Faculty of Design

2006

The Yin and Yang of Seduction and Production: Social Transitions of Ethnography Between Seductive Play and Productive Force in Industry

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This paper examines social transitions in forms of ethnographic representation from seductive play to productive force in Industry. With a focus on the hi-tech consulting and marketing fields, I examine the eight strategies of ethnographic representation include, (1) informal conversations, (2) designed printed materials, (3) video, (4) electronic presentations, (5) personas and scenarios, (6) experience models and diagrams, (7) opportunity matrices, (8) and experience metrics. It addresses the use of these strategies within modal degrees of symbolic seduction and productive force as shaped by the theories of Baudrillard and Taoist philosophy. I propose that the combination of the concepts of Seductive Play and Productive Force and Yin Yang provide a way out of several challenges in ethnography's engagement with business decision-making, especially related to its role, mission, and power. I attempt to seduce ethnographers into seeing themselves as Taoist "scholar/warriors" able to maintain the human-centered balance in any Industry context.

Introduction

The purpose of the EPIC community is to develop understandings of the praxis of ethnography in Industry. By ethnography, I mean the philosophical orientation that says that knowledge about people's experiences should be represented from the modalities of the people studied. Because of my hybrid intersections across the fields of design and anthropology, I come to this understanding through the examination of the representational channels and forms that ethnography uses to communicate what it is/does in Industry. In the high-tech consulting and integrated marketing sectors with which I have been most intimate, there are eight representation strategies used:

1. Informal conversations
2. Designed printed materials
3. Video
4. Electronic presentations
5. Personas and scenarios
6. Experience models and other diagrams
7. Opportunity matrices
8. Experience metrics

This paper addresses the use of these representation strategies within modal degrees of symbolic seduction and productive force as shaped by the theories of Baudrillard. I select

Baudrillard as an intellectual interlocutor because of (1) his clear articulation of what is at stake in productive and symbolic modes and (2) the similarities of his thinking to Taoists ideas in Tai Chi Chuan. Through my practice of Tai Chi Chuan over the past five years, I have learned that applying Taoist principles to the business contexts reduces my perception of sharp dualities and my protective disengagement with dehumanizing processes[1]. My proposal is that the combination of the concepts of Seductive and Productive and Yin Yang provide a way out of several challenges in ethnography's contemporary engagement with business decision-making:

- The effective communication of the value of ethnography to business decision-making
- The underlying assumption that ethnography has to demonstrate its value to business-decision making
- Ethnographer's fears of cooptation within the structure of business
- The interdisciplinary jockeying for power among ethnographers, designers, engineers, business managers, etc.
- The articulation of a mission of Ethnography in Industry

I present this proposal in a series of "songs" in order to seduce ethnographers into embracing a role of, what Deng Ming-Dao calls, "scholar/warriors" who can effectively use techniques of symbolic seduction and productive force to maintain the human-centered balance in business decision-making.

Contemplative Songs of Seduction

The Song of the Universe of Production

> *We now live in a universe of forces and relations of forces... A universe of production, investments, counter-investments and the liberation of energies, a universe of Law and objective laws, a universe of the master-slave dialectic.* (Baudrillard 1990: 177)

As ethnographers, you now work in a universe of production. As explored in the work of Baudrillard, production transforms objects into products by rendering visible "their positive identity (as 'this' not 'that')" and releasing them "into domain of economic exchange" (Grace 2000: 16). Production has as its defining principle "indefinite accumulation" (Grace 2000: 16). Quoting Baudrillard (1990: 84) directly, "Production only accumulates, without deviating from its end." Business recognizes that it operationalizes the universe of production. Management guru, Peter Drucker (1992: 98), states it plainly, "In every business in the world, production and distribution of goods or services is considered the ultimate good."

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[1] Although I will address this more in-depth later, some key Taoist concepts are that of the lack of sharp dualities among forces and that one must yield to any situation. To yield means to connect and follow a situation (i.e. go with the flow) until you can redirect its path.

As ethnographers engaged in business, you participate in the supporting of the purpose of business. You are part of the process by which air, water, heat have all been given a positive identity of radio band spectrums, Disani, and oil and released into economic exchange. In the universe in which you work, speculations on indefinite accumulation or growth on a quarterly basis impacts decisions to hire or layoff people. In the universe of production, business is the mechanism by which people are provided the means for the indefinite accumulation of products or now even productized experiences. The universe of production supports an investment mentality of uneven reciprocity (ex. ROI equals "I give you $1 if I will make back $2."), legal structures that protect it, and binary self/other oppositions (ex. Management/worker). Resistance is futile, for Baudrillard (1990) tells us that the force of production co-ops resistance. Drucker (1992: 100) tells you that if you do not concentrate on the specialized task of business then you will cause confusion. Although it may not seem so, perhaps it is wiser to yield to the universe of production and its forms. Perhaps in yielding, you will find the means to neutralize production's powers and thus can redirect its energies. By yielding, the ethnographer does not sell out or end up co-opted, but rather the ethnographer engages with the business force to open up possibilities for change. What forms of change? Perhaps, it will result in greater balance among business, worker, customer, and environmental values. It has been foretold that the younger generations[2] are "less tolerant of one-sided profit" and will require new rules for business (Parrish Hanna, personal email communication, August 7, 2006).

The Song of Productive Representational Strategies

> *On inspecting any one of these Charts attentively, a sufficiently distinct impression will be made, to remain unimpaired for a considerable time, and the idea which does remain will be simple and complete, at once including the duration and the amount.* Thomas Hankins (1999:1) quoting William Playfield.

To yield, one must first understand the force to which you are yielding. In the business universe of production, the two main representational strategies that business decision-makers use to enable the production and distribution of services and products are (1) the chart and (2) the spreadsheet. These are strategies of both the abstraction and simplification of mostly numerical data to aid in business decision-making. Charts and spreadsheets abstract in the sense that they take concrete events, peoples, and objects and deal with them as numeric ideas of production and distribution, providing distance. They also simplify in the sense that make these events, peoples, and objects easier to understand and thus decision-making easier to do. The chart and the spreadsheet are indicators of economic performance, the primary data of business decision-making. But as Drucker (1992: 99) points out,

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[2] In marketing parlance, this specific group is referred to as generation Y, echo-boomers, and millennials. Peter Rose of Yankelovich, Inc. (2006) in a recent presentation to the United Way Community Leaders discussed how commerce follows social engagement for the younger generations.

"…economic performance is not the only responsibility of business anymore than educational performance is the only responsibility of a school."

In this context of abstraction and simplification and responsibilities beyond economic performance, ethnographers have engaged with industry. Originally, you served to correct the blind spots in abstract representation by providing the concrete, the grounded, and the "real." You address business's responsibility to the "…employees, the environment, customers…" that it touches (Drucker 1992: 99). Your role has been that of the storyteller and your tools have been those of seduction.

The Song of the Storyteller

The storyteller demands respect because only she can hold the different stories in one narrative, chart the connection and development between them. The storyteller promises to reveal the hidden meanings of the everyday; we see strange things, she explains what is going on. This ability shows that she herself is more than we can see. (Bhuttacharyya 1998: 10).

A professor once said to me that ethnographers are "merchants of exotic tales." The currency of ethnographic exchange has historically been narrative. In the world of Discovery Channel and the Internet, ethnographers are not the only storytellers now, but their role is still a powerful one. Stories have the power to open the mind to new possibilities for action. In 1001 Arabian Nights, Shaharazade tells the King 1001 stories of women to open the King's mind and change his actions. The women in her stories are clever, loyal, virtuous, witty, courageous, stubborn and beautiful. The exposure to many kinds of women displaces the image of women as treacherous that led the King to behead his new brides. The power of her storytelling also changes the King's actions. He listens to Shaharazade's stories for 1001 nights, thus sparing the lives of 1001 women including Shararazade herself. (Bhuttacharyya 1998: 34).

Stephen Denning (2006:1) tells business decision-makers "…that narrative [storytelling] is central to addressing many of today's key leadership challenges." The purpose of this storytelling is not to entertain, but rather to spark action among diverse groups of stakeholders. These actions include igniting organizational change, communications, capturing tacit knowledge, transferring knowledge, innovation, building community, and enhancing technology (Denning 2006). Ethnographers tell business decision-makers stories to result in these actions and more. You tell stories of employees and/or customers as clever, fickle, inventive in extending the use of products, making work-arounds of products, and sophisticated in their processes and tastes. You tell these stories to displace the images of customers rational choice decision makers. You tell stories of workers' value. You tell stories of possible futures. It is the play of seduction that reroutes the ideas about people from their primary course as passive consumers of goods and services that they need and desire. It is the play of seduction that breaks down the distinction between producers and consumers.

The Song of the Play of Seduction

> *Seduction's enchantment puts to an end to all libidinal economies, and every sexual or psychological contract, replacing them with a dizzying spiral of responses and counter-responses. It is never an investment but a risk; never a contract but a pact; never individual but duel; never psychological but ritual; never natural but artificial.* (Baudrillard 1990: 82-83)

Both Robert Greene (2001:xxiv) and Jean Baudrillard (1990:1) begin their examinations of seduction with an observation on how seduction starts a feminine power against male brute force. Greene (2001: ix-xx) describes the genesis of seduction in depth:

> *In the face of violence and brutality, these women [Bathsheba, Helen of Troy, I Shi, Cleopatra] made seduction a sophisticated art, the ultimate form of power and persuasion. They learned to work on the mind first, stimulating fantasies, keeping a man wanting more, creating patterns of hope and despair—the essence of seduction.*

The key to seduction is the human mind. It is in the human mind where all things are illusionary. As Daniel Gilbert describes in *Stumbling on Happiness* (2006), the mind is unreliable because it fills in the blanks incorrectly, chooses only the exciting parts, and ignores patterns of previous failure. The brain's pre-selection for excitement and ignoring of past failures finds itself in the selection of high tech products. In the HBR article "Defeating Feature Fatigue," Roland Rust, Debora Thompson, and Rebecca Hamilton (2006: 5) studied how consumers select models with shiny new features, but whose poor usability causes customer dissatisfaction. Even when embodied in objects as opposed to narrative, seduction is about working the mind. The play of seduction requires playing with the mind, which is capable of even seducing itself.

According to Baudrillard (1990: 46), the play of seduction is about the "reversibility and disaccumlation" of the "real" back into its illusionary forms. Victoria Grace explains how for Baudrillard, "Reversion is rather an annulment of pretences to establish and fix the truth, real, desire, power" (1990: 164). It is meaning deflected from its truth. The mental playfulness of seduction is both serious and important because it opens the possibility of all meaning, which is crucial in ethnography's engagement with Industry. Since the early days of Xerox and Bell Labs, ethnographers used the play of seduction as a strategy to address their concerns with the effects of the force of production on people. When you tell stories about workers whose knowledge is crucial to the bottom line or customers whose lives are complicated by technologies, you challenge the truth and inevitability of a layoff or the development of the equivalent of an electronic pet rock.

The force of production exists in duality with the play of seduction. It creates and codifies the "truth, reality, desire, and power" of objects and identities to ensure their accumulation or growth. Through productive force, the business organization transforms empty signs, such as a 10% drop in quarterly profits, into the truth of an economic decline, the reality of workforce redundancies, the desire for brand experiences, and the power to

shape national policy in the name of wealth accumulation for an organization's shareholders. Against the brute force of productivity, ethnographers have primarily challenged for example the reality of workforce redundancies and the desire for brand experiences through stories of workers and customers. Yet as ethnographers, you take the strategies of "the subordinate" and the "intermediary" who controls through persuasion and indirection, never directly challenges the productive brute. It is possible that this is no longer enough to extend business's greater responsibility beyond the economic performance?

The economic downturn in the high-tech sector in the early 2000s ushered in a focus, by business decision-makers, nearly solely on economic performance. At places like Sapient, ethnographers were forced to adapt to the new business environment or were laid off. And adapting to the new business environment required not just learning the modalities of business, but co-participation in productive force through the packaging of ethnographically-informed service offerings. It is not an accident that my position at Arc Worldwide was one of experience planner not experience modeler or researcher. Some ethnographers were resistant to these processes for moral or economic reasons and opted out. Yet, for those who remained, the reversibility of the play of seduction requires constant vigilance and creativity to keep meaning in annulment, thus in play.

But Baudrillard cannot guide you completely on this path. Richard Vine (1989:1) critiques what he considers the whole of Baudrillard's philosophy as a desire for absolute childhood, "…a craven exemption from thinking, responsibility, and physical effort." One could be tempted to levy this critique against ethnography in its seductive play, but I am not. What Vine assumes in his critique is a fixing of a negative sign of childhood. I argue that Baudrillard finds childhood as a way of engagement because there is no duality between nature/culture, work/play in children. This notion is featured in Taoist philosophy as well. Baudrillard (1990: 114) indicates his familiarity with Taoist ideas when he speaks about the "subtle art of the turnaround which appears in Sun Tseu's Art of War or in zen philosophy and the other oriental martial arts." The Taoist idea of Yin Yang serves as a better guide to helping ethnographers really engage with shifting business contexts and the representative forms that communicate its engagement.

The Song of Yin Yang

According to legend, early Taoist formulated this idea [Yin Yang] from looking at a hillside. Where the sun struck the southern side, they were called yang; where the hill was in the shadow they named Yin. There was no sharp line of demarcation between light and shadow…Neither could exists without the other; they defined each other…As each moment passed, the edges between light and darkness moved—a graphic display of yin and yang (Ming-Dao 1990: 189). See Figure 1.

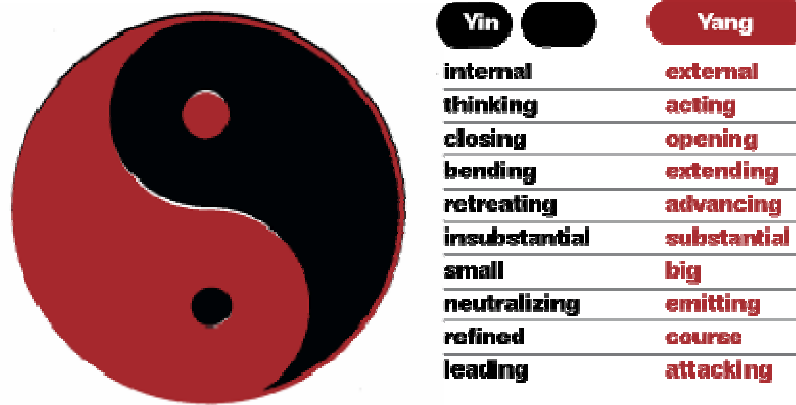| Yin	Yang
internal	external
thinking	acting
closing	opening
bending	extending
retreating	advancing
insubstantial	substantial
small	big
neutralizing	emitting
refined	course
leading	attacking

FIGURE 1 Yin Yang symbol from the Tao

Like the play of seduction, Taoist ideas of Yin Yang start with human mind. In Taoist teachings, the human mind has two minds, Xin (i.e emotional mind) and Yi (i.e. wisdom mind)[3]. Providing the passion and direction to formulate ideas, the two minds are responsible for all human creations, which first start in your imagination. (Yang 2003:10).

Yin Yang results from the action of the human mind. When the two minds turn to internal thinking, Yin results. Yin strategies relate to internal contemplative phenomenon and processes of closing, bending, retreating, etc. Yang results when the two minds turn to external action. Yang strategies relate to external active phenomenon and processes of opening, extending, advancing, etc. (Yang 2003: 19). Like the relationship between light and shadow, Yin Yang insists on the relativity of all things. Even Yin can sometimes be Yang and vice versa. (Ming-Dao 1990: 189). This closely relates to Baudrillard's idea of reversibility. Yin Yang is never in balance for that is stasis and thus stagnation, which is the opposite the Taoist "view of change that nothing is permanent" (Ming-Dao 1990: 191). This resonates with Baudrillard critique of the "fixity" of production. The alternation of Yin and Yang in cycles is another principle that is key[4].

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[3] In neurobiology and evolutionary biology, there exists the concept of two minds as well. According to psychiatrist Dr. David Servan-Schreiber (2006: 10) in *Instinct to Heal*, there are (1) the limbic structures "responsible for emotions and the instinctual control of behavior," and (2) the cortical "cognitive" brain that is "responsible for language and abstract thinking." Dr. Sevan-Schrieber's intervention in psychiatry, based on his exposure to Tibetan, Indian, and Chinese medicine, is to expand clinical treatments so that they address the emotional brain not just the cognitive brain.

[4] According to an email from Parrish Hanna of Arc Worldwide and Samsung, Ying Yang exists "…in different forms in all Asian countries and manifest themselves in the core attributes and operating policies of the largest Asian companies. Korean's enable *Cho GamSung*, while Japanese employ *Kansei*, each trying to achieve balance a deeper level of meaning in their products and services."

The concept of Yin Yang is a useful guide for the praxis of ethnography in Industry for two reasons:

1. Contemplatively, it releases you, the ethnographer, from the fear of cooptation by productive business forces. By extending yourself actively in externalizing productive processes, you make moot the need to prove ethnography's value to business, thus enabling you to redirect the energies of business.
2. Actively, it provides a means by which to map out strategies of engagement along a range of seductive (Yin) and productive (Yang) techniques. The skill at which you use these strategies will enable you to compete with business decision-makers, even other designers and engineers sometimes, in harnessing productive forces in order to reverse them into seduction.

Active Songs of Seduction

The Song of the 8 Trigrams Ethnographic Representation in Industry

The Taoist eight trigrams are the result of taking the Yin Yang into the three dimensions of harmonious existence (Heaven, Human, Earth). (Yang 2003: 5). I use the Taoist 8 trigrams to guide you (see Figure 2), the ethnographer, through the intent, approach, and techniques present in the 8 strategies of ethnographic representation with which I am intimate:

1. Informal conversations
2. Designed printed materials
3. Video
4. Electronic presentations
5. Personas and scenarios
6. Experience models and other diagrams
7. Opportunity matrices
8. Experience metrics

Yin strategies – Informal conversations, designed printed materials, video, and electronic presentations are the four main communication vehicles of ethnographic representation. As communication vehicles, they yield in various degrees to the forms communicated through them. With stronger Yin energy, their strategic intent supports internal contemplation. These forms of ethnographic representation are more commonly used in academic ethnography and reinforce the role of ethnographers as purely seductive storytellers.

Informal Conversation – The earliest form of ethnographic representation is explained through the trigram of Yin Yin Yin. It demonstrates the softest most seductive strategy for engaging business decision-makers. At the highest level, the goal of the informal conversation is Yin, to induce internal contemplation in the business decision-maker. Its approach is Yin, to yield or bend to the ideas of the conversant to learn his or her weaknesses. Its technique is to keep the ethnographer's story Yin, insubstantial and thus

malleable. You allow yourself to be seduced by the conversant, so that you seduce them in return.
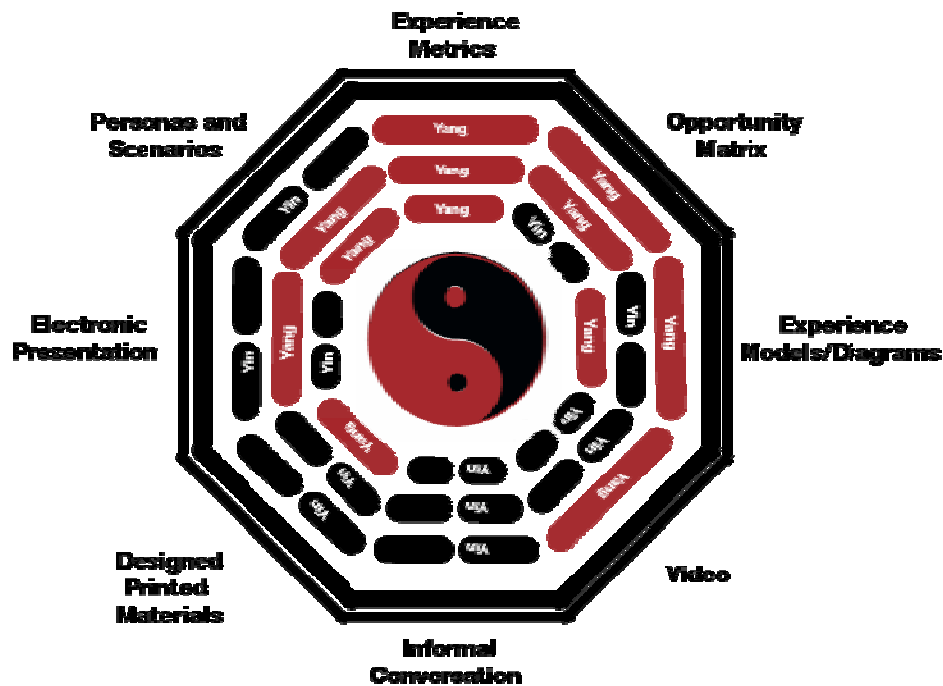

FIGURE 2 The eight trigrams of ethnographic representation

Designed printed materials – The earliest visual dimension of ethnographic representation varies according to its format and content. It is explained through the trigram of Yin Yin Yang. The intention of the designed printed material is Yin, to induce internal contemplation skillfully through visual communication. Because printed formats work best when communicating clear and simple ideas, the approach to their creation often yields to the key interests of the business decision-maker and is thus Yin. It differs in technique from the informational conversation because its paper format is Yang, more substantial and fixed.

Video – The introduction of moving sound and image is explained through the trigram of Yang Yin Yin. The intention of video is often more Yang, to affect more direct action on the part of the decision-maker. You strongly want to challenge their assumptions thus, you exploit the decision maker's weakness – a lack of a deep understanding of the employees or customers – by presenting to him or her simulated voices and images of employees or customers. Although video may seem to be Yang in terms of extending new ideas, its approach is more Yin because it neutralizes a decision-makers resistance with the storytelling

coming from the mediated experiences of people. Its technique remains Yin, insubstantial and thus malleable, through the potential editing of content in the vehicle.

Electronic presentations – Inclusive of PowerPoint and KeyNote presentations, they are explained through the trigram of Yin Yang Yin. The intention of the electronic presentation is Yin, but it seeks to induce contemplation within a group as opposed to an individual. Its approach is Yang because its linear format and story arc is often used it to extend or advance ideas, while allowing a relatively small opening for questions. Its technique is Yin because the rearrangement of slides allows the vehicle to remain malleable, thus insubstantial.

Yang strategies – Personas and scenarios, experience models and diagrams, opportunity matrices, and experience metrics all have stronger Yang (external) energy. These strategies are active forms resulting from ethnography's direct engagement with business. Although they are strategies for storytelling as well, they are direct in their participation with business decision-making through the adoption and adaptation of the two main productive representational forms—the chart and spreadsheet.

Personas and scenarios – They are explained through the trigram of Yin Yang Yang. The intentions of personas and scenarios are Yin; they induce contemplation in business decision-makers by reversing their ideas about who are their employees or customers. Their approach is Yang because you use scenarios to extend or advance ideas about the future, as opposed to yielding to current or past conditions. Their technique is Yang because their highly structured form is often substantial and fixed in time. It is their fixity that is often their weakness, although efforts to digitize and automatically update personas and scenarios will make them more fluid in the future.

Experience models and diagrams – They can be explained through the trigram of Yang Yin Yang. The experience model's intentions are Yang; it seeks to directly attack decision-maker's views of their workers or customers' experiences. Yet, its approach is Yin, neutralizing decision-maker's resistance by "naturalizing" the user's experience. Its technique is Yang in that it is substantial and fixed and derives its persuasive power from its fixity, although like personas efforts to digitize and automatically update them will make them more fluid.

Opportunity matrices – They can be explained through the trigram of Yang Yang Yin. Opportunity matrices are productive representation forms with ethnographic contributions to fill in the box. As such, their intentions are Yang, resulting in direct action by the decision-maker to follow one opportunity or another. Their approach is Yang, the direct advancing of new ideas. Their technique is Yin, for the forms of the opportunities are often electronically produced and thus insubstantial and very malleable in their content.

Experience metrics – The optimal production form is explained through the trigram of Yang Yang Yang. Whether in the format of feature/function requirements, innovation, and

brand value matrices, experience metrics[5] are often represented through cost/benefit spreadsheets with ethnographic stories contributing to the ranking of user and business benefit. Ethnographers may facilitate the ranking of technical and operational costs. Their intentions are Yang, resulting in direct action by the decision-maker to include or exclude features tied to business goals. Their strategy is Yang, the direct advancing of new ideas. Their technique is Yang, because the measurement equation is relatively fixed. In one white paper by Process Impact, the equation was "…priority = value %/ (cost % * cost weight + risk % * risk weight)" (Wiegers 1999).

An ethnographer's ability to effectively use each of these ethnographic representational strategies in various business contexts will determine its ability to use ethnography to fulfill its intention—how to balancing the responsibility of business to its economic performance with its responsibility to the employees, people, and environment it touches. Ethnographers must become Scholar Warriors.

Conclusion

The Song of The Scholar Warrior

> *Skill is the essence of the Scholar Warrior. Such a person strives to develop a wide variety of talents to a degree greater than even a specialist in a particular field. Poet and boxer. Doctor and swordsman. Musician and knight. The Scholar Warrior uses each part of his or her overall ability to keep the whole in balance, and to attain the equilibrium for following the Tao.* (Ming-Dao 1990: 10).

I conclude with a posing of what is a stake in theorizing about ethnographic praxis the way I have in my songs. Ethnography's contemporary engagement with business decision-making faces many challenges:

- It must effectively communicate its value to business, while undermining the assumption that it has to demonstrate its value to business-decision making.
- Ethnographers must overcome their fears of cooptation within the structure of business.
- The interdisciplinary jockeying for power among ethnographers, designers, engineers, and business managers must end.
- It must articulate an intention that engages with the mission of business.

Ethnography will be better able to meet these challenges if ethnographers understand themselves as Scholar Warriors. In other words, you must "master a broad spectrum of disciplines, to balance the two sides of everything" (Ming-Dao 1990: 18). By understanding the intention, approach, and technique of the representational strategies that

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[5] Experience metrics refers to the "experience economics" work found in articles and seminars by the Design Management Institute. I am most familiar with the work through the Decision Sciences and Database groups at Arc Worldwide and the writings and presentations of Dave Norton of Stone Mantle, www.gostonemantle.com.

you use to communicate who you are and what you do, you release yourselves from fear and panic in the business contexts in which you work. Then you can all focus on the ultimate intention, which is the cultivation of the understanding of "all the unknowns that haunt human existence" (Ming-Dao 1990:4).

Notes

I'd like to thank my intellectual interlocutors Mohammed Mohammed, my husband; Parrish Hanna of Arc Worldwide, Ric Grefé of AIGA, Lauralee Alben who has helped to clarify my intentions, and the Anthrodesign list serve. This paper came out of many conversations and Epic Emails with all of you. I'd like to thank my Tai Chi teacher Will Diaz, for guiding my path on the Tao. I like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and the EPIC organizers for their acceptance. None of the information presented represents the views of my former employers Sapient and Arc Worldwide, or current employer, University of Illinois at Chicago and City Design Center.

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