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A Visual Turn for Organizational Ethnography:

Embodying the Subject in Video-based Research

Abstract

For organizational ethnography we argue that traditional philosophies of onto-epistemological realism be supplanted by interpretive and reflexive thinking to provide fresh theoretical assumptions and new methodological proposals for film- and video-based research. The argument is developed in three phases: First, to establish *analytical context*, we explore the historical evolution of the ethnographic organizational documentary and discuss habitual problems – methodological, philosophical and technical – filmmakers have faced when claiming qualities of directness and objectivity in their work; that is, through the style of 'film-truth'. Second, to advance *new conceptual logic* for video-based organizational research, we supplant the objectivist and realist philosophy underpinning traditional documentary filmmaking with sociologically interpretive and reflexive arguments for undertaking ethnography in organizations, a subjective process which importantly yields greater understanding of affect and embodiment. Finally, to define *new methodological opportunities*, these interpretive and reflexive arguments are marshalled to underpin a strategy of participatory thinking in video-based organizational ethnography – a 'withness' approach facilitating a greater sense of affect and embodiment as well as polyvocal interpretation of visual data; a practice which sees filmmakers, social theorists, participants, and viewers alike united in analytical space.

Keywords

Documentary, embodiment, ethnography, filmmaking, organization studies, participatory, realism, video

Introduction

'Ethnographic film is too serious a thing to be left to filmmakers' (Ruby, 1998, p. 6)

This paper concerns relations between theory and practice in visual socio-cultural research. Given the increasing relevance of ethnography and visual research in the field of organization studies, the question asked is 'how should we (re)present data on organization in video-based ethnographic investigations'? To this end, we discuss three elements central to documenting the life-world of the organization visually – ethnographic filmmaking, social theory, and participant interaction.

When assessing organizational issues we argue that approaches and techniques of ethnographic filmmaking have traditionally offered researchers little more than mindless empiricism, or facts without theory. In contrast, we suggest that while, historically, ethnographic filmmaking reflects standard realist ontology – and signally mechanistic allegories of the body – contemporary forms of interpretive, reflexive and relationist analysis comprise a more varied palette for understanding organization visually. Indeed for explaining such issues we feel tensions arise when contrasting advances in social theory with the traditions and practices of film-based ethnography.

Our suggestion therefore is that ethnographic organizational research should take a *visual turn* [1]. This sees a valuable association established between interpretive/post-structural theory and documentary filmmaking practice in organizational ethnography emphasising affect, embodiment and polyvocality. We seek to bring together the expertise of the filmmaker and the organization theorist and unite them with participants and viewers in the same or very similar analytical space. Such inquiry promotes new assumptions, logic and method for conceptualising participatory video-based organizational ethnography.

The argument is realised in three parts. First, we establish context by analysing the history of ethnographic filmmaking on work and organization. After discussing developments in method, style and technique, we examine conceptual and philosophical – mainly onto-epistemological – principles relating to how documentary filmmakers have traditionally sought to present reality, and especially bodily reality. Second, we discuss the relationship between ethnographic filmmaking and modern social theory as the onto-epistemological focus shifts from 'truth' philosophies of realism to interpretative assumptions of idealism. We argue that recent social theory offers agendas far richer

than realism for the modern filmmaker to consider, especially when exploring affect and embodiment in video-based accounts. And third, we join these historical and conceptual arguments to advance visual inquiry infused with social theory, a project which takes reference to 'participatory' (Milne, Mitchell and de Lange, 2012) and 'withness' (Shotter, 2006, 2011) thinking on research methodology. Reflecting on possibilities for more affective, embodied and above all 'critical' documentary, we argue ultimately for achieving this within a polyvocal approach to video-based organizational research.

Analytical Context – In Search of Reality

> '*The important filmmakers of the future will be amateurs*' (Attributed to Robert Flaherty, c.1925, by Jean Rouch, 1992)

The main audience for our project is organization theorists/researchers and the objective to provide an agenda for interpretive, reflexive and participatory inquiry in video-based organizational ethnography. The questions we address are ones concerning the advantages that video-based research can offer organization studies; specifically, approaches informed by sociologically subjective concepts. Our goal is to strengthen the conceptual base for undertaking video-based organizational ethnography through a 'turn' to alternative forms of theory and method. To establish a *context* of this analysis, we initially discuss the history of documentary filmmaking as it relates to ethnographic studies of work and organization, a history reflecting a predominantly passive onto-epistemological standpoint. In tracing this history, we explore relationships between image, and reality, and focally how notions of organization have been portrayed under the realist banner of 'film-truth'.

Contextualizing film-truth

Documenting the nature of work and organization through films claiming to offer realistic insights is an issue much discussed by commentators over the decades. Writing varies from studies of the evolution of documentary styles (Eaton, 1979; Issari & Paul, 1979; Nelmes, 2012; Winston, 1995), through work with a conceptual or philosophical emphasis (Bruzzi, 2006; Carel & Tuck, 2011; Carroll & Choi, 2006; Livingston & Plantinga, 2009), to discussions of research and empirical

possibilities (Bell & Davidson, 2013; Emmison & Smith, 2000; Heath, Hindmarsh & Luff, 2010; Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary & van Leeuwen, 2013; Milne, Mitchell and de Lange, 2012).

In terms of the evolution of films investigating the 'truth' of organizational experience, much of the literature has considered ways in which workplaces and other organizations are depicted in relatively small-scale and low-budget documentaries (Aitken, 1998; Barnouw, 1975; Barsam, 1992; Rotha, 1973). Such writing discusses productions whose focus is frequently the lives of agricultural and industrial workers, and signally their occupational skills, social relations and cultural experiences (Banks & Ruby, 2013; Cousins & Macdonald, 2006; Stead, 1998). Customarily, the filmic subject is the physical *body* of workers, as used to emphasise heroism in organized labour, the aesthetics of physical toil, or intimate experience of conventions, customs and rites (Aitken, 1990; Corner, 2005; Durington & Ruby, 2011; Winston, 1995).

The style of ethnographic documentary in which such representations have characteristically been portrayed is that commonly referred to as 'film-truth' (or cinéma vérité; kino-pravda; and relatedly direct cinema; living camera; realistic cinema). The history of ethnographic film-truth has seen the evolution of techniques dedicated to producing evermore direct and unmediated images of social performance (Cousins & Macdonald, 2006; Issari & Paul, 1979). Philosophically, the established concerns of this genre are the effects of artefact and mediation in productions which claim to offer straightforward reflections of everyday reality; in other words, issues which confront the filmmaker who is attempting to become, methodologically, a 'fly-on-the-wall'. Achieving such relatively unmediated access to reality thus lies at the heart of both technological developments and stylistic movements (Barsam, 1992; Durington & Ruby, 2011; Rotha, 1973). For a century and more, ethnographic filmmakers have reproved the aesthetic in which the art of the commercial film is based, with dramatic or stylistic elements of such productions being rejected as a "hindrance to the portrayal of the vital truth" (Armes, 1966, p. 125).

Debate has also concerned the objectives of ethnographic documentary in the film-truth tradition. Writers have described a plethora of styles emerging under this heading, many seemingly marginally connected to the goal of realising low reactivity images. During a popular decade for the genre, the 1960s, writers argued that film-truth had become applied so freely that many offerings had

'absolutely nothing in common except celluloid' (Lipscombe, 1964, p. 62; see also Nichols, 2010). Other commentators suggested film-truth was 'the biggest hoax of the century' and that 'nothing is more fabricated, more prepared, more licked into shape' (Charles Fox, quoted in Issari & Paul, 1979, p. 12). Such disparity has made film-truth one of the most debated styles in filmmaking and film studies (Bruzzi, 2006; Christie, 2007; Nelmes, 2012). Indeed, despite the continuing demand for organizational (especially corporate) documentaries – for example, *Inside Job*, *Roger and Me*, *The Smartest Guys in the Room* or the largest grossing documentary, *Fahrenheit 9/11* – visual anthropologists have often referred to the 'myth of transparency' (Bell & Davison, 2013, p. 2) or even to 'death of the ethnographic film' (Ruby 1998, p. 1) when summarizing sociological critique about the status of the genre.

History, philosophy and method

We can trace the origins of organizational ethnographic documentary to Dziga Vertov's work on the 'kino-eye' as early as 1919, which advocated a 'social realist' approach to filming everyday social and organizational events (Cousins & Macdonald, 2006). Vertov's concept of *kino-pravda* required the non-participation of the filmmaker as a fundamental condition of attaining ethnographic authenticity. The camera was assumed to be an instrument of scientific study through which human vision could be extended, similar to the microscope and x-ray. Instead of using sets, actors and scripts, workers would play workers and peasants would play peasants.

It was more than 40 years later, however, that the genre became widely adopted. Interest was stimulated by the kind of *social science meets ethnographic film* relationship we advocate in this paper. The visual project in question, *Chronique d'un été* (Chronicle of a Summer, 1961), was an experimental documentary by filmmaker Jean Rouch and sociologist Edgar Morin in which passers-by were asked just one question: 'are you happy'? In wake of *Chronique*, a large number of categories and concepts emerged to define ethnographic filmmaking in the film-truth – or for Rouch/Morin, *cinéma vérité* – style, these varying according to the filmmaker's interpretation of philosophical principles and practical objectives. Among the many styles associated with film-truth documentary around this time were the 'realistic cinema' approach of Bill Jersey; the 'living camera'

style of Richard Leacock; the 'direct cinema' method of Donn Pennebaker and the Maysles Brothers; and the 'personal documentary' mode of Norman Swallow (Winston, 1995) [2].

Nevertheless, despite such a range of classifications and conceptions, as Ward (2005, p. 10) argues 'notions of objectivity and transparency resonate through the history of documentary'. Similarly Bruzzi (2006, p. 120) suggests that 'observational documentary has not been rendered obsolete by the advent of more interactive and reflexive modes of non-fiction television and film'. Accepting the implicitly *objectivist* assumptions of social transparency, in its purist sense the film-truth documentary filmmaker has attempted to avoid judgment, so that the apparently 'authentic' experience of a situation can be revealed. Technical proficiency is deemed less important than accessing the genuine sense of a setting. The filmmaker works classically without predetermined notions of plot and avoids imposing structure, for the customary resources of the commercial film – scripts, actors, stages, lighting, props, narration, etc. – are deemed anathema and somewhat corrupting of 'reality'. The task is merely to follow those involved and capture their experiences This is the style that spawned much 'reality TV', with Fetveit (1999) for example tracing the lineage back though *living-camera* and *cinéma vérité* all the way back to *kino pravda*. If work for example by Charles Ferguson, Alex Gibney and Michael Moore is included, far from film-truth documentary being a faded genre, recently we have witnessed its "renewed popularity" and how it has become a 'global commodity' (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 1), notably through examining organization-related issues such as corporate failure, systems collapse, business scandals, profiteering and cost-cutting in health care.

Technological evolution

Importantly, in seeking to improve audience experience of ethnographic documentary, filmmakers have taken advantage of progressive technological innovations. Notable here has been the availability of ever smaller and lighter equipment capable of recording longer sequences, with better-quality sound, and in more intimate locations. Historically these developments have reflected movements from static to mobile to personal equipment and its use from the domain of professionals to that of amateurs. In an era where digital equipment is now widely available, technological developments have increasingly presented opportunities for greater reflexivity on the part of the filmmaker as video

becomes more 'personal' (Ruby, 2000, 2005). Three brief examples from the history of documentary make the point.

Kino-eye. In suggesting filmmaking purge itself of 'everything that has not been taken from life' (Sadoul (1940, p. 172), Dziga Vertov's work represents the first significant attempt at ethnographic documentary. Influenced by the social realism of early Russian filmmaking – and also arguably by the time and motion studies of Fredrick Taylor and Frank Gilbreth's 'Scientific Management' (see Beller, 2006; Cockburn, 2015) – Vertov initially argued that a fundamental criterion for attaining ethnographic veracity was the abstention of the filmmaker from any creative process, as instead he proposed a philosophy of cinematic realism in which the camera operated scientifically as a 'cine-eye' (Nichols, 2010). Given the technology available at the time however Vertov's proposals were exaggerated in suggesting such a style could be used for anything more than recording brief film sequences. To obtain '*kino-pravda'* (film-truth) images with large static equipment his early work sees very short scenes recorded, frequently from hidden locations, or later with the use of telephoto lenses to show scenes ordinarily unavailable to human perception (as, for example, from the top of a building or underneath a moving train in *Man with a Movie Camera*, 1929) (see Feldman, 1977; Lawton, 1978; Latteier, 2002).

Living-camera. Many of the technological problems faced by Vertov seemed resolved decades later in what is considered a breakthrough in ethnographic documentary – Drew Associates' *Primary* (1960). This black and white film in the 'living camera' style saw the rationalism of film-truth writ large. With support from *Time-Life* to develop light and mobile 16mm equipment, Robert Drew was contracted to record the 1960 Wisconsin Primary, and specifically to track John F. Kennedy's campaign. With synchronized sound and vision, the filmmakers could now 'walk in and out of buildings, film in a taxi or limousine [and] get sound and pictures as events occurred' (Leacock, 1992) and in so doing, the body is shown as naturally observed – as presenting its own truth (Nichols, 1991). The ethnographic story could now metaphorically 'tell itself', as the filmmakers intended to offer no narrative other than the series of events leading to Kennedy's victory. Instead the philosophy of *Primary* was to present viewers with evidence they could 'interpret themselves' – the film would depict but not judge (Cousins & Macdonald, 2006).

Personal video. Ethnographic filmmaking saw another paradigm shift with the advent of video camera technology. This emerged in the 1980s with 8mm 'camcorders', which served to synchronise sound and vision and technically unite them in a single apparatus. This made location shooting a one rather than two person task, and also saw high-quality filmmaking technology become widely available. The earliest devices were tape-based, but from the turn of the 21st century digital recording saw tape replaced by storage media. Reflecting Robert Flaherty's (1925) prophecy that 'the important filmmakers of the future will be amateurs', commentators suggest this technology yielded the type of images the pioneers of film-truth always sought – direct accounts that take us closer to the aspiration of wielding the 'camera pen'; where evidence is recorded as directly on film as it is written on paper (see Murthy, 2008; Tabachnick, 2011). Recently digital video-making facilities in cell phones have made this notion even more prescient, through facilitating concealed recording and the express creation, sharing and distribution of moving images free from control over broadcasting content by studio companies (for e.g. see *Tehran Without Permission*, 2009, directed by Sepideh Farsi).

New Conceptual Logic – A Turn to Subjectivity and Reflexivity

> *'There are two ways to conceive of the cinema of the Real: the first is to pretend that you can present reality to be seen; the second is to pose the problem of reality'* (Morin, 1980, p. 1)

For making sense for example of organizational phenomena, film anthropologists have suggested that customarily 'the ethnographic film is undertheorized and underanalysed' (Ruby, 1998, p. 1). Indeed Bruzzi (2006, p. 2) makes a strong case that 'theoretical writing on documentary has … not kept pace with developments in critical and cultural theory'. To tackle this problem for organization studies we begin by placing the implicit 'truth' assumptions of realist ethnographic documentary under critical sociological scrutiny. In seeking to theorize film-based ethnography for an organization studies audience, we ask whether it can ever represent a *genuine* manifestation of events. In other words, can ethnographic documentary ever offer an objective lens on social, cultural and institutional issues when editorial decisions involve concerns about the organizational world and how it is should be represented? Having therefore discussed one element of the above quotation by Edgar Morin –

attempts by ethnographic documentary to present a 'reality to be seen' – we now consider the other; how organizational ethnographic filmmakers can conceptualise 'the problem of reality'.

Representation and ideology

While we have noted the Cartesian onto-epistemological assumptions underpinning many early documentary philosophies – that notions of social reality reflect an independent sense of being – current sociological thinking suggests such arguments are frequently as 'illusory' (Bruzzi, 2006) or 'imaginary' (Nichols, 2010) as those underpinning mainstream forms of filmmaking (Pink, 2013). The question this raises for organizational research, therefore, is how to present 'realistic' issues of work, occupations and institutions in video-based ethnographic form.

Contemporary film theory suggests that as documentaries are inevitably subject to a range of editing and other post-production processes (for e.g. see Nelmes, 2012), their offerings inevitably reflect the normative components of character, story and setting displayed in other visual genres (Durington & Ruby, 2011). The argument goes that audiences for ethnographic documentary are typically presented with the kind of analytic structure they would receive in mainstream film entertainment (Banks, 2001). This is based on a simple habitual process in which defined predicaments generate dramatic tensions that are inevitably resolved in conclusion. In other words, in being so structured the organizational ethnographic film makes reference to reality that is always imbued with significations (Nichols, 2010).

Other forms of modern sociological criticism highlight the role of *ideology* in organizational ethnographic documentary. Arguments often relate to charges of the 'constructed' nature of film-truth outputs. Thus the claim of early documentarists that their films were contracted because they offered privileged access to 'reality' has become considered by many to be an ideological effect (Bruzzi, 2006; Nichols, 2010). Instead, the suggestion from sociology – that ethnographic documentary typically offers *assembled* forms of evidence – serves to destabilize notions that film-truth somehow offers a superior social ethic (Heath, Hindmarsh & Luff, 2010). In this view, the landmark films of Dziga Vertov, Robert Flaherty, and Robert Drew for example are charged with

offering access to *a* world rather than *the* world – they *represent* rather than *reflect* reality (Nichols, 1991, 2010).

Contemporary social theory suggests therefore that the truth claims of ethnographic documentary correspond not so much to what we discern realistically about the world, but ways in which the world can be interpreted via systems of elucidation and justification (Bruzzi, 2006; Durington & Ruby, 2011; Nelmes, 2012). It is argued that the worlds of workers and managers, for example, are brought to us through representational agencies (Pink, 2009, 2013). The organizational world is accessed ethnographically via media which serve to structure, dramatize and reconstruct everyday actions. As the ethnographic narrative takes form we are transported from fact to construct through the medium of signification. Rather than a 'mindless' theory-neutral correspondence between the empirical and perceptual – the 'myth of transparency' (Barthes, 1977) – filmic evidence becomes shaped by arguments that rely on tactics and conventions for their execution (Pink, 2013). The ontological realism the early ethnographic documentary filmmakers sought seems increasingly outmoded in situations where reality is shaped by authorial judgments on what does or does not justify being observed.

Embodiment and affect: Beyond the passive body

We are saying therefore that if we wish to explore possibilities for a more reflexive and contemplative perspective on visual ethnographic accounts of organization then contemporary social theory offers a way forward. Specifically we argue that sociological thinking from anti-structuralist or post-structuralist (Hassard & Wolfram Cox, 2013) perspectives offers the means to theorize important new insights for ethnographic documentary.

In constructing this argument we highlight two issues in particular that have aroused interest among sociologists in recent years – *embodiment* (Farnell, 2013; Hindmarsh & Pilnick, 2007; Wolkowitz, 2006) and *affect* (Brennan, 2004; Clough & Halley, 2007; Clough, 2008; Protevi, 2009; Thrift, 2007) – and which serve to promote a greater sense of subjectivity in conceptualising the practices and products of organizational ethnographic documentary. These issues have been of

increasing concern to those wishing to understand ethnographic experience of work and organization (Dale, 2001; Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012). Drawing on interpretive and discursive thinking, we highlight the importance of affect and embodiment for modern video-based organizational ethnography and how these issues can be conceptualised, for example, dramaturgically, phenomenologically, semiotically and narratively (Waskul & Vaninni, 2006). We discuss how such concepts can provide the basis for a more reflexive understanding of video-based ethnography; as for example in work on video-shadowing by the Montreal School (Cooren, 2015a, 2015b; Meunier, & Vásquez, 2008; Vásquez, 2013), an approach which draws inspiration from relationist analysis in post-structural theory (Goodwin. 2000; Heath, 1997; Heath & Luff, 2013; Mondada, 2003, 2006).

In post-structural theorising, for example, there has been much interest in work that examines the relationship between 'body and organization' (Hassard, Holliday & Willmott, 2000; Lennie, 2000; Turner, 2008) and seeks to place embodiment at the centre of the analytical stage (Goodwin, 2000; Küpers, 2013; Styhre, 2004). Organization theorists have argued that mainstream analysis has tended to 'disembody the subject' (Brewis & Sinclair, 2000), or else more marginalize the body as a medium of analysis (Dale, 2005; Dale & Burrell, 2000; Ogden & Wakeman, 2013). Attempts have been made to retrieve the body from the position of being a passive object of scientific inquiry to emphasise an affective or subjective body (Benthall & Polhemus, 1975; Blacking, 1977; Csordas, 1994), as well as stressing consideration of the multifarious character of bodily experience (Hindermarsh & Pilnick, 2007; Hockey, 2009; Riach & Warren, 2014).

We have described however that the tradition of realist ethnographic documentary filmmaking has emphasised the essentially passive presence of the body, taking little account of its often 'contested' (Holliday & Hassard, 2001) nature. This has led those interested in using film and video to communicate social and cultural research to 'look outside the conventions of ethnographic and documentary film for models to discover a form appropriate for their purposes' (Ruby, 1998, p. 1). The incarnation of characters in film-truth organizational documentary is disparaged in that it often reflects, or even requires, a bland, clinical and routine sense of physical display and social encounter: metaphorically to 'reach out yet not touch someone' (Nichols, 1991, p. 233; also see Pink, 2009). An assumption underpinning such work is that the bodies of workers or managers, for instance,

should be presented in a passive, taken-for-granted manner; as expressively commonplace, or even 'flat' (Aitken, 1998).

In terms of body images in such productions, Harry Watt's celebrated 1936 GPO Film Unit production *Night Mail* – a film concerning the Royal Mail delivery train service between London and Scotland – provides a ready example of a visually passive and essentially disembodied organizational documentary. The stilted images of workers and supervisors, augmented by the 'received pronunciation' voiceover narration, suggest a sense of detachment, aloofness, and impassivity. While at the time Watt and colleagues experimented innovatively with sound, visual style and editing (Winston, 1995), the film largely portrays workers as mere physical bodies; their agency as mere mechanical activity (see Figure 1). In *Night Mail*, which is one of the best known film-truth documentaries, the postal service is constructed as a formal, functional and prescribed chain of operations through which the collecting and delivering of mail is accomplished routinely and unproblematically 24 hours a day. By visually signifying employees' physicality as a constant and integral component of the mechanics of the Royal Mail, the body is 'present and yet absent' (Waskul & Vaninni, 2006). Images of a secure body symbolize the immutable and invulnerable qualities of the state's mail service together with the passivity of the pre-World War 2 British working class. Consequently, the representation of the mechanistic body as fixed and stable serves to 'flatten' (Aitken, 1998) any sense of contradiction, ambiguity or difference, thus obscuring the multifarious relationships between the body and embodiment in the sense of a person's affective experiencing, or living *through* the body (Dale, 2005).

Figure 1. Body images from Night Mail (1936).

Notions of body and embodiment have of course been conceptualised in multiple ways by different disciplines. Forms of medical knowledge for example have constructed the body primarily as a physical and biological object. In the social sciences, on the other hand, embodiment is conceptualised in terms of *affective* aspects of human subjectivity – my or your body as I or you experience it. The argument is that individuals experience their body as a capacity for doing – a way of living through the acculturated body. This is a process through which the body, as physical *object*, is experienced, produced, sustained and transformed as affective *subject* (Riach & Warren, 2014). As Waskul and van der Riet (2002, p. 488) suggest, a person 'does not "inhabit" a static object body' but is 'subjectively embodied in a fluid, emergent and negotiated process of being'. In this sense, the body, the self, and our social interactions are experienced in a manner whereby 'distinctions between them are not only permeable and shifting but also actively manipulated and configured' (Waskul and van der Riet, 2002, p. 488). Hence the body and embodiment emerge from each other: it is through the affective and emotional body that we perform, express and present *subjectivity* to others in terms of 'meanings and effects' (Meyer et al, 2013, p.522). Yet through the same activities others also judge our body as *object*, by means of appearance and performance. The body is thus both subject *and* object, or as Waskul and Vaninni (2006, p. 2) argue, the 'affective body' and 'experiences of embodiment' are 'layered, nuanced, complex, and multifaceted' at the level of 'human subjective experience, interaction, social organization, institutional arrangements, cultural processes, society, and history'.

While these arguments are taken from contemporary social theory, in film studies writers have started to express similar sentiments (Bell & Davison, 2013). Film theorists have called, in particular, for filmmaking styles that produce subjects who are 'multiple', 'split' and 'layered' (Friedberg, 2006), or else for 'fluid' (Marchessault & Lord, 2007) productions that analyse organizational contradictions and paradoxes through enlightened and enlightening ethnographic documentary (Pink, 2013). Thus modern ethnographic films that seek to analyse work and occupations, institutions and organizations must call attention, necessarily, to representing the body and embodiment in multiple ways (Bruzzi, 2006; Pink, 2009). Signally they must stress the proactive over the passive; the processual over the permanent (Carel & Tuck, 2011). Our argument therefore is

that social theory which highlights qualities of human affect and the cultural production of embodiment can offer insightful resources for representing the subject and experiencing subjectivity through ethnographic organizational documentary.

Theorizing subjectively

Although a number of interpretive and reflexive theories have been deployed to conceptualise the body sociologically (Dale, 2001; Pink, 2009; Turner, 2008), we have noted that of particular prominence are contributions from dramaturgical, phenomenological, semiotic and narrative analyses (Waskul & Vaninni, 2006). It can be argued that these positions offer established sociological frameworks from which to conceptualise subjectivity and reflexivity in visual ethnographies of organization. Our suggestion therefore is that insights from these perspectives can help us conceptualise a more nuanced sense of affect and embodiment in video-based research investigations. For filmmaking logic that reflects greater appreciation of affectivity and embodiment the value of these positions can be summarised as follows:

The *dramaturgical* body is embedded in social practices and can thus offer a corrective to the traditional passive assumptions of ethnographic documentary, which suggest that social bodies 'just are' (Nichols, 1991). In the dramaturgical view, the body is central to human identity, social relations and emotional display; it is represented in ways that are variously personal and communal, private and public, confidential and political. For social and organizational settings, the classic symbolic interactionist work of Erving Goffman (1959) emphasised that bodies are always performed, staged and presented. People do not just *have* a body but actively *present* or *do* a body. It is therefore in the presenting and doing that actors are embodied; an active process through which the body is realised and made meaningful.

In the *phenomenological* body, the focus is again on meaning but with greater emphasis on *being* as embedded in experience: the body as a corporeal anchor in the world yet concerned with consciousness and the phenomena that appear in acts of consciousness. Affective experience of the self is realised through numerous forms of meaning, both literal and metaphorical. In this view, 'thick' (Geertz, 1973) descriptions of lived experience reveal how the life-worlds of individuals and

groups are produced and reproduced. Reflecting Schutz's (1967) notions of 'because' and 'in order to' motives, the framework conceptualises the body as constituting the demands of self and society, yet characterized by activities organized by outcome-orientated actions immersed in goals external to the body (McCloskey, 1988). Such assumptions can be clearly differentiated from our earlier analysis of visual realism and its overtones of Cartesianism, seeing the organized world as a set of objects which act and react upon one another.

The *semiotic* body is produced and acted upon mainly through culture and discourse (Casey, 2000; Nixon, Hall & Evans, 2013; see also Foucault, 2006), with the conceptual emphasis reflecting forces of sign and symbol (Howson, 2005). Given the 'cognitive turn' in semiotics, the corporality of signs in human semiosis became an important focus of sociological attention, and notably in film studies (Nelmes, 2012). It is apparent for example in verbal, nonverbal, and paralinguistic communication, where the human body is the embodiment of signs (Buckland, 2007). The body is therefore configured and re-configured through multiple representations of identity as related to the effects of discursive power, where the body can be socially constructed as a site of emancipation or resistance (Goodwin, 2003). Notions of normalisation are central to such analysis as 'people undertake their own corrective espaliering of the body to fit self into the needs of the organization' (Dale & Burrell 2014, p. 172). This self-corrective phenomenon is an effect of the way discursive power acts on the body in forms that are at once material, sensual and symbolic.

And the *narrative* body is situated in reflexive stories we tell about our bodies, and those others tell about their bodies and the bodies of others. Auerbach (2000) for example in his analysis of 'repetition, recursion and the body' in early cinema illustrates how the notion of person is a narrative accomplishment bestowing a sense of coherence; that is, it becomes structured by language, grammar and syntax, as well as by social, cultural and institutional discourse. Narrative for instance is suggested as a form of 'working subjectivity' and a site of 'discursive struggle between narratives of the self and institutional discourses which frame our (embodied) subjectivity' (Waskul & Vaninni, 2006, p. 12). The narrative study of the body conceptualises the embodied self as a set of stories we negotiate, struggle against, create, and of which we ultimately live out the consequences (Denzin 1989).

In addition, writing on a range of aesthetic issues (Ewenstein & Whyte, 2007; Sørensen, 2010; Warren, 2008) has placed emphasis on affective and embodied experience, or work demonstrating a greater sense of 'bodily intensity' (Deleuze, 1994). Writers on film theory for example have stressed the need for 'sensory ethnography' (Pink, 2009, 2011, 2013) of a multifarious kind in contemporary visual research, as have anthropological filmmakers themselves (see for instance Dargis, 2010; Hoare, 2013; Sweeney, 2009). Social theorists have advocated perspectives reflecting similar affective and embodied practices (Clough & Halley, 2007; Clough, 2008; Thrift, 2007), while cultural anthropologists have offered analogous views on sense perception processes (Brennan, 2004; McGrail, Davie-Kessler & Gruffin, 2015; Protevi, 2009). Closer to home, writers in organization studies have suggested the need for innovation and creativity in embodied and affective analysis (Dale & Burrell, 2014; Lennie, 2000; Riach &Warren, 2014). In other words, scholars from a number of fields have advocated approaches to ethnographic-related research that seek to 'problematize' and 'challenge' traditional or mainstream assumptions of what constitutes *real* organizational experience (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013); or to underscore experience that is "dynamic and energetic … rife with possibilities to produce 'new' and 'emergent' phenomena" (McGrail, Davie-Kessler & Gruffin, 2015, p. 4).

We suggest therefore numerous innovative ways to conceptualise affect and embodiment in video-based organizational ethnography – modes of expression that move us beyond habitual realist, objectivist and Cartesian assumptions. Nichols (1991) has argued, for example, that bodily representation through film and video can be prefigured through overlapping conceptual axes – narrative/anti-narrative and history/reflexivity. It is similarly through our infusion of diverse conceptualisations of affect and embodiment that we can provide guidance on developing more innovative practices, styles and visions for film-based ethnographic organization research. As Pink (2009, 2013) has argued, the aim of such research is to encapsulate a plurality of components in communicating visual ethnographic messages.

New Methodological Opportunities – Realising Participatory Research

'As participatory video often aims to reveal hidden social relations and provoke collective action, it may be regarded as a sociological intervention' (Milne et al., 2012, p. 8)

Our argument is that forms of ethnographic research underpinned by a range of interpretive, reflexive and other sociological perspectives can contribute to organization studies in *non-textual* ways; that is, in visual texts we 'read' instinctively. In practice, this can take a multimodal (Iedema & Wodak, 1999; Meyer et al., 2013) form and serve to document various ways in which 'talk, gesture, gaze, and aspects of the material surround are brought together' (Stivers & Sidnell, 2005, p. 1). The analysis which results reflects the influence of a range of visual, aural and theoretical stimuli in inquiry where a viewer's own affective reactions can become part of the investigative process – a situation where we gain a greater sense of subjective *involvement* in understanding the research setting and its meaning. This sees an emphasis on *emic* rather than *etic* research practice (Morris, Leung, Ames & Lickel, 1999).

The philosophy behind the type of video-based investigations we have in mind is akin to what Shotter (2006, p.585) has described as 'thinking from within'. In traditional Cartesian logic the suggestion is that orthodox practice orients us toward 'thinking from the outside' and on issues we observe 'over there'. The kind of visual organizational inquiry we advocate, however, involves abandoning such exterior philosophies and arguing that a more engaged form of investigation is appropriate to participatory visual research – a form which allows us to 'affect the flow of processes' from 'within our living involvement with them' (Shotter, 2006, p. 585). This kind of engaged and reflexive understanding is only available when we enter into what Shotter terms 'dialogical' social interaction: in other words, it remains unavailable to us as *external* observers and only becomes accessible when we adopt a mentality of 'withness-thinking', rather than the more familiar 'monological' or 'aboutness-thinking' of mainstream social research. As Polanyi (1958) suggested similarly, what we gain from 'understanding-from-within' is awareness of 'action guiding feelings'; or else in Schutz's (1967) terms, feelings that offer an anticipatory sense of the contextual 'style' or 'grammar' of what is to come (Shotter, 2006). Phenomenologically, this reflects qualities of the existential processes with which we are involved, and above all the intimate, affective and embodied feelings that can be lost in descriptions 'from the outside'.

In developing such proposals, we have drawn not only upon our own expertise as a team of sociologists-cum-filmmakers, but also from consulting other professionals in the course of this conceptual but also practical investigation. Our aim is to promote inquiry that reflects the progressive *participation* of filmmakers, sociologists, participants and ultimately viewers when researching issues of organization. We wish to achieve a more 'democratic' (Ohanian & Phillips, 2013) logic of investigation for ethnographic filmmaking – one that connects stakeholders polyvocally in common analytical space. We address therefore the recent challenge to develop 'new forms' (Smets, Burke, Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2014) of organizational ethnography through advancing a method that avoids the 'blindspots' (Bell & Davison, 2012) of traditional documentary. A by-product of this project is for audiences to become engaged more interactively in the research process, a situation whereby they begin to understand more fully, for example, the life-worlds of workers and managers, producers and consumers through greater appreciation of the subjective side of organization (Clough & Halley, 2007).

Towards participatory visual inquiry

Recently an interest in 'bringing actors back in' (Eder, 2009) has brought ethnographic research to the fore in organization studies (Smets et al., 2014). This has generated requests for innovative methods in organizational ethnography (Van Maanen, 2011; Watson, 2011) by researchers in fields as diverse as institutional analysis (Kellogg, 2009; Smets, Morris, & Greenwood, 2012), the sociology of finance (Knorr-Cetina & Bruegger, 2002b; Preda, 2007, 2009), strategy as practice (Jarzabkowski, 2005, 2008; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011; Vaara & Whittington, 2012), and technology studies (Leonardi, 2011; Orlikowski, 1996, 2007). With this in mind we argue for abandoning onto-epistemological realism in ethnographic documentary in favour of anti-structural and post-structural theorising that places emphasis on affect and embodiment.

We argue that 'withness' inquiry is invaluable here for encouraging often disempowered or marginalized organizational actors to participate in visual research related to everyday experiences (see for instance Elder, 1995; Fine, 1992; Pink, 2013). The objective is to complement conventional non-participant ethnographic documentary with methods that allow for more 'detailed analysis of

practices … in their sociomaterial context' (Vesa & Vaara, 2014, p. 288). The goal is to bring together organization theorists, filmmakers and research participants in generating field work, with this logic seeing key issues discussed subsequently with viewers and audiences in the process of analysing data and making practical recommendations.

In methodological terms, we argue that recent technological developments, coupled with increased familiarity with filmmaking practices, have facilitated moves towards less 'obtrusive' (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 1966) forms of visual inquiry. This has seen digital innovations bring ethnographic documentary nearer to what filmmakers long considered the technological holy-grail – the 'camera pen'. When considered alongside the greater availability of editing software and possibilities for social media distribution, the means of making an ethnographic documentary are increasingly within the public's grasp. In short, much of the conceptual and technical apparatus required to realize intimate, affective and participatory work appears in place (Wiebe, 2015; see also Bell & Davidson, 2013; Bell, Warren & Schroeder, 2013). Indeed contributors to the *Handbook of Participatory Video* (Milne et al., 2012) have argued variously for promoting the kind of historically suppressed participant involvement we have in mind in 'critical research' emphasising 'affect', 'empowerment' and 'reflexivity' and which promotes 'learning from communities', 'reaching new audiences' and 'fostering social change'.

Participatory filmmaking and research opportunities

Building a bridge from social theory to visual analysis, our own participatory work has been directed at realising theoretically-infused video-based contributions to 'critical' (Adler, Forbes & Willmott, 2007; Alvesson & Willmott 1993, 2003) and 'dark side' (see for instance Linstead, Marechal & Griffin, 2014) organization studies. In these productions, 'classical' organizational concerns of bureaucracy and scientific management for example are analysed in connection to contemporary issues of surveillance management, work intensification and corporate ideology (see e.g. https://vimeo.com/70846837). Such films contribute critically through deploying post-structural 'mimicry' (after Irigaray, 1991) to 'escap(e) the confines of organization theory' (Hassard, Kelemen & Wolfram Cox, 2008, p. 31). The result is film-based analyses that play with assumed boundaries

between fact and fiction (see Bordell & Carroll, 1996; Carroll, 1996; Hight, 2010; Juhasz and Lerner, 2006; Rhodes, 2006). Issues of subjectivity, affect and embodiment are central to work that reflects interpretive perspectives discussed earlier – dramaturgy, phenomenology, semiotics and narrative. The products of cooperation between filmmakers and sociologists, on the one hand the professional quality of these films would have been impossible to realise without the expertise of the filmmakers while, on the other, narratives of organizational control, occupational stress and workplace alienation would have been difficult to conceptualise without the expertise of social and organization theorists.

Equally, our current empirical work is directed at promoting opportunities for participatory inquiry in visual and textual ethnographic fieldwork. From an observation- and interview-based study of care homes (see Burns, Hyde & Killett, 2013; Hyde, Burns, Hassard & Killett, 2014), we gained access to document the experiences, thoughts and feelings of residents, care workers, managers and relatives. The case represented an opportunity to study a complex situation of multiple, often competing, perspectives. Given the plethora of recent scandals in this 'care' sector – many of which have been exposed by film-based observation (see for instance Dugan, 2014) – we argue that the elderly body and its professional treatment represents a prime topic for analysis among 'things [which] might be meant by "critical"' (Fournier & Grey, 2000, p. 8). In this research the concept is again to marry the expertise of filmmaker and social theorist. To offer genuinely *polyvocal* interpretations of emotions, feelings and perceptions, in what can be extremely sensitive organizations to access for research, we have argued for eliciting additional voices in the research process (Sayad, 2013). A more 'progressive' (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996) form of research partnership in such locations involves not only accessing the phenomenological and dramaturgical experiences of residents, but also those of care workers and managers: in other words, contrasting various stakeholder perspectives in the process of agreeing the research agenda, how to collect data, and ways to present analysis. The research philosophy is that filmmakers, organization theorists and participants should come ideally to inhabit a common reflexive space for interpretive inquiry – a methodology which moves us from a two- to three-pronged form of research association, or what might be termed a new form of 'investigator triangulation' (Denzin, 2006).

This raises the possibility of realising other innovations for interpretive and reflexive organizational research. In addition to participants joining sociologists and filmmakers to define the research agenda, advances in technology present opportunities for them to be more fully involved in data collection. Video-based information can be gleaned by participants armed with their own digital technology – such as camera phones or web cams – and thus acting metaphorically as their own 'auto-ethnographic' view-finders (Vesa & Vaara, 2014; see also Karra & Phillips, 2008), with this serving to provide rich and affective experience [3]. Such participatory inquiries; where the traditional 'subjects' of research are now trained in basic video-making skills, signal a role-shift for the professional filmmaker; whose responsibilities now lie mainly in production and realising an intelligible cinematic form, which is customarily their specialism (Milne et al., 2012).

Building on arguments developed earlier in the paper, the methodological approach we propose advocates providing communicative spaces that facilitate progressively 'polyvocal' forms of organizational analysis (Arnold & Brennan, 2013; Tobin & Davidson, 2006); signally, dialogues between filmmakers, social/organizational theorists, and research participants. We argue that this represents 'withness thinking' in emphasising possibilities for diverse conceptualisation, multiple forms of representation and pluralistic discourse, while also stressing a spirit of connectedness between the parties involved. The idea is for filmmaker, theorist and participant coming together to realise visually 'rich' (Weis, Cipollone & Jenkins, 2014) images of relevance to organizational themes – ethnographically complex and sensitive images that cannot be replicated in written accounts (Meyer et al., 2013).

As also argued, central to advancing this method is achieving a sense of 'reflexivity' (Alvesson, Hardy, & Harley, 2008; Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Cunliffe, 2003) in the consumption of the visual product. Ironically we can make reference here to a documentary discussed in Part One, Rouch and Morin's *Chronique d'un été*. Although very much in the 'realist' style, a novel and atypical feature of the filmmaking process was that participants were invited – post-production and as members of an audience – to view the finished film and express opinions on what was presented. Albeit a seemingly unconscious form of participatory inquiry, *Chronique d'un été* nonetheless anticipates a sense of reflexivity in visual ethnography (Yang, 2012). Indeed it goes someway to

anticipating the type of withness thinking we have in mind – adopting reflexive post-production practices which generate affective responses and involve participants assessing the research and its product (Mak, 2012). Such inquiry can also see video-based methods combined with, for example, observations, photographs and interviews to provide a variety of inputs to a research investigation (see for instance Meyer et al., 2013; Olivier, de Lange, Creswell, and Wood, 2012). Visual research may also be embedded in written forms, as suggested recently by some academic journals in business and management.

We have suggested that video-based ethnography be underpinned by social theory appropriate to the topics under investigation, and also that participatory ethnography be undergirded by interpretive, reflexive and other forms of theorising; for example, phenomenological, dramaturgical, semiotic, and narrative. In our research on care homes, such perspectives are deployed to highlight, *inter alia*, sites of resistance against institutional practices, normative self-correction processes, or the accommodation of habitual organizational requirements (Rosile, Boje, Carlon, Downs & Saylors, 2013). Rather than generate a single discursive alternative in ethnographic documentary – another form of film-truth – our approach offers a range of analytical opportunities for an organizational research team to consider when framing visual explanations (see for instance Bordell & Carroll, 1996; Carroll, 1996). In our current empirical work, for example, a 'body as narrative' view suggests that video-based research can vividly capture the many discursive struggles that managers and workers, relatives and residents, engage in to produce a discourse of the (primarily aged) body. Drawing on Foucault's (1979) notion of the semiotic body as a 'trace of culture', one possibility is to capture the espaliering of embodiment (Dale & Burrell, 2014) and how through such 'capturing' the subject gradually submits to the needs of the organization, or alternatively resists such colonising processes.

A final extension of this argument is that our method is underpinned by assumptions related to another concept mentioned earlier – multimodality (Iedema & Wodak, 1999; Meyer et al., 2013; Stivers & Sidnell, 2005). Kress (2010), for example, has argued that communication is multimodal and the concept of multimodality offers practical ways to conceptualise the various visual opportunities for representing affect and embodiment in material and experiential terms (see for instance Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). For the former, such opportunities may reflect, among others,

practical factors of image, lighting, perspective and sound (Pink, 2009, 2013). For the latter, they may reflect various verbal and non-verbal factors within inter-subjective communication (Riach & Warren, 2014). When everyday action is interpreted by participants themselves, the narration may reflect an 'inner dialogue', or bodily sensing in ways not mediated by explication from an 'outsider'. Some filmmakers (and musicians and sound artists) for example have gone as far as to locate microphones internal to the body to capture aspects of deep corporeal experience.

Therefore, a strategy of participatory visual research, underpinned conceptually by 'withness thinking', is suggested for demonstrating, explaining and potentially disrupting social, cultural and institutional relations in organizations (De Lange, Mitchell & Stuart, 2008). This strategy takes recourse explicitly to a range of sociological concepts for interpreting visual ethnographic data in a participatory mode. This strategy may serve to encourage social change, as it unlocks possibilities for alternative modes of inquiry, interpretation and representation, while similarly confronting a diverse range of ethical and power-related organizational concerns.

Conclusion

When analysing ethnographic documentary, film studies academics have historically emphasised realist and objectivist philosophies. In contrast, we argue they have overlooked a set of philosophies that are of equal or greater importance for making sense of visual studies of organization – ones based on interpretivism and reflexivity, and underpinned by perspectives such as dramaturgy, phenomenology, semiotics and narratology. These perspectives hold advantages for modern ethnographic documentary in that they stress the inevitably affective and embodied character of organizational life, notably through analysis which stresses human sensitivity, feeling and emotion. The paper is not restricted however to arguing for a 'visual turn' merely in the way we conceptualise the ethnographic organizational documentary. Although this is one of our aims, the article also offers methodological and empirical suggestions in concert with developing research potential in organization studies generally. This takes the form of an innovative participatory strategy for qualitative research that emphasises reflexivity and 'withness thinking'. In seeking to champion the subjective and embodied qualities of ethnographic documentary, like the realism of film-truth this

strategy attempts to get 'closer' to the subjects of inquiry. Where it differs is in joining expertise for the polyvocal framing and participatory investigative process – a strategy that moves us progressively towards an *emic* method for video-based organizational ethnography. The end result is organizational research in which filmmakers, social theorists, participants and viewers alike are brought together in the same analytical space.

Notes

[1] Although this paper focuses on film- and video-based forms, we acknowledge that they represent only a sub-set of the range of visual research topics and methods that can be drawn upon in organizational ethnography. The ethnographic study of the visual can also include, for example, work relating to drawings, graphics, photographs, pictures, and signs. It includes new visual data produced by researchers in empirical investigations as well as existing visual materials used, for example, in historical and sociological analysis (for overviews see Bell & Davison, 2012; Emmison & Smith, 2000; Margolis & Pauwels, 2011; Meyer, et al., 2013; Ray & Smith, 2012; Rose, 2011; Spencer, 2011).

[2] Despite being regularly categorized as forms of 'film-truth' documentary, such approaches can reflect important methodological differences, and notably so regarding the role of the filmmaker in relation to action. Whereas the philosophically detached *living camera* or *direct cinema* filmmaker (for example, Richard Leacock, Donn Pennebaker, or more recently, Roger Graef, Dianne Tammes or Paul Watson) stands by in the hope that something dramatic will occur – the metaphoric *fly-on-the-wall* – the filmmaker in the *cinéma vérité style* (for example, Rouch & Morin, or more recently, Nick Broomfield, Joan Churchill or Molly Dineen) purposefully intervenes in the hope that action will be stimulated and 'hidden' layers of reality revealed – the metaphoric *fly-in-the-soup* approach (see Armstrong, 2006; Barnett, 2007; Bruzzi, 2006; Cousins & Macdonald, 2006).

[3] This discussion resonates with recent debates on the use of body-worn video cameras by police officers, an issue that has been highlighted recently due to a number of high-profile civilian shootings by the United States police. It is expected that the majority of front line police officers in the UK will soon be equipped with body-worn video cameras.

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