Researching the Middle: Visual Ethnography as an Experimental, Innovative Method

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the body of knowledge that argues for necessity of enacting creative, performative research methods that incorporates embodiment and reflexivity. It suggests studying social phenomena by highlighting liminality, that is to say, being in-between and in the middle. The epistemological issues in context of representation and reality are critically evaluated, in defense of experimental innovative methodological searches, in particular visual ethnographic methods. The very premises of this article stem from knowledge acquired through practice and performance, by dancing and using a video camera simultaneously during fieldwork of a research on dance, the researcher rendered the very experience of middling *(between dance and camera) as a method of investigating social phenomena in its fluidity and temporariness. In that context visual ethnographic methods are offered as a way, in which the researchers can reach at another form of knowledge, which is not attainable through using conventional social scientific methods. In investigating dance in high-tempo, repetitive, rhythmic, continuous music that lasts over a long time, the main line of argument of the research was that dance is fundamentally elastic and therefore it can neither be located nor limited or identified through writing. It challenges the objective realist claims of social scientific methods. By engaging in dancing and using a video camera it generates and offer this as dancing methods.*

keywords: *representation, visual ethnography, methods, hermeneutics, dance research*

Résumé

Recherche sur le milieu: Ethnographie visuelle comme une méthode expérimentale, innovatrice

Le but de cet article est de contribuer à l'ensemble des connaissances sur les méthodes de recherche créatives et performatives qui intégrent la réflexivité et la subjectivité de chercheur. Il propose d'étudier les phénomènes sociaux en soulignant liminalité, c'est-à-dire, d'être entre-deux et au milieu. Les questions épistémologiques dans le contexte de la représentation et la réalité sont évaluées de manière critique, en quête des méthodes expérimentales, innovatrices et en particulier par des méthodes de l'éthnographie visuelle. Les prémisses de cet article sont issues de connaissances acquises au cours de la pratique et la performance, en dansant et en utilisant une caméra vidéo simultanément lors des travaux de terrain d'une recherche sur la danse pendant laquelle la chercheure a vécu l'expérience d'être au milieu (entre la danse et la caméra) comme une méthode de recherche des phénomènes sociaux dans leur fluidité et leur caractère temporaire. Dans ce contexte, les méthodes de l'éthnographie visuelle sont proposées comme des moyens par lesquelles les chercheurs peuvent atteindre une autre forme de connaissance qui n'est pas accessible par des méthodes conventionnelles de sciences sociales. En enquêtant sur la danse répétitive, rythmique, en haute-tempo avec la musique continue qui dure longtemps, la principale ligne d'argumentation de cette recherche était que la danse est fondamentalement élastique et donc elle ne peut ni être situées ni être limitée ou identifiées par l'écriture. Elle remet en cause les revendications objectives et réalistes des méthodes de sciences sociales.

mots-clès: la représentation, l'éthnographie visuelle, les méthodes, l'herméneutique, les recherches sur la danse

Özet

Ara'nın Keşfi: Deneysel, Yenilikçi Bir Yöntem Olarak Görsel Etnografi

Bu makalenin hedefi bedensel, yaratıcı, performatif ve araştırmacının öznelliğini yansıtarak geliştirdiği araştırma yöntemlerine dair bilgi külliyatına katkıda bulunmaktır. Sosyal olguları araştırırken ara'da oluş ve eşikte olma halini vurgulayarak çalışmanın gerekliliği önerilmektedir. Sosyal bilimde epistemolojik sorunlar bağlamında temsiliyet ve gerçeklik meselesi eleştirel bir yönden tartışılarak, deneysel ve yenilikçi yöntemlerin aranması gerektiği savunulmakta ve görsel etnografi önerilmektedir. Bu makale araştırmacının dans ile video kamera ara'sında deney ve deneyim yoluya sahadan çıkardığı bir bilgi olarak sosyal olguların akış halinde, her daim hareket içinde oluşunu ve geçici, uçucu olma halini savunmakta ve bunları ara kavramı çerçevesinde tartışmaktadır. Bu bağlamda video etnografisi uzlaşımsal sosyal bilim yöntemleriyle ulaşamayacağımız başka türden bir bilgiye ulaşmak için uygun bir yöntem olarak önerilmektedir. Bu makaleye kaynaklık eden araştırma esnasında yüksek tempolu, tekrara dayalı ritmik ve zamansal devamlılık arz eden müzik ortamlarında gerçekleşen dans pratiği araştırılmış ve sonuç olarak dansın bir yere ya da manaya çakılamaz, sabitlenemez, sınırlanamaz, tanımlanamaz ve yazıya indirgenemez olma hali vurgulanmıştır.

anahtar kelimeler: temsiliyet, görsel etnografi, yöntem, hermenötik, dans araştırmaları

Introduction

Representing social phenomena in academic writing is a challenge from the start. We need to search for ways of enacting a movement methodologically, because social life itself is complex, multiple, diffuse, non-coherent, and excessive and in flux. Social world is not a definite, static, fixed and simply organized matter that passively waits there to be analysed or to be seen, rather it has spiralling and kaleidoscope like images, thus we need to work hard on methods to create and know incomplete instants in the fluidities that make up the reality (Law 2004: 14).

> We are not good at thinking movement. Our institutional skills favour the fixed and static, the separate and self-contained. Taxonomies, hierarchies, systems and structure represent the instinctive vocabulary of institutionalised thought in its subordinating of movement and transformation…There is movement - of a kind: the simple movement of definite things from one definite place to another. But it's a form of movement which denies the restlessness of transformation, deformation and reformation. Simple location reconstitutes a world of finished, subjects and objects from the flux and flow of unfinished, heteromorphic 'organisms' (Cooper 1998: 108).

The research process enacts a continuous movement with twists and breaks in thought, intentions, hopes, fears, decisions and non-decisions. The practice of moving methods which is referred to as 'the *middle*' in this article refers to a search for creating a 'moving' study of the social phenomena[1]. In this search for creating a movement, experimenting with a video-camera could be helpful. The ways in which we encounter and experience issues of embodiment, performativity and reflexivity in research could be enhanced by using video ethnographic methods during the research process. In doing research, the video-camera may become a medium through which we enact new openings on ethnographic knowledge and methods.

Each research process is about experimentation, it is a mode of experience and it provides not only a new awareness and a different understanding on the issues of representational realism, but also on the objectivity and subjectivity

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1   Where I am is the *middle* of dance. It is from there that I wish to approach these issues in my research on dance. I danced in the *middle* and wanted to write about the affections of it and convey them to others in a social science context. In my research, I sought to experiment with feeling as a way knowing and I explored how moving and thinking enact together and simultaneously in us. I centralized dancing as a way of enacting the research in my study and gathered my data, from the affects of dance. Besides, I experimented with a video camera and my enactments between the camera and dance generated *middleness* from the field. I had several participants in my research, some of which I only danced with and some of which I talked to about their own experiences of dance. These all were my sources of data, but among them, the main source was my bodily feeling and thinking in the *middle*. In theoretical terms I enact and generate *middle* from Deleuze and Guattari (2004) and Robert Cooper's understanding of hermeneutics as an 'interstanding' (1997), it has connotations to Victor Turner's work on liminality (1982) as well as many other theoretical sources.

of knowledge. What is more, through experimentation we may develop a more general framework of some of the epistemological issues in social science. Initially, my research was about dance, which is a pure movement in the moment, however the knowledge that I gathered applies to epistemological issues and representational matters in social scientific enquiry in general[2].

In what comes next, first I need to consider the issue of representation in depth and identify why representation is an issue to consider and be critical about in social scientific research by drawing on the idea of *method assemblages* in particular (Law 2004). I will briefly present my experience with the video-camera during the field work to talk about the moments in which I enacted *middling* practically. Then, I will develop the theoretical base for *middle* phenomena in research experience and argue that we might enact the *middle* as an exploration of the muddle rather than modelling and ordering things in research process (Cooper 1997). Finally, I will suggest that video camera might indeed be helpful in ethnographic field work and open the research to its possibilities. There is an anxious axis between subjective, reflexive knowledge and objective realist knowledge. However, I will endeavour to explain that these two forms of knowledge are in fact, related to each other (and to the deadlock between representation and reality, which they all are connected to epistemological issues).

My purpose in this article, therefore is to outline what is involved in the enactment of bodily, performatively reflexively practicing of social science by enacting the '*middle*' and to offer it as innovative moving method appropriate to the study of social phenomena. The practice of moving methods, which is referred to as 'the *middle*' in the title of this article, became the backbone of my research that was a search for creating a 'moving' study of dance. In this endeavour to create a movement, I decided to experiment with a video camera. In the process, the camera moved me in ways that I had not moved before. While I had previously only thought about the issues of embodiment, performativity and reflexivity in the context of dance, I actually experienced them with the camera

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2   In broad terms, I conducted a research on dance. My fieldwork was a multi-site ethnography that took place in Istanbul, London, Czech Republic and France from 2003 to 2007. In those sites, I joined several dance events of different kinds (28 events in total) such as; warehouse parties, clubs, raves, squad parties, commercial music festivals, street parties and mobile-clubbing events. In these events I danced, made video recordings, took photographs, and conducted interviews. While shooting with the video camera, I observed people through the eye of the device. I took field notes while dancing or shortly after. I conducted 20 unstructured interviews with amateur dancers, DJs and event organizers. My primary method has been to centralize the acts of dancing in my research rather than to observe and, in addition, I experimented with video in the field. I conducted research in this way so that I may have a different and broader understanding of the phenomena that I am studying; I needed to go through the deep dance experience myself. I did this because I feel and argue that knowing is an affectual phenomena and that we need to feel things from the inside in order to have an idea of them and in that sense knowing is subjective, heterogeneous and variable (Law 2004, Baker 2002). Thus, I researched the experience of dance through enacting and bodily *middling* the music in the *middle*.

in my fieldwork and this has deepened my understanding of them. Also, while thinking about how to engage and enact the visuals in the research, I regarded the representation issue more comprehensively than I had at the outset of my research. During my research, the video camera became a medium through which I enacted new openings of ethnographic knowledge and methods. This research process and experimentation was a mode of experience, it provided a new awareness on the issues of representational realism, and on the objectivity and subjectivity of knowledge. What is more, my experimentation helped me to develop a more general framework of some of the epistemological issues in social science.

Representational Problems in Social Scientific Research

To begin with choosing the way to do research is a political issue. It is a political decision, simply because we are making a decision about the kind of contribution that we want to enact in the making of the world and of realities. I will later develop this point further by presenting the idea of *ontological politics* (Law: 2004, Mol: 1999). Methodological choice reveals the researcher's intention concerning 'how to participate in enactment of social realities' and therefore how to change, affect and effect the world (Law 2004: 66).

Recently conventional qualitative methods have increasingly become the new orthodoxy; they establish approaches and standards of "soft" method as opposed to "hard" method in social science (Crang 2002: 648). Qualitative research takes an ontological position on the move in which the stable, fixed, accessible and predictable readings of a culture, the world are left behind for opening to multiplicity of meanings, uncertainties and complexity of things (Smith 2001).

In conventional qualitative methods the norm often involves finding the best way to represent reality 'objectively'[3]. For instance, the 'intensive' approach - as opposed to the 'extensive' one (see Sayer 1992: 218-228) - provides a better way of getting at details. The former is not less 'objective' than the latter (Sayer 1992: 226). Again in defence of qualitative methods as structural analysis and interpretative analysis, a critique that 'derides' them as 'storytelling' (in Blaug 1980: 127), is seen as a pejorative description (Sayer 1992: 228). To give concrete examples; in a research on poverty, there are two possibilities, first an extensive approach would involve a "large survey on a representative sample of low-income households" in order to gather data "on variables such as type of employment, if any, income, number of dependents and household structure, type of housing tenure, persons per room, ethnic origin, education and skill qualifications" (Sayer 1992: 220). By contrast an intensive study would focus on a very small number

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3   For examples that argues and defends to get at objective realist knowledge in social science
    methodologies and conventional qualitative methods see Bryman 1988; Glaser and Strauss
    1967; Miles and Huberman 1984; Patton 2002; Sayer 1992.

of people and "examine each one exhaustively in terms of its history and its context, i.e. its specific experience regarding housing, employment, education, the welfare state, transport" (Sayer 1992: 220). The second is considered to be the preferable information for qualitative research (Sayer 1992) and produces more vivid research insights. However, my general feeling overall is that there is not enough room in conventional qualitative methods for 'affects' and the 'mess', which I believe are important aspects of social research.

From the same research topic example here is another understanding which is marginal to conventions: in conducting a " research about 'poverty', a camera wandering in the room and the environment will help a lot more than the textual data in questionnaires, in 'knowledging', that is to say 'affecting'" (Ulus Baker 2002):

> We social scientists go to poor regions, ask our questions and bypass it... finally we analyse our data, this does not mean that we 'see' the poverty that we are researching, we may be able to 'understand' it, 'convey' it, but we do not 'see' it... how can we 'show' poverty... it probably has plenty, maybe infinite images... a crack in the wall, a pregnant belly, a hand that pours water from a jug... all these signs are much more 'affective' than the words and theories in social science (Baker 2002[4]).

Here my intention is to point out the relation between 'affect' and 'knowing' and in parallel 'affecting' and 'knowledging'. From this line of thought 'story-telling' could be a necessary tool in talking about events in social science. Thinking on methods through Actor Network Theory opens the space to 'affects', 'mess' and 'stories' (Law 2004; Mol 1999 see also Callon 1998; Haraway 1991; Latour 1987; 1990; Singleton and Micheal 1993).

In performing social science we are not only dealing with a set of techniques, the problem is not just about method, but most importantly, it is concerned with a "way of being, it is about what kinds of social science that we want to make" and obviously as a component of this "what kinds of people we want to be and how should we live" (Law 2004: 10). Looking at the ways in which scientific knowledge is produced involves practicing a set of messy possibilities. Through its practice, science not only describes realities, but also produces them (Law 2004: 13 see also Callon 1998; Haraway 1991; Latour 1987; 1990; Singleton and Micheal 1993). Therefore, different practices of science produce different realities and different perspectives. In that case, the question is how we to relate to and choose between these multiple realities. Because to choose between the different possibilities of the realities has political causes and implications, it is about how to contribute to the enactment of the world. This is to say that the truth is multiple and complex rather than definite and fixed and by emphasizing this fragility of the temporally enacted realities, social science should approach this "vagueness and indefiniteness" (Law 2004: 14

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4   This text is published in Turkish only, this is my translation and emphases are mine.

see also Haraway 1991; Latour 1987; 1990). This will not be the weakness of methodology, but it shows that "*much of the world is enacted in that way*" (Law 2004: 14 original italics). To understand the enactment of the world methods needs to be worked out carefully and in order to have a broader understanding the idea of *method assemblages* is helpful. *Method assemblages* are:

> enactments of relations that make some things (representations, objects, apprehensions) present 'in-here', whilst making others absent 'out-there'. The 'out-there' comes in two forms: as manifest absence (for instance what is represented); or, and more problematically, as a hinterland of indefinite, necessary, but hidden Otherness (Law 2004: 14).

'In-here' refers to the bits and pieces that we 'chose', the patterns that we find and we decide to bring in, thus it refers to our 'representation' (Law 2004: 14 see also Haraway 1991; Kuhn 1970; Latour 1987; 1990). 'In-here' is enacted through bringing things into presence by detecting them from the cloudy mess of a multiple, complex, intermingled, non-coherent set of relations. The processes in which the method assemblage detects and determines a selection from the mess is enacted through the appearing *similarities* and *differences* in this mess and then they are given voice through representation. *Method assemblages* do not only apply to scientific models but also, they apply to different spaces of orderings, such as a worship house, alcoholics anonymous are also *method assemblages*. "Because they detect, resonate with, and amplify particular patterns of relations in the excessive and overwhelming fluxes of the real" and enact through repressing 'other' objects, relations, representations, apprehensions into silence (Law 2004: 14). For that reason the definition of method assemblage: "is a combination of reality detector and reality amplifier" (Law 2004: 14; see also Kuhn 1970). Behind this there is a challenge to the assumption of a single, external reality 'out-there', which is 'beyond us', 'precedes us' and is the 'same everywhere', in Euro-American thought, in which there is no place for 'heterogeneity and variation' (2004: 23-25 see also Haraway 1991; Kuhn 1970; Latour 1987; 1990). Consequently, representations enact as claims to total realities, without any space for flexible openings. This line of thought that Law seeks to challenge, has influenced all disciplines, ranging from sociology, to anthropology, to visual ethnography and as well as film theory. They all were concerned about the objectivity of knowledge and subjectivity problem in the context of reality and representation[5].

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5   In film theory we see that there has been a distinction between two approaches. The 'realist' approach, that defends to represent and capture reality and the 'anti-realist' approach. See Bazin 1967 for 'realist' approach; see Aitken 1990 for Grierson and see Vertov 1984 for 'anti-realist' approach. In ethnographic filming see Heider 1976 for realist ethnographic objective film discussions and Banks 1992; 2001; Mac Douglas 1995; Martinez 1996; Pink 2001; for Jean Rouch see Eaton 1979 and see Rubby 2000 for discussions that incorporate issues of reflexivity, subjectivity, embodiment and performative use of video ethnography. See also Rose 2007 for discussions on the interpretation of the found visual images in context of visual methodologies. On issues of representation and art and particularly video-art see Bolt 2004; Bellour 1989; Berensel 2002.

Representations, despite the fact that they cannot be certain and total 'truths', enact as if they are so, by use of *allegories*, which make possible to 'move between realities', so that the multiple realities 'hold together' (Law 2004: 108 see also Latour and Woolgar 1986). But there is a trick in this, because representation enacts within a denial of its allegorical character, despite the fact that it is built in it, it shows itself as if, it is *direct* representation. The directness of representation is honoured in Euro-American thought, but in actually, it is mediated and it is never direct (see Law 2004, chapter 2):

> If a statement in endocrinology (or medical sociology) corresponds to a reality out-there, if it simply seems to describe it, then this is because most of the assemblage within which it is located has been rendered invisible, Othered. The authorship, the uncertainties, the enactment of out-thereness, all of these have disappeared. The *appearance* of direct representation is the effect of a process of artful deletion. So the argument we need to make is this. On the one hand, indeed it is the case that direct representation offers no overt space for allegory. But on the other hand direct representation is *built* in allegory. There is nothing direct or literal about the link between present statement and the absent realities. This means that those statements come out (or are telling) of something other or more then the reality they describe. They are effects of allegory that conceal their allegorical origins. That is what representation is: *allegory that denies its character as allegory* (Law 2004: 108 original italics see also Kuhn 1970; Latour and Woolgar 1986).

The security of universal truth is inactivated, through seemingly direct representations in this mechanism. Overall, in this way of thinking, the security sustained within is challenged and to take the risky experimental slippery ground is offered. With such concerns in mind, I confronted representation and my motor was to enact movement in the study of dance. From the beginning, I was anxious about the possibility of enacting a process, where I am trying to communicate something that happens at a subjective level (as an experience and practice) by depending on the general. This is again very much connected to social science's ways of generating knowledge as universal and objective 'truths', that escort *imperialism* (Law 2004: 15 see also Haraway 1991; Latour 1987; 1990). Because dance, is completely crucial to my existence, to my biography, I am very sensitive about reducing and fixing it in such a way. Also I have ontological concerns and therefore political ones, in my life, relations, in academia and the world. The different practices of science produce different realities and different perspectives, in that case in deciding how we should relate and choose between these multiple realities *ontological politics* matters in the manner described by Annemarie Mol (Mol 1999 in Law 2004):

> If realities are enacted, then reality is not in principle fixed or singular, and truth is no longer the only ground for accepting or rejecting a representation. The implication is that there are various possible reasons, including the political, for enacting one kind of reality rather than another, and that these grounds can in some measure be debated. This is *ontological politics* (Law 2004: 162)

The issue then for me is to choose how to represent, and be open to insecurity, by considering that *weakness* is *strength*. Therefore, methods, and the ways in which we enact relations and the world is completely crucial. As I will suggest *middling* -as a movement in-between-, not only in research, but in life in general, offers the possibility of escaping rigid categories and judgments. *Middling* may offer a flexible space for symbiosis, which is what dance is about. In the search for the possible ways to escape fixation and freezing dance, I thought that I had to enact a moving method and a movement in the enactment of the thesis. Dance is a three dimensional volume, pure movement in the moment and to carry it into a two dimensional surface (into writing) was a problem from the start. So I went to the fieldwork with a video camera, I was hoping that I can 'capture' the vitality and vividness of the event of dance through video recordings. With those concerns, I decided to experiment video-camera to enact such a movement. In addition to this, I hoped that images may create more powerful affects compared to words produced in form of a conventional academic writing.[6] My dance with the video-camera has been instructive and important as I will express in what follows.

Visual Ethnography and the Fieldwork

The techniques of conventional qualitative methods are the frequently used methods of participant observation, interviews, interpreting qualitative sources, ethnography, observation, semi-structured interviews, or alternatives such as group work (Crang 2003). However, recently some innovative methods for investigation of the social phenomena are considered, video-ethnography is one of them[7].

In the fieldwork, I had difficulties in getting clear images while shooting the event of dance. Camera demanded a lot of labour and concentration like the dance itself. Should I dance or should I shoot? This dilemma between whether to focus on dance or the camera generated a new awareness in time in me. I decided to try a combination of the two for a while. Thinking about some solutions and trying some different tactics produced a process of experiencing and evolving in the process (see Pink 2001). As my fieldwork progressed, I started getting used to the camera, integrating it with my body and eye. There was also a progress in my shootings too. Finally, I became more familiar with the tool and I realised that it was no longer creating a distraction in my dance and relation to the music anymore. I integrated camera with dance. First I was dancing and then shooting some bits, then I was embodying the camera and the music and finally I combined camera with dance. I found myself dancing with the camera in the *middle*, most of the time. I ended up discovering the enactment of the *middle* between dancing and shooting. This happened by *middling* between my body,

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6   I am not implying all styles of written text here. However 'poetry' and 'story telling' are powerful
      ways to create powerful affections.
7   See Heider 1976; Banks 1992; 2001; Mac Douglas 1995; Martinez 1996; Pink 2001; Ruby 2000
      for detailed discussions on visual ethnography.

camera and music. At the beginning the camera and I were two separate bodies, but through the process we became one.

Therefore, one of the questions that arise during video-ethnography is to whether to focus on the technical skills that the device demands or to focus on the study of the research subject. Does the researcher have to make choice between the camera and the social event? Jay Ruby points out to this divide, in the case in where an ethnographer works together with a theatre person (2000). He suggests that a problematic emerges in deciding which will be paramount, should the product be primarily good theatre or good anthropology? He demonstrates the importance of an anthropological background and the necessity of its implications on the work (Ruby 2000: 262). During my fieldwork, I have encountered the similar problem while using video-camera for research purposes. I embodied these contradictions for quite a long time, it became the most crucial problematic during the practice of my fieldwork. I was not simply able to take sides with ethnography as Ruby does. To me these two (focusing on the social event and the camera) had to merge into each other and I realized that the formulation of the visuals demands a full understanding of how pictures or a video piece works and how necessary it is to be experienced in it.

Ruby demonstrates that the ethnographer must also stimulate the people (s)he studies by becoming a provocateur in order to gather data (2000). Herewith he remarks that information is also obtained by the embodied experience of the ethnographer (Rubby 2000: 242). These were the very moments in which my thoughts on the issues of embodiment, reflexivity and performativity moved further and realized that these matters are not only crucial in engaging with music and dance event, but also in the event of shooting as well.

Related to this while experimenting with the camera and also with photographs, I realised that the devices may provide me an enhanced way of looking at things, an additional focus on the research environment, for some moments I felt that the device became my eyes, which I make use of intensively to see my surrounding. The people in the crowd were seemingly not distracted by the presence of the camera. So in the process I was transformed by enacting *middle* in various ways. First by focusing on shooting, I entered the *middle* of the camera, after I embodied the device I started moving with it in and out of the social event that I was investigating. The sort of a transformation that Jean Rouch mentions as 'cine-trance[8]' has taken place in me (Eaton 1979). Towards

8   Jean Rouch (an important figure in ethnographic film) discusses that a transformation takes place in all the people including the crew and argues that camera is not simply as a tool that records reality, but as a transformative force, that creates a change in the film maker and the event and he advocates for the provocative use of the apparatus without zooming and moving towards the target instead, therefore the camera(wo)man: "is no longer, just himself but he is a 'mechanical eye' accompanied by an 'electronic ear'. It is bizarre state of transformation in the film maker that I have called, by analogy with phenomena of possession, the 'cine-trance' (Eaton 1979: 57)."

the end of my fieldwork I was not using zooms anymore and moving very comfortably in the crowd, taking close-up shots with the camera in my hand and using the camera to communicate with people.

In short, the shooting process became an experience in itself by time, so I started enacting this (in/out) side moves between the camera and social event continuously through my fieldwork. This transformation has occurred by experimenting and I analyse this process in context of the reflexive, creative use of the camera in an embodied way in visual ethnography. The concerns I had about trying to 'capture' the vitality of dance has transformed in to concerns about 'enactment of the *middle*' through camera in research and *middling* between the social event and the camera. The shooting practice itself became the main thing, rather than the images that I have gathered or how I am going to assemble them later on. The process itself became the vital thing through its effects on me and the ways in which it transformed me. It made me think on and realize other aspects of movement and the *middle* (as a verb). Thus, through experience and experiment, I have realized that the event of dance cannot be 'captured' and indeed there is NO space that is out of representation. However, I have also realized that the issue is not 'to capture', it is 'to *middle*' as a movement in-between, because it is where things are alive. Could the camera device picture the mischievous gestures and the line of flight that the dance event embodied as I hoped? No it could not indeed. Some of the images that I have gathered in total give a slight effect of what I am trying to express in-here, but in general they were far from reflecting the density of the social event that I was investigating.

However this was not what I was trying to get at anymore. As a result while trying to get at one thing (and searching for it) I could not manage to get at it, however within the process, I realized (or come across) something else. Therefore, methodologically speaking this experiment was beyond useful. It generated the core of the research (*middle*) in practice first and then later in theory. At this stage however the question remaining is: 'What is the implication of doing the research by *dancing in the middle*?'

The Middle in Social Theory

Dance is a continuous movement, a coming and going, a passing on. It is a play that consists of the constant repetition of to and fro movement without any particular goal or final destination (Gadamer 1986: 22, see also Callois 1962). This coming and going in-between quality in its "interstanding" brings along displacements and dislocations:

> In interstanding, we occupy a dynamic space that moves always *between* (inter) terms. In *understanding*, in contrast, we are placed *under* the term as in the emplacement of the subject under the object in a fixed relationship. In the

> dynamic *middle*-muddle that is the continuous coming-and-going of interstanding we meet and especially distinctive feature of hermeneutic message: the lack of location, of fixed focus, the missing place (Cooper 1997: 698).

This way of understanding hermeneutics[9] is very closely related to dance. Robert Cooper generates *middleness* from a discussion of Gianni Vattimo's (1997) understanding of hermeneutics as an 'interstanding' an in-betweenness of movement that is not locatable, non-placable (Cooper 1997, see also Cooper 1998; Deleuze and Parnet 1987; Deleuze and Guattari 2004). I suggest that a theoretical *interstanding*, in betweenness is indeed fundamentally related to the practice and in-here to enacting dance. Hermeneutics is not the 'cognitive rendering of an object', it as an 'event' that comes and goes in between in all its variety and multiplicity in all sorts of forms (Cooper 1997: 691; see also Deleuze and Parnet 1987; Deleuze and Guattari 2004). Thus it is fundamentally related it to movement. It is explained as "the act of interpretation, of going-between" and is regarded as a movement in between, as "the nature of movement between things rather than the things themselves" (Cooper 1997: 690; see also Deleuze and Parnet 1987; Deleuze and Guattari 2004). An event is a 'coming into being'; a lively practice of coming and hermeneutic interpretation involves an endless process of coming and sending on messages (Cooper 1997: 692; see also Deleuze and Parnet 1987; Deleuze and Guattari 2004). Likewise dance enacts a simultaneous receiving (of the sounds), interpreting (through thinking bodily, enacting memory and self-trajectories) and sending (through body). Dance is a bodily hermeneutic interpretation of a process of coming and going, so it is one of the most obvious 'unfounding' forces that we have as it provides the recognition how we can enact the possibilities of the world. This is what deep dance is an 'unfounding' force. Dance involves the bodily communication between people. In that sense it is the going-between of movement from people to people, it is a mediating force. In that sense dance is a bodily form of hermeneutics (of interpretation and of communication), because it is an 'event', a movement and a becoming as "coming to be" (Cooper 1997; see also Deleuze and Parnet 1987; Deleuze and Guattari 2004). Clearly dance could not be rendered cognitively, in contrast it is an 'event' that opens up the possibilities of the world. It does not have a 'true meaning' behind it, but it is a world making process by its quality of opening up possibilities. It is the *middle*. The *middle* then is the liminal, or rather the liminoid (Turner 1982a, 1982b). I am trying to suggest a study of dance as endlessly liminoid and a social science methodology that is liminoid[10]. In Turner's liminoid (1982a, 1982b) and in the cultural geographical literature that

9   My purpose here is not to present the whole hermeneutic literature, but to situate the grounds that the line of thought that the concept of ' *middle*' is built upon. See Dilthey 1972; Gadamer 1976; Heidegger 1962; Ricoeur 1981; Vattimo 1997 to track the literature on hermeneutics.

10 According to Victor Turner a 'liminoid' condition arises out of the margins of the socio-economic structure. Turner claims that a liminoid condition has the capacity to criticize the dominant social structural order and create new alternative orderings and to bring social change (Turner 1982b: 50-51). Liminoid conditions are seen as an independent domain of creative activity, in industrial leisure, genres of arts, carnivals, night life, clubs, sports, games and many other spheres (Turner 1982b).

is influenced by it (Shields 1991, Hetherington 1996, 1997) the emphasis is on how the liminoid becomes a part of the structure, how it is normalized. However, things are different in the *middle* or the liminoid, a process of transformation may enact and it matters, we cannot simply argue that it turns back to structure or sameness. In Deleuzian understanding, rhythm is a movement, it is the *middle*, and transformation comes from within the rhythm as a force (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 342-387). My aim in-here is to focus on the moment of this rhythmic movement, therefore on unfounding transformation and the possibilities that it embraces by assembling the research as the *middle*. In dance or else, it is this 'rhythmic movement' what matters, or the 'unfounding' forces, the 'process'. This is fundamental reason, why I am interested and trying to enact the *middle*, in dance, camera, and research in-here. Because it brings change, it unfolds, it deteritorialize and most importantly transforms. I argue for putting this aspect forth rather than how it is re-ordered, re-structured or reterritorialized, simply because such assemblages gives importance to fixation and inherently imply rigid worlds. By putting forth 'transformation', 'the *middle*', 'the liminoid' moments, I try to enact flexibility 'in-here' and this is a 'political' choice.

Enacting the research in the ' *middle*-muddle' is a play in-between; it brings and opens up the possibilities of it. Dancing and moving, *middling* the space, things and people (music, dance and camera) may bring a process of dislocation and displacement, it is an actual world making process. The reason to experiment with a video camera, in the beginning of the fieldwork, was to try to produce movement through visuals to create an affect in the viewer. However, the video camera moved my body and therefore my thoughts, it has transformed me and I realized that the issue was something else.

I was in the *middle* (physically) of things, people as a mediator, my body became a medium to communicate and interpret and therefore actively participate in a world making process. In the dance floor, I was the "missing link", the absence between these people that connects them; I was *interdancing* and opening closed circuits by my lack of location in there. I go to this boy then to the other girl, back to another boy, I try to spread and disperse around. I am unallocated, unplaced, and I carry as well as send messages in-between, music and people also from people to people, like a transmitter. The "missing link" is the missing connection, Cooper explains from Beer:

> The metaphor of the 'missing link' is, as Beer indicates, a generalized way of talking about absent connections. In hermeneutic interpretation the absence of connections is vital for the continuous handing over and sending of the message. The incompletion of links is the necessary stimulus for their continuation... in the popular imagination the 'missing link' as 'a hypothetical type between two life forms, particularly between mankind and other primates'... It was applied to freaks, social classes, ethnic groups, and stimulated the rise of the detective story. Its internal structure reflects the essential features of Vattimo's act of hermeneutic interpretation: it 'weakens' or 'unfound' reality, it seeks opening

rather than closure, it's always going-between and never settling in one place. It mixes the near and the far, the conventional and the strange, the normal and the monstrous (Cooper 1997: 699 quoted from Beer 1992).

My experience with the video-camera was significant in making me realize *middling* as a method. First, I *middle* the rhythm, then people and then space. Then I entered the experience of the video camera, which only made sense after I *middle* the camera and finally I *middle* the music, camera and dance. The *middle* made me realize the possibilities and openings first in practice then in theory.

Conclusion

As I have mentioned in the beginning the issue of enacting video camera derived from questioning the possibilities of producing a movement in this study of dance. Thinking about the ways in which I can enact such a movement in social scientific area.[11] This is why I was oriented towards the camera. As a result video-camera did not offer a way to escape representation as I hoped, however it offered more crucial insights on methodological matters.

By enacting the camera performatively and through the body, by dancing with the camera in the *middle*, *middling* between camera and dance during my fieldwork, I began to enact a spatially mobile continuous movement (like movement within movement), which I have discussed here as *middling* (as a verb). These spatial movements (first in dance, then through the camera and later in dancing with the camera and eventually in theory and practical life) have made me realize the methodological significance of the *middle* or *middling* (as a verb that signifies moving in between events). *middle* refers to spatially standing and moving in between. More clearly it refers to dancing in the *middle* of the dance floor. And relatedly it refers to entering the *middle* of the rhythm and sound world which I will call as *interdancing*. But more importantly I carried this metaphor of *middle* as a verb form while I am talking about how I moved between and *middle* the camera, music and dance. And I also developed *middling* as a movement, a strategy approaching theories and paradigms.

My engagement and experiments with the video camera has made me experience video-camera as an event like dance. The result of shootings that I have made surely gives a better feeling of the environment and enactments on the event of dance. Therefore, they are important in giving a stronger affection compared to a written text. All theories question the deadlock of realism and some suggest there is a need to get out of representation (in text, in images) and social science and hope that the use of images can be helpful in moving further afield. I argue that images help and contribute powerfully in affecting

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11 During this process Non-representational theory was a theoretical pushing force (see Thrift and Dewsbury: 2000, Dewsbury: 2000, Thrift: 1997, 2004).

and therefore knowing about things, but we will still be in representing. But I argue that the issue is to better represent. The ancient magical incantation *abracadabra* derives from the Aramaic word meaning 'I create as I speak' therefore, in choosing what we talk about and how we talk about it, we also decide which version of realities to enact. This necessitates being honest and opening space to the vagueness, complexity, heterogeneity as an *ontological politics* in researching the social world.

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