

Ten years on

This is a landmark, for us. The tenth issue of the *Journal of Organizational Ethnography* (JOE) is now complete. Ten years on, we can look back and reflect upon the work collected in the pages of the journal over this time. We set out our ambition “to provide a natural home within the social and management sciences for organisational ethnographies” (Brannan *et al.*, 2012, p. 5), and we would like to think that is what JOE has become. Having said in the last issue (Brannan *et al.*, 2021) that we have not been prolific as editors, perhaps we will be forgiven for a more extended reflection. In this short editorial, we will draw out some of the themes of the past ten years before going on to introduce the collection of essays in this issue.

In looking back, we might first acknowledge the on-going strength of the connection between the journal and the Annual Ethnography Symposium. Throughout, the journal has published papers, often from early career academics, that received their first airing at the symposium, such as those by O’Boyle (2014), Merkus *et al.* (2014), Vincett (2018), Stoycheva and Favero (2020) and Bird (2020). Many papers are from participants who have gone on to get their doctorates, such as those by Lake *et al.* (2015) and Richards (2019). Others have been early work that has since developed into books, such as the work by Garthwaite (2016) and Brooks (2018). Still other work is by more established collaborators who have supported the symposium and the journal over the years (e.g. Kirke, 2015; Kamsteeg and Wels, 2017; Weir, 2017). We might have highlighted many more and can only apologise to those not listed above.

The point is not that the symposium furnishes a good number of papers. Rather, the journal is connected to a community of sorts. One that has changed over the years as researchers have come and gone, but consistently a welcoming space for like-minded folk to gather. But that means we, as editors, often know our authors. While it is perhaps for them to comment rather than us, we have sought to take a developmental approach to the editorial process. Having seen research presented at the symposium, having encouraged submission, we are almost as interested in seeing the work published as the authors. Furthermore, many of our reviewers have attended the symposium and understand what we are trying to develop and maintain. So, very much a community, a “natural home”.

At the same time, we might also recognise the contribution made to the journal by the special issues we have published. There is always a balance to be struck between regular “open” issues and the themed special issues. For us, they allow the journal to reach newer audiences. Whether that be because of the subject, such as public service reforms or the non-profit and charity sectors, or because they focus on questions of methods and work in the field, they draw readers to the journal who might otherwise be unaware of it. The collection on autoethnography (volume 7, issue 3, 2018), for example, has been well read and cited. And the more recent ones on passing the test (volume 9, issue 2, 2020) and taking sides (volume 10, issue 1, 2021) will prove a useful source for teaching and for those about to embark upon fieldwork. We would like to thank the editors of these special issues.

The journal’s future direction is for authors and future editors to decide; some reflections on ten years might however serve as a frame of reference. A notable feature of the journal over its first decade has been the plurality of approaches to field and text work that have spilled onto the pages. In perhaps a very minor way, the journal’s scope has encouraged an open and transgressive approach to questions of what is and what is not ethnographic. This partially correlates with wider developments in and beyond ethnography, which have witnessed the rise in for example post-human approaches to research. Although this approach is enriching,



the journal has remained largely silent as to the impact and implications of a seemingly ever-expanding scope. As a community of scholars, exploring and sustaining the value of ethnographic research with an ever-increasing remit may emerge as a potential challenge.

The relationship between ethnographic and research ethics remains a hotly debated concern. We sense from our submissions that there has been a growing institutional acceptance of ethnographic methods and even some accommodations of sets of ethical protocols rooted more in humanities and social sciences than those of natural science. However, the picture is far from uniform, and ethnographers continue to navigate these waters carefully. Although many of the articles that appear on the pages of the journal directly address ethical issues, a unifying and foundational ethnographic ethics has yet to be articulated.

A final area to explore might be the breadth of ethnographic engagement and the degree to which the community is essentially inward or outward facing. A significant driver for the formation of the conference, which followed over into the establishment of the journal, was the intent to provide a supportive community which freed ethnographers of the need to justify their selection of methods and techniques. Our sense is that this compulsory justification is now less pressing beyond the conference and the journal and that ethnographic methods are more welcome in mainstream publications and judged on their own merit and logic. Nonetheless, the importance of the community is still key, especially for those just starting out.

While on the face of it, ethnographic methods might feel more accepted for some, the question about engagement may be starting to become increasingly pressing. It is revealing from the journal's own data that geographically the journal engages most voluminously in the UK, Australia and the USA. There is also a strong engagement in Europe, and we are encouraged by our readership in China, Malaysia and Indonesia. It is notable, however, that the submissions to the journal are dominated by authors located in European and US institutions. As a journal, therefore, we must do more to ensure that we continue to promote geographic diversity in our readership but crucially diversity in our authorship. It is our hope that new editors can focus specific attention on this challenge.

Introducing the essays

In an echo of our first volume, we have invited contributions to discuss the state of the field and to look ahead. In the first of these, Bagga Bjerger and Mike Rowe discuss the challenges of publishing ethnographic work. The conventions of structure and style can leave little room for the development of description and analysis, for showing not telling. It has been the aim of the journal to encourage experimentation and for very different approaches to the presentation of data. That ambition is easy to set out, but it is not one that authors take up as often as we would like. Bagga and Mike discuss the potential for developing special sections in the journal to present ideas, notes from the field or other content. It will be for the future editorial team to take up that challenge.

Emma Crewe reflects on the development of ethnographic research in parliaments and in political science. A small community worldwide has begun to gain recognition of the value of the approach. In particular, Emma argues, an abductive approach to understanding “what connects to what, how, why, where and for whom” escapes the closed thinking of rational choice theory or institutional theory. Being interested in the subjectivities and interests of multiple participants allows us to better represent what we observe. Having made progress, however, Emma highlights the need for more diversity as a good in itself but also as essential to democracy and to our “global thought collective”.

David Calvey draws upon his own research into nightclub door staff but also upon his ongoing engagement with martial arts to explore a sensory and embodied autoethnography.

David discusses the non-verbal instruction he received: watching, imitating and working with partners with eyes closed and in silence. One of the challenges he acknowledges is, having recognised our senses, how do we record them and represent them to others? And what purpose does it serve? He suggests sensory and embodied approaches foster analytically rich and potentially disruptive accounts.

Layla Durrani, Franz Kamsteeg and Harry Wels discuss an organisational ethnography teaching practice that emerged during lockdown. Visiting a goat farm with students, they engaged in wild pedagogy, exploring the smells, taste, sounds, sights and the feel of the site. Such pedagogy was perhaps primarily COVID-19 safe. But, as animals mingled with ethnographers, it also opened up a way of thinking beyond the classroom to engage with a multi-species as well as a multi-sensory practice. Layla, Franz and Harry stand back from this experience, connecting it to wider discussions of the ecological challenges we face and argue that we need to think beyond the narrow, bounded organisations that are traditionally our focus and place them in their wider context.

From a different angle, Melissa Fisher also argues that we might break down some of the neat boundaries we draw between organisations. Drawing on her recent experiences following up on her work with women on Wall Street that has taken her into the world of film production and of the United Nations, Melissa sets out the case for a feminist para-ethnography in which we might recognise that our informants are often much more than that. Acknowledging the expertise of our interlocutors and the collaborative nature of much of our work, can we think differently about the ways in which we engage with organisational ethnography?

Robert Kozinets argues that we are now, whether we like it or not, all engaged in post-analog ethnographic projects. But that does not mean we have to throw out all the old texts on fieldwork and fieldnotes. We are still engaged in understanding the perspectives of others, but we recognise that the boundaries are less defined. Rather than conducting ethnography, we “pursue the ethnographic”. We remain concerned with the context and with the macro, even as we examine the micro. Noticing that our work has always been altered by technology, Robert argues that we need to engage with the practices of netnography, not least because our organisations are embedded webs of information and communication.

With these essays, we complete a decade as founding editors of the journal. We would like to sign off by thanking our Editorial Advisory Board for their support and guidance, our reviewers for their service to the journal and the ethnographic community, our authors for their commitment to publishing with us and thereby making the journal what it is. Finally, thanks of course to our readers for your continued appetite and engagement with all things ethnographic. We look forward to the next ten years!

Matthew Brannan, Manuela Nocker and Mike Rowe

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