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THE BAKER'S DOZEN: THE PRESENCE OF THE GIFT IN SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

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This paper explores whether or not Marcel Mauss's concept of the gift is applicable to understanding the diverse roles that ethnographers assume in corporate environments. Kneading together the themes of gift exchange from anthropological literature on the one hand and "Representations" from the participatory design research community on the other; we suggest that the artifacts we create and share with customers actually evoke the presence of the gift in customer interactions. We argue that specific types of representations - a key component in our methodological toolkit - may be likened to the thirteenth loaf in the baker's dozen; given to the customer to demonstrate equitable partnerships, enhance communication and garner trust in a perpetually changing marketplace. Using case studies, we examine how these objects illuminate the complexity of our own sociality in professional settings and furthermore, help to deepen or transform customer service engagements.

INTRODUCTION

In part, this paper describes our experience of a paradox in business: companies wish to create the spirit of durable relationships with customers based on a series of transitory exchanges within a dynamic and competitive marketplace. We take our premise from Michael Thompson's playful foray into "rubbish theory", through which he explores what it is that determines people's perceptions about value. He suggests that transitory goods are those that decrease in value over time, while durable goods increase in value and thus have "infinite life spans". What makes the premise interesting is its interpretative and temporal aspect: what one considers a second-hand car, another deems an antique (Thompson 1979). We will focus not as much on interpreting the value of goods per se, but on how a sense of durability gets infused into a landscape of transient interactions with customers through the use of graphical representations.

We discuss the relational aspects of service engagements and how our focus as practicing ethnographers is towards building relationships with our customers and amplifying the relevance of people's work. The specific way in which we do this is through sharing with customers the artifacts that have been created from our interviews and observations with them in the field. Graphical representations are a significant component of our methodology: we discuss the use of representations

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as well as a toolkit of graphical icons called "the Blue Guys" to explore themes in the discourse around "the gift" (Mauss 1990). We suggest also that the representation itself inherently embodies our sociality, that is, our professional roles, interactions and connections with others. Hence, discussions around representations evoke a response from customers that feeds our mutual relationship and extends beyond it. Finally, we examine the dichotomy in the role that the artifact plays within a global services organization.

This paper is also a reflexive one. Ethnographic and ethnomethodological literature in the domain of Computer-Supported Cooperative Work accentuates how critical it is to make context visible for truly useful understandings of people's work. Suchman (1987) for instance, questions some fundamental assumptions behind the design of intelligent devices and cautions against the building of static, abstract models or ideal-state representations of work, emphasizing instead that one examine actual contingencies in operational plans. Similarly Bowers, Button and Sharrock (1995) call attention to the fact that people working in a production print environment can anticipate problems in advance and respond to situations as they occur in ways that a job scheduling system simply cannot. In essence, ethnomethodologists caution against the privileging of work process over work practice.[2] What we hope to demonstrate in this paper is how we frame contingencies within our representations and use them not only to design and implement technology but to build stronger customer relationships. Representations reveal the grittiness and dynamism of the problems uncovered in the field by contrasting what was expected to happen with what actually happens. It is not, however, only the accuracy of the representation, the contextual minutiae or the deconstruction of work that is significant, but how the creation and use of these representations enable crucial conversations. Our emphasis is on the *interactions* that socially embodied artifacts afford and how representations invoke far deeper discussions with collaborators and more immediate and powerful ways in which to engage.

THE SPIRIT OF ETHNOGRAPHY IN BUSINESS

Our data reflect our participation on projects with customers of a Fortune 500 company. Over the last fifteen years, the company made significant changes in how it markets its offerings, to some extent moving from the exclusive production of objects ("selling devices") to the evoking of relationships ("selling services").[3] Anthropologists, ethnomethodologists and designers played no small part in supporting the shift towards services by exploring the application of ethnographic methods in service contexts, which included constructing methodological training workshops and participating with consultants and content delivery teams in the new service based organization. According to the Wikipedia, the open-source, online encyclopedia, the service sector is distinguishable by its "focus…on people interacting with people and serving the customer rather than transforming physical goods", while the service economy "refers to a model wherein as much economic activity as possible is treated as a service."[4]

Don Slater points out that the distinction between goods and services appears slight when considering the wider material, symbolic and social practices that influence each. What is more critical he says is to focus on "the changing conditions under which social objects are brought into being in the first place" (2001:14). While agreeing with Slater, we have also found that the difference in strategic emphasis between products and services in the corporation has in turn transformed the scope and definition of our work, some of which will be covered in this paper.

Earlier, our work as ethnographers in this corporation focused primarily on product innovation or addressed issues around organizational practices *within* the institution. Whenever possible, we used a participatory design approach (cf. PDC '94 for a wide range of studies advocating these methods). We worked closely with engineers, computer scientists and graphic designers to create robust prototypes and new features for products that were grounded in understandings of the work practices of our research partners and the internal needs of our organizations. Our roles in customer engagements were directed at research and development, and the timeframes for projects were longer than in consulting engagements. Typically, we conducted a series of open-ended interviews and observations at customer sites, using audio-video equipment to record the interactions for future analysis. From this we produced a number of "deliverables". Our objectives were not to create a checklist of technical specifications, but to demonstrate the nuanced context and varied perspectives in the doing of the work (Button and Dourish 1996) that might transcend pre-conceived notions about how the new prototype or product might be used.

We continue as before to conduct fieldwork at customers' sites. What has changed over the last seven or so years is that we are now actively invited to participate in the sales cycle.[5] We work on service engagements with a focus on new business process offerings that employ emerging technologies, saturating whenever possible, technology and service offerings with understandings of customer practices. Similar to other companies that have leveraged the skills of social scientists and designers (cf. case studies in Squires and Byron 2002), the new global services organization has incorporated ethnographic approaches at its point-of-sale. For the sales force, relationship building is crucial and ethnographers and designers can provide special attention to clients. First, the expectation is that we might help to expand the conversation from the sale of solutions and devices to the elicitation of the "real" problems faced by the customer. As one Account Manager noted wryly, "They trust researchers because they know you aren't trying to sell them hardware." We are asked to deepen the communication during sales calls over the telephone or in person by describing the variety of perspectives that the company can offer their clients – from new themes in research to socio-technical approaches to organizational change, and challenges in the adoption of new technology.

Secondly, the sales process now involves multidisciplinary teams that blend technical and business components with work practice analysis and Lean Six Sigma; a multi-dimensional approach that is well advertised through case studies on the company's public web site. The objective is to engage with customers around the specific problems they face and to develop a tailored solution that has wider applicability in the market. Prior to the development of the services organization, business account managers sometimes offered their time and our skills - data gathering, analysis and design - gratis to customers[6] in order to build the relationship.[7] Nowadays, we charge differently in different situations, sometimes only for travel and local expenses and in other cases our services are built into the costs to the client. The point is that the company is investing strategically in this work, whether or not customers explicitly pay for it. Thus we still maintain old approaches with development and research teams and have also been experimenting with understanding and developing new ways to intercept services business models within the global services organization.

REPRESENTATIONS AS PARTIAL CONNECTIONS

Much has been written in the last ten years about the nature of work and representations in participatory design and science and technology studies, ranging from issues associated with the specific rendering of work practices (Wall and Mosher 1994; Brun-Cottan and Wall 1995) and the

voicing of work (Suchman 1995), to the inherent negotiation between invisible/visible work (Star and Strauss 1999), and abstractions and particularities of ethnomethodology and design (Button and Dourish 1996).[8] More recently, researchers have resurrected the concept of the gift in socio-technical domains, such as open source software (Zeitlyn 2003), and file sharing practices (McGee and Skageby 2004).

Rather than focus on the democratization of design, we turn our gaze inwards to the representation itself, bringing to light how the artifact deeply embodies our own sociality as ethnographers and our "partial connections" (Strathern 2004). We refer to partial connections not as techno-biological entities, but as Marilyn Strathern so brilliantly argues, as "a series of perspectives… [that interact] as a constellation of elements [where] each position generates a further elaboration with an enlarging and diminishing effect on the constellations of the previous position" (2004:108).[9] In other words, representations capture what we see, hear, discuss, absorb, feel and observe but also contain the distillation of our analysis and partial worldviews, with issues shifting in focus from the foreground to the background and back again depending on our assigned or adoptive roles as archaeologists of the workplace, scouts for innovative design, and flag-bearers for the invisible.

We use Wall and Mosher's definition of representations as illustrations that consist of "sketches, video-stills, photographs, copies of notes or documents or combinations of these" that are "typically used to characterize some aspect of a site, a work activity or a proposed design" (1994:90). Over the years, we have created a portfolio of representational methods and tools that allow us to visually display our findings and analysis. This includes a graphics toolkit that consists of a library of icons that help us to depict the variety of every day objects used or exchanged in the environments that we study, such as computers, printers, tables, telephones, documents, files and filing cabinets, email, faxes and software applications. Appealing figures bring alive the interactions at work; with people seated at conference tables during meetings, puzzling over printers, handing each other documents of specific kinds in a particular sequence, or staring at computer screens on desks that are spilling over with books, papers, and emptied mugs of coffee. There is even an icon of the ethnographer as a videographer, later adopted as part of an emblem for the work practice and design team. It adorned the wall near our laboratory and was placed within the footer of our slide packs which are circulated within the research organization and business units. Then again, the icon library, although often updated to incorporate new icons based on new field studies, does not contain images of stethoscopes, vehicles, ATM machines, clocks, art objects or scientific instruments. Instead, the flurry of phenomena we might uncover in different "vertical industries" is captured through video stills and photographs.

At times representations are printed out on 11"x17" paper and pinned up in the laboratory. They are used to illustrate our methodology to internal visitors or in discussions with external customers. These are visually compelling pieces and in part, symbolic of the group that created them. The icons too, have grown a life of their own, affectionately referred to as "Blue Guys" by those in the know and over time, the term has been adopted by others further removed from their creation. As team members left the group to work elsewhere, they asked for copies of the Blue Guys to take with them. Recently they were adopted by another group of researchers working on a large consulting assignment overseas. They have become widely requested, and the toolkit has been made available on a company-wide repository. The Blue Guys are currently being used by the global services organization as well as product development, sales and research groups. This is not mere clip art generated for the general public but has come to represent the identity of the group in which it was created, its methods and its particular purview of design that privileges the customer. The representations embody the shadow space between client and supplier, a porthole to work that some will never see in person.

Representations re-situate the multiplicity of tasks, sites and interpretations of the workplace. They turn indexical and polyphonic; marking with situational interactions the places where work gets done. Representations point to elements in a customer's work place to which we wish to draw attention. At the same time, we maintain that these are snapshots in dynamic environments where people's roles are not clear-cut, but change according to need and circumstance. If representations are abstractions of primary research and grapple with what is understood from a field site and what is offered for design, they also present a topology of how people's work practices interleave complex activities at various points in time. The views toggle across "place" (the different digital and physical realms in which activities happen), time, and conceptual or analytical "space". On the one hand, the views capture problems that people experience when moving information from numerous, password-protected databases to an Excel spreadsheet; coordination work with sheaves of paper moving between hallway printers, staff mailboxes and the individual's desk; the distilling down of hundreds of images between the library at work and the projector at home, and on the other hand, they encompass data revealed through observations at customer sites and suggestions made during product design sessions.

To sum up, the icons used in the representations serve to catalog both the work practices and material objects that we seek to portray. Yet, while the imprint of the ethnographer permeates our representations, the ethnographic voice still persists as narrator rather than *in* the narrative. Rarely is the grist of our evolving relationship with customers made explicit in the illustrations, except to frame the methods that we use, the phases of the project, or how the data are analyzed. The ethnographer must choose what to reveal to the immediate audience while keeping in mind that the sub-text of the work may be disassociated from the reports circulated to senior management. For instance, will internal political negotiations at customer sites be important to our product team if our engagement is only a short one? How do we describe work that "falls through the cracks" without blame being personally attributed to employees? How do we apply to service engagements the position that representations disclose certain aspects while leaving others out? Consulting projects are phased along tight schedules: risks are high, the clock face marks time by Quarterly results, and "closing a deal" involves the difficult act of persuading customers to close the door on your competitors. What the corporation wishes to understand are newly revealed perceptions and practices that will help keep or attract *purchasing* customers.[10] Elicitations of people's work are of interest to the extent that they extend business alliances or inform opportunities for innovation.[11] In these cases, it is the intended audience that will determine the framing and content of our analysis. We create many versions of the same analysis for different audiences; use cases for engineers or software architects with information on how customers interacted with systems; graphical representations for customers, business development, heads of research or C-level personnel, and reports whose content range from understandings of current state to future scenarios and challenges.

Those in sales best understand how critical it is to build personal relationships in a marketplace crowded by choice. Workshops are organized for customers; account executives make one-on-one calls to clients; and business groups and Lean Six Sigma teams, following the decade of Knowledge Management, use intranet portals to record and communicate "lessons learned" and "best practices". Any foothold that might further a relationship is explored. Unexpectedly, we found that the pragmatism that ethnographers and designers bring to the table is a welcome addition to discussions with customers wary of purchasing and adopting emerging technologies.

REPRESENTATIONS AS GIFTS

It is the nebulous, shifting nature of gift exchange that so fascinates in the context of service engagements. As Mark Osteen points out, "Certainly we do not give gifts to everyone whom we encounter, and most gift theorists recognize a distinction between the domains of market and gift". (Osteen 2004:2). Chris Gregory builds upon Mauss's initial proposition that certain types of gifts might exemplify the original form of exchange between people or groups, but distances himself from the spirit of Mauss's writings. He proposes that the mode of exchange renders gifts and commodities distinct, wherein the focus lies on objects that are exchanged and whether they are "alienable" or "inalienable". Osteen summarizes Gregory's work succinctly, "In a gift economy, objects are personified; in a market economy, persons are objectified" (2004: 233). Keith Hart (2001) however, reminds us of the depth of sociality in exchange, "Mauss held that there are two prerequisites for being human: we each have to learn to be self-reliant to a high degree and we have to belong to others in order to survive, merging our identities in a bewildering variety of social relationships." The glue that holds social groups together is "the idea that exchange must be two-sided", in other words, that reciprocity is induced by the obligation to give, receive and return over time. Hart (2001) continues, "In every way modern markets deny this premise, separating individuals from the object world and from each other, banishing the spirituality and social substance from exchange. Yet our humanity inserts the spirit of the gift into market economy in profound ways." These are precisely the tensions explored in this paper, and we use the following examples to illustrate how the thread of reciprocity surfaces through various interactions with customers.

CASE STUDIES

Let us ground the discussion based on three case studies. The first case study involved a project in the transportation industry aimed to ensure 100% compliance in meeting regulatory standards with respect to distributing and reading updated bulletins of equipment maintenance documentation. In all, 3500 maintenance technicians had to read and sign that they read the new bulletins within twenty days of publication: a challenging proposition. The solution had to integrate with the sites where documentation was stored, in addition to new software that they deployed worldwide. Two ethnographers, one with a technical background, participated as part of the services consulting team in fieldwork and design sessions with the customer. Sets of representations were constructed, based on detailed descriptions of the current practices and the compilation of multiple viewpoints: (a) corporate management responsible for ensuring compliance, (b) the IT department implementing the tracking system, (c) middle managers covering site level compliance and (d) supervisors and technicians responsible for maintenance. (See Figure 1) Representations captured procedural, physical and cultural aspects of the work as well as some underlying problems. For example, how time-consuming and frustrating it was for technicians to interrupt pressing work in the bays in order to read on PC's and sign off on documents in binders stored in break rooms. Or, the binders tended to float to different points in the bay, so the chances of finding them were marginal. The second set of representations captured the discussion around proposed changes and implications for software integration with their current system. Finally, a third set of documents illustrated the anticipated impact of the solution, uncovering metrics to measure impact on existing practices and noting what would change for each one of the stakeholders. These greatly helped the customer envision the look and feel of the new solution. Ethnographers invested heavily in eliciting multiple perspectives and spent a substantial amount of effort sharing what was learned and refining the solution with the infrastructure vendor and the services team responsible for the solution. Obtaining a comprehensive view of the entire process

revealed points of interception for the solution further upstream than anticipated. The representations illustrated to the customer that the global services team had a good understanding of the work: in fact, the technical solution followed very closely the initial proposal created by the ethnographer. Months after implementation, the feedback from the client was very positive. The attention paid to all perspectives and in particular that of the technicians was deeply appreciated: a supervisor wrote saying it was his belief that the solution was successful because it addressed concerns of those responsible for compliance at every level. Beyond the customer relationship, the analysis embedded in the representations and final solution was used to develop a case study, published on the customer's website. The illustrations were also utilized as training materials for global services consultants.

In the second case study, a research team was sponsored by a business unit to work with a state-affiliated organization that supplied educational and technical infrastructure to school districts. This was not a service engagement per se as it took place before there was a global services group. But it embodied many of the characteristics of a service project; primarily, to exploit existing technology to improve current processes and to uncover other potential applications, in this case for a new scanning and web-based repository for administrative and academic work. Over several months, two ethnographers and a designer interviewed administrators and faculty members at particular sites and observed the hurdles faced by K-12 schools in making state educational standards transparent. The study had interesting outcomes. New applications were found in unanticipated places, such as a music teacher wanting to create student folders that held digital sheet music (enabling students to practice their instruments by reading music off their computers), lessons, music schedules, videotaped segments of student recitals, and written critiques. We also identified a few opportunities to streamline paper intensive work. On the whole, our findings highlighted just how difficult it was to compile and put standardized educational materials into electronic form for web access by the school and wider community. One of the schools then used the representations to justify creating a new contract position to help overworked teachers move material online. Moreover, our interactions were pivotal in raising a number of issues for school districts; among them that security and access needed to be addressed at a district policy level before the solution could be implemented.[12]

A third example in higher education used work practice analysis to develop a web-based prototype application to integrate new digital image collections with the library's academic collection. The team, unlike those in consulting engagements, was composed entirely of researchers. The project was not bound by severe time constraints and the fieldwork, software architecture and prototype development took more than a year. The technology was designed based upon ongoing and lively interactions with faculty, librarians, curators, technical support, administrative staff and management. The ways in which faculty members organized, sorted, presented and archived 35 mm slides had a significant impact on our design.[13] Ultimately, the design of the prototype was based on metaphors

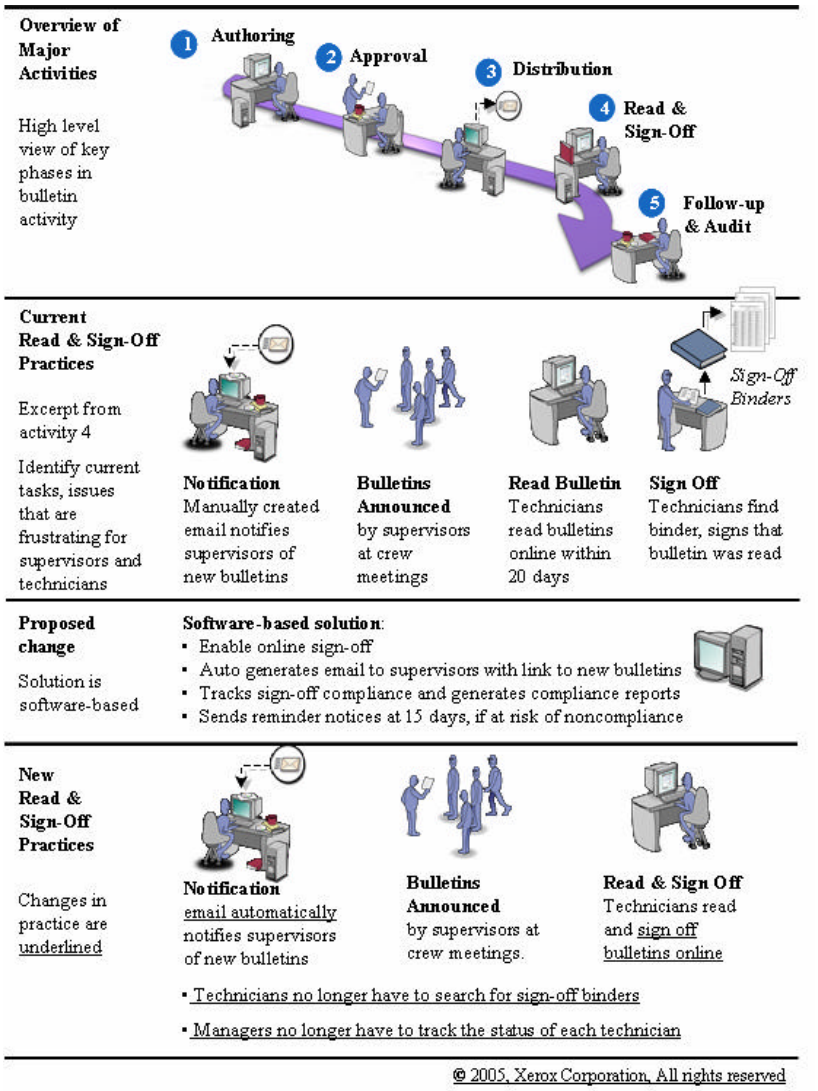

FIGURE 1 Evolution of representations over the course of a service engagement
Representations capture different stages in a service engagement focused on developing a solution to support maintenance bulletin compliance. An overview provides a high level view of key phases in the compliance activity. From here we capture the detailed work practices within and across the phases. As we understand the complexities and issues with the current practices, we begin to overlay various solutions that may address the issues. Finally, representations capture the envisioned solution and the impact on the work.

gleaned from our interviews and observations of objects that people used, such as slides, light tables, carousels and albums. At this time, we also developed an early version of a graphics toolkit, a language in pictures, that enabled those of us who thought in visual terms to reflect this orientation and describe our findings graphically. Early on, representations were used to verify whether we had accurately captured people's work practices. We spent several wonderful hours with an architecture professor, for instance, who enthusiastically marked up the data with his corrections. Representations also captured the technical and organizational challenges that we observed while people were converting and cataloguing images. On one occasion, a joint meeting was set up with the departments concerned to discuss what we had found. Considering that the data were sensitive as they highlighted where things went wrong, the outcome of the meeting was remarkable, with the technical staff openly voicing their concerns. As a result of this, a decision was made to buy digital (photographic) equipment that saved time and prevented re-work. Thus, as initial representations were developed and shared with the library staff the ensuing discussions would give rise to others on campus that would lend additional perspectives on issues and lead to actionable decisions.

We return to the central problem raised by Thompson; what is it that creates or destroys value? What we hope these examples demonstrate is how representations compound value; building, layer upon layer, mutual comprehension, trust, joint engagement, buy-in and commitment. These are critical for the service engagements we encounter. We recognize that it takes a long time to build emerging technologies that will integrate effectively into customer environments; one can rarely anticipate how well they will be received. Nevertheless, to a large extent, customer after customer gifts to us their time and a patient revealing of their worldviews. The sharing of representations with them is not merely to verify and expand our findings or give voice to the dexterity of labor so frequently lost in the din of daily work, but to recognize the risks that they take in deferring value. Representations help to bring immediacy back into the relationship, where customers need not wait for the new solution to be built in order to determine whether or not their risks in the partnership paid off. By visually and tangibly acknowledging the problems they share with us and the richness and complexity of their practice, we return it to the forefront. These are the thirteenth loaf in the Baker's Dozen: prestations[14] within pre-existing formal engagements that nevertheless demonstrate our efforts towards reciprocity. We do not expect customers to pay for these graphical instantiations, nor do we expect a return in kind. Instead, we anticipate that our analysis will be thoroughly dissected or discussed with our clients, and hope that it might trigger discussions within and across their organizations. Often we find that discussions around representations provoke a different level of communication between teams, where people are momentarily free to reflect on the intricacies of their own practice and visualize the intersections of work across the whole organization. There is a higher probability that our service to them may in turn strengthen our mutual engagement as customers grow personally invested in the joint solution. While it remains questionable as to whether customers explicitly acknowledge representations as gifts, it is clear that representations inevitably induce deeper connections and generate a panoply of conversations, minimize misunderstandings and erect a scaffolding of trust between us. We argue that these prestations to customers are distinct from deliverables to our business partners: the former recognizes the construction of relations inherent in our immediate interactions, while the latter emphasizes the sharing of information where in the long run, the roles that people play are deemed more significant than the individuals that fill them.

THE ABSTRACTION OF KNOWLEDGE WORK

Next, we will explore an issue raised by Lucy Suchman that remains relevant not only to participatory design but our work within the services organization. “It is problematic,” she writes, when "normative representations" are removed from the sites where work takes place and "used in place of working knowledges" (1995:61). In addition, Brun-Cottan warns that ethnographers and designers must “keep the analytic grounding of our work visible” lest the value of our contributions remain tacit and risk becoming invisible (2004:8). This is symptomatic of the tension in our role as corporate ethnographers. We investigate, analyze and recommend. If we get lucky we are even able to “implement” in meaningful ways. But an uneasy symbiosis exists between “inalienable representations”,[15] that is, objects that partly embody the ethnographer, and “deliverables”, which take a life of their own when for instance, a senior vice president emails our reports to others who are less aware of and less interested in their sub-text. How do you convey the value of labor in situations where it is seen as a cost? The challenge remains very real: can the ethnographer truly address the issue that the metadata sometimes becomes the data itself, a mere descriptor of information used for purposes other than which it was intended? Is it indeed possible to avert the specter of shadows cast in Plato’s Cave, and infuse discussions about the customer back into two dimensional representations skimmed over by harried executives?

The next example demonstrates how complex the positioning of work can be, and perhaps raises more questions than can be answered. We were involved a highly visible potential strategic alliance between two Fortune 500 firms. Hardware and software from both companies would be used to build a “workflow solution” for a financial institution that wished to streamline the processing of large amounts of files and papers. The third company, the customer, was keen to cut costs. Onsite, we interviewed those who processed the data as well as their managers and the Information Technology team, tracking, among other things, who did what to which files as documents were circulated, and trying to better understand the ways in which people sifted and retrieved information. We noticed that different employees spent a considerable proportion of time checking and re-checking the same financial data, which caused our Lean Six Sigma and IT colleagues to consider automating that function. On closer examination of the video-tapes, the ethnographers realized that not all financial information was complete at the beginning of the process. People double and triple-checked the figures to ensure that new information was recorded. New data appeared at random times on databases, in emails and hardcopy. Financial mistakes could mean a significant loss of business.

When the representations were shared with the client, the manager, John,[16] and other employees said that they were amazed at the “accuracy” of our insights, considering that we had been onsite for less than a week. An electronic UI mock-up had been created on the basis of use cases and work practices captured in the representations. The ethnographer visited the site a second time to review the user interface and potential problems that might emerge in the new solution. The customer responded positively to the participatory aspect of the project and worked closely with us to define the parameters, features, and fields for the software. Issues around automation also changed. John recognized that Jane’s work could not be replaced with a software system because she “still needed to check the figures and set up the remaining bells and whistles that can’t be automated.” For technical and monetary reasons, however, the project had to be modified. During a conference call to discuss this, John remarked, “I really liked when [the ethnographer] came and we discussed the layout of the screen. I want to be able to see some of that [on the new workflow system], so if we want to change direction, I’m excited about all of that.” Shortly afterwards, there were organizational changes in the company. New personnel were introduced and additional costs surfaced that had not been anticipated

by either side. The relationship too was altered, moving from discussions about how current practice might map to the future solution, to insurmountable technical challenges. Eventually, both parties agreed to withdraw from the contract.

In the meanwhile, several representations had been extracted from reports and incorporated with Lean Six Sigma workflow diagrams into slides for a "CEO Summit", a joint meeting between the CEOs of companies participating in the alliance. Only, the work practice insights had been framed rather differently. What was identified as important at the client site, that is, the employees' meticulous double-checking of financial figures from disparate electronic and hardcopy sources, was positioned as redundant work and a case created to cut the costs of labor through automation.

This example should not suggest a deliberate misrepresentation of data but how the project took a life of its own and the nuances of work were lost in its re-framing in order to meet strategic needs. Similarly, there was a concern that the Blue Guys, now available on the corporate web site, might be utilized simply for straight descriptions of work in flowcharts that reflect static process rather than dynamic practice. Would the icons being used to represent work become mere tokens or also embody the invisible nature of the work? More recently, we are in fact seeing new and interesting ways in which the Blue Guys are being portrayed by others in the company. They are being added to descriptions about work processes. The net effect is that people are given a more prominent role in technology discussions and are being placed back into the story. It has become far easier to discuss and portray people's work instead of focusing entirely on a techno-centric view of the world.

CONCLUSION

If one wishes to infuse some aspects of an ethnographic approach, or even determine if they are desirable and feasible, it is necessary to understand the work practices, constraints and objectives of the organization and teams responsible for the consulting engagements. Part of our research agenda is to explore if ethnographic methods would be useful in services engagements and if so, what kinds of tools and training could be provided to the consulting teams. At the same time, ethnographers and designers are invested in doing right by the individuals with whom we work, whether internal colleagues and managers, or external collaborators. These partial connections might merge, run in parallel or diverge. What we hope to have demonstrated is how representations embody those tensions, and how Mauss's concept of the gift discloses relational nuances even further. This in turn, leads us to discuss the changing nature of our work and to reflect on its impact. Finally, the question inherent in this paper is how one might integrate and draw upon different disciplines as a resource to help comprehend our own ethical practices in pragmatic ways.[17] In the end, the objective is straight-forward and asks simply for us to reveal our own "mundane practice" within sight of our complex but mundane sociality.

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[1] See Jordan (1996) for ways in which to elicit different kinds of analyses from a workplace, creating records that focus on people, objects and settings.

[3] This, incidentally, sometimes involves "hardware drag", or the sale of devices in addition to consulting services.

[4] The source of this information is: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Service_sector

[5] Many of our interactions with the services business resemble Squires' description of rapid ethnography for product development (2002:107-108).

[6] At times to our dismay as it appeared to undervalue what we delivered to our management, especially when it was difficult to quantify contributions to company's "bottom line".

[7] Internally, our activities were funded by the research organization.

[8] We would like to acknowledge the pervasive influence of long-standing debates about ethnographic representation in anthropology. This paper however, will not specifically address those issues.

[9] One might see two dimensional instantiations of this concept in software tools such as Grokker and the hyberbolic browser.

[10] We often study sites where the client is not a corporate customer.

[11] See Suchman (1995: 62-63) for a discussion on how representations might best be used to induce a dialog between actors and ethnographers rather than an elucidation of difference.

[12] Cf. Brun-Cottan (2004) for further information on the "conflicting interests" between teachers, manufacturers, organizations and ethnographers in this case.

[13] See Marshall (1998) for a more detailed analysis of this project in the context of metadata creation for online image collections.

[14] For Mauss (1990), a "total prestation" represented a multi-layered gift, one that embodied social, economic, political and even religious properties. Not all these properties are relevant in our case. However, it is clear that representations reflect and indeed further the weaving together of the social fabric of relationships with customers.

[15] For a fuller discussion on Gregory's distinction between gifts and commodities and alienable or inalienable objects, see Osteen (2004).

[16] This is a pseudonym.

[15] Many thanks to Nina Wakeford for this insight.

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