Chapter 5.14
Exploring "Events" as an Information Systems Research Methodology

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ABSTRACT

In this article we build upon existing research and commentary from a variety of disciplinary sources, including information systems, organisational and management studies, and the social sciences that focus upon the meaning, significance and impact of "events" in the information technology, organisational and social context. Our aim is to define how the examination of the event is an appropriate, viable and useful information systems methodology. The line of argument we pursue is that by focusing on the "event" the researcher is able to more clearly observe and capture the complexity, multiplicity and mundaneity of everyday lived experience. An inherent danger of existing traditional "event" focused studies and "virtual" ethnographic approaches is the micromanagement of the research process. Using the notion of "event" has the potential to reduce methodological dilemmas such as this without effacing context (Peterson, 1998, p. 19). Similarly, in this article we address the overemphasis upon managerialist, structured and time-fixated praxis that is currently symptomatic of information systems research. All of these concerns are pivotal points of critique found within event-oriented literature regarding organisations (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 2004; Peterson, 1998).

INTRODUCTION

An examination of event-related theory within interpretative disciplines directs our focus toward the more specific realm of the "event scene." The notion of the "event scene" originated in the action based (and antiacademy) imperatives of the

situationists and emerged in an academic sense as critical situational analysis. Event scenes are a focus for contemporary critical theory where they are utilised as a means of representing theoried inquiry in order to loosen the restrictions that historical and temporally bound analysis imposes upon most interpretative approaches. The use of event scenes as the framework for critiquing established conceptual assumptions is exemplified by their use in *CTheory*. In this journal's version and articulation of the event-scene poetry, commentary, multivocal narrative and other techniques are legitimated as academic forms. These various forms of multidimensional and multivocal expression are drawn upon to enrich the understandings of the "event" to extricate its meaning and to provide a sense of the moment from which the point of analysis stems.

The objective of this paper is to advocate how information systems research can (or should) utilise an event scene oriented methodology. The paper is organised as follows: we begin by presenting the theoretical background and definitions of "event scenes" and the "event." We do this as a means of illustrating how events capture multidimensional and multivocal forms of expression. The significance of this method is that it is a nonlineal and less time focused approach that has the potential to challenge the managerialist, structured and time-fixated praxis that is currently dominating information systems research and development. In the next section we illustrate why and how event oriented methods advocate including elements of illogical asemiosis of experience that eschews the application of management process and articulates arhythmic patterns of life, including political and cultural experience. We then argue there is a need to utilise consumption based approaches in information systems research away from traditional production-based systems understandings. Finally and most importantly, utilising an event-based focus in information systems can challenge existing

constructs that perpetuate mainstream regimes of power by widening the boundary of what we understand as "the system."

WHAT ARE EVENTS AND EVENT SCENES?

The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation. (Debord, 1994, Thesis 1)

In this paper we present a sample of literature concerning event-oriented approaches, especially those inspired by the situationists, in order to consider the more specific representational issues found in the specific praxis of the "event scene." We build upon Peterson's (1998) literature review that offers a taxonomy of organisational events to develop a critical debate regarding the relationships of events to organisations. The event scene is the direct descendant to the situationism's act of détournement, in which significant and insignificant elements of observations are isolated and inserted into new and unexpected contexts. Détournement is most readily explained with examples such as found art and the work of artists such as Tracey Emin that includes her Curriculum Vita (CV) presented as a framed piece and more recently an abusive text message sent to a fan. A majority of Emin's work places the mundane in a formal environment in unexpected ways, forcing the viewer to (hopefully) reconsider their position and view the subject of the works in new ways. As a necessarily obtuse explanation of this tactic, Debord and Wolman (1956) describe détournement as being "less effective the more it approaches a rational reply" to the cultural situation it critiques. The situationist's invocation for obscurity is a political resistance to the likelihood of mainstream recuperation — of being made ir-

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