

An Intellectually Bold Volume on Ethnography with a Twist
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Tuuli Lähdesmäki, Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, Viktorija L.A. Čeginskas and Aino-Kaisa Koistinen (eds.) 2020. *Challenges and Solutions in Ethnographic Research: Ethnography with a Twist*. Routledge. ISBN 9780367376857. 256 Pages.

This interdisciplinary volume was published during the global Covid-19 pandemic and may therefore have escaped the notice of many of its potential readers. However, it is a work that deserves the attention of a broad range of scholars. It is creative, thought-provoking, and sometimes provocative in its quest to twist ethnographic practice. The stated goal of the volume is to “rethink ethnography ‘outside the box’ of its previous tradition and to develop ethnographic methods by critically discussing the process, ethics, impact, and knowledge production in ethnographic research”. Building on the works presented and discussed at the Ethnography with a Twist Conference held in Jyväskylä, Finland in 2019, the authors represent trans-(North-)Atlantic institutions and a variety of disciplines working with ethnographic methods.

The editors introduce the volume by pointing to two uses of the titular word ‘twist’: as an intentional aim to conduct ethnography with new tools, and as sensitivity to use those unexpected moments – twists – that always occur in fieldwork. This is a nice way of connecting several aspects of ethnographic fieldwork that have perhaps become more visible in recent methodological developments. When e.g. the affective turn invites us to be more attentive to the embodied nature of human interaction and knowledge production, researchers move into areas where we need to push the limits of our tried-and-tested vocabulary. When participatory approaches to ethnography insist on collaboration with all participants in our studies, the chance of the unexpected multiplies.

The authors urge us to view ethnography with new eyes and discuss common problems and issues with a candour and courage not often seen. They build particularly on methodological developments moving towards multi-modality in process and outcome, such as autoethnography and retrospective, subjective, collaborative, and reflexive turns in ethnography. Although the individual chapters have their flaws and weaknesses, the authors and editors deserve praise for the effort bringing together new ways of thinking about ethnography in all its facets. The result is a volume that has the power to inspire as well as to invite debate. The thirteen chapters of the volume are divided

into four sections, and they span from researchers' collaborative analysis and writing, visuality, and other forms of multi-modality to discussions of power relations, the ethics of ethnography, and embodied and affective ethnography. The volume does not even restrict itself to contemporary fieldwork but moves into testing new methods for interpreting archival data (Chapter 11 on the sensorial-affective experience of migration).

The volume is not a handbook in new ethnographic methodologies. I would rather say it is a tasting menu, offering possible novel solutions to old and new problems. As such, it would make a good addition to traditional methodology literature – something to point adventurous students to when they are on their way into the field for the first time and will benefit from knowledge of the plethora of creative solutions that exist. The book would also be a good companion for experienced researchers wanting to move beyond the state of the art or to read for inspiration when starting a new project. For both these purposes, I appreciate that the editors have made the extra effort to put together a helpful index. Several of the individual chapters contain very helpful short or more comprehensive literature reviews on the methodologies they discuss. For instance, Chapter 1 starts with an introduction showing how the development of ethnographic practices is ongoing, with a shift towards collaborative, multi-sited, and mobile ethnographies trying to adapt to current cultural transformation. Similarly, Chapter 5 on the ethical challenges of using video in ethnography both takes us through the history of video in documenting fieldwork as well as points to how the new GDPR guidelines affect academic practice. Furthermore, some contributions can be read as instructions on how to conduct experiments similar to those of the authors: Chapter 2 describes a sensory ethnographic workshop in such detail and with enough practical advice that it would be possible to copy, and Chapter 4 does the same with participant-induced elicitation in digital environments. The methodologies in Chapter 6 (storycrafting) and 7 (drawing as an autoethnographic method) are similarly instructively and enthusiastically described, giving even this non-visual reader a temptation to try.

Ethnography has many layers, and the volume touches upon several of them: from planning and executing fieldwork to gathering data and analysing it, together with peers as well as with informants. Most of the chapters of the volume actively discuss collaboration in one or more of these layers, from accessing the field to reflexive co-creation of methodologies and theoretical developments. Some of the more fascinating contributions describe radical co-construction of analysis, even including the reader in the analytical work – such as when the authors behind Chapter 3 extend an invitation to the reader to “travel with us through the process of ethnographic knowledge

production”, and move on to take the reader on a walk. They are attempting nothing less than communicating the unwritable, and this reader found it a very fruitful experiment. Another example of this is the contribution to involuntary ethnography in Chapter 12, where the reader is presented with an open-ended analysis and an invitation to share in the author’s discomfort and doubt.

The best parts of this volume are those where the authors have genuinely tried to do something new in their ethnographic practices and simultaneously have managed to explain these inventions clearly to the reader. This is not an easy feat. In its weaker parts, the volume shows how difficult it sometimes is to convey in written form the complexities of methodological practice. The main point of each chapter is to discuss methodologies, but to be able to do that, they have to explain their case studies, and the balance between the two endeavours sometimes is not ideal. For instance, in the way Chapter 9 describes challenges to studying people living in poverty, the author comes off as naïve and perhaps not prepared to do ethnology outside her own culture. Similarly, in Chapter 8, since the main point is to describe a particular retrospective methodology when studying commemorative practices, it is difficult for the reader to understand why the author so strictly opposes another, existing approach to commemorating the same practices. In both these chapters, this reader felt she did not get “the whole story”. At the same time, the generous invitation to get to know the research process from the inside helps make up for such flaws. Several chapters make visible aspects of research we do not normally see, such as unabridged transcripts and field notes.

Overall, the volume is a very thoughtful collection of ground-breaking work, helpful to both beginners and experienced researchers working with ethnography. Taken together, the different chapters pose critical questions to the entire process of knowledge production in ethnography. It invites radical openness around how we act in the field, with the field and with each other. In describing such a courageous volume as this one, it seems unfair to ask for more. However, if I were to ask for additions or to suggest next steps for the editors, it would be to build on what is hinted at in several of the contributions but is not followed up on: the structural aspects of research practices, those that are beyond the researchers’ command nevertheless have a great impact on what ethnographic research is capable to do. Funding, and the time restraints of research projects are two such banal but important structural aspects; another is the limits posed by publishers and journals in how research results are published. A radical approach to working with, around and against such limits from the same team of excellent scholars behind this

volume would be a joy to see! As this volume stands, I am grateful for the intellectual boldness of its editors and contributors, and I look forward to their further work.

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