How to go on? An ethnographic return to the 'rough ground' in PAR

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Abstract: Inspired by philosophical concerns with ordinary language, I write as a practitioner (and ethnographer) frustrated by how pictures of research that reduce action to quests for rational consensus seemingly blind people to the spontaneous and realistic pull that PAR exerts on participants to return to the "rough ground" of everyday life. Drawing on the case study of an Indigenous radio show in Montreal, I look ethnographically at the transformative qualities of Action (Research) as woven into participants' response to the more ordinary and immediate question: how to go on? I suggest that what matters in participatory-action is not so much knowing or the failure to know than acknowledging and accepting (or accommodating or refusing) others' positions and commitments.

Keywords: Participatory Action Research; ethnography; Wittgenstein; voice

¿Cómo Seguir Adelante? Un Retorno Etnográfico al "Terreno Áspero" en Investigación de Acción Participativa (IAP)

Resumen: Inspirado por las preocupaciones filosóficas sobre el lenguaje común, escribo como practicante (y etnógrafo) frustrado por cómo las representaciones de la investigación que reducen la acción a la búsqueda de consensos racionales aparentemente impiden a las personas ver el empuje espontáneo y realista que la IAP ejerce sobre los participantes para volver al "áspero terreno" del día a día. Partiendo del estudio de caso de un programa de radio indígena en Montreal, observo etnográficamente y de otras maneras las cualidades transformadoras de la (Investigación) Acción en cuanto que se teje como parte de las respuestas de las personas participantes a la pregunta más común e inmediata: ¿Cómo seguir? Sugiero que lo que importa en la acción-participativa no es tanto el saber, o la incapacidad de saber, sino el reconocimiento y aceptación (o acomodo o rechazo) de las posiciones y compromisos de los otros.

Palabras clave: Investigación Acción Participativa; etnografía, Wittgenstein, radio comunitaria

February 2016: CKUT studios, Montreal

I am in the basement studio of CKUT90.3FM, a campus-community radio station in Montreal. It is early morning but everyone on the Inuit radio team is excited to hear Reggie's voice.[1] A journalist from APTN, Canada's national Indigenous broadcasting network, is also there.

1 Although all participants' names are available in the public domain, I use pseudonyms throughout this paper.

Evan, the Inuk producer, gives a signal and the journalist starts filming over Alasie's shoulder as Reggie's voice is patched into the studio. "Is that you Reggie?," Alasie, the host, asks in Inuktut, smiling as she adjusts her headphones with both hands to better catch Reggie's voice on the end of the line. "Yeah, it's me, it's me Alasie….I'm here" Reggie replies warmly. The journalist is doing a story about Alasie, a charismatic and much loved Inuit elder and social worker in Montreal, interviewing Reggie on *Nipivut*, the first Inuit radio show in southern Canada. Like a dispiritingly high number of Inuit in Montreal since the mid-1980 s, Reggie had been living on and off the streets for a number of years. Calling in from a local shelter, he was on the radio that morning talking with Alasie about being in the news.

One bitterly cold night the previous week, Reggie had seen a young man huddled outside a McDonald's at a major intersection in the downtown core. As he tells Alasie in his own words, when he saw the boy he saw himself as a younger man, alone and struggling on the sidewalk; that is why, Reggie says, he crossed the street, knelt beside the boy and gave him his coat : "here, this'll make you warmer" he said. What Reggie didn't know was that the boy was not homeless but a student who had come up to Montreal for the weekend. His friend had been filming his "street experience" from a discrete distance across the way for a class project. Astonished by Reggie's selfless act, the students uploaded the video to YouTube. Within days it had gone viral. Word spread and journalists began contacting Reggie for interviews, APTN included, but Alasie, who knew Reggie well, was the first and only contact to speak to him about what had happened in Inuktut.

That morning on *Nipivut*, Reggie got to express his story in his own words. When he put down the phone, Alasie wiped away the last of her tears. "Wow, that was emotional" she sighed, turning to tell the journalist that giving Reggie the opportunity to speak in Inuktut had changed everything: "as soon as he started to talk about his life in Montreal," Alasie said, "he started crying and talking about his mother."

I watched the APTN national news run the story that night. The three minute segment spoke movingly of Alasie and Evan's commitment to mobilise the power of community radio to amplify the voices of Inuit, like Reggie's, across the island of Montreal and beyond. It also highlighted the transformative actions being taken *by* Inuit *for* Inuit in challenging the mostly negative portrayal of urban Inuit in the mainstream media. I felt, if only briefly, I had glimpsed change through participatory action happening in real time, but in ways that I knew I still could not quite yet grasp or find words for.

Introduction

Nipivut means "Our Voice" in Inuktut. The bi-weekly radio show went to air in October 2015. It started as an "action" of a participatory social history project before becoming the cornerstone of a long-term Participatory Action Research (PAR) initiative organised around Montreal Inuit community development called "Mobilising *Nipivut* | Mobilising *Our Voice*". To be clear, by PAR I refer to a practice of action-oriented inquiry that directly benefits the individuals involved by prioritising their needs, agency and participation throughout the entire process (see Kindon, Pain & Kesby 2007). Drawing on the host Alasie's lifelong commitment to the well-being of fellow Inuit, the *Nipivut* show exemplified the intent of PAR in its attempt

to mark out a new space in the city from which Inuit could speak to and about what mattered to them.

To situate myself, I am a socio-cultural anthropologist at Concordia University in Montreal. With Alasie, Evan and other Inuit colleagues as well as, in later years, urban Inuit organisations in Montreal and Ottawa, I have served various roles on the project from co-researcher to co-director. I am currently the principal investigator on Canadian federal government funding that helps sustain the *Nipivut* show and another Inuit radio show the team has helped establish in Ottawa.[2]

Community radio shows are valorised as the building of socially inclusive infrastructures that allow marginalised communities to obtain ownership over their own development through communication (e. g. Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada 2002, Pavarala 2003). Lopez Franco et al vividly describe community radio as a vehicle of self-empowerment, allowing community-driven broadcasters to enact the rights "of those most marginalised…not only to speak but to be taken into account" (2020:179). I do not contest but fully support the political potential of community radio to amplify people's voices. At the same time, however, what I have learned from the Nipivut project is that preoccupations with transformative change cannot deflect attention away from what is actually at stake in "having a voice".

"Back to the Rough Ground!"

In this paper, I want to look again at the radical picture of PAR, by returning its practice back to the context of everyday life. Simply put, my claim is that the capacity of PAR to effect transformative change is not the heroic picture of autonomous actors freely speaking for themselves and then charting a rational escape from everyday problems. When practitioners talk about PAR what they commonly evoke is the central, alluring image of people as free and autonomous individuals who, in spite of their marginalised status, are able to decide to participate and to make decisions over what to do in order to change a problem situation (Kielty 2019:25). On this basis, participation is understood as a rational and voluntary act, and an expression of individual autonomy in service of a collective that hinges on the capacity to erase perplexity and confusion and privilege agreement over disagreement (Kielty 2019:14). It is not so much that this picture of rational deliberation is wrong as it is misleading. It serves to reproduce a mostly unproblematic image of action as autonomous self-assertion that ultimately conceals much more than it reveals about ordinary life.

In contrast, the radical nature of PAR is, I suggest, the pull it exerts on people to return to the "rough ground" of everyday life, that is to say our shared life in language. In this picture, participatory-action is not reducible to the actions of self-contained, rational agents. Instead, PAR is a living process, indivisible from how it is woven into the circumstances in which it takes place and in the interactions, both linguistic and social, that occur between people. Such complexity does not weaken or diminish the project of participatory action. Instead, it reminds us of its *human* basis. As John Shotter puts it, if we slow down and actually look around at

2 Since 2015, the Nipivut project has been funded in part by two grants from the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (an Insight grant [435–2013–1794] and a Partnership Development Grant [890–2017–0033]). My reflections on this project mostly derive from my involvement in its day-to-day workings between 2015 and 2017.

what is *ordinarily* happening in front of us in any participatory project, it is not "action" we see but "joint action," the whirl of social life, as "people's activities become spontaneously and responsively intertwined or entangled with those around them" (2008:37). This is the inevitable ground from which encounters happen, events arise, and transformation occurs (Dumm 1999:21).

Yet, as Wittgenstein (1957) and other thinkers (Cavell 1979) concerned by ordinary language remind us, this ground is not smooth but rough. Anchored in the "rough ground" of our uses and practices of language, the possibility of our journeying together across the terrain of everyday life, (an apt metaphor for the project of PAR), rests, precariously and without any guarantee, on *the extent to which individuals, in speaking for themselves, can speak for others* (Hammer 2002:120–122; also see Shotter 2008:160–164). In ordinary life, this cannot be taken for granted. To speak, to "have a voice" is to speak for oneself but, ordinarily speaking, it is also to "risk both being rebuffed and having to rebuff others" (Hammer 2002:179). "Nothing guarantees that my speaking to you about what matters to me … will be met by your understanding (or caring to understand)" (Gordon 2020:39). Indeed, in the "rough ground" of everyday life, nothing and no one else assures the practices, traditions or agreements of any community (of speakers) other than the individuals concerned and their "willingness to take an interest in others and themselves" (Hammer 2002:119).

This is a radically different picture of language, but its significance could not be more ordinary. By highlighting the instability of our life in language, Action Research, for example, becomes less about the guarantees of consensus offered by models of agreement through scrutinous rational deliberation than about the ordinary and realistic *hopes* people have of finding ways of "going on" together in the effort, the *struggle,* to co-ordinate activities and change their social environments in ways that everyone involved can (hopefully) acknowledge and recognise themselves in. As I hope to demonstrate, careful attention to this fact changes the terms in which we understand the rationality of PAR's claim to effect meaningful change.

Structure

I divide this paper into four parts. First, I fill in the broader history of the Nipivut project, highlighting the context of how it came about, what changes it sought to effect and some of its achievements. In the following section, what I suggest was at stake in Reggie's interview that morning was the project's claim to navigate the variable depth of community relations. For Alasie, the use of "nipivut" in Inuktut did not refer to voice as an uncontestable or freely given activity. Instead, *Our* Voice signified a quality of gentleness and response, that Alasie embodied. In supporting community members from all walks of life to "find their voice", Alasie was situating action in an ordinary ethics of care. For community members to become radio-makers and therefore initiates of this practice was a social achievement, but it was also precarious and uncertain because it was also a fragile and vulnerable act of self-disclosure. I discuss the difficulties this presented for evaluating the project's enactment of "change" and

how it challenged me to think of participation differently, less a matter of autonomous, self-assertion than a self-regarding question: can I bear to make myself known?[3]

In the third part, I discuss how the ethical demands of this way of conceptualising PAR changed my understanding of participation from a moral good to a material-social exchange of labour (Horner 2002). Creating the time and space for people to participate became as important as the work itself. I provide examples of how the project addressed this issue and the implications it had.

In the concluding section, I re-assess the value of this project for PAR. I point out how this turn to "ordinary realism" in understanding what was at stake in the Nipivut project is not as radically different as it may first appear, but actually an expanded response to a more common place reading of PAR. As such, I hope this intervention can inspire readers to reflect on, and respond differently to, the issues at stake for those involved in their own projects.

Nipivut (Our Voice): Marking out a space for Inuit to speak

For the Montreal Inuit community members I was talking to around the time we got *Nipivut* up and running, the formation of an Inuit radio show in the city was a moment of collective pride. As someone close to the project told me, it showed them that "anything is possible." Radio has an important history for Inuit in communities across the Canadian Arctic (see Northern Quebec Inuit Association 1974).[4] Although the idea for an Inuit radio show in Montreal had been around for as long as anyone involved with the project could remember,[5] Evan, the Inuk producer above , and I knew, (because we had read the report), that Inuit representatives from Montreal had first publicly voiced the idea of a radio show at a national consultation on urban Inuit policy initiatives in the early 2000s (Tungasuvvingat Inuit 2005).

Committed to seeing if we could realise this community identified need, in early 2015 Evan and I conducted an initial needs assessment with Montreal Inuit. Most community members we reached out to returned, in one way or another, to the idea of a show as a *caring* response to the urban Inuit situation. Today, statistics show that up to one third of Inuit live outside of the four Inuit land claims regions across the Arctic and in or around southern Canadian cities. Inuit are known to experience important health and socio-economic disparities compared to non-Inuit in Canada, and these are often amplified in cities. The testimonies of prominent Inuit community members at the federal government's One Voice symposium on urban Inuit in 2005 indicated how social isolation, poverty, and overt discrimination have shaped the experiences of a significant number of Inuit in cities across the country (Tungasuvvingat Inuit 2005).

In terms of demographics, Montreal is the second largest (if unofficial) community of Inuit in Quebec when compared to the 14 official Inuit municipalities located in the northern Nunavik land claims region. Yet there is no one story of being Inuit in the city. Over the years, the population has increased as Inuit have moved to Montreal to find employment, access

3 I take this question from Veena Das' interpretation of the work of Stanley Cavell (see Das 2020:17).

4 The story of how Inuit quickly appropriated the use of radio technologies introduced to northern communities by government and military officials in the 1950s overlaps in important ways with the story of Inuit efforts to get out from under settler-colonial rule and speak for themselves as a self-determining people, in their own language.

5 This meant the idea of a radio show had been circulating in Montreal since at least the early to mid-1980s when Inuit started to appear in the city in increasing numbers.

quality health care, or gain educational opportunities unavailable in the north. Some have sought to escape the lack of safe and adequate housing or other difficult personal or social circumstances in home communities (rooted in histories of colonialism); others have been forced to relocate because of the justice system. Some are visiting family members or passing through, or have chosen to move south just because they could. Moreover, there are now second and third generations of Inuit who only know life in cities, having been born and brought up in the south.

Yet, in spite of the clear diversity of urban Inuit experiences (see Watson et al 2021; cf. Watson 2014:27–44), public perceptions of Inuit in Montreal commonly fall back on troubled stereotypes of itinerancy and poverty based on visible situations of Inuit homelessness. Although Inuit account for only 10% of the Indigenous population in Montreal, they make up 40% of the Indigenous homeless population in the city (Kishigami 2015).[6] While Inuit organisations consistently draw systemic linkages between the current homelessness crisis in the city and the intergenerational impacts of colonial rule affecting Inuit across the Arctic (see Makivik Corporation 2014), over the years the city's media has done little but reinforce the image of Inuit in Montreal as a people "out of place".

In recent decades, violent attacks against Inuit have been on the rise. This negative messaging reached a critical juncture in 2010. This was when the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services was forced to rescind their application to build an Inuit out-patient facility in a northern Montreal borough due to the anonymous discriminatory campaign of a local resident group who publicly opposed the project by characterising Inuit in circulated flyers as a "social problem" and a "dangerous" and "at risk" population who would bring prostitution, drug use, crime and homelessness into the area (Watson 2017:197). The fact that the borough mayor at the time failed to distance themselves from this messaging was not lost on anyone.

Getting to Air

Upon completion of the needs assessment, Evan and I turned to establishing a PAR framework. By building on a network of community contacts, we formed an ad-hoc working group of Inuit and non-Inuit community representatives and, with the support of the radio staff at CKUT90.3FM who had, by chance, an open slot dedicated to Indigenous language programming, we put a call out on Facebook for a radio team, including the host of a prospective show. Alasie replied immediately. Without question, Alasie, as a central community figure, was pivotal for what was to follow. In spite of everyone's busy schedules, the initial core team took radio production workshops provided by CKUT.

By early summer (2015), we had crafted a joint proposal for an Indigenous language programme identifying four main aims: promote the use (and learning) of Inuktut in the city; connect Inuit in northern communities with those in southern cities; provide Inuit with paid employment and transferrable skills based on media production training; and restorying the negative images of Inuit circulating in the public sphere. Although team members were spread

6 The issue of homelessness is explored with stark emotion by the Inuit documentarian Jobie Weetaluktuk in his 2005 film *Qallunajatut* ("Urban Inuk")

across the city, we figured out a way of working together. Later, Evan would tell me how he saw this as epitomising the Inuit ethic of *Piliriqatigiingniq* (working together for a common purpose). On October 6, 2015, roughly six months after we first pitched the idea, *Nipivut* was on air.

As a PAR project, the show reflected a claim to an (urban) Inuit community that the radio team, gathered around Alasie, was making and for which, in the production of the show, they were taking responsibility for. The responsibility for the radio content, mostly interviews, rested with Alasie (and later other co-hosts), a producer and a small and often changing collective of Inuit individuals. *Nipivut* constituted an ethical and political appeal to recognise Inuit as belonging in the city and the constitution of a collective (Inuit) Voice as reflective of the differences within the Inuit community.

In the early months after its first broadcast, the show gained unanticipated momentum. Alasie, Evan and other team members were invited on to morning TV shows and gave in-depth interviews to several Montreal newspapers. Behind the scenes, I was working hard to mobilise the resources of the show and partnered with an Inuit employment centre in the city to provide several vulnerable individuals with paid job opportunities and transferable skills training. In terms of content, alongside a live Christmas show that had Inuit connecting with others in cities across the country for the first time, a standout event that received positive media attention was Alasie's anchoring of an hour long outside broadcast one freezing cold February night with homeless Inuit as part of a national homelessness radio marathon. Broadcast solely in Inuktut, that show was relayed live on campus-community radio stations across southern Canada.

As a result of partnering with a national Inuit media corporation, the *Nipivut* show started to be rebroadcast on local stations in Arctic communities. Within four years, three producers of the show had gone on to secure full-time positions at major Inuit organisations. In 2017, the National Association of Campus and Community Radio Stations awarded *Nipivut* the Best in National Indigenous Broadcasting honour at its annual ceremony.

The Ethics of Voice: radio-work as an ordinary ethics of care

Reggie's testimony on *Nipivut* that morning was not, I contend, simply an example of "giving voice" to a marginalised individual that the APTN news report had initially and enthusiastically characterised it to be. Instead, it highlighted what was at stake in "having a voice".

In PAR, "voice" is commonly characterised as the individual right to express privately held ideas and opinions. Richard Winter talks about individuals "finding their voice" as the foundation for "thinking in dialogue with others" that makes possible the self-transformation of one's cultural setting (1998:67). This connection between voice and social change reaches back to the pivotal work of Paulo Freire and descriptions of action as primarily deriving from the recovery of people's ordinary voices: the task of allowing the "oppressed" to "find the words" to describe their own reality and overcome the "culture of silence" they have been subjected to (McKenna 2013).

When I first watched the APTN evening news story, I admit to having felt emboldened to speak *about* Reggie's voice as a kind of exemplary object of participatory research that I could

point at. Thinking back, perhaps I sought to emulate the "victory narratives" of Action Research (Owen et al. 2005) I was coming across in my reading at the time that seemingly had no problem in talking about "voice" as an uncontestable action – as a separate, "dead form", as Shotter might put it (2008:183), that anyone, provided the opportunity, could pick up and use like a tool from a toolbox.

Yet, as Toril Moi reminds us, action is not an object; having "neither depths nor surfaces" action is not a box we can lift a lid on to look at what is inside (Moi 2017:180). If we assume we could talk of actions objectively as separate from "us", their doers, then the ordinary world would be nothing more than a system of separately existing parts where what happens could be simply explained away by the language game of causes and effects and autonomous agents (Shotter 2008:180, Moi 2017:180). We do not live separate from the world. For Wittgenstein and other philosophers of ordinary language, to equate ordinary people's "voices" with perspicuity or clarity of expression is potentially not only naïve but dogmatic *if* it deflects attention away from what is at stake for people as they use language to traverse the ambiguous, textured and often challenging terrain of their ordinary worlds. Whatever we call "action", it is not an object we can point at, but an interpersonal matter that rests on, and continually returns us to, self-other relations.

The textures of voice

With Reggie, that morning, Alasie was not sitting down to record his "voice", as though the overarching aim was to add another audio interview to a shelf or digital file marked "archive". *Our* Voice signified a quality, that Alasie embodied; a quality of gentleness and response, what Sandra Laugier evocatively terms an "ordinary ethics of care" (Laugier 2020:13). As Laugier explains:

> "*Care* proposes bringing ethics back to the level of the "rough ground of the ordinary" … the level of everyday life. It is a practical response to specific needs, which are always those of singular others (whether close to us or not), of the "everyday life of the other;" it is work carried out just as much in the private sphere as in public; it [is] a commitment not to treat anyone as insignificant, and it is a sensibility to the details that matter in lived situations." (original italics; 2020:25)

Nipivut was an ethics of care in this sense. The show was an expression of (moral) learning based on Alasie's lifelong commitment, as a social worker, to paying attention to the textured realities and circumstances of other people's lives. For Alasie, who was adamant the show should promote the use of Inuktut, this notion of care was indivisible from the use of language. Attention to personal expression was a means of showing, and therefore caring for, people's moral vision, their way of dealing with the world (original italics; Laugier 2020:11).

This was the project's principal claim to action as "joint action" or what we might call, following John Shotter's lead, a relationally-responsive practice (2008:160–161). It was the pull of inquiry by Alasie into the *depth* of ordinary agreement between herself and her guests; "depth" here meaning, the extent to which, in finding their voices, individuals were allowing others to make sense of them (of who they are, how they carry themselves, what they stand for) (cf. Hammer 122–123). By paying attention to what counts, what is at stake for Inuit in their everyday, the project provided trainee radio-makers, mostly Inuit youth, with "an ap-

prenticeship of attention to the expression of others" (Laugier 2020:13). In this, team members were learning, as they were arranging, conducting and editing interviews, how to respond and be responsive to others based on a new sensibility for meaning (cf. Laugier 2020:13).

They were learning a key turn in PAR that the project was promoting: that is, what matters is not so much knowing, or the failure to know, than acknowledging and accepting (or accommodating or refusing) others' positions and commitments, and taking (or evading) responsibility for what it is we say about the world, about others, about how things might be. One cannot underestimate the challenge this presented, as I will return to below.

The achievement of *Nipivut* that morning was making public this commitment to an ordinary ethics of care for all Inuit. As such, Reggie's account of life told in Inuktut was not a retelling of facts but, with Alasie's mediation, an act of self-disclosure, an appeal to community. His story was, in the context of this action project, a moral expression of Alasie's staunch position she was taking responsibility for: that Inuit are Inuit and, regardless of wherever they may be or whatever situation they find themselves, they have the right to be heard and should have access to the same kinds of basic material support as Inuit in other parts of the country.

The locus of action then was not on Reggie's voice. The responsibility for "Our Voice" rested on the response of listeners. This was inherently risky and was traversing the variable depth of community relations. In contrast to the idea of voice as having an uncontestable value, there was no guarantee that people would recognise Reggie as a representative speaker, by which I mean that, in speaking for *himself*, listeners would recognise Reggie as speaking *for* them. In response to Reggie's story, people were being asked to reflect on and position themselves. So, when Reggie spoke of his love for family (his mother had also lived with him on the streets) and his struggles over the years with substance use, he was asking people to respond to the implicit question that, through his tears, he was asking himself: who am *I* in relation to *us?* It was unsettling, but in Alasie's sensibility for the situation, the ability to improvise and move on when faced with certain reactions (Laugier 2020:13), she exemplified how to "go on" with care and compassion with Reggie as he chose to tell his story. That is what made their encounter over the radio that morning so poignant and so moving and that is what I struggled with, at the time, to find the appropriate words to describe.

Can I bear to make myself known? The difficulties of evaluating "change"

For all of its success, the sustainability of the show remained vulnerable to a high turnover of participants. For some individuals with varying attachments and past experiences of community, the stakes of participating and becoming involved were often difficult to navigate. In one way or another, whether people chose to continue on with the show or not, the nature of the work consistently returned participants to the same self-regarding question: can I bear to make myself known?

To reiterate, the use of the first person plural in Nipivut, "*Our* Voice", did not reflect a pre-existing community in the world. Throughout but particularly in its early years, the authority for the project's existence rested squarely on the authority Alasie carried within community. Alasie led the way. In doing so, she demonstrated to others, by example, what was at stake for

the project. The project's use of PAR was very much a means of orienting participants within the idea of "finding a voice", helping them to "find their way around" what was at stake for themselves and others. For all of its other achievements, the participatory intent of *Nipivut* returned in the production of each show to the experiences of individual team members and to the value of bringing "talk [about "voice"] back into a living connection with the circumstances that gave it its life in the first place" (Shotter 2008:202): – that is, again, the question Reggie was posing himself, who am *I* in relation to us?

In general, I agree with the position that, before it can be anything else, Action Research is not an epistemological endeavour but a pedagogical-based practice "directed at practitioner growth rather than at understanding reality at all costs" (Villecanos de Castro & Banegas 2020; also see Watson 2019). However, this obviously makes it challenging to evaluate the impacts of a project. By action, the *Nipivut* team never pictured its ambition as making way for a solution to community cohesion. Thankfully, the funding I had received for this project did not require a strict demonstration of outcomes. This freedom has allowed me to think more deeply about the *Nipivut* project's adherence to a relationally-responsive model of joint action and individuals' striving for personal integrity.

The concept of personal integrity has helped me qualify my understanding of how trainees on the *Nipivut* team worked with "voice" as a deeply textured activity. Participation in any community-based project can place a heavy burden on the shoulders of participants. Finding one's voice in this context, by which I mean finding out where one stands in relation to others, can help individuals somewhat alleviate, or at least come to better grips with, the pressure of associating one's participation with a form of consent to speak on behalf of others (Horner 2002). The team was alert to this fact and to the expectations that participation placed on individuals, that is, of being ready to be challenged by others' opinions and experiences while remaining open to self-transformation. As I will come to describe in more detail below, the project consciously chose to avoid conflating participation with a voluntary and moral commitment to "community" by making clear that it was a form of material labour, for which individuals would receive compensation and other benefits.

Nevertheless, the show's elders and producers always returned participants to the space of radio-making as a space of learning and personal development in which Inuit individuals on the team could first experience and, then, hopefully, go on to identify with, the value of paying attention to the expression of others. As I have mentioned already, however, this only made sense because the project rested solely, and precariously, on everyone's willingness and capacity to take an interest in others *and* themselves (Hammer 2002:119). The fact of working in this participatory manner was never easy and this directly contributed to the turnover of participants, but there was no other viable alternative we could find. More often than not the fact of making oneself known through the work was a lot more difficult than some participants expected it be. It also highlighted a key if also implicit tension between conformity (with others' voices) and self-reliance (relying on one's own voice) that individuals on the radio team were faced with working out.

Ethnographically speaking, insight can turn on moments when what is ordinary comes undone, an instance, for example, when someone (suddenly) finds they cannot speak for one another (Cavell 1979:19–20). One participant, for example, who was deeply committed to the project, expressed to me on several occasions how, having come from a different part of the country, the show had offered him an opportunity "to get to know" other Inuit in the city and gain a sense of belonging in community. He spoke of feeling he had "found his voice" through

working closely with other Inuit on the show and felt, over time, that when speaking, others recognised themselves in his words. In this sense, "voice" was empowering, but the textured reality of everyday life became all too evident when he decided to speak out (and, in my opinion, justifiably so) against the representation of Inuit in a new art film release and discovered how, in taking responsibility for what one says, "finding one's voice" can also reveal its ethical and political dimensions. This story is why I find PAR is radical and transformative, not because of its idealism but because of its ordinary realism, its capacity that is to pull its participants back to the struggles of what is at stake in seeking to effect change.

The Depth of *Nipivut*'s Material Claim to Community

The work of "finding one's voice", especially in the political context of a marginalised community, is neither easy, nor is it to say it ever comes to an end. That is why from the start of the Nipivut project, the team took the decision to distance itself from other models of PAR that regard participation as a voluntary and moral commitment to a collective good. As an anthropologist, I fully agreed with this decision. Assuming that community members would want to be involved, and want to contribute to a collective voice because it was a "good", community-driven project was, I felt, to invoke an idealist ethics that placed the burden of the project's efficacy on the good will and character of community members. If the project were to fail, it would cast aspersions on the moral character of participants. Properly considering the material barriers to participation turned consideration of Voice from a cultural (and philosophical) asset or product or topic into a material-social condition.

Throughout this paper I have referred to participation on the radio show as "work". Participation is a form of labour if we regard it to be "a material practice aimed at altering the physical and social environment" (Horner 2002:570). In the Nipivut project, therefore, we tried, to the best of our ability, to provide (somewhat) adequate financial compensation to all who became involved. We also attempted to address other material concerns and barriers to participation. For many individuals, for example, finding the time to participate was difficult due to a host of other obligations during the week. In some instances, we were able to work with the Inuit employment centre in Montreal and create a programme where *Nipivut* "work" was included in clients' training. We also held discussions with a local college to see if we could integrate radio-work as part of Inuit students' course offerings: this did not succeed in the end, but it led to discussions around similar ideas. We found providing participants with handheld zoom digital recorders allowed them to conduct interviews at any time of day if they wanted to seize an opportunity. One participant talked excitedly about seeing an elder she had not seen in many years in Montreal one day, and because she had a recorder to hand, caught up with her and was able to share her story with people on the radio. Space was also an issue for many people. We had access to space at my university and to studios at the radio station. I know that on more than one occasion, the office space was used as somewhere to spend the night for individuals employed on the show and affected by situations of homelessness.

The implications of this materialist approach to the project were significant, more than I had initially expected, and certainly helped ensure the sustainability for the first six years at least. Considering the personal and existential difficulties of voice I have raised above,

rearticulating voice from a material perspective provided some (but definitely not all) individuals with a sense of social distance from some of the project's ethical demands. The chance at paid employment also helped build individuals' CVs and expanded their list of professional skillsets. On the other hand, the funding of individuals to produce a community radio show invited some quiet feedback that it only served to undermine the voluntary ethos of community radio. While I understood this position, I think the social inequalities Inuit face in the city merited a material-social as opposed to a strictly cultural approach to radio production. One lasting impact of providing financial compensation is the question of future expectations. The team has had to face this yet, but if funding is not available, it will require a rethink of the very premise of the project's participatory ethos.

Conclusion: PAR and Ordinary Realism

In its enactment of a participatory ethic, PAR compels its practitioners to acknowledge and work *within* the ordinary relationally-responsive, efforts of people to break new ground. Any meaningful inquiry into knowing what is ordinarily said and done, the site of participatory action, must necessarily traverse people's everyday worlds textured in endless and often difficult ways.

Yet movement requires friction. This is why engaging in action-oriented inquiry is often reported to be difficult and "messy" (Cook 2009). Unfortunately, practitioners are often reticent to elaborate on such experiences for fear of discrediting the principles of social justice, empowerment, decolonisation that PAR has come to stand for (Lenette et al 2019:162).[7] My point in this paper is that in learning from Wittgenstein and other thinkers concerned with ordinary language, we gain a genuine sense of how the relation between language and the world is vulnerable and unavoidably so. Practitioners of PAR, a deeply human endeavour, must be responsive and alive to the "uncertainty of [human] relations" (Das 2020:46). It is not the flawless, friction-less ice but the "rough ground" that teaches us what is actually at stake in "the stitching together of action and expression in the work of bringing about a different everyday" (Das 2020:58). Acknowledgement of this reminds us to look again at the formation of our agreements (in participatory work, for example) less as a normal instance of rational, communicative exchange than a moment of reflexive self-interpretation, the terms of which reveal, from my perspective as a participant, whether I recognise myself in the defining activity and in others speaking for me (and me for them) (Cavell 1979:25; also see Norris 2006:13–14).To paraphrase the philosopher, Cora Diamond, this is the "difficulty of reality": the fragility of our agreements and the variable depth of our relationships and the "*we*" upon which they depend, that practitioners of PAR do not, indeed, cannot turn their back on but must work from *within* in their efforts to collaborate and figure out ways of 'going on'.

Although I remain indebted to John Shotter (1980, 2003, 2008) for having brought "ordinary realism" (through Wittgenstein) into Action Research and organisational science[8], I

7 On this point, I would suggest that if one is to speak like Orlando Fals-Borda – a key architect of PAR – of "authentic participation" then it must not take communal agreement for granted but recognize that a genuine community would accommodate, indeed encourage, disputes (Hammer 2002:179).

8 I would also like to draw attention here to Marco Motta's (2019) articulation of "ordinary realism" in anthropology.

do not find what I have attempted to sketch above a distinctly different take on PAR as much as an engaged and expanded response to a more familiar reading of its method. When Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, for example, described Action Research in the introduction to their edited Sage Handbook as not so much a methodology than an "orientation to inquiry," they provided a straightforward yet telling definition: "Action Research primarily *arises*" they wrote "as people *try* to work together to address key problems in their communities or organisation" (my italics; 2008:1). I find this description to be evocative of the shift in PAR practice I have been wanting to articulate in this paper in two important ways.

Firstly, the focus on action as "arising" is particularly meaningful. Immediately, it decentres the origins of action, moving it away from rational agents and the idea of a generic, mobile, instrumental method to be imposed on the world. From my reading, I take this to mean that people's appeal to action is actually more responsive than what is normally understood by its use in research to assert some confident form of doing or acting *on* the world to intentionally change or shape it somehow. Here, as it arises, action already infers a relation, a form of engagement or strategic inquiry that people create together in *response* to specific circumstances and to each other based on what people understand to be happening, or not happening, within a local social context (Somekh 1995:341).

Secondly, and as importantly, Reason and Bradbury tell us that people do *not* work together, rather they "*try* to work together". Action then is not only a response to the world but also an on-going effort or struggle to share and co-ordinate activities. This sets action against the skepticism of human fallibility. Thus, we expect, for how can we not, that in the course of a project mistakes will be made and, one assumes, because language is an artefact of our human condition, excuses to be given (Austin 1957). Hannah Arendt talked of this when talking about the irreversibility of action in terms of "setting things in motion". The fact our actions unfold in endlessly indeterminate and contingent ways are only made bearable, she argued, by two speech acts: promising and forgiving (Arendt 1958). It is the "promise" that establishes trust and dependability in the other upon which social life turns. The act of forgiveness (the fact of mistakes and the giving and acceptance of excuses) reflects the harm that is alive in the world by "allow[ing] a way of going on to new futures" (Beckwith 2011:8).

What I take from Reason and Bradbury's definition is that a finer sensibility for what is at stake in the ordinary, rough ground of our everyday lives is already there within PAR practice. Bringing an ethnographic eye to action, as I hope to have done in this paper, can allow us to look again at what sets PAR apart from other forms of inquiry and, moving forward, provide an ever more robust defence of its transformative potential.

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