

Critical Performativity in the Field: Methodological Principles for Activist Ethnographers

Organizational Research Methods
2019, Vol. 22(2) 564-589

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DOI: 10.1177/1094428117744881

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Abstract

It has been proposed that engagement with activism might make critical organizational scholarship more relevant to practitioners. However, there is a lack of systematic inquiry into how such engagement might be undertaken, which this article redresses. We propose activist ethnography as a suitable methodological framework for critical organizational scholarship, drawing on organizational ethnography, militant ethnography, and participatory action research, to construct a theoretical framework which we use to analyze four ethnographic vignettes of our own experiences of research with activists. Our contribution is to (a), assess the methodological challenges and opportunities of engagement with activism, (b) give an account of our own experiences as activist ethnographers for others to learn from, and (c) propose strategies whereby the challenges of academic activism might be negotiated and the opportunities maximized.

Keywords

ethnography, qualitative research, participative inquiry, critical theory

The concept of critical performativity, has been proposed to critical organization scholars as a way of forging positive, affirmative, engagement *with* practice (Spicer, Alvesson, & Kärreman, 2009). It has been suggested that critical academics should work outside of the corporate world with groups that include “activists” (Willmott, 2008), trade unions and women’s groups (Fournier & Grey, 2000), or variously defined “marginalised” groups (Adler, 2002; Adler, Forbes, & Willmott, 2007), including sweatshop workers (Boje, 1998) and students (Grey, 2007). Fleming and Banerjee (2016) have similarly called for critical scholars to work more closely with “social and environmental activists, the unemployed and precarious workforce” (p. 270) and the network of alter-globalization movements. Through such engagements, critical scholars are encouraged not only to understand practice, but importantly, to work toward changing it. This can be through the

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transformative redefinition of dominant discourses (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012), raising the consciousness of practitioners (Wickert & Schaefer, 2015), or offering practical guidelines for organizations (King & Learmonth, 2015).

Through such calls, critical performativity promotes organizational scholarship as a form of academic activism, seeing engaged research as a route to transformative change (Kieser & Leiner, 2012). Yet, despite these aspirations, there are few examples of systematic inquiries into how such engagement might be carried out (see King, 2015). Questions therefore remain concerning the theoretical and practical issues that might be faced by those wishing to take critical organizational scholarship into the field. Our primary contribution, therefore, is to provide methodological principles for the nascent critically performative researcher. We do this in two ways: First, we evaluate other methodological traditions that have sought to bring about positive change through the research process, namely organizational ethnography, militant ethnography, and participatory action research (PAR). We synthesize these approaches into a new theoretical framework for an activist ethnographic methodology. Our proposal is that a fruitful activist ethnographic methodology may be constructed from a synthesis of the procedural virtues of organizational ethnography, the activism of militant ethnography and the democratic learning of PAR. While the term *activist ethnography* is not new (for examples, see Bisaillon, 2012; Craven & Davis, 2013; Emihovich, 2005; as well as our discussion below), we offer a more systematic set of principles for undertaking such a methodology.

Second, we contribute to a distinctive “activist ethnography” by reflecting on our own engagement with activist organizations, presenting our experiences for the guidance of others. Using four vignettes to illustrate different methodological issues, we explore the personal, ethical, and practical dilemmas that arise from attempts to combine the roles of critical organizational researcher *and* activist and suggest practical strategies for working through these issues, which we summarize in Table 2 and its accompanying discussion. We conclude that procedural virtues, derived from organizational ethnography, provide the critical organizational researcher with a way of negotiating the very real difficulties and contradictions of activist ethnography in the field. Furthermore, we argue that activist ethnography promises to realization of the “radical reciprocity” called for by Ellis (2007, p. 7) between researcher and researched but rarely achieved in other approaches.

The article proceeds as follows: We begin by evaluating the aspirations for engagement of critical performativity, placing it in the wider context of academic activism, including activist ethnography. We derive several “procedural virtues” from organizational ethnography, which we contrast and combine with elements of what we term “militant ethnography” and PAR. We go on to analyze our own experiences of engagement as activist ethnographers, reflecting on the possibilities afforded by the different approaches reviewed. We then combine theory and reflection to provide suggestions for others wishing to extend critical performativity from theory to practice. Finally, we evaluate the potential of our methodology for future work.

Critical Performativity and Academic Activism

The argument for moving from negative critique, removed from practice, to a positive, affirmative, engagement, to bring about change (Spicer et al., 2009), rests on a perception that critical scholarship is disengaged from the world. Critical scholars, it is said, “fiddled with footnotes” while the “global economy crumbled” (Spicer, Alvesson, & Kärreman, 2016, p. 243). Critical performativity proposes an interventionist approach, where critical theory is used to transform organizational practice. The natural partners for such an enterprise are argued to be those movements and groups who themselves aim to bring about positive social change (Fleming & Banerjee, 2016). Despite the novel coinage of “critical performativity,” this is not a new idea and these aspirations are shared with a broader tradition of academic activism, usefully defined by Flood, Martin, and Dreher (2013, p. 17) as encompassing four elements: “[a] a means to produce knowledge to inform progressive

social change . . . ; [b] a means of conducting research which itself involves social change . . . ; [c] a site for progressive strategies of teaching and learning” and [d] seeking to change the institution of the academy itself. Khasnabish and Haiven (2015) define academic activism similarly, arguing that academics should use their privileged position and occupational autonomy for the benefit of activist groups. In common with critical performativity, there is much invocation of the academic activist as public intellectual using their social capital to influence change at the level of public discourse (Cooper & Coulson, 2014; Hawthorne-Steele, Moreland, & Rooney, 2015). Others suggest advocacy and help with the authorities for socially disadvantaged or marginalized participants (Checker, Davis, & Schuller, 2014) or using one’s role as educator to bring about changes in consciousness within one’s students (Coté, Day, & de Peuter, 2007; Eschle & Manguashca, 2006). What all these various conceptions of academic activism have in common is the desire that scholarship might be more than an abstracted intellectual exercise.

Academic activism looks mostly to either ethnography (Coleman, 2015; Hussey, 2012) or PAR (Chatterton, Hodkinson, & Pickerill, 2010) as providing an appropriate methodological framework for close engagement with participants (for examples specific to organizational research, see also Barros, 2010; King, 2015). For example, Emihovich (2005) used ethnography in her consciousness-raising work with activist groups. Hussey (2012) sees activist ethnography as producing useful knowledge for activists while contributing to academic knowledge. Coleman (2015, p. 265) proposes activist ethnography as a “third space” between academia and activism that enables “solidarity work” with activists. A highly interventionist form of ethnographic activism that privileges the activist role over the researcher role has been termed “militant ethnography” by Juris (2007). It is paralleled by Schepher-Hughes’s (1995) “militant anthropology” and Lyon-Callo and Hyatt’s (2003) “ethnography from below.” Militant ethnography requires that “researchers have to become active participants” in social movements and help with “actions and workshops, facilitating meetings, weighing-in during strategic and tactical debates, staking out political positions, and putting one’s body on the line during mass direct actions” (Juris, 2007, p. 165).

Critical performativity shares the aim of academic activism to transform practice (Wickert & Schaefer, 2015), particularly through the role of “public intellectual” (Bourdieu, 1998), placing academic expertise at the disposal of social movements (Spicer et al., 2009). However, there is little guidance concerning appropriate methods for the putative critical organizational scholar. For instance, in their “illustrative case,” Alvesson and Spicer (2012) apply critical performativity to a fictional example that provides little practical guidance on the issues likely to face researchers dealing with the real world. In Table 1, by contrast, we identify a wide range of methodological issues and principles from our reading of the wider literature on academic activism and organizational ethnography. We highlight as significant research aims, researcher identity, researcher-participant relations, representation, power relations and ethics, and methodological tactics. In our next section, we consider the contribution of organizational ethnography to these methodological principles, identifying procedural virtues that we argue are essential to realize the aspirations of critical performativity.

Organizational Ethnography and Procedural Virtue

Organizational ethnography is characterized by ethically oriented methodological principles derived from its anthropological antecedents that, we argue, are indispensable for the activist ethnographer. We term these principles “procedural virtues.” We believe that the term is of our own making but we are aware of G. A. Fine’s (1993) skeptical use of the ethnographer’s “classic virtues.” We use procedural virtue to denote ethico-political principles that we argue are widely found within organizational ethnography but that tend to be restricted to how ethnographic texts are produced. These principles have emerged in response to various critiques of anthropology from postcolonial,

Table 1. Different Methodological Models of Critical Academic Engagement.

Methodological Issue	Critical Performativity	Organizational Ethnography Procedural Virtues	Militant Ethnography	Participatory Action Research	Activist Ethnography
Primary Aim	Taking theoretical critique and making it relevant to organizational practice, looking for critical possibilities in the present (Wickert & Schaefer, 2015), transforming practice through critique (Spicer et al., 2009).	Authentic rich description of organizational cultural settings. Often aimed at revealing unseen or marginal communities.	Political change based on the convictions of the researcher. Ethnography as political praxis (Juris, 2007).	To co-construct with research participants' positive changes in the research setting. To work with congruent organizations that already have shared aims. To engage in mutual learning with participants.	Combine procedural virtues with the cooperative values of participatory action research in the pursuit of dialogical co-constructed political aims.
Identity (researcher role)	The "romance of lonely dissent" (Parker, 2002). Public Intellectual forging symbolic weapons of resistance (Bourdieu, 1998).	The radical writer as autonomous artist.	Political radical and dissenting outsider.	Coparticipant with facilitation and authorial expertise.	Constant reflexivity based on recognition of tensions within the self and between different team roles.
Researcher-participant relations	Ambitions to extend engagement beyond mainstream organizations to social movements and other alternative organizations (Fleming & Banerjee, 2016; Willmott, 2008), primarily through the contribution of academic expertise (Spicer et al., 2009; Spicer et al., 2016)	Giving "voice" to participants. Empathetic accounts from the perspective of the participants.	Seeks to persuade participants of researchers' perspective and to encourage political action based on this.	Aspires to equality through processes such as cowriting and a democratic negotiated approach to all aspects of the research.	Explicitly acknowledge and negotiate issues of researcher/activist identity struggle. Equal weight given to activism and research. Rejection of notion of superior intellectual contribution.

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Methodological Issue	Critical Performativity	Organizational Ethnography Procedural Virtues	Militant Ethnography	Participatory Action Research	Activist Ethnography
Representation	Usually assumed that academic/authorial expertise resides solely in the researcher (Spicer et al., 2016; Wickert & Schaefer, 2015). The researcher presents the represented to other researchers through conventional academic dissemination. (King & Learmonth, 2015).	Ideals of representing marginal or unheard voices through authorial interpretation and skilled writing (ethnographer as artist) (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Van Maanen, 1988). The academic as expert is retained. Either as a facilitator of political action or as a mentor in radical political theory. Often incorporates an ideal of the democratization of knowledge.	Primary focus is on political change and so issues of individual representation are less significant than accounts of political action. The academic as expert is retained. Either as a facilitator of political action or as a mentor in radical political theory. Often incorporates an ideal of the democratization of knowledge.	Equal partnership with participants including joint control of representation (cowriting). Continuing modification of representations as engagement proceeds through mutual learning.	Interrogation of own identity and practice as activist. Integration of activist and researcher self within the same individual. Thus, representation from the inside, including self-representation. Adoption of participatory action research principles enhanced by the academic-activist self.
Power relations and ethics	Researcher as guru and “public intellectual,” stating what the practitioner <i>could, should, or would</i> do in a particular situation (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; King, 2015).	Critical reflexivity—sensitivity to power relations but remedy located less in the field and more in how participants are represented in written text.	Assumes the researcher empowers participants in new ways by persuading them to reinterpret their situation and to challenge the status quo.	Becoming conscious of and seeking to overcome inequalities in power relations with participants is central to participatory action research methods at all stages of research.	Acceptance of conflicts and tensions and constant working through these as value in the research-activist process. Heightened sensitivity to power relations through identity conflicts with the academic activist self.
Methodological tactics	Primarily theoretical critique (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Cabantous et al., 2016; Gond et al., 2015; Hartmann, 2014; Spicer et al., 2009) with aspirations for more practical engagement (Fleming & Banerjee, 2016).	Observation. Participation. Interview. Critical reflexive thick description (Cunliffe, 2002). Empathetic representation as a primary aim. Use of self-reflexivity, i.e., through pair interviewing (Gilmore & Kenny, 2015)	Argumentation and challenging of assumptions of participants. Encouragement to undertake political action. Authoring as political action.	Intervention in practice and the use of ethnographic methods to collect and present data. Facilitation of mutual learning through a collaborative process of interpretation. Coauthorship of accounts of participation and participants.	A synthesis of other four approaches with the added dimension of the collapse of the distinction between academic and activist. No assumption of a privileged role in the field as researcher. Use of team ethnography to deal with the challenges

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Methodological Issue	Critical Performativity	Organizational Ethnography Procedural Virtues	Militant Ethnography	Participatory Action Research	Activist Ethnography
	Few examples of direct engagement with practice, but some that draw on participatory action research (i.e., Barros, 2010; King & Learmonth, 2015) for methods.	as a means of achieving a critical reflexivity on own assumption.			of closeness and distance inherent in the research experience and to productively utilize identity tensions.
Critiques	<p>Calls for engagement tend to remain just that. There is very little detail as to how CP might be implemented.</p> <p>Assumption of superiority of academic theoretical expertise over activist praxis.</p>	<p>Radicalism restricted to how texts are produced. Retains unequal power relations based on authorial discretion. Primarily for an academic audience.</p>	<p>Serious ethical questions posed by the risks created for the researcher and researched.</p> <p>Assumption of political leadership retains implicit unequal power relations between researcher and researched.</p>	<p>Despite aspirations to democratization of knowledge, academics reframed as possessing expertise in facilitation. In practice learning from participants limited (Chatterton et al., 2010).</p>	<p>Few critiques as a novel approach. Issues include the difficulty of balancing academic-activist identities, particularly if there are expectations of career success based on this approach.</p>

feminist, and other radical perspectives. These critiques begin with the posthumous publication of Malinowski's (1967) diaries challenging the status of the author as a dispassionate observer and other positivistic assumptions (Okely, 1992), including a realist understanding of text (Foley, 2002), and the assumed neutrality of ethnographic research (Bourgois, 2003). These have framed debates ever since (Denzin, 1997; Fortune & Mair, 2011). Clifford and Marcus's influential *Writing Culture* (1986) outlined the key features of these critiques including the potentially regulative function of ethnography, and the elitism of ethnographers. In response, organizational ethnography has taken a critically reflexive turn that is the foundational procedural virtue (see Collinson, 2003; Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016; Wray-Bliss, 2002, 2004). Critical reflexivity might be summarized as an acute sensitivity to, and continual reflection on, the methodological issues we identify in Table 1 and their effects on texts, the researcher, and participants.

Reflexivity combines with an emancipatory intent in much ethnographic work, often expressed as a desire to give a voice to the marginalized (Rodriguez, 2003) and a commitment to the representation of everyday life (Kondo, 1990). Van Maanen (1988), for example, lauds the Chicago School's accounts of life on the social margins (Whyte, 1993) and of manual work (Terkel, 1970). Hassard, McCann, and Morris (2007) propose that organizational ethnography presents the "human side" of working life in ways that challenge dominant managerial orthodoxy. Madison (2012) further argues that organizational ethnography should be characterized by a "compassion for the suffering of living beings" (p. 5). A questioning of the dynamics of the practitioner/researchers' relationship (Dehli, 2003) becomes itself a form of intervention and engagement (Huizer, 1979; Huizer & Mannheim, 1979). Simply being there is not enough, argues Okely (1975), rather one must join with "people immersed in those situations and circumstances [who] are trying to make sense of their reality" (Chell, 1998, p. 70) and help them to a "better" understanding of their own situation. As with PAR, this may involve "a more radical democratization of knowledge" (Rose, 1990, p. 11) that finds its expression in multiauthored texts (Fischer, 1986), and cooperative storytelling (Tyler, 1986).

Engaging and accessible writing is another means by which giving voice to those on the margins might be realized within ethnography and is again exemplified by the Chicago School (Burawoy, 2000; Gergen, 2003; Van Maanen, 2010). Van Maanen (1988, 2010), in particular, has argued that ethnography should be an engaged literary art. Humphreys, Brown, and Hatch (2003) advocate organizational ethnography as "improvisational jazz," emancipating the researcher from positivistic norms. Gilmore and Kenny (2015) celebrate the "messiness" of ethnography and its ability to incorporate multivocality, and a cooperative partnership between researcher and researched (Cunliffe, 2002; Ybema, Yanow, Vels, & Kamsteeg, 2009). The techniques of the novelist may be used to communicate the emotional dimension of, and promote empathy for, the other (Nugent & Abolafia, 2007), linking artful representation with a commitment to emancipation (Chorashi & Wels, 2009). Denzin (2006) argues for an ethnography that aims "to change the world by writing from the heart" (p. 422).

Writing from the heart suggests another of our proposed procedural virtues, that of relationality and emotionality in organizational research. Burkitt (2012) has argued that theories of reflexivity tend to be too individualistic and rationalistic, which leads to the exclusion of the emotions. However, for the activist ethnographer, understanding the emotional dimension of engagement with others is essential. It is difficult to envisage a form of critical performativity not linked to compassion for the other (Hansen & Trank, 2016). Hibbert, Sillince, Diefenbach, and Cunliffe (2014) suggest that a relational reflexivity will lead to the generation of richer insights. Gray (2009) argues that affectivity is an essential aspect of how we apprehend the world and so emotional reflexivity is a crucial aspect of the ethnographic method. Gilmore and Kenny (2015) suggest a team approach to ethnography as a way of enabling this desirable emotional reflexivity.

To summarize this section, we have highlighted a number of principles that have been developed within ethnography to meet various challenges to it. We have termed these principles "procedural

virtues” and identified them as reflexivity, emancipatory purpose including giving voice, engaged and accessible writing of use to, and sometimes coproduced by, participants, and relationality-emotionality. These virtues, we propose, are an essential element of a critically performative activist ethnography and align well with the related emancipatory intent of academic activism. However, we now justify our position that the procedural virtues are not sufficient in themselves as a method for actualizing critical performativity, drawing on both PAR and militant ethnography for complementary methodological principles.

Militant Ethnography, PAR, and Activist Ethnography

Critiques of organizational ethnography suggest that the procedural virtues often remain unrealized and are overly focused on the concerns of academics rather than participants (Wray-Bliss, 2003), rarely reaching “beyond the self-referential sphere of scholarship” (2009, p. 17). G. A. Fine (1993) argues that ethnographers, despite a “kindly” surface, may operate “against the interests of the observed group” (p. 272). Maxey (1999) suggests that activists are mostly indifferent to academic writing, however well-written. In addition, the procedural virtues do not incorporate the aim of working alongside activists. In the following paragraphs, therefore, we supplement the procedural virtues with methodological principles from militant ethnography and PAR.

We characterize militant ethnography as an active involvement *with* activists beyond generating knowledge *about* them (see also Davis, 2003; M. Fine & Weis, 1996; Lyon-Callo & Hyatt, 2003). It supplements the procedural virtues of reflexivity, giving voice, and relationality-emotionality, with the aim of building “long-term relationships of mutual commitment and trust.” By becoming “entangled with complex relations of power,” one lives “the emotions associated with direct action organizing and activist networking” (Juris, 2007, p.165). “Better interpretations and analyses” result because such involvement “generates practical, embodied understanding” (Juris, 2007, p.166). Militant ethnography, therefore, aims to satisfy the more interventionist aims of academic activism. However, we propose that such active involvement still requires the reflexivity and ethics of the procedural virtues if the risks associated with militant ethnography are to be mitigated.

One striking illustration of such risks is provided by the militant ethnography of urban anthropologist Vincent Lyon-Callo (2004), who for 5 years worked as an associate director of a homeless shelter in Northampton, Massachusetts. He conducted a “politically engaged ethnography [with] an explicitly activist methodology” (p. 21). Lyon-Callo attempted to persuade his participants to change their thinking and practice according to his own political convictions. Despite participants often finding Lyon-Callo’s Foucauldian terminology alienating, he claimed that he succeeded in conducting an insightful ethnography and in persuading participants to challenge aspects of how the shelter was organized. However, there were also serious negative consequences. The actions he encouraged led to funders, business leaders and politicians withdrawing support, leading to Lyon-Callo’s resignation and three workers losing their jobs (Lyon-Callo, 2004). The case illustrates the risks of fomenting resistance to established practices and taking on powerful interests which can have very real material consequences for both researcher and participants. This is not to suggest that such action is necessarily wrong, rather that the ethics and consequences of activist research are complex and unpredictable. Had Lyon-Callo paid sufficient attention to the procedural virtues of empathy, relationality, sensitivity to power relations, and the ethics of his intervention, the outcomes might have been very different.

If militant ethnography stresses the need for academics to contribute *to* activism, PAR by contrast stresses the necessity of learning *from* activism and forms the third pillar of our own ethnographic activism, that is, a combination of procedural virtues with the *working alongside* of militant ethnography and the *learning from* of PAR. As Fenwick (2003) and Gorli, Nicolini, and Scaratti (2015) point out, PAR has had a rather limited uptake within organization studies, although Ripamonti,

Galuppo, Gorli, Giuseppe, and Cunliffe (2016) propose a reflexive version of action research with managers. PAR with activist organizations has though been widely used in urban geography (PyGyRG, 2016). We draw on these examples of PAR because they took place within similar groups to our own ethnographic study and so provide insights of direct relevance to our work (for examples, see Chatterton et al., 2010; Doná, 2007; Hodkinson & Chatterton, 2006).

PAR aims at creating relevant and accessible knowledge for both academics and practitioners (Chatterton, Fuller, & Routledge, 2007, p. 219). It is arguably less combative and more collaborative than militant ethnography, but PAR scholars acknowledge similar messy realities and tensions (Chatterton et al., 2010). However, it is more alert to the role of the procedural virtues in aiding the ethically concerned researcher (Fuller, 1999), sharing with organizational ethnography a stress on power relations, the emotional dimensions of close relationships with participants, and the potential consequences of seeking social change as part of research (Chatterton et al., 2007). PAR contributes to our understanding of reflexivity as including developing our academic practice by learning from our participants. One example is applying the consensual decision-making methods learned from alter-globalization groups to academic conference organization (for examples, see Bell & King, 2016; Land & King, 2014).

PAR may thus be characterized as sharing a commitment to the procedural virtues of organizational ethnography but extending them though collaboration and participation with those researched. The aim is to bring about positive change and facilitating the organizational and critical analytical skills of all participants (McTaggart, 1997, in Reason & Bradbury, 2006, p. 1). This requires commensurate changes in academic practice, transforming “an alienating ‘Fordist’ mode of academic production into a more flexible and socially owned process” (Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007, p. 1). Unlike much militant ethnography, PAR seeks to address problems that are meaningful to participants who jointly determine with researchers the ethics and risks of intervention (Kindon et al., 2007). This partnership may extend to writing the research collectively (see Chatterton et al., 2010). Like organizational ethnography, PAR struggles to realize these aspirations. Cooke and Kothari (2001) argue that PAR researchers tend to be the dominant partners in the research process, and as Pain and Francis (2003) observe, “despite our best efforts we found, like others, that the ideal of participation is seldom achieved, and that fulfilling the key premise of participatory research—effecting change with participants—is fraught with difficulties” (p. 51). One of the persistent difficulties in both cases is the rejection by the assumed “beneficiaries” of academic activism (see our own experiences of this below).

We do not therefore believe that PAR provides a panacea to the problems of combining activism and research, but it does suggest a third strand to our combination of the activist contribution of militant ethnography and the procedural virtues of organizational ethnography that stresses the democratization of useful knowledge for both academics and practitioners. PAR principles are useful in that they suggest ways of sharing relevant and accessible knowledge with groups in ways that do not increase dependency or hierarchy; offering both radical critiques and inspiring alternatives (Chatterton et al., 2007).

In Table 1 we summarize and contrast our ideas concerning the procedural virtues in organizational ethnography, the more interventionist approach of militant ethnography and the collaborative democratic ethos of PAR and suggest how a combination of the strengths of all three might be used to construct a distinctive activist ethnographic methodology. In the next section, we present our own journey toward the development of methods to negotiate the practical issues peculiar to activist ethnography. This is clearly germane to the chief aims of this article, in that it provides a practical example to guide those who might wish to follow our approach. Of significance are the messy realities of attempting to implement the procedural virtues within activist ethnography. Issues faced included how to balance academic and activist concerns, relationships with participants and how best to represent the complexities of the multiple viewpoints of ourselves and our participants. In the

following section, we therefore outline our initial methodology and how this developed as well as the context of our research.

Experiences of Activist Ethnography

Methods and Context

In this section, we explain how we sought to construct and apply the methodology proposed in the final column of Table 1, through our own engagement with a constellation of alternative organizations and social movement projects in a medium-sized city in the Midlands region of the United Kingdom, which we call Midtown. It should be borne in mind that, as is often the case, we did not enter the field with a fully worked out prescriptive “toolbox” of methods. Rather we sought to employ the procedural virtues of reflexivity and relationality as a way of learning with and from our participants as the project unfolded. We wished to give a voice to those engaged in alternative forms of organizing rarely heard in organization studies. We adopted a critically reflexive stance that did not assume that our expertise as academics (the “public intellectual” identity central to critical performativity) made us superior to our participants. However, we also wished to pursue the ideals of militant ethnography in terms of working for positive emancipatory social change alongside the groups we were engaged with. Consequently, what these changes should be and how the groups organized to achieve them, were matters for mutual learning and negotiation, as congruent with PAR’s insistence on the democratization of useful and accessible knowledge production. Where we departed slightly from ideals of cocreation of knowledge was in the writing of our primary published account of our engagement. This was due essentially to disinterest on the part of our participants concerning academic texts (about which more below). However, we did produce a range of other documents from webpages, reports of meetings, and so on that were of direct use and relevance to the groups studied.

We became involved in what was self-described by members as the “Midtown Alternative Consensus” (MAC), a loose network of activist and alternative lifestyle groups, as they attempted to coordinate joint projects. Over a six-month period, we jointly attended all the MAC formal planning meetings, 10 in total, that comprised a group of 25 participants. This period culminated in a festival in October 2009 which included 63 events, of which we attended 12. Over 275 participants were present at the festival. However, our intention to develop an activist ethnography congruent with the procedural virtues required both a longer and deeper period of engagement with the MAC. This was achieved through Daniel, the more fully immersed of us, having been a part of the MAC for approximately 10 years and having attended hundreds of meetings and helping to organize tens of events. This long-term immersion considerably enhanced the more intensive six-month engagement, particularly because of preexisting relationships of trust.

We utilized familiar ethnographic data collection methods including observing, conversing (including informal conversations, questions at meetings), and interviewing. In addition, we analyzed various documents produced by the MAC including the MAC website (16 pages) and their online magazine (eight representative editions). We also read and summarized in excess of 100 emails and 200 messages posted on the numerous social media platforms used by the MAC. Field notes were made during events or as soon as possible afterward, comprising in total 48 pages. We observed the locations and spaces important to participants and how they chose to present themselves in terms of dress, lifestyle and speech. Finally, we conducted a small number of in-depth life history interviews (six in total) with key participants. A key feature of our activist ethnography was a team approach (Fortune & Mair, 2011) which provided us with a range of options to enact the procedural virtues of reflexivity and sensitivity to issues of power and representation through dialogue between us. It also enabled us to explore the emotionality of our different forms of

engagement and to strengthen the reciprocity of our relations with each other and with our participants as envisaged by Gilmore and Kenny (2015).

From our review of the literature, we were aware of the pitfall of losing sufficient critical distance from our own insider assumptions (Alvesson, 2003) in fully immersed research. We therefore adopted different roles. Patrick acted as more of an observer and undertook the more overt data gathering including conducting interviews. Daniel, on the other hand, was a long-standing member of the MAC and so had a unique insider access and understanding. The team approach enabled the challenging of assumptions through a constant process of discussing our responses to our participation with each other. Tacit assumptions, emotions, tensions, and knowledge could thus be surfaced, explored, and incorporated into our research. Our team approach also enabled us to balance activism with research (as proposed in Table 1) by undertaking different but complementary roles that would have been hard to combine in a single individual.

We decided that the most effective way to present our learning was to use autobiographical vignettes, a well-established way of communicating the experience and “feel” of the ethnographic process (Barter & Renold, 2003), particularly when incorporating self-ethnographic data (Humphreys, 2005). Vignettes enable the writing of rich ethnographic description within the confines of a journal article (Van Maanen, 2010). In addition, Ripamonti et al. (2016) suggest that vignettes are an effective way of representing the emotionality of the activist ethnographic encounter. Each of our four vignettes focusses on a different methodological issue related to the procedural virtues as delineated in Table 1. As the use of vignettes emerged as a central element of our activist ethnography, an account of how we developed them in our research may prove a useful example for others wishing to pursue similar methods.

The first stage of writing the autoethnographic vignettes was developed by a lengthy and recursive reading and rereading of the field notes and reflexive diaries both as individuals and together, discussing them and reflecting on which experiences were most salient (Hay, 2014). The differences, sometimes disagreements, concerning our perceptions and emotions that surfaced during this stage enabled us to reflect on the various academic and activist identities at play and challenged our preconceived notions regarding the setting. We became aware of how applying the procedural virtues was frequently problematic in practice. Based on these discussions, we moved onto the second stage of crafting ethnographic stories using Elbow’s (1981) freewriting technique of focusing on the emotional content to examine which experiences felt important, or on moments where we felt uncomfortable or questioned our beliefs or practices (Humphreys, 2005). The third phase, was to move these accounts beyond introspection by reflecting on the broader social-context captured in the experience (Reed-Danahay, 1997). This involved reflecting on our assumptions and subjecting them to analytical insight in the context of the broader environment provided by both rereading of our data and existing research into similar groups. Our team approach greatly helped: We swapped individually drafted vignettes, each reading the other’s narratives, asking clarifying details and refining the stories. We then jointly analyzed them in terms of how they exemplified those features of the procedural virtues, PAR, and militant ethnography that we were attempting to combine in our activist ethnography. We then tested the utility of our vignettes by “performing” them (Ellis & Bochner, 1992) at conferences, exploring what aspects resonated with others and subjecting them to critical scrutiny and feedback before rereading the field notes and analyzing them against our key themes. This entire process was recursive, we frequently returned to earlier stages to refine our vignettes.

By engaging in this rigorous reflexive process, we were able to adjust and develop our ethnographic practice. It made us more aware of the power relations, competing identities, ethical dilemmas, and tensions between institutional and activist goals that we discuss below and that other activist ethnographic researchers will also need to negotiate. Such an awareness enables these issues to be incorporated into richer, more nuanced ethnographic accounts as well as enhancing our

understanding of how one might contribute to activism. In our next section, we present our vignettes and discuss in detail how our attempt to develop a distinctive activist ethnography was experienced in the field.

Vignette 1: You Are Not One of Us (the Outsider's Perspective)

In this vignette, we address the methodological issues identified in Table 1 concerning researcher identity and researcher participant relations and identify methodological tactics to address them.

It was the second meeting of the MAC. I had had a friendly reception at the first meeting when Daniel and I explained how we would like to base some research on the social center project over the next few weeks. I was confident of a positive response when I asked whether I could record the meeting, rather than making frantic notes. As soon as I asked the question, the atmosphere changed. I suddenly became very aware of being an outsider. Suspicion about our research was evident; some being very hostile to it. Others, while being happy about the research, still had some reservations about recording. Some thought that our academic viewpoint would help them organize more effectively. Some were distrustful of my motives, fearing a journalistic exposé or feeling that it was exploitative to use their project for research. "We don't know you," they told me. "How do we know that you won't just leave when you have the information that you want?" (Patrick, from notes taken after the second MAC meeting)

Patrick's role as largely observer-participant is highlighted in the vignette. It is not unusual in ethnography for there to be issues of acceptance and researcher anxieties over this (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016). However, such issues are particularly salient within activist ethnography where one wishes to work alongside the group rather than simply study it. We had expected that this would be a low-key request, given Daniel's long-standing involvement with the group and Patrick's experience with similar groups. We were both taken aback by the reaction. It illustrates the danger of assuming, as critical performativity tends to, that academics will be regarded positively (see, e.g., Willmott, 2008) and welcomed by activists because of shared causes or intellectual expertise (Spicer et al., 2009). Instead, some MAC activists were suspicious of our involvement. When we discussed this reaction, we reflected that this was partly due to being business school academics, an off-putting identity for alternative organizations like the MAC (Fournier & Grey, 2000; Parker, 2002). Such reactions have also been noted in PAR research. Chatterton et al. (2010) found they were sometimes seen as "exploitative, unaccountable, managerialist, and compromised by our academic status" (p. 251). We concur that the (perceived) expertise and social capital of the academic was seen as inimical to a pursuit of inclusive, democratic "do-it-yourself" learning.

For us, this experience suggested that the procedural virtues of empathy and giving voice as well as critical reflexivity cannot be restricted to the writing of ethnographic accounts as tends to be assumed in organizational ethnography. Rather, these virtues must be pursued from the outset of involvement in the field. Our response to the suspicion of the MAC was informed by our reading of PAR and its emphasis on learning from and being alongside. First, we undertook a range of mundane but helpful tasks including taking minutes and notes for the group, creating webpages or simply moving the furniture for meetings (see, e.g., Chatterton et al., 2010). This reciprocity demonstrated our desire to engage as ordinary members of the group and not to assume a superiority based on academic status. Such activities also enabled us to understand from the inside the everyday lives of MAC members and so enriched our research. Our second strategy was a relational one, to actively build relationships over time with members of the MAC. Our team approach considerably aided us in coping with these sometimes emotionally difficult episodes. We provided each other with mutual

support and helped each other develop a reflexive understanding of the processes that were occurring and what underlay them, enriching our eventual accounts of organizing in the MAC. For scholars without the advantage of Daniel's long-standing connection with participants, it might prove much more difficult to obtain acceptance, again demonstrating the importance within AE of team approaches and complementary researcher roles. The vignette underscores that aspirations, such as coproduction of knowledge and academic activist involvement, are always likely to be problematic and require long-term and effortful work. However, the vignette also suggests a possible strategy to such co-construction. Within our activist ethnography, the procedural virtue of giving voice to the marginalized had to be worked on through active involvement in the consensual democratic decision-making process used by the MAC. This helped develop the related virtue of sensitivity to power relations. By taking seriously the reactions of the activists when we asked to do the recording, we jointly arrived at an appreciation of each other's position and needs and so determined together a way forward to respect and meet them. It was only by abandoning a researcher role based on academic social capital that this was made possible.

Vignette 2: Who Am I? Academic or Activist? (the Insider's Perspective)

In this vignette, we address the methodological issues of conflicting researcher identities and the ensuing ethical dilemmas.

It's a couple of weeks into the project and things seem to be progressing. I am quite excited about this, yet I am also becoming increasingly uncomfortable. The problem is that I feel a little on the edge of the group and not able to fully join in. Whereas others seem to speak authentically as members of the community, I feel conscious of my other academic identity. I wonder, as I speak, if others, knowing what I do for a living, look at me differently. Do they expect me, as an organizational "expert" to be able to offer solutions?

Yet I also don't feel I can really be an academic here either. I have a notepad with me, and take notes but I feel self-conscious about them. Patrick seems quite able to write down what people say, but I feel sheepish about it. Every time I do it I notice that I am shielding my notepad as though I am trying to pretend that I am not really writing things down. As the meeting goes on this discomfort grows, I put my notepad down, I sit and listen. I'll try and remember what has been said. (Daniel, from notes taken after the Fourth MAC Meeting)

The anxieties and conflicts of insider activist ethnography rarely surface in official accounts despite the fact that "their location in between various social groups and psychological states often leaves researchers at the margins, or shuttling between periphery and centre" (Gilmore & Kenny, 2015, p. 67). This discomfort may account for the tendency within organizational ethnography to mitigate it through the researcher identity remaining dominant. In activist ethnography, where the embodied presence and activities of the researcher cannot be easily distinguished from those of the activist, identity conflicts are particularly problematic (see Wacquant, 2011, for a discussion). The tensions experienced by Daniel, resulted from simultaneously negotiating two identities on a public stage rather than through the private reflection assumed in much writing on the procedural virtue of critical reflexivity.

The issues raised for activist ethnography by this are both practical and emotional. Practically, it is difficult to combine data gathering methods, such as note taking, that require standing back from the immediate flow of events when one is also simultaneously trying to fully engage in the moment. Our way of addressing this was through negotiating complementary researcher roles, to turn this issue into a positive advantage. Patrick was able to undertake data gathering and observation, freeing Daniel to participate less self-consciously. This enabled Daniel to retain his focus on experiencing

activism, thus supporting the procedural virtue of constructing empathetic accounts based on an insider viewpoint. Discussion between the authors then surfaced the different perspectives of each researcher role. Again, the vignette suggests that the procedural virtues should not be restricted to the writing-up stage but should be incorporated into a flexible and dynamic process of active reflexivity in the field. Being attentive to the procedural virtues during activist-ethnographic fieldwork can also offer new vantage points for analysis. Straddling both worlds means that it is possible to use one mode of being, the researcher, to reflect on the conditions of possibility for the other, the activist, and vice versa. Pursuing this dialogic form of reflexivity also encouraged us to be open with each other about our anxieties and tensions which in turn taught us a great deal about the emotional dimension of organizing in the MAC for its members.

Vignette 3: Participants or Friends?

In this vignette, we address the methodological issues of power relations, researcher identity, and ethics when researching participants who are also (or who become) friends.

We finish our coffee and start looking at the paper that Patrick has drafted. We are both pleased to see it taking shape. Mostly, the paper reflects our joint discussions; however, Patrick has added new material from his recent interviews. They include accounts of serious depression, isolation, sexual abuse and suicide attempts, all freely volunteered by interviewees. Patrick is pleased with these accounts believing that they offer rich insights into the lives of activists. However, as Daniel reads this material for the first time he feels very different.

“Do you really think we should include this stuff about depression and suicide attempts?” Daniel asks.

“Why not, they all consented to this stuff being used? We’ll be careful how we present it. I think it’s important to the research,” replies Patrick.

“But I just don’t feel comfortable with revealing the lives of my friends like this,” continues Daniel. “Should I really be reading all of this about the pain and difficulties that they have been through? What will it be like when I see them again knowing these things from their past that they haven’t told me? I don’t like the idea that we are broadcasting these stories to the world. It’s just too close to home.” (Meeting between Patrick and Daniel taken from Patrick’s notes)

Our different reactions as authors to the life histories of participants brought into sharp relief tensions between the academic and activist self. For Patrick, the stories were engaging, revealing, and personal. They required handling with great care and sensitivity, but they did not violate his relationship with the participants. For him, the use of these stories accorded with a representational ethics based on an empathetic understanding of the other (Reedy, 2009) and so was congruent with the procedural virtues. However, Daniel had long-standing friendships with the storytellers that he expected to continue and he struggled with these stories being made public. It felt voyeuristic to him and he wished to protect his friends from academic analysis and the judgement of outsiders. The vignette illustrates that the procedural virtues might mean very different things to researchers depending on their precise relation to the field, even though both authors shared a sense of the possibilities that these quotes might offer.

Again, while this issue is not unique to activist ethnography, it is particularly acute because of the close, long-term engagement, and ambitions to work with the activists involved. Issues of power relations and ethics when friends provide “data” may have a powerful personal impact. As Brewis (2014) has identified from her own experiences, there is a dilemma of wishing to avoid betraying

friends and the desire to pursue the procedural virtue of making other voices heard. It illustrates that the procedural virtues are not always compatible or a basis for consensus between researchers. Such tensions are not easily, if ever, resolvable, and our response to them was to confront them together as researchers. In this way, we reinforced the procedural virtue of reflexivity concerning power relations. The procedural virtue of the democratization of knowledge pursued through the coproduction of knowledge within PAR may mitigate these issues. For example, draft accounts can be sent to research participants during the writing process to discuss how they feel about their data being used in this way or their view of the analysis offered. This can be not only a way of validating the research, but also, particularly for those involved in activist groups, a way of giving back to the communities involved in the research (for a discussion, see Varkarolis & King, 2017).

Why then use friends in one's research at all? Within activist ethnography, engagement implies "subjective connection to the participants" and being "genuinely 'part of the experience' rather than being detached from it" (Beech, Hibbert, MacIntosh, & McInnes, 2009, p. 197). Friendships tend to precede or follow such engagement, and Tillmann-Healy (2003) has argued that "friendship-as-method can bring us to a level of understanding and depth of experience we may be unable to reach using only traditional methods" (p. 737). We suggest that friendship as method requires the relational stance that Ellis has termed "radical reciprocity" (Ellis, 2007, p. 7). The democratizing of the research process in PAR offers one route to this whereby participants become fully involved in authoring their own stories (Gorli et al., 2015), although the disinterest of most MAC members in academic texts made this problematic for us. The exploration of emotional conflicts between Patrick and Daniel, however, did again help us considerably in working through these issues and determining a shared ethical position in how accounts were presented. Such constant dialogue enabled us to keep the issues of instrumentality constantly in mind as the research progressed.

Vignette 4: "Who Am I Working For?" (Institutional Opportunities and Constraints)

In this vignette, we address the issues that typically arise within academic activism from tensions between activist and institutional obligations.

I am at home writing material for the MAC website. I promised them that I would get this done by the end of the week. I am enjoying it, playing with different layouts and writing content. It's nice to be doing something that I feel will make a difference. Then I hear an email ping into my inbox and, although it's some pointless university-wide corporate message, it reminds me that I'm officially "at work" and I start to feel guilty. "Really," I tell myself, "what I am doing is far more important than this corporate nonsense. Nobody at my university knows I am doing this," I muse to myself, "I could be doing loads of things from writing a paper to gardening and nobody would know. At least this feels useful."

I like the freedom that I have as an academic to be able to do this type of activity. It should feel a wonderful luxury, yet, as I continue working on the website, my pleasure at it evaporates. "Shouldn't I be doing this in my own time? I'm not exactly paid to do this am I? But this is research," I tell myself. "Surely, it's essential to engage like this?" (From field notes taken by Daniel three months into the project)

Vignette 4 illustrates the many tensions and contradictions that arise when the identity of researcher and activist combine and the difficulties of balancing the various aims of academic activism. Some have argued that it is impossible to satisfy both institutional expectations and academic activist aims. The vignette suggests that when the procedural virtues, particularly those related to critical reflexivity, are extended beyond the construction of texts (as we argue above is a requirement for effective and ethical academic activism), then identity tensions will likely become

acute and so need strategies for managing. One solution is to simply accept that there will be a trade-off between activist and academic career ambitions. As Grint and Jackson (2010) argue, “instead of singularly devoting ourselves to the pursuit of getting published in top-tier journals, we may have to be prepared to walk away from the publishing production line for prolonged periods to lend a hand in our respective communities and get directly involved in real life” (p. 352). Unwillingness to pay this price may partly explain why most proponents of critical performativity remain at a distance from the engagement they espouse (King, 2015). Our vignette illustrates that trying to balance one’s professional obligations and one’s activist commitments leads to considerable stress and anxiety.

If one *can* live with these anxieties and negotiate the institutional pressures, however, we found that academic jobs enable the combination of scholarship with activism to a surprising extent. Being researchers confers considerable freedom in how one uses time (Johnson & Mullen, 2007). This provides opportunities to use some of our time for activist commitments albeit at the cost of heightened professional performance anxiety. Thus, rather than shame-faced hand-wringing about our academic privileges, activist ethnography enables using these for the benefit of those we research (Khasnabish & Haiven, 2015). In turn, the greater degree of involvement with the field supports the extension of the procedural virtues to all aspects of the research process and enhances the ability to produce rich portraits of unfamiliar settings and to represent voices that often go unheard within organizational research.

Discussion: What Did We Learn About Activist Ethnography and How It Should Be Done?

We began by asking whether and how it might be possible to combine research with activism to fulfil the aspirations of critical performativity. In Table 2 we show how we have combined elements of organizational ethnography, militant ethnography and PAR in our own form of activist ethnography, which we developed through our engagement with the MAC. We also show how we extend the use of the procedural virtues from being restricted to the writing of texts to a set of principles that inform all stages of the research process. Finally, we suggest practical methodological strategies (which for ease of reading we have numbered in Table 2 and referred to below) for the putative activist academic researcher. A caveat concerning these strategies is suggested by our own experience of the messiness, tensions, and contradictions of activist ethnography that other academic activists are likely to face (see also Chatterton et al., 2010). These strategies should not be read as a straightforward set of tools, rather they are offered as starting points for reflection through which researchers can become more conscious of, and therefore better able to make decisions about, the challenges they face. Indeed, our fifth proposed strategy in Table 2 is for a flexible, negotiated, and processual approach to the deployment of methodological tactics (5).

Our first proposed group of strategies is for activist ethnographers to identify settings in which they can feasibly embody both researcher and activist identities (1), rather than privileging one over the other. This requires either a long period becoming a fully accepted member of activist groups or the use of existing commitments and affiliations (2). A team approach greatly increases the potential opportunities of one or more researchers possessing such prior memberships (3). Associated with this strategy is the need to “work alongside” rather than simply “being with” participants (4). We found that it was not our academic expertise that was in demand but rather our contribution of another pair of hands to help with the everyday mundanities of practical organizing (Chatterton et al., 2010; Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010). Indeed, our relative autonomy and financial security as academics enabled us to do these things more easily than many of the MAC activists (Reedy, King, & Coupland, 2016).

In addition, the “DIY” culture of groups such as the MAC does not welcome the professionalized expertise that academia is seen to represent. Rather, the main strength of activist ethnography for us

Table 2. Methodological Strategies for Activist Ethnographers.

Activist Ethnographic Principle (From the Final Column of Table 1)					
	Related Procedural Virtues	Proposed Strategy	Issue Addressed	Potential Benefits	
Combine the aims of critical performativity, organizational ethnography, militant ethnography, and participatory action research.	Authentic rich description of organizational cultural settings. Giving “voice” to participants. Empathetic accounts from the perspective of the participants. Representing marginal or unheard voices.	1. Consider and identify settings in which one may fully merge participant and researcher identities (prior engagements, existing affinities, and connections).	The aim of pursuing research that makes a positive difference both to academic and participant knowledge and practice.	Enriched research based on closer identification with participants and an intimate embodied understanding of the field.	
		2. Aim for long-term engagements with groups studied to establish mutual aims and to live the experiences and emotions of participants.	The tendency to avoid identity conflict and tensions by clinging to the special status of “public intellectual.”	Practical assistance as activists to the groups studied, as negotiated between researchers and participants.	
		3. Seek opportunities for team ethnography and the involvement of participants in the writing of research.	The weaknesses identified with each methodological approach when pursued in isolation.	Offers the potential to learn with and from activism rather than simply observing and describing it.	
		4. Identify and pursue “mundane” forms of participation and assistance (“working alongside” rather than simply “being with”).		Closer relationships with participants based on the principle of reciprocity leading to better access and a richer understanding of the setting (“entangled with complex relations of power”;	
		5. Pursue a nonprescriptive, processual, and flexible set of methods negotiated between researchers and participants.		Juris, 2007, p. 165).	
		6. Use of team ethnography with complementary roles linked to a dialogic form of reflexivity throughout the research project.		The avoidance of the most common pitfalls identified with a single methodological approach.	
A reflexivity based on combining and confronting researcher and participant identities.	Extension of critical/self-reflexivity from the text to the field and to the wider lives of researchers. Emotionality/relationality experienced fully within the		The limitation within organizational ethnography of reflexivity to the writing of texts rather than all stages of the research. The avoidance of problems	Richer more nuanced research which gets to the heart of the research setting and where the emotional and relational dimensions are directly experienced and reflected on	

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Activist Ethnographic Principle (From the Final Column of Table 1)	Related Procedural Virtues	Proposed Strategy	Issue Addressed	Potential Benefits
Conscious negotiation of the researcher-activist identity tension—balancing the activist and academic role.	person of the researcher- activist rather than being externalized. Sensitivity to an extended range of power relations both within texts but also experienced through embodied participation.	7. Reframing conflicts between researcher and activist identities from problem to resource by making confronting such conflicts a central part of the research process.	caused by a lack of reflexivity, including the imposition of the researcher's own political assumptions or the unwarranted assumption of the public intellectual role within the CP and militant ethnography approaches.	by the researchers through dialogue with each other and with participants.
	Self-reflexivity. Authentic rich description based on “insider” accounts.		Potentially disabling identity tensions between the researcher and activist role are accepted and explored as a source of learning in themselves.	By identifying, accepting, and exploring such tensions they become available as a source of learning and so enrich rather than disable the activist academic.
Devising appropriate forms of representation for AE and incorporating self- ethnography and coauthorship.	Empathetic, relational, and engaged writing. The representation of marginalized voices.	8. Surfacing conflicts through the application of team-based dialogic reflexivity.	The richness of ethnographic data is difficult to capture and convey within the research paper format. Normal academic writing conventions produce texts that are often seen as irrelevant to activist readers. The plurality of methods is difficult to integrate within other forms of data presentation.	Vignettes have the potential to vividly communicate to a wide readership (academics and activists) the feel and richness of activist ethnographic data in an accessible and empathetic way.
		9. The development of vignettes as a way of representing the experience of the other and the self in engaging and convincing ways.		
		10. The use of a dialogic approach to writing through constant discussion and refinement within the ethnographic team.		

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Activist Ethnographic Principle (From the Final Column of Table 1)				
	Related Procedural Virtues	Proposed Strategy	Issue Addressed	Potential Benefits
Negotiating power relations and ethics	Going giving voice to breaking down the barriers between researcher and participant. Critical awareness of researcher privilege. Developing a sensitive and emancipatory ethics of representation.	11. The conscious and reflexive use of "friendship as method" based on the principle of radical reciprocity. 12. Avoiding assumptions of the value to the research or activism of the public intellectual role.	The various ethical dilemmas and complex power issues demonstrated in the vignettes.	An enhanced awareness of the ethical and power dimensions of research with activists as well as an expanded set of strategies based on team ethnography, for making positive use of these to enrich research.
	Use of a plurality of methods to achieve critically reflexive rich descriptions.	13. Develop a comprehensive familiarity of the methodological traditions of organizational ethnography, militant ethnography, and participatory action research to provide a wider and more flexible range of methodological tactics and responses congruent with academic activism. 14. Work in methodologically diverse research teams.	The weaknesses and pitfalls identified when restricted to a single methodological approach.	A greatly expanded repertoire of methodological tactics to employ as involvement in academic activism emerges in the field. The avoidance of common pitfalls associated with single approaches.

is not the knowledge produced from the research encounter or the transfer of such knowledge from one domain (academia) to another (practice). Rather engagement offers a way of learning from the tensions generated between the roles of researcher and activist. We thus recommend the abandonment, at least in the context of close engagement with activist and social movement groups, of pretensions to public intellectualism (12). Engaging in these groups on their own terms is more likely to open up new and interesting spaces to explore this tension and consider new ways of being academics. As vignette 1 exemplifies, working alongside our participants also built trust, acceptance and understanding. By combining the *working alongside* of PAR with the procedural virtues, particularly a dialogic relational reflexivity arising from our team approach, we felt we enriched our own insights and wrote better research.

Extending critical reflexivity from the text to the field is also a key feature of our activist ethnography and this enlarged procedural virtue was facilitated by employing team ethnography in two ways (6). The first was to ease the practical difficulties of embodying both activist and researcher identities by each participant occupying different roles in the field. The second way was to confront together the tensions and emotions generated by combining activist and academic identities (7 and 8). We identified and worked through these together, using our combined but complementary knowledge of organizational ethnography, militant ethnography, and PAR to develop a way of responding to them. The resultant discussions proved invaluable for our research, although not by finding simple resolutions. Rather our team approach enabled us to better understand the methodological issues involved and to use them fruitfully. It follows that a further proposed strategy is to develop a comprehensive familiarity with these three areas of methodological literature (13) and for ethnographic teams to incorporate expertise across them (14). Our bibliography provides a useful starting point for the realization of this strategy for the nascent activist ethnographer.

We also propose the use of vignettes as an appropriate form of textual representation of activist ethnographic research (9). We suggest that the dialogic, recursive, and negotiated approach we detail in our methods section above provides a framework for practicing many of the procedural virtues relating to reflexivity in the writing of activist ethnographic texts (10). In addition, vignettes are accessible to activist as well as academic readerships, providing a way to engage activists in the writing of the research. We found that MAC members were largely disinterested in conventional academic writing even though they thought deeply about their own practices and theoretical frameworks. For our future forays into academic activism we would like to experiment with the co-construction of vignettes with our participants as a way of achieving the aim of texts more useful and relevant to activists. Rather than waiting until a full paper is written up for a journal (which can be many years after the study is completed), vignettes may be used as a form of quick and timely feedback more likely to aid the activist group (Varkarolis & King, 2017).

Finally, we recommend considering the strategy of “friendship as method” (11). This has much to offer the activist ethnographer, although as vignette three illustrates, it is not without its own challenges. In particular it requires the addition of “radical reciprocity” (Ellis, 2007) to the procedural virtues in order that participants are no longer seen as the “other.” Friendship as method promises to fulfil the procedural virtues related to breaking down the distinction between researcher and participant. It enables activist ethnographers to build richer understandings of the relational glue of mutual aid which sustains activist communities (see Reedy et al., 2016). By sharing the emotions, struggles, pleasures, and everyday interactions as fully part of such groups, many of the procedural virtues take on an active role that goes well beyond how texts are produced.

Concluding Thoughts

We began this article by noting that the aspirations of critical performativity to engage with activism were rarely actualized and that there were, consequently, many questions to be answered concerning

the theoretical and practical issues that might be faced by those wishing to take critical organizational scholarship into the field. Our primary contribution, in this article has been to answer some of these questions through exploring both methodological issues and possible responses to them. We have considered the wider field of academic activism and contrasted and combined three methodological traditions that have all sought to bring about positive change through the research process, namely organizational ethnography, militant ethnography, and PAR. Our combining of these three traditions provides an enriched theoretical framework on which those wishing to embark on activist ethnography may draw. We synthesized aspects of these approaches into our own methodological proposal for a form of activist ethnography (see Tables 1 and 2). We have thus offered a systematic framework for undertaking activist ethnography to achieve the aims of critical performativity.

Second, we have presented learning from our own experiences of developing our method in the field through four vignettes to illustrate different methodological issues. We evaluate these experiences in terms of the personal, ethical, and practical dilemmas that arose during our own attempt to combine the roles of critical organizational researcher *and* activist in order that others interested in academic activist methods might be better prepared to confront similar issues themselves. To this end, we suggest strategies for working through these issues, which we summarize in Table 2 and its accompanying discussion, relating these to an enlarged conception of the procedural virtues. We conclude that procedural virtues, derived from organizational ethnography, provide the critical organizational researcher with a way of negotiating the very real difficulties and contradictions of activist ethnography.

Despite the discomforts and doubts expressed above, we characterize our activist ethnographic engagement with the MAC as positive and would encourage others who wish to bring about change through their research to pursue similar methods. For one thing, we were able to publish a polyvocal ethnographic account of the MAC in a high quality journal, that we hope has challenged many assumptions of how and for what purpose organizing takes place (see Reedy et al., 2016). The insights in this research would not have been possible without an activist intent combined with organizational ethnography informed by the procedural virtues via a team approach. Overall, we consider our attempt to immerse ourselves in the everyday practices and lifeworlds of the alternative organizational practitioners of the MAC as successful. Our access to these lifeworlds and the trust required for our involvement were, however, only possible because of the long-term engagement with the MAC on the part of Daniel. Successfully turning this access into an empathetic ethnographic account of the MAC was only possible because of the less immersed Patrick feeling more able to represent the MAC in writing. These factors may be difficult for others to replicate but our team approach and the strong relationship that emerged out of our shared experiences provided one solution to the difficulty of combining activism and scholarship within a single individual. We were guided throughout by the procedural virtues of organizational ethnography particularly with regards to having a truly “insider” perspective (Brunswick & Coghlan, 2007; Karra & Phillips, 2008), a diminishment of the distance between researcher and researched, and an engagement that occurred over a longer period of time than is typical for other forms of qualitative research (Cunliffe, 2010). Indeed, we were able to extend the practice of these virtues from the production of texts to every stage of the research process.

Our final comment is to suggest that humility regarding the expectations of critical performativity of a positive reception for critical scholarship from activist communities might be a necessary additional procedural virtue. Following PAR’s example of learning from the groups it engages with, we suggest the main value of moving from organizational ethnography to activist ethnography is to participate in new and interesting ways of organizing. In other words, we as academics may have more to learn from activist practice than activists have to learn from our academic practice.


Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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