human relations
THE TAVISTOCK INSTITUTE

human relations
65(1) 63–88
© The Author(s) 2011
Reprints and permission: sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0018726711424321
hum.sagepub.com
SAGE

From hero to villain to hero: Making experience sensible through embodied narrative sensemaking

Ann Cunliffe
University of New Mexico, USA

Chris Coupland
Hull University Business School, UK

Abstract

This article aims to make a contribution to the literature by addressing an undertheorized aspect of sensemaking: its embodied narrative nature. We do so by integrating a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective of narrative and storytelling with a documentary case taken from a filmed tour of a sports team to illustrate the process of sensemaking around a specific event. We argue that we make our lives, ourselves and our experience 'sensible' in embodied interpretations and interactions with others. We suggest this occurs within contested, embedded, narrative performances in which we try to construct sensible and plausible accounts that are responsive to the moment and to retrospective and anticipatory narratives.

Keywords

embodiment, identity, narrative, sensemaking, story

Introduction

> The sensible is nothing but a vague beckoning . . . 'until it thinks itself within me'. (Merleau-Ponty, 2004 [1962]: 248–249)

> Come on Daws, be the f_ing saviour son. (Johnson, 2001)

Corresponding author:
Ann Cunliffe, Department of Organization Studies, Anderson School of Management, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131, USA.
Email: cunliffe@mgt.unm.edu

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

While it seems an obvious statement that we experience life and make sense of our surroundings in sensory as well as intellectual ways, little work has been done to explore how this may occur and how we might theorize the process. Organization theorists acknowledge that organizational life is an emotional experience (e.g. Fineman, 2000; Haynes, 2008), but often view emotions from an essentialist perspective as a variable to be categorized as part of a sensemaking model (e.g. Bartunek et al., 2006), as part of a communicative or discursive process of making sense (e.g. Myers, 2007; Samra-Fredericks, 2004; Taylor and Robichaud, 2004; Whittle and Mueller, 2012), or a factor to be managed in the sensemaking process (e.g. Abolafia, 2010; Weick et al., 2005). This work focuses on developing fixed categorizations after the fact, rather than on lived embodied experience. Second, as Maitlis and Sonnenshein (2010) note, emotions are traditionally viewed as an impediment to sensemaking. Third, few studies have extended the concept of emotion to embodiment and explored the role of embodiment in the sensemaking process. A gap therefore exists in terms of theorizing sensemaking as a *lived embodied everyday* experience.

Our contribution lies in extending the work on sensemaking theory to include the notion of *embodied narrative sensemaking*, which posits that whether we are aware of it or not, we make our lives and ourselves 'sensible' through embodied (bodily) interpretations in our ongoing everyday interactions. Our theorization of embodied sensemaking differs from, and extends, current work in three main ways. First, we define embodiment more broadly than emotion – as bodily sensations, felt experiences, emotions and sensory knowing; second, we situate embodiment in *lived experience* not as abstracted from, and able to be generalized across, experience; and third, we argue that embodiment is an *integral* part of sensemaking. Specifically, we argue that making life sensible:

- occurs in *embedded narrative performances* – in the lived experience of everyday, ordinary interactions and conversations with others and ourselves;
- is *temporal*, taking place moment-to-moment within and across time and space;
- encompasses *polyphony* as we attempt to interweave multiple, alternative and contested narratives and stories;
- is an ongoing *embodied* process of interpretation of self and experience in which we cannot separate ourselves, our senses, our body and emotions.

We develop the concept of embodied narrative sensemaking in two ways. First, by drawing on the work of hermeneutic phenomenologists, particularly Ricoeur and Merleau-Ponty. These authors have much to offer sensemaking theory: Ricoeur (e.g. 1988) because he sees narrative theory as a form of making sense in and across time that involves personal and community identity, and Merleau-Ponty (2004 [1962], 2004 [1948]) because of his theorization of the relationship between perception and embodiment. Second, through a unique illustrative method, a story of the lived experience of the 2001 British and Irish Lions rugby tour of Australia. Our 'data' is a 'fly on the wall' documentary of the 2001 tour presented in the DVD 'Up Close and Personal: Life with the Lions Down Under'. While sport is notably an embodied performance (Dyck and Archetti, 2003), we suggest insights from this context can extend our understanding of the sensemaking process in organizations because, as Strati (2007) notes, we bring our

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

bodies and senses to work and use them to create accounts of our 'intimate, personal and corporeal relation with [our] experience of the world' (p. 62).

The structure of our article is as follows. We lay the groundwork for our contribution by offering an overview of narrative sensemaking followed by an elaboration of three 'plotlines' (themes) central to our conceptual reworking of embodied narrative sensemaking. We then illustrate the concept of *embodied narrative sensemaking* through an abductive exploration (an interplay of conceptual and illustrative empirical material) of how the 'players' in the documentary DVD attempt to make a particular event sensible enough to move on. Finally, we examine the implications of this theoretical reworking of embodied narrative sensemaking for processes of making sense within organizations.

We reflexively recognize that what we offer here is our own second order narrative construction of the first-order sensemaking of participants in the DVD. To emphasize its constructed nature we offer our conceptualization in the form of three theoretical plotlines – sequenced accounts or stories (Polkinghorne, 1988) – followed by three vignettes from the DVD. We suggest that combining the plotlines with the vignettes offers a way of exploring and theorizing how we make life sensible in embodied narrative performances. In addition, the DVD illustrates the emergence of an overarching narrative of redemption, that of 'hero to villain to hero'.

Embodied narrative sensemaking

> The narrative unity of life . . . must be seen as an unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience. (Ricoeur, 1992: 162)

A brief overview of sensemaking and narratives

Sensemaking is often seen as a rational, intellectual process represented through cognitive schemas and models (Chaudry et al., 2009; Grant et al., 2008; Jeong and Brower, 2008). Much of this work assumes there are common meanings and mechanisms, structures, processes and characteristics of sensemaking, and that it is a collaborative activity used to create, legitimate and sustain organizational practices or leadership roles (Holt and Macpherson, 2010; Maclean et al., 2012). Others address more power-driven and contested aspects of sensemaking (Contu and Willmott, 2003; Tourish and Robson, 2006).

Weick's formative work is based on the claim that sensemaking is the means by which we enact (make 'real') our environments: a process of social construction and committed interpretation that 'introduces stability into an equivocal flow of events by means of justifications that increase social order' (2001: 15). More specifically it is the process by which we label, categorize and create plausible stories that retrospectively 'rationalize what people are doing' (Weick et al., 2005). Although Weick sees interpretation as a key element in creating such stories, he defines it as 'the process by which managers translate data into knowledge and understanding about the environment' (2001: 251), i.e. a cognitive information-processing activity. Our article offers an alternative perspective by focusing on the interpretive and embodied nature of sensemaking *within the flow of experience*.

The narrative paradigm (Fisher, 1985), which has a long tradition in the social sciences, particularly in sociology, literary theory, psychology and hermeneutic-based

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

philosophy (e.g. Campbell, 2008 [1949]; Goffman, 1959, 1967; Ricoeur, 1984, 1988) offers a different perspective to the Weickian one outlined above, because it is based on the assumption that we make sense of our experience through narratives, stories or drama. Collective narratives create shared meanings around events (Boyce, 1995; Taylor et al., 2002), and help individuals to interpret their actions in light of their obligations and to understand how they should/should not act in particular social contexts. Thus narratives connect actions, characters and plots with history and biography (Gergen, 2005). From a hermeneutic perspective narratives do not necessarily describe what is real, but are imaginative constructions of order, a 'fabulation' shaped from discordant or unexpected and diverse events and actions (Ricoeur, 1988).

Within organization studies, the nature and purpose of narratives are theorized in various ways: as creating a coherent shared experience and aligning employees with corporate values by highlighting social conventions and acceptable behaviors (Rouleau, 2005; Tyler, 2007; Weick, 2001; Wines and Hamilton, 2009); as deliberately 'authored' and performed as a means of *making* sense of a situation (Boje, 1995; Brown and Humphreys, 2003); as a means of *giving* sense by legitimating and normalizing culture (Currie and Brown, 2003; Rhodes et al., 2010); as containing multiple meanings (Cunliffe, 2002; Yanow, 1998); or as helping storytellers deal with experiences of tensions, trauma and loss (Driver, 2009). Regardless of these differences, the common theme is that narratives are the means by which we organize and make sense of our experience and evaluate our actions and intentions.

In functioning in this way, narratives should have a degree of *narrative rationality* (Fisher, 1985), 'principles – probability and fidelity – and considerations for judging the merit of stories, whether one's own or another's' (p. 349). According to Fisher, 'merit' is based on the internal coherence of a narrative – does the story fit together and are the characters plausible? For others it is about the reliability, trustworthiness and wisdom of the narrative and narrator (Ricoeur, 1992). Narrative rationality is therefore fundamental to narrative sensemaking, because it connect us with our social surroundings through an ongoing process of interpreting, assessing and critiquing our experience: a form of 'critical self-awareness' (Fisher, 1985: 349). Narrative rationality has particular relevance for our examination of how we make our lives sensible because our example centers around an event that draws into question the values of reliability and fidelity and leads to a critical self-questioning.

We offer an alternative to sensemaking as a representational, cognitive, information-processing, or communicative process, and contest the idea that sensemaking is a purely retrospective and linear activity. We build on narrative theory to propose that sensemaking is a temporal process of making our life and ourselves sensible through embedded and embodied narrative performances. It is an interpretive process in which we judge our experience, actions and sense of identity in relationship to specific and generalized others.

Moving the story on: Making life sensible through embedded and embodied narrative performances

We now move on to create our research narrative – the conceptual 'plotlines' relating to how we make our lives sensible through embodied narrative and storied performances.

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

Indeed, we use the term 'sensible' deliberately to differentiate our approach from more cognitive schematic approaches to sensemaking. The Latin root of sensible is *sensibilis*, to do with the senses – being sensitive to and showing good sense in practical living circumstances. We identify three main plotlines, distinct yet interconnected threads that weave through our exposition. While the notion of polyphony (Plotline 1) and narrative identity (Plotline 3) are not new, we suggest that our contribution lies in bringing these plotlines together with embodiment as an integral part of narrative sensemaking (Plotline 2). The plotlines run through each vignette, but for the purpose of our second order sensemaking we will illustrate Plotline 1 mainly in Vignette 1; Plotline 2 in Vignette 2; and Plotline 3 in Vignette 3.

Plotline 1: Making life sensible occurs in polyphonic, responsive and ongoing moments of embodied narrative performance

> The crisis of narrative method in modernity is what to do with non-linear, almost living storytelling that is fragmented, polyphonic (many voiced) and collectively produced. (Boje, 2001: 1)

In their 2004 article, Cunliffe et al. amend Ricoeur's (1984, 1988) work, arguing that narratives are not always deliberate and coherent, but are also spontaneous acts of interpretation and meaning-making which are often improvised, situated, contested and responsive performances that are temporally and contextually sensitive. In other words, we simultaneously enact and modify existing narratives, and create new meanings and narratives in the living moment by perpetually drawing on past events and conversations, present interactions, and by anticipating future events and actions. Narrative accounts are therefore *synchronic*, 'performed' in interactions, actions and conversations with self and others – not in Goffman's (1967) sense of being deliberately acted – but as responsive struggles for coherence.

Cunliffe et al. (2004) argue that because we are always relating and responding to others, narrative performance is also a *polyphonic process*, open to multiple voices and narrations and therefore to contestation. This position is adopted by a number of narrative scholars, some of whom argue that counter narratives can be created as a form of resistance (Boje, 1994; Humphreys and Brown, 2002; Murgia and Poggio, 2009). We take Bakhtin's position that polyphony refers to 'incomplete and uncompletable arguments' (1996 [1986]: 112) within single speech and across emerging, fluid, and multivoiced dialogues: uncompletable because of an ongoing struggle of ideologies, opinions and ways of speaking. Thus, polyphony may be seen in the interplay of competing narratives, when organizational members have different and conflicting stories to tell about the same event, and as actors deal with those competing narratives in different ways (Beech et al., 2009).

While Cunliffe et al. (2004) offer a way of conceptualizing the temporality of narrative performance, they do not explore what this means in practice, nor do they consider embodied aspects. We take their ideas further, suggesting that we make our lives sensible in lived responsive and embodied moments as we struggle to make meaning with others. While all of the articles in this special issue address dominant and/or legitimizing stories, we suggest that in the moment, legitimacy, coherence and closure can be elusive and contested because

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

different meanings are multiply-constructed across different moments of time and space. Thus, coherence, legitimacy and causality are often attributed retrospectively as we look back and try to make sense of events. We also argue that, given the polyphonic and synchronic nature of narrative performance, its responsive and contested nature, it often becomes difficult to separate out sensemaking and sensegiving and who is narrating and being narrated because our narrating voices are always entwined with others. Thus, sensemaking is not always the deliberate, collaborative, unemotional process often assumed.

Plotline 2: Making our life sensible enough to go on is an embodied process

> Sense experience is that vital communication with the world which makes it present as a familiar setting of our life. (Merleau-Ponty, 2004 [1962]: 61)

Plotline 2 addresses how we make sense of our relationships and our surroundings in lived embodied, responsive dialogue and actions, and in doing so (re)create ourselves, others, and ways of moving on.

As we have argued, sensemaking is generally theorized as a disembodied cognitive activity, and while the role of emotion is sometimes acknowledged, the broader issue of embodiment is not studied as an integral part of the process. Studies of emotion in organizations center around how they are managed, performed, exploited or resisted at work (Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 1983; Höpfl, 2002). Essentialist perspectives identify, categorize and/or focus on developing positive emotions, often objectifying emotion as sensory reactions separate from lived experience (e.g. Lilius et al., 2008; Rafaeli and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004). Indeed, Fineman (2000) observes that studies of emotion rarely take into account individual biographies or unconscious processes.

This observation also applies to studies of embodiment, which often focus on the body outside lived experience. While feminist researchers have been particularly concerned with challenging essentialist conceptions of the body-mind duality and drawing attention to the relationship between bodies, gender, sexuality and power, much of their work studies bodies as material inscriptions of discourses, as subject to disciplinary practices, or as part of performances of gender or work (e.g. Bell and King, 2010; Butler, 1999 [1990]; Harding, 2002; Tyler and Cohen, 2010). Embodiment is often construed (through the work of De Beauvoir, 1989 [1953]) as a biological condition to be examined in relation to a social or cultural context, with the body conceptualized as a separate materiality rather than an integral part of lived experience and our sense of self. In addition, notions of the body and embodiment have rarely been examined in relation to sensemaking (see Hindmarsh and Pilnick [2007] for one exception) and the few studies that have, focused on such issues as embodied cognition (e.g. Maitlis and Sonnenshein, 2010) or the body as a physiological system (e.g. Heaphy and Dutton, 2008). In other words, as a disembedded and disembodied body. We argue that embodiment is integral to sensemaking – that we make life sensible through our lived, felt bodily experiences and 'sensing' of our surroundings – a 'sensing' in which individual and collective narratives are implicate.

We begin by defining 'embodiment' as an emotional, personal, felt and sensed bodily experience embedded in words, gestures, facial expressions, 'body language' and so on,

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

through the lens of hermeneutic phenomenology. While Ricoeur draws attention to the importance of 'the body' in terms of its indivisibility from ourselves – a feeling body that is mine (opposed to a brain we don't feel) and that mediates myself and the world, he does not explore in any depth what this means. It is Merleau-Ponty (2004 [1962]) who more extensively articulates the relationship between perception, our body and how we make sense. For him, we *are* our bodies, we come to know the world experientially as our bodies help us attune ourselves to our situation. Our bodies are the source of familiar actions and have 'a knowledge of place which is reducible to a sort of co-existence with that place' (p. 121). For example, we don't need to look at our hands when picking up an object, nor think about how to use specific muscles and bones – we just know how to do it. And we do not necessarily understand the meaning of gestures intellectually, but we sense meanings and emotion in gestures, facial expressions or the rhythm of action – and we intuitively understand its significance through *sense-perception*. In other words, we sense through sight, sound and touch ways in which we can '"be at home in" that world, "understand" and find significance in it' (p. 275).

In sum, we argue that we cannot separate ourselves from our body: who we are, our thoughts, feelings, body, speech, response to others are interrelated and play through lived moments in which we try to make sense of our surroundings. In the following vignettes we will illustrate and explore Merleau-Ponty's ideas further.

Plotline 3: Making life sensible is as much about who we are as about narrating events and experiences

> In the end we become the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives. (Bruner, 1994: 53)

Over the last 30 years, the idea of narrative identity has come to the fore: 'a model of the human subject that takes acts of *self-narration* not only as descriptive of the self but, more importantly, as *fundamental to the emergence and reality of that subject*' (Kerby, 1991: 4). Thus, narratives and storytelling are seen as a crucial part of identity work in that we are constantly engaged in trying to create relatively coherent narratives of our life (Bruner, 1987; Martin and Wajcman, 2004; Watson, 2009).

For some, identity construction lies 'at the root of sensemaking, and influences how other aspects, or properties of the sensemaking process are understood' (Helms Mills, 2003: 55). This process is seen alternatively as collaborative (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000) or contested (e.g. Brown et al., 2008; Fletcher and Watson, 2007). We argue that it can be both, and that in the embodied experiential moment it is practically difficult to separate the two because much of what we do is responsive, intuitive and is interwoven with feelings about ourselves and others.

Thus, Plotline 3 centers around the narrative that we make our life and selves sensible in embedded and embodied moments of acting and speaking, narrative performances that reflect who we are and who we hope to be. We do so by responding, contesting, evoking, evading, imagining and confronting identity constructions by self and others. We may create some sort of sense – no matter how transient – from differing and disparate narrations if we can find justifications (*narrative rationality*) for our and others' actions.

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

In summary, 'making life sensible' is a complex interweaving of self-other, of retrospective and prospective, discursive and embodied, routine and creative, explicit and intuitive sensemaking. What we offer below is not a theory, model nor cognitive process designed to represent sensemaking – but interpretive insights into how we make our everyday experience sensible in ongoing circumstances. We acknowledge that our interpretation of the data runs the risk of translation, a 'creative betrayal of the original, equally creative appropriation by the reception language; *construction of the comparable*' (Ricoeur, 2006: 37).

Making life sensible through narrative and storied performances

Method

Our 'data' is the DVD documentary 'Up Close and Personal: Life with the Lions Down Under', the story of the 2001 British and Irish Rugby Tour of Australia. The DVD offers a 'fly-on-the-wall' look at team life over a two-month period and an opportunity to study micro-practices of sensemaking that can be translated to other contexts.

We selected just one event during the tour on which to focus our attention: that of a team member speaking out publicly against the management. The event is extra-ordinary, warranting much interest from the media and lending itself to our purpose by begging the questions: 'what is the story here?' and 'what do I/he/we do now?' The event offers a way of exploring the temporal unfolding of narrative sensemaking and illustrates a redemptive narrative of 'Hero to Villain to Hero' (team member's retrospective narrating). The DVD illustrates how tour participants make sense of the situation on a moment-to-moment basis and in different circumstances by presenting a range of narrative performances: one-to-one interviews, media and social events, pre- and post-match coach-player talks, coach and manager conversations, training sessions, discussions on the treatment table, and recordings of matches. Player-held camera recordings (player-cam) offer players' personal narratives as they reflect on situations and give 'voice to experiences that are [otherwise] shrouded in secrecy' (Ellis and Bochner, 1992: 79).

We propose that although the context of the data is an organized sport event, meanings may be taken from how the members make sense that can be extrapolated to other social organizations (see Katz and Koenig, 2001 and Zucchermaglio and Talamo, 2000 for further examples of a sport/management/organization knowledge interface). The use of televised, documentary material for research purposes is not new, even if more generally located in studies of communication and media (e.g. Corner, 2002; Kilborn, 2003). We suggest that while documentaries are particular constructions of events, they display social protocols of knowledge and institutionalized practice (Corner, 2002) by presenting a sense of reality (Nichols, 1999).

Thus, the DVD documentary offers a unique opportunity to study the temporal and polyphonic nature of making life sensible because it is filmed over a period of two months, presents multiple interpretations, reactions, thoughts and feelings of the 'actors' and invites the sympathetic engagement of the audience. We acknowledge this is a Tamara-like (Boje, 1995) opportunity to see the multiple, contentious and responsive

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

nature of the narrative and storied process of making our experience sensible. Tamara-like in that: a) decisions have been made prior to the research about what stories, interactions, reflections and reactions of team players, coaches and managers to follow as they discuss and interweave their experiences in 'a polyphony of competing narrative voices' (Cunliffe et al., 2004); and b) because of such decisions we do not get the 'full story'. There are many incidents and events, extra-ordinary and less ordinary that lie on the editor's and researcher's cutting room floor.

We interpreted our 'data' through an abductive lens. Abduction is associated with pragmatism, having found its inception in the work of Charles Sanders Peirce. Based on the idea that knowledge is generated within the social practices of participants and researchers, it is concerned with translating observations of experience and/or participants' accounts in relation to the researcher's interests. The abductive method is therefore an iterative process of observation, interpretation and the application of concepts in a form of 'pragmatic commonsense' (Friedrichs and Kratochwil, 2009: 710). Abduction is about: discovering what *may be* rather than testing theory (Peirce, 1955); using concepts to interpret and explain *surprises* in lived experience (Agar, 2010); a detective story in which we seek to construct plots from which we can generate insights about a particular case (Czarniawska, 1999). In addition, as Locke et al. (2008) note, abduction is itself an embodied experience in which 'developing new ideas [is] bodily conducted and bodily felt' (p. 916) – a living sensation of doubt, imagination, and frustration, etc. Thus, we chose abduction over other methods (such as discourse and conversation analysis) because it embraces embodiment as integral to lived experience and 'method' and goes beyond a pure linguistic or action analysis to allow us to explain our data by combining and elaborating existing concepts with observations to generate useful practical and theoretical insights. These insights emerge not from testing theory (deduction), nor from the data (induction), but from using theory with the data in imaginative ways (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Our abductive process involved watching the multiple interactions in the documentary with the three plotlines in mind; using the concepts to explain our observations and our observations to further develop the concepts.

We illustrate this abductive process in the following sections of our article. We first present the researcher's narrative (retrospective sensemaking) of the event, followed by three vignettes from the DVD that illustrate the polyphony of multiple voices struggling to make sense of the event across time and space. These vignettes illustrate the embodied, embedded and temporal nature of sensemaking, enabling us to offer ideas about how we attempt to make life sensible in our responsive narrative performances. We offer an abductive interpretation of the accounts of various 'players' involved in shaping the retrospective narrative created by a team member of 'hero to villain to hero'.

Emplotting 'The Tour Diaries Incident': The researchers' story of events

Characters:

Matt Dawson – Team Member
Donal Lenihan – Team Manager
Andy Robinson – Coach

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

Graham Henry – Coach
Various Team Members
Members of the Media

The Plot:[1]

During the 2001 tour Matt Dawson published a 'Tour Diary' in the British newspaper, the *Daily Telegraph*. After the first test match, the diary included a criticism of the way in which senior managers had been treating the players. The headline, 'Harsh Regime Tears Us Apart' was backed-up with comments such as: 'Mindless training. Lots of unhappy people', 'GH doesn't inspire me at all', 'Lenihan hacked me off. Treated us like kids', and 'It's official some of the boys have decided to leave the tour.' Our study begins with Dawson talking to the 'player-cam' explaining why he wrote the diary entry, and an interview where Team Manager Lenihan explains why he has decided to keep Dawson on the tour despite his perceived disloyalty. The game following this incident is against ACT (Australian Capital Territory-Brumbies), a mid-week, non-test, but nevertheless important game. At half time the score is 22:10 against the British Lions: Dawson, the designated kicker, misses an opportunity to score. The camera moves to Coach Robinson ordering the touchline staff via a headset to have another player take the follow-up kick, to convert the try. On the pitch, Dawson is preparing to take the kick – he kicks the ball through the posts and scores. With a few minutes to go, another try is scored making the score even at 28:28. The successful conversion of this try will win the game. Despite the coach again ordering another player to take the kick, the ball is handed to Dawson. This is clearly a significant moment for him. He converts the try, thus winning the game for his team. In the changing room, post match, he is shown sitting alone, emotional, congratulated by his team members and a silent handshake by the coach. Dawson then explains on the player-cam what happened on the pitch, why he continued to take the kick and how he was feeling about the incident.

What follows are three vignettes – responsive narrative performances – from the DVD. They appear in the chronological order indicated in the plot above, and follow on from each other in quick succession. While we address one particular plotline in each vignette, we also discuss others: it is impossible not to consider that moments of making life sensible simultaneously embrace polyphony, identity and embodiment.

Vignette 1 – Narrative performances around a post match press conference: Making life sensible in polyphonic and responsive moments

> An individual cannot know what he is facing until he faces it and then looks back over the episode to sort out what happened. (Weick, 1988: 305–306)

In this vignette we see the temporal nature of narrative performance as both Lenihan and Dawson synchronically try to make sense of a past event (the diary and reactions), current feelings and actions ('reading it now it was sort of . . . a nightmare', 'totally and utterly irresponsible'), and an anticipation of future actions ('building bridges', causing 'more controversy').

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

Post match press conference:

***Member of the press*:** 'This morning in a paper in London there is sustained and very harsh criticism of the management methods on tour by Matt Dawson which is not, does not represent you in any way . . .'
***Manager Donal Lenihan*:** 'I haven't seen the article and I really don't think there is any point in saying anything else until I do. I mean comments about the spirit of the camp and all then all you have to do is look at the performance here this evening. You know we did have a hard week there is no point in beating about the bush about that. But I think we do our talking out on the rugby pitch and that's it.'

Matt Dawson to player-cam

'It was a naïveté to think that any of that information that was controversial would somehow come across as non-controversial. But I thought I was writing a piece that was informative, yet interesting and apt for the way the tour was going. But you know, reading it now, it was sort of, although, you know, the weekend has been a sort of nightmare rather than a dream and it's as if I have woken up and thought, right well, you've read it, I've read it in the cold light of day and unfortunately that's not good enough on my part. And now I'm going to have to spend the rest of the tour building the bridges that unfortunately I burned by my . . . the untimely article.

I thought it was the end of my tour, due to my own stupidity, which I never thought I'd ever end up saying. I don't think anyone expects to go home except due to injury or illness and unfortunately I nearly re-wrote the history books in a way that I wouldn't have been very happy with.

Interview 2 with manager Donal Lenihan

'At one stage I strongly considered sending him home but I think it would have caused more controversy had we sent him home. The week between the first and second test. We won the first test. The focus has to be on winning the series, winning the second test. If we sent him home I think everything, the newspapers, the pressure would be built up again within the squad because of that incident. He wasn't sent home but he has been heavily fined. He has made a public apology to the manager and to all the players. I think what he did was totally and utterly irresponsible for a player of his experience.'

I could sit here and everyone will expect me now to say 'Oh well everything's great, I've taken a telling off and now I'm going to be Mr Positive, saying everything's going well on the tour and with the game and all the coaches are brilliant and we've now got a great game plan and all the rest of it. I am going to be very wary about doing that because it just looks pathetic on my behalf. Over time I've now realized that a lot of the stuff that I wrote, not a lot of the stuff, some of the stuff I wrote, has changed.'

Figure 1

As Dawson speaks into the player cam, he is sitting on the edge of his bed, hunched over, looking down rather than into the camera, speaking quietly, hesitantly, one hand stroking his neck. His bodily gestures give us a sense of his lived moments of responsive

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

'interaction and struggle' (Bakhtin, 1996 [1986]: 92), with himself and others. We see the various narrators (Dawson, Lenihan, the press) each trying to emplot some sort of coherence in the moment of speaking, to create some sort of coherence or concordance out of discordance (Ricoeur, 1992). But we see the difficulties in doing this because of the polyphonic nature of the narrative: the multiple interpretations and voices (press, readers, team members) and Lenihan's initial reluctance to offer a coherent story because he does not yet have a sense of the plot. He speculates by referring to the past 'hard week' and the team's performance.

Lenihan's press interview and Dawson's player-cam comments are possibly examples of Boje's (2001) antenarratives, pre-stories, speculative bets and struggles to make meaning, moments where 'time present is more difficult to disentangle' (Colville et al., 1999: 143). In Interview 2, Lenihan seems to have emplotted a degree of *narrative coherence* around how he dealt with Dawson's lack of fidelity or deviation from the 'team story' of loyalty: he continues on the team because it would be too controversial to send him home, he's apologized, been fined, and we need to focus on winning. In this way, as Weick suggests (above), Lenihan retrospectively crafts a more linear and causal storyline that in that moment is sensible enough to move on.

However, Dawson is still struggling to make sensible and construct a plausible explanation of the discordance of his 'own stupidity', 'naïveté' and 'utterly irresponsible actions'. In this moment of narrative performance we see the temporal nature of making life sensible in his *retrospective* explanation as he attempts to justify his actions and construct a coherent story (synchronically) *in the moment*, with *future possibilities* in mind by organizing for potentially adverse responses, 'everyone will expect me . . . I'm going to be very wary . . .'. We see in these comments he intentionally or unintentionally responds to polyphony in relation to his now-contested identity as hero: how his team members, coaches and the readers of the article view him and see his comments as controversial (rather than informative). He attempts to create some sort of *narrative rationality* as he 'describes, explains, justifies, constructs discourse objects, transmits emotions, creates intimacy or distance' (Gherardi and Poggio, 2007: 7). For example, he justifies ('But I thought I was writing a piece that was informative, yet interesting and apt'); shows emotion verbally and bodily ('a sort of nightmare'); constructs discourse objects (Mr Positive); and creates intimacy with the audience ('I never thought I'd ever end up saying. I don't think anyone expects . . .'). He brings us into his struggle to emplot coherence through our sense-perception (Merleau-Ponty, 2004 [1962]) – the tone of his voice, his demeanor giving us an idea of the 'emotional mix of confusion or inchoateness that marks [his] experienced realties' (Fineman, 2005: 6). We sense, through his bodily expression and comments such as 'not good enough on my part', 'everyone will expect me to . . .', and 'naïveté', that he experiences emotions of guilt and confusion – emotions not deliberately performed but *felt*. Yet, out of this struggle, threads of a narrative are beginning to emerge – from a 'dream to a nightmare' and narrowly 'avoiding rewriting the history books'.

We also begin to see Dawson's contested sense of identity playing through his evaluation of his actions and in his attempt to emplot some sort of narrative rationality of motives and actions (Ricoeur, 1992) – as informative/naïve, being good enough and pathetic. In doing so, he judges the merit of his actions against others (Lenihan, tour members) and the broader storyline of the tour (what it means to be a good team player,

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

'Mr Positive'), constructing them as a mistake, 'it's not good enough on my part' and through the 'untimely article'. In evading ('burned by my . . . the untimely article') and confronting ('need to build bridges') he is at least trying to recognize himself and re-narrate his identity in the story (Ricoeur, 1988). Many of his comments reflect his concern that others may no longer accept his credibility (being sent home, looking pathetic). Ricoeur (1992) argues credence is a central issue in narrative identity because it means justifying ourselves to others. It is this imagined audience and their spoken and unspoken criticisms that help Dawson judge which issues are salient to his emplotment of narrative identity.

Identity issues possibly play through Lenihan's narrative performance as he responds to expectations from the press, public and the team relating to how he should handle the situation, storylines that influence what it is possible to say. He provides an account that minimizes damage to his 'character' as a manager and how others may subsequently treat him. In making his actions sensible to those others he appears to be responsive to how they may judge the plausibility of his account – in storytelling terms power is expressed in acts that shape what people may say and how they determine the criteria for plausible stories.

We also get a sense of the embodied nature of these narrative performances. Dawson's player-cam response is visceral, his words, gestures and facial expression indicating he is still struggling to make sensible his own naïveté in 'the cold light of day', the multiple interpretations of others, the bridges he's burned and the damage he's done to relationships with team members. In the photograph (and particularly in the DVD), we sense the tension in the room as we look at Dawson's posture and team members' expressions. Our sense-perception of physiognomy and gestures is an integral part of making sensible – not a cognitive operation but implicitly understood through our own bodies (Merleau-Ponty, 2004 [1962]: 215).

To summarize, we suggest sensemaking is more than translating data into knowledge (Weick, 2001), more than discourse and human communication (Fisher, 1985) – it involves polyphonic, responsive and embodied struggles for meaning. We see Dawson's attempt to create – yet not quite achieve – a meaningful narrative by grasping fragments of his actions, the responses of others, and his now contested sense of identity. We see an illustration of a 'complex interplay between societal discourses, work practices, life events outside work and reflexive individual organizing of those disparate episodes into personal meaningful narratives with a different extent of coherence and consistency' (Belova, 2010: 69).

Vignette 2 – Narrative performance as more than words: Embodied sense

> Space 'consists of different regions and has certain privileged directions . . . closely related to our distinctive bodily features and our situation as beings thrown into the world'. (Merleau-Ponty, 2004 [1948]: 43)

In the following vignette we can see how various people make sense in the moment in everyday embodied actions, which are the outcome of a rapid succession of responsive moments of making sensible.

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

The ACT vs Lions game just into half time. Score at half time 22:10, now 22:17. Dawson, the designated kicker, is about to take the kick ……..

***Commentator*: '**Just two points difference, if this goes over . . . *[the ball misses the post]* . . . Oh, bad miss, bad miss!'

Second try:
***Coach Andy Robinson to touchline staff*:** 'Rog to take over kicking, get Rog to Kick it, get Rog to kick it, over . . .'
***Commentator*: '**He wants another bite of the cherry.'

Dawson takes the kick again and this time scores.

Healey scores a try. Player hands the ball to Dawson to kick.

***Captain Martin Johnson*:** 'He's got to kick it to win. Come on Daws, be the f---ing saviour son!'

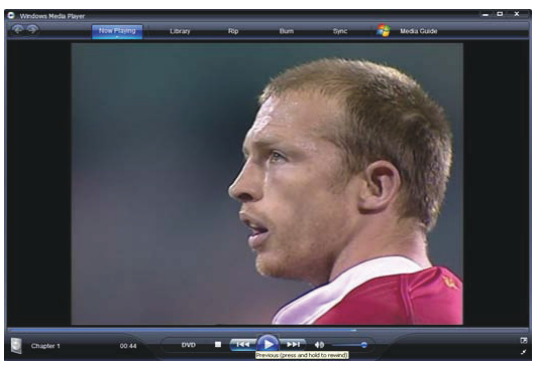

Figure 2

The three-way screen split is not only symbolic of the polyphony of concurrent sense-making, but also illustrates the embodied and embedded in-the-moment responses to the events on the field: the coach whose demand was ignored, the unhappy coaching team,

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

and players from both teams. This, we suggest, is an example of how dialectical organizing processes occur in the moment of making life sensible: dialectical in that in moments of both discordance (between coaches and players) and concordance (of the players) a way of moving on occurred. The significance of the moment to Dawson – the chance to redeem himself – is implicitly understood by the player who hands the ball to Dawson to take the try instead of taking it himself – a moment not lost on the commentator, 'if this goes over . . .'. Nor it seems on Dawson, his face transfixed in an expression of concentration as he prepares to kick: a moment of significance in which there's a chance to re-narrate his story and his identity.

No dialogue took place on the field, suggesting that significance can be a shared sense-experience – but one that may be contested (the coaches not wanting Dawson to take the kick, the team player and captain who do). We may interpret in the handing of the ball to Dawson and the look between the two players, that both sense that this is a significant moment in Dawson's ongoing narrative struggle, a moment that does not have to be articulated but is understood 'as if the other person's intention inhabited my body and mine his' (Merleau-Ponty, 2004 [1962]: 215). Thus, we make intuitive choices based on bodily responses, which we understand through sense impressions, gestures, expressions and emotions.

This has implications for how we make life sensible. Dawson is not an 'outside spectator' organizing objects in his field of vision, but experiences the 'dialectic of milieu and action' (Merleau-Ponty, 1965: 169) in which action both unfolds and alters the field. In other words, he is not computing hard data on exact distance from the goal, wind direction and velocity and the trajectory of the ball, he senses these based on his experience, sense-perception and his body. He looks at the ball, holds his hands in a way typical of rugby kickers, aligns his eye with the posts, and kicks . . . and in doing so, others on and off the field respond.

This situation requires subtle discrimination and a skillful response – a response not based on technical reasoning, but on an understanding in which Dawson 'experience(s) the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance' (Merleau-Ponty, 2004 [1962]: 167). For Merleau-Ponty, our movements are governed by intentions, but they are movements whose relations lie in our *expressive bodily space*. He (appropriately for our context) gives an example of football players who 'feel' the direction of the goal:

> For the player in action the football field is not an 'object', that is, the ideal term which can give rise to a multiplicity of perspectival views and remain equivalent under its apparent transformations. It is pervaded with lines of force (the 'yard lines'; those which demarcate the 'penalty area') and articulated in sectors (for example, the 'openings' between the adversaries) which call for a certain mode of action and which initiate and guide the action as if the player were unaware of it. The field itself is not given to him, but present as the immanent term of his practical intentions; the player becomes one with it and feels the direction of the 'goal', for example, just as immediately as the vertical and horizontal planes of his own body. (1965: 168)

Thus, in the moment just prior to kicking the ball, Dawson's sensemaking is not necessarily an information-processing activity but draws on an intuitive and informed feeling in his body – he senses the lines of force, the distance, his adversaries' positions on the field,

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

and his critics off the field. It is an experience shared by musicians as we see in Humphreys et al.'s article (2012) when saxophonist Toussaint says he found the 'strongest way of learning, sort of by osmosis basically . . .'. Merleau-Ponty (2004 [1962]) terms this *motility*, a pre-reflective intentionality or form of sensing the totality of our experience, 'movement and background are, in fact, only artificially separated stages of a unique totality' (p. 159[2]) – artificially separated, we suggest, in retrospective sensemaking.

Thus, while Dawson says nothing, his physiognomy speaks to us of a narrative rationality of redeeming himself in relation to others – a moment in which he senses the whole and 'feels the direction'; a moment intersected by a polyphony of voices (players, coaches, press, manager, etc.) which lend it significance. Yet while the significance of the moment is shared across Dawson, team members (the Team Captain mutters 'Come on Daws, be the f---ing saviour son') and coaches, it is contested in terms of what actions to take and what meaning to make: a polyphonic, fragmented and contested process in which making life sensible in the moment is more responsive, intuitive and embodied than controlled and coherent: shaped in *doing*, in *dialogue* (Pye, 1995) and, we suggest, in *sensing*.

Vignette 3 – Narrative performance and identity: Making life sensible is interwoven with who we are

> We learn to become the narrator and the hero of our own story, without actually becoming the author of our own life. (Ricoeur, 1991: 32)

What we have seen up to this point are the multiple, embodied, shared and contested ways in which participants try to make sense of the situation in a polyphony of

In the changing room post match	***Matt Dawson to the player-cam***
Team member: 'Hero to villain to hero . . .' **Coach Graham Henry**: 'Absolutely superb performance guys. Magnificent guts and character. 22:10 down at half time. We are in the shit. We are down behind the eight ball. To get up from there you can look at yourselves in the bloody mirror and feel bloody proud.' **Manager Donal Lenihan**: 'Well done boys.' **Coach Andy Robinson**: 'Absolutely superb. Well done . . .' *(Applause from the coaches)*	'The message came on for Rog to kick and fair play to Rog he said 'no Daws go for it'. It was about 40 yards out. He said 'no, go for it, you do it, you do it'. And it gave me a real big boost that it slotted straight down the middle and I was just in the groove then. It was one of the most important things I have ever done in my rugby life, probably in all of my life. Because it affected . . . it affected the people that I love and I know in the players around me and in the squad around me and I know that I upset them and I had one chance to do it and so, looking at it I'll probably look back and think, there was no other way to . . . I know I could have stood up in front of the boys, I could have stood up in front of individuals but there was no way, I don't think to repay what damage you have done than out on the rugby field. Whether that was playing or kicking I hope I did it today.'

Figure 3

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

interpretations around an event. But making sense is not just about events, it is also about narrating identities in embodied ways through feelings and bodily sensations – 'magnificent guts and character', 'and feel bloody proud', 'I know that I upset them'. Dawson's comments also illustrate the intertwined nature of embodied narrative sensemaking and narrative identity. His earlier identity struggles and frustrations turn to exhilaration in the 'big boost that it slotted straight down the middle and I was just in the groove then'. The team's demeanor has changed from that seen in Vignette 1. Dawson stands upright, looks at the interviewer, speaks quickly and confidently while the other players laugh and talk in the background. Not only can he reclaim his sense of identity as a hero in the eyes of others, he can also present himself well in moral terms (Baumeister, 1986) and be judged well by others: 'It affected the people I love . . . I hope I did it today'.

Across the three vignettes we see the temporality of narrative identity and how, as we make sense of our experience, our understanding of who we are both provides continuity (a life history), but is also being continually reconfigured in relation to our experience. We may see in Dawson's struggle his 'narrative identity continues to make and unmake itself' (Ricoeur, 1988: 249) as he faces 'imaginative variations' in terms of how others may see him or act towards him. He not only writes himself into the story as victim or hero (Sims, 2005), but his identity is also narrated by multiple others across time within multiple narrations.

If we plot the narrative of victim/villain/hero across the vignettes we see that:

> Dawson narrates himself as victim (of his own and other's actions) in his bodily expression and comments about 'naïveté' and 'nightmare' in Vignette 1 . . .
>
> . . . In Vignette 2 the possibility arises that Dawson may become the 'f___ing saviour' (the Team Captain) . . .
>
> . . . Which is configured into a redemptive narrative of 'Hero to Villain to Hero' by a team player in Vignette 3.

This multiple narrating over time occurs in an unstable mix of fiction/fabulation (hero, villain), experience of events, and within the contexts of Dawson and others' life histories (Ricoeur, 1992). We also suggest that within and across the vignettes, this shaping of narrative identities encompasses constructing a *narrative rationality* of motives, actions, and people, etc., as the players try to 'recognize themselves in the stories they tell' (Ricoeur, 1988: 247). In Vignette 3, Dawson attempts to do so by creating a plotline ('He said, "No go for it . . ."') and a justification for his actions: the successful try score as a gift to his colleagues to make amends for the perceived disloyalty from the tour diaries. The narrative rationality of 'Hero to Villain to Hero' may not only offer a new sense of himself – a narrative identity he feels more comfortable with – but also a sense of *narrative closure*, a 'sense of finality with which a piece of music, a poem, or a story concludes' (Carroll, 2007: 2). From now on, Dawson's narrative can be told with a coherent retrospectively-storied plot, a relevant cast of characters, a comfortable identity, and a moral – that the 'damage done' to one's identity can only be redeemed by proving yourself and your commitment to the team 'out on the rugby

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

field'. The impact of this re-narration of identity is expressed in Dawson's heartfelt comment: 'It was one of the most important things I have ever done in my rugby life, probably in all of my life . . .'.

In this temporal narrative performance Dawson has become the hero of his own story without necessarily being the author of his own life (Ricoeur, 1991), a story constructed in multiple embodied and embedded narrative performances, by many people, in many moments.

In this final vignette we see the discordance, doubt and struggle felt by narrators in the earlier vignettes woven together into a 'sensible' story. Concordance emerges and we are given the storyline 'From Hero to Villain to Hero'. Dawson can replot his life story and redeem himself in relation to others from the discordance of the initial tragedy.

Discussion: Emplotting the research story, embodied and embedded narrative sensemaking in organizations

As a mode of inquiry, abduction focuses on 'the conjectural and suppositional in the theorizing process . . . in provoking us to see and form new ideas' (Locke et al., 2008: 908). Our aim is therefore to take the plots we 'imagined' from the events and the reflections in the DVD and offer insights into embodied narrative sensemaking.

To summarize, the DVD illustrates how participants try to make sense around an event, and how Dawson tries to make sense of who he is as a person and a team player. The verbal and facial expressions and body gestures of the players, coaches and manager convey the intensity of their emotions and play into their attempts to make the situation sensible. Sensemaking is driven by a need for *plausibility and narrative rationality* in relation to others – fidelity to the accepted story of what team life and loyalty should be. Authors in this issue share an interest in how dominant, plausible, stories may circumscribe (Näslund and Pemer) or legitimate (Maclean et al.; Whittle and Mueller) sensemaking. We suggest that while narratives present a means of validating past, present and subsequent actions, plausibility is contested, that what is plausible for one group (the Manager and coaches) may not be so for another (team players). This is in keeping with Humphreys et al. (2012) who also pay attention to the contestation of stories. We further contend that plausible identities are contested as Dawson grapples with Lenihan's comments about his total and utter irresponsibility – we see an illustration of the emotional and embodied nature of the struggle to make our lives and ourselves sensible. Finally, the DVD offers an example of a reversal of a potential epic tragedy and the construction of the plotline of 'hero to villain and back to hero'. But stories of heroes, villains and team players in organizations are not new, nor are they the main concern of this article. What is our concern is a reconceptualization of narrative sensemaking as embodied, embedded, responsive, temporal, occurring in and across everyday lived moments.

We believe that the insights emerging from the data are relevant to organizational life in a number of ways. To explore this we go back to our three plotlines.

Plotline 1: We try to make our lives sensible both in the moment and retrospectively by responding to and taking into account the polyphony of 'other' voices, as we struggle to explain and justify our actions and create narrative coherence from discordant and concordant experiences. Dawson's struggle to construct a plausible explanation and

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

justify his actions in Vignettes 1 and 2, and Lenihan's accounting for what he did and might have done in Vignette 1, illustrate the responsive and polyphonic nature of making our lives sensible to ourselves and others. Both try to organize their experience and actions and search for narrative coherence judged against the broader narrative of what it means to be a good team player and manager.

We suggest that these processes of making life sensible also occur in organizations. Organizational members also narrate order or concordance from flux and discordance in moment-to-moment narrative performances, performances that are responsive and momentary as well as connecting in and across time. As such, organizational members need to recognize that making sense is a *temporal process* rather than a one-off activity, that past events and conversations, present responsive interactions and the anticipation of future events and actions all play into sensemaking and are to be considered. If we accept the perspective that organizations are pluralities of narratives and stories, then making sense occurs not just in formal decision-making forums or one-off activities as some suggest (Lüscher and Lewis, 2008; Viaar et al., 2006), but all the time in mundane responsive interactions as we go about figuring out what to do and who we are. Managers, decision-makers and leaders therefore need to understand that we make sense in everyday ordinary interactions as well as formal forums because we continually feel, make judgments and evaluations and try to construct some sort of *narrative rationality*.

Narrative sensemaking in organizations is also about recognizing and responding to multiple narrations: a process more usually contested than consensual (Currie and Brown, 2003). Sense and organizing emerge when a story begins to come together, identities begin to make sense, identities and actions can be given a sense of narrative rationality and we can connect plot and character. Yet we need to be aware of dominating stories presenting a univocal view, for while such stories may imbue order, they may limit other ways of making sense and acting. Indeed, Gabriel and Connell (2010) suggest that we should construct imaginative narratives to open up diverse meanings. It is also too simple to imagine that people are using shared neutral plots (Rhodes et al., 2010) because, as we see in the vignettes, narrators respond to perceived and felt judgments of approval or condemnation – as employees we feel just as angry and hurt if our performance is criticized or pleased if we prove ourselves, as Dawson did. Managers cannot assume a shared 'rationality' or 'objectivity' of a view or decision – rather, they need to see work life is open to multiple interpretations which need to be sought and included.

Plotline 2: Weick et al. (2005: 419) state that 'further exploration of emotion and sensemaking is crucial to clear up questions such as whether intraorganizational institutions are better portrayed as cold cognitive scripts built around rules or as hot emotional attitudes built around values . . .'. We suggest that this is not an 'either/or' case; mundane interactions and everyday narrative performances of organizing are embodied whether we are aware of it or not. Making our lives sensible in the phenomenological moment of living involves our knowing bodies, as we intuitively sense and respond to behaviors, feelings, emotions, moods and possible reactions of our colleagues.

Second, if, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, it is 'the bearing of my gestures or of the spatiality of my body which allows me to maintain relationships with the world without thematically representing to myself the objects . . .' (1964: 89), then what does this mean for organizational sensemaking? We propose it means that making organizational experience

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

sensible is as much about sense-perception, pre-reflective intentionality and motility (Merleau-Ponty, 2004 [1962]) as information processing and factual data. Instead of dismissing or attempting to edit out senses from sensemaking, they are an integral and useful part – to explore intuition rather than to focus purely on accounting through good reasons.

Third, it is acknowledged that emotion is integral to sensemaking in many contexts such as boardroom dynamics (Brundin and Nordqvist, 2008), leadership (James and Arroba, 2005), and learning (Vince, 2011). However, few studies go beyond categorizations of the types of emotions and their management, to embodiment at work. We suggest that not only should embodiment be recognized as an unavoidable part of organizational life, but accepted as an integral part of creating *narrative rationalities* that help make our life and experience sensible in relation to others. We should ask: How do embodied responses (my and others' feelings of mistrust, jealousy, anxiety, fear, dislike, excitement, etc.) play into our actions and ways of making sense of this situation?

Fourth, as Merleau-Ponty (2004 [1962]) suggests, our bodies are the means by which we sense the totality of our experience (*motility*), often before we can articulate that experience. We hear organizational members say 'I feel there's something wrong', 'I sense a change in George's attitude', or 'My gut tells me I need to talk to Susan' – feelings that can provide an impetus to further sensemaking. Within organization studies motility is alternatively articulated as insight, sensing, intuition, tacit knowledge, etc. Leaders inspire people to work together, decision-makers are incisive, team members think outside the box, and doctors make inspired diagnoses – perhaps based on their ability to recognize, explore and understand their sense-perception. Many studies attempt to develop instruments for measuring these behaviours as a basis for promotion or training, but few explore the lived experience of motility.

Fifth, we concur with Strati (2007) who argues that this is a form of sensible knowledge, an intimate experience with the world that allows us to become familiar with organizational space, not just in terms of physical work activities but also in social relationships. Being aware of our own and others' bodily sensations and gestures can give us a fuller understanding of the complexity of situations. Embodied and embedded forms of sensemaking are important in helping us understand the qualitative differences in the way people behave and how their sense of identity influences relationships and actions. We therefore need to understand how the texture and intensity of emotions and bodily sensations help us make sense of our inchoate experience, and explore how they may be a form of 'data' that might give us a better sense of the situation. Just as rugby players do, organizational members also need to sense the 'dialectic of milieu and action' (Merleau-Ponty, 1965: 169) – how their action both unfolds and alters the field in both subtle and overt ways.

Finally, our use of abduction also itself offers a reflexive example of embodied narrative sensemaking. Fineman (2005: 6) says the form of theorizing used by emotion researchers 'often bears little resemblance to the kind of feelings [researchers themselves] personally express'. As we watched the DVD, we found ourselves not as neutral observers, but responding to the in situ words, gestures, facial expressions, body language, and actions of the players that sensitized us to their emotions. We felt Dawson's elation when he converted the try. Feelings and bodily sensations can therefore be 'data' for our sensemaking as researchers. Indeed, Locke et al. (2008) agree that bodily

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

sensations of possibility provide an opportunity to enrich our theorizing. We extend their claim that bodily sensations of possibility (hunches) can indicate 'the presence of an idea to explore' and that feelings and expressions of doubt can help avoid 'premature closure' (p. 10) in our research to sensemaking in organizations.

Plotline 3: Throughout each vignette we see the impossibility of separating our feelings and identity from the ways in which we make life sensible. To paraphrase Ricoeur (1992), people are not separate from their experiences, they actively make sense (emplot) of their experience in a *mutual genesis* in which they narrate both a story and themselves: identity shapes the story as the story shapes identity. As we have seen, a loss of a character's identity corresponds to 'the loss of the configuration of the narrative' (p. 149), and a crisis of making life sensible through narrative closure. We struggle to make our lives intelligible by working out meanings, constructing narrative coherence, and telling stories: by connecting action, plots and characters, attributing intentions, evaluating, judging, searching for our sense of identity, and anticipating action. As O'Connor (2002) theorized in her study of entrepreneurs, 'good' narrators make sense by connecting plotlines in which they plot themselves, imagine themselves in others' stories (investors, customers, etc.), and narrate the company in a convincing way. As Vignette 3 illustrates, narrative closure can be crucial in lending coherence and validity not only to past present and future actions, but also to our sense of identity.

Concluding comments

In the article we demonstrate how we make sense of our surroundings and experiences in sensory as well as intellectual ways and theorize the process as *embodied narrative sensemaking*: where embodied and felt experiences are integral to creating plausible accounts of our experience and ourselves. We argue that we cannot divorce our living bodies from the context, and that recognizing this moves us beyond a pure cognitive appraisal, which enables us to understand that organizing also operates on a sensory level through sensory knowing and bodily sensations that is everyday and ordinary. This enriches our understanding of how we make sense in lived experience by illustrating the relationship between embodied identities and making life/self sensible.

Second, we argue we make sense in everyday narrative performances, evolving accounts and struggles to create meaning from fragmentary, multiple and contested narratives. Sensemaking is temporal in at least two ways: in the moment of performance we draw on past experiences, present interactions and future anticipations, and second, we plot narrative coherence across time. In addition, we illustrate that narrative coherence comes as much from subtle, small, responsive, particular, in-the-moment, and often contested, narrative performances as from large, conspicuous, sustained actions, and occurs in search of answers not only to 'What's the story?' (Weick et al., 2005: 410) but also to 'how do I fit into the story?' Narrating events into a coherent story helps us understand how we fit into larger narratives (Czarniawska, 2006: 1665).

Finally, our conceptual and empirical findings suggest that we need to open up theorizations of sensemaking to consider everyday, embodied moment-to-moment ways of making life sensible. Sensemaking is inescapably embodied and entwined with identity – even within organizations where rationality and evidence are used as constructs for

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

plausibility – because we cannot avoid inserting ourselves into the process of creating order from the 'unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience' (Ricoeur, 1992: 162).

We attend to some limitations of our theorizing and analysis of the material from a sports' context in terms of its generalizability. We suggest that because embodied sensemaking takes place in everyday interactions, that it may be relevant in all arenas of social activities and relationships; sport, creative arenas and less apparently creative arenas (such as senior managers' teams) all have members engaging in their own making-sensible, organizing, identity-work activities. We contend that while the sports context of our article is particularly suited to making visible intuitive, embodied, processes because of its physicality, we all engage in these processes daily, consciously and otherwise. However, we accept that the generalizability of our claims are influenced by our ability to make our analysis resonate with our audience's own sensemaking.

Acknowledgements

Original footage taken from the DVD 'Up Close and Personal with the Lions: Life with the Lions Down Under' and reproduced with the kind permission of IMG Media Archive <http://www.mediaarchive.com>.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1 Based on the DVD.
2 Original quote from Goldstein K (1923) *Uber die Abhangigkeit* (p. 163).

References

Abolafia MY (2010) Narrative construction as sensemaking: How a central bank thinks. *Organization Studies* 31(3): 349–367.

Agar M (2010) On the ethnographic part of the mix: A multi-genre tale of the field. *Organizational Research Methods* 13(2): 286–303.

Bakhtin MM (1996 [1986]) *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (McGee VW, trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bartunek J, Rousseau DM, Rudolph JW and DePalma JA (2006) On the receiving end: Sensemaking, emotion, and assessments of an organizational change initiated by others. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 42(2): 182–206.

Baumeister RF (1986) *Identity: Cultural Change and the Struggle for Self*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Beech N, MacPhail SA, and Coupland C (2009) Anti-dialogic positioning in change stories: Bank robbers, saviours and peons. *Organization* 16(3): 335–352.

Bell E and King D (2010) The elephant in the room: Critical Management Studies conferences as sites of body pedagogic. *Management Learning* 41(4): 429–442.

Belova O (2010) Polyphony and the sense of self in flexible organizations. *Scandinavian Journal of Management* 26(1): 67–76.

Boje DM (1994) Organizational storytelling: The struggles of pre-modern, modern and postmodern organizational learning discourses. *Management Learning* 25(3): 433–461.

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

Boje DM (1995) Stories of the storytelling organization: A postmodern analysis of Disney as Tamara-land. *Academy of Management Journal* 38(4): 997–1035.
Boje DM (2001) *Narrative Methods for Organizational and Communication Research*. London: SAGE.
Boyce ME (1995) Collective centring and collective sense-making in the stories and storytelling of one organization. *Organization Studies* 16(1): 107–137.
Brown AD, Stacey P and Nandhakumar J (2008) Making sense of sensemaking narratives. *Human Relations* 61(8): 1035–1062.
Brown AD and Humphreys M (2003) Epic and tragic tales: Making sense of change. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 39(2): 121–144.
Brundin E and Nordqvist M (2008) Beyond facts and figures: The role of emotion in boardroom dynamics. *Corporate Governance an International Review* 16(4): 326–341.
Bruner J (1987) Life as a narrative. *Social Research* 54(1): 11–32.
Bruner J (1994) The remembered self. In: Neisser U and Fivush R (eds) *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Butler J (1999 [1990]) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
Campbell J (2008 [1949]) *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Novato, CA: New World Library.
Carroll N (2007) Narrative closure. *Philosophical Studies* 135(1): 1–15.
Chaudry A, Wayne SJ and Schalk R (2009) A sensemaking model of employee evaluation of psychological contract fulfillment: When and how do employees respond to change? *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 45(4): 498–520.
Coffey A and Atkinson P (1996) *Making Sense of Qualitative Data. Complementary Research Strategies*. London: SAGE.
Colville ID, Waterman RH and Weick KE (1999) Organizing and the search for excellence: Making sense of the times in theory and practice. *Organization* 6(1): 129–148.
Contu A and Willmott H (2003) Re-embedding situatedness: The importance of power relations in learning theory. *Organization Science* 14(3): 283–296.
Corner J (2002) Documentary values. In: Jerslev A (ed.) *Realism and Reality in Film Media*. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, Museum Tuscalanum Press, 139–158.
Cunliffe AL (2002) Social poetics: A dialogical approach to management inquiry. *Journal of Management Inquiry* 11(2): 128–146.
Cunliffe AL, Luhman JT and Boje DM (2004) Narrative temporality: Implications for organizational research. *Organization Studies* 25(2): 261–286.
Currie G and Brown AD (2003) A narratological approach to understanding processes of organizing in a UK hospital. *Human Relations* 56(5): 563–586.
Czarniawska B (1999) *Writing Management: Organization Theory as a Literary Genre*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Czarniawska B (2006) A golden braid: Allport, Goffman, Weick. *Organization Studies* 27(11): 1661–1674.
De Beauvoir S (1989 [1953]) *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books.
Driver M (2009) From loss to lack: Stories of organizational change as encounters with failed fantasies of self, work and organization. *Organization* 16(3): 353–369.
Dyck N and Archetti EP (eds) (2003) *Sport, Dance and Embodied Identities*. London: Berg.
Ellis C and Bochner AP (1992) Telling and performing personal stories: The constraints of choice in abortion. In: Ellis C and Flaherty MG (eds) *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE, 79–101.
Fineman S (ed.) (2000) *Emotion in Organizations*, 2nd edn. London: SAGE.
Fineman S (2005) Appreciating emotion at work: Paradigm tensions. *International Journal of Work, Organization and Emotion* 1(1): 4–19.

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

Fisher WR (1985) The narrative paradigm: An elaboration. *Communication Monographs* 52(4): 347–367.
Fletcher DE and Watson TJ (2007) Entrepreneurship, management learning and negotiated narratives: 'Making it otherwise for us – otherwise for them'. *Management Learning* 38(1): 9–26.
Friedrichs J and Kratochwil F (2009) On acting and knowing: How pragmatism can advance international relations research and methodology. *International Organization* 63(4): 701–731.
Gabriel Y and Connell NAD (2010) Co-creating stories: Collaborative experiments in storytelling. *Management Learning* 41(5): 507–523.
Gergen KJ (2005) Narrative, moral identity and historical consciousness: A social constructionist account. In: Straub J (ed.) *Narration, Identity and Historical Consciousness*. New York: Berghahn Books, 99–119.
Gherardi S and Poggio B (2007) *Gendertelling in Organizations: Narratives from Male-Dominated Environments*. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press.
Goffman E (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Allen Lane.
Goffman E (1967) *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-face Behavior*. New York: Random House Inc.
Grandey A (2003) When 'the show must go on': Surface acting and deep acting as determinants of emotional exhaustion and peer rated service delivery. *Academy of Management Journal* 46(1): 86–96.
Grant AM, Dutton JE and Rosso BD (2008) Giving commitment: Employee support programs and the prosocial sensemaking process. *Academy of Management Journal* 51(5): 896–918.
Harding N (2002) On the manager's body as an aesthetic of control. *Tamara: Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization Science* 2(1): 63–76.
Haynes K (2008) (Re)figuring accounting and maternal bodies: The gendered embodiment of accounting professionals. *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 33(4–5): 328–348.
Heaphy ED and Dutton JE (2008) Positive social interactions and the human body at work. *Academy of Management Review* 33(1): 137–162.
Helms Mills J (2003) *Making Sense of Organizational Change*. New York: Routledge.
Hindmarsh J and Pilnick A (2007) Knowing bodies at work: Embodiment and ephemeral teamwork in anaesthesia. *Organization Studies* 28(9): 1395–1416.
Hochschild AR (1983) *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Holstein JA and Gubrium JF (2000) *The Self We Live By: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Holt R and Macpherson A (2010) Sensemaking, rhetoric and the socially competent entrepreneur. *International Small Business Journal* 28(1): 20–42.
Höpfl H (2002) Playing the part: Reflections on aspects of mere performance in the customer-client relationship, *Journal of Management Studies* 39(2): 255–267.
Humphreys M and Brown A (2002) Narratives of organizational identity and identification: A case study of hegemony and resistance. *Organization Studies* 23(3): 421–447.
Humphreys M, Ucbasaran D and Lockett A (2012) Sensemaking and sensegiving stories of jazz leadership. *Human Relations* 65(1): 41–62.
James K and Arroba T (2005) Reading and carrying: A framework for learning about emotion and emotionality and organizational systems as a core aspect of leadership development. *Management Learning* 36(3): 299–316.
Jeong H-S and Brower RS (2008) Extending the present understanding of organizational sensemaking: Three stages and three contexts. *Administration and Society* 40(3): 223–252.
Johnson M (2001) 'Up Close and Personal: Life with the Lions Down Under'. DVD produced by NTL for Lace International.
Katz N and Koenig G (2001) Sports teams as a model for workplace teams: Lessons and liabilities. *Academy of Management Executive* 15(3): 56–69.
Kerby AP (1991) *Narrative and the Self*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

Kilborn RW (2003) *Staging the Real: Factual Television Programmes in the Age of Big Brother*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Lilius JM, Worline MC, Maitlis S, Kanov J, Dutton JE and Frost P (2008) The contours and consequences of compassion at work. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 29(2): 193–218.
Locke K, Golden-Biddle K and Feldman MS (2008) Making doubt generative: Rethinking the role of doubt in the research process. *Organization Science* 19(6): 907–918.
Lüscher L and Lewis M (2008) Organizational change and managerial sensemaking: Working through paradox. *Academy of Management Journal* 51(2): 221–240.
Maclean M, Harvey C and Chia R (2012) Sensemaking, storytelling and the legitimization of elite business careers. *Human Relations* 65(1): 17–40.
Maitlis S and Sonnenshein S (2010) Sensemaking in crisis and change: Inspiration and insights from Weick (1988). *Journal of Management Studies* 47(3): 551–580.
Martin B and Wajcman J (2004) Markets, contingency and preferences: Contemporary managers' narrative identities. *The Sociological Review* 52(2): 240–264.
Merleau-Ponty M (1964) *Signs* (McCleary RC, trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
Merleau-Ponty M (1965) *The Structure of Behavior* (Fisher AL, trans.). London: Methuen.
Merleau-Ponty M (2004 [1962]) *Phenomenology of Perception* (Smith C, trans.). London and New York: Routledge.
Merleau-Ponty M (2004 [1948]) *The World of Perception* (Davis O, trans.). New York: Routledge.
Murgia A and Poggio B (2009) Challenging hegemonic masculinities: Men's stories on gender culture in organizations. *Organization* 16(3): 407–423.
Myers P (2007) Sexed up intelligence or irresponsible reporting? The interplay of virtual communication and emotion in dispute sensemaking. *Human Relations* 60(4): 609–636.
Nichols B (1999) The voice of documentary. In: Rosenthal A and Corner J (eds) *New Challenges for Documentary*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 8–34.
O'Connor ES (2002) Storied business: Typology, intertextuality, and traffic in entrepreneurial narrative. *The Journal of Business Communication* 39(1): 36–54.
Peirce CS (1955) *The Philosophical Writings of Peirce*. New York: Dover Publications.
Polkinghorne D (1988) *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
Pye A (1995) Strategy through dialogue and doing: A game of 'Mornington Crescent'? *Management Learning* 26(4): 445–462.
Rafaeli A and Vilnai-Yavetz I (2004) Emotion as connection of physical artifacts and organization. *Organization Science* 15(6): 671–686.
Rhodes C, Pullen A and Clegg SR (2010) 'If I should fall from grace…': Stories of change and organizational ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics* 91(4): 535–551.
Ricoeur P (1984) *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1 (McLaughlin K and Pellauer D, trans.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Ricoeur P (1988) *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3 (McLaughlin K and Pellauer D, trans.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Ricoeur P (1991) Life in quest of narrative. In: Wood D (ed.) *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*. London: Routledge.
Ricoeur P (1992) *Oneself as Another* (Blamey K, trans.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Ricoeur P (2006) *On Translation: Thinking in Action* (Brennan E, trans.). London and New York: Routledge.
Rouleau L (2005) Micro-practices of strategic sensemaking and sensegiving: How middle managers interpret and sell change every day. *Journal of Management Studies* 42(7): 1413–1441.
Samra-Fredericks D (2004) Managerial elites making rhetorical and linguistic 'moves' for a moving (emotional) display. *Human Relations* 57(9): 1103–1143.
Sims D (2005) You bastard: A narrative exploration of the experience of indignation within organizations. *Organization Studies* 26(11): 1625–1640.

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016

Strati A (2007) Sensible knowledge and practice-based learning. *Management Learning* 38(1): 61–77.
Taylor JR and Robichaud D (2004) Finding the organization in the communication: Discourse as action and sensemaking. *Organization* 11(3): 395–413.
Taylor SS, Fisher D and Dufresne RL (2002) The aesthetics of management storytelling: A key to organizational learning. *Management Learning* 33(3): 313–330.
Tourish D and Robson P (2006) Sensemaking and the distortion of critical upward communication in organizations. *Journal of Management Studies* 43(4): 711–730.
Tyler JA (2007) Incorporating storytelling into practice: How HRD practitioners foster strategic storytelling. *Human Resource Development Quarterly* 18(4): 559–587.
Tyler M and Cohen L (2010) Spaces that matter: Gender performativity and organizational space. *Organization Studies* 31(2): 175–198.
Viaar PWL, Van den Bosch FAJ and Volberda HW (2006) Coping with problems of understanding in interorganizational relationships: Using formalization as a means to make sense. *Organization Studies* 27(11): 1617–1638.
Vince R (2011) The spatial psychodynamics of management learning. *Management Learning* 42(3): 333–347.
Watson T (2009) Narrative, life story and manager identity: A case study in autobiographical identity work. *Human Relations* 62(3): 425–452.
Weick KE (1988) Enacted sensemaking in crisis situations. *Journal of Management Studies* 25(4): 305–317.
Weick KE (2001) *Making Sense of the Organization*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Weick KE, Sutcliffe KM and Obstfeld D (2005) Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization Science* 16(4): 409–421.
Whittle A and Mueller F (2012) Bankers in the dock: Moral storytelling in action. *Human Relations* 65(1): 111–139.
Wines W and Hamilton J (2009) On changing cultures by injecting new ideologies: The power of stories. *Journal of Business Ethics* 89(3): 433–447.
Yanow D (1998) Space stories: Studying museum buildings as organizational spaces while reflecting on interpretive methods and their narration. *Journal of Management Inquiry* 7(3): 215–239.
Zucchermaglio C and Talamo A (2000) Negotiating social and organizational identity in a small work group. *Giornale Italiano di Psicologia* 27(3): 57–86.

Ann L Cunliffe is Professor of Management at the University of New Mexico, USA and Visiting Professor at the Universities of Leeds, Strathclyde and Hull, UK. Her recent publications include the book *A Very Short, Fairly Interesting and Reasonably Cheap Book about Management* (2009), and articles in *Organizational Research Methods, Management Learning, Management Communication Quarterly* and the *Journal of Management Inquiry*. Her research interests centre around bringing a philosophical lens into management and organization theory; examining the implications of reflexivity for teaching, research and management; and qualitative research methods. She is currently Editor-in-Chief of *Management Learning* and organizes the Qualitative Research in Management and Organization Conference. [Email: cunliffe@mgt.unm.edu]

Christine Coupland is Professor of Organizational Behavior at Hull University Business School, UK. Her recent publications include articles in *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management, Organization* and *Human Relations*. Her research interests centre on issues of identity and language drawing upon theoretical perspectives from organization studies and constructionist social psychology. More recently, in keeping with an interest in theorizing the processes of organizing career, she has been working in the area of the ageing working population. She is currently Associate Editor for the *Scandinavian Journal of Management* and regularly convenes research streams at the BAM and CMS conferences. [Email: c.coupland@hull.ac.uk]

Downloaded from hum.sagepub.com at FUNDACAO GETULIO VARGAS on February 5, 2016