Monika Kostera

Organisational Ethnography

2007 Lund: Studentlitteratur

3.4. Text Analysis

As soon as a true thought has entered our mind

it gives a light which makes us see a crowd of other objects

which we have never perceived before.

Francois Chateaubriand

How to Study Texts?

Ethnographers do not just study organisations "live" in terms of talking to people and being among them. The analysis of texts created or used by an organisation may be equally as interesting. In the case of an enterprise these can include annual reports, prospectuses, organisational charts, internal regulations, bulletins, announcements, advertisements, websites, etc. Almost every contemporary organisation has some kind of textual record, which provides a good source of information about the past. In the following passages I present several research methods which can be used by organisational ethnographers: culture analysis, rhetorical analysis and semiotic analysis. This is not a complete list of usable methods of course, as I have omitted deconstruction, poststructuralist analysis, content analysis, psychoanalytical approach to the text, etc. I have made this selection primarily because my students have made use of these methods in their work – and so have I. I will give examples from their research, from my own, as well as some from the literature.

Culture Analysis

Critical culture analysis is a method that is characteristic to cultural studies and is typically used for research on the mass media. A vast array of media texts are available for study, such

as those found in the press, popular publications, television programmes, radio broadcasts, films, etc. Its goal is above all the capture and description of those components of the text that are "unconscious, unintentional […]; cultural studies direct itself to the problem of how the history that human beings make and live spontaneously is determined by structures of meaning that they have not chosen for themselves" (Denzin, 1992: 74). In other words, the point is to show what makes so many people watch films like *Titanic*; why Harlequin books are so appealing; why financial reports of big corporations are regarded as respectable documents, etc. All such texts are produced and read by people, although neither the authors nor the readers decide what the texts contain at the level of symbolic cultural assumptions.

Cultural analysis is, above all, associated with symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). It is assumed that a vast authoritative role is played by the mass media in the process of the production and interpretation of contemporary meanings. Nowadays, the mass media exerts a great impact on the construction of culture, such as through the re-creation of official ideologies. The researcher is to analyse all the accessible texts and look for traces of the ideological message and then give this message a name. The messages are commonly "hidden" in the sense that instead of "speaking" to the reader, the text rather "does" certain things to them.

> Such textual readings attempt to show how specific texts create their particular images of subjects and their experiences. These readings attempt to examine the narrative-writing strategies that structure the texts' treatment of text and author, presence and lived experience, the real and its representations, and the subject and intentionality. These are explicitly critical readings […] (Denzin, 1992: 82)

The researcher doing text analysis is, however, not just restrictively ascribed the role of a critical reader. One may also be interested in how the texts are received by their "natural" or

intended readers. Frequently, and especially within the tradition of symbolic interactionism, it means the study of the *epiphanic moments* in the lives of people - the breakthroughs or particularly important moments inspired by mass media communication. The researcher may be interested in "collecting the reactions" to the texts, i.e. analysing the modes in which the readers receive them. The "level" of reception may be especially interesting, i.e. whether the readers read the text literally, naively, or to borrow a term coined by Umberto Eco, whether they are *semiotic readers* who independently interpret texts in terms of conveying meanings and ideologies.

Norman Denzin (1997) also highlights that texts are not just carriers of ideologies but are also the arenas of political negotiations. The ethnographic analysis of the text should not only take the recipient understood as a component of texts into account (see the description of the *model reader* at the beginning of Chapter 3 in the section about semiotic analysis), but also as living human beings that belong to a certain social group. Depending on the approach to the role of the reader, the ethnographer may seek interpretations from people who are naturally suited to be the recipients of the text. Since ethnography is not a methodology that aims towards a complete and full picture at the level of a general social theory, it does not need to be the presentation of "all" viewpoints, but rather a section of the problem, providing as rich characteristics as possible. For instance, one may look at the meaning of management as portrayed by textbooks, and how they are read and interpreted by full-time students of management at Växjö University on the basis of interviews conducted with a selected group (for example, those who attended classes on a certain day of the week). The results will not refer to all readers but to some selected problems that are seen as crucial from the point of view of the interviewed students. The location for conducting such a study should also be strategically selected. Is it important for some reason? What meanings are created? Are the meanings interpreted in a socially significant way? Is there any chance that people who

interact with each other and with the text do so in a way that could be regarded as typical or extraordinary? In such studies structure is seen as the creation of interactions between people. The researcher may show how the process takes place, in a "bottom-up" way, from single people to the (schematic) picture of the whole. Taking time into account can also be very important: ethnography is always about a certain fragment of time. In order to be truly able to understand the present, it is good to have some knowledge of history. For instance, a researcher interested in the contemporary images of companies in the East European press may gain a lot of valuable insights by including an analysis of press articles relating to business in the early 1990s and perhaps also from selected periods of time before 1989.

Norman Denzin describes culture analysis as messy, multilevel and making use of a lot of techniques and methods. Its final phase is to compose a story based on the ethnographic research (narrativisation). One can look for plots and characters, and decide on the genre and leifmotif – or leitmotifs. Real-life characters can be included in the story as this strengthens the contextual footing and is an important trait of ethnography as well as a good way of making the story more exciting.

John Fiske (1987) wrote a book about contemporary television culture. The author was interested in the meaning that was conveyed by television broadcasts in modern society in the United States. Several TV programmes and series are presented and analysed from the viewers' point of view: how, according to the intentions of the authors, "should" the programmes and series be received by the audience and how are they actually received? Fiske reflects on how they contribute to the construction of the everyday reality of American TV viewers. The script writers are not the only actual authors of the TV texts as they are often co-authored by different social and political forces. They may not be authors in the sense of intentional creators, but are instead zeitgeists or fashions that use stereotypes as their creation material.

In the mid-1990s, I (Kostera, 1996) analysed images of managers in the Polish business press. I selected three papers: a daily, monthly and a weekly magazine, which my reference group of managers claimed to read on a regular basis. I then studied issues of the monthly magazine from a specific three year period and one full year's issue of the weekly and the daily respectively; all from the first half of the 1990s. In the two latter cases I focused on the columns dedicated to management issues, although I also paid attention to other articles that touched on themes relating to companies and managers. I was particularly interested in the symbols used in the discourse about firms and the people that manage them, as well as in the metaphors promoted as the future management model to follow. Next, I asked a group of readers of these newspapers and magazines (participants in the MBA[1] programme I was teaching) to write their reflections on the messages about the firms and the managers conveyed in the journals.

The picture that emerged from my analysis was dominated by Western images, in particular American. Both Western companies and Western managers were presented as the examples to be followed: the icons of fashion, efficiency, and the virtues of good management. The Polish examples were used as a negative background against which these icons were presented and looked particularly striking. Sometimes Polish enterprises were described in the category of a success story: how management had succeeded in transforming them from "state owned behemoths" into modern management. However, it was always clearly stated that this transformation was guided by Western models. Many actual success stories of Polish enterprises that my students and I were familiar with were never featured in the press. One aspect in particular remained hidden: the field material I had collected pointed to the fact that it was quite common for Polish companies at that time to be active within two dimensions, namely, the political and the economic. The press image only highlighted the

[1] Master of Business Administration.

economic aspect. The consulted readers were rather sceptical towards this simplified picture of the enterprise and either approached it with irony or reflection. They stated their own critical opinions clearly, even though they did also admit to liking the "Western fashion show", as one of the participants called the images of the foreign corporations. With regard to the press images of managers, the participants were much more careful and even showed signs of subtle irony. The only theme that they completely refused to comment on was the role of female managers that was presented in a very one-sided way by the press and where women were portrayed as childish, where their traditional social role was understood in terms of femininity, and where marriage and motherhood were strongly emphasised and their professional role downplayed. I thought this was unfortunate since there were quite a lot of women managers in Poland and a lot of educated female professionals were active in Polish business. The readers refrained from commenting on it, however, which I found rather peculiar. I entitled the chapter of the book dealing with this topic *The Silence of the Women*.

In the following passage Jerzy Kociatkiewicz talks about his work with texts.

Studying Texts (Jerzy Kociatkiewicz)

In analysing organisational texts, I quite often encounter a problem that, while banal-sounding, is bothersome enough to merit mentioning: most of the texts that I study are, simply speaking, incredibly boring. I am not the only person to comment on this problem: Bowker and Starr (1999), having studied the international disease classification system, admit that their research felt like reading the phonebook, except that it was even more boring. Worse, reading texts just once is never enough: text analysis requires spending long hours poring over the research material in order to capture recurring plots and determine the qualities of its model author, reader, and

framing perspective. Setting out to study a text I feel like a poor man's literary critic: the work is, essentially, similar, only instead of dissecting the works of Shakespeare I strive to determine the narrative structure of a profit sheet. Frankly, it is quite frustrating,

Invariably, then, I begin by venting my frustration on the text, deriving great pleasure from discovering all the typos and stylistic mistakes: that at least provides an excuse for a very thorough examination of the studied text. At the same time, of course, I keep trying to jot down what I see as the main ideas of the analysed piece (very often, however, these turn out to be quite different from what I ultimately conclude to be important) and, at some point in the process, I start to discern some recurring themes, characteristic ways of framing issues and so on.

At this crucial moment my impressions change drastically: the text runs out to be a fascinating story after all; a prospectus shows how the company name (but not the company itself!) dominates its market, technical specifications of computer video cards tell of different ways of dividing space, and reports of the Pope's visit to Poland relate the story of organising around a common idea rather than a common goal as well as of a carnival culture. Of course, old computer magazines and financial reports still do not magically transform into masterpieces of literature: their style still does not reach even the level of *Harlequin* novels, but an important conversion still occurs: the text becomes a story. Moreover, it is a mysterious story, one that has possibly never been read before: perhaps all its previous readers have seen only the text, i.e. the description of the company's financial results, video card comparison, or reports of the city's preparation for a Papal visit[2].

[2] E.g. Kociatkiewicz and Kostera (2001; 2005)

> Even more importantly, text analysis does not end with discovering the hidden story: it still needs to be pieced together from its dispersed fragments, details must be found and the story's presence in the primary document has to be documented. This, however, is not boring in the least: what is boring is just reading prospectuses and old newspapers…

Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetoric has a long history, dating to the times of antiquity. In the second half of the last century it was regarded as inferior, and only recently has it regained its position as a respected area of the academic discourse. Deirdre McCloskey (1985/1988; 1990) pointed out that even the most eminent economists use rhetoric in their academic publications. Indeed, their prominence also lies in their ability to use it in an elegant and convincing way. Rhetoric is the art of persuasion. Persuading readers about the values of research results (their authenticity, purposefulness, usefulness, etc) is one of the aims of academic discourse. It is not just sheer logic that is subject to assessment (critique, acceptance and recognition) but also suggestiveness and the ability to appear credible. In its pure form logic may be encountered in mathematics or philosophy. Other disciplines often use rhetorical tropes, such as metaphor,[3] although this does not mean that they become less rational.

> To admit now that metaphor and story matter also in human reasoning does mot entail becoming less rational and less reasonable, dressing in saffron robes

[3] Here I mean metaphor as a stylistic figure applied in the text – not as epistemological metaphor underpinning discourse that Gareth Morgan writes about (1986; 1983/1987). The epistemological metaphor (see Section 1.1) is a language or dictionary used for descriptive purposes, for example, of organisation. In a text written from the epistemological perspective of organisations-as-organisms, the expression: "organisations are like organisms") may not be explicitly stated at all. Here the metaphoric quality lies in the vocabulary and the characteristics of the object on the basis of the applied terminology and not in the direct use of the metaphor in the text. In rhetorical analysis it is not so much underpinning epistemological metaphors that are sought but rather explicit expressions in the text.

> or tuning into "New Dimensions". On the contrary it entails becoming more rational and more reasonable, because it puts more of what persuades serious people under the scrutiny of reason. McCloskey, 1990, p.6).

Rhetorical analysis is well suited to the organisational texts found in the field, such as advertisements, internal bulletins, annual reports of the company, etc.

According to Kenneth Burke, figures of speech, which are the classical tropes, include the following:

> […] metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. And my primary concern with them here will be not with their purely figurative usage, but with their role in the discovery and description of "the truth" (1945, p. 503).

The researcher's task is to identify tropes in order to find out what the texts attempt to communicate, to whom and in what way. Burkean tropes are often interesting to look for in the discourse about organisations.

- Metaphor is an expression of an unusual usage of words in a new context so that they acquire new meaning. For instance, the "competitive edge", a quite common expression in management jargon, can be seen as powerful metaphor (which I myself quite like). It brings to mind both images of fight (the blade of the sword, the swish) and light (the shining of the blade) and at the same time suggesting something dangerous, aggressive, but also beautiful.
- Metonymy is an expression where one word serves as a semantic representative of another word, for example, "ministerial office" as a designation of the position (and work) of a minister. This figure of speech is very commonly applied, and its usage may provide clues about elements that happen to be paired semantically, for example, furniture is often used in this way (e.g. chair, stool, desk, table, etc.).

- Synecdoche is a kind of metonymy where the part represents the whole. For example, someone bragging about his "terrific new wheels" probably means a whole new car and not just a set of wheels.
- Irony is a characteristic of a style in the text which implies a deliberate contradiction between the literary meaning of the utterance and its actual meaning that is not expressed directly. Irony may be subtle or blatant. It may play a particularly important role for people who feel oppressed or limited in their freedom to act. Irony makes it possible to construct one's identity and to achieve dignity. For example, in Nazi-occupied Warsaw during World War II jokes flourished among the inhabitants, even though the times were not ones of mirth and merriness. There are many interesting ethnographic works devoted to the issue of irony in organisations, among others Hatch (1997) writing about the humour of managers, and Kunda (1992) describing the strategies of survival in a company distinguished by "the strong corporate culture".

Apart from these main tropes there are also many others, and one can learn about these in the literature on rhetoric.[4] These may also prove useful in analysing organisational texts, although they are not as popular as the ones presented above.

The tropes used in management may be also categorised differently in a way that is not necessarily in tune with classical typologies. Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges (1988) listed the following figures of speech in management, depending on the power of expression that may exert a positive impact on the change: metaphors, labels, and platitudes.

[4] Such tropes may be for example: a) the rhetorical question: using the question not to express a lack of knowledge but to underline the viewpoint of the speaker, among others: "People, when being afraid of losing their job, work more, but do they work better?" The question may have an ironical expression, which means that its function is similar to the irony being highlighted. From time to time they also appear in the form of pseudo-statements: So what. The solitary question mark may also take the role of a rhetorical figure; b) apostrophe: a formal, direct phrase, a personification of an unknown recipient, among others "O Irony!"; c) omission: signaling that the speaker intends to skip certain issues, used as a way of drawing attention to them; d) paronomasia: the use of words that sound similar in order to compare them semantically, contrast them and bring them together, among others "dirty deal" ; epithet: the noun's attribute, among others: puppet managers, i.e. managers who lack control over the organisation; titular engineer, transparent structures, increased income, etc. Epithets may well be metaphorical, as in puppet managers and transparent structure; descriptive, as in increased income, and legitimating: titular; f) repetition: multiple use of a word or words in the utterance.

Metaphors compare something that is less known with something that is familiar to us and help to create and "domesticate" reality. For example, competitive edge is such a medium, as are expressions such as excellence, or companisation.[5] Labels diagnose the current condition and tell us "how things are". For example, they include expressions that describe poor cash flow or high employee turnover. As they are they are not meant to change reality, although they may constitute an introduction to the decision about such a change, for example, when the cash flow is "poor" the social actors may regard it as a condition that requires some action to be taken in order to change it. Platitudes were once regarded as metaphors but have now lost their creative power, for instance, the expression "success is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration" was an original metaphor. Nowadays it fails to surprise and may even induce irritation by its predictability, rather than contribute to an "aha" experience. In management phrases like "highest quality" and "most professional" are good examples of platitudes.

Deirdre McCloskey (1985/1998) presents a rhetorical analysis of texts in *The Rhetorics of Economics*, including a piece by Paul Samuelson that almost exclusively consists of numbers. McCloskey draws attention to the rhetorical features of using mathematics and shows how such a writing style - one relying on the "power of numbers" - became a norm in the field of economics. Statistical notions also have a rhetorical side, for example statistical significance does not imply that something is important or significant for society. McCloskey demonstrates that even the most "exact" texts carry a persuasive message. She also points out that rhetoric can be used in a skilful and beautiful way – and also carelessly and without reflection. The former is the use she advocates, also in the discourse of economic sciences.

Another example of rhetorical analysis of organisational texts is a study of the jargon used by consultants by Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges (1988). The researcher interviewed

[5] This neologism was created to remind of expressions such as decentralisation, and, apart from the more technical meaning it carries (splitting up a bigger company into smaller ones), it also suggests that the phenomenon it denotes is at the same time novel and recognisable.

consultants and their clients and analysed these conversations paying particular attention to the figures of speech: metaphors, labels and platitudes. The consultants described themselves as people who coin powerful metaphors. Czarniawska metaphorically calls them merchants of meaning; professionals whose job it is to create and sell symbolical products. Metaphors can present and teach terms, such as the textbook notions of competitive strategy, direct marketing or human resources. They are meant to serve as a framework for the analysis of an issue. Some metaphors are related to identity construction and help in the framing of organisational roles and organisations in general. There are also metaphors that serve to conceptualise something genuinely new. They may be derived from books (popular and academic publications) or from art, films and old legends. Sometimes the consultants create them themselves, promote them in public and attempt to sell them as profitably as they can. There are also fashions and styles in the business world, such as in Sweden in the 1960s when the technical approach was dominant and a prominent place given to metaphors derived from the world of technology. In the 1970s the trend was marked by psychology and the ideas of group dynamics, and then, in the 1980s, ideas of management of meaning gained popularity. Such labels are used by consultants to assess the situation in the companies: whether it is good, bad, or requires change. In the interviews collected by Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges, the following phrases were used, among others, as positive labels: leadership, strategic management, efficiency, democracy, active dialogue and profitability. Negative phrases included: centralised control, budget deficits, detailed regulations and childcare. There were also ambiguous labels, dependent on context and tone such as: savings, regional policy, reform, etc. In consulting jargon one may also encounter many platitudes or worn-out metaphors. These are not used to bring about change but, on the contrary, have a domesticating character in that they make it possible to think about the reality as something familiar and obvious.

Kaj Sköldberg (1990) reflects upon various organisational forms in terms of their poetic logic. Bureaucracy, human network, system and culture are presented as manifestations of poetic logic based on the enactment of respectively, tragedy, romance, comedy and satire. These dramas are each directed by a leading trope: metonymy, metaphor, synecdoche and irony. The book provides a rhetorical analysis of business administration ideas and the main styles of organising. The aims, and in particular the effectiveness seen as the ultimate goal of organising are also depicted as features of the narrative genre. Each style of organising has its own dominating ideal of effectiveness: effectiveness of input, personality, the system and the mission. Changes in business administration are transitions between dramas and perspectives and follow the order of the main trains of thought based on the classical four tropes.

Semiotic Analysis

Umberto Eco's ideas (1962/1989) about open work may be quite useful for the analysis of organisational texts. Open work can be interpreted in many different ways; ways that do not diminish its power of expression or uniqueness. Every time it is read anew it receives a new meaning and comes alive in a new perspective. The reader can be seen as a creative co-author of open work. It does not mean that the interpretation can be completely arbitrary or include over-interpretation.[6] Umberto Eco (1992) does not advocate an over-interpretation of texts, that is, reading them in a way that would be at odds with what the text is attempting to convey. It has nothing to do with the author as a person, however, or what he or she had in mind – which is indeed their private business. Neither does it mean that there is only one way of approaching a text. On the contrary, all texts can be read in two main modes (Eco, 1990): the semantic and semiotic. The semantic reader is a naïve reader, who accepts the text at face

[6] The authors: philosophers and semiologists take diverse stances in this respect, from advocating faithfulness to one interpretation to the full freedom in reading the text (Collini, 1992).

value in its literal form. Such a reader allows the text to guide him or her, thus succumbing to feelings evoked by the narration. The semiotic reader on the other hand is a reflective and critical reader, pondering over the ways through which the text guides them, what kind of feelings it brings about, why the text is experienced as sad, joyful, moralistic, etc. Naturally, it is possible for a person to be both kinds of reader; even simultaneously. The distinction is not about having two groups - naïve and smart readers - but a typology of the modes of reading that are not mutually exclusive. The way of reading that is characteristic for the researcher conducting the semiotic analysis is the semiotic reading. He or she is looking for hidden aspects, such as textual strategies in terms of how the text has an impact on the reader. One of the basic textual strategies is the model reader: a form constructed by the text itself (Eco 1992/1996).

> The Model Reader of a story is not the Empirical Reader. The empirical reader is you, me, anyone, when we read a text. Empirical readers can read in many ways, and there is no law which tells them how to read, because they often use the text as a container for their own passions, which may come from outside the text, or which the text may arouse by chance. (Eco, 1996)

The model reader is constructed by the text in order to have it read in a certain manner. However, the model reader:

> is not the one who makes the 'only/right' conjecture. A text can foresee a Model Reader entitled to try infinite conjectures. (Eco, 1996).

Umberto Eco (1992) says that empirical readers can only guess who the model reader is on the basis of what the text suggests by its intention. The model reader may work out who the model author is – also a textual strategy integrated into the text. Also, the model author's aim corresponds with the aim of the text. He or she may speak to the reader as a narrator, either as a representation of the empirical author or as an impersonal spirit permeating the text, who

can sometimes be modest and sometimes omniscient (the science clams that…), subtle or all-mighty (it is decided that…). It is not only literary works that have a model reader; newspapers, documents, timetables, codes, academic texts and textbooks also have model readers. The limits of interpretation are, according to Umberto Eco (1994), not related to the empirical authors or readers, but defined by the intention of the text. This strategy is included in the text in order to guide the model reader to certain interpretations – and away from others.

> the text's intention is not displayed by the textual surface... One has to decide to "see" it. It is possible to speak of the text's intention only as a result of a conjunction on the part of the reader (Eco, 1992, p. 64).

It may be easier to recognise the intention of the text if one is familiar with the genre. For instance, a story beginning with the words "Once upon the time…" is most probably a fairytale. This phrase, however, may also turn out to be ironic, and the story may actually be part of another genre (parody, or detective novel). If this is the case, and the irony is to be encountered further in the text, then unravelling the fairytale at the beginning of the text would have its implications from the viewpoint of its intentions. Umberto Eco claims that finding the intentions of the text is only possible by comparing its excerpts with the whole, contextual analysis, otherwise known from the ethnographic methods.

In semiotic analysis, the researcher may wish to characterise the model reader, their freedom of interpretation, as well as the model author present in the text. But there are many other interesting aspects of organisational text to study. Hervé Corvellec's (1997) list of topics may be of use for the planning of such research:

- General outlook of the text: general presentation, format, cover, pictures
- The narrator and focalisation

    - The narrator (the model author): signs of the narrator, grade of intrusiveness of the narrator, distance of the narrator, reliability of the narrator
    - Focalisation: angle from which things are seen, identity of the focaliser(s), unrestricted point of view, internal point of view, objective point of view, or else?
- The audience – model reader (who and why)
- Arrangement of the text
    - Titles: name given to the report, name given to other performance reports
    - Table of contents: overview of the structure of the text is given
    - Highlights: presence of highlights, what is highlighted and how
    - Presence of summary
    - Text and time: order, duration, frequency of the text (if it is for instance a bulletin), signs of the spatio-temporal orientation of the text
- Style
    - The language of activity report: technical terminology, positive and diminishing words
    - The practice of naming and of normalisations
    - Verbs: are verbs in the active or passive voice? If in passive voice, is the agent explicated?
    - Types of speech presentation: free direct discourse, normal direct discourse, and normal indirect discourse
    - The place given to figures
    - The place given to performance indicators
    - The place given to diagrams

    - The practice of quotation (rules of quoting, how it is quoted, why and when, etc.)
- Organisation of the narration
    - Plots: events, presence of functionality, equivalents events (relevance of events), order of presentation (among which temporal axis of the events), duration of events and speed of the narration, casual relations, organisation of the events into a plot, multiple sequences of narration, homogeneity of the narratives
    - Characters: traits and attributes, articulation of the traits, categorisation of characters, portraits and portraying technique (means of characterisation), characters who are and characters who do
    - Settings: indication of the spatio-temporal complex
- Explicit/implicit information and presupposed information
- Themes
- Comments

An interesting example of semiotic analysis is provided by Hervé Corvellec (1997) in his book *Stories of Achievements*, about annual business reports. The main category of these reports, *performance*, has an association to many interesting contexts from financial results achieved by the company, to achieving good results in sports, theatre and the arts (performance art). Hervé Corvellec reflects on this ambiguous term on the basis of etymological analysis and goes on to meticulously study its usage in the various languages and concrete meanings applied in management. He has also studied the associations that this word invokes in the world of management, drawing a comparison between running a company and sport. Notions connected with *performance* are numerous and include competition, comparison, comparability, hierarchy, fairness, etc. *Performance* is a product of

the narration of the annual reports, which is a result of the textualisation of the organisation. As a result, the companies gain both a language and an identity. The author reflects that narratives presented as single success stories may be included in genre that is similar to hero myths, together producing a kind of series. In terms of an axis of time each organisation can be said to have its own series in the form of a collection of reports. These stories are important as a genre as they reflect the striving for the operationalisation of the idea of progress that is characteristic to contemporary societies.

Working with Organizational Texts (by Herve Corvellec)

Working with organisational texts may be a simple and effective way of collecting the research material. Once I proved it to some students of mine, when I asked them to wait for a while, while we were sitting in my office at the university. I then left the room, went through the parking lot to one of the Astra factories that was located just across the street. At the reception I just grabbed several brochures and the annual report. Two minutes later I was back in my office and the students were asked to study the pictures taken from the texts from the semiotic perspective. In the same way, I was able to collect 4000 pages of press and media materials (including the transcriptions of interviews), simply copying some pieces of the larger archive being a part of a larger project about big cities conducted by my colleague (Corvellec 2000). It is increasingly possible to access material directly in electronic form, which makes it easier to quote it later and conduct the qualitative analysis.

2. Working with organisational texts, however, also assumes that the researcher has learned how to structure the reading process. For example, reading from an aesthetic, rhetoric or semiotic perspective is quite special, in the sense that different questions

need to be asked in relation to the text depending on the different conceptual frameworks underlying these perspectives. It is not the same as the attempt to categorise the text and locate it within the theory of genres and say that it is, for instance, an epic. Neither is it the identification of various kinds of styles used to illustrate a situation and the claim that the most frequently used metaphor used in Dagens Industri, a newspaper dedicated to business, is the ocean. Similarly, it is not an analysis of how a certain sign is related to an object through speculating how such a sign might appear in a different context, nor is it the replacement of an excerpt of text with another in order to see what happens. In other words, naïve or superficial reading does not suffice. In addition, the time that has been gained in the process of gathering data should be used to systematise one's approach to the collected texts.

3. Working with the text does not exclude other forms of fieldwork. Thanks to my interlocutor I managed to gather some of the most interesting texts relating to the internal workings of organisation when he suddenly remembered that he had some interesting internal documents that might be of interest (Covellec 1997, Chapter 5). In the same way, an interview will obviously yield much more if the interviewer understands the subject matter being discussed, which in turn makes the reading of the organisational texts extremely valuable.

4. Notes from the Field

4.1 Field Notes

The invariable mark of wisdom is to see

the miraculous in the common

Ralph Waldo Emerson

A Fieldwork Diary

Many qualitative researchers give considerable thought and careful consideration to their field notes. Those working with grounded theory (Sections 1.3 and 5.1) are particularly concerned with meticulous note-taking, and, subsequently, the ordering and interpretation of their notes. Many ethnographers also like to keep a fieldwork diary during the time of research, although there are no hard and fast rules as to how this should be done. In organisational ethnography and cultural anthropology alike a variety of methods can be used for taking field notes. My students often keep notes for their own personal reference, although they sometimes ask me to read them as well. As an aid to their own research other reviewers and colleagues might also be interested in reading an ethnographer's notes. If one intends a broader audience, one should thus try to ensure that the field notes are intelligible.

Classical field notes are rather boringly realistic, often coded (instead of revealing the identity of interviewees they are represented by special codes which also help to classify the person into certain categories, for instance, into groups differentiated by age, social class, etc.), and very brief. Not everyone follows such a pattern, however. Some researchers relish chaotic notes – as I do. I like doodling in my notebook, using a handwriting style that is difficult to decipher by anyone else, pasting in things that I find relevant or interesting at the

time, etc. But there are also researchers who prefer to take methodical notes in accordance with the rules set out by grounded theory. In short, there is a wide array of possibilities open to the researcher, depending on personal preference and the particular objectives in question.

Researchers often regard their field notes as something very personal, especially if they include their feelings and private comments. Some ethnographers have an emotional connection to their notes. They are, after all, a record of their own experiences. Jean Jackson (1995) interviewed ethnographers about their field notes, where her interviewees "were expressing powerful and ambiguous feelings towards their notes" (p. 37). The author describes the notes as being betwixt and between the different worlds and roles played by the researcher in the field and the researcher at the home university. It is as though the notes were a kind of a correspondence between the person as a professional researcher and the person as a private individual. It is as though one of these above-mentioned people occupies the field – the world where they are a visitor and where their task is to find out and learn about what is going on – and are then deposited in a different world – of the university or workplace, a place where the ethnographer belongs and is perhaps a top-class expert in the area being studied. These two roles may be completely different. The notes thus serve as a reminder that they are actually strangers, even in their own world at their own university. Someone with such a "dual personality" or role has probably learned to understand and respect others, and in such a case are no longer one hundred percent "one of the gang" in the same way as people who stay in one culture all the time. The researcher may treat his or her notes as a kind of bridge between these two worlds in that they help in the interpretation of the field material and may sometimes even facilitate an understanding of one’s own culture.

Notes and Stories from the Field (by Ulla Eriksson-Zetterquist)

On heading towards my field for the very first time with the very broadly formulated research problem about career and gender, I had not read methodological books on ethnography. There were two reasons for this: I'd only recently been accepted onto the PhD programme and one of the major learning expectations was to approach the field without too much pre-understanding. Nevertheless, as I had read studies about organizational cultures, I knew what the final result should look like. This is what my work in the field looked like:

Before the meeting that I was supposed to observe started, I jotted down general reflections about the room, seating arrangements, interior design, the participants, etc. I carefully recorded the start of the meeting in my notes and took notes as accurately as time allowed. During the meeting I not only grew more and more exhausted, but also became much more familiar with the new environment, so that in my notes I documented actions that I found interesting. The less interesting parts were noted from a general point of view. On the agendas of the meetings that I was observing regular breaks were provided for. I came to experience that taking notes during these breaks was difficult, as it was regarded as socially unacceptable to walk around armed with a notebook about the companies included in my research. At the same time, it was during the breaks when personal reflections of the participants emerged and could be captured .Sometimes their comments were of particular interest to my project. (One example were the impressions shared by young, newly employed women who had just listened to gender and career stories told by the financial manager about his own situation with two wives and six kids from two marriages: "can't he see that he is a pastiche of himself?!"). My solution was to devise a brief note about the discussion just before the meeting re-started after the break, and make an effort to remember the

stories so that I could write them down in full at the end of the day.

This constant writing in my diary turned out to be another difficulty in the field work. A professor, who was very experienced in ethnographic research, once told me the story of one of his research projects where he needed to slip out to the loo in order to take notes. This made the people at this company even more suspicious because not only was he a strange, observing researcher, he also spent 20 minutes at the loo… According to recommended ethnographic methods, the researcher should construct a story from the pieces written down in the form of notes immediately after the observation: this, indeed, is one of the most important parts of the field research. Time is of crucial importance here. Neither is it easy, due to illegible handwriting, and a fickle memory, to fill in the brief notes with meaningful content. As it is actually impossible to decide in advance which parts of the collected material will be used in the future work, I also need to include the whole meeting in the story. Describing only the "key moments" would not really work.

Writing a story was a very time-consuming phase of the research and took place when I was already physically exhausted after several days of field research (in terms of having to constantly make handwritten notes and the concentration required during the whole process). Quite often I felt my body aching from the tension brought about by the necessary and inevitable process of distancing myself from the closeness inherent in the field research. The reward for this work is the content-rich stories, and, moreover, the pleasure derived from writing them. Writing your own versions of what was going on is both amusing and liberating. In my case it starts with a story without references or analysis, where I am able to pour everything out that happened and play with styles and phrasing. In parentheses and footnotes I can include my observations and reflections, this being a part of the process of distancing. The comments may

indeed be nasty, but they are often useful for the subsequent stage of analysis. In the versions accessible to others the comments are obviously deleted, although they do given an additional energy boost to the in-the-field data.

What to Jot Down?

Keeping in mind that in ethnography field notes have a personal character and that there are many ways of taking them, I will nonetheless try to give some advice based on my own experience, as well as that of other researchers.

Many of my students either take notes because this gives them a sense of security and companionship in the field, or because they want to make sure that they will remember things that have taken place in that milieu, such as what people looked like, how they behaved, etc. Many of them like to take notes during the research, albeit discreetly. A person that takes notes during a private meeting usually attracts a lot of attention and could even be taken for a "spy". Some of my students prefer writing things down when they get back home, in a café, or in the bathroom, like in Ulla Ericsson's story. I am often quite blatant about note-taking, but then, I always carry a book and/or a notebook with me wherever I go so that most people are quite used to it.

Another question concerns what to write down. Elisabeth Chiseri-Strater and Bonnie Sustein (1997) propose that the following information should be included in field notes:

- The date, time and place of research
- Details about facts, numbers, description of events
- Sensual impressions: views, sounds, textures, scents, flavours
- Reaction of people to the presence of the researcher (incl. note-taking, recording of the interviews)

- Words, expressions, summaries of conversations and the specific language of the field
- Questions and doubts about people in the field to be studied later
- Page numbers, in order to make it easy to locate information in the future

In order to systematise one's notes it is a good idea to arrange them according to particular types, for example: impressions, descriptions inspired by observations, tentative analyses and conclusions, one's own reflections, feeling and reactions from the research. Some people who divide the sheet of paper into columns designated for various categories of the notes. Others use colour highlighting to mark different styles. Those researchers who prefer to type their notes might use various types of font to distinguish certain excerpts of the text. Some, and I include myself here, write more spontaneously and hope that they will be able to remember why they have noted specific aspects.

It is a good idea not to muddle descriptions noted from observations with one's own reflections and opinions. Some people also like to paste a variety of useful things into their notes by way of record, such as pictures, cuttings from newspapers and magazines, post-it notes on which the researcher or someone from the field wrote something valuable (or potentially valuable).

The following notes, written during research undertaken by Maida Owens (1999), provide an example of how this might be done. The excerpts are taken from her research notebook.

THURSDAY, JULY 8, 1999	NOTES
I asked Rachel if she remembered folding paper to make something that she told	*I don't really remember doing much with folding paper. I do remember spending most*

fortunes with. At first she wasn't sure what I meant, but with a bit more description she said, "Of course." She said that she hadn't thought about that in a long time. I asked if she would agree to be interviewed. Since she had grown up with me doing such things, she was familiar with the idea. But when I said that I wanted to put the interview online, she wasn't so sure, especially since I also wanted to include photographs of her folding the paper. I told her to think about it, and that she didn't have to do it.

FRIDAY, JULY 23, 1999

I asked Rachel again about being interviewed about paper folding. She seemed a bit shy about it, but agreed to be interviewed. She immediately folded a fortune-teller, but I said that I didn't have the tape recorder at home to do the formal interview, so we couldn't do it right now. I told her the type of things that I would ask her.

At what age did she do this type of paper-folding?

of 8th grade French class making spit balls and sticking them down a little hole in my desk. I don't think of spit balls in the same category as folding paper, though. I wonder why I immediately thought of spit balls when I thought of paper folding. I wonder if my kids make the same connection?

Why did she do it? In what types of situations did she do it?

Why did she stop doing it?

Suddenly a paper airplane whizzed by. Rachel's 19-year-old brother had overheard our conversation, made a paper airplane, and shot it at me. I asked him if he would agree to be interviewed, and he said, "No way. Absolutely not." I asked why, and he said that he didn't want to be on the Internet. So I asked if I could include a photo of his airplane in the project, and he said that would not be a problem.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 14, 1999

I wanted to experiment with photographing the folded paper before the actual interview. Also, I had recently gotten a digital camera and needed to get familiar with it. I was also concerned about photographing something white. Since the white paper was the subject of the photographs, it would need to be carefully planned so that the photographs would be usable. Without a carefully planned

NOTES

Remember to get from work:

1. Digital camera

2. Plenty of computer disks. (The disks fill up fast, especially when the setting is on fine).

3. Tape recorder

4. Audio cassettes

background, the paper would not show up.

I was right. The white paper was going to be a problem with or without a flash. On my white kitchen counter, the white paper did not show up. I tried it on my wooden kitchen table and that didn't help much because the room was quite dark. The flash on the digital camera was not sufficient for this photo shoot. The flash simply washed out the paper. The great thing about the digital camera was that I could find out immediately whether a shot worked.

5. Batteries for recorder and microphone

6. Release form for Rachel to sign.

It is not often that one's field notes are published. Students may want to show them to their supervisors (or may be required to do so), and sometimes their colleagues want to take a look. Having said that, however, entire collections of field notes and other materials collected during field studies by famous anthropologists are available for perusal at, for instance, the American National Anthropological Archives.

4.2. Transcription of Interviews

The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible

Oscar Wilde

Why Bother to Transcribe?

People often wonder why one needs to transcribe? One response is because we need the material. To a qualitative researcher, transcripts provide the main substance of the texts and form the basis for argumentation. In qualitative research there are more or less rigorous rules for how to transcribe data from the field. Ethnomethodological conversation analysis is grounded in the very meticulous transcription of conversations and everything that is relevant at the time: poses, intake of breath, silences, intonations and turns in taking the floor. In grounded theory there are researchers who do not transcribe all the material but make do with recurrent listening to the tapes and coding the material into categories, thus providing information as to where the exact data can be found. Most ethnographers would probably place their preferences in this respect somewhere between these extremes. Interview material and also notes from observations are carefully and literally typed into the computer files; it is often the researcher him- or herself who does the transcription. Some people like to do it, even though it is tedious and not very creative, because they then recall what happened in the field in vivid detail. Also, to some people the best ideas for categorisations and conclusions come to mind during the transcription phase. Nonetheless there are also people who prefer to let someone else transcribe their interviews. People have different types of memory: some

have better auditory memory, some visual, and some kinetic. It is good to know to which type one belongs to.

There are two standards of transcribing the interviews: the exact and the grammatically and linguistically edited. The former entails the literal recording of the interlocutor's speech, irrespective of whether he or she uses incorrect phrases or rude formulations, repeat themselves a lot, etc. In the latter case the transcriber eliminates the mistakes, stumbles, rude phrases, etc. Most readers assume that the first solution is adopted, unless stated otherwise. If the researcher decides to edit the interviews, it may be a good idea to explain this in a footnote.

Inspirations from Other Methodological Traditions

A rich variety of transcription methods are often applied in qualitative research projects. Some of them may serve as inspiration to ethnographers who wish to enrich their realistic transcriptions of the literal content of the interviews with some kind of supplement that also provides an account of gestures, intonation, places taken by people when they speak, or just about the structure of the statement. Here I briefly review those that I consider to be of particularly importance:

- Transcription of symbols: qualitative research based on symbolic interactionism where a record of signs, gestures and face expressions of the interviewees are also included. My students often make a note (e.g. by using a "smiley") of whether the interviewee was smiling, rolling his or her eyes, making an angry face, etc. Gestures and other symbols may be written in square brackets – […]. It is commonly assumed that everything placed within the square bracket is a personal remark of the author, for

example, [inaudible] means that the researcher could not hear the utterance of the speaker in a certain fragment of the tape.

- The interview may be written in the form of a table where each column is assigned for one person. This form may prove especially useful for group interviews. In the final column we might make a note of the time or for how long the person was speaking. In this way it becomes clearly visible who the leader in the group is, who dominates the floor, who the most passive person in the conversation is and also the moments when all the participants talk simultaneously (without resorting to the complicated ethno-methodological recording)
- Another practical idea of supplementing the text is to illustrate the interviews with pictures. This technique is particularly popular among my students equipped with mobile phones with cameras. Naturally, one can also use a traditional camera, although it is then more difficult to check whether the picture is acceptable and usually means that one has to take a lot of pictures as back-up.

Transcribing the Interviews: A Torment which Proves Beneficial (by Dorota Dobosz-Bourne)

Transcription is perhaps the worst part of the ethnographic research. I simply cannot think of a person who actually likes it. The monotony of typing, guessing the words that happened to be disturbed/drowned by some noises in the background. It may be even worse. When I once got back home I just realized that the entire interview, which I was very fond of, was simply unplayable. I have no idea of the reason, but our voices sounded strange, like from the other world, and it was basically impossible to transcribe anything. What a disappointment!

Having transcribed the interviews I printed them out and, then, I arranged the printouts into a booklet of a sort. Then I began to read them in turn, at the same time writing little side notes with the plots that seemed interesting or were simply recurring in several interviews. In this way I created a list of themes, such as "people at work", "job satisfaction and motivation", "foreigners in the company", etc. Then I took a lot of markers, each of different colour, and assigned each colour to a single theme. Back again, I was reading the interviews, but this time I highlighted every sentence within the certain plot with the right colour. Hence, my interview booklet was all coloured; each sentence was of a colour. Then I drew up a table of the themes. It resembled a matrix, with all the themes put in vertically and the numbers of the interviews horizontally: from the very first to the very last. What followed was that I was flicking through the interviews, page by page, and writing the page numbers where certain theme appeared into the respective field in the matrix. For example, in the field 3 and the theme "people in the organization" there were the following numbers: 2, 5, 7. It meant that this theme is to be found in the third interview on the pages: 2, 5, 7. That turned out to be very helpful during the process of writing, as in the thesis I was reporting on every theme in turn. Describing the certain topic it was just enough to take a look at the table and in one verse I had the page numbers where my interviewees were talking about it. Then I could just read the excerpts of the relevant interviews and think about how they could be put and presented together. Once I figured out this, I marked the pages where I was to take the quotations from. On each page I put the little post-it card on the side, numbered from one to a given number, depending on how many pages there were to be used. Next, I was simply writing the story, beginning with my own words, and after that taking the proper quotation from the interview. And so the writing went on, sentence by sentence. This very part of

writing ethnography was most satisfying to me. I was very happy that finally the actual narrative was about to emerge out of the initial chaos. All the interviews, seeming so detached from each other at the beginning, suddenly merged into a coherent story and thus acquired some new meaning. After that, the thoughts, associations and metaphors were coming to my mind just naturally. The puzzles fell into place and the story about "The Galaxy of Corporation"[7] emerged.

[7] Dobosz (1999)