

## Revisiting innovation in qualitative research

Amanda Coffey

In this issue of *Qualitative Researcher* we return to questions of innovation within qualitative research practice. Readers will be aware of the many recent calls to methodological development and innovation across the social sciences. These have stemmed partly from the external environments within which and against which social scientific research is situated. There are increasing imperatives, for example, to improve the quality and impact of social research, and a drive to achieve this through research excellence, innovation and the development of cutting edge methods of inquiry. At the same time there has been and continues to be an ongoing creative process of methodological development from within and across disciplines. Qualitative research has been at the forefront of such methodological creativity. The art and craft of qualitative research has not stood still, and there has been considerable recent development of both method and methodology. For example, the increased use of visual and multimodal methods of enquiry, the marrying of social science with arts-based practices, and the development of methods with and within digital technologies and environments. Qualitative research has been a rich site for methodological engagements and experimentation, set within a context of finding new and enhanced ways of capturing, analysing and representing social life; drawing on an increasingly wide repertoire of methods, modes and data. And as we know such calls to experimentation are differentially viewed from within the field of qualitative methods and social science more generally – celebrated and abhorred in seemingly equal measure. Thus we have had a ‘business case’ for methodological innovation, in the context of research excellence, impact and quality; and also a more organic call to the ebb and flow of qualitative inquiry – as

developing, shifting, changing – and here considerable disagreement as to the worth of those innovation practices. It is possible, of course, to reconcile these two perspectives or processes, but there is a level of discomfort for qualitative researchers in doing so. An approach that focuses on innovation as key to ensuring competitive and high impact social science is often seemingly at odds with much of what is occurring within qualitative research practice. There are potentially divergent as opposed to convergent paths. The creative end of qualitative research often remains the furthest removed from social science research that is perceived as high quality or more importantly high impact. However good the poem or performance is, it is often not perceived as science or evidence. We also, too, need to be realistic in relation to enhancing research practice and methodological development - the imperative to innovate is often at the expense of well founded research - appropriately and sensitively carried out, so methods used to good effect, with adaption and reflection.

The articles in this issue all engage, in very different ways, with the imperative to methodological innovative; and all reflect on the opportunities, difficulties and tensions of potentially innovative qualitative research practice. William Housley and Robin Smith outline three methodological innovation ‘types’ within contemporary qualitative research practice. They argue that it is possible to view such innovative practices as reductionist and in danger of stripping out the social. They are sceptical of some calls to methodological innovation; but are also optimistic that an increased focus on everyday practices across the social sciences may bring enhanced attention to (new) methods for understand-

### Contents of Issue 13

**Page 1 - Revisiting innovation in qualitative research**  
Amanda Coffey

**Page 2 - Stripping out the social: Innovation and reduction in contemporary qualitative methods**  
William Housley and Robin James Smith

**Page 5 - Visual methods: Innovation, decoration or distractions?**  
Max Travers

**Page 7 - Computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS): A personal view**  
Kate Ness

**Page 11 - Innovating as we go: Ethnography as an evolving methodology**  
Kate Moles, Emma Renold, Gabrielle Iverson and Mariann Martsin

**Page 14 - News and Forthcoming Events**

ing the accomplishment of the social in and through social action. Max Travers has made a number of important recent contributions to methodological conversations about innovation in qualitative research. In his short article in this issue he revisits the oldest 'new' set of methods – visual methods. Travers reflects on the recent mixed take-up of visual approaches across disciplines and traditions; asking whether such approaches can transform qualitative research practice or merely serve as a distraction. Travers also raises some interesting and non trivial issues relating to the technologies and technical skills of

innovative practice. Kate Ness, too, discusses technologies of qualitative research practice, with her short essay on her own use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). It is worth noting that software enhanced data analysis has moved from innovation to expectation; in a sense CAQDAS is an example of a successful innovation, in that it has been accepted and normalised within the social sciences. Ness engages with some of the debates in relation to software supported analysis and reflects upon her own practice. The article by Kate Moles and her colleagues at Cardiff discusses on an

ongoing project to reflect upon the organic nature of research design in practice. The article reflects on the project's use of movement, mobility and mobile methods within an ethnographically orientated project, arguing that ethnography is *essentially* methodologically innovative and creative. The article reflects on the idea of innovation in the context of 'reflexive action and reaction to changing ethnographic moments'. Taken together these articles provide useful framings for critically, and I think optimistically, engaging with the dialogues and practices of innovation with(in) qualitative research.

## Stripping Out the Social: Innovation and Reduction in Contemporary Qualitative Methods

William Housley and Robin James Smith

### Introduction

In this short paper we take issue with some recent developments in the design and application of qualitative research which, to our mind, are indicative of a reductionist tendency. As discussed previously (Atkinson, Delamont, and Housley, 2009 Housley and Smith, Forthcoming), 'qualitative methods' are increasingly deployed across disciplinary boundaries and are to be found in multiple fields of inquiry. Despite the proliferation of qualitative research methods indicating a triumph of sorts, our concern lies with the 'post-disciplinary vacuum' in which qualitative methods are now routinely employed. This development affords a space from which 'innovation' is consistently driven without recourse to disciplinary questions and first principles. We, of course, are not against innovation in itself; however, the problem remains that the full contribution of qualitative research cannot be realised when sociological inquiry is reduced to a narrow focus on practices or experience without consideration of social organisational features in relation to different orders of action. In what follows we discuss a series of 'methodological innovation types' that we associate with a reductionist

tendency. These are articulated in terms of three waves which, although not strictly chronological, are understood to display a typological progression that can be observed in recent, rehashed and resurrected trends in qualitative innovation.

We have chosen to describe the three waves of reduction in qualitative methods as follows: firstly as *conceptual couplings* (the reduction of the complexity of the social and of social organisation via the reification of particular conceptual domains), secondly *activity type pairings* (couplings of ordinary actions which are positioned as increasingly efficient means of 'accessing' participant's experiences and everyday lifeworlds) and, finally, *self-research* (the collapse of inquiry from the social to 'the individual' found in auto-ethnography and life-logging). As suggested, conceptual couplings such as 'discourse and subject', 'narrative and experience', and 'space and place' (to which one may add 'representation and display', 'embodiment and affect', among others) provide narrow analytic foci which are operationalised as methodological innovation in terms of activity type pairings such as 'walking and talking' and 'making and telling'; the pinnacle of qualitative reductionism, it may be argued, can be found where

the study of others is rejected in favour of a 'narcissistic substitution of auto-ethnography for research' (Delamont, 2007). In the remainder of the paper we discuss each wave in turn; but before we do so, a caveat. In many ways this paper should not be read as simply dismissive of the forms of inquiry that we identify and, further, not as entirely negative regarding the current landscape of qualitative inquiry. We are, in fact, somewhat optimistic that topics of inquiry that are currently understood within the hubristic frame of 'methodological innovation' may, in time, herald a rediscovery of the importance of ethno-methods and 'the interaction order' as a means of understanding both social process, the accomplishment of orders of action and the contours of culture. Indeed, we may yet see further evidence of Gary Alan Fine's (1993) 'glorious triumph' of interactionism and the further confirmation of Atkinson and Housley's (2003) observation that 'we are all interactionists now'.

### The first wave: Conceptual couplings and the fragmentation of the social

Our first wave involves 'conceptual coupling' and is characterised by a

process of specialisation, fragmentation and reduction. In this section we choose to discuss only one of the list provided above; namely, 'narrative and experience'.

An oft repeated claim that is made across many forms of contemporary qualitative innovation is that a methodological approach has granted the researcher some form of privileged access to the experiences of the participants. For example, the misappropriation and abstraction of methods of Narrative Analysis in relation to the study of 'illness narrative' and 'experience' has been recently documented (see Atkinson, 2010). We argue that narratives should not be treated *sui generis* and neither should the narratives produced by participants be treated as a direct window on experience. What *is* of *sociological* interest and significance are the contexts in which people tell narratives and how these narratives function as social action. As argued by Schegloff (1997:1) 'Recipients are not only oriented to the story as a discursive unit, but to what is being done by it, with it, and through it'. This topic of inquiry is often obscured through the predominance of interview techniques within qualitative research where the 'good interview' is seen to get access to 'what people really think about X'. Thus, such accounts and narratives are consistently under analysed and often simply reproduced as instances in support of whatever frame the particular research is contextualised within *a priori*. Such forms of reduction thus pay scant regard to the status of narrative and stories as mechanisms for social inscription and the reflexive and accountable ordering of social relations.

Therefore, our general concern with the various reductive conceptual couplings that we have identified in this piece (and discuss in more detail elsewhere, see Housley and Smith, forthcoming) is that they result in discrete programs of work in which specialised concerns can be reified within their own analytic territory resulting in overstated claims for paradigmatic status regarding the complexity of social organisational orders to which little attention is accorded. In other words, conceptual couplings are symptomatic of the abstraction of

action from the social without necessary analytic and/or theoretical measures of reconnection. Questions relating to the definition of the situation, the organisation of experience (Goffman, 1974), and the recognition of social facts as accomplishments rather than things (Garfinkel, 2001) are sidelined in the drive for innovation and novel forms of research methodology. In the following section we identify the way in which the conceptual coupling of 'narrative and experience', alongside the contemporary vogue for concerns with 'space and place', is operationalised in research practice.

### **The second wave: On activity-type pairings**

As identified in previous issues of *Qualitative Researcher*, 'walking methods' are increasingly popular within qualitative research across the social sciences as a means of gaining better access to participants experiences *and* the places in which they live. Whilst we accept the general value of the 'walking interview' our concern, again, lies with the way in which *such data are treated*. In terms of the analysis of spatial practice we are also highly sceptical of the analytic status that is afforded to the route that is taken by the participant, often recorded in contemporary research with GPS technology.

It is clear that walking interviews, bimbles, and go-alongs offer something in addition to the standardised sociological interview and we recognise the affordances of the situated and mobile interview. The central benefit is found in the way in which participants are able to construct accounts from available resources in a 'live' setting as opposed to the rather stale and isolated environments in which interviews are normally conducted. It is also worth noting, however, that Edward Rose (see Carlin, 2009) argued that if one is conducting an interview then this should be recognised as a different order of data collection and production, than ethnography say, and should be done in a quiet and isolated setting. Despite these considerations, however, we note that the isolation of 'walking whilst talking' from the ongoing

stream of activity regularly and readily found in social settings does not get us so very far away from other interviewing techniques and, in this sense, we feel debates relating to the status of the talk produced in the interview situation also apply to the analysis of the walking interview as a particular strip of activity or performance of mobile practice. Walking in itself is both spectacularly mundane and mundanely spectacular. It is something that gets routinely done everyday by the majority of people simultaneously on crowded pavements with a minimum amount of fuss; yet, viewed through a certain lens it is, in fact, a rather special accomplishment. The fact that people are able to recognise, navigate, and produce this 'pavement order' is an achievement of those involved in its construction and walking is, therefore, an organised and organising spatial activity in which social process may be observed in operation. People go about their daily rounds in a similarly organised and organising fashion, moving through their neighbourhoods and communities as they do so. Furthermore, there are professionals whose job entails walking, of moving through a particular territory, the better to know their particular patch (here we are thinking of outreach workers or Police officers). These acts of walking are topics of inquiry in their own right and are constantly getting done without the behest of a researcher; yet scant attention is paid to the way in which these and associated activities might be getting done as routine social accomplishments.

Whilst the reduction of the organisational nature of walking and talking to a innovative means of accessing space and place (a potential geographical (g)loss of the social) and experience is indicative of the second wave, the reductive moment that is the concern of this paper finds its current peak in the method characterising what we call the third wave; namely, auto-ethnography.

### **The third wave: The reification of the (academic) self**

Auto-ethnography (the act of primarily writing about one's self, relationships and experiences) is, somewhat

surprisingly, currently being advocated by its proponents as a means of political change within qualitative methods. Via a close examination of personal experience (the researcher's personal experience that is) it is argued that access is gained to the 'historical moment' and that the auto-ethnographer proceeds to universalise the affects of that moment upon a singular life (Denzin, 2003). In this sense, we find, in our third wave, a simultaneous reduction and conceptual inflation taking place whereby 'experience' is reified and promoted whilst organisational matters, framings and stratifications are sidelined. Of course, society is encountered by people via the self (a founding principle of interactionist sociology) and there has long been the acknowledgement that reflexivity is an important relational affect associated with the research process. These sociological idioms do not, however, result in the self or 'the individual' being sufficiently positioned as a stand alone analytic lens through which to apprehend social process, let alone effect social change. This is an *analytical* issue that is not avoided by removing oneself from disciplinary concerns.

Many arguments against auto-ethnography have been put forward and we would like to add another: the contribution of sociology to social change is not to be found in increasingly innovative, 'seventh moment', methodologies and researcher's collapsing analytic attention to their own private troubles (although explaining private troubles in terms of public or sociological concerns is another matter) but, rather, in the rigorous application of sociological method, theory, and analysis that considers the issue of subjectivity alongside questions of social organisation and/or social change. To give an example, in writing *Asylums*, Goffman (1961) avoided emotive and normative language instead providing a sharp (and some would say, cold) analytic focus on the conditions of the inmates and the social interactional order of institutional life. And yet the 'cold' analysis of Goffman prevails (and had effects in 'the real world') precisely because of the rigorous and considered manner in which he went about reporting his

observations. It is this analytical rigour and disciplinary logic, above all other considerations, which should remain the criteria of judgement for qualitative research and, subsequently, claims of innovation.

### Conclusion

In sum we should reiterate that neither innovation nor analytic reduction are bad things in themselves; it is true, after all, that the reduction of complexity and constant, if small, innovations in practice are a necessary feature of everyday and organizational life. Further, to end on a positive note, we return to the point that we made earlier. The increased focus upon everyday practice across the social sciences may yet see an accompanied analytic attention to the methods through which various aspects of 'the social' are realised and accomplished in and through everyday ordinary (and sometime extra-ordinary) social action.

<sup>1</sup>. In a recent paper Max Travers (2009) outlines how innovation has also been driven by technological innovation and quasi-market relations associated with academic audit and the rationing of limited research resources

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# Visual methods: Innovation, decoration or distraction?

Max Travers

Whether they capture the still or moving image, visual methods are the oldest new methods in qualitative research. Anthropologists from Malinowski (1929) onwards have included photographs in field reports, and in later decades made films about different cultures (Ball and Smith 1992). Sociologists trained in symbolic interactionism such as Howard Becker (1974) and Doug Harper (1998) have been promoting the use of photography since the 1970s, as a superior means of addressing lived experience to written texts. However, relatively few sociologists, or those in related disciplines and subject areas, have taken up this opportunity. Why is it that there is, apparently, so much resistance or lack of interest in using visual methods?

In a previous paper about innovation (Travers 2009), I advanced the sceptical view, held by some old-school ethnographers, that there is something shallow or gimmicky about new methods such as auto- and performance ethnography. By contrast, supporters celebrate these as representing an advance in qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). There has always been a debate in modern industrialised, and technologically driven, societies between those for and against the scientific project. Many favouring new methods, including photography and film, believe that they allow us to get close to lived, emotional or embodied experience. Those favouring traditional methods want to understand and analyse lived experience intellectually. This distinction was brought home recently when a visiting speaker persuaded those attending a seminar at my university to participate in a drumming circle, which is not the same as understanding this therapeutic technique intellectually. For the traditionalist, showing an image, making a film or playing drums is not by itself sociology: it only becomes so with a lot of explanatory text.

In writing about visual sociology, one

has to acknowledge that there are different methods, and theoretical traditions, and each needs to be assessed on its own merits (Travers 2001). In this article, I will consider how symbolic interactionists use photographs when conducting ethnographies, through focusing on the work of Doug Harper (for example, 1982 and 1987). I will also consider how conversation analysts are turning to the analysis of multi-modal communication and interaction (Heath et al 2010) through analysing video-recordings. In each case, I will offer some thoughts on whether collecting and analysing visual images is an innovation that improves or transforms qualitative research, or whether it is a decoration or even a distraction. I will conclude by considering the extent to which you require expert or technical knowledge to pursue this kind of research, which may explain why visual methods are not more widely used.

## Using the visual image

The best known visual sociologist working today is, arguably, Doug Harper. He has published a number of studies, both as a solo researcher and collaboratively, which combine sociological text with images. These include his (1982) doctoral thesis about hobos (supervised by Everett Hughes), an ethnography of a repair shop (1988), and most recently a popular book about Italian culture based on the analysis of photographs of families cooking and eating meals (Harper and Faccioli 2010). He believes that “presenting social life photographically makes it more sociologically comprehensible” (Harper 2004, p.93).

In his (1982) study of a repair shop, a celebration of people working with their hands, Harper used photographs as an elicitation device (for a recent example based on “participant photography”, see Wright et al 2010). He also uses the photographs to reveal the detail of the work to readers, and to allow us to see his central subject

character, Willie, at work in this social setting. In the study about Italian culture, the photographs allow us to meet a number of families, but also to see how they prepare and eat meals. This differs considerably from how people relate to food in American society.

Without having space to give a full appreciation of his objectives or narrative technique, Harper is not simply inserting photographs in the text. He is telling a story using both the text and pictures. As Jon Prosser has noted in relation to the study of the repair shop, this is artfully done:

“...his description of his relationship with Willie is empathetic with a hint of what could be called postmodern in that it is collaborative; and he makes insightful and informative self-reflective remarks airing the dilemma of acting either from a formal social scientist stance or an artistic/aesthetic stance that is part and parcel of being a visual sociologist. What is more Harper covers much reflexive ground with minimal narration – hence the avoidance of ‘navel gazing’” (Prosser 1998, p.106).

To appreciate these observations, you really need to look at the study: how the images themselves tell a story with “minimal narration”, which is not the way we use words in traditional ethnographies. However, they also raise difficult questions that Harper and other visual sociologists have never fully answered to the best of my knowledge. In the first place, there are other studies that have celebrated craft work (for example, Pirsig 1974, Crawford 2009) without using photographic images. Do the images add anything substantial, or are they simply decorative? In the second place, it is apparent when watching any visual presentation, that the images tend to divert attention from serious analysis (the same goes for playing drums or performing a play). This may not be intended, but it happens. Harper is a good sociologist because he is offer-

ing a provocative view of the modern world: that it was better before industrialisation when we had proper communities, and were closer to nature. The images, particularly in the book about Italy, seem designed to appeal to those who are already persuaded, rather than leading into a sociological discussion about modernity.

### Video-analysis

Some qualitative researchers feel that there is too much text in visual sociology, and prefer the medium of ethnographic film in which the painstaking work of frame by frame composition is hidden from the viewer. Others see no better way to address lived experience than giving their subjects camcorders, and publishing their video diaries. The problem here is that there is usually no text whatsoever: there is no attempt to explore or question sociological ideas or arguments through the moving images. This criticism cannot, however, be advanced against conversation analysts who are starting to analyse video- in addition to audio-recordings of interaction in social settings. The editors of a recent collection about organisations believe that presenting stills from the videos “facilitates a more detailed understanding of these moments of interaction than field observation” (Llewellyn and Hindmarsh 2010, p.43). They also argue that the serious analyst needs to view the video-recording repeatedly. This enables one to see, for example, how shoppers in a store show their availability for interaction with sales assistants through their body language (Clark and Pinch 2010).

In this case, it would be difficult to argue that the images form a distraction from sociological analysis. To the contrary, the images are the data that has to be analysed within this sociological tradition *without* bringing in outside knowledge. It would not be possible, for example, for a conversation analyst to employ photo-elicitation techniques, through showing the shoppers the video-recordings and asking them to comment. Instead, the objective is to develop a cumulative, scientific understanding of practices that we largely take for

granted: how gestures and body language are used in communication. Even so, one can argue that some of the images are decorative. It would be difficult to appreciate the social organisation of talk without the repeated inspection of a transcript. However, we already know, as culturally competent consumers, that touching and using the object we are looking at in a shop may attract the attention of a sales assistant. We do not need to inspect a video-recording repeatedly to understand how this happens.

### The technical character of visual methods

Those looking for new methods in qualitative research are often disappointed by the specialist or technical nature of these sub-fields. The field of visual sociology tends to attract people, like Doug Harper or Howard Becker, who are already accomplished photographers. They have expensive equipment, and talk about photography as a technical challenge and aesthetic pursuit, in addition to providing material for sociological research. Consider, for example, the following example supplied by Jon Prosser and Donna Schwartz (1998, p.116):

“I am walking along a city street. In one pocket I have a camera and a notebook and in the other two lenses and extra rolls of film. A young couple are peering into a jeweller’s window. I take out the camera and begin shooting, using the wide angle lens and a slow shutter speed to freeze the couple and turn other shoppers into a blur, suggesting and emphasising the couple’s stillness and intimacy. I change to a short telephoto, shift position, and shoot against the light to accentuate their intimacy and body language. The couple’s reflection in the window catches my eye and I switch to a standard lens and shoot some more, aware that the image is analogous to a theoretical concept derived from interviews with other couples conducted earlier in the study. I put my camera away, take out my notebook and...”.

Most people reading this article will possess either a cheap digital camera,

or access to a camcorder. They would not be able to take a clear, or aesthetically pleasing, photograph of a couple looking into a jeweller’s window. Moreover, they know, from a succession of frustrating experiences, that using images poses great technical challenges. After completing a research project, some will have considered setting up a website to display findings including relevant visual images. This, however, requires specialist technical skills that are, in practice, only acquired by the serious internet hobbyist. Similarly, it is possible to include images and video-clips in undergraduate teaching, assuming that you do not see them as an entertaining distraction from real teaching. But, as a colleague observed, preparing a lecture becomes similar to making a feature film: it takes a great deal of time, and by all accounts is more difficult than transferring photographs taken on a mobile phone to a Facebook page. My own view is that these technological problems are not trivial: someone should be designing better software that allows anyone to do visual sociology.

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## Computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS):

### A personal view

Kate Ness

#### Introduction

Computer software is increasingly used to assist in the analysis of 'qualitative', particularly ethnographic, data. It is widely agreed to help in organising and controlling data. It is claimed by some to increase the researcher's closeness to the data (Lewins and Silver, 2005), though others say the opposite (MacMillan, 2005). This paper gives an outsider's, non-expert view on the use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). It is based upon an investigation into the possible use of the software for the author's own research (Ness 2009; 2010; 2011). This combined textual, archival, interview and ethnographic data, and used methods of analysis drawing on iterative grounded theory and critical dis-

course analysis (Fairclough 1989; Green *et al* 2009). The particular CAQDAS programs investigated were NVivo and Atlas.ti. A brief review of the literature was also conducted, with particular emphasis on the use of CAQDAS for discourse analysis.

#### What the software can and can't do

The main functionality of these programs is based on 'code and retrieve' – once the text is coded by the researcher, searches are fast and comprehensive, and complex (Boolean) searches can be undertaken. This assistance with 'mechanical' aspects of the analysis is often said to free up the researcher to concentrate on the 'conceptual' aspects (Thompson, 2002; Seale, 2000).

As such, the decision as to whether it is worthwhile investing the time needed to learn to operate the software and to input the data in the correct format, in exchange for the time saved by its use, would be a matter for each individual researcher. It would no more be taken to reflect on the quality or seriousness of the research than the decision to use a Mac or a PC, a highlighter or a pencil.

Yet there seems to be a proselytising zeal for the CAQDAS in some quarters. Thompson (2002) writes 'even though computer programs represent a genuine advance over manual methods of data analysis and have been designed to help speed up the process, some researchers continue to resist their use'.

This manages to portray the resistance as irrational, whilst taking for granted that ‘computer programs represent a genuine advance’, and that they do in fact help speed up the process as they are designed to do. No evidence is provided in support of this claim to greater speed. However, MacMillan (2005) reports that ‘In our own case the time spent on the problems we encountered with CAQDAS, and fruitless attempts at inconsequential coding that bore no relation to the finished analysis, considerably *increased* the time we would have spent on the ... study had we restricted our research to using the traditional manual methods of examining the data.’

There also seems to be a tendency to make implicit claims that the software can actually do more than merely assist; ‘more than just coding’. Thus for example Lewins and Silver (2005), whilst careful to state clearly that CAQDAS cannot ‘do’ analysis and the researcher is still in control, nevertheless seem to stray close to implicitly claiming ‘more’ for the software. They describe “code-based theory building software” as ‘allowing the researcher to test relationships between issues, concepts, themes, to e.g. develop broader or higher order categories, or at the other extreme, to develop more detailed specific codes where certain conditions combine in the data’.

It is claimed that using the software to search for relationships between codes (for example, co-occurrence or proximity) ‘will produce a secondary level of analytic coding’. In addition, they conclude that ‘When used systematically and within the individual researchers’ ‘comfort zone’, CAQDAS packages can ... increase ‘transparency’ and methodological rigour’

### CAQDAS for ethnographic work

Coffey *et al* (1996) discuss the increasing use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis for ethnographic work. They argue that the widespread influence of CAQDAS is promoting convergence towards a uniform mode of data collection, storage, analysis and representation. This new ortho-

doxy combines the presuppositions and procedures inscribed in contemporary software with methodological perspectives associated with (a certain form of) grounded theory. Coffey *et al* warn that ‘many of the analytic strategies implied by code-and-retrieve procedures are tied to the specific inputting requirements of computer software strategies’. Consequently, ‘there is an increasing danger of seeing coding data segments as an analytic strategy in its own right, and of seeing such an approach as the analytic strategy of choice’ (Coffey *et al*, 1996, paragraph 7.7).

A similar view of the convergence of (versions of) grounded theory and CAQDAS, and the danger that researchers may be led implicitly towards the uncritical adoption of a particular set of strategies as a consequence of adopting computer aided analysis has been outlined by Lonkila ‘nearly all of the programs developed specifically for qualitative data analysis tell us: if you want to do qualitative research with the computer, you have to code your data. ... It may be that at least some kind of coding is needed in most qualitative research, but it is also possible that coding is overemphasized, given the fact that a large part of the qualitative researcher's work consists of interpretation and a fine-grained hermeneutic analysis....’ (Lonkila, 1995, pp. 48-49)

### CAQDAS for discourse analysis

MacMillan (2005) also makes the point that CAQDAS (though frequently described as a tool that can be used for all qualitative research) is designed to categorise data through a system of codes, compatible with the grounded theory concept of theory emerging from the data. She found few studies using CAQDAS as a tool for other qualitative methods, and fewer still examining its use in discourse analysis. CAQDAS has been used in some more quantitative approaches to studying language, such as content analysis or corpus linguistics, where an interest in counting or measuring linguistic features lends itself readily to the search, count, and code

facilities of computer programs. There were no examples of the use of CAQDAS for discourse analysis (such as CDA) which studies how language works by examining its use in context. In explanation of this, van Dijk (2004) argues that, while CAQDAS may provide the means for a large scale quantitative search, a deep qualitative analysis on a smaller selection of data will ‘generally yield much more insight’.

MacMillan set out to evaluate the use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software for a discourse analysis of news articles. The researchers found that ‘throughout this process our focus was on operating the software, and assigning and reassigning codes. Little attention was given to issues of interest from a discursive perspective...’ Thus, ‘the danger of coding according to the capabilities of the software is that the researcher is steered towards treating the data in terms of categories, and as such something that can be given significance through counting, dividing, and subdividing. Coding becomes the method of analysis, rather than a way of managing the data.’

### The problems with the software

Thus, whether the software is being used for ethnographic work or for discourse analysis, it appears that the procedures required by the software can have the effect of ‘pushing’ the researcher towards a particular method of analysis. Approaches such as conversation analysis, discourse analysis and narrative analysis do not use thematic coding, and if coding is not the framework for analysis, then it can be argued that there is no place for the software, except for preliminary case selection and as a way of moving between the data and the research notes.

The other major problem is decontextualisation, which may lead to a tendency to focus too much on the detail rather than on the overall, holistic picture. (Thus, not seeing the wood for the trees.) It is particularly difficult to take into account the effects of temporal sequence in the data. Ten



Have (1991; 1998) looked at some of the practical considerations of using software for conversation analysis. Although his overall appraisal is fairly positive, he found that the software was unable to allow the analysis of sequential structures, so segments of text became fragmented and isolated during the process of coding. Recent versions of the programs have supposedly ameliorated this by making it easier to move from the retrieved passage to the spot it came from in the original document or by supporting retrieval without removing the passage from its immediate context.

But, for discourse analysis the wider context is crucial; the material to be analysed has to be understood in relation to its rhetorical, interdiscursive, interactional and social context (Fairclough 1989; 2005; Wetherell *et al.* 2001; Wodak 2002). It would, as Wodak argues (2002, p.87) be impossible to grasp the meaning of phrases in a text without contextual information, which may include an ethnographic understanding of the phenomena being studied, as well as knowledge of recent political history and structural and cultural changes in a particular country or institution. Thus a range of resources are brought to bear in seeking to tease out the meanings behind the text. Studying the emergence and constitution of discourses, their dissemination and contestation, mainly entails the analysis of texts. However, researching operationalisation of discourses, that is, their effects on social reality, calls for accessing insider perspectives in order to assess how discourses are materialised and enacted (Fairclough 2005).

Systematic procedures for chunking and coding (computer-based or not) may exacerbate any tendency to focus on literal meanings and superficial content, rather than implied meanings embedded in context. Fowler and Kress (1979, p.198) emphasise in their discussion of critical linguistics that examining texts using any tool or method which creates distance by lifting discourse out of context to consider it in isolation “would be the very antithesis” of this approach. CAQDAS and other forms of systematic coding also make it difficult to

take account of the importance of what is **not** there, which can be crucial in CDA or deconstruction-based approaches.

Boje (2008, p.207) suggests that ‘one reason story-intertextual research is not progressing is an over-reliance upon qualitative research software’. Again, what is being lost is embeddedness in context or intertextuality; the connections to other texts and other stories. Story research ‘has become a matter of collecting story-text ...then developing a codebook of variables to facilitate text classification and model building. Yet, once entered into story databases, the context is lost.’ Boje concludes that ‘it is not impossible to do intertextual work with software, just difficult’.

#### CAQDAS as a rhetorical device?

My own feeling is that the use of CAQDAS functions largely as a rhetorical device to present the analysis as being in some sense more ‘scientific’, ‘modern’ and even ‘objective’. (Compare with van Dijk’s comments on the use of statistics to enhance credibility by emphasising objectivity (van Dijk, 2000).) The actual method or process of analysis is often unclear in qualitative work such as discourse analysis. Qualitative researchers may feel the need to compete with the (often spurious) ‘rigour’ of quantitative data analysis, replacing statistical analysis with something which appears equally complicated. Stating that data was analysed using a specific computer program may stake a claim to scientific respectability. ‘coding data for use with computer programs is not *analysis*. It is important to avoid the misapprehension that coding and computing lend a scientific gloss to qualitative research’ (Coffey *et al.*, 1996, para 7.6).

What is being hidden or glossed over is the intuitive element, not seen as scientifically ‘respectable’. Analysis of qualitative data is an intuitive art, with interpretive leaps and flashes of inspiration. (Indeed, this is often true of the analysis of quantitative data in the natural sciences too.) Having made the interpretive leap, the com-

puter may help with the painstaking cross-referencing of data needed to back it up, to convince readers that it involves more than an intuitive reading. Yet if the use of CAQDAS actually gets in the way of making that leap in the first place, reducing the analysis to a mechanical procedure, its use will be counter-productive.

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## Innovating as we go: Ethnography as an evolving methodology

Kate Moles, Emma Renold, Gabrielle Ivinson and Mariann Martsin

Qualitative mobile methods are heralded as innovative ways to involve participants, disrupting the power dynamics of the static interview and allowing the production of a co-constructed knowledge, between the researcher, the participant and the landscape. Much of this practice is informed by an understanding of place as something fluid, mutually produced and constructed. Previously we have argued that mobile methods are a useful technique to generate understandings of place (Moles and Anderson, 2008), of creating exchanges that are full of interruptions and disruptions. Researchers have discussed the ways in which the sounds of the landscapes can distract or engage the participants, shifting the focus of the walks and the emerging narratives to productive effect (Hall, Lashua and Coffey, 2008). Consequently, narratives that emerge from this method can reach into unknown

territories, such as future imaginaries, embodied memories and fantasies (see Ringrose and Renold in press). Some argue that this method can allow researchers and participants to move with the rhythm of the walk (Ingold and Lee, 2006), passing through and into places that might have remained unexplored through other 'static' methods (Moles, 2008). In sum, the narrative and physical wandering that can come to characterize this method has the potential to create research encounters in which intimacies can be interwoven within narratives of the ordinariness of the everyday (Ross *et al.*, 2009).

Mobile methods, then have the potential to offer a creative approach to 'knowing localities' that perhaps 'traditional', 'static' interview based personal experience methods can offer. As such, this method is often represented in the methods literature as

potentially 'innovative' (for example, Kusenbach, 2003). However, the demonstration of whether mobile methods constitute an innovative research technique is not the focus of this paper. Rather, this claim is held up as a problematic and a starting point for a wider and critical discussion of the ways in which methodologies evolve, particularly within a participatory framework in which research questions and methods are generated over time and from the context specific inter-subjective negotiations of the relationships between researchers and research participants (see Renold *et al.* 2008). This paper thus aims to begin to explore the processes involved in an evolving methodology and cautions against adoptions of 'new' and seductive methods without full consideration of how methodological choices emerge out of the emplaced and situated understandings, cultures and social interactions of the partici-

pants and the researchers. While the latter point can be made about any research method, it is the current branding (and funding) of alleged 'innovative' methods that have gained currency in methodological developments of late. *In extremis* the novel and by implication risky and 'unknown' is valorized over the known, the 'traditional', stable and the established.

### **'Being there' – an evolving methodology**

This paper is informed by ethnographic research undertaken in a south Wales valley town. The broad research objective was to explore young people's understanding and use of local public and private spaces in a community experiencing regeneration. Methodologically, we positioned ourselves in such a way as to acknowledge and respond reflexively to the messiness of social life – to put ourselves in the midst of things from the onset, *in media res*. This involved paying attention to the affective and multi-sensory dimensions of place simply through 'being there' (Geertz, 1973). This process evolved in ways that included creating strategies of recording walking, watching, talking, eavesdropping, feeling, and touching (using a range of multi-media devices). This classic ethnographic start to the project built up multiple layers of understanding place as, for example, physical environments, as sources of symbolic resources, as social constructs and in terms of embodied affect. Slowly we began to focus in on young people's own subjective understandings of place through generating a suite of different methods to record and learn about these local cultures and relationships, *in situ*, as and when the moment (i.e. research encounters) arose.

Our organic approach to research design, led very much by our evolving relationship with research participants (never fixed, and constantly changing, see Renold et al. 2008) meant that we approached each research encounter with a plethora of creative methods, from maps and drawings, to written diaries and videoed walking tours. In

relation to the latter, the 'mobility' of the walking tour had to be constantly negotiated to mirror the rhythms and movement of the young people themselves. In many ways, the reflexiveness of our approach involved following a number of 'lines of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980) – that is, moments which took us away from methods that in theory allowed an exploration of place and space (e.g. to undertake walking tours with young people from the youth centre). It allowed research questions to shift and be re-understood in relation to the participant's responses and engagements and foregrounds how methods cannot be used unreflexively and thus disconnected from participants' own local cultures and social relations. Consequently, some methods succeeded and engaged the young people, and at other times, in other places, the very same methods could fail to engage and research encounters were closed down. However, we were acutely aware, given the way our project was designed and funded, that we were in a luxurious position of being able to follow multiple analytic lines of flight. Having the capacity to break from *a priori* prescriptions of what we 'should' be doing, we were able to use methods that were informed by the *in situ*, emplaced subject positions of the participants. One example which we briefly set out below detail our research relationships within the local youth centre.

### **The youth club – an evolving methodology**

After an initial period of research in the local schools, we shifted our analytic gaze to include a youth club positioned in the centre of the town. The youth club had been mentioned in a few of the interviews we had conducted in the schools, but it had not emerged as a central place for many of the young people interviewed. However, when we began to spend time in the youth club, we found that many of the young people who attended were those who had been excluded or marginalized in school, and who did not feel comfortable in the institutional cultures operating in that space. Indeed, the centre was a stark contrast

from the regulatory demands of the school space, though of course it had its own rituals and rules which had to be negotiated by the young people and by us continually. Our initial entry into the youth club involved negotiations with the staff about what our role would or could be. We were warned away from more formalised engagements, on the grounds that the young people wouldn't be interested. It was important to the youth workers to provide a place where young people didn't feel under pressure to participate in formalised activities. We learnt fast that the youth centre operated as a key space for young people often marginalized in the 'formalised' cultures of the school and the 'informal' (yet still highly coded) subcultural world of the street. Located between the school and the street, produced a blurring of the public and private in ways that produced what Matthews conceptualizes as a 'third space' for young people. This inbetween space offered them a liminal zone of engagement in an in-between world which they could claim as their own (Matthews, Limb and Taylor, 2000).

### **Unexpected journeys**

Engaging young people in this 'in-between' space required a creative approach. We had to come to the centre with a variety of ideas about how to engage the young people, depending on who was there when we arrived, and how they were disposed to engaging with us (if at all). For example, the evening we selected to visit the youth club was also the one in which the boys went to play football. This opened up possibilities for us, and so it became routine that one of the members of the research team would accompany this group to the hall in a nearby village where they played five a side football for a few hours, and videoed the games. By moving into this sphere of opportunity, we also opened up another way of interacting with the young people; each afternoon before the boys went to play, we projected the video from the previous week in a room in the youth club, allowing them to come and see themselves, and allowing us to

hear how they accounted for what they saw. The journeys to the football also emerged as an important time for the boys, and as such accompanying them in the minibus created new opportunities for insight into their interactions and how they understood each other. This assemblage of methods, over time, has generated some complex mappings and conceptualizations of bodies, movement, pedagogy and place (Ivinson and Moles, 2010)

Early ideas to employ the technique of 'mind maps' (Clark and Emmel, 2009) as a way of generating conversations about young people's subjective representation of place was not taken up in any meaningful way by the majority of young people. After long conversations about local cultural landmarks (e.g. 'the red steps', 'the black bridge' etc.) we instead decided to bring in large printed maps of the town and equipped with stickers and pens, we asked them to tell us more about these places and show us on the maps. For a few evenings this worked really well – it captured the imagination of some young people who arrived and they were engaged with the maps, and had stories they wanted to tell us about different places (from local drinking dens and off-roading adventures through to memories of shared summers swimming in the lakes and camping). Our maps were layered with stickers and stories; and thus the places began to be created through these devices. An eventful and productive night for this method was at Halloween, when we asked young people to talk about scary places. During this evening, the maps were not used in the same way; instead they were used by the young people only as a starting point which lead into a discussion of ghost stories and scary imaginaries. The places these stories took place in couldn't be represented on a map, but using the maps, along with computers and an overhead projector, young people began to type up short excerpts of stories which could immediately be shown and shared with the group. We were able to follow these narratives and uncover another layer of the complexity of these young peoples' lives in relation to death, and the ghosts that still haunted them. This

theme had emerged in some of the accounts in the schools, but this evening made us appreciate the presence of death and multiple loss for some of these young people. The evening at Halloween allowed these young people a cultural context to express and share their losses in multiple ways, and the prevalence of belief in ghosts and accounts of actual sightings allowed us to think about these narratives further.

### Reflection

We approached this project anticipating the deployment of mobile methods as a way of engaging young people with ideas of their relationship to place, and often did employ this method. However, it was the interplay between the different methods which seemed to engage the young people in the project. The notion of 'mobility', thus took on a central place in our overall research design in our role as researchers constantly 'on the move'; adapting, reacting, and creatively providing methods through a reflexive understanding of the local cultures of the research setting (as within any participative ethnography). A key part of this is how we were moved in multiple ways (physically, ontologically, emotionally and metaphorically) and the strength (and indeed challenge) of sustaining a research design as something always 'in movement' and 'in action'. In this way, our methodology (theory of method) rather than our methods (in decontextualised isolation) were producing innovation at the level of data, analysis and ever evolving research questions – questions and analyses that we are now in the midst of exploring.

In this short piece, we have reflected on ideas of innovation, reflexive action and reaction to changing ethnographic moments; the static and the active, the moving from place to place. In many ways we could argue that essentially ethnography is always already innovative, as it is always responding to and generating new questions and analyses of culture, persons and place.

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## WISERD Annual Conference 2011

“Changing Wales: Social, Economic and Political Perspectives”  
Tuesday 28th and Wednesday 29th June 2011  
Sketty Hall, Swansea

WISERD will be holding its second annual conference in Swansea in June 2011. The theme of the conference is *Changing Wales: Social, Economic and Political Perspectives*.

This theme reflects WISERD's roots in and commitment to inter-disciplinary and mixed method working. Building on the success of the inaugural conference, speakers will be drawn from academic, local government and third sector agencies and the conference will be relevant to anyone interested in public policy developments and debates affecting Wales and beyond.

Confirmed contributions focus on:

Migration and Wales; Inequality in Wales; Education; Children and young people; Crime and Social Justice; Devolution, political change and citizen participation; Ageing and Housing

Professor Charlotte Williams, Professor of Social Justice, Keele University will give a keynote address. Professor Gareth Rees, Director of WISERD will deliver a special lecture on changes affecting Higher Education

Other keynotes will be confirmed shortly.

See the WISERD website [www.wiserd.ac.uk](http://www.wiserd.ac.uk) for more details including booking information.



# News and Forthcoming Events

## WISERD Workshops and Events

### Qualitative GIS: An introduction

3 March 2011

Cardiff University

The session will introduce the concept of Qualitative GIS, and outline its relationship to GIS (Geographical Information Systems). Examples drawn from literature, and from participants own work will be used alongside discussion and practical activities.

<http://www.wiserd.ac.uk/training-events-2/workshops/qualitative-gis-an-introduction/>

### Introduction to the British Birth Cohort Studies

16 March 2011

Cardiff University

The day will serve to introduce three of Britain's internationally renowned national longitudinal birth cohort studies: 1958 National Child Development Study (NCDS); 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70); Millennium Cohort Study (MCS)

<http://www.wiserd.ac.uk/training-events-2/workshops/introduction-to-the-british-birth-cohort-studies/>

### Locating and Using Data Resources in Wales

11 April 2011

Cardiff University

This course provides an overview of some of the data resources available for research within the Social Sciences, focussing upon resources relevant to Wales. The course outlines the key sources of information related to data and research resources of potential interest. The aim is to fill knowledge gaps regarding the existence and scope of information sources currently available for researchers. <http://www.wiserd.ac.uk/training-events-2/workshops/locating-and-using-data-resources-on-wales/>

<http://www.wiserd.ac.uk/training-events-2/workshops/locating-and-using-data-resources-on-wales/>

### Multi-modal Qualitative Research Workshop

18-19 April 2011

Cardiff University

This two-day workshop will encompass the collection and analysis of multiple modes of

qualitative research data. Primarily based on the combined use of textual, visual and audio data this workshop will give participants practical insights into the affordances and limitations of different modes of qualitative data. Participants will have the opportunity to experiment with collecting and analysing different kinds of qualitative data and to consider how they might be combined, both practically and theoretically.

<http://www.wiserd.ac.uk/training-events-2/workshops/multi-modal-qualitative-research-workshop/>

### Walking Workshop: Methods Going Mobile

117 May 2011

Cardiff University

By looking at the different types of walks that can be part of research, for example, as method with guided walks, go-alongs, bimbbling and as practice, with looking at how walking actively constructs the way we come to 'know' places – we begin to think about the potential that research going mobile has. There are theoretical, methodological and practical issues to be considered with walking, and the walking workshop usefully engages with these topics to produce a coherent and informative day based on walking. <http://www.wiserd.ac.uk/training-events-2/>

### WISERD Annual Conference 2011

28–29 June 2011

Swansea

Conference Theme: "Changing Wales: Social, Economic and Political Perspectives". Key note speakers include; Professor Charlotte Williams, Keele University and Professor Gareth Rees, Cardiff University. Further information available on the WISERD website:

<http://www.wiserd.ac.uk/training-events-2/>

## Other Workshops

### Methods in Dialogue: Researching Mobilities

9 March 2011

University of Manchester

The speakers will introduce the different methodological approaches they have taken to researching mobilities. This is followed by discus-

sion and debate from participants, exploring the distinctive research questions, practices, insights and types of knowledge that different methodological approaches to researching a topic can offer.

<http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/realities/events/dialogue/mobilities/index.html>

### Introduction to Qualitative Interviewing

10-11 March 2011

University of Oxford

This two day course, run by the Health Experiences Research Group, aims to introduce researchers to the method of qualitative interviewing using a combination of practical workshops, group discussions and formal lectures.

<http://www.primarycare.ox.ac.uk/research/herg/hergcourses/QualInt>

## Conferences and Seminars

### The British Sociological Association Annual Conference 2011

6-8 April 2011

London School of Economics

The BSA celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2011 and this is reflected in the theme of the annual conference: **60 Years of Sociology**. The conference will explore the past, consider the present and assess the challenges of the future for sociological research in an ever-changing social landscape.

<http://www.britisoc.co.uk/events/Conference.htm>

### 2011 Symposium; Ethnography: Theory, Form and Practice

5-7 September 2011

Cardiff University

The 6th Annual Joint University of Liverpool Management School and Keele University Institute for Public Policy and Management Symposium on Current Developments in Ethnographic Research in the Social and Management Sciences. <http://www.liv.ac.uk/management-school/ethnography-conference/2011-symposium.htm>

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*Qualitative Researcher* provides an interdisciplinary forum for social scientists to share their research and discuss questions arising from the application, innovation and dissemination of qualitative research. *Qualitative Researcher* invites contributions in the form of opinion pieces and polemics that stimulate debate; brief articles presenting current empirical research projects; and reports of instances of methodological innovation. Submissions should be between 1500 and 2000 words and as a reflection of *Qualitative Researcher's* pragmatic and inclusive orientation endnotes and references should be kept to a minimum.

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