Book Review

Advances in Visual Methodology
Sarah Pink (Ed.), 2012, SAGE, 271 pp. ISBN: 978-0-85702-848-8

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I n recent years we have witnessed a 'visual turn' in the social sciences, as an increasing number of scholars are engaging with visual methodologies for the collection, analysis, and display of both qualitative and quantitative data. To mention an example, video ethnography is gaining momentum across a range of disciplines, at a time when social scientists are increasingly concerned with capturing the minutiae and details of social practices. What is more, recent developments in information technology are extending the range of techniques for the capture and analysis of visual data, therefore opening up new possibilities for research and practice. It is no coincidence that several books on visual methodologies were published in the last ten years (Margolis & Pauwels, 2011; Rose, 2007; Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001) and an entire volume on visual data analysis was included in the SAGE collection on qualitative research methods (Banks & Flick, 2007). But what is distinctive about Sarah Pink's *Advances in Visual Methodology* is the attempt to establish visual methodology as an interdisciplinary field of practice, while recognizing the interconnectedness of theory, technology and methods.

Articulated in five parts, this book brings together the lessons, experiences, and reflections of leading scholars in visual methodology, cutting across disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. Part 1 provides an introduction to the central themes of the book, by outlining the theoretical waves, technological shifts, and ethical issues that define the context in which visual methodology is being practised. The second part takes a dual perspective on practice, by exploring how visual methods can be employed to investigate the practices of participants, and also initiating a meta-reflection about visual research as a practice in itself. Taking forward the practice perspective, Part 3 suggests conceiving of visual methodology as being embodied, and reflects on the emergence of "an ecology of place" for visual research that encompasses both offline and online environments (p. 96). The fourth part shows how such theoretical and technological shifts are implicated in the practices of visual researchers, while also giving way to creative combinations at the intersection of public scholarship, visual arts and applied research. The final part delves further into the debate on the engagement of visual methods across disciplines, and offers reflections on the challenges and

opportunities to advance visual methodology as an *interdisciplinary field of practice*.

The consequences of such a conceptualization are far-reaching: With theoretical grounding in practice theory, visual methodology is emergent rather than cast in stone, and can be thought of as what people – researchers and participants – actually do with visual material. This view is particularly timely, and reflects an increasing concern of social scientists with shaping their research practices in the direction of greater collaboration, reflexivity, and creativity. By advancing a process perspective, Pink and colleagues suggest that visual methodology is co-constructed in the research encounter, and constantly re-shaped in the everyday practices of researchers. But the foremost merit of this book consists of drawing connections between theoretical and technological developments, in such a way as to trace possible routes for visual methodology to bring forward new types of knowledge. To mention an example, Sarah Pink (Chapter 7) draws on the 'spatial turn' in practice theory to conceptualize new avenues for visual ethnography at the intersection of virtual and physical reality. Elisenda Ardévol (Chapter 5) and Francesco Lapenta (Chapter 8) contribute to outline methodological approaches that comprise both online and offline dimensions, while also reflecting on the implications of conducting visual research within a heterogeneous space.

An additional merit of this volume consists of bringing together multiples disciplines, by encouraging dialogue among diverse streams of research, and creating a terrain where visual methodology can emerge as a unifying force. Throughout the pages of the book – and quite literally in Roderick Coover's conversational essay on digital technologies (Chapter 11) – the authors share their research experiences, and experiment with borrowing visual methods from neighbouring disciplines. But the most creative advances come from the intertwining of public scholarship, visual arts, and applied research, which in turn bring along the potential for visual researchers to pursue new ways of knowing. For example, Susan Hogan and Sarah Pink (Chapter 13) engage in art therapy practice, by mobilizing visual imagery – in the form of dreams, memories, and reveries – as research techniques to expose the inner dialogue of participants. Such an

approach leads to surprising results which challenge the linearity of research reports, bring to surface inner contradictions and resistances, and implicate the researcher in knowing with the participant.

Perhaps this work would have benefited from cross-fertilization with management and organization studies, where scholars are beginning to establish the foundations of visual methodology by looking at examples in the social sciences (Bell & Davison, 2013; Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary, & van Leeuwen, 2013). Such a dialogue would have spurred further elaboration, with visual anthropologists and sociologists reflecting on how a research trajectory is being taken forward and re-invented in a diverse research context, which nevertheless shares similar theoretical developments. It was therefore encouraging to see Sarah Pink giving a keynote address at the launch event of a researcher development initiative of the International Network for Visual Studies in Organisations (http://in-visio.org/). In her inspiring talk, Sarah Pink invited the attendees to *make* rather than just *do* visual methods, by reflecting on the specificities of the research contexts that are being attended to in management and organization studies. From a more practical viewpoint, *Advances in Visual Methodology* may have gained from the inclusion of an epilogue to wrap up the fourteen chapters, and leave the reader with a greater sense of closure and direction as to the future steps. Yet such a concluding chapter may have run counter to the objective of portraying visual methodology as being constantly shifting and in the making.

It may be useful to conclude by quoting a passage which well represents the essence of this work, and further clarifies why it is worth reading: "Understanding (visual) methodology is concerned with comprehending how we know as well as the environments in which this knowing is produced". In turn, this means engaging with the latest theoretical developments, and exploring how these are co-implicated with technological developments and media practices (p. 3). Interestingly, *Advances in Visual Methodology* pursues this endeavour by attempting not to capture the state of the art in visual methods, but rather to offer an occasion for the reflective researcher to elaborate on theory, methods, and technology. It is left with the reader to take up the lessons learned throughout the pages of the book, and to contribute to the making of visual methodology as an interdisciplinary field of practice.

References

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