

STORYTELLING AND MATERIALITY IN ORGANIZATIONS – CHALLENGES FOR ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

Karen Barad's post-humanist agential realist account of mattering (Barad, 2007) has far reaching implications for understanding intentionality, memory, and knowing in organizations. We argue for a diffractive ethnographic methodology as a supplement and alternative to hermeneutic and deconstructive ethnographic approaches. This is accomplished by considering human beings as material-discursive of-the-world becomings rather than narrative beings or historical-discursive constructions.

We position our approach to ethnography within the literature on organizational storytelling, which is re-conceptualized from a material-discursive point of view. As such human beings are considered as iterative intra-active 'living stories' (Boje, Jørgensen & Strand 2013). Living story is in a time, a place of collectively lived participation with the world that is here and now (e.g. Jørgensen & Boje, 2010).

Living stories are stories-in-the-making and an ingrained part of the theatre of action. It is a performative, enacted and embodied material way of being that is a part of identity in-the-making including "gender-in-the-making" (Barad 2007, p. 87), as well as race-in-the-making and class-in-the-making. Living stories are 'material stories' in the sense of being made up of material-discursive (re)storying actions in organizations (Strand 2012, p. 46).

Challenges for organizational ethnography is to describe and analyze the living relationalities that at any time constitute the specific spacetime-matter configurations that at any moment and in any situation make up the organization. 'Spacetime-matter' highlights here the inevitably entangled state of multiple spatial, temporal and material dimensions that configure performativity in organizations and at the same time are results and governing forces of what people do.

It implies further that focus is relocated from what takes place in the human mind to what takes place in here-and-now performances. Focus is in other words relocated from conceptual thinking and language use towards everyday practices, which are seen not seen as the results of human or discursive agency only but are seen as the results of diffractive interferences of the material and the discursive and where spatial and material dimensions also have agency.

This leads to a third implication, which is performativity is the result of a diffractive process in the here-and-now moment of becoming. While ethnography traditionally has

emphasized inter-subjectivity and language-use, diffraction gives a more adequate varied, complex and material insight into what creates performativity in organizations. The argument for is thus to adopt a multimodal ethnographic approach, which does not rely on oral or written language or text alone.

Instead we argue for what Barad has called an entangled genealogy (2007, pp. 389-390) based both on history, on text and on detailed analyses of what takes place in the moment of becoming. We don't argue for one particular ethnographic method but seeks to construct a framework in which different ethnographic methods (interviews, participant observation, document analysis, material artifacts, turn-by-turn analysis etc.) can play different roles in describing and understanding the living stories in organizations thereby giving a holistic, rich and varied account of what is at stake in organizations.

The article develops the methodology in the following steps.

First, key notions of ethnography in relation to storytelling in organizations are presented. Intentions are to specify some initial considerations in regard to what characterizes storytelling as a textual field. We position our approach as third approach different from a narrative approach and a historical-discursive approach and argue for a more material-discursive understanding of living stories.

Second, the material-discursive understanding is developed in depth from Karen Barad's work. We argue that stories are then seen as co-configured through the entangled state of agencies of bodies, artifacts and spaces. It has dramatic consequences for our conception of performativity because terms like memory, intentionality, knowing etc. are conceptualized as something that do not belong to individuals but instead are seen as embedded and embodied in the apparatus of the whole situation.

Third, we draw out the implications of this approach to organizational ethnography and describe a multimodal ethnographic approach within the framework of entangled genealogy.

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