical work—is not going to get me anywhere quickly: it's not the norm for US Business Schools, neither quantitative—nor qualitative, not seen as credible management research or rigorous empirical work, not playing the game. Seen as weird. But sometimes you have to make choices ...

*A poetic moment.* French philosopher, Ricoeur talks about *instants*, moments that have the effect of rupture, of beginning to think about or see something differently. And while such instants may stand out in our memory, Ricoeur (1991) says they are dialectically and thickly embedded in the present, past and the future—in that "we speak of what is going to happen ... that which has just happened and which, in a certain manner, is still there in the form of primary memory, intertwined with present experience" (p. 210). So although an "instant" is represented as a point in time, it also resonates across time and has rich possibilities for our future. My epigraph story is such an instant, it led to a reinterpretation of myself, my work and to the scholar I am today. It captures the premise of my article:

*That the choices we make about the type of work we want to do as scholars are not just intellectual ones, they are intricately interwoven with who we are—made in poetic moments, in-relation to others, and have political consequences in terms of our identities and careers.*

Such choices are political because of increasing pressures to conform to ever-narrowing forms of research conventions and publication norms, while opportunities to be imaginative and write differently are diminishing.

## Setting the scene

Scholarship is a choice of how to live as well as a choice of career; whether he knows it or not, the intellectual workman forms his own self as he works towards the perfection of his craft [*sic*]. (Wright Mills, 1959: 196)

I begin with a story because it is one I believe resonates with many academics, particularly those who find themselves engaged in research that is different to the mainstream. Scholars who struggle with their sense of identity and place in the academy, but who persevere because they have a passion for the work they do. It is a story that captures much of what I would like to explore: that embedded deeply within the choices we make about our work and in our accounts of the lives of others are narrations and choices about *self* and who we are as scholars. Over the years, I have had many conversations with doctoral students and early career researchers about the type of research they would like to do, but feel they cannot because it is not acceptable. Doing research that is “different” is about *alterity* (Lévinas, 1961)—being constituted as “the Other” and as the Other there are practical consequences in terms of getting published, gaining tenure, building a career and being seen as a credible scholar:

My otherness became vividly clear to me during a meeting on the topic of research as part of preparations for an impending AACSB reaccreditation visit to the US University at which I was faculty member. The Associate Dean commented that there was a group of quantitative researchers, a group of qualitative researchers, and Ann [waving his hand vaguely towards a distant corner].

Being relegated to a corner is difficult to live with on a daily basis and does not help generate a strong identification with your home institution (Empson, 2013). As I will illustrate, despite trying to belong (Butcher, 2013), my “corner” status and being constituted as the “other” had both personal and political consequences in terms of my feelings of isolation and my career. Yet, despite this, I believe strongly that we can and should follow our passion because it is the basis for shaping our scholarly identity and for an inclusive and polyphonic organization studies.

Richardson (1997) asks, “How do the specific circumstances in which we write affect what we write? How does what we write affect who we become?” (p. 1). Questions similar to the one I have been asking for the last 20 years and which form the crux of this article—“How is who we are, what we write, and who we become, related?” It is a question that affects us personally and professionally and one that is becoming more significant in the current era of academic governance, research metrics, and the audit culture now prevalent in many universities (Craig et al., 2014), where our academic imagination and creativity are being eroded by the push to conform to increasingly narrow views of “good” research and conventional forms of writing.

So how can we find new modes of scholarly being (Ricoeur, 1976: 94), engage in imaginative and thought-provoking work, *and* have a career? I suggest by being passionate about our work—a passion that comes from an inner sense of commitment, persistence, and the recognition that the journey to becoming a scholar is fluid and complex.

This article is not an intellectual critique, a paper about career theory, nor a pure autoethnography, but a juxtaposition of theoretical and personal insights to highlight the embedded and embodied nature of our identities and our life as scholars. It is situated in *new or narrative ethnography* developed by Goodall (2000), who wrote “narratives shaped out of a writer’s personal experiences (his own [sic]) within a culture and addressed to academic and public audiences” (p. 9). Narrative ethnography encompasses the belief that personal narratives are also collective ones, because we live and work in a dialectical relationship with our social, cultural, historical, and linguistic circumstances. It means moving away from objectifying the self as an identity, to putting ourselves into the story by cultivating our *sociological imagination* (Wright Mills, 1959): to interrogate our relationship with and our responsibility—our ability to recognize the need to be responsive—with and for others. It is also a form of writing more typical of feminist studies (e.g. Ettorre, 2017; Griffin, 2012; Jolly, 2005; Scott, 2016), communication studies (e.g. Goodall, 2005, 2008; Herrmann, 2012), anthropology (e.g. Behar, 2013; Kondo, 1990), literature (e.g. Marmon Silko, 2010), and sociology (Richardson, 2007), than management or organization studies where few

scholars find their narrative voice. Those that have, relate their experience of exploring multiple identities in the research–practice divide (Bartunek, 2006; Empson, 2013), the academy (Brewis, 2005; Haynes, 2011), the field as researchers (Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013; Humphreys, 2005; Marshall, 2016), teaching and learning (Mangan et al., 2016; Sinclair, 2010), and in the struggles of PhD students (McDonald, 2016; McLachlan and Garcia, 2015; Prasad, 2013). It is a form of writing that is important because, as Parker (2004: 56) says, reflexive writing from “within” can help us understand and reshape our experience—we may unbecome and become someone else—while at the same time offering a narrative that “might well be recognized by other(s).” My aim is therefore to offer a reflexive narrative of one scholar’s experience that might resonate, encourage others to follow their passion, and find ways of shaping themselves as scholars. It is also about highlighting the politics and ethics of alterity, understanding we are not alone and that we need to take responsibility for shaping our academic community and an inclusive Organization Studies.

What follows are formal narratives of scholarship and selfhood interwoven with self-narratives of passion (Livholts, 2009), persistence, and resistance—of being provoked, inspired, and challenged to think differently—of making political choices about research and writing that have practical consequences for our sense of self and our career. I have come to understand it is a narrative that resonates with many organizational scholars engaged in interpretive, poststructuralist, feminist, and other “non-mainstream” work—a narrative we discuss in hallways but rarely in journals. It is a narrative of despair, loneliness, optimism, and hope, important because it is about the future of the academy and the discipline.

## A philosophical lens on scholarship

I am interested in exploring the relationship between self and ethics—or more precisely, how we shape our sense of self as organizational participants, leaders, and researchers. This interest is partly explained by my philosophical stance, which straddles social constructionism and hermeneutic phenomenology and which creates interesting intellectual tensions but also a number of connections. As Levin (1998) says, hermeneutics

works with an intricate rhetorical logic, a dialectic between languaging and experiencing in which there is an intricate interaction, by no means straightforward, between the implicit and the explicit, the virtual and the actual, the “always already” and the “not yet.” (p. 350)

This quote captures for me the core and intrigue of our relationship between our-selves, our experience, our actions, and our accounts of the world. It also highlights that who we are is always uncertain and becoming.

Early work in hermeneutics was initially about interpretation and the meaning of texts, but in the work of Ricoeur (e.g. 1976, 1981) and Merleau-Ponty, (1962, 1964) interpretation takes on a different lens in the context of our everyday life. For Ricoeur (1992: 179), knowing our world and ourselves is an “unending work of interpretation,” not in the traditional sense of understanding another person’s intention or meaning, but about opening up possible ways of seeing and being which “*gives to the subject a new capacity for knowing himself [sic]*” (Ricoeur, 1976: 94).

My epigraph story was the beginning of what became a reinterpretation of my self and my more philosophically/intersubjectively driven research interests. Three threads began to form the warp and the weft of my research: poetics, reflexive selfhood, and alterity: threads which come together in this exploration of the challenges and choices we face as scholars following our intellectual passion while contending with conventions of academic life that can stifle difference and plurality,

choices caught up in the interplay of personal experience and conceptualizations of self and sociality. Let me explain.

## Scholarship, poetics, and self

*Poetics: Concerned with “different possible ways in which we might relate ourselves to our surroundings”* (Shotter, 2008: 108)

I draw on poetics in two ways: first, as poetic moments or “instants” (Ricoeur, 1991) involving how we interpret our lives in relation with others; second, poetic in the sense of our interpretive work as scholars. Both can be related, as in my epigraph story.

I have borrowed the phrase *poetics and politics* from the book *Writing Culture* by Clifford and Marcus (1986), and I would like to begin my exploration of scholarship by going back to their work because this was one of my first poetic moments. They argue that anthropology, particularly ethnography, is a literary and poetic process in which our research accounts are skillful fashioning of cultural fictions, not accurate truths but partial and ideologically saturated interpretations of the lives of others. In other words, ethnography is about writing not about real life, and even though we observe, survey, interview, and study people in the field—we always leave and rewrite our notes in the relative seclusion of our office. Thus, much of our scholarly writing is about making sense, retrospectively, about what we think happened.

I remember reading this work during my PhD and was rather skeptical. My MPhil had been basically functionalist, presenting a model of the role of UK health service administrators drawing on observation, interviews, and diary analysis. And here were some US guys telling me I had not discovered what was *really* happening! That our research accounts are not accurate descriptions but translations, reconstructed narratives of the past, in our own words and based on our own intellectual interests. And what was *even more* bothersome to me was Clifford’s (1983) argument that as ethnographers we should be careful about claiming *any* expertise or authority in portraying the lives of others. I had, after all, read all those books about management! I was observing managers doing things *even they themselves did not know*—didn’t that make me an expert?! It was at this point that the first seeds of doubt were sown—not something (so I thought) you wanted to happen when embarking on a PhD.

It was Van Maanen’s (1988) influential book *Tales of the Field* that gave me some perspective by making doubt okay: it offered a ‘different possible way’ and helped me to rethink scholarship. He asked us to consider the relationship between the culture (the organizations) we study, our observations and experiences as researchers, the ways in which we present our fieldwork, and how others may read our work. He suggested that we live and work in particular language communities that have their own conventions—their own ways of seeing, saying, and doing. Because of this, our research is subject to multiple interpretations, and thus always open to controversy and debate. And this is okay. Van Maanen also encouraged us to engage in “narrative ingenuity and novel interpretation” (p. 140), which does not mean making up whatever we want to about organizational life, it does mean taking our scholarship seriously. Being rigorous but tentative, being aware that our interpretation is one of many and so crafting our work in careful, critical, provisional, and ethical ways. And because our work is an interpretation, we need to focus not only on what we do, but how we do it—the *heart of reflexivity*.

I begin with Clifford, Marcus, and Van Maanen because their ideas about the poetic nature of our work were poetic moments for me (as well as many others). They resonated with me as a PhD student, challenging me to think about the type of work I wanted to do, how to go about doing it, and how to be reflexive in the process—“instants” leading to a reinterpretation of who I am as a

scholar. So, I found my interests changing. My PhD became a working through of issues of interpretation, poetics, and how to carry out reflexive inquiry. I asked Robert Chia to become my PhD supervisor along with Mark Easterby-Smith and this led to another poetic moment:

I was working on my Ph.D. while living in the US, and Robert came to visit. I'd written half of my thesis, which I gave him to read. After a couple of days, he said, "Well, yes, this is okay, you can write a thesis like this—or you can write a *real* Ph.D. thesis. A Ph.D. is a Doctor of Philosophy, and a good thesis incorporates philosophy—whatever the topic." I was devastated, I thought I'd nearly finished! That night, unknown to Robert, I cried in my room for 3 hours. But the following morning I decided I needed to do what he suggested—I didn't want to write just *any* old thesis. So I set out on the task of deciding what I needed to read and reading it. I found myself grappling with questions relating to the very nature of social and organizational realities, rethinking my ideas about knowledge and the shape of organization and management theory, and thinking about thinking itself ... An instant, a rupture that led to reinterpreting my past, present, and embracing a challenging and uncertain future.

Because what I began to realize was that even though I was studying management, a philosophical understanding *is* important. Not because philosophy gives us the truth, but because it is a mode of inquiry that pushes

our thinking to the point where we are not prepared for its results, to the point of a kind of surprise or to the point where there is an irruption of that which could not already be accounted for in our prior forms and rules of thinking. (Docherty, 1996: 198)

*This* is a poetic moment—*this* is what makes the path of scholarship exciting and what lends passion to our work—being struck by an idea sufficiently to want to explore it further! And philosophy gives us a context in which to situate and question our beliefs about the way the world works, who we are in the world, and the nature of knowledge.

So I rewrote my thesis, it was still about management, but incorporated very different ontological and epistemological assumptions. I moved from realism to social constructionism and post-structuralism, from positivism to social poetics and narrative, from management roles to language and reflexivity. Ideas I became passionate about and which shape my life and work today.

In theory, scholars work with self-discipline and logic: they begin with a research question, go out and gather data, analyze, theorize, plan out the research account, and then write it. But I have never experienced my work in such a deliberate, linear, and compartmentalized way. Just as artists and novelists use imagination within their work, so does the scholar. An idea resonates, fascinates, as we read, talk, mow the lawn or listen to music and we follow it. We read more, think about how to go out and explore the idea, prevaricate, puzzle over, become passionate about and, eventually, with much self-doubt, go out and talk to people—at work, in organizations, and at conferences. We ask questions, explore options, run up blind alleys, and have to turn back, but in doing so we also experience generative moments (Carlsen and Dutton, 2011) in which we eventually find a path we can follow, and along the way write hopefully interesting, thought-provoking, and persuasive accounts.

And I suggest that as we engage in this imaginative activity of scholarship, as we engage in research and writing our articles, we are also writing ourselves. Which brings me to my central premise, that *scholarship is intimately interwoven with who we are*.

### *Self and scholarship*

The basic practical-moral problem in life is not what to do but [who] *to be*. (Shotter, 1993: 118)

Back in 1947, cultural historian Barzun claimed that a scholar

corrects at every turn the first false impressions that we form of the heavens, the fields, and the workings of our human frame; he [sic] tells us how we should walk, sleep, eat, dance, and think, and he tries against heavy odds to light up the dark chamber of our brains with the *artistic and religious visions of the great spirits of humanity*. (p. 394)

Since then, scholarship has been—and still is—viewed as the disembodied, dispassionate, intellectual pursuit of an expert enlightening those who need enlightening. Personal accounts often take the form of researcher confessionals (Van Maanen, 1988) addressing how our individual biases affect (often negatively) the objectivity and neutrality of our research. However, as Ricoeur (1992) says, *there are no ethically neutral narratives* because our research and writing is replete with our assessments and choices about what to do and say. Reflexive and critical researchers who connect with the lived experiences and/or inequalities of their research participants accept that research is an engaged and emotional experience, carrying an ethical responsibility to participants and for articulating the position we take. They also recognize that in studying others we are mutually constituting both ourselves and others (Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013; Fine, 1994; Haynes, 2011; Prasad, 2014). While putting ourselves in our research can open up new ways of doing and being researchers, theorists and practitioners, it can also be risky. Personal revelations (e.g., Doloriert and Sambrook, 2009; Learmonth and Humphreys, 2012; Roth, 2009; Scott, 2016) can be criticized as narcissistic or as a form of therapy, and may lead to vulnerability.

One account that resonates with me still, because it captures in such an evocative way the interweaving of our intellectual choices and our sense of personal isolation—is that of Boje's (1997) story in *From Outcast to Postmodernist*. He says,

I never felt I belonged at UCLA. In fact, during the 1 1/2 years I waited for my 4-year review to be completed, I stopped speaking altogether. The fear was crippling. Walking across the sculpture garden, past all the nude statues of women in contorted and bizarre stances, I prayed that no one would notice me, that no student would speak to me, that no faculty would interact with me. I was inside my body somewhere; I could climb up into my brain and peer out of my eyes to facilitate a class discussion, but my self was hiding somewhere in my left leg, just above my ankle.

Such experiences of fear and unknowingness can force us to question and rethink our sense of identity and our notions of scholarship. This was almost me in 1997:

I was going through a major personal crisis. I'd finished my PhD and was deeply frustrated with being a part-time Business School faculty member with no prospects at a North Eastern US University. It was only teaching and my interaction with students that gave me *any* sense of connection. I'd applied for a tenure track position, but despite excellent teaching evaluations, I was deemed unsuitable. I knew I hadn't got the job because my Department Chair avoided looking at me or talking to me when we passed in the hallway. 6 weeks later he finally told me—saying it was because my research was “not about management”; that I had more in common with “the people across the road” (Humanities and Communications—I had started to work with John Shotter); that I would never get published in the “right journals” (ASQ, AMR); and the crux was that my work was “too innovative for a Management Department”!

At that point, like David, I was somewhere inside my body—it became clear to me just how different I was and how political and far-reaching my choice of research had been. Kristeva's (1991) comment resonated: “A paradoxical community is emerging, made up of foreigners who are reconciled with themselves to the extent they recognize themselves as foreigners.” I realized I was a foreigner in more than one sense of the word—by birth, education, philosophical stance, intellectual interests and methodology. I was totally disconnected.

Job applications to various US Business Schools were unsuccessful. I was usually told it was because of a lack of appropriate research topic and methodology (“what on earth does reflexivity have to do with management?”). I just didn’t fit. I got depressed. It was fine making a decision to do different work, but it was a personal and political decision about fitting or not fitting a norm—and living with the consequences of that choice on a day-to-day basis was not easy. I was struggling with how to deal with it. So I did the US thing and went to therapy ... to discover I was going through a mid-life crisis like everyone else. I found my personal angst categorized and rendered normal. I was told I should learn to separate out personal and work stuff and focus on getting a hobby - ballroom dancing would be good. Somehow that didn’t make me feel any better, it actually made me feel worse because I *couldn’t* separate my work and personal life. The ontological and epistemological issues I was grappling with were not *just* intellectual ideas but existential ones that permeated my research, my teaching and my whole being.

Holstein and Gubrium (2000: 103) argue that as human beings, we are narrators who “artfully pick and choose from what is experientially available to articulate [our] lives and experiences.” We create coherent narratives around significant events and place ourselves and others as characters. In creating this coherent narrative identity we connect ourselves to our social context, to others, and we get a sense of continuity over time and place. A view shared by Gross (2002) who suggests that philosophers make choices about their work based on their intellectual self-concept, a relatively stable narrative rooted in a range of values, commitments, and competencies—in which we enact the narratives created by us and for us by others. I struggled with this, for while stability can offer ontological security and “norm”ality, it can also create disconnection and desperation:

‘Cause you can’t jump the track, we’re like cars on a cable,  
and life’s like an hourglass glued to the table.

No one can find the rewind button, now, so cradle your head in your hand  
And breathe, just breathe.... (Nalik, 2005)

The “track” meant conforming to the political game of publishing in the “right” (the top 4 US) journals (Prasad, 2013)—which, given the philosophical basis of my work and my obvious deficiencies in terms of being able to structure an article in the acceptable way, write a “good” literature review, test propositions, construct a rigorous interview protocol, or develop generalizable theory (all comments from rejection letters)—was never likely to happen. As one editor of a top journal noted upon rejecting my paper after a third revision, “As I write these comments I realize that in essence there may be a difference in terms of our respective commitments and expectations in terms of what makes a theoretical contribution.” Yes, but even so we are still judged using the evaluation criteria of the mainstream paradigm! The paper was later accepted in a top European journal and has been on the “Most Read” list since publication. But at that point, I felt glued to the table and conflicted, a not unfamiliar experience, as Ford and Harding (2008) note that in seeking recognition from a conference, “it failed to recognize us [...] and domination and subjection resulted” (p. 247). It is a struggle many scholars share in terms of trying to shape their sense of self within academic conventions while staying true to their interests.

Narrating our lives into some sort of sense is not easy. Who we are as both a person and a scholar is complicated and often contradictory. And who we are is also partly unknowable and precarious. Stanley and Temple (2008) observe “there are of course, narratives that can and cannot be spoken, for narratable subjects are made and unmade, and the narratives that are available and can be spoken may be disabling as well as enabling” (p. 278). The narrative of scholarship available to me in the late 1990s and early-mid 2000s was both potentially disabling—in terms of knowing that if I continued to do the work I felt passionate about then my career prospects in the United

States would be extremely restricted—yet also enabling because I would be damned if I would conform. I believed in my philosophical orientation, that research is about the meanings people give to their lived experience, and I wanted to do what *I* thought was interesting. I did not want to be bored for the rest of my career. So I *would* find ways of getting my work published in quality journals and I *would* make a contribution to knowledge but in my own way if I could only figure out what that way would be. In these moments of unknowingness “when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human” (Butler, 2005: 136), we begin to shape our sense of self. And I felt I would only be true to myself if I “jumped the track” and followed my passion.

Two poetic moments of opportunity helped me do so. The first, one of those chance occurrences,

20 years ago I happened to meet Karen Locke at the Academy of Management. She was chairing the session in which I was presenting and we connected! She introduced me to a small, but significant, group of women ethnographers who had taken risks and who were passionate about their work. It was their example, encouragement and support that frankly kept me sane, intellectually alive and engaged in the work I really wanted to do.

And this is a crucial aspect of our lives as scholars—finding colleagues who are interesting and fun to work with: people with whom you can talk, laugh, debate, and whine—even if across continents. *Finding your community is important.*

Jumping the track is a risk, but a risk we can take by recognizing that life is a chiasm of chance events, actions, and choices—unexpected vexations, challenges, and opportunities are not simple and controllable. We live with others in complex relationships, in a series of *instants* and *presents*. So, who we are and what we do is not always a case of rational or artful choice, but sometimes of *cobbling together*. In the chiasm, lie opportunities to follow our scholarly passion, to both belong and be individual. The key lies in recognizing those moments.

The second moment was rediscovering the work of Ricoeur. The book in my epigraph story is *Oneself as Another*, which resonated in multiple ways. It brought me back to Shotter’s observation that figuring out “who” to be not “what” to do was important (see Cunliffe, 2016a for a further account) and revealed an important connection between my personal experience and developing research interests. Interested in identity, I began with Sartre (1956, 1965), but after many cups of tea followed by bottles of wine, I eventually found his focus on a purely self-reflective consciousness abstracted from lived experience, problematic. I had previously read Ricoeur’s work on interpretation and narrative, and happened to pick up *Oneself as Another*—a poetic moment. As part of Ricoeur’s later work, it is dense, nuanced, contradictory, and a book that needs multiple readings because of its complexity. I found his thoughts on identity and selfhood offered not only a different way of thinking about how we conceptualize identity, but also an intriguing way of thinking about the contradictions in *my* life, scholarship, and who I am in relation to others.

In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur develops a hermeneutics of self, which addresses the question “*who am I?*,” rather than “*what am I?*” And there *is* a crucial difference: the “*what*” is disembodied, an *idem* identity which is a collectively experienced generalized and objectivized “*I*” (a scholar, manager, etc.) in which we compare ourselves with others in terms of commonly accepted descriptors, generalized identity markers, and traits such as middle class or introvert. I began to realize that being categorized as a “critical” scholar by others was a “portrait painted from outside” (Ricoeur, 1992: 141) that did not help me deal with my frustration, loneliness, and “corner” status. Rather, I needed to focus on *who* I wanted to be. For Ricoeur, *who we are*, is *ipseity*, recognizing our and others’ uniqueness, our personal history, our intentionality, and our accountability for ourselves and others. And this is where ethics became important because *who* consists of *character*, which

for Ricoeur is about keeping our word, solicitude for others, and fidelity—about being self-constant in those moments of “unknowingness” (Butler, 2005). “*Who*” is also about intention, about being able to say “I intend to . . .,” to act and to evaluate the goodness of our choices and actions and whether these are plausible in the eyes of ourselves and others. So, I began to explore my frustrations and think about who I wanted to be as a person, scholar, and researcher: to hold myself responsible for myself in the present, for “the consequences to come” (Ricoeur, 1992: 295), and to try to act with personal and academic integrity and self-constancy.

I developed a clear research agenda based on my interests and what and how I wanted to write—an agenda situated in a philosophical orientation. But our intentions lie within contextualized and political narratives that include the gatekeeping activities of journal editors, funding bodies, and promotion committees. While holding myself responsible I was still “the other” in the far corner, a lonely experience with political consequences for my career in the United States:

I applied for promotion to full professor but was not supported by my Department Chair. I was told I needed one more publication and was applying a year early. I appealed. The Dean, who didn’t understand my work, supported my Chair. During the ensuing stressful and time-consuming appeal process I discovered there were 11 external evaluations from key people in the field (the norm was 5–6) all of which recommended promotion. I presented a comparison of my Harzing scores with the last 5 faculty members promoted - who happened to be male and doing mainstream research. My citations per year were 10 times higher than the next person and my total number of citations 6 times higher. I had academic service as a journal editor, associate editor, an international editorial board member on six boards, and as an Academy Division Chair. I took my appeal to the top of the University where the decision was made to promote me and where I was told mine was one of the clearest cases for promotion seen in 20 years. The following year was made extremely difficult for me and for the people who had supported me. At the end of that year I resigned and moved to the UK. Interestingly, soon after I left two younger male faculty members in my Department with less strong records were promoted without a problem, also at least a year early.

And I am not alone in this type of experience. I was fortunate in being able to “*jump the track*,” whereas many are not. My decision to resign for personal and professional reasons and was not an easy one. I loved where I lived (and have now returned there), but if I stayed I would have to spend most of my time fighting key “others.” I was tired, even more isolated, wanted to get on with research and writing, and felt that I could better support others in a similar situation from a different place.

The personal narratives I have related up to this point have been about poetic moments of unknowingness, the tensions of idem (the “ideal” scholar) and ipseity (who I am), which spurred self-reflexivity around who I wanted to be as a person and scholar: choices about belonging and being different.

Which brings me to my third and final thread—alterity.

## Alterity

*The selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other; that instead one passes into the other.* (Ricoeur, 1992: 3)

What I hope is emerging is a narrative of self and scholarship situated in poetic moments in which we grapple with how we are both the same and different to others (colleagues, department chairs, conference participants)—experientially and intellectually. Moments that may lead to exploring and reinterpreting who we are as a person and scholar. It is also an explanation of why I am interested in the work of hermeneutic phenomenologists and believe that a philosophical lens can offer a very

different perspective and understanding of issues of selfhood, scholarship, and organizational life. Because by exploring what it means to *be* in the world, the nature of our experience, and how we come to know our world and ourselves—we can gain some very practical insights into how we live our lives as ordinary people, as scholars, and as leaders and managers of organizations.

And what you may also notice is that although these poetic moments and narratives may ostensibly be about me, they very much incorporate others.

Which takes us to the issue of *alterity* and the idea that we do not live our lives in isolation but *in relation* to “others,” particular people, generalized others, language systems, narratives of culture and history. Alterity is *not* an abstract concept, it is rooted in “the face-to-face bonds of everyday sociality” (Gardiner, 1996: 132), in how I relate with people who play a significant part in my life—my parents, friends, students, co-authors, research participants, mentors and colleagues, people whose lives interweave with my own in ways difficult to fully articulate.

Lévinas (1961, 1972) is generally accepted as first conceptualizing the relationship between self and the world through the notion of the other, the “alter.” Otherness is a central concept in Lévinas’s work, one that is meaningful to my argument in two ways. First, in relation to the idea of how our identity as scholars emerges in relationships with others, and second, the ethical responsibility that alterity brings to our work. He argues that although “I” am unique in that “no one can answer in my stead” (Lévinas, 1972: 33), the “other” calls me into consciousness. This recognition that there is an “other,” separate and yet related to me, is reflected in his notion of *infinity*, of thinking beyond ourselves and being willing to *receive* the other (Lévinas, 1961). The radicality of alterity is that even though we are inextricably linked and you are always present, you will always be separate and thus strange to me—you will always be more than I can know.

Which brings us to the ethical nature of the self-other relationship: “The fact that in existing for another I exist otherwise than in existing for me is morality itself” (Lévinas, 1961: 261). Who I am is not only about me, but who I am in relation to the other—to you—and I am ethically bound to respond to you. For Lévinas, ethical responsibility lies in not reducing the other to make them the same (his notion of *totality*). So, from the perspective of scholarship, this *respons-ability* means being open to others, to different ways of thinking and acting, to practitioners and their experience, without trying to integrate them into monologic forms of theorizing—something we often do as we theorize the lives of our research subjects into academic language. And, if we are not careful, by privileging particular forms of research and scholarship we integrate same/other into a totality. It is here that Ricoeur and Lévinas connect. For both “the philosophy of alterity is intended to disrupt the conventional Western philosophical discourse which privileges unity and sameness over alterity and difference.” (Dahl, 2001: 28–29).

But it is Ricoeur (1992) and particularly Merleau-Ponty’s (1962, 1964) work that really helped me situate alterity (intersubjectivity) in lived experience. Both believe we are who we are because of our relationships and our interactions with others—not as two individuals coordinating activity and coming to an understanding of what each other thinks, *but as separate yet inseparable*. We are who we are because everything we say, think and do is interwoven with others. This is the relational and mundane nature of living our lives with others—the radical, (in)separable and enigmatic nature of self/other relationships. Self and *other*, researchers and researched, scholars and students are separate, yet mutually entangled in a complex web of present, previous, and future relationships; conversations; language communities; and historical and cultural ways of speaking. For Ricoeur (1981), we extend our horizon of experience, our subjectivity and possible worlds by responding to and shaping unfolding meanings with others. This is the origin of the moral bond, which can also be a touchpoint for reflecting on our work as scholars. In practical terms, this means recognizing that we shape and maintain the very academic practices we find oppressive and challenging them in ways we that we can—and this differs for each of us.

Radical alterity and infinity play through our lives as scholars, both in terms of our identity, selfhood, and our scholarly activities. My personal narratives have been about alterity: choices I made in relation to others and to an “Other” that have been simultaneously personal, intellectual, and political because they were around issues of conformity or nonconformity, being the same or different, about reason and passion, pragmatism or desire—choices which have very real consequences in terms of our career.

## From being in “the corner” to relationality

In his powerful narrative ethnography, Goodall (2005) suggests that we inherit narratives that have personal and ecological consequences because they provide ways of understanding our identities, our “life grammar,” and what counts as important. The academic narratives I inherited were “deeply and ontologically ‘constitutive’” (McNay, 2009: 1178) because embedded within them lay choices about conformity and deviance, appropriation and risk, isolation and friendship. My narrative is not unique; it illustrates the frustrations of living with alterity and the tensions of idem identity and ipse selfhood that we deal with personally on a day-to-day basis. It also illustrates the challenges that many non-mainstream scholars face in their search for a sense of identity and place: as they try to deal with the political pressures to conform that may be exerted by PhD supervisors and examiners, academic journal editors and reviewers, and in promotion and tenure decisions. The politics of self and scholarship lies in complex struggles over meaning and conformity, both personally and on the wider academic stage, because they are vested “in certain ways and means of being, living, and representing” (Ashcraft and Allen, 2009: 22). It is in these complex struggles that we can find a sense of our identity and ourself—and that we may choose to ignore or engage with in different ways:

Having made the decision to hold myself responsible, I became passionate about how I might begin to challenge and perhaps change the normalizing and politicized academic narratives I inherited—not just in my own work but also for others. Finding my community was not enough, I also felt an ethical responsibility to support colleagues in making choices and doing work that may be different to the norm. My goal in teaching Ph.D. students became to offer the range of ontological, epistemological and methodological possibilities open to them so they could decide which resonated and how to follow their (not my) interests. I work on: developing and encouraging different ways of “theorising”; creating spaces for dialogue and collaboration with others experiencing similar frustrations [e.g., workshops, the QRM Conference]; enacting and encouraging others to explore imaginative possibilities in their own work through practical feedback and support; and on creating opportunities to publish work such as that in *Management Learning* that “push(es) the boundaries of thinking.” (Cunliffe and Sadler-Smith, 2015: 4)

How might we embrace radical alterity and an ethical responsibility to the Other without rendering them the same and appropriating their lives intellectually and practically? I suggest through passion tempered with reflexivity. While reflexivity is often enacted as a critique of others, it is also questioning ourselves in relation-with-others, the potential impact of our assumptions and the ways in which we may enact our various identities and responsibilities (Cunliffe, 2016b; McDonald, 2016). Self-reflexivity is crucial in coping with those moments of unknowingness and for recognizing our responsibility and accountability for ourselves and others: for not possessing or making the Other the same as us. Isn't this an aspect of scholarship not to be lost among the pressure to conform when the politics of academic choice are colonized by the choices of academy politics.

Scholarship is more than “asking interesting questions that address important issues and/or challenge existing beliefs” (Ordóñez et al., 2009: 84–85), it is also about striving to be adventurous, imaginative, human, and ethically responsible—open and responsive to uniqueness in

ourselves and others. This form of scholarship helps us avoid the intellectual arrogance that results in thinking we are expert and able to appropriate other's lives (academics, managers, and students). Scholarship also means having a sense of who we are in the world; embracing alterity, relationality and reflexivity; being passionate about the questions and ideas we are exploring—while accepting there is still a lot we do not know; and being open to those poetic moments both in and out of the field in which we think what needs to be thought about, and imagine new possibilities.

By embracing alterity—the spaces of unknowingness and betweenness where new possibilities, new questions, new ways of seeing, being and acting arise—we come to know ourselves. This is especially so when an all-consuming passion for the journey of knowledge and for telling authentic, evocative, and significant stories interweave with our need to be responsive and responsible scholars. As Wright Mills (1959: 223) says,

For in the end, it is this—the human variety—that you are always writing about. Thinking is a struggle for order and at the same time for comprehensiveness ... It is this dilemma, I suppose, that makes reflection, on those rare occasions when it is more or less successful, the most passionate endeavor of which the human being is capable.

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