
Editorial

Heather Höpfl*

University of Essex,
Wivenhoe Park,
Colchester, CO4 3SQ, UK
E-mail: hopfl@essex.ac.uk
*Corresponding author

Sanna Laulainen and Anneli Hujala

University of Eastern Finland,
P.O. Box 1627, FI-70211, Kuopio, Finland
E-mail: sanna.laulainen@uef.fi
E-mail: anneli.hujala@uef.fi

Figure 1 Two men in front of a diner on a snowy night, 1969: William Gedney



This special issue is concerned with the increasing interest in photographic and other visual approaches to ethnographic research. In particular, it examines what visual ethnographic methods contribute to an understanding of organisation/organisations. It is apparent, however, that despite this interest, visual methodologies and their application are still relatively scarce in contemporary management and organisational research

literature (Gallhofer and Haslam, 1996; Preston et al., 1996; Jeacle, 2008; Petersen and Oestergaard, 2003; Warren, 2002; Parker, 2006). Parker (2006) has put forward the view that “most accounting, business and management research remains almost exclusively focused on text, both in terms of evidential sources and research output format” and goes on to say that, “this preoccupation with the text, ignores a potentially valuable sources of information and insights available not only form contemporary images, but from historical images as well” [Parker, (2006), p.2]. Warren (2002) expressed the view that photographic representations enable the researcher to access actors’ sensory experiences. It is the aesthetic perceptions, intuitive and interior experiences that both drive and reflect human behaviour and activity in an organisation. Work by Sievers (2007) and Strati (1999) has also contributed to the development of a coherent body of research. Kostera (2007) stresses the importance of mindful observation, with the use of all the senses, in ethnographic research of organisations; a conscious attempt to experience the here and now. “Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled” [Berger, (1991), p.7]. Höpfl (2008) uses the myth of Medusa to show the danger of the gaze of the observer – but also the birth wisdom that comes with (observing) reflection. “The remedy against delusion lies in looking her full in the face. If organizations are to be more congenial places to work, they must give up their naïve obsession with heroism. Forget Perseus, embrace Medusa” [Höpfl, (2008), p.27].

This special issue draws on selected papers presented at the stream in EGOS 2012, hosted by Heather Höpfl, Monika Kostera and Ricky Yuk-Kwan Ng. Given the research interests of the stream proposers in ethnography, photography and aesthetics, there is a specific concern with the research relationship between observer and the observed. Dyer (2005, p.162) says, “from a photographer’s point of view, a window looking onto the street is a way of being of the world but not in it. You retreat inside but you can go on monitoring the street without inconvenience, the jostle, the crowdedness”. This detachment frequently characterises the relationship between researcher and researched and so, for us, poses a question about the ethnographic lens through which the ethnographer comes to view the subject. Dyer, draws on Gedney’s photographic work, an example of which is shown above, and comments on what he sees as a visual reciprocity between the loneliness of the photographer and the solitude “which can only be expressed in terms of other people” [Dyer, (2005), p.162]. In other words, he is saying that the *view from a window* style of photographic work is inherently melancholic. It is interesting to consider the extent to which this might also apply to the ethnographic relationship and to speculate on the epistemological issues which this raises.

In a similar vein, Szarkowski (1978) has made a crucial statement which is relevant here claiming that photographs are mirrors and windows. The two notions signify the metaphorical use of ‘mirror’ to reflect the subjectivity of the artist who made the photograph, and by opening up the *window*, in a phenomenological sense, in order to provide a better appreciation of the subject (Szarkowski, 1978). In 1978, Szarkowski curated the ‘Mirrors and Windows’ exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York which sought to draw attention to the way that journalistic photography had defined the terms of a fictitious intimacy with the world [of the subject]. The images in the show were divided into ‘mirrors’ – pictures that sought to describe the photographer’s

reflection of his/her own sensibility – and ‘windows’ – which were *realist* photographs which sought to expose the outside world. The significance of this lies in Szarkowski’s implicit definition of ‘outsider and insider’, ‘voyeurism to exhibitionism’, ‘out there, in here’ and these distinctions clearly have implications for the way in which different standpoints and perspectives are interpreted. These various issues have significant implications for research design.

Ethnography requires field participation and engagement, using observations, in-depth interviews, documentations by logs as well as other visual media such as photographs, films and sound recordings to observe social patterns (Kostera, 2007) so as “to collect and analyse data of a particular phenomenon with as little hypothesising as possible” [Montiel, (1985), p.49] (cited in Creswell, 2003). Moustakas (1994) (cited in Creswell, 2003) argues that this approach enables the researcher to understand the ‘lived experiences’ of a small number of subjects through extensive interaction and to come to understand patterns of meaning. Rose (2001, p.3) proposes the term ‘critical visual methodology’ to indicate “an approach that thinks about the visuals in terms of the cultural significance, social practices and power relations in which it is embedded; and that means thinking about the power relations that produce, are articulate through, and can be challenged by, ways of seeing and imaging”.

The papers in this special issue reflect on the ethnographic lens and consider its implications for the study of organisations. The papers present diverse contributions from a visual perspective and introduce new ways of designing ethnographic research.

In the first paper, Tuomo Peltonen prepares the ground for visual methods in ethnographic research in general. He presents alternative representations of organisational realities by emphasising the performative turn in ethnography and photography. He illustrates photography as a historical and current part of the ethnographic approach in a wider sense instead of as complementary data. He reflects on and extends the role of the pictures as the performances of a ‘perspective’ that reflects and informs his own experiences as a cosmopolitan member of the academy workforce in an interesting and enlightening way. In that sense his orientation has an autoethnographic tone. By re-reading the photos more critically he makes a valuable contribution to visualising artefacts and underlining an alternative way of appreciating the potential of photos.

The second paper presents thorough and enlightening considerations about what it means to view the world through an ethnographically informed lens. Robert McMurray draws attention to how photography and online films can be used as tools to excite the social imagination and engender unconventional and alternative ways of seeing the world. By equipping academic management students with smart phones he constructed an innovative learning space where participants, would-be managers representing the facebook generation, were encouraged to act as ‘organisational ethnographers’ of their own lives and to challenge their taken for granted assumptions, e.g., about routines of rationalisation. Utilising film and photography in ethnographic research affords a potential for creative and critical understanding, not least by creating a sense of fun and facilitating a playfulness of mind. Active imagination cultivating to ‘see anew’ could be utilised even more in research within the social sciences.

In the third paper, Anneli Hujala, Sanna Laulainen and Kaija Kokkonen report their experimental study on applying creative movement as a method in management research. The paper considers whether a method based on harnessing the whole corporeal body of a participant may create new and different kinds of knowledge compared to, for instance,

conventional interviews. In this special study design, the participants were invited to express and visualise their feelings and insights regarding managerial interaction through creative motion and ‘dance’. The study draws loosely on the phenomenology of body and emphasises the significance of embodied and aesthetic dimensions of management. The relationship between the researchers and ‘those researched’ is also called into question, the researchers themselves being active co-participants in the study. Regardless of the limited applicability of such an intensive method, the potential of using embodied methods as part of ethnography in order to understand the ‘lived experiences’ of research subjects may deserve further exploration in the future.

Elen Riot provides interesting insights into mimesis, ‘imitation in act’ by connecting it with the management control in the context of multinationals. Drawing on her ethnographic work in a French multinational, she sheds light on the nature and role of mimesis as part of social representations and actors’ behaviour as they interact and share knowledge with each other within the doctrine of control. Diverse modes of mimesis, including, e.g., PowerPoint presentations of controllers in yearly workshops or in training sessions for employees, serve as ways of engagement forming a common frame of experience for different actors of the organisation. This may result in organisational conformism through deliberate imitation of other actors, thus continuing and reproducing conventional ways of acting according to the prevailing organisational culture.

Ricky Yuk-kwan Ng and Heather Höpfl focus in their paper on how visual production aesthetics inspires and shapes people’s concepts of work and workplace reality. They utilise the division between professional and personal life, which also highlights the symbols and meaning of work in a critical way. They also use concepts from visual media, diaspora, exile and *mise-en-scène*, to illustrate a ‘real’ workspace as symbolic representations. In this comprehensive representation of photo-ethnography they demonstrate and interpret the paradoxical nature of personalisation of workplace.

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