





From cooperative practice to research and back: learning from the emotional experience of ethnography with two social enterprises

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|  Consummating: celebration of being-values | Practical knowing: knowing how to do something demonstrated through skills or competencies |  Grounding: validation of truth-values |
| | Propositional knowing: knowing in conceptual terms, expressed in descriptive statements and theories. | |
| | Presentational knowing: expression/symbolisation of intuitively felt resonance with the worlds and the meaning embedded in its enactment. | |
| | Experiential knowing: direct encounter, feeling and imagining, knowing through participative, empathetic resonance. | |

From cooperative practice to research and back: learning from the emotional experience of ethnography

Purpose: The paper explores how experiences and emotions arising from the performance of ethnography shape the construction of knowledge about democratic practice in two social enterprises. It argues that ethnographers can develop a more nuanced understanding of organisational practices by moving beyond the self-reflexive work of being aware of one's position to embrace the emotional work of engaging reflexively *with* this position, re-embedding reflexive moments in the process of knowledge construction.

Design/methodology/approach: Reflections are made on the emotions and experiences arising during a 12 month ethnographic study in two social enterprises.

Findings: The author found that engaging reflexively with relational and emotional processes of meaning-making opened up three analytical starting points. First it highlighted and helped the researcher to see beyond the limits of their assumptions, opening them to new understandings of democracy. Second, it gave rise to empathetic resonance through which the researcher was able to 'feel into' the practice of democracy and re-frame it as a site of ongoing struggle. Finally, it brought to consciousness tacit ways of knowing and being central to both research and democratic praxis.

Originality/value: The paper adds to limited literature on processes of knowledge construction. Specifically it contributes new insights into how emotional experiences and empathetic resonance arising at the meeting point of research performance and democratic praxis can offer analytical starting points for a more nuanced understanding of democratic organising in social enterprise.

Keywords: ethnography; emotion; participant observation; worker cooperative; democracy; insider-outsider research

Introduction

Ethnography is, on the one hand, described as ‘an endeavour to describe reality’ (Zickar and Carter, 2010: 305) and produce ‘accounts of how the social world works’ (Watson 2012: 15) and on the other is recognised as an intersubjective, world-making process (Yanow, 2012; Cunliffe, 2009). Between these two readings ethnography is caught in a contradiction between trying to speak for and of participants while ‘avoiding objectification and the reductionist treatment of subjects’ (Driver, 2016: 2). In addition to challenging the existence of a single reality, the intersubjective nature of knowing through ethnography raises questions over whose reality and ways of knowing we are really describing.

Emphasising the researcher’s role in processes of intersubjective meaning-making Yanow (2012: 33) explains:

[...] positioning researchers bodies on site in the midst of research processes, ethnography violates both physical-ontological objectivity and cognitive-emotional-epistemological objectivity. Placing the researcher’s body on the line – as the main instrument of ethnographic knowing – challenges [...] the researcher’s ability to be cognitively and emotionally distant.

Despite questions over whose reality is being described in ethnographic research and the role played by emotional experience and ‘body praxis’ (Jackson, 1983: 328) in determining these ‘realities’ there is limited reflexive engagement with, and therefore transparency around, the *process* of knowledge construction in academic journals (for examples see Kenny, 2008; Garthwaite, 2016; Warren, 2012). As Donnelly et al (2013) recognise, the absence of such reflection leaves a sanitised, systematic and objective account of research that jars uncomfortably with researchers’ lived experiences of a messy and organic process. This is problematic for two reasons. First, the repeated presentation of linear accounts of research creates the sense that experiences of non-linearity and fluidity are the exception rather than the norm. This in turn generates unrealistic expectations, limiting space for the ‘imperfectness of the researcher’ (Koning and Ooi, 2013: 29) and generating pressure to conceal the challenges that, in practice, shape the direction and focus of our research (Donnelly et al, 2013). As such, the sanitisation of research processes downplays the value of ‘mess’ and emotion, makes opaque a central element of the analytical process and limits opportunities for inter-academic learning. Second, it falsely portrays the researcher as a cognitively neutral expert (Wray-Bliss, 2003; Turner and Norwood, 2013). Such portrayals limit opportunities for self-discovery through our own

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3 exposure to vulnerability which, contrary to objectivist understandings of 'good research',
4 contributes to academic rigor, credibility and trustworthiness (Donnelly et al, 2013). Specifically,
5 Koning and Ooi (2013: 21) argue that using body praxis and emotion as data reveals our part in
6 knowledge construction, making knowledge claims 'justifiable and accessible' and creating more
7 transparency over whose reality is being described. Moreover, such transparency allows readers to
8 see what has been lost and what has been gained through the meaning-making process and assess
9 for themselves the merit of our claims (Luttrell, 2000).
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16 Following these concerns, this paper seeks to offer an honest account of my own experience of
17 ethnographic research with two cooperatively run social enterprises. Through this account it
18 explores how experiences and emotions arising from the performance of ethnography informed the
19 construction of knowledge about democratic practice in the two case study organisations. As such,
20 the paper adds to limited literature on processes of knowledge construction in organisational
21 ethnographies. Specifically it contributes new insights into how emotional experiences and
22 empathetic resonance, arising at the meeting point of research performance and democratic praxis,
23 can offer analytical starting points for a more nuanced understanding of democratic organising in
24 social enterprise. At these meeting points my own views on what constitutes democracy, based on
25 understandings and expectations arising from Participatory Action Research (PAR), were
26 experienced alongside and at times challenged by the cooperatives' own democratic practices.
27 While literature (Pain and Francis, 2003; Greenwood et al., 1993) recognises that PAR is situated on
28 a continuum from single expert researcher to full researcher-participant collaboration, my aspiration
29 was always for the latter. As such, I sought clear and structured engagement with all participants in
30 every stage of the research, from the development of research questions to analysis and writing up.
31 This aim sat in stark contrast to the day-to-day reality of democratic organising. In each case study
32 research gradually revealed democracy to be a messy and experimental praxis, 'always in the
33 process of becoming' (Springer, 2011, p.530) and never reducible to participation in formal
34 structures alone (Beeman et al, 2009). When participants referred to their organisations'
35 democratic practice they were not referring to just their membership structure, shared ownership or
36 processes of decision-making but to culture and ethos that 'permeates the entire organisation'
37 (Novkovic, 2012: 93): a culture and ethos made most apparent through the emotional experience of
38 being an observant participant.
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55 Reflecting on these experiences and building on the understanding of body as instrument I contend
56 that organisational ethnographers should go beyond the self-reflexive work of being aware of ones
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3 position to embrace the emotional work of engaging reflexively *with* this position (see Cunliffe,
4 2003; Driver, 2016; Rhodes, 2009). From this perspective, reflexivity is not about self-discovery of a
5 pre-existing identity or of a knowable agency or power. Nor is it about standing back 'in order to
6 subjectively reflect on ourselves in relation to objective circumstance' (Burkett, 2011: 464). Such
7 rational, individualist approaches imply that there is a single knowable agent and pre-existing
8 identity of which to be aware. I follow Rose (1997) and Gibson-Graham (1994) who dispute this
9 claim by highlighting the overdeterminist and decentred nature of subjectivity. Moreover,
10 individualistic approaches to reflexivity ignore the 'inherently relational and, thus, emotionally
11 laden' (Koning and Ooi, 2013: 17) nature of ethnography, and more importantly, the impact that
12 emotions have on the way that we see ourselves, others and our social context (Burkett, 2011).

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21 Responding to these omissions, I understand reflexivity as an exploration of the changing self in
22 relation to others, where both self and other are viewed as autonomous individuals engaged in
23 *ongoing* and life-changing processes of self-construction (Ledwith, 2007: 607). These processes
24 constitute acts of listening to multiple voices of the self and others and temporarily performing (and
25 mis-performing) more certain subjectivities (Rose, 1997; Cunliffe, 2003). Reflexivity is, in other
26 words, about exploring difference, conflict and contradiction and understanding our engagements at
27 and with these boundaries as creative moments where researcher, 'researched' and research make
28 and remake each other. It is at these moments that we come to understand, not only how our
29 positionality and experiences inform the type of knowledge that is produced but, more
30 fundamentally, *how* we have come to know (Mikkelsen, 2013).

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39 Adopting this understanding of reflexivity I sought to use my experiences and emotions as research
40 tools. Feelings of anxiety, frustration and contradiction were not avoided or suppressed but rather
41 were viewed as productive moments and analytical starting points from which knowledge was
42 constructed (Koning and Ooi, 2013; Kenny, 2008). In their interaction with the research process and
43 participants these emotions made me vulnerable to question my assumptions, told me of the co-
44 constructed, fluid and plural nature of reality and the self and offered insights into the relation
45 between myself, participants and the praxis of democracy (Rhodes, 2009).

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52 Following a brief introduction to the two organisations involved in this study I set the scene by
53 outlining my understanding of research as a reflexive, intersubjective performance. Through
54 exploration into five productive moments I proceed to show how paying attention to emotional
55 responses made me more empathetic to the challenges, joys and processes of democratic organising

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3 and offered new insights and knowledges. Following Finlay (2005: 272), such embodied and
4 intersubjective experiences of empathy – of “feeling into,” or gently sensing another person or an
5 object – are thus understood to generate richer accounts of participants and organisations: accounts
6 that move beyond idealised and rationalised concepts of organising to reveal instead the disordered
7 and tacit ways of knowing and being together that form the foundation to democratic praxis in social
8 enterprise (see Smith, 2001).
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13 14 15 16 17 **Context and case studies**

18 This paper uses data produced through a year-long study with two cooperatively run social
19 enterprises: Vegetal and Collective Traders¹. Both case studies are trading enterprises, owned and
20 run, predominantly or solely, by the people who work in them (Banton et al., undated). While
21 adopting different legal forms they share a commitment to the cooperative principles that are
22 guided by, and put into practice, values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity
23 and solidarity.
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29 Vegetal is a small community shop established in 1986 to promote and raise awareness of the
30 benefits of whole, organic and locally grown foods. It has seven full-time members, one part-time
31 book keeper and between six and eight part-time staff. All seven members and the part-time book-
32 keeper participated in the research. I worked part-time in the shop as a non-member employee
33 between 2009 and 2013, re-entering as a researcher in 2014. Between November 2014 and April
34 2015 I spent an average of six hours/week volunteering in the shop and attending meetings. Over
35 the preceding six months my involvement reduced to attendance of fortnightly member meetings.
36 In addition, I advised members on possible alterations to their governing documents that would
37 bring them in line with the 2014 Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act.
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45 Collective Traders was set up in 2010 with the mission to:
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49 *(...) give people the choice and opportunity to live, work and play co-operatively*
50 *and create a mutual local economy. (Collective Traders, March 2016)*
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58 ¹ Pseudonyms have been used for both case study organisations and their members.
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3 Central to this mission is the creation of meaningful work and the relief of unemployment. This is
4 achieved through the development of projects centred on core areas of events, food, low carbon
5 economies and social enterprise support. Projects, which comprise Collective Traders' main source
6 of income, are carried out by a combination of employed and self-employed people, and volunteers.
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8 Beyond the core mission, members aspired to create a 'real social hub' and 'centre for social action
9 in the area, [...] empowering people to take more action on things that they are passionate about'
10 (Rob). At the time of my research Collective Traders had 15 active members contributing to the
11 delivery of projects and participating in decision-making processes. Six of these members
12 participated in the research.
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19 I have been a member of Collective Traders since 2010. Prior to my research I worked as a food
20 processor, making preserves and catering for events, and as kitchen manager. I gave up these roles
21 in 2013, re-entering as a researcher in 2014. Between December 2014 and May 2015 I spent an
22 average of eight hours/week, helping to pack vegetable boxes, contributing to events and attending
23 meetings. During this time I gradually took on the role of cooperative secretary, working on
24 membership and governance issues. I continued in this role until the Annual General Meeting in
25 February 2016 when the revised governing documents I had been working on were adopted.
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33 **Research as reflexive, intersubjective performance**

34 Heron and Reason's (1997) Participatory Worldview offers a framework through which I have come
35 to understand how body praxis, including participation in action and emotional response, contribute
36 to the construction of knowledge. The Participatory Worldview and its underlying constructionist
37 epistemology reject the positivist separation of mind from body and knower from known (Duberley
38 and Johnson, 2009; Graham, 1992) adopting instead a subjective-objective view of reality that
39 understands the world to be inhabited and co-constructed by multiple interacting subjectivities.
40 From this perspective, all (propositional) knowing is a 'mediated – subjective and intersubjective –
41 relativistic account' (Heron and Reason, 1997, p.278) of what is there: an ever-becoming account
42 that tells not only of the objective cosmos 'out there' or of ourselves within the world, but also of
43 our interrelation and co-presence with the world and other subjects.
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52 Expanding on this constructionist understanding of knowledge, Heron and Reason (1997) explain
53 that we participate in and articulate subjective-objective reality in four interdependent ways;
54 experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing. Our understanding of the world is
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3 shaped by these ways of knowing *and* by their association and dissociation with one another as
4 depicted in figure 1.
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8 Insert Figure 1: adapted from Heron and Reason (1997, p.281-2)
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11 This 'extended epistemology' offers 'an alternative to the traditional academic privileging of
12 theoretical, abstract, propositional knowledge' that understands 'legitimate' knowledge to come
13 from outside practice (Armstrong and Banks, 2011). It accepts researchers' and participants'
14 encounters, feelings and imaginings as a valid source of knowing, expressed and consummated in
15 practice. Thus, reflecting the potential for empathetic learning emphasised by Finlay (2005) the
16 Participatory Worldview shares in Jackson's (1983: 340-1) contention that:
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23 *[...] using ones body in the same way as others in the same environment, one*
24 *finds oneself informed by an understanding which may then be interpreted*
25 *according to ones own custom or bent, yet which remains grounded in a field of*
26 *practical activity and thereby remains consonant with the experience of those*
27 *among whom one has lived.*
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33 As Jackson expresses here, engaging in body praxis is not therefore about feeling the same emotions
34 and actions as participants (Smith, 2001) but rather is about sharing experiences and feeling
35 common and uncommon ground that subsequently inform our interpretations.
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40 In contrast to Jackson who engaged body praxis in an unfamiliar culture, my own use of
41 ethnographic research methods was 'grounded in a commitment to the first-hand experience'
42 (Atkinson et al, 2001: 4) of a familiar place. As such it helped me to bring to consciousness practices
43 and tacit ways of knowing that, as a former employee, I may have otherwise taken for granted
44 (Zahle, 2012). As a participating-observer and insider-outsider I adopted a position of spect-actor,
45 alternating 'between [doing] "seeing"/remembering and being blind to the fictional reality [...]
46 installed in the sites of field work' (Castañeda, 2006: 89). Following the positioning of ethnography
47 within a performative and intersubjective ontology, I came to understand knowledge to be formed
48 and reformed through the 'ongoing *re*-definition of the situation' (Castañeda, 2006: 92, emphasis
49 added) as we interact with others.
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3 The productive moments of re-definition and re-knowing discussed in this paper emerged at the
4 meeting point of the research performance and democratic praxis, and of insider-practitioner and
5 outsider-researcher. In order to explore these emotionally laden and relational moments I utilised
6 three routes of reflexivity identified by Finlay (2002): 'reflexivity as introspection', reflexivity as
7 'intersubjective reflection' and 'reflexivity as collaboration'. The first recognises emotion and
8 experience 'as a springboard for interpretation' (Finlay, 2002: 215). It encourages the researcher to
9 explore the meaning behind their anxieties, pleasures and contradictions, including the insights
10 these might offer into the plural nature of reality and the self and our relation to the research
11 context and other subjects. The second encourages us to build on these relational insights to
12 interrogate 'the mutual meaning *emerging within* the research relationship' (Finlay, 2002: 215).
13 Extending this path reflexivity is pushed beyond an 'individual concern, [and] the responsibility of
14 the lone researcher' (Gilmore and Kenny, 2015: 56) to become instead embedded in a process of
15 mutual collaboration. This process accepts the reflexive capacity of both the researcher and the
16 researched, and explores how the reflexive moments shape one and other. These three reflexive
17 paths were woven together throughout the research process to construct understandings of
18 democracy. By embedding them in the performance of ethnography I respond to Gilmore and
19 Kenny's (2015: 58) warning that reflexivity is often a 'formulaic afterthought', deployed to
20 'authenticate ones work'. Moreover, using emotion and experience as productive moments and
21 analytical starting points steers the researcher away from the murky waters of narcissism. In the
22 sections that follow I explore five productive moments, two emerging at the meeting point of
23 research and democratic praxis and three from the meeting and negotiation of my own plural
24 insider-outsider roles.

25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 **Negotiating access and embarking on the challenge of understanding democracy**

42 How do you get ethical approval from a group of as yet undefined people who make up a non-
43 hierarchical organisation? Who do you approach in the first instance and is it the researcher's
44 responsibility to ensure that this individual passes information on to, and gets the approval of, all
45 other members? These were some of the questions that I faced at the start of my research:
46 questions that interrogated, not only the suitability of procedural ethics (Bell and Bryman, 2007;
47 Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Jeanes, 2016) to a collective context, but my very understanding of
48 democracy in both research and practice.

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55 In Vegetal, the process of negotiating access and getting ethical approval was relatively straight
56 forwards. I hand delivered a letter to the shop, outlining the purpose of the research and what
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3 participation would involve, and followed this with an e-mail to a group e-mail address. The e-mail
4 was printed out and posted on a notice board by Steve, in clear view of all staff, with the question
5 'Should we participate in this research?' Below this was a list of cooperative members' names and a
6 space to tick yes or no.
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11 One week after the notice was put up I received the following e-mail from Steve who had become
12 my main point of contact:
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17 *We've just had a meeting and we are all agreed that it would be great to have*
18 *you here doing your research thing. We have signed up myself, Isla, Lucy and*
19 *Richard as people who would be happy to take part individually but I would not*
20 *be surprised if Ewan and perhaps Andy would be happy to take part if they can*
21 *work it into their schedules. What would you like us to do next?*
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27 Seeing the notice and knowing that the decision to participate in the research had been made in a
28 members' meeting brought much relief and comfort. I felt, not only that my ethical concerns
29 regarding informed, collective consent had been addressed but that this had been done in a
30 democratic manner that aligned with my own Participatory Worldview and matched my
31 expectations regarding what constitutes democratic decision-making. Furthermore the process
32 introduced me to the nature of democracy in Vegetal, revealing clarity over who should be engaged
33 in decisions and how their views should be sought. However, the process concomitantly highlighted
34 that those with the most knowledge, passion or time, or simply those with whom you connect,
35 inevitably become informal gatekeepers. As illustrated above, Steve took a leading role in helping
36 me to negotiate access to the organisation through his willingness to relay information to, and liaise
37 with, members on my behalf. Throughout the research Steve continued to open doors to the
38 organisation, happily offering information on the organisation's past, its formal articles, and its
39 hidden tensions and emotions. As the research progressed, I came to see different members as
40 'gatekeepers' of different types of information depending on their character and area of expertise.
41 While I often worried about ethical and undemocratic implications of utilising members' sympathies
42 in this way, my research gradually revealed it to be one example of individual-collective autonomy.
43 Elaborating on the issue of autonomy in relation to decision-making Isla explained, 'there are
44 subdivisions, so you don't need to take decisions to everyone all of the time'. My own experience of
45 negotiating access and the emergence of gatekeepers helped me to understand the ways these
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3 'subdivisions' naturally developed to reflect members varied skills, while concomitantly taking into
4 account the needs and concerns of the collective.
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8 My assumptions over what constitutes democratic decision-making were further questioned by my
9 initial engagement with Collective Traders. Here, formal agreement to participate in the research
10 was reached through a far more cumbersome and angst-ridden process than was the case at
11 Vegetal. In the year prior to the start of my research I had left my former role as kitchen manager
12 and adopted instead the informal and voluntary position of 'Research and Governance Assistant'.
13 Over the course of this year Collective Traders' membership changed dramatically, with two founder
14 members and one long-term member leaving, and a number of projects closing. This occurred
15 alongside my own dwindling involvement as pressure from my academic work mounted. By the
16 time I approached the organisation in October 2014 to formally invite them to be involved in the
17 research, there was no clearly defined body of members to approach. Only one founder member
18 (Peter) remained and the now unfamiliar management committee was in its early stages of
19 development. Not knowing who else to contact, I hand delivered an invite letter to Peter who, two
20 weeks later, agreed to the research on behalf of the organisation. This initial agreement was
21 followed by a meeting on 7th November in which myself and Peter discussed my role as researcher
22 and the practical outcomes he hoped the research would deliver. During this meeting, Peter
23 identified two other members as potential participants who I subsequently contacted with
24 information and a formal invite. An additional three participants were recruited after research had
25 started as they emerged, through observation, as key players in the organisation.
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38 Through the process described, individual informed consent was gained from all *participating*
39 members. However, Collective Traders' wider membership had not been consulted on the decision
40 and, unless I encountered them during my research, had no knowledge that the research was being
41 carried out. As such I feared that this formal ethics procedure failed to take account of the
42 organisation's collective identity. It did not, in other words, acknowledge the positive and negative
43 impact that the research could have on individuals *as members* of the organisation.
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50 In contrast to my experience at Vegetal, the process of negotiating access to Collective Traders left
51 me feeling, first that I was not fulfilling my own commitment to a participatory research process, and
52 second that the organisation of which I was member was failing to fulfil its own democratic ethos.
53 Experiencing this dual sense of failure revealed how my understandings of what constitutes
54 democracy in *research* shaped my judgement of what constitutes democratic practice in social
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3 enterprise. This judgement harboured an epistemic commitment to promoting certain types of
4 democracy that, as time went on, I came to understand as not always compatible with time
5 pressured organisational or research praxis. Thus, my feelings of failure drew my attention to
6 certain assumptions and values, specifically around the need for structured and inclusive
7 communication on all issues, and in doing so opened them to critique. I was pushed to question
8 whether my judgement was valid and explore more hidden practices of democracy. More
9 specifically, my experiences of negotiating access to each organisation brought to the fore two key
10 learnings about the praxis of democracy in social enterprise.
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17 First it revealed the utilisation of members' diverse experiences and skills as central to democratic
18 practice. As expressed in the following quote, members' differences were brought together,
19 respected and valued for their collective benefit. Reflecting on skills brought from his corporate
20 background Richard (Vegetal) explained:
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26 *Hopefully I add a bit of balance to the organisation, being a bit of a bread head as*
27 *Andy likes to call me. But I guess that's my strength, and that's what I chuck into*
28 *the pot.*
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33 In addition to supporting autonomous working, this valuing of difference enabled members to shape
34 decisions and organisational practice in meaningful ways. In this case, Richard used his strengths to
35 develop and implement a business plan and as a member of a small team developing marketing
36 strategies. While always open to question, these activities did not involve 'everyone all of the time'
37 but rather relied on a deep, shared understanding of what the collective is about, what challenges it
38 faces and what it hopes to achieve.
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45 Second, and interrelatedly, it brought to my attention an underlying and deep recognition of
46 individual-collective interdependence in which members understand themselves as 'accountable to
47 [a] sense of *joint enterprise*' (Wenger, 2000: 229, original emphasis). From this perspective
48 autonomous decision-making, including decisions about what I should and should not 'see' as a
49 researcher (in Vegetal's case) and whether research should be carried out (in Collective Traders'
50 case), was reframed as part of a 'collective project' that shapes and is shaped by common goals,
51 shared responsibility and trusting relationships. Thus, paying attention to feelings of relief and
52 anxiety experienced through the negotiation of access generated a more nuanced understanding of
53 democratic practice beyond full member participation in decision-making.
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In addition to these learnings, my feeling of frustration at the chaotic nature of the negotiation process at Collective Traders offered early insights into the challenges posed by their organic, ever changing membership; the absence of formal communication procedures, including regular members' meetings; and the subsequent development of informal hierarchies, most significantly, Peter's strong leadership role. These challenges became the focal points of my research and actions as an observant participant. Space does not allow for further exploration of these challenges. The point I wish to make here is that at the meeting point of research and democratic praxis emerged new insights that challenged my assumptions and expectations, made me open to other ways of seeing, and informed the focus and direction of my research.

Learning from missed opportunities and the balancing of multiple roles

A recurrent anxiety throughout my research was deciding what to observe and when. This anxiety was founded in a recognition that 'things, acts [and] events *might* be meaningful, depending on circumstances' (Ybema et al, 2009: 15, my emphasis). Furthermore, I was aware that each decision to include some voices and experiences at the expense of others shaped the direction of the research, often in unknowable ways. The following fieldnote extract captures my frustration at missed opportunities, and the interconnection between these missed opportunities and the multiple conflicting demands facing practitioner-researchers. Experiencing these conflicts heightened my awareness of the challenges Rebecca (Collective Traders) was facing in balancing multiple jobs, aspirations and financial needs.

After helping Rebecca and Kelly to pack the vegetable box in the storeroom I went into the office to catch up on writing up fieldnotes.

In hindsight I should have stayed in the storeroom to help Rebecca pack the boxes into the van ready for delivery. However, at the time I felt anxious about the growing pile of fieldnotes that needed writing up.

This 'hindsight' arose when I discovered I had missed a conversation between Peter, the one remaining founder member who had adopted the role of HR manager, and Rebecca, who Collective Traders employed for 8 hours a week to pack and deliver vegetable boxes. The conversation centred around the opening of a new job focused on expanding and marketing the box scheme.

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3 After 15 minutes Peter joined me and Kelly in the office and told Kelly that he had
4 spoken to Rebecca about her role at Collective Traders. Rebecca had expressed
5 concern that Peter didn't seem to think she was committed to Collective Traders.
6 Peter discussed this with her, explaining to Rebecca that if she wants to get more
7 involved she needs to find the time to do so and needs to develop new skills in
8 marketing and other 'veg box' skills. Kelly said that it was good that the
9 conversation had been started, and that it was food for thought.

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11 After Peter left Kelly commented to me 'better write that down.'

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18 'Why do you say that?' I asked. 'I don't know. It just seems like something
19 important' replied Kelly.

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22 Of course she was right and I was berating myself for not hearing the
23 conversation.

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27 Reflecting on this relayed conversation and on other observations made during my time as an
28 observing participant I noted:

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33 There is an interesting and challenging 'confrontation' at Collective Traders
34 between the need and expectation placed on members to put in extra time; an
35 awareness of self-exploitation and its problems/un-sustainability; a desire to
36 reward people for their time and effort; a recognition that people need to make
37 a living; and a desire to break away from the straight monetary valuation of work.

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43 My own experience of the conflicting demands of participating, observing and keeping on top of
44 writing up and analysing observations helped me to "feel into" Rebecca's experience of balancing
45 the demands of volunteering at Collective Traders (as a means of increasing her paid hours) with
46 multiple part-time jobs and the need to make a living. In the first instance, my empathetic response
47 made me question my desire to probe Rebecca about the conversation she just had. Consequently,
48 the event was left out of my analysis of the cooperative's working practices. Subsequent reflection
49 on the event, through the lens of my own experience, brought to my attention the demands placed
50 on those working in a young, democratically run social enterprise, including requirements to
51 volunteer that called upon members' passions and values. I became sensitive to other members'
52 experiences of self-exploitation and expressions of resentment towards demands on their time.

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Moreover, reflecting on the source of this self-exploitation, I became attuned to the day-to-day negotiation of values, aims and financial needs at an organisational level. The challenging nature of these ongoing negotiations was captured by Steve (Vegetal) who explained that having a business focus 'without being overwhelmed by the need to make a profit' is a difficult balance to strike. The following exchange, taken from a members' meeting at Vegetal, illustrated this conflict and the ongoing need to interrogate organisational identity in the context of members' and customers' needs. Following a discussion about whether Vegetal should supply one of their competitors, Andy, a long-term member, brought up another business matter: the pricing of produce.

Andy: How things are priced depends on, for me, it depends on where you want to drive this [organisation]. I know that we are talking about making more money and that sort of thing, we put the vegetable box price up [but] there are two or three things here that I have noticed are overpriced [gives some examples]. We are buying them for x amount and we are still putting them out for this. Some of this when we started, when I started, some of the Vegetal thing was to give the customer something back. I don't know whether it is across the board that these things happen but I think some of that, when we are saying let's make as much money as we can, whether we are losing something of the essence. [As a] community shop we are supposed to be... [H: yes, yes, yes] so we got to think, you know what I mean.

[...]

Richard: We want a pay rise [following reduction during difficult financial times]

Andy: You got to think of Vegetal's ethic. If there is any left.²

We see in this quote that, for Andy, money has become too much of a focus. He longs to return to the days Vegetal identified more strongly as a community shop. Richard, described by Andy as 'a bit of a bread head', recognises the need to make more money, not in order to increase profit, but in order to keep in line with inflation and improve members' pay and living standards. These two

² While Andy's comments highlight broader, ongoing concerns over balancing social and economic aims and needs, wider conversations and observations revealed that higher prices on some products acted to compensate for, and enabled lower pricing of, locally sourced and organic produce that the shop sought to promote.

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3 positions capture the multiple, and at time conflicting, demands facing social enterprises with a dual
4 social-economic characteristic. Moreover, the quote reveals democracy as a site of ongoing
5 deliberation where members can utilise their diverse skills, experiences and aspirations to shape
6 decisions and practice, and maintain the balance between social and economic goals.
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11 In both of the above examples, my own feelings of exploitation and resentment towards the
12 demands of observant participation, situated along side my passion and love for research, made me
13 more aware of the contradictions inherent to social enterprise. Passion and resentment, love and
14 exploitation jarred against one another, creating frictions that told me of my own and participants'
15 plurality and the conflicting demands we face, including those between our aspirations and values,
16 and certain economic and social expectations. Through my experience of balancing multiple desires
17 and needs in research I gained, therefore, an understanding of democracy, in both research and
18 social enterprise practice, as a site of ongoing struggle that demands 'digging deep into the site and
19 into [ourselves]' (Humphrey, 2007, p.23).
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29 **Journeying between insider-outsider**

30 Adopting the role of both researcher and cooperative practitioner I found myself constantly flitting
31 between the 'field' and 'non-field', theory and practice, researcher and researched (Rose, 1997:
32 313). Through this 'flitting' I came to know not only of the objective cosmos 'out there' or of myself
33 within the world, but also of my interrelation and co-presence with the world and other subjects as a
34 researcher, activist, friend and colleague. I became acutely aware of the fractured, decentred and
35 'plurivocal' nature of the self as I temporarily and contextually engaged multiple identities in the
36 research process (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). My experience aligns with that of Routledge (1996:
37 414) who explains:
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46 *In my own experiences it is not clear to me where one 'role' or position begins and*
47 *where the other ends. This blurring holds out the possibility that "insider" and*
48 *"outsider" voices may coalesce into a new perspective, one which is not just*
49 *counter-hegemonic or simply oppositional [...] but which opens a new arena of*
50 *negotiation, meaning, representation.*
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3 As suggested in this quote, it was through my engagement with the spaces in-between insider and
4 outsider and in the process of moving from one to the other that I formed new understandings of
5 democratic practice. In the next three sections I explore insiderness and outsidersness as a site of
6 knowledge construction.
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9 10 11 New insights into the meaning of mutuality

12 I was made more conscious of the 'blurring' of insider-outsider boundaries referred to by Routledge
13 (1996) by comments made by participants. During one observation session at Vegetal, Isla asked me
14 how my observation was going. 'It's going really well' I replied. Aware that my emic perspective
15 may be making it difficult for me to 'see the beliefs, values practices and behaviours embedded in
16 everyday life' (Richards and Morse, 2013: 56) I added:
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24 *I'm not sure what I am missing, what I am taking for granted because to me [as a*
25 *former employee] it is just normal.*
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29 Isla empathised, and went on to explain that when I am at Vegetal 'we ask you to do things because
30 we need the extra pair of hands and because you just get on with it and fall into your role as worker'.
31 While, in my role as researcher, I tried to see the organisation with 'fresh eyes' Isla's description of
32 me *falling* into the role of worker captured my recurrent experience of uncontrollably descending
33 into the blindspots of an insider. This re-adoption of a familiar role could be seen to support
34 scepticism over the potential of ethnographic study in researching one's own community (Richard
35 and Morse, 2013). However, aside from the benefits of trust and historical knowledge that came
36 with researching organisations with which I was already involved, the process of 'falling into' my
37 former worker role helped me to re-experience and re-imagine past feelings of belonging and
38 created a sense of mutuality. Paying attention to the latter, I became aware that my desire for
39 mutuality arose, not only from feelings of guilt over the demands my research was placing on the
40 organisations but also from its deep embedding in both the organisations' practices of democracy,
41 and in myself as a practitioner. Mutuality was re-experienced, in other words, as a democratic 'way-
42 of-being' and a form of tacit knowing. The time that I volunteered as an observant participant was
43 not seen in terms of reciprocity. I was not giving time and receiving data in return. Rather I
44 understood my labour as commons. When I was at Vegetal my time and skills were available as a
45 collective resource. As I developed an awareness of how I was framing my own practice, I became
46 more sensitive to similar framings occurring in both case study organisations. For example, I came
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3 to see Vegetal members' willingness to accept a dramatic reduction in wages (a cut from £10 to £8
4 per hour in a relatively short space of time) over reductions in staff numbers not only as a matter of
5 organisational survival but more fundamentally as an expression of their commitment to mutuality
6 and concomitant being-as communal subjects. This mode of being challenges the view of members
7 as subjects of two contradictory demands: 'a worker-subject concerned with his or her individual
8 reproduction' on the one hand, and 'an owner-subject occupied with the continued viability of the
9 firm' on the other (Byrne and Healy, 2006: 249). Reflecting on my experience and following Byrne
10 and Healy (2006: 249) I chose instead to:

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18 *'[...] theorize this subject as a communal subject who is located in, and identifies*
19 *with, the gap between his/her individual self and the social space of the firm and*
20 *its reproduction.'*
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25 Members' location in the gap between the individual self and the reproduction of the firm was
26 emphasised when I asked members of each organisation about their long term visions. In both
27 cases, members recognised how they had benefitted from the work of previous members and
28 expressed a desire to do the same for future generations.
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34 *Isla: I think that the other thing is, we are not in it to make a business profit - a*
35 *profit off the business by selling it and thinking we will be alright. It doesn't work*
36 *like that.*
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40 *Researcher: The whole thing of celebrating Vegetal being around for 30 years. If*
41 *those people who had set it up had been in it to make a profit they would have*
42 *sold it wouldn't they?*
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46 *Isla: Yes, absolutely. Which is why we are here doing this. Because if we had had*
47 *to buy our own business and start it up ourselves we probably wouldn't be doing*
48 *it would we?*
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53 In a similar vein, Peter expressed a desire to develop:
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3 *[...] a kind of open source thing [Kelly: Yes] so that people could learn from our*
4 *mistakes and also see what we have done successfully and be able to repeat it.*
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9 Listening to these aspirations in the context of my own experiences of and commitment to mutuality
10 revealed an understanding of profit and success as collectively owned and spanning space and time.
11 As I felt my own labour as a collective resource I became sensitive to organisational surpluses of
12 time, knowledge, money and skills, not as property or a source of future individual equity, but as
13 collective potentiality (Cornwell, 2012). Once again, a deep sense of individual-collective
14 interdependence was brought to the fore. As the above quotes imply, such interdependence,
15 expressed in and through practices of mutuality, supports democratic engagement and processes of
16 empowerment for both current and as yet unknown members.
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22 23 Learning from belonging

24 Alongside recognition of my skills and experience highlighted above, a sense of belonging emerged
25 also through experiences of friendship grounded in common interest and shared values. This was
26 illustrated in conversations that expressed a shared passion for food and cooking, a similarity in
27 political views, a common desire for economic democracy and a mutual commitment to cooperative
28 working. The significance of these conversations lay in what they revealed about the requirements
29 of organisational membership. Specifically, reflecting on the source of my own sense of belonging
30 drew my attention to the importance of finding the 'right mix of people' and of processes of
31 individual-collective alignment to the success of a democratically run organisation. In relation to the
32 former, experiencing the joy of friendship helped me to make sense of Vegetal's and Collective
33 Traders' long, protracted recruitment processes. In both organisations, focus was less on applicant's
34 skills and knowledge and more on finding a 'nice person'. As such, getting the 'right' mix of people
35 is, in Isla's (Vegetal) words, 'a bit of a personality thing'. It is about the *possibility* of friendship: a
36 possibility that emerges over time and therefore necessitates informal conversation and a period of
37 probation in place of the more conventional formal application and interview process. Again,
38 reflecting on my own experience of friendship, members were not talking here about being 'best
39 mates'. I refer to members of both organisations as friends but I do not socialise with them outside
40 of the work context or divulge intimate secrets or worries. Rather, friendship in this context refers
41 to the development of 'reciprocal awareness, good will, and practical doing' for one another under
42 an acceptance of our pluralism (Schwarzenbach, 2005: 234). Friendship becomes, in other words, a
43 form of competency that accepts members' multiplicity as friends, colleagues, managers, employees
44 and employers.
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As I found in managing my own friend-researcher-colleague plurality, recognising when to foreground friendship and when to lay it to one side is not always easy. When I decided to leave my role as Collective Traders' secretary so that I could focus on my academic career I felt intense guilt and sadness, not only because I felt I was letting the organisation down but also because I was breaking a tie between myself and Collective Traders' members. While breaking this tie was personally challenging I recognised that finding a more suitable secretary, specifically one more involved in the organisation, was necessary to Collective Traders' development. Experiencing this dis-connection helped me to 'feel into' the personal and emotional ties that, combined with the equal 'management' status of all members, makes dealing with personnel issues and disputes both more challenging and 'more human'. As Steve explained:

If I were to find anything wrong with the cooperative system, I suppose we have had difficulties with personnel in the past in terms of if somebody doesn't fit very well, it's harder as a cooperative to face that situation. But, at the same time you come out with a better resolution at the end of it. I think you feel more human in the way that we deal with those sorts of situations even if it is more uncomfortable and difficult. It's about a human interaction. That's what's so important about being a cooperative, that aspect of talking to each other with respect and honouring the individuals in the company. And I think its times when we haven't done that when things have gone wrong.

In addition to being central to 'the right mix of people', friendship emerged as the starting point for individual-collective alignment. For example, sharing her narrative of becoming a member of Collective Traders Helen explained:

My relationship with Collective Traders has been an organic slowly growing thing, mainly based on my relationship with Peter and a recognition, having worked with several horrendous bosses, that I need to work with someone I respect [...] that I enjoy working with, who is passionate and dedicated. Peter and the team he has developed around him are like this. This recognition has led us to go from simply using their postal services to submitting joint bids and delivery projects together.

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5 Using my own experiences of re-aligning with the organisations as a practitioner-researcher and
6 concomitant feelings of belonging as analytical starting points, Helen's story helped me to
7 understand the concept of alignment to connote not a 'one way process of submitting to external
8 authority, but a mutual process of coordinating perspectives, interpretations and actions' (Wenger,
9 2000: 228). As such, alignment develops incrementally as individual and collective identities engage
10 in a push-pull that brings together 'the singular and the common' (Kioupiolis, 2010: 142). This
11 push-pull process recognises that achieving individual-collective alignment is not easy. As illustrated
12 in my discussion on negotiating access, in order to work effectively in Collective Traders and Vegetal
13 I was pushed to question my understanding of what constitutes democracy, letting go of a desire for
14 structured communication to accept instead a messy and evolving practice of learning together. In
15 Vegetal, Steve identified similar pushes on members' ways of thinking and being. Discussing three
16 new members Steve explained that, having come from a 'traditional employment perspective' Lucy,
17 Richard and George experienced a 'culture shock'. He commented that George (the newest
18 member) 'still sees himself as an employee in a business' rather than as a member and business
19 owner. He went on to stress:
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32 *You can't make people change their mind-set. You need to come to an awareness*
33 *and understanding yourself. If you get told that reinforces the mind-set of being*
34 *a worker.*
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39 Mindful of the value of participation in my own 'researcher' learning this comment brought to the
40 fore the centrality of learning through doing to the development of cooperative subjectivities and
41 therefore to democratic practice. It is through these gradual processes of learning and alignment
42 that members developed shared aims and values and became open to new ways of doing, knowing
43 and being: both factors essential to ongoing deliberation. I found therefore, in *both* research and
44 practice, that the 'acquisition of cooperative knowledge, skills, practices and values', including those
45 associated with the praxis of democracy, occur:
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53 *[...] via informal and intersubjective processes [...] from [members] collective*
54 *responses to their difficulties rather than from an enlightened vanguard; from*
55 *within their collective moments of struggle, not from above or outside them.*
56 *(Vieta, 2012: 138)*
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5 In recognising similarities between processes of learning in research and social enterprise practice I
6 brought an intersubjective view of meaning-making, central to my understanding of ethnography, to
7 my framing of democracy. This framing foregrounded the view that we come to know the world
8 when we meet with the 'other'; when we 'listen to understand, not to judge or triumph', hear
9 others' experiences as valid and from here 'question [our] assumptions' (Takacs, 2003: 32).
10 Experiencing such relational processes of coming to know, first through the negotiation of access
11 and later in my own re-belonging led me to position them as central to democratic praxis.
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17 Learning from feelings of otherness

18 The sense of belonging discussed in the previous section sat in sharp and at time painful contrast to
19 a sense of otherness. The latter arose most strongly when members foregrounded my researcher
20 role. The jovial nature of the following exchange (Vegetal) and observation (Collective Traders)
21 generated both feelings of acceptance and friendship, and discomfort and otherness. They made
22 me acutely aware of my plurality and the tensions and uncertainties that arise from occupying
23 multiple positions.
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31 *George (who was on his way out for his break) asked me how long I was planning*
32 *on staying.*

33 *Researcher: Until 5ish*

34 *George: Long enough to get your data!*

35 *I laugh nervously*

36 *George: When are you going to get us in a chair and start attaching electrodes to*
37 *our heads?*

38 *I laugh, again nervously*

39 *George: Are you going to put us in a maze and have us find cheese?*
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47 Participants' anxiety over my researcher presence was similarly expressed in Collective Traders:

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50 *Before starting to pack the vegetable boxes there was some chat about the*
51 *Christmas party (that I had attended). Kelly and Rebecca commented (jokingly)*
52 *that they couldn't believe that they were discussing it in front of me saying 'it*
53 *might go in the little book. It is like having a journalist here.'* Rebecca joked that I
54 *might write things in my book and then claiming that 'it must be true, the little*
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3 *book told me.' She apologised for this comment and explained it was just*
4 *because her and Kelly are jealous of my important work.*
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8 Comparing the two experiences outlined here I noted that as a member and cooperative secretary of
9 Collective Traders feelings of otherness were felt more acutely. In response to George's comments I
10 felt nervous, highly aware of my researcher role and consequently, somewhat inadequate. In
11 contrast, the experience with Kelly and Rebecca brought additional feelings of exclusion. As Rebecca
12 and Kelly's jokey comments suggest, at Collective Traders my researcher role meant that I could only
13 be party to certain conversations *even though* I was also a friend and colleague. A similar sense of
14 exclusion was felt later in the research when meeting schedules and reporting systems that I had
15 spent time developing were rejected, and when members expressed frustration that ongoing
16 discussions on governance were getting in the way of more pressing day-to-day actions. As Kelly
17 commented:
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26 *'Once all this governance gumpf is done we will have more time to talk about*
27 *trades'.*
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32 Although not intended as such, members' expressions of frustration challenged the importance, not
33 only of my research but also of my work as secretary. It raised questions once again over my
34 understanding of what constitutes democracy, specifically the importance of fixed, written rules and
35 structures, and regular meetings. Furthermore, it drew attention to the origins of this
36 (mis)understanding, namely my relatively irregular involvement in Collective Traders compared to
37 other members' more in-depth engagement through participation in trading activities.
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43 By reflecting on these experiences I came to better understand Collective Traders' democratic
44 practice. Most prominently, I became aware of their 'do it yourself' mentality and focus on learning-
45 through-doing, and the importance of day-to-day interaction and in-depth engagement to decision-
46 making processes. This mentality and focus, underpinned by the recognised benefit of individual-
47 collective alignment to both member empowerment and organisational development, necessitated
48 an open and flexible approach to formal governing documents, understood by members as a 'loose
49 framework for action' (Peter, Collective Traders). Crucially, this understanding created room for
50 members to challenge and change practice in light of new learnings. Thus, while members'
51 disengagement with governing documents and formal processes initially raised concerns over their
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3 democratic practice, reflexivity reframed disengagement as a desire for openness essential to
4 democratic member participation.
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8 Reflecting on my experience of otherness similarly challenged my understanding of the purpose and
9 practice of meetings. In contrast to Vegetal where meetings were seen as an opportunity for
10 members to get together and make decisions, in Collective Traders:
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15 *The point [of meetings] is not the attendance. The point is the deadline it creates*
16 *to feed into a reporting structure (Peter).*
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21 Again, this view emphasises the importance of information sharing as a means to learning-through-
22 doing and autonomous decision-making, extending democracy beyond participation in formal
23 decision-making processes.
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27 As was the case with the negotiation of access, comparing my experience of outsidership at Vegetal
28 and Collective Traders opened my mind to new perspectives on democracy. Specifically it
29 highlighted alternative views on, and variety in, the purpose and practice of meetings, and new
30 perspectives on the role of governing documents. In both cases we see that democracy constitutes
31 more than participation in formal structures alone. While important in maintaining communication,
32 these formal structures serve to support more fundamental democratic practices of learning-
33 through-doing and interacting, empowering processes of individual-collective alignment and an
34 underlying commitment to individual-collective interdependence.
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42 **Conclusion**

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44 This paper has explored five productive moments arising through the intersubjective performance of
45 ethnography. Two emerged at the meeting point of research performance and the two case studies'
46 democratic praxis, and three through the meeting and negotiation of my position as an insider-
47 practitioner and outsider-researcher. In each of these productive moments, experiential knowing,
48 including direct encounters, emotional response and empathetic resonance, were connected to
49 practical knowing through presentational and propositional knowing. The latter two took the form
50 of fieldnotes that expressed how events and conversations were framed. This connection, and
51 subsequent construction of new insights and knowledges, did not take the form of a one-directional
52 movement from experiential knowing to practical knowing. Rather it took the form of an ongoing
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3 cycle in which my ways of seeing and understanding democratic praxis were challenged, re-formed
4 and consummated in practice, and emerging competencies and tacit knowing were grounded in
5 experience.
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9 This ongoing cycling was enabled by moments of reflexivity. Each reflexive moment constituted an
10 exploration into the meaning behind feelings of guilt, anxiety, frustration and contradiction, and an
11 interrogation of 'the mutual meaning *emerging within* the research relationship' (Finlay, 2002: 215)
12 and process of collaboration. I have shown in this paper that engagement in such relational and
13 emotional processes of meaning-make opened up three analytical starting points. First, they
14 highlighted and helped me to 'see outside the bounds of [my] own perspective' and limits of my
15 assumptions (Takacs, 2003: 27). Here I was reminded that it is in the meeting of different ways of
16 seeing and being in the world that we problematise our understandings and assumptions and in
17 disagreement that we truly 'come to know the basis for [our] own position' (Dryzek and Neimeyer,
18 2006: 635). It was at these points of challenge that I came to (re)understand the purpose and
19 practice of meetings and governing documents, not as central to the practice of democracy in and
20 of themselves, but as a means to support more fundamental and empowering processes of learning-
21 through-doing, learning-through-interacting and individual-collective alignment. Thus, I came to
22 recognise intersubjective moments – moments of mutual and relational meaning-making - as a
23 central component to the praxis of democracy, through which members were able to utilise diverse
24 experiences and skills to challenge and shape collective practices. Second, they gave rise to
25 empathetic resonance through which I was able to feel into the challenges and joys of democratic
26 practice. Feelings of resonance revealed the challenge and necessity of finding the 'right mix of
27 people' and re-framed democracy as a site of ongoing struggle. Finally, reflexive processes brought
28 to consciousness tacit ways of knowing and ways of being central, and common to, both research
29 and democratic praxis. Specifically, it brought mutuality to the fore as a democratic way-of-being,
30 underpinned by a shared sense of individual-collective interdependence that ran throughout the
31 organisations' praxis of democracy.
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48 In all of these moments, my understanding of reflexivity as a process of exploration into the
49 changing and overdetermined self, of meeting with and listening to the multiple voices of self and
50 other, and of temporarily performing and re-performing more certain subjectivities became itself a
51 research tool: a means to frame and understand similar processes occurring in practice. Submerging
52 myself in this framework by focusing on, and subsequently writing about, my experience of an
53 emotionally laden and relationally embedded research process (Koning and Ooi, 2013) informed me
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3 not only of the 'lived reality' of organisational research but also of the lived reality of the
4 organisations themselves. The outcome was a more nuanced and complex understanding of
5 democratic praxis in social enterprise. I found therefore that conducting ethnography as an insider-
6 outside elicited significant emotional responses and reactions that I consider to be an 'intrinsically
7 valuable part of the research process and its outcomes' (Gilmore and Kenny, 2015: 72). The five
8 productive moments discussed reveal the role played by encounters with the other, empathetic
9 resonance and body praxis in the process of knowledge construction, and how the performance of
10 ethnography shaped the avenues I chose to explore and the observations and fieldnotes I chose to
11 make. If these accounts resonate with, and give other researchers the confidence to explore their
12 own emotional experience of research, I have achieved my aim.
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