Title:
From the photographer to the visual researcher. Problems with visual organisational ethnography.

Abstract:
As visual methodologies have become popular, many organisational researchers start to use their cameras as research tools. However, unlike spoken and written language, using images appears to be far more problematic. While it is obvious that any scientific text should be free of linguistic errors, it is not uncommon to see poorly prepared photographic documentation accompanying ethnographic work. Moreover, since the interpretative basis of qualitative methodologies accepts subjectivity of the researcher, his or her technical mistakes are either neglected or attributed to unique style. Nevertheless, although technical skills are not the essence of visual ethnography and are even disregarded by the key authors in that field, their lack may lead to many methodological mistakes. Not only because poorly lit or faultily composed photos could distort the viewer’s reception. A more important issue is that inconsiderate usage of the photography can lead to distorted interpretation. That is why all visual researchers should pay a special attention to the trustworthiness and rigour of their methods, as well as the clarity and quality of the acquired illustrative material. The awareness of photographic rules does not restrict researchers to a realistic approach, since they may choose narrative or even highly reflexive perspective, but this choice must be conscious, meaningful and easily understood for the viewer. Additionally, visual ethnography induces many other considerations, especially relating to the empowerment of the viewer’s interpretation, new methods of visual data coding that do not ultimately reduce the visual material into the text, new tools for image capturing, image editing or even printing quality limitations. All these problems are especially symptomatic in the emerging fields of visual research, such as visual organisational ethnography, where the common researchers’ visual literacy is yet to be developed. Visual organisational ethnography additionally must cope with the issues of copyright and identity protection, trade secrets, limited access to the field and time restrictions. That is why a better understanding of the role of skills and style is crucial for the development of visual research methodologies. Based on the research project dealing with the mutual influence of organisational design, architecture and aesthetics, the paper offers the author’s considerations addressing the mentioned problems.