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Book Review:

Handbook of Emergent Methods edited by Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy. The Guilford Press: New York – London 2008

As researchers, we are always expected to present our methodological approach, the chosen epistemology and research methods which we are going to apply while presenting a future research project. As Gouldner noticed already in 1971 in his "The coming crisis in Western sociology", usually the funding institutions tend to be conservative and preferring projects using well-known methodologies and common research tools, despite the fact that they might be obsolete and not adjusted to new issues being researched. Furthermore, the scientific work, when discussed by the experts and supervisors, is expected to follow well-known guidelines because what is new and unknown can be seen as suspicious. For these reasons researchers are often cautious in innovating and experimenting, sometimes even preferring to hide the fact that they have discovered new research method! The authors call for courage in exploration and publication of texts on "emergent" methods, that is the new methods that emerge in the fieldwork to cover "method gaps", that is discrepancies between "true and tried methods" and requirements of new complex issues.

You can learn about new developments in qualitative research such as hypermedia methods, metaphor analysis, performance-based methods such as ethnodrama, or "new critical collaborative ethnography" by reading this book. As it offers a panoramic view, it is possible to see how many doors were recently opened in social sciences research methods. Of course, if you got attracted by any of these methods, you need to search elsewhere for more information as this book provides you just with a brief introduction. Although not all new developments represent a rupture with well-known methodological approaches. The methods with a few decades of tradition, such as grounded theory, are able to adapt to dynamic social reality thanks to its open-endedness and flexibility, as Kathy Charmaz convinces in her text. New developments in focus group interviews are also reported, especially application of focus interviews in international environment seems very promising.

Of course there are serious reasons for precautions against free quest for new methods. If we allow freedom of methods exploration – the critics would say anything can go. Experienced scholars might be afraid that research can change in an artistic cocktail not grounded in any kind of ontology and methodology. However, as Chinese painter Lu Ch'ai wrote in *The Tao of Painting* in 1701:

To be without method is deplorable, but to depend on method [is] entirely worse. You must first observe the rules faithfully; afterwards modify them according to our intelligence and capacity. The end of all methods is to have no method. (p. 2)

I could not agree more, but I do not remember most of my teachers inviting me to modify methods. I agree with Jennifer Platt's observation that there is something wrong about the fact that the history of sociology is usually presented as history of theories, while "has seldom given attention to practical research methods or, indeed, to empirical research" (p. 9).

There are new complex issues emerging which push on the boundaries of traditional domains of science such as gene research. There are movements that reshaped the very concept of research such as feminist or social justice movement. In addition, there are new research tools available thanks to technological progress, such as usage of global information system (GIS) for spatial research. Moreover, most experienced researchers experienced that their initial research tools, methods and theoretical concepts appeared to be useless in the field and had to develop new ones. Which issues can force us to broaden scope of research? The authors provide us with a case study of genetic testing which is brought by technological changes and broadens the frontiers of medicine (p. 8). The medicine doctors are facing ethical and political decisions which need to be explored in an interdisciplinary way. For example, should the gene information be guarded from employers and insurance companies? What consequences can have reading of "gene maps"? Even good news can produce bad results as in case of 37-year old woman who learned that on the contrary to her mother and sisters she has very low risk of breast cancer. She suffered depression because of deep sensation of guilt. Also working in interdisciplinary teams with doctors, engineers or artists requires the social scientists to "de-disciplining" (p. 12) and broadening borders of their disciplines.

Many of these essays not only present new methods but also pose ethical and practical questions regarding their use. Gunilla Holm in her chapter "Visual Research Methods. Where are We and Where Are We Going" poses the question whether visual methods such as video or photography are more neutral than verbal ones? (p.325). Some leading authors in this field such as Hockings, talk about "film-as-a-constructed-text", a joint product of its producer, the subject and the viewers (p. 326). From this text we can learn about new applications of visual methods in research. In particular, Photovoice is a methodology designed especially for community action research projects. The participants are simply given cameras "to take pictures of aspects of their lives that they see as relevant and important for improving their community" (p. 329). It is an empowerment methodology that seeks transmission of knowledge from communities to policy makers through photography and narratives following them. In case of photo elicitation, pictures serve in eliciting information that the researcher otherwise would not learn about. Sometimes photographs can offer different from the oral narratives version of the story. In the study of teenage mother made by Holm (p. 333) the visual story of photos made by the girls themselves is much more happier presenting them in a way they want to be seen. However, the accompanying verbal comments talk about the girls' struggles. To produce real visual anthropology, the texts and visual materials should be interwoven, just as in daily life and the pictures should be discussed.

This handbook convinces me how much research methods are changing. Limiting teaching of social scientists to traditional not-digital, separated from the

body and emotions research methods seems to be similar to teaching art students realistic painting of the 19th century, while the art around them is dominated by use of body and multimedia digital technologies. This handbook can inspire you a lot with methods that cross borders between art and science, visual and verbal, mind and emotions and many others. The authors pay tribute to embodiment theories which tracing back to Merleau-Ponty in argue, that "experience exist between the body and the mind" (p. 346). In many feminist and performance-based methodologies body represents the "condition and context through which social actors have relation to objects and through which they give and receive information" (p. 346). Last year, when I participated in a methodological conference of International Sociological Association in Naples, I listened to a presentation of an indigenous Canadian feminine researcher Alex Wilson who went a step further and incorporated records of her dreams occurring during research as hints basing on "indigenous research methodology". Although the authors often emphasize importance of author's intuition, this method, however, did not emerge in this book. Well, it is good to remember that there are more things in heaven and earth, than the social scientists dreamt of...

References

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