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“The problem of photography”: the spatiality of photographs in organizational ethnography

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Abstract

The use of photography in organization studies has increased rapidly in recent years. Yet, this increase in use has not been accompanied by a critical consideration of the ontological and epistemological implications of photographs as data. This article addresses this and theorizes the use of photography in organization studies. Recognizing recent attempts to prompt theoretically informed visual research (Bell & Davison, 2013; Meyer, Hollerer, Jancsary & Van Leeuwen, 2013; Ray & Smith, 2012; Shortt & Warren, 2017) we place photographic theory in the foreground by examining elements of Flusser’s (1983) philosophy of photography and its implications for organizational research. This centres on the dialectical relationship between text and image in all communicative action, particularly, on the production of space by organizing groups. We elaborate the key theoretical and methodological implications using existing field studies before moving on to consider the photographic aspects of one of the authors’ own ethnographic field research.

Key words: Photography, photographs, space, text, Flusser

Introduction

Recent years have seen an increasing turn to the use and discussion of visual data, usually in the form of photographs, to help craft novel insights into organizing, the organized and organization (e.g. Bell & Davison, 2013; Buchanan, 2001; Cochoy, 2009; Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011; Decker, 2014; Elmes, Justo, Whiteman, Hersh & Guthey, 2012; Endrissat & Noppeney, 2013; Garud, 2008; Guthey & Jackson, 2005; Guthey, Whiteman & Elmes, 2014; Hindmarsh & Pilnick, 2007; Hirst & Humphreys, 2013; Jarzabkowski, Burke & Spee, 2015; Kunter & Bell, 2006; Lawrence & Dover, 2015; Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary & Van Leeuwen, 2013; Munir & Phillips, 2005; Rasche & Chia, 2009; Ray & Smith, 2012; Shortt, 2015; Shortt and Warren, 2017; Strati, 2000; Swan, 2010; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2011; Werle & Seidl, 2015). In part, this development can be attributed to the expanding ubiquity of the camera and the capacity of the photograph to indicate presence (Barthes, 1982).

Photographs can be used as a form of certification that a researcher was indeed there (wherever and whatever ‘there’ is?) at the time when certain events occurred and particular phenomena could be observed. Furthermore, it also results from an increasing acknowledgment that organization studies is impoverished without the simultaneous investigation of verbal and visual modalities (Meyer, et al., 2013).

And yet, this research move is not without its problems. Bell and Davison (2013) report that photography and the photographs it produces have become associated with realist or naïve empiricist approaches to social research in which “image data is not interpreted, but presented as a window on the truth” (Pink, 2001 in Bell & Davison, 2013, p. 8). According to Meyer et al. (2013), the resort to photographs in organization and management theory (OMT) is under-theorized and fragmented, as a consequence of which we are left uninformed how photographic data acts in empirical research and how it shapes the insights that are crafted.

Our motivation in writing this article is to theorize the non-representational use of photography in organization studies. This is needed because we can only see the use of photography in empirical research increasing as more and more researchers become sensitized to the visual experiences they encounter during their fieldwork. Such an increase is to be applauded, but it must coincide with greater awareness that the taking of photographs is never a neutral act (Clegg and Kornberger, 2006), but one suffused with assumptions, preferences and theoretical implications that researchers need to consider. Alongside a growing sensitivity to the visual, researchers must also develop a more reflexive orientation (Bell & Davison, 2013) to ‘what’ is seen, ‘how’ this is seen, and ‘why’ it matters in their research. Our main contribution then is that we offer a coherent linking of organizational and knowledge production practices in two different but complementary discursive modes of organizing – the visual and the spatial.

The context in which photography is considered here is that of organizational field study research (Shortt & Warren, 2017). This is important to emphasize because in this context “photography is generally seen as useful in generating dialogue with the field” (Shortt & Warren, 2017 p.3) which includes the use of visual field notes by the researcher “as they actively engage with (rather than just document) the field site.” (p.3). In other words the researcher establishes a dialogic relationship with the space(s) in which their work is being conducted. For us then space becomes a central element to this theorization of organizational field research photography. In our conceptualization of space Ricoeur’s (1971) notion of meaningful action-as-text is coupled with Lefebvre’s (1991) concept of (non)-representational space to integrate embodied, relational and socio-material elements in the production of meaningful texts. We view this process as an intertextual accomplishment, subject to manifold textual influences absorbed and reinterpreted by organizational actors.

Our contribution allows us to enhance existing understandings of photography by examining more closely how the relationship between photographic and textual practices are theorised. Specifically, we draw from Flusser's (1983) phenomenological treatment of photography, to account for the spatiality of photographs and the photographer (Lefebvre, 1991).

Because of the complex interplay in this theorization between organizational and knowledge production practices, we structure our article in six substantive sections. Following this introduction, we consider the increasing use of photography in organization research, initially by using Flusser's (1983) philosophical framing of photography as an extension of the rise of visual ethnography in social research (Harper, 2003). We elaborate on our understanding of space, which leads us to examine the conceptualisation of space as text. The relationship between textual and photographic treatments of social phenomena is then considered critically. Our review addresses the key question; what is the role of photography in researching organizational space? In the following section we explore how a conceptualization of space-as-text offers both methodological coherence and deeper theoretical insights into photographing organizational space. This leads us to consider the first author's fieldwork photographs in which the production of a meaningful social space for the organization and delivery of a community festival has been researched using photography. We conclude by restating the methodological and theoretical insights from this consideration of the relationship between textual and photographic constructions of organizational space.

Photography, the photograph and its use in organizational research

Philosopher and cultural theorist, Vilem Flusser (1983) in his series of essays on the philosophy of photography, positions photography historically within a post-industrial phase

in the development of recorded human communication. In his view this process began many millennia ago with the development of the image as the principle means of conveying information and meaning between humans. Over time, this was slowly superseded by the development of the text. Images in the context of Flusser's theorisation are connotative, or ambiguous, complexes of symbols offering "mediations between the world and human beings (where)...the world is not immediately accessible and therefore images are needed to make it comprehensible." (Flusser, 1983, p.9). He goes on to assert that at some point, linked to processes of human industrialization and the rise in textual literacy, humans have ceased to decode or interpret the images they produce. In consequence, we increasingly view images not as representations of the world which help us to orientate ourselves, but instead treat them as projections into the world which act to change our experienced reality. The development of photography is viewed then as part of a technological acceleration of this process of 'idolatry' by which "the technical images currently all around us are in the process of magically restructuring our 'reality', and turning it into a 'global image scenario'" (Flusser, 1983, p.10).

It is interesting to reflect on this view some three decades after Flusser's articulation of it, amidst the rapid accumulation of digitally produced, distributed and stored photographs we encounter every day on the internet and social media sites. Flusser (1983, p. 76) produces a multi-faceted definition of the photograph, one aspect of which views it as "an image of a magic state of things whose symbols inform its receivers how to act in an improbable fashion". The significance of this lies in the ability of the photograph to produce or change belief in the viewer which influences the way in which they act towards the subject. It is notable for example how photographic images (both still and moving) are now increasingly referred to as 'proof' of some phenomenon or other by the individuals or groups which

circulate them. These are often then recirculated by social (and some news) media organizations with little or no critique, allowing social and political groups to influence the beliefs of the wider news consuming public. Witness for example the attempt by far right groups in Britain and the US to use photographs and video footage, circulated on social media, of a dispute in the Netherlands containing violent aggression by one person against another as evidence of a ‘growing migrant violence’ problem in Europe. In subsequent news reporting it was revealed that the two people in question were Dutch nationals and that no contextual information was offered by either to indicate the source of the dispute itself. Nevertheless it prompted the US President to recirculate the images (via Twitter of course!) with his support for the narrative created by the far right groups.

For Flusser (1983), the relationship between image and text is of central importance for our understanding of the world. His historical narrative creates a dialectic between texts which support conceptual thinking, and images that encompass imaginative thinking. Texts allow linear explanation of events and phenomena using concepts; images indicate significance and meaning within these events, using what Flusser refers to as a two-dimensional magic. The social dialectic nature of their relationship has had two implications. First, their interplay means that, over time, practitioners have created texts which are more imaginative and images which are more conceptual. And second, as texts became more imaginatively complex and abstract, technical images were developed for use alongside them to simplify and aid clarification for the reader/viewer by indicating significance and meaning within the text. The danger here however is that the use of photographs “in order to make texts comprehensible again” (Flusser, 1983 p.13) persuades the viewer to accept a simplified, and often uncritical, interpretation of the text’s meaning.

The development of anthropological research, and by extension ethnographic field research, is an example of how texts and technical images are brought together in an interplay of the conceptual and the imaginative. Social anthropologist, Christopher Pinney (2011) argues that the modern disciplines of photography and anthropology (along with its sub-discipline, ethnography) have a shared history. They can trace their beginnings to the same period in the early nineteenth century – the establishment of the Aborigine’s Protection Society, anthropology’s earliest funding body, in 1837, and the production of the first Daguerrotype photographs in 1839. In charting this “doubled history,” Pinney (2011 p. 17) notes the linguistic limitations of the early exponents of anthropology as a key factor in the establishment of photography as a “vital tool in the transmission of...what was thought to be reliable data” (p. 15). Although the naïve realism which pervaded much of nineteenth and early twentieth century anthropological photography was eventually superceded by developments in cultural anthropology (Bateson and Mead, 1942), critical theory (Benjamin, 1999) and semiotics (Barthes, 1982), there is still a prevailing view in much ethnographic work that photographs contain evidential traces of some real event or phenomenon. As Flusser (1983, p. 15) notes, “this apparently non-symbolic, objective character of technical images leads whoever looks at them to see them not as images but as windows”. This apparent ‘magical’ realism which pervades photography has led organizational researchers Bell and Davison to assert that a ‘myth of transparency’ has arisen regarding the use of photographs in research that belies a “realist epistemology which assumes that images capture something that is observable and real” (2013, p. 2).

Pinney (2011) highlights a number of problems with the ways in which photographs are used in anthropological research. One of these relates to the excessive visibility of photographs as a document of a particular event – their “tendency to solidify presences and claims” which

produces a “heightened assertion and presence” (Pinney, 2011, p. 80). Photographs appear to strengthen discursive claims to truth by over-emphasizing what is present while negating and marginalizing what is absent. In her consideration of discourse in visual methodologies, Rose (2012, p. 193), declares that “the ‘realism’ of the photographic image is produced, not by photographic technology, but by the use of photographs in a specific regime of truth”. She (2012, p. 190) sees photography as part of the construction of a discourse, “a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it”. This offers us a further insight into how photographs work, challenging Flusser (1983) by suggesting discourse as the framework in which imagination is shaped, and as the basis of the ‘magical’ beliefs which guide the production and observation of photographs.

Flusser (1983) also theorised that photographs reconstruct time (and space), bringing the point of image capture by a photographer to the viewer’s present. The consequences of this lie partly in the reception of the photograph by the naïve viewer as a representation of the world itself - the “state of things” (Flusser, 1983, p.41) - and partly in the ways in which photographs are used and distributed by the photographer. In social and anthropological research they are used to transmit information, usually to illustrate, simplify or highlight the significance of an event or phenomenon to a peer audience with a view to prompting academic dialogue about it. This however is often constrained by the relatively limited experience of the audience members in dealing with image-based information.

Harper (2003) argued that much of the pioneering documentary visual studies undertaken by ethnographers from the 1960s to the present (see Becker, 2002), intentionally promoted discourses of social justice while at the same time inadvertently suppressing critique by retaining an element of naïve realism. Contemporary visual ethnography, he argues, has

shifted its emphasis to recognise “the polysemic quality of the image – its multiple meanings and interpretations” in order to “create a dialogue around the competing and complementary meanings of the images” (Harper, 2003, p. 244). He advocates use of a specific technique – photo-elicitation - which “exploits the polysemic character” (2003, p. 245) of the photographic image. Sometimes autobiographical and reflective approaches to photo-elicitation require researchers to act as the critical audience of their own photographic ‘data’. They attempt to interrogate and critique processual and relational aspects of the phenomenon they are investigating and their own role as an actor in them. A number of organizational researchers have also adopted a participatory approach to photo-elicitation, asking research subjects to take photographs and then conducting an elicitation exercise with them (e.g. Shortt, 2015; Warren 2002 (discussed later) & 2008; Shortt & Warren, 2017). The dialogue created around the photographs is then further critiqued by the researcher, with a view to examining how meaning has been produced. Most recently Shortt & Warren (2017) have proposed the development of a new phase of this interpretivist approach which they term Grounded Visual Pattern Analysis (GVPA) which systematizes the construction of meaning from groups of photographs taken in a field study.

In the field of organizational and management research, three recent reviews of photographic methods (Ray & Smith, 2012) visual methods in management research (Bell & Davison, 2013), and visual organization studies (Meyer et al., 2013) together offer a broad outline of the uses of photography in context. The approaches to photographic organizational research documented by Ray and Smith (2012) are centred on how certain photographic practices can be used in conjunction with particular theoretical approaches to generate evidence of, with and by research subjects. They identify three major philosophical approaches – realist, critical and interpretive – and four aspects of photographic practice – production, elicitation,

analysis and ethical considerations – to analyse the use of photographs. Bell and Davison (2013), in their drive away from realist-empiricist approaches, argue for a strong theoretically-informed visual organizational research. They offer a more subtly delineated series of approaches from Foucauldian power/discourse analysis, through to semiotics and intertextuality, aesthetics, rhetoric and ethical philosophy. Meyer et al. (2013) offer five approaches to the conceptualization of visuals in business and management research – archaeological, practice, strategic, dialogical, documenting – some of which relate to how they are used by the researcher, and others to particular phenomena in organizational life.

In this regard Flusser (1983) offers an interesting contrasting framework for theory development in photography which combines theoretical and practical concerns. In addition to his conceptualization of the photograph as a magical image prompting improbable actions, Flusser reflects on the nature of the camera as a post-industrial apparatus – a particular form of information gathering tool which facilitates play and stimulates the imagination of the photographer – but one through which the outputs are governed by a program – a set of complex technical specifications and processes which compel the photographer to behave in certain ways, suppressing critical awareness of the banal functionality of their practice. What this intimates is that in both organizational and knowledge production practices, it is important not just to understand how visual artifacts and practices are used, but what their performative intent may be.

To summarise then, there are three significant dimensions to Flusser's theorization of photography that impact on the work of the organizational researcher and that enable a more reflexively engaged scholarship. The first is that researchers' should not assume that photographs illustrate directly the text they are producing. Instead they should be recognized

as capable of prompting questions which are rarely alluded to in researchers' narrative accounts. Second, researchers should be wary of assuming that photographs represent unproblematically the phenomenon which is the focus of the research. We argue here that, because of the limits placed on the photographer by the functional apparatus and the program of photography, researchers make aesthetic choices over the ways in which phenomena are represented that evoke viewers' emotions in support of their narrative. The third dimension is that as photographs provoke dialogue in various ways and with various actors dependent on how they are produced and distributed, researchers will need to address this dialogue either in their methodological choices or in their dissemination approach.

In shaping some of our methodological choices, these three inter-related dimensions of photography – prompting questions, evoking emotion and provoking dialogue – also affect the ways in which we theorise the phenomena we study. We now move on to consider organizational space. More specifically, we are interested in how space is produced and used in the practices and processes of organizing. As will be seen, we have a particular theoretical framing of this phenomenon which in itself is subject to challenge and critique, but which prompts us to consider more carefully the relationship between text and photograph in this area of organizational research.

Understanding organizational space as text

We primarily draw from the work of Henri Lefebvre, holding that space is socially produced and in turn is productive of social relations. This implies that space is more than merely a passive, materially-constituted backdrop. Lefebvre's (1991, pp. 11-12) conceptualization of space as "the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias",

incorporates the notion that it results from a 'triad' of simultaneously active elements (1991, p. 33). Through this triad he sought to establish space as both an outcome and a process of social production comprising:

- Spatial practice, giving rise to 'perceived' space, or phenomenologically encountered space that over time becomes a taken-for-granted sensory experience;
- Representations of space, producing 'conceived' space, or organized space that is consciously represented in forms such as plans, maps and designs, to advance the intent of bodies of power and authority such as state or capitalist organizations;
- Representational spaces, denoting 'lived' space where the social and the material meet, where meanings are assigned and subject positions reinforced.

(Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33)

Lefebvre (1991, p. 38) notes society and space to be in a relationship of dialectical interaction. This suggests an inseparable entwinement whereby society and space co-constitute each other, through the interaction of these triadic elements. The importance of representation to Lefebvre's theory of space (highlighted by its use in two of the triadic categories), raises questions about space as a modality of discourse. Formal representations of space surface considerations of the power relations in meaning making and discourse construction, in particular who author(ize)s and by what authority are spatial representations made. Representational space on the other hand, where meaning is not fixed but constantly in negotiation amongst actors, does not require such authorization and is not subject to a single author(ity). Spatial discourse, in other words, is subject to ongoing work between those actors producing multiple representations of space, and those producing lived space.

Organizational researchers' theorization of space has developed since Clegg and Kornberger's (2006) work to focus attention on space as more than a static, neutral backdrop

in which organizational events occur, but as an organizational phenomenon of itself. This period has witnessed an increasing interest in space and how the spaces where organization occurs are consequential for how it emerges (e.g. Beyes & Steyaert, 2012; Clegg & Kornberger, 2006; Dale & Burrell, 2008; Dobers & Strannegard, 2004; Fleming & Spicer, 2004; Halford, 2008; Munro & Jordan, 2013; Tyler & Cohen, 2010; Wapshott & Mallett, 2011). Lefebvre's (1991) influence on this work can be seen for example in Dale and Burrell's (2008) framing of the social production of space as integral to an understanding of organizational power relations; in Dobers' (2006) examination of the inhabitants of an office block staking out and colonizing their spatial territories; in Wapshott and Mallett's (2011) consideration of the production of work spaces at home; and in Beyes and Steyaert's (2012) theorization of a "processual performing" of everyday lived space.

The notion that space can be symbolically organized and read as a form of text is linked in part to Ricoeur's (1971) use of the text paradigm to understand broader social practices of meaning-making. In organization studies, Yanow's illustration of museums as organizational spaces is an example of the treatment of organizational buildings and built spaces as 'texts' (1998, p. 217). She expands on Ricoeur's hermeneutic tradition, which views human artifacts and activities as texts whose meanings can be analysed using tools developed by literary theorists and critics. A key facet of this enhancement is the relationship between a text's author(s) and its reader(s), as to how meaning is constructed, conveyed, mediated, claimed and assigned. In the built environment, Yanow (1998) considers the architects and designers of museums to be the authors of spatial texts. She examines how the intended meanings of these original authors conflict with those experiencing them – staff, managers, executives – who operate and thus re-interpret the designed space in negotiating their everyday lives. Her view, that the tension between the text authored by spatial designers, and the readings

constructed by users is an area of organizational practice worthy of further research, invites important questions for us about who exactly is involved in spatial authorship and what this implies.

Lazar (2015), in her recent analysis of street protest movements in South America, offers a view of space as a relational text, one which is produced not by single identified authors but through a process of intertextuality. She draws on the views of art historian Frank Vigneron that a ‘text’ can be “any kind of cultural product” (2010, p. 41 in Lazar, 2015, p. 244), and that all texts are “intertwined with the assimilation and transformation of other texts ... informed by other texts which the readers or viewers have read or seen, and by their own cultural context.” (2010, p. 41 in Lazar, 2015, p. 244). She uses the concept of intertextuality as the “relational orientation of a text to other texts” (Bauman, 2004, p. 4) to examine the visual and spatial organization of contemporary mass protest events (Horstkotte, 2008; Putnam & Cooren, 2004). From an organizational theory perspective, this resonates with the recent work of theorists of relational practices among voluntary and cooperative organizations, and self-organized groups (see Steyaert and Van Looy, 2010; Bouwen, 2010). What emerges is a relational form of space-as-text, rooted in Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of dialogics, suggesting space as both the outcome and ongoing process of intersubjective meaning-making encountered between actors in open, social situations.

Photographing organizational space: theory and methodology

It is surprising then that, despite every photograph being of some ‘space’, there have been few studies of organizational space that have explicitly used photography as part of their methodology. Below, we discuss three applications: Munro and Jordan (2013), Warren (2002) and Hirst and Humphreys (2013), to explicate how photography and space have

cohered in organization studies. In considering the role of photography in researching spaces of organization, there are three particular aspects of photographic methods which researchers need to recognize explicitly in their work: first, the relationship between any photographs used and the text which they signify. Second, the aesthetic choices made, sometimes unconsciously by researchers in the production and display of their photographs. Third, how and with whom do photographs provoke dialogue over meaning in a text? Three notable studies of organizational space using photographs offer some help in developing the three dimensions of our theorisation here.

Prompting Questions.

Munro and Jordan's (2013) study explores the tactics of spatial appropriation by street performers during the Edinburgh Festival of 2010. The aim of their study is to develop an "understanding of the sociality of organizational space, showing the way in which space is created through spatial tactics, rather than simply being an epiphenomenon of architecture or designed spaces" (Munro and Jordan, 2013, p. 1499). The street performers are characterized as the instigators of organizing processes whereby the unregulated "smooth space" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) of the Edinburgh streets are occupied and temporarily appropriated using "spatial tactics" (de Certeau, 1984) to establish hybrid performance workspaces. These tactics include the establishment of the performance space (the 'pitch') in conjunction with Festival and City regulatory processes, the improvisation of physical boundaries (the 'edge') between performance and audience areas, and the incorporation of material props and audience activity into the show. They suggest that space in this context is enacted in the embodied practices of the creative artists, a view which accords with Lefebvre's (1991) notion of spatial practice.

As Munro and Jordan (2013) freely acknowledge, with clear comparative referencing to Warren (2002), their use of photographs is as “an *aide memoir* and as a form of visual field note in support of the ethnography rather than as the primary object of analysis” (Munro and Jordan, 2013, p. 1501). This positions the photographs as illustrative of the text of the article, which facilitates the authors’ elaboration of a narrative based on a clear theoretical framing, outlined in two parts. First, the interview data reveal something of the discourse of street performance in a liberal capitalist economy in which tropes of creativity, empowerment and ownership are foregrounded. Second, the authors’ assertion that temporary ‘ownership’ of a space by an individual performer can be achieved through the daily process of tactical appropriation is an extension of the creativity of the performer.

The key question we ask here is: what is the relationship between the spatial text of the festival’s organizational practices and the photographs presented in the article? Only three images are used in the article, all of individual performers working in their temporarily ‘appropriated’ space. All photographs are open to multiple interpretations and in re-viewing the photographs our focus centres on the temporary adaptation of planned architectural city space for the organizational needs of the fringe festival. This is acknowledged in some parts of the narrative, such as in the reinforcement of power relations in the way ‘conceived’ space is produced. For example the macro-political processes by which the city is organized and managed as an annual festival space, involving local government institutions, festival organizing bodies and commercial interests, clearly impact on the micro-politics of street performance spaces through the daily ‘pitch’ allocation process. This process could be interpreted as a ‘re-presentation’ of space, another of the three elements of the social production of a temporary, festival space, alongside the perceived and lived spaces of

performers, audience members and festival workers (e.g. volunteer stewards and council employees).

The inclusion of photographs in this article raises questions which may allow readers to question the authors' account of space. Unlike the written narrative, photographs offer a greater scope and some provocation to interpret, which engages us with the space in a different way. We argue that when photography is used in the researching of space, because both space and photography are discursive phenomena, the acts of photography, and the selection of photographs for an article (as well as those that were not selected!) have an influence on both our understanding of the phenomenon, and on the phenomenon itself. This direct relationship problematizes the researchers' written account – the 'second' text here – by acting not as a window into their truth, but as a critical counterpoint. This suggests that wherever photographs are used in an examination of organizational space they should not be left as illustrative but must be explicitly, critically examined.

Evoking Emotions

Hirst and Humphreys' (2013) study of the spatial reconfiguration of local authority premises at the suitably anonymised Weston County Council allows us to examine aesthetic choice. Their analysis of central and peripheral built spaces as manifestations of a discourse of public service modernization adopted by the council is supported by two contrasting pairs of photographs taken by Hirst during her field research. The first pair support the authors' description of the council's new central headquarters building, Enterprise House, presenting two of the building's more charismatic features (Fairhurst & Cooren, 2009), the restaurant and the central atrium. The central theoretical frame for their analysis, Latour's (2005) Actor-Network Theory (ANT), is also implied in the buildings presentation as a non-human,

‘macro-actor’ (Fairhurst & Cooren, 2009) in the cultural change which took place in the organization. Hints of the “emergence of fluid networking practices, and a shared sense of ambition” (Hirst & Humphreys, 2013 p.1515), which are described as the intended aims of the organization’s leadership for the building, are expressed respectively in the restaurant’s rippling indoor water feature and the immense, light-soaked glass atrium.

By contrast, the second pair of photographs, complements the description of the peripheral warehouse building which housed the council’s Record’s Management Unit (RMU). This bland, windowless unit, on the ‘edgeland’ of an out-of-town business park was home to a neglected group of council workers, who despite their non-status were essential to the administrative work of the council, and indeed to the smooth transition from ‘ancient to modern’ public services at Weston County Council. Though the authors write in some detail about the physical conditions and views of those working inside the building, the photographs are both external views. One is of the building itself, presenting its featurelessness and absence of signage, and the other presents the view from the car park, representing the isolated location.

Hirst and Humphreys’ (2013) study addresses the issue of how built spaces are used in the development of a discourse of modernization – contrasting the modern central buildings with the ‘not-modern’ peripheral building – in the context of a UK local government organization. As such their use of photographs is evocative of their understanding of this emerging discourse, heightening the contrast between the spaces of visible strategic power invested in modernization and the desolate, ‘invisible’ powerlessness of spaces associated with the obsolete (but necessary) practices of paper records management. This juxtaposition of visual signifiers of the two spaces could be viewed simply as a rhetorical tactic which reinforces the

researchers' account of built spaces as elements of an organizational discourse. The reflexive passages in the article however, also appear to surface the authors' emotional reactions to the spaces produced in this study and the events that shape them. The outward view from the car park in one image, may be viewed as an averted gaze from the building whose early closure they may, as they acknowledge, have unwittingly contributed to. These are of course intersubjective interpretations based on a particular, semiologically informed reading of the photographs which, we argue, allows a further insight into their aesthetics, and into the link between the researchers' role in the production of the spatial texts they are part of.

Provoking Dialogue

Warren's (2002) study of the workplace using photo-elicitation methods has, since its publication, influenced a significant strand of research using photographic methods to examine the aesthetics of organization. Based on Strati's (1999) use of photography as a medium for exploring the aesthetics of organizational life, it also contains probably the most detailed consideration of what we may now identify in Lefebvre's (1991) terms as spatial practice – individual adaptation within a dominant re-presentation of space by an employing organization. Here though we are interested in the use of photographs to provoke dialogue between researcher and spaces of organization. The three months' study aimed to capture the emotional responses to an office move by members of a web-site design department of a global IT company (Warren, 2002), using a mixture of participants' and Warren's own photographs. Foreshadowing a later study by Dale and Burrell, she established a key tenet of her research as being individual employee responses to the aesthetic stimuli provided by “the hermetically controlled and ergonomically designed workplaces we physically inhabit, to the logos and symbols of corporate identity and the ‘branding’ of corporate architecture.” (Dale & Burrell, 2008, p. 226). It is the “inherently embodied practice” (Warren, 2002, p. 227) of

organizing by individual employees, prompted by their enforced change of working environment, which the study then seeks to capture using a combination of participant involvement – “handing the camera to the respondents as a means of capturing this data” (2002, p. 232) – and photo-elicitation.

The re-designed office is presented as a piece of planned space that enforces the organization’s view of a creative environment to be experienced by actors. What emerges is a group of individuals responding in a variety of ways to the reinforced spatial dominance of their employer: some fleeing to the rural outdoor surroundings to capture their feelings of order, structure, oppression and control enforced by the office space itself; others drawing on symbols of community such as the placement of shared snacks in their improvisational colonisation of the new space; while still others seek refuge in their creative visual abstraction of the space. In other words the study treats space as a text authored by the employing organization, in a similar way to Yanow’s (1998) museum, with employees as readers/interpreters of it.

In summary, our theorization of organizational space as a form of socially produced text offers a number of research possibilities which incorporate the use of photography as a method. Space has a visual dimension which is integral to our understanding of it as a text. The open, dialogic nature of the spatial texts in which we are interested – spaces which are discursively produced as part of the practices of various organizational actors – is mirrored by the need for a dialogic approach to the images that represent them. In this case Flusser’s (1983) thesis that photographs act magically to make texts comprehensible must be considered in detail.

The use of photography in these three studies has allowed us to explore the ways in which different researchers theorize spaces of organization. While there is clear recognition in all three studies that space is socially produced there are limits to how photography is used in helping the authors to develop their theoretical treatment of the phenomenon. We argue this can be addressed by explicit consideration of space as text, and by exploring the three dimensions of the relationship between texts and photographs – (non)-representation, rhetoric and dialogue – we have drawn from Flusser’s work. In the next section we outline how they can be used as an interpretive framework in developing our theoretical understanding of one of the authors’ field work photographs.

Photography and the production of a space text

Concern over photography and the representation of space has been a significant facet of the research of the *first author* over recent years. His ethnographic study, incorporating photographs, of a Swedish folk-culture festival is concerned with the ways in which organizing unfolds and is practiced by a community in a relatively unstructured rural setting. Through many of these photographs, taken over a five year period, *Author* documented the ways in which a particular community produces and reproduces an organized and organizing space in their village setting. A selection of photographs were used as part of a reflexive (Bell & Davison, 2013), auto-ethnographic account by *Author* of his own involvement in the village’s voluntary, festival-organizing activities. We draw on a number of photographs taken of the festival to illustrate our theoretical considerations.

To begin, it is worth pointing out that although the instigation of a photographic strand to the ethnography was a method-led decision, the study overall was influenced by the theoretical work of Tsoukas and Chia (2002), and the fieldwork of Buchanan (2001), and Harper (2003)

as we realised that photography may help in understanding the complexity and temporal fluidity of processual change. In this context we consider the photographs of “direct relevance to the process- and practice-oriented theories ... centrally concerned with capturing the complexity associated with organizational activities as they continually unfold.” (Bell & Davison, 2013, p. 13) The intention behind the acts of photography was to indicate some of the ways in which spatial production is bound inextricably to processes of organizing over time, at both an individual and a socio-cultural level, even when pre-planned representations of space such as buildings and streets appear only minimally present. Indeed, we suggest that, in the context of this annual event in its rural setting, the use of photography reveals the intertwined processes of organizing and spatial production more vividly than in many more formal organizational settings, laying bare the integral nature of “spacing” (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012) with its attendant materialities, embodiments, affectivities, and minor politics, to the practices of organizing.

Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 below present the site of a village festival celebration and some of the work of volunteer members of the community on improving site access and drainage. Figure 1 was taken at the opening of the festival in 2010; Figure 2 was taken on the first day of the 2013 festival. The initial intention with Figure 1 was to capture a *representation* of the space (Lefebvre, 1991) and how the community volunteer group laid it out to effect the delivery of their festival contribution. Their choice of location, adjacent to the low wooden building – referred to by community members as the ‘fishing cottage’, as it was occasionally rented as an overnight sleeping base by visiting anglers – appears at first an entirely material decision (open, and relatively accessible for stall-holders’ vehicles, and easy for layout planning and construction). Although all the land around the village, including this site, is technically owned by a large private conglomerate it is managed within broader local and national

government regulatory frameworks which maintain ‘rights to roam,’ and local government planning authority. Hence, the site is viewed by the villagers as ‘common’ land which can be improved within light regulatory constraints.

Figure 1 Festival site from access track 2010

With each annual iteration of the festival’s organization, it seemed that an increasing proportion of planning time and activity was spent on the preparation and upgrading of the site. We can see from Figure 1, the wet conditions which caused difficulties for the stall-holders in the setting up of their stalls (the distance between them seems odd) and in driving into and out of the space. In Figure 2, three years later we observe that the village group has gravelled the access track, widened it by clearing some of the lying boulders alongside and provided a hard standing area (middle right, behind the pink flowers) for some of the heavier vehicles.

Figure 2 Festival site from access track, July 2013

Figure 3, in which two members of the organizing group are observed felling a small tree to create an alternative site access, and Figure 4, where the partial completion of a new, gravelled access track and hard-standing area are observed, offer some insight into the process of improvement to the site. So the combination of the four photographs represent the space in which organising practitioners are producing the space in an ongoing process rather than offering an illustration of space as a backdrop.

Figure 3 Clearing a tree from the site perimeter, April 2011

By observing the photographs of the changing face of the site, and the activities involved in its spatial production more closely, we also begin to see something of the symbolic value of the space as a text, or discursive representation, of the festival. This space is set aside for the performance of the festival, protected from visitors' vehicles. It is a short distance from a road, inviting/requiring visitors to abandon their vehicles and walk down the short track to the festival site. Figure 1 invites the viewer to shelter from the weather under the large awning – which incidentally houses a refreshment bar – but still to enjoy the benefits of the fresh air, away from stale cars and houses. The festival is a celebration of the forest area in which it happens. Several of the villages, hamlets and homesteads spread around the vast 10,000 sq. km tract of forest want their visitors to enjoy the forest's mellow, natural beauty, mingle with their non-human as well as human neighbours and produce their own 'festive' space.

The spaces presented in these photographs then may be interpreted not just as socially constructed backdrops for human organizing, but as an integral part of the discursive work of organization. Human and non-human elements interact in an ongoing (in this case identifiably iterative) relational process of spatial production. At the same time we argue that this is part of an intertextual process (Kristeva, 1980) by which each member of the organizing group is able to contribute their own meaningful actions and interactions with each other and with the material, non-human constituents of space. The festival organizing group in their actions and interactions are simultaneously claiming a collaborative authorial and authorizing contribution to the new spatial text of the festival site *and* acknowledging the dialogue they are striking up with their festival visitors. This is a complex process which draws on the non-authored texts of their forest surroundings, expresses their bodily engagement, both conscious and unconscious, and also involves them in the ‘minor’ politics (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012) of organizing. Additionally, it illustrates one of the key dialectical tensions (Bauman, 2004) inherent in intertextuality between closed authorship and open dialogue.

Figure 4 Site access track being relayed, June 2013

The invocation of politics and authorship is an appropriate point on which to consider, as Flusser's (1983) proposed, the photographs themselves as opposed to the space-text they claim to represent. The act of re-viewing them is a prompt for reflexion on the role of the researcher-as-photographic-practitioner, in what we claim is a piece of intertextual production. The key question for us becomes; 'how do we know what we are seeing is what is being claimed'? There are three problems we must grapple with in addressing this question. First, the ethnographic researcher is often faced with the dilemma of faithfully representing the authentic, while at the same time imposing an authoritative interpretation of events. Second, as examined earlier, we are extremely wary of the trap of making truth-knowledge claims on the basis of naïve-realist forms of empirical evidence. Third, the field research presented here is based on an aspect of one of the authors' life experience which is

ongoing (see *Author*) and still involves him in the work and lives of the festival organizing group. Hence, the photographs have been subject to regular review and retrospection as part of his own personal reflections, as well as our discussions over this article.

In addressing these problems, we argue that the researcher's photographs of the events or phenomena they experience act as rhetorical devices in the intertextual production of the space in which they occur. Together they act as a formative encounter (Gray, 2010) for the reader, proffering the author's initial meaning, a threshold into the intertextual process that produces space. The ethnographer who uses photography is arguably more attuned to this process of intertextuality in their production of a combined "image-text" (Warren, 2002, p.238) that attempts to convey both the ordered, narrative influence of the written account and the affective, aesthetic impact of the photographs. The production of this rhetorical image draws upon the same dialectical processes of perceiving, conceiving and creating evident in Lefebvre's conceptualization of social production of space. It also involves conscious bodily engagement in relational work with others (e.g. subjects, readers/viewers, co-authors, peer reviewers), mediated by the materiality of the pen, the laptop and the camera (or camera-phone!) to produce an authored and authoritative artefact.

The photographs in Figures 1-4 above provide a neat visual mimetic that aligns well with our narrative of spatial text production. But not all the photographs taken in the field align so readily. For some, meaning is realized over time when we (and others) review them, reflect on them and discuss them. This realization process reveals perhaps initially unconscious, emotional drives in the production of rhetorical texts that persuade and convince their intended audiences.

Figure 5 below shows the village festival site from a canoe on the lake that it borders. It was originally intended to show the festival site from another angle, that of the lake on the shores of which the village sits. It was also an entirely opportunistic shot, taken on an idyllic summer afternoon during a break away from the festival. It illustrates the choice of site by the organizing group as not simply a space for organizing, but a symbolic space for everyone, they and their visitors, to be close to the lake, potentially the most powerful inhabitant and actor in the village. The relationship of the villagers with the lake is complex, encompassing the embodied, affective and even the political aspects of the space it produces. It is their source of leisure and pleasure, a representation of the vital resources of energy (through the hydro-electric station, 7 km upstream), basic necessities and food stocks (water, fish and the annual moose hunt) and some sources of employment (from the historical practices of timber rafting and water-milling, to the more recent salmon farming). It has a personal meaning for the photographer intertwined with a cultural significance for village inhabitants, which indicates that this non-human participant is potentially a strong (perhaps even authorial) influence on intertextuality.

Figure 5 Festival site from the lake

Finally, in Figure 6 we see a perplexing image of spatial production incorporating the interaction of human and non-human, natural and technological in a strange ambiguous performance of summer stunt-riding on a snow-scooter. Exactly what meanings can be plausibly assigned to this image? This was part of an event which dovetailed with the ending of the 2010, 2011 and 2012 festivals. It appears to indicate appropriation of the lake space for another form of symbolic celebration. It is at once both amusing and troubling, a possible disruption to the spatial text we have constructed. Both the photograph and the practice it momentarily captures, encapsulate the embodied nature of spatial production, but these two acts of spacing (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012) go beyond this. They encompass the material interactions of people and technologies, the emotional joys and physical struggles of the rider (how can I control this thing?) and the photographer (how can I get a clear image of this thing?), and the minor politics of space - is this the 'proper' place (Tuan, 1977) for this?

Figure 6 Is this the proper place (Tuan, 1977) for this?

Conclusions: Photography, spacing and intertextuality

Our aim with this article has been to theorize the use of photography in organization studies. We argue that this cannot be done without an integration of space and spatiality, as all photographs are of ‘spaces’ and our position on this is drawn primarily from the work of Lefebvre (1991). We have foregrounded ethnographic field studies (Shortt & Warren, 2017) in our discussion as these encompass methodologies in which photographs have been used most productively to emphasize the researcher’s active engagement with space. This has allowed us to highlight how an under-theorized photography presents photographic images as naïve truths (Bell & Davison, 2013). Our use of previously published works that incorporate photographs allows us to explore the importance of three key dimensions of Flusser’s (1983) theorization of photography for research on spaces of organization. Meanwhile our own photographs, drawn from an ongoing ethnography help illustrate the value of a more fully theorized photography based on these elements, and of the importance of reflexivity to the photographer in the process of theorization.

In conclusion then, we return to the key question, which has formed the main focus of our examination, namely, to what extent does Flusser’s (1983) theorization of photography aid us in developing our understanding of its use in the organizational research presented. We argue that the spatial practices of organizing to which the festival study photographs contribute, are part of the creation of a symbolically communicative ‘text’, constructed by organizers in their meaning-making of ‘festival’. Our focus on the relationship between the text of spatial organizing and the photographic practices of the researcher reveal practices of spatial production which, we contend, are fundamentally intertextual in their open, dialogic and inter-discursive nature (Bakhtin, 1981). Intertextual space then is an ongoing process resulting from the spacing actions and interactions of a group of organizing actors committed

to the construction of a new collaborative meaning. The photographer/researcher aims to engage directly with this as her/his 'field of study' (Shortt & Warren, 2017), participating in and extending the dialogue beyond the organizing actors.

This poses an intriguing challenge for photographic researchers, as they become part of the process which Lefebvre (1991) outlines in his characterization of space as simultaneously conceived, perceived and lived. The tension established is three-way, between a phenomenologically experienced spatial environment, dialogically developed practices of spacing, and an authored conception of space. Photography is one strand of the intertextual 'weaving' which introduces you, the reader, to the embodied, affective and aesthetic (Warren, 2008) dimensions of spatial organizing. This means that attention must be given to the rhetorical elements of the photographs produced, those which lead viewer/readers by evocation.

Engaging in practices of photography, allows the organizational studies researcher to reflect on the power relations which inhere in communicative action and to offer a more open-ended, dialogic contribution to the spatial text than in a written or spoken narrative.

The contemporary organizational ethnographer, with her/his commitment to close involvement in the practices of organizing of which s/he is a part, is constitutive of the process of intertextual spacing. The visual ethnography and its photographic practices become an integral part of intertextual space, raising specific questions about the relationship between text and non-text, and about organizational space as a research subject. And, it is here we argue, in this intertextual space, that, in O'Doherty et al.'s (2013) phrase, the epistemological and the ontological become enfolded together in organization.

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