

Writing artists accounts of practice: layering, description, analysis,
and evaluation. Chris Smith 2008

**WIRAD Residential Workshop for
PhD Candidates and Supervisors**

Gregynog House, Powys

26th – 28th November 2008

- **“There are only two kinds of research: perfect research and published research ...**

**“Perfect research is never
published and published
research is never perfect.”**

Johan Olaisen

Accounts

- In constructing accounts of practice there may be the necessity for a description of process and work; of analysis of practice and mode of production and reception; there may need to be an account (in a double sense) that takes the form of evaluation. This, however, still may not include all that needs to be accounted.

- If imagining these as layers that exercise our archaeological skills then what constitutes our archaeological tools? If we take the concept of account what then determines their appropriateness, intelligibility, and authenticity? Again, what media and voice will be allowed?

- The whole world of human affairs depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the pleasure of others who have seen and heard and will remember, and, second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things.
- Hannah Arrendt, 1958, *The Human Condition*.

The structure of a PhD thesis

From: E. M. Phillips and D. S. Pugh, *How to get a PhD*, 3rd ed. OUP, 2000.

- Focal theory
 - The research problem — precisely what you are researching and why
 - A clear storyline establishing the nature of the problem
 - ‘Your thesis and the need to support it with data and arguments perform important work for you as the criteria for what is relevant to include in your study. ... be very careful to ensure that the argument is not blurred with extraneous or makeweight material that is not contributing to the maintenance of your thesis position. The thesis of the focal theory should always be in focus!’(pp. 60-1)

- Data theory
 - Gives the justification for the relevance and validity of the thesis
 - Varies according to discipline and thesis
 - Sciences: demonstration that the data from your experiment was adequate, and adequately interpreted
 - Historical studies: documents/artifacts adequate, and adequately interpreted
 - Appropriateness and reliability of data
 - Are your source documents and/or data adequate? Are they properly interpreted/do they use an adequate interpretive framework?
 - Identifying what (data) is needed to support your thesis is one of your tasks

- Background theory
 - The field of study within which you are working
 - You must demonstrate you know this well, that you command an overview to a professional standard
 - Demonstration is usually through a review of existing work (literature and artifacts) in which you evaluate the contributions they make, their weaknesses, and trends
 - That which constitutes the background theory is determined by your focal and data theories

Background theory

Data theory

Focal theory

Research Questions

- Research questions structure your research
- Your research may generate questions pertaining to your focal, data, and background theories
- Research questions require research methods
- You will need to consider the relative merits of the methods available for addressing your research questions

The research problem gets the solution it deserves

- ‘We are wrong to believe that the true and the false can only be brought to bear on solutions. This prejudice is social (for society, and the language that transmits its order words, “set-up”, ready made problems...). Moreover, this prejudice goes back to childhood, to the classroom: It is the school teacher who “poses” the problems; the pupil’s task is to discover the solutions. In this way we are kept in a kind of slavery.’

‘True freedom lies in a power to decide, to constitute problems themselves...

“The truth is that in philosophy and even elsewhere it is a question of finding the problem and consequently of positing it, even more than of solving it. For a speculative problem is solved as it is properly stated” .

(G. Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, New York: Zone Books, 1991, p. 15. See also H. Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, ‘introduction’ part II.)

It is not

‘... a case of saying that only the problems counts. On the contrary, it is the solution that counts, but the problem always has the solution it deserves, in terms of the way in which it is stated (i.e., the conditions under which it is determined as a problem), and of the means and terms at our disposal for stating it.’ (Ibid. p. 16)

‘One can see the empirical world only through some scheme or image of it. The entire act of scientific study is orientated and shaped by the underlying picture of the empirical world that is used. This picture sets the selection and formulation of problems, the determination of what are data, the means to be used in getting the data, the kinds of relations sought between data, and the forms in which propositions are cast. ‘ (H. Blumer, *Symbolic interactionism*, 1969, 24-5).

Ethnomethodology

- Ethnomethodology is generally concerned with 'detailed and observable practice which makes up the incarnate production of social facts'
- Lynch, M., Livingstone, E., & Garfinkel, H. (1983). Temporal Order in Laboratory Work. In Knoll-Centina and Mulkay (Eds), *Science Observed*, London: Sage.

- Ethnomethodology is one branch of sociology there are many variants.
- My concern with it is instrumental; will it help us in accounting our practice?
- Will it help us to frame our questions and does it offer a method of going on?

- ‘I know of no discipline, comments Eric Livingstone (1988), which has suffered more at the hands of its expositors than ethnomethodology.’

- Ethnomethodology through Garfinkel redefined Talcot Parsons's sociological perspective structural-functionalism and'respecified it

The Objective Reality of Social Facts

- Durkheim fundamental position, social order is the acting out of rules
- Garfinkel, states that stable social orders do not proceed from social facts
- Social order is 'made to work'
- Social order does not simply exist
- Nor is social action simply determined by it

- Social order and social action are interdependent
- ‘The objective reality of social facts’
- Is not a fundamental principle but the phenomena to be studied

- The everyday; the practical achievement of social order
- Everyday, people 'know' what rational social behaviour is
- 'Reflexively Accountable'

Indexicality

- Indexicality
- What ethnomethodology tells us is that the production of an account of action is an indexical (or situated) phenomenon. In other words, a user will encounter a system in myriad settings and circumstances, and will attempt to find the system's behaviour rational and sensible with respect to whatever those infinitely variable circumstances might be, day to day and moment to moment.

Ethnomethodology and Ethnography

- The analytic against the contingent description
- ‘ to analyse is, instead, to address the possibility of any finding...’
- Peter Mc Hugh et al ‘On the beginning of social inquiry’ 1974
- An interest in auspices

- Difference
- While both seem to base themselves on qualitative methods and in particular accounts particularly of 'members points of view' and experience.
- There are analytic differences and reasons for descriptions.

Description

- **‘thick description’** a term coined by Clifford Geertz relating to his version of anthropology
- Refers to the indexicality of behaviour and context and our capacity to make sense of actions

- Geertz Clifford 'Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture. In "the Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays (New York: Basic Books 1973) 3 -30

- deep description?
- Multi-layered descriptions?
- Multi-dimensional descriptions?
- Descriptions of the concrete?
- Rich description?
- Theorizing as a careful laying out of rules (auspices?)?

- What about Art?
- Not suggesting a superior sociological analysis
- Suggesting a situated account and analysis

- Relationship to Shon
- Reflective Practitioner
- Not the same as realising and exposing the naturalised state of the reflexive and indexically aware practitioner

- Alone in analysis
- Who will operate in opening up the 'ego' to 'alter'
- Collaboration in art (creative practice) research
- Opening up to the speech of other to reveal grounds and auspices of ego's practice

- The 'writerly' reader, as Roland Barthes termed, it of your (own) work.
- Critique and its modes
- The PhD as showing membership of a critical mode to the everyday.
- **not** membership of the everyday taken for grantedness

- Explanation

That which explains, makes clear, or accounts for; a method of explaining or accounting for; a statement that makes things intelligible. Also (as title), a treatise composed for the purpose of explaining. OED online

Or.....? Describing.

Or.....? Accounting

Do these avoid the AHRC demand that would treat creative text as cultural phenomenon?

- The demand that research reveals itself in unambiguous propositional terms