

Review:

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Hubert Knoblauch, Bernt Schnettler, Jürgen Raab & Hans-Georg Soeffner (Eds.) (2006). Video Analysis: Methodology and Methods. Qualitative Audiovisual Data Analysis in Sociology. Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 217 pages, ISBN 3-631-54276-3, £ 38.40, US-\$ 59.95, EUR 41,10

Key words: video analysis; method; research; practice; visual sociology

Abstract: This book offers the reader a positive overview of the theory and application of this visual sociological technique of video analysis which undoubtedly has a place in our highly visual and technical world. KNOBLAUCH et al. emphasise in this book that video analysis offers the researcher the opportunity to explore and record "natural" ethnographic data whereby the recordings are made in situations affected as little as possible by the researchers. The authors argue that video analysis offers contemporary researchers a unique opportunity to add a further dimension to their work. The book not only offers the reader the opportunity to consider theoretical approaches to this form of analysis, but also offers technical scenarios for the reader to consider in a variety of differing contexts.

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1. Introduction

As an academic about to diversify my methodological approach and venture into video research with vulnerable teenage parents, I volunteered enthusiastically to review this book. On my better days, I consider myself an innovative and contemporary social researcher, alert to making my research more user-friendly and appealing to wider audiences (particularly my students), and more attractive to conference organisers. The use of qualitative audiovisual data analysis seems to tick most of these boxes. If carried out rigorously, it has the potential, as most of the contributors to the book argue, to contribute another dimension to social research. This book offers the reader an overview of the theory and application of this visual sociological technique, which undoubtedly has a place in our highly visual and technical world. Other books on video analysis are on the market, for example, Human Activity Analysis from Video by NUI and ABDEL-MOTTALEB (2008); however, the book being reviewed is particularly broad-ranging in terms of the breadth of possible uses for the approach. Also of interest as a comparison

is the FQS issue on "Visual Methods", edited by Hubert KNOBLAUCH, Alejandro BAER, Eric LAURIER, Sabine PETSCHKE and Bernt SCHNETTLER (2008), which draws together a significant number of articles. Eight articles alone look at the use of photography in research, and of particular interest is how emotion is uncovered through the use of this medium, both in presenting the findings and also in the feelings photographs uncover in the research participant. Video analysis is also reflected on in this issue and, again, the technical issues of undertaking this are explored. This seems to be a constant theme both from the book and the special issue: video analysis, whilst offering another dimension to social research, is not for technical "virgins"; you either need practical, hands-on knowledge yourself or you should employ someone to undertake this aspect for you. [1]

2. The Premise of the Book

As a discursive researcher myself, I am drawn towards techniques of interviewing and analysis which allow the individual or groups being studied to represent their own worlds; as KNOBLAUCH et al. emphasise in this book, video analysis offers the researcher the opportunity to record "natural" ethnographic data whereby the recordings are made in situations affected as little as possible by the researchers. Whilst reading the book, and prior to my own venture into video research, I could not visualise how crashing about with cameras and technicians could produce "natural" data and how the data would not be somehow changed from audio-recorded research. [2]

The book is divided into bite-sized sections looking at methodologies, application in the research field, and the practices of video analysis. The book acknowledges in various chapters (perhaps too repetitively) that video analysis offers a "new" kind of data opportunity for sociologists, perhaps as revolutionary as the tape recorder was several decades ago. It also contextualises the use of video data as a contemporary approach in our global, technological and visual age, especially in a culture where the "Big Brother" "celebrity" "video diary" approach is repeatedly used as a form of televisual entertainment. [3]

3. The Content of the Book

Following the *Introduction*, the book is set out in four clear sections: *Methodologies of Video Analysis*, *Research Fields of Video Analysis*, *Practices of Video Analysis*, and an *Epilogue*. Each section has well set-out chapters relating to the area under consideration written by a variety of International "experts" who have undertaken differing aspects of video analysis. The style of the book is academic; however, the messages that can be drawn from each chapter are largely practical. [4]

The book encourages the reader to acknowledge that video data are amongst the most "complex data in social scientific empirical research" (KNOBLAUCH et al., p.14) and it is clear to see why when the application of the technique in each chapter is considered. However, the authors note that its use in social research

has been patchy. What is apparent, however, is the wide variety of topics that can benefit from its use. There are a number of quite disparate chapters, varying in focus from the use of video analysis on London Underground (used to observe and reflect on individual and group behaviour beyond the images being broadcast), to evaluating the interaction of individuals in museums and science centres and the use of video techniques in operating theatres. [5]

One of the key themes of the book, which is both overtly and covertly addressed in most of the chapters, is the multidimensionality of video research and analysis, allowing data to go beyond methods of textual interpretation. As WAGNER-WILLI suggests in her chapter looking at action in the classroom, "Documentary video-interpretation is focussed on analysing both the multidimensional performative structure of the observed interactions as well as their different conjunctive and communicative dimensions" (p.151). [6]

4. Highlights

One of the most thought-provoking chapters, and one that influenced the conduct of my own video research with young parents, was the chapter by Lorenza MONDADA. The thrust of her chapter is to encourage the reader and video researcher to consider the technological implications of carrying out this type of research. She encourages the reader to consider using the video as an opportunity for analysis, including camera position, official and unofficial data, and how individuals are positioned for interactions. This chapter encouraged me to think about the whole research experience, from the time the participants enter the studio to the camera positions, as part of the analysis. It also reminded me that, unlike more conventional social research whereby the researcher and the participant are usually the only individuals in the room, a good camera technician can actually add to the quality of the data. For example, in my own data collection the camera had been turned off yet an interesting, "unofficial" conversation resumed between me and one of the participants about sexual health. The camera technician prompted me regarding recording this data. Indeed, as SCHUBERT remarks in his chapter about the study of anaesthetics in operating theatres,

"the quality of videographic research does not lie in following strict methodological rules but in the ability to arrange different methods, slices of data and theoretical assumptions in order to gain a deeper insight into the interrelations of real world phenomena" (p.124). [7]

In general terms, research using video as a medium is not easy and this book reflects this challenge through the detail contained in each chapter. There are many different techniques and pitfalls to be aware of. However, the book also reveals the power of the medium and encourages the reader to venture into the voyeuristic world through the use of a lens. [8]

Through the diversity of practice examples in the book, the reader is also encouraged to move away from the technological security of the recording studio

or static videographic technique onto the street and into the café with a camcorder; not quite a "talking heads" approach but rather recording the interaction of talk. LAURIER and PHILO, in their chapter looking at naturalistic video data in a café (one of the few contributors to touch on ethics, albeit briefly), address the question of how to use data in which participants in a café directly respond or alter their behaviour due to the presence of the camera. The authors argue that this "unnatural" data, where individuals play to the camera, has a value as well and should not be discarded, but rather put into a different analytical "pile" to be viewed separately. [9]

5. Lowlight

My primary critique of this book is the lack of attention, from all the contributors, to the ethical and legal implications of conducting this type of research. Nowadays, ethical considerations increasingly have to be addressed head on in sociological and social-care research. Video analysis presents the researcher with an increased list of ethical considerations which need to be addressed primarily because participants' images and thus confidentiality are potentially being compromised; hence, confidentiality has to be thought about in different ways. Whilst as a research participant I can give my consent to talking about an interaction or event, it is quite another issue to be inadvertently filmed whilst I am at a museum or in a café when, perhaps, I should be at work! Consequently, any book which has method in its title needs to address both the strengths and weakness of the method, and this includes ethics. Nonetheless, this is a thought-provoking book for researchers looking for another dimension to their work. [10]

References

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Author

Jane REEVES is Director of the Centre for the Support of Fragile Families at the University of Greenwich, UK. She has written about teenage parents generally, young mothers in care and young fathers who are service users. She is currently working on a DVD with young parents, examining their views of the professionals in their lives and also undertaking a project with Surestart on the Isle of Sheppey, UK, focussing on young fathers. She has also just received funding to explore the complex lives of young women who have children by several fathers. Her book "Inter-professional Approaches to Young fathers" (M+K Publishing) was published in September 2008.

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Citation

Reeves, Jane (2010). Review: Hubert Knoblauch, Bernt Schnettler, Jürgen Raab & Hans-Georg Soeffner (Eds.) (2006). Video Analysis: Methodology and Methods. Qualitative Audiovisual Data Analysis in Sociology [10 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 11(2), Art. 6, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs100267>.