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# Introduction

Cecilia Fredriksson & Håkan Jönsson

Scandinavian Ethnology is experiencing great change. While recruitment to the field among traditional student groups is decreasing, there is nevertheless an increasing interest by corporations, state institutions and NGOs in cultural analysis as an important developmental tool. Evidence of this interest is the fact that at the University of Copenhagen, external funding by both the public and private sectors supports the majority of the doctoral students. Furthermore, some Scandinavian ethnologists have successfully started consultancies in city planning, diversity management, trend ethnography and user-driven innovation. It is clear that ethnology students need to develop the skills of applied research if they are to meet the demands of the job market.

In 2008, a joint Master's Program in Applied

Cultural Analysis (MACA) was initiated in Sweden and Denmark. This international program was the co-creation of the Departments of Ethnology at Lund University and the University of Copenhagen. Currently, forty graduate students from China, the USA and Europe are enrolled in the program.

In developing the MACA program, we recognized the need to assemble some of our established knowledge. ETN JOB therefore consists of researchers' and practitioners' discussions of their applied cultural analysis projects, including reflections on the challenges related to work tasks outside Academia. In these accounts, various practical and theoretical questions are addressed. For example: What are the pitfalls and opportunities in applied cultural analysis?

In such work, do we jeopardize our scientific depth, or do we gain new insights useful to our ethnological methods and theory building? It may be too soon in their studies for students to ask and answer these questions. However, ETN JOB describes how some pioneering colleagues applied cultural analysis as they struggled with these questions.

Apart from the study of cultural heritage, the tradition of applied work is undeveloped in Scandinavia where we have generally taken a sceptical attitude towards the Anglo-Saxon versions of applied anthropology, such as marketing anthropology. The image of a free and idealistic intellectual actor, although not without its limitations, has been our predominant role model in our research work. We recognize that it is important to maintain an analytical distance from the field studied so long as this distancing does not become more a critical deconstruction than constructive suggestions for change. However, we can ask ourselves why we don't use our analytical abilities to study everyday life questions, for example, of health and consumption, by working with the actors and institutions that constantly have to deal with these

important topics. If we don't work with them, someone else will. For instance, business economists and marketing managers already have a successful tradition of using aspects of cultural analysis in product development and marketing. It is often easy to complain that their analyses of authenticity, narration or performance are too superficial, and yet in applying our own analytical understandings, we also experience difficulties. While several authors deal frankly with their frustration in transforming analytical deskwork into suggestions for action, they also express their strong belief in the importance of their contributions.

What can cultural analysis offer public institutions and private corporations? Mine Sylow points to the potential of ethnography for changing those habits that ethnologists traditionally have studied. By focusing on the social and cultural meaning of eating at sports centre cafeterias, Sylow Pedersen suggests some new analytical tools for the food industry.

Other authors, working outside Academia, describe their competences in understanding practice and everyday life. Jakob K. Voldum and Louise Work Havelund, of Red Associates, one

of the most successful companies in user-driven innovation in Denmark, show the importance of methodological competence in ethnology and the necessity of more hands-on analysis in applied projects.

Methodological discussions, as well as analytical skills, must be developed in research settings as Ida Hult points out in her article on TrendEthnography in which she discusses cultural theory and strongly emphasizes the adaptation process that certain work contexts require.

Since the rather bohemian styles of the academic community may be unsuitable for certain business clients or business environments, developing superior communication skills is essential. This is the message of the study by Tine Damsholt and Morten Krogh Petersen who had the task of finding alternative work place organizations at their university. These researchers learned, to their surprise, that miscommunication caused their proposals for debate to be understood as non-negotiable requirements.

Applied cultural analysis can also be an important bridge between very different mindscapes. Robert Willim gives theoretical and empirical examples of the capacity of applied cultural ana-

lysis to bridge parallel realities, re-focus, find new answers and also solve problems.

Often researchers in applied projects are expected to discuss the so-called soft values and ethical considerations. For example, Markus Idvall shows how a well-developed sensitivity in the cultural analytical approach is of great importance in the health care sector. Håkan Jönsson stresses that a built-in, although hidden, mediating competence exists in cultural analysis in his article that focuses on innovation processes.

Today's benchmarking business expects interpretations of the culture and values of one network area for other participants in the same network. More often, however, cultural analysts have asked questions instead of answering them. Since clients want answers and solutions, that approach frequently causes problems. As Cecilia Fredriksson claims, in the context of the fact-seeking fashion forecasting business, as cultural analysts we are responsible for both the intellectual and the successful framing of the tasks we accept.

In sum, these articles reveal the widening scope of applied cultural analysis with its many new fields and perspectives. While recognizing there

are still insufficient tools and equipment for applied cultural analysis, these authors demonstrate their conviction that each researcher or practitioner brings something important and different to the field. The unifying theme of these articles is the need for a constant dialogue between those inside and outside Academia. We hope that ETN:JOB will contribute to this further development of applied studies in cultural analysis.

# Tempting French Fries

## Cultural Analysis as an Approach in the Development of Healthy Fast Food

Mine Sylow

The diet and eating habits of children and adolescents are much debated issues in the Danish public discourse on health and nutrition. The focal points of the discussion are the high fat and sugar content of snack foods and the health problems associated with their consumption. A major concern is the increasing numbers of overweight children. Although much research has been conducted on the problem of eating habits from a scientific perspective, there is perhaps another way to examine how such habits may be changed and the resulting problems resolved.

It is my argument that a different focus on the problem could result in a greater understanding and a more constructive way of dealing with the problem. In this article I focus on the social and

cultural meaning of food by examining how food (in this context, sweets, snacks, sweetened beverages and fast food) plays a significant role in the interactions of young children and adolescents.

The article describes how a cultural analysis approach was successfully used as a part of the development of new and healthier fast food choices for children and adolescents at sports centres. In the article, I describe how this particular cultural analysis project, in cooperation with the food industry, was designed and executed, some results of the analysis, and my recommendations arising from the knowledge gained from the project, in particular the use of cultural analysis outside the academic arena.

## Knowing Why

In my view, curiosity is the motivating force in cultural analysis. When we can answer the question ‘Why?’ then an actual opportunity for change is possible. Food is such an ordinary but essential part of our lives and yet we seldom consider the norms and rules governing our eating habits and choices of food. Even so, we can immediately identify what is right or wrong when it comes to food in the same way as we notice grammatical errors in language. What to eat, how to eat, and in what contexts food is used are part of the shared routine that forms everyday culture and through which personal and cultural identity is shaped.

Therefore, studying the eating habits, for example, among children and adolescents is one way to acquire knowledge from a world where unhealthy food is so popular. Or put it another way, a casual visit to a Danish sports centre, or a quantitative analysis of it, confirms that youngsters love French fries; In itself, this observation will not bring about a change in eating habits, but by using cultural analysis we can change our perspective and ask *why* French fries are so tempting. Such an analysis helps us understand

and ‘get behind’ the food choices of young people. In doing so, the analysis gives us the possibility to get beyond the blindness of our own perspective on food at sports centres and makes it possible to find ways in which, for example, French fries can be replaced with something healthier with the same qualities – as seen from the users’ point of view.

My experience in the joint venture of a humanistic cultural analysis with a for-profit industry confirmed for me that the approach of ‘we need to know why – if we want to change things’ is a very useful starting point. But one must begin by explaining why the social and cultural context of a certain product is relevant, despite the strength of cultural analysis as an analytical approach. This may be a difficult task. One has to realize that conducting an analysis in close cooperation with industry raises certain questions for all who are involved. For example, as I will return to at the end of the article, the industry’s point of view must be considered in order to understand what is meaningful, and all parties must learn something if the co-operation is to be successful.



## From Unique Observations to Generalised Conclusions

Transforming unique observations or stories into generalised conclusions is the next step after ‘knowing why’. I believe this transformation is one of the most valuable contributions of cultural analysis. The qualitative methodology used in cultural analysis can describe both a level of observation – what you actually see – and, by analysis, a level of meaning of connections and concepts. In the research described in this article, ‘thick descriptions’ of life at the sports centres were the starting point for the transformation. In such thick descriptions, the physical surroundings and their various possibilities are decisive in what can be observed. It is, for example, not possible to conclude anything about eating fruit in a cafeteria if fruit is not available. Nor is it possible to say anything about the social interaction of girls in a cafeteria if there are only boys there. These are the premises of the qualitative approach. Even though the observation sites for my fieldwork were different, each provided examples of food’s role in the life of children and adolescents and particularly in their social interaction at each sports centre. In this way, piece-by-piece,

my observations revealed the social and cultural patterns associated with food and young people. In taking this descriptive approach, it became possible to identify characteristics of youngsters’ food culture which can be used more generally, for instance, in product development.

## Healthy Fast Food at Sports Centres – The Case Study

In Denmark, 68 % of school children participate in organised sports at a club, typically at one of the 1100 Danish sports centres that also sell food and beverages. Most of the foods sold are fast food items including frankfurters, French hotdogs, hamburgers of various sorts, toasted sandwiches and, last but not least, French fries, one of the most popular choices, particularly with adolescents. These products are often described as ‘junk food’, i.e., low nutrition food containing high quantities of fat and sugar. This paradoxical combination – facilities where young people engage in sports activities and eat unhealthy food – was the starting point for the project, “Development of healthy fast food for children and adolescents at sports centres”.

The project was a co-operative effort by the Danish Cancer Society (the project leader), five of the largest food companies in Denmark<sup>1</sup> and the sociological research group at the Department of Human Nutrition at The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University in Copenhagen. At the time of the project, I was employed by this Department and was selected to conduct the project's cultural analysis. The project was supported by a public fund for innovation. The aim of the cultural analysis was to conduct product development research that was more innovative than the usual market research often used by the food industry. Readers wishing to learn more about the project, the observations and the analysis are referred to the case study report (Sylow 2005a) and two articles based on the study (Sylow 2005b and Sylow and Holm 2009).

### Methodology and the Setting of the Fieldwork

The methodology used in this study is traditional, ethnographic participant observation that allows the researcher to observe various aspects of children and adolescents' everyday lives e.g. the

activities they have around food at the sports centres. The design of the study was inspired by the work of James P. Spradley (1980). Specifically Spradley's understanding of social situations as identified by three primary elements: "place, actors, and activities" has provided the methodological framework for the observations.

The analysis presented in this article is based on observations made at two very different sports centres in Denmark.<sup>2</sup> The first centre is an open-air sports facility in a suburb south of Copenhagen used for football training, mostly for boys. The second centre is in a small suburban town outside a provincial town in Jutland where the main activities are handball and badminton for both girls and boys. At both facilities, sports activities are organized every day for large numbers of children and adolescents, and both facilities have dining cafeterias where sweets, soft drinks and fast food are sold and eaten.

Children, ages 10 to 12, and adolescents, ages 13 to 17, were the target groups in the study. The groups that were observed in the cafeterias varied in size from two to ten members; both children and adolescents stayed in the cafeteria for periods ranging from 10 minutes to several

hours. I spent approximately 10 observation days at each of the two centres. At the sports centre in Jutland, the observation days were consecutive and were timed between 4 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. In the suburban sports centre, the observations took place between 5 p.m. and 9 p.m., spread over five weeks.

### Questions and Focus

The observation studies focused on describing the role of food in situations where food<sup>3</sup> and meals are part of the lives of children and adolescents at the sports centres. The study was conducted by listening to their conversations, watching their actions and questioning them in small ‘on the spot’ interviews about the activities observed. Much can be observed when sitting long hours in cafeterias surrounded by noisy children and laid-back teenagers. My focus was therefore mainly on their actions around food: What happens when these kids enter the cafeteria? When and how do they queue up? How do they make their purchases? How long does purchasing take? What do they buy? What is their interaction with the sales people and with

others in the queue? Are they alone or in groups? Where do they go with the food/sweets bought? If they stay in the cafeteria, how long do they sit at the tables and with whom? What do they do at the tables besides eat? etc. The following paragraph is an example of a typical observation and analysis in a normal day at the sports centre in Jutland. This description illustrates how I addressed my research questions and, in addition, the description reveals the way in which I chose to communicate my observations and findings to the partners in the project.

### Interactions Around Food

The 11-12 year-old handball girls’ gathering after training was one of the biggest events in the cafeteria:

It is 4 p.m. and a large group of 11–12 year-old girls has just come into the cafeteria. They throw their bags and gear in a pile on a table and go to the counter to buy slush ice – either plain blue or mixed with coke flavouring – and bags of mixed sweets. They join the queue when they come into the cafeteria and the la-

test arrivals are informed, very loudly, about who has already bought something and who is still queuing. Generally the girls are very busy in organising the situation.

“May I buy first? I’m going to have an ice drink [slush ice]”, one girl says to the others in the queue.

“I’m sitting here”, one new arrival says. “Then I’ll sit next to you”, adds her friend.

The seat by the window [that overlooks the sports centre] is apparently the best place and great efforts are made to keep one’s place here, e.g., if one has to queue at the counter. One girl sits on the table with her back to the window. In total, about 8-10 girls have gathered around the table.

“Aren’t you going to have an ice drink? There’s extra top on it”, the seated girls say to those who approach.

The question, “Can I borrow some money?” is asked several times at the table.

The girls at the table discuss the taste of sweets and which sweet they like best.

Once the girls were seated, it was almost like wat-

ching a party gathered around a well-laid table. Each girl had a beaker with slush ice and a straw. The sweets were arranged next to the beaker in decorative ways. Time spent at the table varied but generally no one left the table until everyone was finished. The girls often stayed for two hours in the centre after training, and it was not unusual for them to buy more sweets during this time. Second and third purchases were, however, more individual and were not necessarily bought or eaten with the other girls.

The example above shows how thick descriptions can reveal what kind of food young people eat at sports centres, the cultural and social meaning they attach to the food and the role food and eating play in their social interaction. The example also shows how food is a central part of the sports centre experience. The strict framework around the social interaction was, in many ways, structured around what the girls consumed. The sweets and the slush ice were important and visible accessories in the social gathering. The extensive money borrowing activity meant that almost all the girls could share in the treats. These observations, plus the fact that sweets and drinks were major topics of conversation, emphasize that the

edible accessories functioned, to some degree, as entrance tickets to the fellowship around the table. As it is shown in the research report (Sy-low 2005), adolescents at the same cafeteria also had their own rituals around food, but they differed sharply from those of the younger children, thereby distancing themselves from this younger group. However, the general conclusion for both age groups is the same: They do not always eat because they are hungry. Food can in this case be used to reinforce group membership among peers or in addition, particularly for the adolescents, food can confirm a sense of independence from parents or younger age groups.

## The Results

The overall conclusion of the fieldwork observations was, as illustrated above, that these young people at the sports centres were not particularly interested in food from a physiological perspective. This conclusion was an important eye-opener for the industry considering the prospect of the work ahead of them. The cultural analysis also showed that the food at the sports centres met a number of specific demands made by the child-

ren and adolescents, among them satiation, possibilities for sharing with peers, preparation and price. In the next section, I elaborate on those demands and other central themes that form the background for the recommendations made to the food industry since they later became points of departure for the product development.

## Home and Away

Irrespective of gender or age, both children and adolescents operated with at least two major categories regarding food: ‘home cooking’ and ‘eating out’. That is, they readily distinguish food eaten at home with their parents from food bought and eaten away from home in places like the sports centres. This point, among other things, is linked to the following point about getting value for money - and not wanting to pay for anything you can get for free at home. However, it is not just the food product itself that differentiates ‘home cooking’ and ‘eating out’; the context of preparation and eating is also an important distinguishing feature. For example, French fries are ‘eating out’ food even though many of the young people eat French fries at home as

well. What sets French fries at the sports centre apart is their method of preparation and the way they are eaten with friends rather than with parents as part of a meal at home.

### The Economic Rationale of Getting Value for Money

An important criterion when spending one's own money is getting value for money. At the sports centres, the meaning of this was closely related to the needs of the buyer: If the person is hungry, the food had to be filling, or if the person needed energy, the food had to fill this demand, and so on. But getting value for money also meant not spending money on stuff that they could get for free at home. Therefore, foods like fruit were not popular in cafeterias since fruit was easily available at home. The kids pointed out that the fruit had to be specially prepared, cut in handy pieces or arranged interestingly before they would pay for it.

### Sense of Community

Food that can be shared holds a special position

in the life of the children and adolescents at the sports centre cafeterias. As sharing food generates a sense of community, food shared in the cafeterias provided a reason or excuse to sit together. Being able to share food requires that there be enough food at a cheap price, and French fries is a product which met this demand better than most other foods. One 15 year-old boy commented: "I've chosen French fries because they're good and they're cheap. It's nicer, too, because you can share them with your friends".<sup>4</sup>

### Food as a Tool in Identity Work

As in many other settings, food at the sports centres was also used in identity work, especially by the adolescents. The concern about 'what and who am I?' were questions in which choices of food could be a part of the symbolic answer. Among the children and adolescents at the centres, those who bought hot food such as toasted sandwiches, French fries and French hotdogs were mainly the 13-17 year-olds. The 10-12 year-olds reported that they too would have loved to buy French fries, but they had to be home for dinner: "Even if we could afford French fries",

say the 11–12 year-old girls, “we still wouldn’t buy them, because they are too filling. Our parents get cross if we sit and pick at our dinners”.

The 13–17 year-olds, by contrast, had both enough money and independence to buy hot food on occasion before, during and after dinnertime. Thus, not only was the hot food available at the sports centres different from home food, it also differentiated the children from the adolescents. Both groups ate sweets, but, for the most part, only the adolescents ate the hot food on daily basis. In this way, hot food (like clothes, music, hairstyles, etc.) became a symbol of autonomy. Through their food choices adolescents, could demonstrate their independence from their parents; children under 13 have to eat dinner at home, but adolescents follow their own mealtime rules.

## Recommendations

Working from the cultural analysis, recommendations to the industry representatives were outlined for their future work in developing healthy fast food products. If the cultural analysis was to pass, the recommendations had to meet two

standards. First, they had to be short, precise and useful for the industry. Second, they had to meet the complex socially and culturally specific criteria described by the children and adolescents. The sum of these demands was in short that the recommendations should reflect the following ideas: (1) Products had to be sharable; (2) Products had to have a ‘grown-up’ feeling (not too much ‘mom’); (3) Products had to be filling; and (4) Products had to be ‘worth the money’ as seen from the young people’s point of view.

In making these brief and simplified points, things can get ‘lost in translation’. Because of the required brevity, the recommendations could not contain the usual cultural reflections and only very few of the details that make qualitative results different from quantitative results. This may be a weaknesses of cultural analysis; it works best when it is possible to explain the complexity of results rather than by offering ‘quick and dirty’ commentary. However, as I have tried to exemplify, this potential weakness is not a reason to refrain from using cultural analyses in issues like the one described in this research. I do think it is possible to communicate the results effectively in this simplified way so long as you take the limi-

tations of this communication into account and act upon them. To that end, I found it very useful to present all the findings by literally using the observations. This methodology turned out to be a very successful way to illustrate complex matters, and the observations used as illustrations in the research report came to serve as a common language in the project. Thus all parties involved had the same reference point even though they represented different companies and interests in product development. In discussing the potential of a certain product, the story, for instance, of the 11-12 year-old girls arranging their sweets became an argument whereby one could underline one's ideas. This way of using the observations also prevented the simplified recommendations from standing alone.

### The Product Development

Space limitations prohibit presenting a detailed story of the results of the product development on the basis of the recommendations offered.<sup>5</sup> The shorter version is that the analysis itself was a great success inside as well as outside the project, but in the subsequent product develop-

ment phase, it was not possible to release the recommendations fully. The project did develop a new concept for healthier fast food called "Move'n eat".<sup>6</sup> The five co-operating companies also ended up offering a selection of healthier alternatives in the cafeterias although these products, from the project's point of view, were not completely new. Instead, these products were existing, well-known products joined under a common brand.<sup>7</sup> One reason for this result has to do with profitability. The sports centre cafeteria market is a rather small one and 'real' product development is quite expensive. However, as a result of the cultural analysis, the companies clearly gained knowledge they did not have before. On this background I think the members in the project group, including myself, would have liked to take the product development further. One can say that the realities of the marketplace came across and obstructed this progress.

A private school lunch company<sup>8</sup> told me, they have successfully used the recommendations and the new understanding of the way children interact with food (e.g., the importance of sharing food and the unwillingness to pay for healthy food such as fruit and vegetables) in their school



meals operations. This adoption of the recommendations validates the usefulness of cultural analysis in the search for understanding the role of food in the life of children and adolescents, although it would have been more exciting if the recommendations had ‘gone all the way’ at the sports centres.

### Understanding the Potential of Cultural Analysis

In this section I want to return to my experience at the meeting of an academic discipline and the food industry and what can be learned from it. Such a ‘meeting’ can have elements of culture clash such as those first-year ethnology student read about in textbooks, Maybe this approach should be kept in mind.

At the first group meeting I took a very basic approach in explaining what I thought would be of interest for the project and for future product development. I still remember the discussion that followed in which representatives from the food industry emphatically expressed their view that the focus should be on food, as traditionally defined, and not on sweets and sweetened

beverages, because they did not think the new products should be candy and soft drinks. At this point, the first lesson in using cultural analysis for product development was clear: Yes, an industry might think qualitative analysis is a very good idea, but that does not mean they really understand or comprehend the meaning and potential of such an analysis. Thus my task was first of all to acknowledge this and then to explain *why* it is simply not enough to look at food and food consumption if you want to understand the nature of the food culture in the cafeterias at sports centres. On the other hand, the industry project partners had to learn to think much more holistically than they normally did and they had to be open to the possibilities of this new approach to the subject and to product development more generally.

Based on this experience, I think it is of great importance in working with cultural analysis outside academia to hold on to and promote your methodological competencies as an ethnologist, anthropologist, etc. Yet, at the same time, you need to be aware that working with the industry is a learning process for the industry as well as for the researcher. You know how to perform a cul-

tural analysis and industry usually does not. Industry focuses on profitability that, for the cultural analyst, often is a foreign word. You know what it takes to produce the kind of results they did not know they wanted but are grateful for afterwards. The goal of industry is, on the other hand, from the very beginning fast, useful and focused results. A good cultural analyst acknowledges this duality and therefore knows that a good analysis is also an analysis that is of value to the recipients. In this regard, the combination of fieldwork and analysis takes on a double meaning – as a researcher, you have to conduct the analysis *and* you have to understand the recipient of the analysis if the results are to be meaningful in their corporate world. By taking these blind spots of the industry into account, it becomes possible to explain to them, using this blindness as a picture, why it is important to do what you have planned to do instead of, as in my case, giving into the demand of focusing only on ‘real’ food.

Having said all this, it is important to be aware that the cultural analysis can give many valuable answers but sometimes some questions are just better handled or investigated by someone else or with other methods. From my experiences,

one must be aware of this and act accordingly in order to be a good cultural analyst

## Closing Remarks and a Bit About Letting Go

After having made the analysis described in this article, I conducted a similar investigation on the culture of eating between meals at ‘white collar’ workplaces (Sylow 2006). Furthermore, I have supervised a study on the cultural and symbolic meaning of bread.<sup>9</sup> In considering these various projects, I sometimes wonder – does the food industry in these and other cases have a strategy for handling and implementing new knowledge created by a different source than they are used to? Or does industry continue on the same track simply because it is too difficult to change the way things are? If the latter is the case, the point about taking their needs into account and giving them answers they find operational and useful becomes even more important. A strategy for the cultural analyst then may be to challenge the user more and ask as well as help the user to be clearer about *how* they will use the findings of the study they have requested. It is not enough that the

manager of a research or innovation department loves the results; many other people in the company must also find the results meaningful if the recommendations are to be well-received.

In conclusion, cultural analysis work is also a matter of letting go. When your report or recommendation is delivered, it is actually out of your hands. Someone else owns the results now and you can do nothing about the way they are used - if they are used. However, because you have the independence to choose your projects, you can foresee what differences your results can have. However, these ethical considerations are beyond the scope of this article, but depending on who you are, they can be important to address before accepting a project. Nevertheless, by delivering solid results and alternative ways of looking at things, you have done what is possible in order to facilitate a change or a more basic way of helping explain hitherto unrecognized coherences. My personal view is that cultural analysis is always a rewarding experience where your own perspective is enlarged and your way of looking at things is sometimes challenged. Cultural analysis gives you the opportunity to develop a more complex view on a subject and thereby create

new knowledge. In this sense, cultural analysis is far more than a simple instrument – it expands perspectives.

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## Endnotes

1. Arla (dairy), Royal Greenland (fish), Schulstad (bakery - bread), Tulip (meat) and Agrova Food (vegetables).
2. The full case study consists of the two long observation studies described in this article and three shorter studies of other sports centres in Jutland, not described here.
3. In this study and article, the word 'food' is used broadly to include sweets, drinks, etc.

4. This point about French fries as the best food to be shared, and the social importance attached to them is one of the most important and most quoted conclusions from the study
5. See [http://mad-i-bevaegelse.dk/Real\\_meal/slutrapport/slutrapport\\_final2.pdf](http://mad-i-bevaegelse.dk/Real_meal/slutrapport/slutrapport_final2.pdf)
6. To learn more about Move'n eat, see [http://mad-i-bevaegelse.dk/Real\\_meal/index.shtml](http://mad-i-bevaegelse.dk/Real_meal/index.shtml) or [www.mad-i-bevaegelse.dk](http://www.mad-i-bevaegelse.dk) under 'move'n eat'.
7. That might very well be the reason why the new brand and the associated products never really became the success that was hoped for.
8. 123 skolemad, [www.123skolemad.dk](http://www.123skolemad.dk)
9. The report will be published online at [www.fuldkorn.dk](http://www.fuldkorn.dk), in December 2008.

# People-centric Innovation<sup>1</sup>

On Ethnological Competencies in Business  
Development Consulting

Jakob K. Voldum & Louise Work Havelund

Is that very representative? ... Is this really scientific? ... Why does it take so long? ... Why don't we just use a focus group?

In our work as consultants at ReD Associates,<sup>2</sup> a Copenhagen-based consultancy specializing in user driven innovation, skeptical clients often question us about the validity of our methods. Questions such as those that open this article only hint at the reservations the corporate world has about the use of ethnographic methods for business development and innovation purposes. Perhaps these reservations are about the social sciences in general. In any case, despite this skepticism, we ethnologists, as well as our fellow socio-cultural researchers, have much to offer the corporate world. Let's look at some evidence

that substantiates this blunt assertion.

Historically, the first ethnologists entered the business world in the 1930s when business executives and management were ready to explore any scientific path that might increase employee efficiency and offer the slightest competitive edge (Ante & Edwards, 2006). Since then, companies have flirted and experimented with the various academic disciplines that relate to the business world. However, it is only in the last 10–15 years that ethnography and anthropology have really achieved commonplace recognition in the traditional quantitative world of corporations. Today almost every consultancy or market research firm offers an extensive portfolio of qualitative services and employs a number of experienced social scientists.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, business giants such as

Microsoft, Intel and Yahoo are powerful ambassadors for the social sciences approach to solving business problems. Such companies even have separate corporate divisions that specialize in social sciences research, including comprehensive ethnographic fieldwork activities and academic ‘basic research’.

In the case of Intel, most people probably intuitively associate the company with highly advanced chipsets and micro-processors – with the type of black box technology in the belly of our PCs that we use of every day without grasping its true complexity. We are content to leave such technology to their geeky and pale software and hardware engineers whom we imagine are the majority of the Intel R&D staff. The actuality, however, is that Intel’s social scientists and ethnologists make major contributions to keeping the company ahead of its competition. The anthropologist, Ken Anderson, heads Intel’s People and Practices Research Group<sup>4</sup> that is completely dedicated to researching the social and behavioural aspects of technology and computers. It is the task of this group to answer questions, such as: How do people perceive and utilize technology for various purposes? And what are their unmet

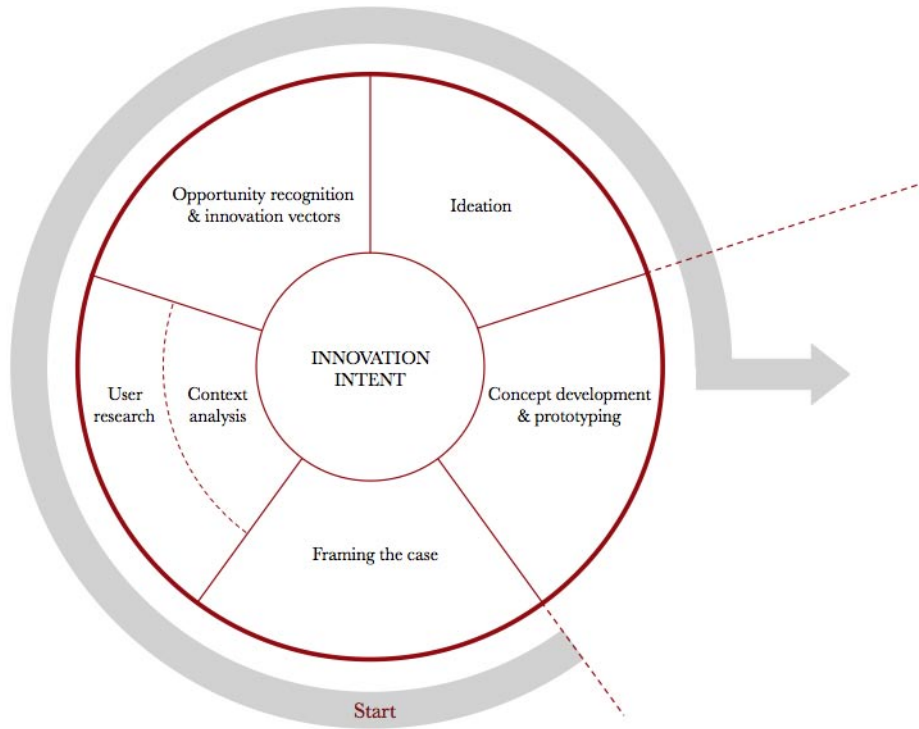
needs? And what about the future? Such questions help inform Intel’s innovation and R&D processes and shape its strategy.<sup>5</sup>

In this article, we present some reflections and perspectives on applied ethnology and cultural analysis for business development purposes. As we describe our competences and shortcomings in providing services to the corporate world, we take as our point of departure our own academic backgrounds as ethnologists at the University of Copenhagen. Primarily we use one particular project to illustrate our ideas although we also briefly describe a second project that dealt with young people’s relationship to the media. The main project we describe was with a large manufacturer of medical devices.

In the medical device project, we were asked to carry out an extensive ethnographic study in the United States and France on chronically ill patients living with wounds, ostomies or (in)continence conditions (some even with multiple conditions). The object of the study was to gain insight into the daily lives of these patients that could be helpful in developing new people-centric and more cost-effective product packaging solutions.

The model below illustrates the overall process of the medical device project. After having ‘framed the case’, that is, after working closely with the client to define exactly what we should investigate, we carried out extensive (ethnographic) research activities in the two countries.

Following our fieldwork research, we continued by identifying, organizing, systematizing and analyzing patterns in the empirical evidence that we could use in developing the relevant (packaging) solutions.



## Are We Really Methodology Experts?

There is no doubt that qualitative and ethnographic research methods are generally understood as amongst our strongest assets - a core dimension of ethnology and an integral part of our academic and scientific identity. However, after you have earned your Master's degree in ethnology from the University of Copenhagen, how knowledgeable are you really with ethnography and its applications? You have some knowledge, of course, but definitely not a lot, and certainly not enough to call yourself an 'experienced ethnologist' or a 'methodology expert'. You are acquainted with theory and have some practical experience, but to go beyond the mandatory methodology elements taught in the Bachelor's program, you must now take individual responsibility for sustaining an interest in ethnographic methodology. (In part, these issues are being addressed by the new MACA-program as it is now possible for the student to dedicate more time to the actual application of cultural analysis).

Our fundamental point is that to develop methodology skills, you have to practice. Certainly, we have become familiar with the main principles

of our field from course work, lectures and Steinar Kvale's seminal work on the qualitative interview (1994). Yet such knowledge is not practice; rather, we have learned rules of thumb, studied some theory and read various reflections on qualitative methodology. In addition, our university experience has taught us only the most commonly used methodological tools - narratives and open-ended and semi-structured interviews. We are unfamiliar with the many alternative tools that can also be used to gather qualitative information about people. Speaking for ourselves, this is the reality.

In our project for the medical device manufacturer, we at ReD Associates actually used a number of methods to generate as rich a data-material as possible. We made our observations (participant as well as non-participant) at hospitals by shadowing specialist nurses who deal with newly diagnosed patients. We spent a day with each patient and his or her family (20 patients in total) at home where we conducted semi-structured interviews. We also tagged along with these patients on a variety of errands and social appointments. In order to address some of the more difficult aspects of their lives on more than one level,



we provided the patients with disposable cameras and diaries that they used daily to describe and comment upon certain aspects of life with a chronic illness. In short, we carefully designed our fieldwork and approach so that we could capture the life of our patient-informants with as much subtlety and nuance as possible.

During the entire project, we made hours of video-recordings and took loads of pictures – for our own as well as for our client’s use. Good photos and video footage, in addition to giving the researcher an excellent opportunity to re-immense him-/herself in the fieldwork, also provide compelling evidence that is particularly valuable in convincing a client of patient behavioural patterns or unmet patient needs.

Furthermore, we also carried out a systematic virtual ethnography – that is, the thematic and sustained study of Internet forums, blogs and chatrooms that related to our study.

Finally, after completing our ethnographic research activities, we used Atlas.ti – a sophisticated, searchable database program designed for use in qualitative data organization and analysis. In Atlas.ti, you can meticulously organize and code a project’s ethnographic data thematically

(for example, field notes, photos, video and audio-recordings). Thus, the researcher uses Atlas.ti to create a database simultaneously and continuously that contains the empirical evidence for a project – organized and systematized in preparation for further analysis and reflection.

In summary, qualitative methods are the assets and core competencies of ethnologists that, in our view, we should develop and practice to a much larger extent. We need to get ‘beyond the qualitative interview’ stage in order to learn about and use other methodological approaches that are available in ethnographic research.

### Applied Cultural Theory

When we were students at the University of Copenhagen, we soon became acquainted with Professor Thomas Højrup’s life-mode analysis and its development as well as his concept of the “theoretical workshop” (det videnskabsteoretiske værksted). This workshop is a conceptual non-place dedicated to logical-theoretical thinking (Højrup, 2002). To be honest, we did not really understand the concept at first. One of us remembers envisaging the theoretical workshop

as a circular room with dazzling white walls and a spiral staircase inside an incredibly tall ivory tower, as if in a fairy tale. There were stacks of disorganized and bleached documents and old, dusty books in the room where a grey-haired, old man sat, lost in thought and occasionally scratching his beard. Despite this rather fanciful image, at least a simple version of Højrup's concept made sense: Theory, logic and contemplation are important! In fact, and this observation may surprise some researchers and practitioners, we assert that our sound training in theory has given us an extremely important tool in the consulting businesses vis-à-vis the ReD Associates approach. Our study of a number of socio-cultural theoretical and analytical frameworks – from Karl Marx to Bruno Latour and from historical materialism to actor-network theory - has provided us with a profound professional ethos that sustains us, even in corporate offices where a hardcore business, and sometimes hostile, logic prevails. For us, this ethos is the non-place of authority – a competence particular to ethnologists that adds an extra level of perspective to our analytical work and to our problem-solving processes.

In our medical device project, theoretical con-

templation was at the heart of our work in all its phases. For example, we applied the framework of Rites of Passage (Van Gennep, 1961) in order to understand and communicate how the life of a patient with a chronic illness is a process of phases. In particular, we were interested in the idea that the period of time after diagnosis is a period of conceptual liminality. In this time frame, the patient often feels alienated from his/her 'normal', healthy self, as well as socially marginalized, because of the new and incomprehensible reality of a serious illness. This is a period when the patient experiences the processes of learning, coping and adapting in order to reach a stage where he or she can actually deal with the reality of life with a chronic illness. In fact, because many patients lack the necessary resources (support, information, mental strength, money, etc.), they never integrate the chronic illness into their lives. They are unable to break out of the state of liminality in order to arrive at acceptance and a 'new normality'. In our project, we used Van Gennep's theory as a "framework of mediation" that allowed us to systematize and triangulate the lives of our chronically ill informants. By describing the business potential of helping people

deal with, or move beyond, the liminality state, we could describe these lives in a way that was more meaningful and relevant for our client.

As this project demonstrates, theory is a powerful communication tool because we can use it to condense and clarify our insights in a persuasive way that makes such insights useful for our clients. As ethnologists, our solid theoretical-analytical training and approach are thus a part of our academic competences. These competences have a place in the commercial field of business anthropology and user driven innovation; therefore, in our role as methodology experts, we should not minimize the importance and relevance of our competences. The application of relevant theory ensures that the key findings we derive from our empirical data – in the abstract process of analysis – are of special value for our clients.

In creating this value, a strong theoretical foundation is key to avoiding the ‘common trap’ of applying ethnographic methods to processes of business development and innovation. Methodological skills such as, for example, qualitative interviews and participant observations, are valuable for collecting interesting and relevant

data. However, a vast amount of qualitative data does not automatically result in powerful innovation data. The analysis of such data requires more than a 1:1 literal translation of wishes or trends. It is important to remember that the work of the ethnologist is not trend spotting.

The second project that is of interest for this article was our project where we were engaged to study young people’s relationship to the media. At first, our client for this project was rather discouraged because the youngsters seemed to have a very innovative, ‘lead user approach’ in their use of various forms of (digital) media. The client repeatedly asked, “What’s new?” and seemed to expect to find innovation ‘out there’ among the users – like ripe fruit on a tree, ready for picking. Rarely is innovation discovered so easily. More importantly, it not the goal of qualitative research to facilitate processes of user driven innovation.

A longer process of cultivation is required if qualitative data is to reveal its innovative value. Research into user driven innovation is not (necessarily) about discovering trend setting user behaviour in areas such as the media. Innovation – and thus true value creation – occurs during the process of abstract analysis. Supported by

social theory (e.g., Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Bourdieu's capital diagrams and Foucault's concept of governmentality), it is possible to understand the "banal", "ordinary" and "common sense" world of the informant in a new way that reveals hitherto "hidden" insights and opportunities.

Actual innovation means moving away from the trend spotting approach of a 1:1 literal translation of user needs toward communication or product development implications. Social and cultural theories are indispensable tools in raising ethnographic 'raw material' to the abstract level of analysis where findings and patterns translate into deeper understandings of the cultural logic and unsatisfied needs of users. Understandings based on this level of abstraction may move innovation beyond the 'fallacy' of, for example, 'making a new product blue' because the user simply wants a blue product.

The 'So what?' of Analysis –  
Transforming Analysis into Concepts  
Our final topic of interest for this article is concept development. At ReD Associates, we very

rarely have clients who are only interested in a deep analysis of a problem. Clients, regardless of their business activity, want to know exactly what our analysis will mean for their company. Thus we always have to ask ourselves the essential question, 'So what?'. For example, in medical device packaging project, all our work had to be directed toward developing useful packaging concepts.

In the university environment, the 'So what?' question, as an addendum to cultural analysis, is not commonly part of the instruction. The general aim of such education is to teach students to be critics, that is, people/scholars who discern and criticize. This pedagogic approach, where theories compete against other theories, results in an endless cycle of deconstruction.

The academic mantra of 'the world is complex' suggests that the world cannot be changed. Yet our experience is that in business there is no need for such complex worlds. We need to reconstruct the world after it has been deconstructed and exposed; therefore we encourage an attitude among ethnologists of reconstruction over deconstruction. We are not proposing that all students of ethnology should become busi-

ness consultants, but we are recommending that they be taught that research results can have an effect in contexts outside the academic tradition of deconstruction and criticism.

Is it possible that ethnology students and researchers would benefit from losing some of their reluctance to deal with the practical and ethical consequences of their research, or by being unafraid to undermine their privileged positions in the academic ivory tower with its academic judgments and solutions? Could ethnologists benefit by following the bold line of socio-cultural researchers such as Donna Haraway and Annermarie Mol who admit they want their research to change not only academic research traditions but the world as well? Haraway (1991) argues that ethnography researchers on both pragmatic and ethical levels need to acknowledge that taking such real world positions does not mean relativism and freedom from action and responsibility. Mol (2003, 2006) applies this same reasoning in her study of the transformation of diabetes care.

We now return to the main project described in this article, the medical device project. This project illustrates the importance of moving beyond the definition of a problem to its solution by

developing meaningful concepts that can transform existing practices. In this way, cultural analysis can have an actual impact.

Several informants in the project explained that with chronic wounds,<sup>6</sup> you have to treat them every day. First and foremost, you need the required treatment products and the knowledge of how to use them. The products referred to here are not the ordinary band-aids you buy at the local supermarket. There is nothing ordinary about chronic wounds since they require treatment skills and knowledge, for example, of how to measure their exudate level, scab-colour, texture and so forth. People with chronic wounds need to dress them meticulously with specific gels, dressings and adhesives. Because the proper treatment of chronic wounds is so complicated, many of our informants stated life very much revolves around the wound. They spend much time and effort in buying supplies, going for check-ups with specialists, getting information, getting organized at home and worrying about infections. If the wound and its healing process are severe, their entire existence is negatively affected, physically, mentally and socially.

So that we could develop suitable and cost-

effective packaging solutions for such chronic wounds, we teamed with the client's product designers and focused our joint efforts on thoroughly revising the client's wound care product packaging. Our goal was also to bring our analytical insights related to the issue to this task. In essence, we were engaged in a process of translation or conversion of the central analytical insights of our study - how patient life is complicated by chronic wounds - into intelligent packaging concepts that could make wound care simpler and more convenient for patients. As our focus was on the holistic aspects of the packaging, as well as its physical attributes, we were interested in developing packaging in the context of other patient needs and issues, such as emotional support and directions for product use, storage and disposal.

We admit that ethnologists are not particularly well trained in the development of sophisticated products or business ideas. Therefore it was imperative that we shared the design challenge with the client's designers. The archetypical designer's approach to a problem or challenge is often to go straight into an 'ideation-mode' and begin immediately to sketch out ideas. We

find this approach similar to the 1:1 trend spotting approach to innovation we have described in this article. In our experience, designers are very good at thinking in terms of solutions - so good perhaps that they are often trapped by their creative thinking and initial sketches. On the other hand, ethnologists are often ensnared in the webs of critical thinking and empirical analysis where it is difficult to remember the 'So what?' question. Given the perils of such monocular vision that is common to both product designers and ethnologists, more interdisciplinary co-operation is advisable. Our experience tells us that when we work closely with product designers, synergies emerge. Designers present us with ideas and conceptual drawings and models; we share with them our analysis, theory and the understanding that products have to meet people's needs. Thus, the designer-ethnologist collaboration joins competencies in productive relationships.

In our several years of experience in business development and concepts we have learned to consider the "So what?" question in all our analyses. In fact, we have even acquired a new vocabulary that enables us to communicate with our corporate clients (e.g., ROI (Return on In-

vestment), benchmarking, KOL (Key Opinion Leader), KPI (Key Performance Indicators), turnover, etc.). Such knowledge is a prerequisite for communicating in business development consulting because the new language facilitates our entry into previously hidden cultural domains. And once ethnologists have entered a new cultural domain, they have entered a dynamic and mutually beneficial relationship. Ethnologists can then communicate and share their valuable contributions.

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## Endnotes

1. The term 'people-centric innovation' is the equivalent of user driven innovation.
2. ReD Associates is a management consultancy

specializing in people-centric business innovation. This means the company is engaged in applying ethnographic methods, developing advanced social science solutions to problems and creating evidence-based innovation in strategy, products, services, sales and marketing. ReD Associates employs an international staff with backgrounds in the social sciences, business and economics, design, architecture, information management and political science.

3. In the business bestseller “The 10 Faces of Innovation” (2005), Tom Kelley, general manager of the California-based design agency IDEO, names “the anthropologist” as one of the important figures in innovation; “...this is the person who ventures into the field to observe how people interact with products, services, and experiences in order to come up with new innovations. The

Anthropologist is extremely good at reframing a problem in a new way, humanizing the scientific method to apply it to daily life...”.

4. <http://www.intel.com/research/exploratory/papr/>

5. In collaboration with Microsoft, Intel also organized the first *Ethnography Praxis in Industry Conference* (EPIC) in 2005. EPIC 2008 takes place at the University of Copenhagen ([www.epic2008.com](http://www.epic2008.com)).

6. A chronic wound is defined as a wound that does not heal in ‘logical’ stages. For example, a wound that does not heal in three months is considered chronic. Elderly people, people with diabetes and paralyzed individuals are particularly prone to chronic wounds for various reasons, including poor blood circulation.



# The First Year in business

The Things I Wish I had Known when I Started

Ida Hult

It was never my intention to become an ethnologist. Even more so, it was not my intention to run a company. I was on the fast track to a “normal” (whatever that is) career, okay maybe with some “saving-the-world-motives” but still a mainstream white collar, fancy shoes, sharp people, high pressure, kind of job. At the university, I had aimed for a degree in economics or similar. I only took Ethnology 101 to have some fun and get a bit of a slow start. Instead ethnology became my middle name and my business.

I fell in love with ethnology, irrationally and head over heels. I’ve been true to ethnography and cultural analysis ever since.

## Applied Ethnography and Trendethnography

During my studies, and since graduation, I’ve applied the ethnological perspective in several different areas. I have used my ethnological skills in journalism and futurism as well as for various tasks in the public sector. Such skills work well in all those areas, but those applications were not for me. With the founding of Trendethnography, my company, I found my niche.

Trendethnography is a company that operates in the mix between ethnology and futurism/trend analysis. As trend ethnographers, we work as strategy consultants in business by using cultural analysis, ethnographic fieldwork and trend analysis tools. We work mostly with large-scale projects, but we also give lectures and work-

shops. One could describe our work as proactive study rather than reactive research. Our typical client is a large company that needs innovation, re-positioning or a change process. We work in several industries: construction, food, banking, insurance, technology and architecture, as well as with both 'Business to business' and 'Business to customer/consumer'. The purchaser of our services is generally a director of product development, business development or marketing. All our studies are based on team ethnography. The typical project requires eight informants and at least 16 weeks of fieldwork. However, we distinguish ourselves from other consultancies by the length and depth of our analysis and our extensive use of theory.

I have worked with applied commercial ethnography and cultural analysis as a consultant for the last three years and I have managed my own business for two years, providing business strategy intelligence in context. My company has two divisions: 'Corporate' and 'Commercial'. The Corporate division, which deals with all kinds of business ethnography assignments, consults with clients using organizational ethnography. We utilize the theoretical and methodological

strengths of ethnology for innovative business development. *The boundless region, the region of le boulot, the job, il rusco – of daily work, in other words – is less known than the Antarctic.*<sup>1</sup> Our processes of change are firmly rooted in the existing corporate culture and aim to improve each client's operations both in numbers and general well-being. The Commercial division focuses on consumer behavior and stories with the goals of advancing product development and improving communication. Because our cultural analysis and ethnographic fieldwork are very versatile, with assignments involving many different clients and situations in varied industries, we are never bored.

I went into this business with the intention of providing my clients with the same light bulb moment insights that I had in my first course in ethnology. My personal goal is that, because of my work, each client will see the world a little bit differently and will give me a hug before I leave. In fact, my business plan expresses that very goal.

Make it ethnological – drafting problems  
Like many other ethnology students, I heard my

professors emphasize the point that ethnological work must propose a solution to a problem. The main question in a problem should work like the barbeque skewer in a mixed grill, holding the empirical material, theoretical perspectives, previous research and new ideas together. Since the problem is generally both compact and complex, it requires an ethnological approach. One has to “ethnologize” the problem.<sup>2</sup> This is still my greatest challenge, in every project, with every client.

I thought the problems would decrease in complexity when leaving school and starting a career in applied research. But on the contrary its increase as complexity is ever growing and more brains are involved in the solution drafts. There is more creativity yet more complexity.

Effective applied research must involve the client. Together we function cooperatively: the client has the expert knowledge of her or his business and we have the expert knowledge of ethnography. At Trendethnography, we draft solutions to problems by relying on our team of fieldworkers who are trained and skilled ethnographers. In our work with our clients, we seek to understand and interpret cultural phenomena,

using those insights in our conceptualizations. Our clients either accept our analysis in order to create or change their products and services, or they try to modify their existing products or services to better fit into its context. Successful projects require that all parties take part in the decision-making process of answering the classic ethnological questions of “When?” “How?” “Where?” “Whom?” and “Why?”. When these questions are debated and answered, the project meets the basic pre-requisites of intellectual stimulation for the ethnographer and benefit to the client.

### Case Study: The Ethnography of Bank Loans

Recently we had a project for a large, international bank where our assignment was to investigate property bank loans in the target group of ‘first-time buyer’. The project was extremely successful and is a good example of our work. The case reveals the typical joys and obstacles encountered in applied ethnography.

We had been talking to the bank client for more than a year before its management felt

brave enough and mentally ready to start. Before we received the contract, we had made several presentations at the bank's office and had informally talked about the method, the theories and the expected results related to our work. Finally, bank management told us, "Do something ethnographic". At that point, the hard work began. We drafted several solutions for everything from the hands-on problems of bank offices to the abstract problems of the value of money to the difference between cash and cash cards before we settled on the area of bank property loans.

The bank had developed a very ambitious and hypothetical understanding of how they thought customers conducted property transactions. When we read their document explaining that process, the problem we would work with began to crystallize. There was nothing very human about the document, filled as it was with schematic flows and diagrams. Our hypothesis was that people are not consuming or buying a loan. They may buy a house or an apartment, but in a sense they are buying a dream. Since the bank had not thought about their customers in this way, our discussions with them became more fruitful and interesting. We talked back and forth and finally

decided to focus on first-time buyers who have not yet established a property loan relationship with any bank. We also decided to focus on larger cities where the property loan amounts are larger. The ethnological question we set out to answer was: How do people really "do" a purchase of a property, that is, what is the human element in the process of financing the purchase?

The goal of our project was to identify the white space between the customers' purchase process and the bank's sales process. Our basic assumption was that the housing market and their own economy are areas that people often relate to on an emotional and irrational level. We began with formulating the questions we would pose to the bank's customers: How do you approach a property deal? How do you talk about it? How do you perceive it? What is your relationship to all the actors in the deal, especially to your bank contact? What is a home? What is your relationship to the "important documents" involved in a bank loan? What is the state of your economy? What is your attitude toward money?

The informants were seven loan applicant households that included some single individuals, some couples and some families. We did 80

hours of fieldwork at each household that were spread over three months from the point of “I think we should move” to the point of “We are finally settled in our new home”. We also conducted deep qualitative interviews with twelve first-time loan applicants.

During this entire process, we maintained close contact with the bank’s representatives who took an active part in drafting our questions and in directing our analysis to their different business sections. We made a presentation to the bank’s representatives midway in our fieldwork to show our progress and our best guess of what the results of the project might be. We also led a fieldwork seminar at the bank where we discussed our empirical material and the best possible questions to ask in the interviews. We were trying to satisfy the bank’s requirements as well as our own ethnological curiosity. We also returned to the bank to lead a seminar on our empirical evidence.

At the conclusion of the project, we made a final presentation and also prepared a written report that included advice, solutions, implications, and so on. As a type, the report is notable in the commercial world for its breadth and depth. Our report is a re-cap of each loan applicant’s history

(i.e., the facts and feelings of the investment) as it developed during the course of our fieldwork and is richly illustrated with pictures and quotes. The report contains a trend map of banking and consumption as well as an extensive section on ethnography, cultural analysis and the theory we used. All our Trendethnography reports, including this one, are prepared based on our main rules:

- Take the client’s (native’s) point of view
- Find out what’s wrong
- Suggest what is better

In our report, working from these rules, we used three categories to explain the loan applicants’ attitudes toward house and home, banking documentation, properties and authority. We classified the statements the applicants made about the bank, their different means of communication, and their general knowledge of banking, loans and the economy. We also talked about two major new target groups that could be of interest to the bank. The final section of the report consists of hands-on advice on what to do next and how to do it.

Since our final report presentation, we have returned to the bank nearly every month to participate in various internal activities, such as education, training, et cetera. Whenever bank representatives have questions, we arrange a meeting. We have provided them with consulting services from new brochures to office design. We are also involved in customer service education and in leadership and sales education. As we have taken a holistic approach in our work with the bank, we participate in all their activities involving home buyer loans. At present, the bank is preparing for another ethnographic project with us that will be in an area that is completely different from loans.

The project's success depended on several factors. First, we maintained close contact with the bank staff. That relationship was crucial as we could use their expertise and they really trusted ours. They also had the chance to change their minds and suggest new approaches during the work, an opportunity that is very expensive in quantitative research but simple and costless in ethnographic research. A second key factor in the success of the project was that we held them back in the beginning. We wanted to make sure that they were ready to go before take-off. When

we presented our results they never once asked for numbers or generalizations or other input. They were totally onboard, curious and ready to take action based on our insights. The third success factor was that we had a good interdisciplinary team at the bank who were in positions of power and therefore could take action quickly. The fourth success factor, and the backbone of Trendethnography, is our strategic principle to stand firmly rooted with one leg in the world of ethnology and the other in the world of business in order to translate between the two. At the office and in the field, we use "our words" as tools. When visiting and communicating with clients we use "their words". Our ethnological insights have to be translated into statements that are comprehensible to our clients.

### A White Space in Business

What's missing in business today? One answer is an awareness of how basic cultural processes affect brands, employers, employees, products and services, including historical context, ethical concerns and cultural meanings. Since such processes have to be understood in a cultural

context, there is a niche where ethnologists can make a significant difference in their work with business entities. A trend without a context is non-existent; it is just an idea on a piece of paper. A desk is generally a dangerous place from which to view the world.

In order to feel at home with my occupational role and identity, I constantly re-read “Vardagslivets etnologi”<sup>3</sup> to know where I come from, to get an idea of where I’m going and always to be comforted knowing that ethnology is a constantly changing expertise. As professionals, we cannot be inflexible. A review of the book’s table of contents is informative: stretch the rules, the hidden culture, the critique of culture as concept, class and ethnicity, Swedes and immigrants, male and female, youth and consumption, the post modern debate, living in an academic tradition, the importance of the ordinary, the fieldwork mentality, the dialogue between history and future, and the mobile searchlight. The index describe my career in short and the services Trenhdethnography offers.

Business intelligence should be classified by the knowledge of what people think, what people do and what they say. However, since many stra-

tegic decisions are based in part on what people say, there is a great opportunity for us with the additional perspective we can provide. The general and significant lack of knowledge of people’s habits provides us with another opportunity. According to Visser, *The extent to which we take everyday objects for granted is the precise extent to which they govern and inform our lives.*<sup>4</sup> The smallest details of daily life tell us stories about much larger national and global changes. Unconsidered trifles can be clues to more significant, subterranean shifts in society. There are always reasons that explain why we perform our most habitual activities – those reasons are historical, political and cultural. Here is where ethnography and cultural analysis can suggest excellent strategies. As Virginia Woolf says: *The skeleton of habit alone upholds the human frame.*<sup>5</sup> Applied ethnography is about delivering insights on the “infra-ordinary” part of our lives that is so routine as to be almost invisible, like infrared light. Ethnography is a searchlight on living.

In (post)modern life the question, ‘How shall I live?’ is answered by our day-to-day decisions on how to behave, what to wear and what to eat in

relation to the constant creation of identity. Achieving control over changing lifestyles demands an engagement in social worlds rather than a retreat to strategic sessions. Applied ethnography is about dressing up numbers with stories. Human beings (even elegant, remote board members) learn by listening to stories. A fellow lecturer on trends and future behavior states that we think about the future twelve percent of the time we are awake.<sup>6</sup> What increasingly affects us all, whether as professionals or as individuals preparing for a better future, is not the tangibles of life, bottom-line numbers, for instance, but rather the intangibles: our hopes and fears, our beliefs and dreams. Only stories and visualizations can adequately capture these intangibles.

‘Context’ and ‘perceived reality’ are two key words at Trendethnography. What we do, what we say, and how we think are both our tools and results. Generally, what people say is considered real. Instead, we deliver “real perceived reality”. Our work, since it is both exploratory and explanatory, is a tool for innovation. I also find my cultural analysis education and training highly useful for pattern and context recognition. It seems to me that an ethnologist with cultural analysis

training see patterns and connections where others see confusing fragments. Our historical approach clears up client confusion. The Mandrake economy comparison, for example, was an enormous relief to a client in the entertainment industry. We also took part in the design of a new tool with a killer application just by realizing the importance of weather in the construction industry. Our impact is often based on our tendency to confront the self-evident and the obvious.. The very different methodology of cultural analysis and of categorization led to the restructurings of the bonus system, employee education, mentoring programs and leadership training at a company in the heating industry. Most businesses look so intently at age, gender, assignments and experience that they have a tendency to forget people, dynamics, change and culture. The ethnological ability to see patterns where others see only fragments is as strength. Use this ability.

### Walk the Walk and Talk the Talk

The Swedish business world is typically conventional, cautious and very much oriented towards numbers and statistics. Yet rules and habits can



be broken. Trendethnography is different because we stress that we are different AND we act differently at the right time. My business training taught me how to walk the walk and talk the talk of business. Yet, since we deliver powerful insights, with a very different methodology, we should not scare off potential clients by making them more uncomfortable than they already are with this new way of doing research (and the fact that we know it and they don't). I say real insight because we deliver perceived reality in a world that sometimes operates on gut feelings. The reality check that our reports provide companies with is often very uncomfortable for them because they have based their strategies on a very different approach. However, gradually we are seeing a change in strategic thinking by our clients. We offer our clients insights that are glimpses of complex and confusing behavior – and we do not sugar coat these insights for our clients. We try to give them the whole picture and not merely a condensed diagram that says, for example, that 82 percent of their customers are satisfied.

Learn to sell ethnography by showing your clients that you speak their language and understand their codes. Adopt corporate clothing,

make small talk over coffee, learn a few business words, and then go “ethno” and show them that you are different. That makes you positively different. If you make your clients both comfortable and curious, they will listen to you.

You can also put your clients at ease by showing them that they are not alone in approaching their decision-making in a qualitative and new way. If you don't have a good study to report or references that back your results, show them what other ethnographers have done in the business world. When you get your first applied commercial project, make it a great reference case. With a few trusted brands supporting your work, skills and results, your job as a commercial ethnographer will be that much easier.

Advice in short:

- Get a reference case.
- Show the client you know business language. Learn how to simultaneously translate ethno-talk to business-talk, in both words and action.
- Get up close and personal. Talk in metaphors. Show pictures. Be real.
- Team up. Get associates with compelling

additional competences and make sure that you have a good network of skilled ethnographers with different backgrounds, nationalities, ages, ethnicities, and so on.

- Don't forget the basics. The basics will astonish a client as they did you.
- Learn your strengths and communicate them in ordinary words.
- Package your skills. People lack the time to try to understand if it is too unfamiliar. If you are for sale, you must be easy to buy.
- Be passionate but strategic.
- Get paid (a lot).

### Closing Remarks: Get Out and Do It

And now for the conclusions: Just do it. Really. The business world needs you. I need you. There are not enough academic positions available: we must enter industry. Applied ethnography is fun, but it is also hard work. Given its empirical findings and its constant need for interpretation and translation, applied ethnography is highly theoretical, interesting and sometimes even mind-blowing. To make your insights actionable, walk the walk and talk the talk. That's how you

make companies act on your results and not just read about them in your reports. Our job as applied ethnography consultants is to deliver useful answers and actionable, easy-to-understand solutions from the point of view of our clients. That job is not the same as delivering comfortable insights. It is quite possible to do outstanding ethnographic research and thorough and systematic cultural analysis in the commercial world. Don't become a sell-out. Do a professional job and only work in industries where you can take companies' needs and strategies into account. Finally, you have to respect and like your clients because you will work so closely with them.

Good luck! I will see you out there.

### Endnotes

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# Cultural Analysis for Innovation and Implementation

Morten Krogh Petersen & Tine Damsholt

During 2006 the University of Copenhagen (the University) resolved to spend less money on facilities rental and to spend more money on its core products: Research and education. Therefore, in its plans for establishing its new Campus University, the University decided it would reduce the size of its rented facilities from some 600.000 m<sup>2</sup> to approximately 500.000 m<sup>2</sup>. Immediately the question arose: How could the University make this reduction without jeopardizing the quality of its research and education programs? It was conceivable that downsizing all the various types of facilities (e.g., auditoriums, laboratories, and offices) by one-sixth might not be the best way to maintain the University's strong commitment to research and education.

This daunting challenge was given to a newly created project group in the University's cen-

tral administration unit, and at end of 2006 the group's leader decided they needed an analytical impact study to inform and advance the discussion. The group turned to the Center for Cultural Analysis (CKA), located in the Ethnology Department of the University.<sup>1</sup> The goal of the Center for Cultural Analysis is to provide private and public organizations with applied cultural analyses that create value in the specific organizational contexts of usage.

As the University's project developed, it became clear that, in this instance, this goal of CKA would only be partially achieved. This article explains the outcome of the CKA's involvement in the project. We argue that in order for the new products and solutions that an applied cultural analysis proposes to have valuable effect in a par-

ticular organizational context, the entire range of relevant stakeholders must be involved. This involvement is required in all phases of the applied cultural analysis: Planning, fieldwork, communication, and implementation.

### User-driven Innovation – Involving and Excluding Users

In the past five to ten years in Denmark, politicians, consultants, and researchers have focused considerable attention on user-driven innovation. A central premise of user-driven innovation is, generally speaking, that you can enhance the value of a new product or solution by involving its potential users in its innovation. This involvement can happen in many ways. For example, well-known consulting agencies such as IDEO<sup>2</sup> may use rather simple questionnaires to learn potential users' likes and dislikes, or they may, more radically, employ potential users in innovative processes in the same way they would employ 'professional' innovators such as designers, engineers, and researchers. These techniques and nearly everything in-between fit the broad concept of user-driven innovation.

User-driven innovation was at the heart of the project group's idea about how we at CKA were to carry out our work on the University's plans for its future workspace. While we were convinced that the involvement of users in the development of a textual and visual material, which could kick-start a discussion among a culturally diverse employee group, was a good idea, we also knew that such involvement was more easily proposed than accomplished. We faced a number of problems. Users are rarely a homogeneous group of people, so which users would be most representative of the different interests? What would the users tell us about and what would they keep to themselves? What knowledge about users do we *include or exclude* when we invite users to participate in innovative processes using certain methods?

In this article, we stress that with user involvement, it is crucial to take into account what we, the researchers, include as well as exclude in our selection of users and methods.

Writing it up – Trying to Involve Users  
At our first meeting with the project group mem-

bers from the University's central administration unit they stated clearly that they did not want a traditional, text-based report. It was essential for them that the project would have a significant impact. To that end, they wanted the material produced by CKA to begin a far-ranging and open discussion amongst the University employees about the physical layout of their future working space. The project leader stressed that they definitely were not looking for a long and dry report that people would not read. Nor did they want a purely ethnographic description of the everyday life of the University employees. The focus was to be on the real needs of the future users of the workspace. The project leader stated: "We are building for the next generation, so do not ask employees older than thirty about anything." Thus there was an undertone of 'othering' towards the current users. The task for us at the CKA was to assemble material that would provoke new ideas, would challenge established assumptions about the ideal individual office, and would overcome prejudices against new forms of working space. Ideally, according to the project leader, the employees "should feel dizzy" when they saw our material.

As University employees ourselves, we knew that the issue of working space was politically tense and that many people had strong opinions on the matter (we did as well). However, the CKA is a professional and independent organization, and so we accepted the assignment.

For the material that was to be produced, we decided to use a format of various text forms and illustrations that would be easily adaptable for Internet publication. We adopted this particular format in order to meet the demands of the project group and to *involve the users*, i.e., the University employees. In this way, we hoped to format the material so it would fit the practices where it would be used.

### Doing Fieldwork – Involving Users

In order to avoid promoting the administrative solution of 'open-office-landscapes', at our first meeting with the project group we explained that our contribution would not concern trends on working space. We declined to participate in the debate on expansive office landscapes versus small, private offices. Rather, our work would deal with the employees' day-to-day working

practices and their interactions with their physical working space in these practices. In this clarifying dialogue with the project group, we argued that insights about the actuality of the many and various day-to-day University working practices, based on a strategically selected sample, would be valuable kick-starters for discussions about such practices given the decision on the decrease in work space. In short, we asked the project group to take the practice turn<sup>3</sup> with us. After some persuasion on our part, they agreed to the proposal.

Clearly, our persuasive efforts were required as the project resources were rather limited. With these financial limitations, it was not possible to make traditional participant observations. As an alternative, we turned the employee sample into observing participants<sup>4</sup> by giving them diaries in which we asked them to record the nature and place of their current work. In their diaries, the employees, or the observing participants, wrote brief descriptions of their own working practices, their co-workers', and, not least, the physical settings of these working practices. In interviews at the follow-up meetings, we asked the employees to elaborate on these diary entries.

Our sample for the diary project and the follow-up interviews was approximately thirty University employees. As we wished to gain insights into the dissimilarity of the working practices at the University as possible, we chose employees from various faculties, jobs (research, administration, maintenance, etc.), and organizational levels.

Thus, our fieldwork applied the methodology of *involving the users* since the diaries and the follow-up interviews allowed the users to express themselves directly. It was clear from their responses that these users were a diverse group of people engaged in a great variety of working practices. The nature of their responses was equally diverse. Some users described their day-to-day working practices in great detail while others jotted down only a few key words. In the interviews, some users questioned our authority by trying to persuade us to highlight certain points in our analysis, while others simply impassively answered our questions. Nevertheless, despite the variety and breadth of our employee sample, we retain some doubt about how representative the 'voices' are that our methodology elicited.

## Analyzing Empirical Material – Involving Ideas about Use

Applied cultural analysis has a descriptive objective of describing and understanding cultural phenomena, but its broader objective is prescriptive in that it uses the insights gained in the cultural analysis to conceptualize new products and/or to make recommendations. Because of this prescriptive objective, there are implications for how the empirical material of applied cultural analysis is analyzed.

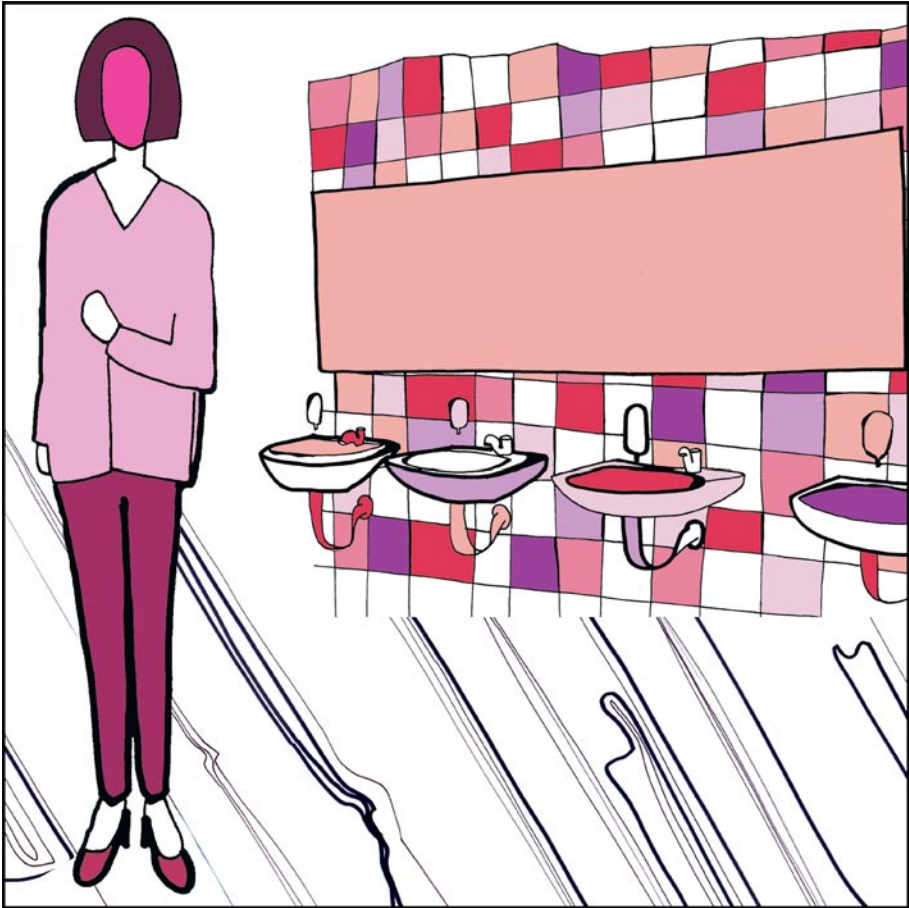
We knew we were to format the ‘result’ of our cultural analysis in this project as a textual and visual material that could provoke discussion among the University’s employees. Our formatting decision was to use scenarios, by which we refer to logically consistent descriptions of possible futures vis à vis working space. We realized that if our scenarios were to provoke the desired discussion, in some way these scenarios had to be anchored in the employees’ existing working practices. It was essential that the employees recognize in the scenarios some similarity to their day-to-day working practices. Therefore, in the analysis of our empirical material, we once again tried to involve the users. In applied cultural ana-

lysis, the question of how the analysis will be used – or perhaps more precisely, the ideas about how the analysis will be used – is as much a part of the analysis process as the use of more traditional tools such as, for instance, theory, coding techniques, or talks with colleagues. So, in analyzing the empirical material we tried to bring in ideas about how our work was going to be used by the users.

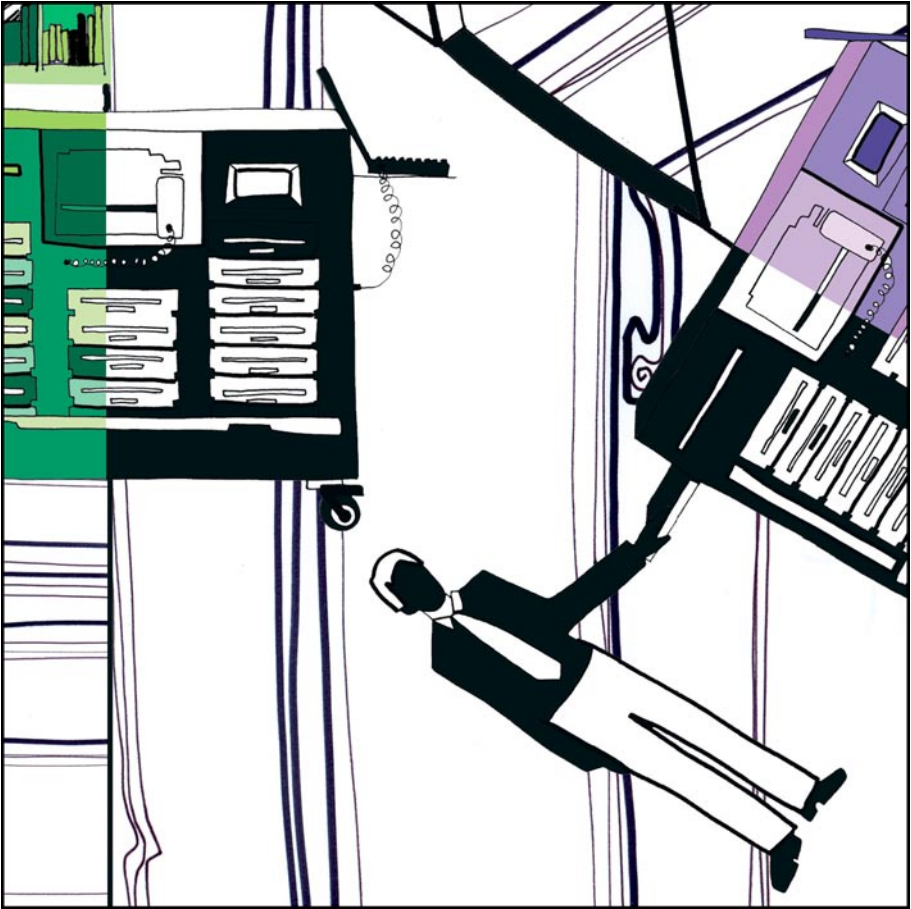
To make sure that the employees would recognize the similarities between our scenarios and their day-to-day working practices, we imagined typical University working practices where we could examine how employees functioned in such environments. We created three imaginary but still typical working practices in which the employee is enacted<sup>5</sup> in distinct ways. These three types of enactments occur in specific working practices involving the employee, the employee’s co-workers, and the employee’s material settings. The three enactments are as follows.

- 1) a singular type – the employee is enacted as having a singular task to attend to;
- 2) a multiple type – the employee is enacted as having multiple tasks to attend to;
- 3) a diffuse type – the employee is enacted as having diffuse tasks to attend to.









The three types of enactments are illustrated in the above drawings. The singular type is illustrated by a bathroom – the only object is the bathroom visit. The multiple type is illustrated by the employee who is wearing many hats. The diffuse type is illustrated by the employee who is between singular working spaces.

In addition to the recognition criterion, the scenarios also had to reflect the fact that in the future the University would retain only five-sixths of its current workspace. We made this point using the well-known logic of ‘You cannot have it all.’ For example, an employee cannot have both a large and private office and an expansive, collegial lounge/dining area.

The three types of employee enactment and the downsizing logic of not having it all were the main building blocks of our four scenarios that we imagined for the future working practices of the physically smaller University.

### Communicating: Excluding Users

When we proposed our four discussion-evoking scenarios accompanied by text and visual aids to the project group, everyone seemed satisfied.

We at the CKA demonstrated that we had transformed our insights from the cultural analysis to the proposed scenarios. However, we quickly learned that there were other stakeholders beside the project group who were involved in discussing and deciding on the future working space at the University.

The project group distributed the four proposed scenarios to the management of the faculties at the University who next communicated them to their employees in various ways. Several occurrences in this phase of the communication are of interest. The workshops that the project group had suggested as methods to promote the debate were never realized. Additionally, a month after our material was completed and disseminated, the project group requested that we changed the subtitle of our work from ‘a material to evoke discussion’ to ‘a material to evoke provocation’. Furthermore, the scenarios that were meant to highlight the multiplicity of the working practices at the University’s working space and that were meant to be discussion-evoking suggestions for possible futures were now to be labeled caricatures of possible futures.

It was evident that there was a significant cri-

tical response to the project group's ideas. The intended 'dizzy' response among the employees that had been envisioned did not cause them to debate the ideal, future working space. Instead they interpreted the material as the conclusions of the project group and the University management about the ideal, future working space that were not open to discussion. The University staff therefore rejected these solutions as either too radical or too simple to benefit their existing working practices and perceptions of 'the good life.' Thereby, they questioned the material's status as a satisfying and meaningful applied cultural analysis.

The University's monthly newsletter published our material as an article in a very reduced version. There was a response at the end of the article from an administrative employee at the Faculty of Health Sciences who was not at all provoked to discussion by the four scenarios. In her response she stated that the solutions proposed by the scenarios were quite similar to the solutions that had already been discussed.<sup>6</sup> The debate that our material was meant to provoke was nipped in the bud.

Six months later, the material and its distribution formed part of a more general critique

of the Dean and the management of the Faculty of Humanities since the communication of the material had not emphasized that the proposed scenarios were meant to promote debate. On the contrary, several employees read the scenarios as the University's final plans for the working space of the new campus buildings. Thus the applied cultural analysis had had an effect, but not the one we intended or hoped for.

Among the lessons drawn from this experience, perhaps the most important one is that, in placing our primary focus on the project group who gave us the task, we mistakenly excluded the majority of users of the applied cultural analysis. We should have insisted on taking the diversity of working practices at the University into account, not only in our fieldwork, but also in the development of the material, especially its communication to all stakeholders. This action would have improved the chances that the University employees would have perceived our cultural analysis and its results as both relevant and useful. The significant disadvantage of that methodology, however, might have been that the project group would have declined our help, thus failing to use our analytical competencies.

Involving users and applying cultural analysis requires considerable financial resources, effort, and time. In the process, management must take the results of the analysis seriously and must concentrate on finding ways to implement these results. Applied cultural analysis is therefore more than a matter of transforming cultural analysis into concrete recommendations; it is also, perhaps most of all, a matter of developing the strategies for communication and implementation of the results. Applied cultural analysis that considers the complexity of usage and the diversity of the users is more likely to make the cultural insights applicable and acceptable.

## Endnotes

1. <http://centerforkulturanalyse.ku.dk>. Morten Krogh Petersen and Anders K. Munk, with Tine Damsholt as responsible senior researcher, conducted the research project. Morten Krogh Petersen mainly wrote this account of the project with minor contributions by Tine Damsholt. The final results of the project can be found at [http://campus.ku.dk/campustemaer/studie\\_og\\_arbejdsliv/arbejdsliv](http://campus.ku.dk/campustemaer/studie_og_arbejdsliv/arbejdsliv)
2. On their homepage IDEO describe what they do in the following way: “We identify opportunities for growth by revealing people’s latent needs, behaviours, and desires, and visualizing new ways to serve and support people.” See [www.ideo.com/about](http://www.ideo.com/about)
3. For an overview. see Schatzki, Knorr Cetina & von Savigny (eds.) 2001: *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*.
4. Observing participants is a term inspired by Czarniawska 2007: *Shadowing*
5. We were inspired by the work of Annemarie Mol, particularly her concept of ‘enactment’ as developed in her book *The Body Multiple* (2002).
6. The article, in Danish, is available at [http://universitetsavisen.ku.dk/dokument2/dokument2/dokument/166\\_universitetsavisen0207.pdf](http://universitetsavisen.ku.dk/dokument2/dokument2/dokument/166_universitetsavisen0207.pdf)

# Bridging Parallel Realities

Robert Willim

Using the framework of applied cultural analysis, my intention in this article is to promote the fusion of a critical scholarly academic approach with more daring imaginings. In the context of cultural analysis, mindscapes exist that describe and analyze similar phenomena, and yet the mental scenes that are produced seldom meet or merge. In this article, I argue for the possibility of building bridges between diverse mindscapes, beginning with a comparative discussion of two recent texts on a similar topic but with much different approaches, followed by an empirical example of a company that uses the two approaches in its marketing of furniture using digital technology.

## RFID

In 2004 and 2005 two interesting works on Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) were published. The first of these works was an article by the cultural geographer Nigel Thrift, and the second was a book by the science fiction writer and design visionary Bruce Sterling. Both works concern the same phenomenon, the spread of RFID, but there are few similarities between them. As background, RFID is an automatic identification technology that uses electronic chips called RFID-tags to store and retrieve data. The tags, which can be attached to or embedded in a product, animal or person, use radio waves for the purpose of identification. The development of this technology has created new possibilities

for tracking objects geographically as well as for gathering other information on these objects.

### Nigel Thrift

Nigel Thrift writes about RFID, barcodes and related technologies in his article entitled *Movement-space: the changing domain of thinking resulting from the development of new kinds of spatial awareness* (2004). His article deals with how these technologies are incorporated in social and cultural structures, thus becoming part of everyday life. Thrift uses the term *qualculation* to capture how technologies based on calculations (from toys to cars to computers) have become almost ubiquitous, giving rise to a new, qualitative phase where their hidden functionalities are integrated into a large number of artefacts. Writing on this topic, coupled to questions about spatiality, Thrift comments on the future of RFID:

But what seems certain is that, increasingly, the world will come loaded up with addresses. It will become normal to know where one is at any point, a mechanically induced version of the sense of direction which is similar to that of the cultures that have this facility... As importantly,

the ability to tag addresses to moving objects which started with barcodes and credit cards and is now expanding and becoming more information-rich with the rapidly expanding use of radio frequency identifier chips will mean that over a grid of fixed co-ordinates will be laid a series of moving addresses specific to particular entities. (Thrift, 2004: 598).

In the article, Thrift suggests possible ways that the new digital technologies equipped with RFID-tags can contribute to our understanding and experience of place and mobility. However, his main focus is on planting questions and promoting discussion in the serious academic environment, supporting his ideas with references from the quality-controlled scholarly community. While this methodology gives his views some credibility, it also puts him at risk of being associated with the somewhat esoteric nature of academic cultural theory. Thrift concludes his article by stating his reservations about being too speculative:

"Throughout the paper, I have been acutely aware that I am walking a tightrope between the kind of techno-hyperbole which is all too common in this area of work and my desire to start



thinking about how the background hum of thinking will be changed...”(2004: 601).

## Bruce Sterling

Although he deals with topics similar to Thrift’s, Bruce Sterling makes no such reservations about possible exaggerations in his book, *Shaping Things* (2005). Instead, Sterling is concerned with visionary claims and broad analytical strokes of the brush. Sterling, who is often a speaker at expos and conferences around the world, may properly be labelled a futurist. He is the brain behind projects like The Dead Media project and the Viridian Design Movement (which inspired the green environmental web log named Worldchanging). In his writings and speeches that reflect his science fiction background, Sterling often uses neologisms to describe future phenomena.

In *Shaping Things*, Sterling writes about a technological device he calls SPIMES (his neologism) that can track histories of objects, by using, for example, RFID-tags and Global Positioning Systems (GPS). Such tracking already exists for a number of objects including delivery parcels that

are tracked by barcodes and RFID-tags. Sterling believes the SPIMES of the future will be able to achieve far more than this by not only tracking the lives of objects, but also by saving this information in a data base and automatically communicating it as needed. Such stored information will then be more valuable than the object itself; if the physical incarnation of a SPIMES-tracked object perishes, information about it can still be retrieved and reproduced. However, SPIMES require more complex technology than today’s RFID and GPS offer. For example, an advanced system of computer generated design, flexible digitally enhanced production of physical products, and automated search engines are required. In his description of the convergences of these technologies, Sterling’s background as a science fiction writer is evident.

The short, web-based, animated film *The SPIME Arrives* ([www.toshare.it/spime/](http://www.toshare.it/spime/)), produced and directed by Sterling, describes how, as items become cheaper and cheaper, the largest economical value is generated from the information created around such items. In the film, a family orders a chair online that is instantly and automatically produced using a cheap 100% recyclable

material. Soon after the chair is delivered, it is destroyed in a thunderstorm. The chair manufacturer immediately delivers a new chair (free of charge) since it can track the life of the chair through its information system that stores data on the destinies of its various chairs. The manufacturer knows the location of all its products and stores information on how they have been used, worn out or destroyed. The film's point is that information about the chair is more valuable, to producer and consumer alike, than the chair itself.

### Bold and/or Thorough

Sterling's images and theories seem almost to exist in an independent universe of ideas. Careful analysis reveals some resemblances in his thinking to ideas by other thinkers, but these are unacknowledged by references. Sterling uses this freedom to paint bold scenarios that the reader experiences as mind-boggling and challenging. While many readers are attracted by the provocative nature of these visions, to the critical academic reader, Sterling's arguments are not entirely credible or sufficiently thorough.

Thrift's article, on the other hand, exempli-

fies how ideas are presented within the academic framework, supported by a detailed scholarly system of references and quotations. This framework implies reliability, although at the same time it allows for few possibilities for free form, imaginative boldness. Thrift's approach to cultural theory is thought provoking and invites further research by its multiple references to other works. However, for the reader not well versed in the sometimes abstract world of cultural theory, Thrift's article may seem obscure and incomprehensible.

These two ways of presenting ideas suggest parallel realities that may never connect. In applied cultural analysis, however, it can be fruitful to look for the connections between these different worlds. The intellect is sparked by Thrift's "grounded" ideas and the imagination is stimulated by Sterling's "slippery" visions. Applied cultural analysis, which bridges these perspectives, can be both critical and constructive, both bold and cautious. If this bridging is grounded in empirical material rooted in ethnographic research, the practice may also be analytically innovative. The following empirical example on the use of RFID may illuminate this idea.

## The Digital and Material History of Chairs

In 1935 four young Finnish designers, including the architect and designer, Alvar Aalto, founded the company Artek. Coupling art and technology in its name, the company's goal was to manufacture and market Aalto's artistic and well-designed chairs internationally. Today Artek sells many types of high quality, mostly wood, furniture. In the beginning, the company sold only newly manufactured products, but in recent years it began selling older and used furniture. RFID was used to make this transition in its business strategy under the initiative of the British designer, Tom Dixon. Artek began this venture by buying furniture that they had sold years before, searching through schools, hospitals and flea markets for the patinized Aalto furniture. Once the company had acquired such furniture items, it attached radio-tags to them and marketed them using the brand *2nd Cycle*. Each furniture item has a unique number that buyers can link to from a webpage where they can read about the item and its history. The intrinsic appeal of the chairs is thus supplemented by their stories.

Artek's use of RFIDs is related to Sterling's

ideas about SPIMES. However, while Sterling concentrates on visions about a sustainable future characterized by more or less replaceable materiality, Artek accentuates how the physical and patinized object is complemented by the informational value attached to it. This is a twist on Sterling's ideas about the uses of RFID. Today Artek collaborates with two large Finnish companies, UPM and Nokia, using this mix of digital applications and physical products.

Thrift and Sterling each write about the possibilities of new technologies, but in very different ways. However, their ideas can be bridged in the real world. The Artek story exemplifies this bridging of modern innovation and historical richness in the marketing of used and recycled furniture. Like Sterling's SPIMES chair, the second-hand Artek furniture reincarnates itself through digital technology. Consistent with Thrift's idea that technology is part of life's social and cultural structures, the second-hand Artek furniture increases its value by promoting its historical and well-researched origins using a digital mechanism. As the Artek story illustrates, the different approaches taken by Thrift and Sterling may inspire us in our use of cultural analysis

theory when we embrace visionary and thought-provoking real world examples of innovation. Let cultural analysis be a truly eclectic practice.

### Bridging Parallel Realities

This article is specifically about RFID and the possibility of the couplings between digital technologies and the physical world. My arguments can also be applied to other fields, particularly in design and innovation. In all cases, the goal is to use the potential that lies in an oscillating change of perspective between different discourses and different analytical techniques. In this way, applied cultural analysis has the capacity to bridge parallel realities.

Instead of just *describing* and *problematizing*

the world using cultural theory and the craftsmanship of academic writing, the cultural analyst can re-focus on finding new answers and *solving problems*. Because of its potential to bridge parallel realities, cultural analysis is a practice that can reach far beyond academic seminars and into processes that make an important difference.

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# Emoscapes and Emotional Skills in Medical Care

Markus Idvall

## A Fieldwork Experience

It was not until some days after my initial visit to the dialysis clinic that I realised what my first day of fieldwork really had been about. As I had expected a routine phone call when I phoned the head nurse at the clinic in order to settle on a date for me to revisit the clinic, I was greatly surprised when my wish to return was turned down. She explained that the situation at the clinic was now quite difficult as several staff members had recently left and the clinic was awaiting the replacement personnel who would begin in the next few months. My presence at the clinic, she indicated, would add to the stress. She sounded tense and was unwilling to discuss any alternative dates. Nor did she comment on my first visit to the clinic, on, for example, the reaction of the staff

and patients to me. I was concerned, but I decided not to ask any questions. It seemed better to simply accept the situation. Naturally I was worried about the future of my research at the clinic, but for the moment, I agreed with the head nurse, hoping that I might return to the clinic at a later date when the situation had improved.

This dialysis clinic was an early field site in my research project on kidney transplantation and dialysis in a cultural perspective, which deals specifically with the situation of the potential recipients of kidney transplants and their experiences of being on the waiting list for transplantation.<sup>1</sup> The clinic receives about 20 kidney patients each day, Monday through Saturday. Each patient follows an individual treatment schedule of three visits per week (Monday-Wed-

nesday-Friday or Tuesday-Thursday-Saturday). Each dialysis treatment takes four to five hours. During treatment, the patient, sitting in a chair or lying in bed, is connected to a dialysis machine that cleans the body of toxic substances. One or two doctors and a number of nurses monitor the treatment that takes place in one large room with around ten patients and in several small rooms, each with one to four patients. Each nurse is responsible for two or three patients.

On my arrival in the morning, I soon realised that I was not free to move around on my own at the clinic. A nurse was assigned to guide me during the day and to introduce me both to the patients and to the practice of dialysis care. She was a woman around 25 years of age, with dark hair and dressed in the clinic's blue cotton jumper and trousers. She told me that she had worked in the clinic for about one year. Although she was very friendly and eager to answer all my questions, it was obvious she did not know the reason for my visit. During one break, we went to the clinic's conference room where she invited me to sit and read some of the literature on dialysis care that was on a shelf. I said that I appreciated the offer, but preferred to follow her during this first day.

The other nurses, also women, kept a low profile towards me the whole day. They were friendly but distant. After I had introduced my project, and myself, no one asked me any questions.

My nurse was responsible for two patients that day: an elderly man and an elderly woman. The man – stout, bearded and wearing glasses – was around 80 years of age and had been on dialysis for about a year. He seemed very social and humorous. During the first hours of his treatment he talked a lot, both with clinic staff and with his fellow patients. I noted that when he arrived at the clinic, carrying a sack, he went directly to the kitchen. Initially I assumed the staff and the patients shared a kitchen, but at our first break I learned that he had brought the staff a loaf of homemade bread, as was his custom on Fridays. As his treatment continued, he became quieter and in the last hour took a nap under his blanket. The elderly woman, well dressed in a buttoned grey cardigan and black trousers, was, as I learned, a few years younger than the elderly man. I had no conversation with her since she appeared uninterested in talking to me. She only smiled at me in a dismissive way. Similarly, it was difficult to make contact with the other patients. In fact, when my

nurse and I entered one room, I immediately noted the hostile looks two male patients gave me. Even after I introduced myself, they maintained their hostility and distance towards me. Clearly, they regarded me as an intruder. In another room I talked with a friendly, elderly man, but after a while I felt our conversation was disturbing the other patient in the room, so I left. I remained outside another room since I was told the patient there did not like strangers. While my nurse was in this room, I looked through its window and saw a woman in her sixties with white hair and a very sad expression. The look of this woman, seemingly old and passive and on the other side of the threshold of a hospital room, dramatised even more the emergent feeling I had regarding my own belongingness to this place, or maybe rather, an urge *not* to belong to this place.

I spent a lot of time with the nurses during my field day, but in the planning stages of my research, it had been the doctors, not the nurses, who had agreed to my onsite field observations. When an ethics committee at the University examined my research plans, the project was approved of by a doctor who was the head of several clinics at the hospital, including the dialysis clinic.

Even before I applied for this formal permission, I had been in contact with another doctor, at this particular dialysis clinic, and had received his informal permission to do observational studies there. However, by the time I was ready to begin my fieldwork at the clinic, this second doctor had transferred to another hospital. His former colleagues, who were still at the clinic, seemed to know about my project and welcomed me on my visit; otherwise, however, they did not interact with me. The nurses worked closely all day with the patients and the dialysis machines, but the doctors visited the treatment rooms only occasionally. I did observe that one doctor sat beside a patient for quite a while; later I learned the doctor had informed the patient about the possibility of taking part in a research project run by the clinic.

When I left the clinic in the afternoon on that first day, I felt quite conflicted. From an ethnographic point of view, I did not know if I had had a good or bad day. On the positive side, I had been welcomed and had observed dialysis care in practice. On the negative side, as the day had progressed, I had begun to feel more and more uncomfortable with the situation and quite isola-

ted. In short, I was relieved to leave the clinic and did not look forward to returning. Of course, I did not know then that I would not be returning.

### The Emoscape of the Clinic

Embodied observations and interviews – fieldwork – almost always elicit strong and contradictory emotions for the ethnographer (Frykman & Gilje, 2003). As a cultural interventionist who intervenes in other people's lives in order to learn about their different practices and values, the ethnographer alternates between radically opposing moods: for example, excitement and boredom, aggression and sympathy, and chaos and order. An interventionist's position is therefore truly ambivalent. Additionally, when fieldwork is conducted in a medical care milieu, this ambivalence is yet more evident. From a societal perspective, the hospital, like medical care settings in general, is a particularly *emotional* place. By their very nature, such settings provoke a certain kind of emotional response that affects all visitors, including the ethnographer. I label this specific emotional landscape an *emoscape*, the environment where a cultural interventio-

nist encounters these mixed responses that she or he must deal with, and later, in the analytical process, transcend and, from his or her selected viewpoint, explain.<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, the emoscape of a medical setting is closely related to the methods the cultural interventionist uses as well as to the results that he or she aims for. As an embodied tool for the task of describing and analysing specific cultural conditions, the cultural interventionist, in fact, turns out to be the perfect investigator of the emotional side of medical care. By using his or her embodied presence *in and between* the central activities and roles in medical care, the cultural interventionist – as contrasted with the medical interventionists of doctors, nurses and quantitative researchers – may teach us about the meaning and the consequences of emotions in medical care. The ethnographic view that the cultural interventionist uses while he or she participates in people's everyday lives unmask the medical setting as a particular societal place that may harbour a number of fundamental but troublesome human realities: illness, health, death, life, love and hatred, for example.

The milieu of a clinic is therefore never really



neutral, but is mostly charged with a certain kind of ambivalence. The use of the adjectives “heavy” and “light” is one way of expressing those contradictory feelings that may haunt the agents of a clinic. That extraordinary burden that one can experience in the encounter with a clinic is, of course, particularly explicit for the seriously ill patients and their relatives. But weight, and its antonym, lightness, can also be a remarkable feeling among the nurses and the doctors of a clinic. Their experiences are not based on the presence of ill bodies per se, but on the tradition of how different kinds of disease models are applied in a responsible way in relation to the patients who are encountered in different embodied situations. As a cultural interventionist in a medical care context, you will then have to ask: In what different ways does the specific clinical practice that is studied feel burdensome for its different social actors, and why can it sometimes be associated with quite the opposite feelings of lightness and easiness (Fioretos, 2008; Frank, 1995:153f.)?

Skill in dealing with human emotions is of great importance in medical settings where emotions are often so intense and close to the surface. A cultural interventionist’s competence lies

in his or her ability to classify and explain the different emotional skills required of the different social actors in such settings. Which practices and values are, for example, contained in a concept like empathy? Why has this psychological term become such a fixed point in medical care contexts? And why does it have such positive connotations?

Several interpreters of empathy have emerged over the years. The psychiatrist and anthropologist, Arthur Kleinman, for example, emphasizes what he calls “empathic witnessing” – or “the existential commitment to be with the sick person and to facilitate his or her building of an illness narrative that will make sense of and give value to the experience” (1988: 54). According to Kleinman, such an attitude among doctors towards their patients is desirable. We may, however, also ask if this empathic skill is beneficial in the relationship of the patients to their caregivers? How may patients benefit by using the empathic witnessing tool in their encounters with medical personnel? The answer may be that patients, with increased empathy, will achieve a better understanding of the disease narratives they hear about themselves.

The sociologist and cancer patient, Arthur W. Frank (1995:145–163), also encourages improving the quality of patient care by developing the emotional skill of empathy. Unlike Kleinman, however, Frank uses an embodied point of departure in his reasoning (see also Frank, 1991:89). This approach is similar to the way a cultural interventionist analyses empathy through his or her embodied observations and interviews. Empathy, according to Frank (and the cultural interventionist) is therefore not “something one person ‘has for’ another”, but something “a person ‘is with’ another: a relationship in which each understands herself as requiring completion by the other” (1995:150). In this respect, empathy is an embodied and mutual identity process where content and direction cannot really be determined in advance by the cultural interventionist in the field. The various emotions experienced must be the object of an empirical and analytical – that is, ethnographical – process and conclusion (Frank, 1995:145–154). The cultural interventionist is thus both close to and distant from the individuals who are studied. By performing this intermediate ‘role’ in medical settings, he or she can provide answers that are both true to and critical of the investigated contexts (Ehn, 1996).

## Conclusion

In my field observations at the dialysis clinic, I quickly learned that dialysis is an intimate and very territorially inclined treatment practice. I also realised that the clinic itself can be under stress for various reasons. Analytically, one can say that I experienced the rich diversity of ambivalent emotions that cultural interventionists confront when they visit a hospital and intervene in clinically charged relationships: for example, between doctor and patient (a classical topic), between the ill individual and his or her family, between doctors and nurses, or between medical personnel and hospital administrators. From an applied perspective, my contributions to the expertise at the dialysis clinic were more cultural than medical. My concern was with hands-on information about the emoscape of clinics, about the different emotional skills and mechanisms existing among medical staff, patients and family members. The knowledge of the cultural interventionist is in this respect always both morally charged and practically indispensable to the running of an effective and ethically sound health care system in society.

## Epilogue

At the time of writing this text, in early summer 2008, more than a year has passed since my telephone call with the head nurse. As my research project on transplantation and dialysis is still going on, my intention is to return to the dialysis clinic in the near future in order to get a deeper understanding of dialysis practice. Maybe this possible future return to the clinic will also shed more light on the ethnographical and interventionist questions that I have discussed above.

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## Endnotes

1. My research project is within the framework of the Vårdal Institute, a cross-disciplinary research institute in Sweden specialising in health care and nursing issues.

2. For an interesting discussion on the critical potentials of the concept of landscape, see Appadurai (1996). See also Idvall (2003).

# The Cultural Analyst

An Innovative Intermediary?

Håkan Jönsson

I first began to realise the commercial potential of Cultural Analysis when I studied the food industry during my research for my doctoral degree. At the time, I saw the industry only as a study object. It seemed both unethical and unrealistic to imagine myself intervening in the activities of food companies. What use does the food industry have for an ethnologist? Gradually, however, I began to see that ethnographic methods, such as observations and cultural theory, especially on the search for authenticity in late modernity, could provide an understanding of the everyday life of consumers that most food companies do not have. Yet it was difficult to make contact with the commercial sector of the food industry. People in the industry were aware that they needed a better understanding of their consumers than

that obtained by focus groups and questionnaires, but the idea of hiring an ethnologist seemed a bit strange to them. And I lacked the communication skills to tell them why they needed us. Fortunately, I found a platform at the foundation Ideon Agro Food, that was established to promote innovations in the food sector by applying research results. During the last three years, as a member of a team of project leaders from different sectors of the University – microbiology to food technology to horticulture – I have worked with several food related projects.

On several occasions during these three years, I have asked myself if I have the right qualifications to be a leader in food innovation projects. At times, I have felt quite uneasy in situations that I did not foresee and that I had not been trai-

ned to handle. Although most of the projects I have been involved in have been quite successful, I have sometimes wondered whether this success really stems from my professional skills as an ethnologist. I could not help suspecting that anyone reading an introductory text on cultural analysis could have presented my light version of cultural analysis just as well as I. I was also concerned that I lacked the competencies that a more skilled project leader would have.

These concerns were allayed, however, by a recently completed project in which I began to realise that all along I had been using some very important skills inherent in the anthropological tradition, without reflecting on their use and value. I now conclude that there is a significant role for cultural analysts to play as intermediaries. In this role, cultural analysts may participate in the creation of some very innovative concepts. In the following description of that project, I show how I reached that conclusion.

### The Project – Creating Culinaria

In 2007, I led a project aimed at developing Culinary Tourism in Österlen, a region in the

southeast of Skåne in Southern Sweden. As a result of the project, some small enterprises started a cooperative association in late 2007. The mission of the association is to attract domestic and foreign tourists to Österlen as a culinary destination – Culinaria. At the time of this writing, May 2008, thirty-two enterprises have joined the association that held its first major event, the Österlen food trail, 10–18 May 2008 (see [www.culinaria.se](http://www.culinaria.se)). We in the project consider it a success story for applied cultural analysis. The project, realised in less than two years, has received a lot of media attention, and has laid a foundation for business development in a growing commercial sector. Yet there were problems during those months, as described below.

The background for the project derives from research on how recent developments in late modern life have influenced the food system and the food industry. In order to communicate health and safety, it has now become almost mandatory for food companies to identify food by its origin (see Burstedt, Fredriksson and Jönsson 2005). In spite of, and partly as a reaction to, the global flow of food products and meal concepts, there is now a growing consumer preference for locally

grown food. Roland Robertson's (1995) term "Glocalisation" is very relevant as a description of this contemporary food system, a system likely to favour local farmers and local markets. Yet, while consumers show an increasing interest in locally grown food and expect authenticity in food products, many food companies, often the smaller ones, that can offer such products face economic difficulties. Some of these difficulties are the result of the growth of large companies in the food industry that force small companies from the market. For the remaining small companies, there are often difficulties in distribution. Because of logistics and price competition, the giant retail food companies are unable to integrate these smaller companies into their systems.

I discussed this paradox – that local food companies are going out of business when demand for their products is stronger than ever – with another Ideon Agro Food project leader, Anders Lareke. We concluded that the small-scale food companies needed new markets. An international review showed us that small-scale, high quality food producers are most successful in tourist regions. For example, we found that Culinary Tourism has long been popular in Tuscany and Provence but is also

strong in newer tourist areas like Oregon, Napa Valley, Scotland and the Cape Province in South Africa (Hall & Sharples 2005; Wolf 2006).

Lareke and I then did a pilot study on the possibilities for integrating food and tourism in Southern Sweden. In our study, we first described the societal background of the growing appreciation for food authenticity in general and for local food in particular. This stage of the study was traditional cultural analysis and certainly was not groundbreaking. The second stage was more original, at least in a Scandinavian context, since we used our findings to suggest commercially interesting concepts. Basing our argument on the idea that tourism and local food are linked since both sell *the experience of place*, we proposed that the tourism and local food industries could be combined as a new and profitable industry: Culinary Tourism. We suggested five especially interesting development projects linked to Culinary Tourism, most of which required cooperation from several companies in the region. As successful Culinary Tourism requires a large and varied supply of experiences, we needed the collaboration of an assortment of enterprises. Restaurants, food producers, cultural institu-

tions and travel agencies have to work together if the culinary tourist is to move easily around the landscape and experience different culinary tastes. We noted that the critical mass of actors among these enterprises was in two sub-regions in Skåne, one of which is the southeast corner, known for its many artists and apple orchards.

We also concluded that the concept had to be entrepreneur-driven if it was to be successful. Previously, several public organisations had taken the lead in financing projects aimed at establishing functioning concepts in the local food markets, but these projects have had difficulties in involving the entrepreneurs. So we asked ourselves: How could we involve the local entrepreneurs? While many of them were highly competent in their specialised fields, few had profitable businesses. They were already over-worked and under-paid, so there were limited resources, both financial and personal, to put into the project. And many of them were individualists, not particularly inclined to work in collaboration.

Early on, we realised that the private sector could not provide the financial support for our time and expenses, at least not in the first stage of the project. Therefore, we approached a local

bank that has a foundation that supports economic growth in the region. The bank was enthusiastic about the project and agreed to provide some financial support. In addition, we obtained financial support from the local municipalities and from a regional project that has as a goal the increase in food sector innovation.

### Inviting the Actors

In January 2007, we invited various companies and local actors to a meeting to discuss developing Culinary Tourism in the region. We presented our different concepts to some fifty people, of which the “Food festival/food trail concept” was the most inclusive and most enthusiastically received. The region already has “The Art trail”, an event held annually at Easter time when the local artists open their studios and galleries to the public. Over 50 000 people follow “The Art trail” each year, so a “food trail” seemed an interesting idea, especially if it could be combined with special offers from restaurants and other actors in the culinary business.

We decided to act on this concept. During Spring 2007, we made a more detailed plan of



how a food trail could be organised. We then made contact with education institutions with the result that a class of 35 students from the Creative Service Leadership education programme in Malmö made project reports and presented them in early June at the museum of the medieval monastery in Ystad. The museum's director was interested in developing the museum by offering "A taste of history" during the food festival. A student from the Culinary Arts and Science Institution in Kristianstad also contributed to the project by conducting interviews with the entrepreneurs who had expressed interest in the food festival.

While our own research and the students' contributions provided the food festival concept with a strong knowledge base, we soon realised that the project was much more complicated than we had first thought. None of us had any experience in designing and implementing a major event like a food trail. Despite their enthusiasm, we also saw that we could not count on the entrepreneurs for the preparation work. They were busy enough with their day-to-day-work, and the interviews showed that few of them had any concrete ideas about activities for the festival, apart from their own participation.

The project needed a skilled events manager, a PR expert, and a webmaster to build an attractive homepage. We approached Anna Maris in the city of Ystad, the major city of the region (although a small one), who was working on making the town and region a film centre. She was involved with the production of the Swedish police movies, entitled "Wallander", and had succeeded in attracting tourists to the area, especially German tourists, who are fans of the Henning Mankell novels the movies are based on. Thus Maris was experienced with working with PR in the UK and had the necessary connections in the tourist industry. She saw the potential in the project and began work on it by conducting a long-term plan for the food festival, with the goal of 100 000 visitors by its third year. We also initiated discussions with one of Sweden's major food magazine concerning publicity and an attractive brochure. A web design bureau made a homepage dummy.

### Involving the Actors

The project seemed to be successfully underway. Yet we had concerns. We had the infrastructure in place, but we thought the entrepreneurs were

not as fully committed to the idea as we would have liked. Based on our interviews and other contacts with them, it became clear that the entrepreneurs needed to take ownership of the process. To this point, we had owned the project since we controlled the project money, carefully managing it to cover all expenses until the project was a reality. We then took a self-critical look and saw we had talked a lot about the need for an entrepreneur-based project, but had been afraid of giving up control. As a result, we felt the entrepreneurs were not sufficiently involved and committed.

We concluded it was time to give up some control. To that end, at a meeting in early September 2007, we proposed the formation of a cooperative association. A provisional board was nominated and, following a turbulent meeting where we were criticised for moving too quickly, the provisional board was elected. We found this criticism a bit unwarranted since there were now imminent deadlines for the homepage, the catalogue and the various publicity venues.

Suddenly, working with six entrepreneurs with different backgrounds and visions for the association, I had to establish an association and

organise a major event in just a few months. A lot of hands-on work had to be done. I was involved in writing protocols, developing statutes for the association and planning the food trail. Despite the demands of the work, I felt we had taken a great leap forward since we project leaders were no longer working on our own. The provisional board was the most crucial element that allowed the project to progress. The board members, who were the entrepreneurs, now had control of the project. Lareke and I were not board members. Representatives from the public organizations demanded oversight of the association and so were appointed non-voting board members.

Now that we, as original project leaders, were in the background (although we still had a great deal of responsibility for the work), the entrepreneurs felt and took the responsibility for the project. After an enormous effort by all, the association was founded on 21 November 2007. The enthusiasm of the board members for the project gradually spread to other entrepreneurs in the region, and by year-end there were over thirty members in the association. We had come a long way since September when the project looked doomed to failure.

## Cultural Analysts as Innovative Intermediaries

Although the project was completed successfully, it is still relevant to ask in what way cultural analysis was factor in its success. In the pilot study stage of the project, it is quite obvious that the cultural analysis of the region and the search for authenticity were fundamental to the whole concept. But after that? I am still uncertain. Possibly a skilled project leader should have taken the project forward in the second stage.

My University experience and training had not fully prepared me for taking a project from a concept to the market. I had to use competences that I acquired in areas outside the University. For example, I had experience in writing protocols for my housing-cooperative and other organisations that were useful in the project's second stage. Furthermore, my experience as a chef had made me results-oriented and quite practical.

On careful consideration, however, once the project was completed, I realised that even in the latter stages of the project, my cultural analysis skills were of value. To push forward the idea of the association, I had to convince the entrepreneurs and the public organisations that each had

something to gain from the collective effort required to make the association work. Therefore, I made a basic life mode analysis that allowed me to understand the entrepreneurs' values and daily experiences. This knowledge showed me how to re-ignite their enthusiasm for a project that at one point was falling apart. I had to make the same analysis with respect to the public representatives so that they would remain positive and not feel excluded from the process. In summary, with my training as a cultural analyst I was able to assume the role of an intermediary in a project where a diverse assortment of people – food producers, restaurateurs, travel agents, PR experts, public servants and academics – had to work together in order to make the concept work.

In some ways, this project falls within the classical tradition of anthropology and ethnology where it is typical to study a group's culture in order to explain that culture to another group. Cultural analysis is not merely the application of research and education, however, since it can also be an exercise in economic competence. In a time where many commercial innovations occur by combining separate activities, we can use applied cultural analysis in these situations

to overcome the initial mistrust between actors who have different agendas and traditions. In the project described in this article, the two very different industries of food and tourism were successfully joined.

There is a future for cultural analysts as intermediaries between dissimilar industries such as health and tourism (e.g., the Spa industry) or food and fashion (e.g., celebrities' food courts and clothing boutiques) or the telecom and entertainment industries (e.g., the hybrid product of mobile phones/music players). Nor is this intermediary function limited to the commercial sector. For example, cultural analysts have a role to play in developing better health care for marginalized groups, in the lobbying for sustainable development projects, and in linking academia with the public and private sectors in co-operative projects.

The education and training of cultural analysts should include instruction in intermediating skills. As teachers, my colleagues and I may have placed too much emphasis on the outsider position of the cultural analyst. Possibly the romantic tradition of the free intellectual in the humanities is counter productive if we want to make a difference outside academia. We have not hesitated

to take the insider perspective in the study of culture, for example, in Papua, New Guinea, but we have had second thoughts about the insider role of an ethnologist or anthropologist in a shareholders' meeting. We would do well to rethink that attitude. By entering the role of the insider in projects, the cultural analyst may offer important services to clients and may make that difference that inspired most of us to study cultural analysis.

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# Trend Analysis

For Fashionistas Only?

Cecilia Fredriksson

*Why do millions of people end up wearing the same style of clothing?*

*What makes people change their tastes in food, music, and cars?*

*It's because of trends – the powerful process of change that affects every industry across the globe (Vejlgaard 2008).*

## Trying to Predict the Future

Predicting the future is the principal aim of all trend analysis. The science of forecasting results from the challenge of trying to predict the future, although predicting future outcomes is never totally accurate. Everyone is fighting the same enemy: the ever-changing future. Since the future is always under construction, the cultural

awareness of the prediction process may offer new possibilities for cultural analysis and for fashion studies. In academia, there are ambivalent attitudes toward the subject of fashion; sometimes fashion is even regarded as superficial and populist. However, some of the most respected theorists have used fashion systems as their point of departure for developing theories on modernity and society.

This text focuses on the construction of trend analysis as a learning objective. Besides investigating trend analysis as a working process, I analyse the cultural consequences and possibilities that becomes visible in the process. Through a discursive reading of some hands-on-literature I reflect upon the skills and qualifications that seen necessary for trend analysis.

Instead of focusing on content, I examine the cultural construction of fashion forecasting and trend analysis. A quick look inside a forecaster's toolbox may be helpful.

Work on client commissions is often characterized by confused expectations. Defining the project is an important starting point that is best formulated in consensus with each client. Indeed, in some instances the project definition is the assignment. To illustrate this point and to show its relevance to trend analysis, I will briefly describe my interaction with clients at a museum in the south of Sweden.

### Applied Experience

*Thus, the process of cultural analysis must be one of constantly questioning presuppositions – examining the role of our own assumptions and points of view and interrogating what we think we know and why we think we know it (Sunderland & Denny 2007).*

As an ethnologist with a focus on the culture of consumption, my interaction with the media and society at large has been rather extensive. Cul-

tural analysis in consumer research is of general interest, and I have often found my results discussed in the media. Since this experience has never caused me any great concerns, I seldom dismiss a (friendly) journalist. While there is no monetary reward for such media interaction there are often considerable psychic rewards. Such intrinsic satisfaction differs greatly from the extrinsic satisfaction of well-paid assignments. Although academics avoid media discourse, when they do interact with the press, they may exhibit a sense of false modesty. Interaction with the media seems to be a polite gesture of charity, a practice that in Sweden is called “the third task”. The danger in media avoidance for the cultural analyst, however, is that media encounters may be the only opportunity for applied experience.

The role and responsibility of the applied cultural analyst is much discussed. As cultural analysts we are well trained from a theoretical perspective to identify, collect, classify and deconstruct different facets of human life. When we are called upon to apply our cultural analysis training by clients who require our expertise, we often feel lost in assignments. It can be a scary and difficult challenge to take on the commission

of applying texts and analyses in practice. We may lack control of the implementation of our results or lack the confidence of our clients. We may worry about our inadequate work experience to the point we sometimes are reluctant to “serve society” with any cultural knowledge. Academia seldom provides internships for students who want work experience and researchers rarely have direct interaction with everyday working life. Even if the academia image often acts on a scene perceived as free from benefits, the staging process is applied science of general interest.

In 2005 I undertook a project to create a new design exhibition at Kristianstad Museum in Sweden. I was given a free hand in mapping the problem in cooperation with the museum curator and stage designer. The only requirement was that the concept should involve consumption and culture. The project lasted for six months and gave me the opportunity to write some interesting texts.

The first challenge was the brainstorming session with my clients. In order to give them some cultural understanding of today’s consumer society, I sent them a one-page draft of “statements” in advance of our meeting and prepared

myself for an interesting discussion. The draft contained the societal conditions and imperatives that I found important as a starting position. Their reaction was difficult to interpret, and even today I am not really sure what happened. We talked and talked, as if trying to convince each other of the very special conditions of consumption and the serious meaning of consumer buying. Clearly my one-page draft was very provocative. Instead of offering a project proposal, I had tried to create a mutual understanding of the actual subject. However, what at first seemed a blunder turned into a successful strategy. These provocative statements triggered the beginning of a fruitful cooperation between the three of us. And I escaped the trap of solving somebody’s problem. Instead of being held as a hostage with the mission of explaining irrational human behaviour (a common task for social scientists), it was possible to start a problem-based project in cooperation with clients.

The project became a diffuse and thrilling analysis of design obsession in contemporary Swedish culture. As labelling the exhibition became important, we finally agreed on the name “Designation” that reflected an observed trend

that became even more visible during the “Year of Design” in Sweden in 2005. My theoretical knowledge of the aesthetics of everyday life, as well as timing and intuition, coincided with the contemporary cultural discourse.

### Sense Making Models

*First comes the innovation itself – the new idea that changes the lives of the people who apply the innovation. Next are the communication channels through which new ideas are disseminated (Gloor & Cooper 2007).*

For fashion professionals, there is an increasing number of hands-on-literature in the area of forecasting where trends are often described as unsolved mysteries requiring systematic investigations. There is a common belief that trend analysis is related to intuition in forecasting since some talented trend chasers seem able to predict the future on the basis of their personal intuition. Since fashion forecasting is big business, however, more scientific methods of forecasting are necessary. Developing such methods requires a point of departure in order to make sense. A selective

reading of actual trend analysis manuals reveals some key models that illustrate the taken-for-granted-assumptions about “how people are”.

One of the most popular models among management students is *the Pyramid of Needs*, based on psychologist Abraham Maslow’s still forceful ideas about essential human needs and the hierarchy of fulfilment. Briefly, the model states that before aesthetics needs are fulfilled, the more basic needs of food and shelter have to be met. According to this psychological model style and fashion are self-actualization needs, related to well-being and class culture.

A model close to the shape of the pyramid is the *Diamond* that depicts different attitudes towards fashion and trends. Using this graphic model the current trend sociologist, Henrik Vejlggaard, claims that everyone is part of trend processes, even those who say they are indifferent or appear never to accept any changes. The Diamond visualizes six trend groups where the bottom point consists of anti-innovators and conservatives, and the top point, unsurprisingly consists of trend creators and trendsetters. Somewhere in the middle of the diamond we find the mediocre trend followers and the mainstreamers.



These mainstreamers and trend followers are more flatteringly ingratiating interpreted by the coolhunters Peter Gloor and Scott Cooper, who use the *Swarm* to depict collective intelligence. The bee swarm metaphor suggests that fashion forecasters can better predict the future if they watch swarm behaviour since a group of people is better at solving problems than professional experts. Coolhunting through swarm creativity is in fact a well-established interpretation of human behaviour. Watching the swarm is natural science transformed into marketing.

A majority of the sense making models are based on traditional and physical ideas of rational human behaviour. However, contrasted with rationality, there is also a strong influence on such models from the science of chaos, often explained as “a different way to think” where order and disorder are complementary. An ever-changing world requires new insights on how to handle complexity. The need for a sense making system is striking in the fashion business. An interesting explanation also comes from chaos theory. Pioneering work in chaos theory is closely related to weather forecasting in which an initial assumption is that weather constantly repeats the

same patterns over time. Weather reduced to algorithms creates a system based on orderly disorder, containing predictability as well as unpredictability. The presumed similarity between weather and fashion reveal forecasting’s strong confidence in natural forces.

Another interesting explanation of the nature of unpredictability, which can also be related to fashion, is the *Butterfly Effect*. Even this metaphor, often used in the context of environmental issues, is inspired by chaos theory and illustrates the large consequences of small variations. The butterfly symbolizes a “strange attractor” that underlies the orderly, but nonlinear, pattern of today’s self-organizing fashion system. The butterfly effect makes forecasting necessary and possible. The butterfly is the fashion forecaster authorized.

### Butterfly Skills

Like the storm chasers, trend chasers locate the spawning ground of trends and use their skill and knowledge to identify emerging concepts. Trend chasers transmit their findings to other forecasters, product developers, marketers, and the

press, setting of the chain reaction that people call fashion (Brannon 2005).

Naming orders the extent of certain aesthetic expressions. It often starts (and ends) with “style” as a simple description of what is in vogue. Thus, the simple description has strong, authentic ambitions. Style is perceived as something real, personal and unique. Style is in demand today and, unless you are inherently stylish, you have to keep up with actual trends. Trends, the result of extended style, are more a collective phenomena. When a trend turns into fashion, everyone can adopt some styles. When a fashion becomes readily available, trend chasing for new and fresh styles will begin again.

Trend analysis is an assignment that requires a window on the future and a discovery of *the Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times. For the forecaster the difficulties lie in recognizing the spirit of the times when living in these times and in acquiring the flexible competence to discover connections between dissimilar phenomena. By “connecting the dots”, it is possible to outline some sense making scenarios. However, the scenarios have to connect and capture the collective mind. This requires using creativity, expertise and problem

solving. It is also important to understand the limitations and purposes of different forecasting methods. A distinction is often drawn between “tame” and “wicked” problems, since the two positions require different solutions, such as “thinking inside the box” versus “thinking outside the box”. Yet the choice of method must be based on judgements and evaluations that avoid polarizing arguments between the two positions. A forecaster should never be satisfied with only one solution. Because a trend is always accompanied by a counter trend, the forecaster should always have a number of different scenarios to present to clients. The proficiencies needed for such multi-tasking have their origins in cultural analysis.

## Products of Prediction

*The raw material of forecasting is information. Most trendspotters look for trends by scanning media and through observation. Critics of trendspotters wonder why companies would pay for a service that anyone can do. /---/ Trendspotting depends on being able to filter the trends from the stream of information (Brannon 2005).*

The long-term forecaster's toolbox contains a systematic plan for investigating "cultural drift" as well as the research strategies of media scanning, interviewing, observation and scenario writing. In particular, scenario writing is an interesting technique for presenting results since it describes the evolution from the present to some possible futures. Through scenario writing, possibilities are imagined and staged as narratives. A minimum of three different scenarios is recommended: the "surprise-free" scenario, the "best-case" scenario and "the worst case" scenario. Finally, the forecaster has to decide which "key indicators and signposts to watch", a step that requires certain abilities that goes beyond simple butterfly skills. This is a crucial factor in trend analysis. Even if the creation of alternative futures is a useful concept, the final forecasting presentation demands connecting the dots.

A reading of several fashion forecasting manuals established that the close connection between culture analysis and trend analysis is fairly clear. Both culture and trend analysis share a mutual interest in collective shared ideas and in material culture for observations and analysis. But the purpose of research fundamentally differs when it co-

mes to research questions and the use of results. I found the humble interpretation of forecasting data of greatest interest. Despite strong beliefs in psychological influences, as motivation and needs, the serious will to a deeper understanding of "a blurred world" is impressive. The balancing act between chaos and order is reflected in the constant efforts to develop a more systematic approach. In the forecasting glossary, *analytical thinking* is "logical, linear and based on facts". However, such adjectives have to be understood as reflecting a rhetorical attitude towards the forecasting aura of talented intuition in a present legitimating process. Talent and intuition are not enough. There is a need for convincing job descriptions, and there is a need for well-educated trend analysts.

Trend reporting is an impressive genre of creativity and certain aesthetics. The distinction between mediation of results in academia and the corporate world is total. Even if academia has a lot to learn about the presentation of results, the forecast presentation highlights a superficial faith in the natural sciences and the psychological sense making models. In relationship to the inclination for psychological analysis that cha-

racterizes the marketing world, trend reporting reflects notions of rational needs and choices that are often presented as more or less “closed” connections of dots.

When creative methods end as labelling, naming and ordering the extent of aesthetic expressions, trend gathering then becomes trend production. The precedent of naming is a powerful tool, seldom discussed in academia. Whether we, as academics, want to participate in such processes is another issue. In any case, the awareness of these processes is nevertheless a competence of great importance to cultural trend analysts. In trend processes, we are responsible for the intellectual framing of the task accepted. A retrospective view of the problem-based *Designation* project in cooperation with the museum clients reinforces the fact that framing the question is a crucial moment and an inevitable learning objective. Providing clients (and students) with some provocative statement can neutralize conformity and exaggerated expectations.

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# Epilogue

Tine Damsholt & Orvar Löfgren

## A Changing Landscape

These essays explore new areas and untraditional workplaces as the authors apply cultural analysis in various demanding tasks such as trying to organize a gastronomic event, observing cafeteria habits among children, doing fieldwork in a hospital clinic and crafting a design exhibition. In reading the essays, the reader finds him/herself in a terrain where the ethnologists are pioneers exploring new fields and facing new challenges.

A major challenge for you, as the ethnologist, is to convince your clients that you can employ useful analytical tools that they know little or nothing about. To that end, you need to understand and evaluate your own toolbox. As Ida Hult points out, you may have become so familiar with some ethnographic techniques and tricks that you take

them for granted. However, these tools may be new to the client and you need to explain them. Second, in your work, you may realize there are some skills you need to develop if you are to meet new challenges creatively. This is, for example, the realization Håkan Jönsson came to when he added the role of an event organizer to his role as cultural analyst. Third, you may find your most difficult task is not the cultural analysis itself, but rather the problem of communicating the results to the client. As Mine Sylow discovered, something may well be lost in the translation from fieldwork to the project. Fourth, you will have to learn to let go of a project and let the clients or other actors involved take ownership. Your success here will depend to a great extent on the partnerships you have developed with these pro-

ject participants. You will have to decide when and if they are ready and willing to take responsibility as well as negotiate your future role in the project.

## Skills and Competences

Examining and evaluating the contents of your toolbox so that you can communicate that knowledge to your clients is always challenging. It is understandable that many ethnology and cultural studies students have doubts about their expertise and skills, particularly since most have a humanities background where the tradition of confident self-presentation is weak. Students may well ask themselves: What do I know? What competences do I have, especially compared with the skills of an economist, a political scientist or a hands-on technologist? Why should I be hired? Do not, however, undervalue your knowledge and abilities. You have learned many techniques and many skills; these are the special assets you bring to your work.

The essays in ETN:JOB highlight many of these tools, some of which are very visible, others subtler. A review of the various situations described by these ethnologists and cultural analysts

reveals that cultural analysis can provide a new perspective on problems and offer new solutions. ‘The ethnological perspective’ that they have developed in the tradition of cultural analysis is their unique contribution that allows them to visualize cultural phenomena in different ways, but it is important to be able to pin down what this perspective consists of and how it works. An important element in this collection of essays is that the authors describe, in detail and in factual situations, what works and what doesn’t. We learn something about both the assets and the deficiencies of the toolbox. We also learn that the toolbox requires constant updating and reorganization. It will change the more you work with it.

While the concept of ‘applied research’ has recently become popular in ethnology, there is a danger that the concept could become merely a branding label for a magic wand in cultural analysis. Applied research in ethnography, in reality, means dealing with very different problems in very different arenas and among very different groups. As these essays show, this may mean observing kids by the pool, sounding out museum curators for an exhibition, borrowing techniques

from the arts world or adapting to a hospital setting. Each situation requires particular skills and specialized approaches. In sum, applied research in new settings requires changes both in methodological and theoretical approaches. When ethnographers or cultural analysts return to Academia, they also bring new perspectives and insights back to their discipline.

