Abductive Ethnography of Practice in Highly Uncertain Conditions

By
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The highly contextual nature of ethnographic inquiry allows a researcher to develop and adjust data collection and analysis to specific social situations. This methodological flexibility also makes it possible to choose for analytic attention specific instances of human activity and experience that show potential to illuminate conceptual issues or alter our theoretical understandings. Theoretically interesting social activity can be identified using Peircean abduction. In the field, the researcher embraces serendipity and intuition. Data analysis begins neither with inductive nor deductive reasoning. By initially disassociating the data from their context, specific theoretical debates, and the experience of data collection in the field, the ethnographer is able to play with the data freely and let this process generate a surprising discovery. This discovery is then articulated through a dialog among insight, contextualized empirical evidence, and theoretical knowledge. Leaving open the possibilities of insight and discovery, abductive ethnography is a strategy of unforeclosed possibilities.

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Of the methodologies available to study the vicissitudes of human sociality, ethnography offers the greatest potential to grasp in empirical terms how social life is lived from moment to moment. Ongoing observations of how people go about their daily lives, detailed recordings of their conversations, focused dialog with particular individuals about specific details of their thought and feeling, combined with meticulous notations of the aesthetics of space—that is, the physical and sociocultural environment in relation to which these dynamics transpire—have the potential to capture daily living as it is actually happening in real

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time. Close observation enables the researcher to pay attention to how social life is emerging through time in a given context and notice the ways in which a multiplicity of factors bear on the outcome of that social practice. This inquiry can be complemented by printed materials and mass-mediated information of all kinds, including photographs, maps, videos, historical accounts, archival materials, newspapers, televised news, digitally transmitted communication, and more, all of which can help us to make sense of the complexities of the social dynamics we study.

When sociability is approached in this way, it becomes clear that ethnographic fieldwork is highly contextual. In fact, ethnographic methodology offers no specific procedures that can be learned in the classroom and no well-honed techniques that can be taught through textbooks and then readily applied in the field. Rather, to paraphrase the classic methodological manuals used in graduate courses, skilled ethnographers share their fieldwork experiences through "tools of the trade" and "tales of the field," which are meant to provide novices with some basic epistemological understandings and the necessary confidence to enter the field and begin collecting their own data (see Van Mannen 1988; Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). This methodological adaptability is reflected in not only the use of ethnography across numerous disciplines and fields but also in divergent understandings of what constitutes ethnography, as each discipline and field of specialization modifies the approach to address its own concerns and disciplinary expectations (see Denzin and Lincoln 1994). In this sense, ethnographers have the opportunity to learn, invent, develop, and adjust their method as they are collecting their data in a specific context.

The highly contextual nature of ethnographic inquiry also has theoretical potential. Ethnography is best suited to the study of multiplicity, complexity, contingency, ambiguity, and indeterminacy in ways of living. It allows a researcher to choose for analytic attention specific instances of human activity and experience that show potential to illuminate conceptual issues and to stumble upon particularities of social life that alter our theoretical understandings. Theoretically interesting social activity can be identified using Peircean abduction. Rather than following a predetermined set of research questions in the data collection process, abductive ethnography embraces serendipity and allows intuition to guide the fieldwork. Data analysis begins neither with inductive nor deductive reasoning. By temporarily disassociating the data from their context, specific theoretical debates, and the experience of data collection in the field, the ethnographer is able to play with the data freely and let this process lead to a surprising discovery and insight. This discovery is then conceptually articulated through the dialog among the insight, contextualized empirical evidence, and theoretical knowledge.

To be sure, as a sociologist in training I did not set out into the field in this way. Rather, I had come with a focused research design that called for a condensed period of fieldwork with primary reliance on semistructured interviews and specified in detail how many people I was to interview, what roles my interviewees were to represent, and what kinds of questions I was to ask them. The project

was designed to yield data that would bear on a number of theoretical issues in cultural sociology through analysis of the different meanings, representational practices, and organizational strategies used for preparation and performance of the millennial celebrations in Jerusalem in the year 2000. The millennial celebrations, however, turned out to be a nonevent. In hindsight, the disintegration of my carefully planned project opened for me the possibility of exploring first the empirical and then the theoretical potential of ethnography. Eventually I was able to articulate this exploration as the problem of the emergence of social order under conditions of uncertainty.[1] The challenge is how to articulate the contingencies through which social forms come to be configured through daily living and explicate how it is that some configurations of social life turn out to be relatively durable while others disintegrate or fade away. This has become a cornerstone for my conceptual and methodological agenda, tying together a wide variety of my empirical interests and igniting my theoretical and methodological imagination (Bajc 2006b, 2007b, 2011a, forthcoming; Bajc, Coleman, and Eade 2007).

The Christian Millennium in Jerusalem: A Nonevent

My millennium research project developed through my experiences in Jerusalem, first as a recipient of a visiting student scholarship at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1996–1997 and then during additional Hebrew language training the following summer. I found the city extremely enticing, cosmopolitan in the many different languages spoken, while also charmingly traditional, with people expressing their identities in their varied garb. During my explorations of the city, I discovered that Jerusalem was in the middle of efforts to organize, in close succession, three year-long global public events (Bajc 2012a). A brochure I picked up at a tourist information center announced that the year 1996 would be a celebration of "3000 years since King David established Jerusalem as the capital of his Kingdom." A tourism official explained to me during one of my visits to the municipality that 1998 would mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel. The Apostolic Letter by the late Pope John Paul II, published in a Franciscan magazine handed to me at one of their monasteries, proclaimed the year 2000 a Jubilee Year, "a religious event of the Church with a universal human significance."

   I focused my attention on the upcoming millennial celebrations. The pope invited his followers from all over the world to undertake a pilgrimage to Rome and the Holy Land and tourist brochures in Jerusalem listed a myriad of events that were to take place beginning in fall 1999 and throughout 2000. For some people I spoke with, the year 2000 meant the advent of the second coming of Christ and the end of days. Others looked forward to a nice New Year's Eve party, joining people around the world commemorating the end of the second millennium. I became curious about how a city with such religious, ethnic, and political diversity would promote these events, and the roles tourism and pilgrimage might play in them.

The millennial year was expected to start with large-scale Christmas and New Year's celebrations in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, followed by an increasing number of visitors throughout the year. When I arrived mid-December 1999, I hopped aboard the bus bringing people from Jerusalem to join the fabled Christmas Mass with the late Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat and his wife Suha in the Nativity Church in Bethlehem, just as I had done in 1996. Courtesy of the European Union, the road to Bethlehem was brightly lit, and the plaza in front of the Nativity Church newly paved with the white Jerusalem stone. Local newspapers ran stories on the Y2K scare about the imminent collapse of computer software and reported on raids, expulsion, and denial of entry to visitors believed to be associated with attempts to destroy the Muslim Sanctuary on the Temple Mount. In late December, I woke up to even more interesting news: All public celebrations were canceled in response to the ruling of the chief rabbinate of Jerusalem that all commercial establishments involved in the millennial celebrations would lose their kosher license.[2] The 31st of December was a Friday night, the Sabbath, which in the Jewish religious tradition is the day of rest. I did not make much of this news; after all, preparations for the millennial events had been going on for years.

Yet on that Friday evening, the city of Jerusalem was strangely quiet. Close to midnight on December 31, no more than fifty people, most of whom were journalists, were on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city as a man read out loud from the Bible. I heard a journalist next to me say to another, "Absolutely nothing going on here, let's go down to the Old City." I quickly asked if I could join them. The streets of the Old City were completely deserted. The journalists became frustrated and gave up. I continued searching, eventually leaving the walled Old City of Jerusalem and walking toward the city center. That part of Jerusalem, too, was frighteningly quiet. At last, I was able to find one bar that was so full that people spilled out onto the street. By then, it was too late to look for a taxi to take me five miles down the road to Bethlehem. As I found out the next day, Manger Square in front of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem did host several thousand people, and their countdown included the release of two thousand white doves.

This disappointing entrance into the millennial year in Jerusalem gave little indication that there would be any celebrations in the following months. During the first two weeks of January, my interviews with officials in the tourism industry generated little interesting data. "Well, things like that happen around here," a hotel manager told me, but he was not willing to elaborate. "Maybe it teaches us to be humble," said another, but offered no further reflection. Shifting my attention to tourists, I realized that while many may have been willing to share their experiences with me, they were reluctant to have their experience interrupted by my interview. "You cannot write a dissertation on something that didn't happen!" commented a faculty member at Hebrew University. I finally had to face the fact that the research project for which I had been preparing for years had fallen apart.

From Focused Qualitative Research Design to Intuitive Ethnography

I spent the rest of January and the better part of the following month buried in the two major daily newspapers published in English, the *Jerusalem Post* and *Ha'aretz*. It was as if what I were missing about ways of living in Jerusalem was hiding from me behind those lines somewhere on those pages. During this time of reflection, I made a decision to forget my dissertation proposal and start anew. I went back to the Old City of Jerusalem and began absorbing whatever I could during the day and typing my field notes during the evening. The merchants graciously offered me coffee with cardamom or black tea with mint while we conversed about the city. Eventually one of them respectfully offered me some advice: "Why are you asking all these questions? Don't you know that only Secret Service comes around asking questions?"[3] He then raised his right index finger to his right eye, pulling down slightly on the lower eye lid, "Look and you will see." Then he moved to his right ear, pulling it up front a bit, "'Listen and you will hear." Finally, he rested his finger on his lips, pointing up, and then recited, "Don't speak and you will know."

Sensing that this merchant had summed up the art of doing ethnography in Jerusalem, I followed his advice closely. In the political climate of Jerusalem where asking questions was perceived with suspicion, I learned patience and honed my ability to notice. In this wildly diverse, multilingual city, I needed to become sensitive to obvious and not-so-obvious cultural variations in the nuances of daily interaction, including body language, dress, movement, facial expressions, and intonation. No longer pursuing questions outlined in my research proposal, I followed my intuition, embraced serendipity, and allowed the social dynamics that transpired at whatever place I found myself to pull me in their own directions. My effort to grasp the complexity of social life in Jerusalem had some resemblance to multisited ethnography (Fisher 1999), yet my approach was intuitive and serendipitous with no specified research agenda.

This approach enabled me to discover miniature universes of a huge variety of social groups in Jerusalem. In mid-February, I was introduced to a Jewish-Israeli tour guide who took an interest in my research and offered to arrange for me to observe his tour group of Evangelical Protestants from Michigan. Before I was able to join, the guide needed the consent of his group, its spiritual leader, and the tour agency. When I first met the group in a five-star hotel, I was greeted with singing: "Oh, what a beautiful morning, oh, what a beautiful day. . . ." The minute we boarded the bus, the guide picked up the microphone and talked nonstop about politics, culture, religion, history, the Bible, the day's news, and life in Israel and Palestine until the moment the group exited at the next tourist site. The group's spiritual leader brought a group from his church every February because his people trusted him regardless of the political situation in the city. I followed the group to souvenir stands, diamond shops, mosques, synagogues, churches, archaeological sites, caves, and museums. Once they got used to having

me around, people became excited that I was interested in their experiences, and several sat next to me on the bus to share their stories. Organized tours were one of the few occasions where people saw my tape recorder as a welcome sign of my genuine interest in them and admired my notebook for its tiny and diligent handwriting.

That March, Pope John Paul II was coming to town, which I regarded as an opportunity to observe a global event. Details about his visit were not released until shortly before his arrival, and I soon discovered that participating in anything involving the pope was extremely difficult. While the public was deliberating symbolic and diplomatic significance of the pope's visit, I became tuned to the surveillance mechanisms put in place to control participation at these events and prevent any interruption of the meticulously planned itinerary (Bajc 2011b). The city was transformed into a sterile zone of safety as the security apparatuses replaced the daily routines of hundreds of thousands of people with a new social order in a completely controlled space. I had never imagined that the state could have the power to order and control social life to this extent (Bajc 2010).

Throughout the year, I followed a variety of other tour groups. An American group of senior citizens came on an educational tour organized by Elder Hostel, which is a secular establishment. Yet when their tour guide hurried through the crowded Nativity Church in Bethlehem because "there were too many people and it was just a cave with a star on the floor where people believe that Jesus was born," a number of people on the tour became so distressed that the tour agency made a separate bus available the next morning for anyone who wished to return to Bethlehem and spend as much time in the cave as they wanted. A Roman Catholic group from Croatia was organized by an energetic Franciscan monk who behaved more like an entrepreneur than a spiritual leader. An Armenian group from Canada led by an Orthodox priest included born-again Evangelicals who did not participate in group prayers and secular people who were only interested in culture and politics. A Lutheran group from the United States saw organized tours to Jerusalem as venues through which visitors could learn firsthand about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A huge group of Evangelical Protestants who came for the Feast of Tabernacles had an itinerary that resembled nothing I had seen before, with plenty of prayers in the desert and speeches by Israeli politicians but not a single visit to a church. I learned from these groups that each comes to Jerusalem to have its own desired experiences, which are, however, far removed from the daily life in the city. These particular experiences are possible when intrusions from the surroundings are minimized. For this reason, the most highly valued are those tour guides who know how to encircle their group in a kind of social bubble to shield it from the outside world (Bajc 2006a).

Muslim tours proved very difficult to locate, and Jewish groups seemed inaccessible. While I observed long lines of idling buses and people picnicking while waiting long hours to enter the West Bank from Jordan, once Muslim groups reached Jerusalem they effectively blended in with the locals and became invisible. I spent many days at the Western Wall observing Jewish groups but was not

invited to join any of them. I learned from the tour guides that while the Israeli and the Palestinian Ministries of Tourism each provided centralized and highly regulated training and license examinations for tour guiding, once the guides acquired their license they tended to specialize in what they called "Christian, Jewish, or Muslim tours." Each of these markets had its own distinct network of tourist agencies, tour guides, tourist services, and itineraries. While for most groups, the first encounter with Jerusalem was the Mount of Olives, which offered a panoramic view of the entire city below to which they would all descend, each followed its own distinct path to specific points in different parts of the city. Experiences on organized tours were carefully structured, although individuals' experiences varied widely. I began to see the arbitrariness of boundaries between the secular and the religious and distinctions between tourism and pilgrimage (Bajc 2012b). What organized groups seemed to have in common was the effort by all members of a group to work together so that each individual could have his/her desired experience. Ritual was central to this effort (Bajc 2007a). Tourism and pilgrimage traveled in different circles, yet they were interconnected so that to understand the workings of one circle, I needed to have an overall understanding of all others.

By befriending an Armenian bishop who attended my Hebrew classes, I was introduced to the Orthodox denominations. After being frequently seen walking with the bishop along the Christian Quarter Road into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, I was invited to the Patriarchates of other denominations, their convents, and their places of worship. I learned that the structure that houses the sites associated with the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Christ, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, is divided among multiple Christian traditions that competed with one another for the right to worship there. I stumbled upon the Orthodox Ritual of the Holy Fire when one of the clergy in that church casually asked me on that Orthodox Easter Friday afternoon, "Hey, do you want to see the holy fire?" I was observing how these religious groups with such different liturgical traditions and languages of prayer were able to practice their belief under the same roof when I suddenly found myself invited to the one ritual for which these Orthodox and Catholic traditions must put aside their cultural and theological differences to be able to perform together and in this church the ritual of the resurrection of Christ in the presence of thousands of pilgrims from around the world.

In this deeply divided city with durable boundaries, I was able to move among cultural spaces that are not customarily crossed, wearing a conservative long skirt, baggy pants, or fashionable tight jeans as the occasion demanded. By the end of the summer, I had attended Jewish services, bar and bat mitzvahs, and Shabbat dinners. I was invited to evenings of Arabic poetry reading and local Palestinian art exhibitions in galleries and cultural centers of Ramallah, to Muslim weddings in Haifa and post-Hajj reunions in the observant Muslim city of Um el-Fachem, to merchant trading in the West Bank city of Nablus, and to house parties in liberal Tel Aviv. Noticing that I crossed many social boundaries between quite

separate groups, one official said to me, "You sure do find your way around!" By then I was in direct contact with the Palestinian and the Israeli ministries and municipalities, religious establishments, and tour guiding schools. I was given private tours of a number of excavation sites and invited to study institutions dedicated to reconstruction of life during a particular historical period to convey the experience of that life to visitors.

The momentum that I was able to build by continuously moving between and within Christian, Jewish, and Muslim spaces was interrupted at the end of September by a furious response on the part of the Palestinians to the unwelcome visit of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, accompanied by a large military entourage, to the Islamic holy site on the Temple Mount. As what came to be called the Second Intifada (Palestinian Uprising) brought violence to the fore, I sat on the roof of an Old City monastery for a number of Fridays in a row, looking down on the entrance to the Muslim sanctuary, observing exchanges of stones thrown by young Palestinians and rubber bullets shot by the Israeli army. Within weeks, the West Bank became littered with checkpoints and roadblocks, and I observed the pathways that tour guides and bus drivers created in their effort to avoid or defy the barriers imposed by the Israeli military as they tried to lead their groups to the Palestinian city of Bethlehem.

As the carnage began dominating the news and the number of fatalities continued to rise, I was less and less able to cross these lines and eventually found myself circulating among only the tourism industry professionals and their hastily organized crisis management meetings. As tour groups began canceling trips to Jerusalem in late October, the Israeli Ministry of Tourism and Jerusalem's tourist agencies launched an international promotional campaign offering free trips to Jerusalem to potential tour leaders with the sole purpose of demonstrating that the places tourists visit were safe. But the violence continued, and by mid-January 2001 tourism had come to a halt. On my last visit to the Palestinian territories in early January, I saw the shelled, bombed, destroyed, and partially burned homes of Christian Palestinians in Bait Sachur and Bait Jala, the suburbs of Bethlehem. I returned to Philadelphia emotionally and physically exhausted to the point that, for over a year, I rejected any engagement not only with my data but also with news reports about the city I had left behind.

Abduction as Analytical Method

When I was finally ready to begin to engage with my data, I faced some 950 pages of typed notes; three small handwritten notebooks; more than one hundred tapes with focused interviews and recorded conversations; and three boxes of maps, press releases, tourism promotional literature, and newspaper clips of daily news and commentaries on tourism and religion. As I wondered how this huge mountain of data could ever be organized into a flowing narrative that would be theoretically relevant, I often thought of Jonathan Turner's reflections on this

endeavor. In the introduction to one of his explications of theoretical synthesis in sociology, Turner wrote, "I doubt if [the] process of mechanically raising the level of abstraction from empirical findings will produce interesting theory. A much more creative leap of insight is necessary, and so I would not suggest that theory building begin with a total immersion in the empirical facts. I suspect that, once buried in the facts, one rarely rises above them" (1991, 24). An analytical theorist, Turner was far removed from the problem of how to derive theory from ethnography, but his intuition seemed to me right on the mark. There is a tendency to get bogged down in the details of the data, which makes it difficult to situate it in relation to social theory.

Rather than taking a systematic approach to the immense multiplicity of living that I recorded in Jerusalem, my focus shifted between the different sources of empirical evidence and the various happenings I noted. What came into focus through this approach to data analysis was something other than social change in its conventional sociological sense. What jumped at me was the realization that uncertainty shaped every aspect of life in Jerusalem. Indeed, uncertainty was built into the conditions of living in the city. So I asked myself, what was this uncertainty? How could it be explicated through my data? What are its analytical and theoretical implications? How did I arrive to this insight in the first place? It was time for me to engage in some methodological and conceptual reflections.

One way ethnographers begin to work through the data with the intention to raise it to a theoretical level is outlined in "grounded theory" (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The general idea is to organize data according to recurring themes in the field notes. Themes can be derived from the disciplinary knowledge of the ethnographer or from the indigenous, cultural knowledge of the people studied. These categories can be coded and cataloged to uncover patterns, which can then be delineated as conceptual or causal relationships. Another way theoretically minded ethnographers begin to organize their data is by thinking about the ongoing theoretical debates in relation to the empirical issues they study. The literature review, a central part of a dissertation or grant proposal, helps the scholar identify lacunae and inconsistencies and formulate a set of research questions. For most analytical ethnographers, whether this process begins with theory or data, once the process is set to motion it actually becomes a close dialogue between the empirical evidence at hand and the available theoretical knowledge, a kind of "dialogical parallelization of theoretical and empirical inquiry" (Glaeser 2000, 12).

My insight about uncertainty, however, was not derived in this way. My data do not show that the word *uncertainty* or equivalents of this concept were part of everyday talk in Jerusalem, so uncertainty was not an indigenous cultural category. Social change, one of the central categories of sociological knowledge, was a recurring theme in my data, but it was very different from my insight about uncertainty. Social change refers to processes of alterations, shifts, and transformations in social order. The sense of uncertainty that jumped at me from my data had to do with the indeterminacy of social life, the sense that what feels like

routine daily living in Jerusalem is actually underlain by dynamic forces whose interaction often leads to unpredictable outcomes. Nor did I derive uncertainty from social theory because uncertainty is not a prominent concept in these theoretical debates. In my search for how to articulate this insight methodologically, I was directed to the ethnographic approach of the Manchester School (Evens and Handelman 2006). The anthropologist Max Gluckman and his students pursued "creative and rigorous guesswork as a logic that introduced new ideas" through ethnography. This way of approaching ethnographic fieldwork and subsequent data analysis resembled the philosophy of knowledge of Charles Saunders Peirce (Handelman 2006, 99). I was familiar with Peirce's semiotics and his contribution to theories of the self, but his concerns about the logic of inquiry were new to me. I looked through the 2005 special issue of *Semiotica* devoted to Peirce's thinking about this question to see if I could find connections with my own sense of the concept of uncertainty.

Peirce seems to have been most interested in the phenomenon of creativity. In social science research, deliberations about creativity are related to the question of what kind of inquiry can actually yield originality, which is how a new discovery could come about. Research methodologies are based on reasoning, a controlled, deliberate process through which we arrive at a conclusion from a set of premises. When the reasoning originates from theoretical knowledge, a process referred to as deduction, it is a form of inference that refers to logical implications so that the veracity of the conclusion of the process of reasoning is judged on the premises on which it is based. Alternatively, when ethnographers work from the data to build conceptual relationships, the reasoning originates from empirical evidence. This is a process of induction, a form of inference that begins with a relationship between some elements in an empirical phenomenon, articulates the relationship in a propositional form, and lifts that to a more general statement so that the new formulation transcends the original phenomenon for which it provides an explanation.

Peirce concluded that neither deductive nor inductive inference could possibly lead to invention, whether on purely rational terms or through lived experience. Deduction inference is judged on the basis of its own premises; inductive inference yields ever more general statements. In fact, Peirce realized that we do not think about the world we experience along either of these lines of reasoning because much of our knowing is based on emotion, on being sensitive to, rather than analytical about, the world around us. So how, then, is new knowledge generated? Peirce reasoned that there had to be a capacity in human beings to instinctively know things and then reason about them. We must be endowed with an instinct from which we are able to form new knowledge. Looking for ways to capture instinct and its reasoning in philosophical terms, Peirce articulated this process of knowing as abduction. This conclusion created a problem for Peirce because, as Sami Paavola (2005) explains, in philosophical terms, if abduction relies on instinct it cannot be a form of reasoning, but if it is a form of reasoning it cannot rely on instinct. How could a form of reasoning be grounded in instinct,

insight, or guessing? Could an ethnographer rely on such imaginative faculties and still reason according to the rules of social theory building?

The analytical process of abduction starts when we observe something surprising about a social activity or phenomenon that attracts our attention. A perceptual insight is therefore a precondition for abductive inference. Infinite possibilities can be imagined as an explanation of this discovery, so we use guessing to select the one that seems most plausible. Such an instinct becomes a hypothetical idea that is deliberately and consciously stated through abductive inference so that the relationship between guess and premises is a result of reasoning. By noticing such surprising things, we derive strong intimations about reality without being fully conscious of it. These intimations, however, are not simply pure guessing; they are based on tacit knowledge, clues, or strong intuition about what the data are communicating. Our instinctual way of thinking is adapted to the living environment and shaped by our sociological and tacit knowledge. Guessing, instinct, or intuition become a kind of a hypothesis in which we have good faith but needs to be subjected to further examination. This examination leads us back to the empirical evidence, and if necessary, we collect additional data by going back to the field and then work with these data to create a theoretical narrative.

Ethnography as a method of inquiry is itself based on the premise that the field-worker will discover a social world of others. Discovery, surprise, and creativity in the Peircean sense, it seems to me, are of a different kind. Building on Peircean abduction, Lorenzo Magnani (2005) suggests that the cognitive process of creative thinking is discovery through doing, by working with, rather than simply observing, the empirical objects. The implication for ethnography is that a flesh of insight will appear through playing with the data rather than the act of observation. This further implies that what is needed is a distance between the data collection, which is laden with experiences of the ethnographer, and the data, which may speak for themselves. My discovery of uncertainty came as I was immersed in the data from a distance, far away from my experience of the data collection. It emerged out of my approaching the data intuitively rather than systematically, by playing with the data, working with them rather than through them.

Some Considerations for Theorizing Abductively Using Ethnographic Data

I conclude this discussion by briefly outlining some of my considerations in theorizing abductively with ethnographic data. Inspiration for how to begin to grasp uncertainty theoretically came from complexity theory and its concern with processes that cannot be reduced to linear cause-effect relations (Eve, Horsfall, and Lee 1997; Hayles 1990; Urry 2003). I articulated uncertainty as particular kinds of conditions when there exists a potential for human and nonhuman elements to interact freely and align themselves to create relations with each other in such ways that they can lead to novel configurations of human sociality. That is, uncertain conditions are created during dynamic moments of social life when

social and nonsocial elements and their properties interact in nonlinear, active, and contingent ways, leading to unpredictable outcomes. With this in mind, I looked for instances in my data through which I could most clearly explicate dynamics of social life empirically and comprehend the potentialities created through such situations theoretically.

What stood out the most from my data was an event that forcefully expressed not only an instance of uncertain conditions but also the ability to control this uncertainty. The visit of Pope John Paul II demonstrated the power to control social interaction in such a way that potentialities that could lead to unpredictable outcomes could be minimized (Bajc 2011b). My prolonged engagement with these data generated an analytical insight to envision how public events as phenomena that are emergent in nature take form under conditions of uncertainty. With this theoretical and analytical focus, I selected three other events to compare social dynamics in different domains of complexity and to theorize how it is that social forms that emerge under uncertain conditions are sometimes more and other times less durable. For each situation, I organized the data into a detailed, moment-to-moment flow of activity, showing how the process emerged from one moment to the next. As the domain expands, the reconstruction of the process is achieved through a series of snippets of recorded moments with a larger amount of time passed between them. Data organized in this way allowed me to explicate moments of ordering of social interaction. Depending on the situation, this sometimes minimized uncertainty and other times channeled its outcomes.

Theoretical statements derived from theorizing abductively remain open-ended. This is particularly the case when the data explicate an emergent phenomenon such as a reoccurring public event. In this case, the data can be updated every time any interested ethnographer observes that event. The reconstruction of each event involves working with the data, and playing with how to reconstruct the event itself creates a potential for a discovery. As the case is updated, existing theoretical statements may be modified or perhaps even abandoned if new insights appear. New insights can be generated by not only the addition of new data but also simply by a fresh look at the existing data by another abductive ethnographer. So, much like the theoretical problem of uncertainty, the abductive analytical method requires that ethnographers be comfortable in their own uncertainty of outcome. It demands that they be open to new possibilities that a rereading of the data may generate and never fear the moment that a discovery may necessitate a major revision, or rethinking, or even abnegating of the theoretical argument previously made. As comforting as deductive or inductive forms of knowledge production may be to an ethnographer frustrated with what looks like an insurmountable pile of data and no leads to go by in making sense of it, Peirce would argue that such forms of reasoning foreclose the ongoing process of discovery, of revisualizing the snippets of social situations described in the data, and of questioning and rethinking that such discovery may generate. To leave the possibilities of discovery, insight, or surprise open, abductive ethnography is a strategy of uncertain conclusions, unforeclosed possibilities, open-ended outcomes, and nondefinitive statements.

Notes

1. The process is described in the doctoral dissertation on which this essay is based; see Bajc (2008).

2. See Tamar Hausman, "Rabbis Throw Cold Water on New Year's in Jerusalem," *Jerusalem Post*, 29 December 1999.

3. There is a wide range of secret service organizations operating in Israel and Palestine; see Zureik, Lyon, and Abu-Laban (2010).

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