Methodological encounters in a third space: ethnological field-working with Barbara Czarniawska

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Abstract

This article reflects on the intellectual presence and influence of Barbara Czarniawska, particularly in relation to her contributions to the field of organizational research methodology. Drawing on our personal encounters with Barbara and engagement with her prolific writings, we explore two core aspects of field-working: (1) the researcher's role as a sense-maker and ethnologist of organizational practices; and (2) the concept of 'shadowing' and its value as a methodological disposition when researching fluid processes of organizing. These dimensions are not mutually exclusive but instead converge to create what we contend is a third space—a conceptual and research-practice domain in which fieldwork becomes more enriched and actor-oriented. We explore and explicate a central distinction that Barbara draws between "ethnology of organizing" and "organizational ethnography". The former engages with the meaning-making processes that emerge from fieldwork, capitalizing on the richness and pertinence of direct field experience. "Organizational ethnography", on the other hand, is a term that Barbara is inclined to view disparagingly because it so often equates to mere "data collection" and recording procedures. Barbara's methodological guidance also highlights the importance of language and narrative in ethnology, and her approach aligns more closely with anthropological traditions than those of management and organization studies. By advocating for an ethnology of organizing, she encourages researchers to view organizing as interconnected and relational sets of ongoing processes which can be narratively recovered by participating and learning with actors.

1. Introduction

Encounters with Barbara Czarniawska were invariably rewarding and enriching experiences, particularly when it came to methodological questions. What distinguishes Barbara's methodological work is how her understanding, insights, and recommendations emerge from an appreciation of diverse disciplinary perspectives. She draws seamlessly from anthropology, linguistics, sociology, and literary studies alongside her home discipline of management and organization studies. Barbara demonstrates a remarkable capacity to distil complex theoretical

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reflections and articulate them with exceptional clarity and precision. In doing so, she offers more than intellectual inspiration—she provides crucial methodological reassurance. Through her work, Barbara affirms that rigorous scholarship requires our methodological choices to be consistently well-justified and contextually relevant. Her interdisciplinary fluency serves as both model and reminder that robust research methodology transcends disciplinary boundaries, demanding instead a commitment to theoretical coherence and empirical appropriateness.

It is easy for us to agree with Barbara that methodology could never be reduced to consideration of 'mere methods'; rather, it represents a way of engaging with and relating to the actors' experience of *knowing* and *organizing*. From her prolific published writings on methodology (Czarniawska 2008; 2014a; 2014b; 2017a; 2021) one theme particularly stands out for us, namely, the recurring interrogation of what it means to conduct fieldwork. In this article, we explore what we believe to be two fundamental aspects of field-working, as reflected in her intellectual engagement with the subject.

We intend to present selected insights that we, personally, derived from our encounters with her writings and face-to-face discussions on the subject. This is not to say that Barbara herself would pursue the lines of inquiry or procedures we have followed based on our reading of her work or, indeed, that she would have endorsed our interpretations. These remain *our* responsibility.

We have chosen to write this essay in the present tense, as if Barbara were physically with us, so to speak, as we still feel her intellectual presence and want to convey the imminent influence she has on our thinking. Through our familiarity with her methodological practices and guidance, we identify and seek to elucidate two interrelated dimensions of field-working. Firstly, Barbara advises the researcher to adopt a position or disposition of *sense-maker* of organizational practices; in other words, to take on the role of an ethnologist to narrate not only what is observed about an actor or actant but also what one *experiences with* that actor or actant. Secondly, the researcher is encouraged take up an *accompanying role* by following the actor or actant; *shadowing* the phenomenon of interest within their environment and tracing organizational journeys. These two methodological considerations are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they enrich the fieldwork experience and its efficacy by creating what we have chosen to designate as a *third space*; a concept that we explore further below.

2. No data, no technique, no method

For Barbara, conducting fieldwork is far from merely collecting data or extracting information from participants, as is often assumed in methodological literature (Ehigie and Ehigie 2005; LeCompte and Goetz 1982). Again, in contrast to much received methodological wisdom (see, among others, Badubi 2017; Bryan, Klein and Elias 2007; Horwitz, Horwitz and Barshes 2011; Levy 2000), fieldwork does not simply entail the application of theories to *interpret* observations or merely make sense of people's actions within their organizational practices. Barbara is an ethnologist in the traditional sense of the term, that is, a researcher who primarily narrates their participatory experiences by recording and documenting observations *in writing* (ethno-*grapho*). That said, we also know of her inclination to employ photographic methods. As evidenced in her ethnographies at ANSA, Reuters, and TT (Czarniawska 2012), she records *images* of offices, machines, furniture, and other artefacts that constituted the

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texture of organizing in those places. She closely observes how people act and their relationships with the objects they use. Objects themselves are often viewed as actors or, following the influence of actor-network theory on her thinking, *actants*, and she is curious about how these objects shape the ways in which organizational tasks are performed. It is no surprise that, in our methodological encounters with her, she often alluded to the exemplary value of Julian Orr's (1996) ethnography of humans-machines interaction. However, Barbara's primary interest lies in language—not only in *what* people narrate about something, the content of their stories but, more importantly, *how* they narrate their organizing; or, as she and Gagliardi prefer to put it, discovering the narratives we organize by (Czarniawska and Gagliardi 2008).

For Barbara, the act of writing—ethno-*graphy*—lies at the very heart of ethnological research. Narrating observations is not merely a *component* of the process but, rather, constitutes the core task of making sense of fieldwork experiences. It is not just about recording what people do or say; it is the obligation to *articulate* those actions and thus transform field phenomena into a third narrative. As she insists, the reason for "stepping into" the field is "because both the actions and the accounts of action abound there" (Czarniawska 2007: 9). Interestingly, in many of her didactic writings concerning how to conduct fieldwork, Barbara critically examines what organizational studies define as "organizational ethnography" (Czarniawska 2007; 2008; 2014a; 2014b; 2017a; 2021; Czarniawska-Joerges 1991; Czarniawska and Kranas 1991), and, in our view, does so with well-founded and compelling arguments. The term "organizational ethnography", as a syntagma, is used in some literature, to denote a research paradigm rather than a method (see, among others, Bell 2010; Cunliffe 2010; Gaggiotti, Kostera and Krzyworzeka 2017; Kostera and Harding 2021; Ybema, Wels and Yanow 2009; Yanow 2009). Such an approach is much more attuned with Barbara's conception of research. However, more frequently, "organizational ethnography" is employed to describe a qualitative data collection technique. As Dahles, Höpfl and Koning (2014) have observed, the term is often reduced to a methodological approach adopted by researchers who combine observations with interviews. There is even organizational studies literature which advocates conducting "ethnographic interviews" (Spradley 2016); a proposition that would seem preposterous from an orthodox social anthropological understanding of what rigorous ethnographic discipline entails (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Geertz 1988; Rosaldo 1986, Shostak [1981] 1990). Indeed, we would contend that Barbara's position is aligned more closely with the tradition of social and cultural anthropology (see, among others, Ingold 2008; Wolcott 1999) than with the often-denuded versions of ethnography promulgated in some management and organization studies literature. It is only when organizational ethnography is deployed by organization scholars as "more than method", that it begins to align with what Barbara considers "ethnology" proper.

This is a crucially important point. As we are eager to point out, most research that justifies its methodology under the term "organizational ethnography" does not produce ethnographies in the strict sense of the term, that is, a corpus of recorded descriptions, interviews, collection of artefacts, materials or audiovisuals produced when narrating experiences of the field. Attenuated forms of "organizational ethnography" typically do not refer to what is written or narrated—as Barbara would insist—by researchers immersed in their fieldwork. Little research in organization studies, for instance, includes detailed and extensive descriptions of observations, or engages *deeply* with the writing experience of the researcher in the field. By contrast, anthropological practice—considered by Barbara as the

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foundational discipline for ethnography (Czarniawska-Joerges 1989; Czarniawska 2001; 2009; 2011)—traditionally requires the full inclusion of fieldwork materials (for example, in appendices), making them openly available for readers to make transparent the basis upon which analyses are constructed and interpretations developed (see among others, Malinowski ([1922] 2013); Mead 1928; Radcliffe-Brown 1922); Whyte ([1943] 1993). Ethnographies are archived and accessible to other researchers for further study, allowing scholars from various disciplines, not only anthropology, to engage with this material and develop their own analyses without conducting first hand fieldwork.

On this topic, Hugo Gaggiotti recalls discussing with Barbara the limited visibility of ethnographies within academic production in the field of organization studies. One key argument is that, since many researchers in this field are affiliated with business schools, the tradition of scientific production in these kind of institutions has not systematically incorporated the publication of extensive ethnographic corpora. Interestingly, these lacunae in practice contrast with examples of work hailing historically from the foundations of the discipline; take, for instance, the extensive ethnographic corpuses published by Elton Mayo (1933) and the anthropologist Lloyd Warner (Warner and Lundt 1941). In more recent times, with some exceptions (see for example Mol 2002; de Rond 2017; O'Doherty 2017), most scholarly outputs in organization studies do not include ethnographic material generated during fieldwork. In other words, the *publication* of ethnographies as independent documents is not typically practiced within the management and organization studies field.

While we draw inspiration from Barbara's "ethnology of organizing" and recognize its enduring influence on us and others, our argument also points toward ways it can help address other contemporary critiques of organizational ethnography. Recent debates have highlighted the limitations of conventional organizational ethnographic research (Alcadipani and Cunliffe 2024) addressing, among other organizational settings, the digital (Akemu and Abdelnour 2020) or the mobile organizing (Bjørner and Schrøder 2019). The inspiration from Barbara's "ethnology of organizing", with its emphasis on narratives, multi-situated practices, and the multiplicity of voices, should provide resources to respond to a variety of organizational settings. It encourages researchers to foreground reflexivity, to engage with the polyphony and to experiment imaginatively with forms of organizational enquiry.

3. The ethnologist: a "good" writer

Barbara was an exceptionally gifted writer, so it might be unsurprising to learn that another issue we discussed with her on several occasions is the *quality* of writing in ethnographic-based research. In this regard, she maintained, rather provocatively, that many anthropologists and other social science writers do not develop sufficiently sophisticated narrative skills which, in turn, undermines the dissemination and impact of their work, including the ethnographies they produce. The anthropologist Kristen Ghodsee, for example, ponders the point as follows:

> So why do so few ethnographers write clearly? The question perplexes me. Lack of training provides part of the explanation. In graduate school, professors concentrate on teaching ethnographic methodology: choosing a fieldsite [*sic*], clearing human subjects review, identifying primary informants, ethnographic interviewing, and so forth. If apprentice ethnographers must learn a new language, hundreds of hours will be dedicated to mastering a foreign grammar and syntax. If writing gets discussed at all, instructors focus

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> on producing fieldnotes. A plethora of books advise students on how to ethically deal with human subjects, make accurate observations about those subjects, and process those observations as ethnographic data (2016: 5).

In our conversations with Barbara, we consistently engaged in discussions about which anthropologists can be taken as exemplars whose writing style should be aspired to. Hugo Gaggiotti recalls several such exchanges but one, in particular, concerning the writing of the anthropologist Victor Turner stood out. Barbara appreciated Turner's style of conceptual framing, which involved narrating stories that often drew from personal fieldwork experiences. He employed an admirable simplicity of expression and never strayed into presumptuous or pretentious prose. Like Turner, Barbara was deeply influenced by literature, theatre, and philosophy, and she admired Turner's ability to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions. This was exemplified for her in Turner's critique of Van Gennep's concept of the "liminal" and his introduction of the concept of "liminoid".

Richard Handler also delves deeply into the complexities inherent in the task of writing ethnographies:

> Much ethnographic writing is boring. Most anthropologists do not have the writerly skills to translate personal experiences and personally observed scenes into incisive prose. Yet, writing—"fieldnotes"—is a central methodological tool of our discipline. Rendered as a written record, the experiences and scenes of the field become our data, often our most important data. Organized, edited, elucidated, and translated, those records become central in ethnographic writing and anthropological theory-building (Handler, s/d).

Engaging with ethnographies, by writing or reading, is a distinctive practice of the ethnologist. For Barbara, another is *experiencing* field-working itself. For Barbara, fieldwork implied a certain "stay", "in situ", which could be of a shorter or longer duration (Sambrook, Hillier and Doloriert 2024). In some cases, a relatively quick "dip" into the field is justifiable; an approach described by some organizational ethnographers (or "ethnologists", as Barbara prefers to call them) as "quick and dirty ethnography" (Vindrola-Padrós and Vindrola-Padrós 2018). However, Barbara proposes a more dynamic and flexible conception of field-working, characterized by displacement and mobility (Czarniawska 2007). It is not only a matter of being *in the field*, but of establishing a *relationship with the field*; being part of the field. In this sense, field-working involves an immersion that, although not necessarily prolonged in time, would allow the researcher "to make the field a place to stay".

Knowing that one of us (Hugo Gaggiotti) is an anthropologist by training, Barbara discoursed extensively and vividly on this topic during personal exchanges. She held a broad understanding of anthropology and the way anthropologists engage in their production of ethnographies. And in her writing, she consistently compared the ethnographies produced by organization studies scholars to those produced by classical, rather than by contemporary, anthropologists. She did, however, recognize that the subjects and themes of study within organizational ethnology would (and should) differ from those of cultural and social anthropology. In identifying realms of inquiry for management and organization studies scholars, Barbara asserts that:

> In our case, it will not be nations or peoples [that will be the subjects of study], but professions or communities of practice – not their way of living, but their way of working

Submitted 19/02/2025 – Accepted 21/10/2025

> (organizational scholars have no mandate to intrude in people's personal lives) (Czarniawska 2017a: 3).

Barbara's approach to fieldwork reveals an important methodological distinction. For her, remaining in the field represents less of an emotional experience and more of an interpretative exercise—what might be called *analytical elucidation*. This sets her apart from organizational scholars like Yiannis Gabriel. Though both scholars were close colleagues sharing a deep intellectual passion for organizational storytelling, Gabriel places greater emphasis on the emotional, symbolic, and psychoanalytic aspects of fieldwork (Gabriel, 2017). Barbara, by contrast, takes a more reflective and analytical stance. While she recognizes that emotions are an inevitable part of fieldwork, she stresses the importance of learning to systematically "decipher" these emotional responses rather than simply experiencing them (Sclavi, 2007).

4. Towards and ethnology of organizing

> Organizational ethnography seems to be in fashion … but I am not sure what exactly is meant by the term. In general, I am more interested in organizing than in organizations as such, so I would prefer to use *a term that permits wider interpretations*. My term would be ethnology (Czarniawska 2017a: 2; added emphasis).

Barbara is vocal and forthright in arguing that, when observing and participating in organizing as researchers, we should adopt the role of ethnologists. In this respect, although she is more post-structuralist and discourse–narrative oriented, Barbara shares similar commitments with other organizational researchers, such as, John Van Maanen (1988) who typically adopt more mainstream approaches to fieldwork. Barbara was not against the production of "classical" ethnographies of organizing but certainly expressed more vocally her aversion for the term *organizational ethnography*. She has a similar way of conceptually distinguishing ethnography from ethnology as many social anthropologists. Take, for instance, Isabelle Flemming, for whom:

> Ethnology is highly theory driven, using a comparative approach with the writings of ethnographers to search for commonalities that may underlie all cultures or human behaviors. In addition, ethnology takes a broad view, comparing cultures or looking at the deep history of a culture in order to explain why and how it functions as it does…ethnographies differ from ethnologies in that the former are *descriptive*" (Flemming 2010: 153, added emphasis).

Ethnology offers to Barbara, as she says, a *wider interpretation* (Czarniawska 2017a: 2) of being part of organizing when field-working; an opportunity to reflect, not only on how to write (*graphe*) but also on how to make sense (*logos*) of organizing. One of the key contributions of her thinking with respect to becoming an ethnologist of organizing is the capacity of her writing to challenge both colleagues and PhD students to examine and expose their reflective stance when field-working. Clear examples of provocations and critique in this regard can be found in most of her methodological writing (Czarniawska 2008; 2014a; 2014b; 2017a; 2021).

So, what would be the key features of *an ethnology of organizing* as conceived by Barbara? First, the act of "observing". From a methodological perspective, observation proves to be a far more complex process than commonly assumed. Barbara is fully aware of this complexity, making

Submitted 19/02/2025 – Accepted 21/10/2025

profound points and offering substantial arguments in many of her methodological writings. A key starting point for her exploration of the act of observing is the distinction drawn in post-Enlightenment scientific and social scientific inquiry between the "subject" who observes, and the "object" of observation. Typically, the object observed is not the observer themselves but something or someone external, establishing a fundamental *separation* between the observer and the perceived. In other words, observation presupposes the existence of someone or something external to the subject, one considered distinct from the observer and, as such, subject to external observation.

This assumption of difference between the observer and the observed, and the tension it gives rise to, lies at the heart of many of the methodological debates that interested Barbara (Czarniawska 1985; 2014a; 2014b; 2017a; 2021). Her discussions and inquiries centre on how this distinction shapes our understanding and conceptualization of the dynamic relationship between actors, actants and researchers, as well as consideration of the epistemological consequences of orthodox subject/object duality. For Barbara, reflection on such issues is crucial, enabling her to examine not only the philosophical implications of observation but also to consider its effects on organizational theory and the theorizing of organizing (Czarniawska 2014c; Czarniawska and Wolff 1986).

Secondly, the researcher's role. For Barbara, one's conception of the role of the observer and adoption of a research "position" is not only a methodological decision but also an ethical choice. She makes the normative point that this choice carries with it a responsibility and insisted that researchers should avoid reducing the other to a subordinate position in relation to the researcher. They should also refrain from making attributions about what the other feels or thinks. Barbara goes so far as to argue, for example, that researchers studying organizations do not have the moral right to inquire into individuals' emotions or make attributions based on participants' narratives (Czarniawska 1983; 2017b). In this respect, Barbara shares Latourian conceptualisations of individual and networked actions as observable practices (Latour, 1993, 2006), and vocally rejects any explanation of organizational life using behaviourist models.

The limitation of research knowledge generated under assumptions of subject/object duality is also illustrated by Barbara's assertion that the most effective way to learn something is through direct practice—by doing it oneself. She ranks observation, along with what she refers to as the experience of fieldwork as secondary in the hierarchy of knowing. However, for Barbara, the experience of fieldwork involves much more than observation or participation as an observer. Barbara argues that an outside observer cannot know more than an actor about that actor's own actions (Czarniawska 2014a; 2014b; 2017a; 2021). In other words, while an observer can observe, describe, and make sense of a practice, they cannot *know* more than actors in situ about their particular practice. According to Barbara, it is impossible for an observer to understand an organization more deeply than those who experience it, as it is precisely these actors who produce and reproduce it.

However, according to Barbara, an observer can focus on those aspects of the observed practices that capture their attention. The observer may also recognize unfamiliar differences between the actions of the actor and what they themselves would have done, or failed to do, in a similar situation. In this sense, observation does not suggest superior knowledge; rather, it offers a *different* and distinct perspective, shaped by the *observer*'s position and experience (Czarniawska 2014a; 2017a; 2021). This perspective is further enriched and refined through a

Submitted 19/02/2025 – Accepted 21/10/2025

translative dialogue with, and observation of, the actor on the understanding of *difference* between the observer and observed.

In her writing Barbara is aware of the complexity involved in observing contemporary organizations, which, by their nature, are both recognized and, in many cases, familiar to us, and which we can "make sense of" by drawing on our own alternation of being immersed in similar and different experiences during fieldwork (Czarniawska 2007; 2008; 2014a; 2014b; 2017a; 2021; Czarniawska-Joerges 1991; Czarniawska and Wolff 1986).

Nevertheless, Barbara remains committed to provocative critique in her methodological writing. A clear illustration of Barbara's argumentative, even agonistic approach in this respect is found in her frequent debates, whether in written/published exchanges (Czarniawska 1986; 2007; 2008; Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges 1990) or personal encounters. Barbara consistently advocates for the value of engaging with and building relationships around *difference*, asserting that it is precisely in the confrontation with otherness that meaningful insights emerge.

A reconstruction of a remembered personal conversation may help illustrate the point we are making:

> HG: I am not sure about your arguments in respect to the benefits of observing differences.
> BC: Why not? The day when everything you observe is fully understandable is an indication that the day has arrived for you to step back and leave the field. You have become too comfortable; therefore, you have lost your critical stance.
> HG: But I have the experience of the opposite. For example, there came a day when doing some recent research when I understood everything being said at a meeting. But this was not a signal to retreat; rather it presented an opportunity to deepen engagement and collaboration. It signified to me a matured grasp of the context, language, jargon, and dynamics at play, which enhanced my critical thinking and analytical insights.
> BC: Hmmm… write about it.

This type of argument with Barbara produces exactly the effect she seeks to engender for readers who engage with her works: not necessarily agreement or disagreement but, rather, provocation that throws one back on oneself and invites further reflection and reasoning. In this regard, her style of engagement with interlocuters and readers is decidedly Socratic; an outcome, almost certainly, of her own close familiarity with classical dialectics.

5. Observing and doing

Debate concerning the relationship between observing and doing are, of course, not new and have been a subject of reflection long before Barbara engaged with it. Anthropologists have used the concept of "participant observation" or similar methodological perspectives to discuss the benefits and limitations of the interaction between observing and doing almost since the inception of the discipline (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Malinowski ([1922] 2013); Mead 1926; Radcliffe-Brown 1922).

Participant observation is understood as a hybrid approach that integrates both action and observation, as "participation" involves acting and engaging in collaboration with others on an equal footing. For Barbara, participant observation is an exemplary research method (Czarniawska 2017a) precisely because it merges these two elements of doing and observing.

Submitted 19/02/2025 – Accepted 21/10/2025

However, Barbara is aware of the challenges involved in implementing participant observation in organizations that she categorizes as "modern". She argues that participant observation is questionable in these settings due to issues related to power, confidentiality, ethics, and other factors. What stands out most in her reflections, however, is the difficulty she perceives in attempting to combine participation and observation *simultaneously*. For her, this duality is not only challenging but often impossible. Action and reflection on action cannot occur simultaneously, she maintains; thus, reflection is always delayed, occurring after the action itself. As she notes:

> Observers are able to see alternatives—and to distinguish among them. But actors can see alternatives only in the moment of reflection, of observing, of not acting (2007: 9).

6. A theorist of organizing and doing fieldwork

As an ethnologist Barbara adopts a methodological perspective that traces the path from the field to theory, rather than starting from a pre-existing theoretical framework to analyse organizing. This approach shapes her particular interest in "shadowing," which, as we explore further below, represents for her a main stance and disposition that researchers should adopt in the field. Shadowing enables theoretical reflection based on the experiences and concrete manifestations of *being with* actors. One of our conversations with Barbara shed more light for us on what she meant by "shadowing". During the exchange in question, she expressed reluctance to assume a predetermined theoretical position before entering the field. According to Barbara, a restrictive theoretical perspective not only limits the understanding of what is happening in the field but also interferes with the interpretation of the actors' experiences. In her view, imposing a preconceived "theory" on the practices of the actors—a priori *theorization*— is counterproductive. For Barbara, the primary starting assumption is to conceive of actors as *authentic experts in their own practices*. In this regard, the ethno-*logos*'s task is not to explain practices through theory but to assume a role closer to that of a *translator* whose function is to express and try to understand the practices as they are defined from the perspective of the actors implicated (both human and non-human).

Barbara does not reject or deny the presence of theoretical frameworks before entering the field, nor does she dismiss them during fieldwork. Instead, she views these frameworks as an inescapable part of the researcher's background; an inherent aspect that cannot be avoided. However, she emphasizes that theoretical pre-conditioning should not dictate the researcher's approach to observation or fieldwork. It forms part of the researcher's pre-existing knowledge but should not define the way in which the researcher engages with the field. This perspective aligns with the approach taken by many ethnologists, who often carry a "suitcase" of theories and models, sometimes reluctantly. Great skill is required, moreover, in bracketing or suspending one's theoretical presumptions and predispositions.

Barbara's perspective can be illustrated through examples drawn from our own research. In our studies of international management, international cooperation, and the movement of global ideas and practices, for instance, the body of work and thinking associated with "postcolonial theory" (Banerjee and Prasad 2008; Prasad 2003; 2012) has exerted a significant influence and been an undeniable presence when we have conducted fieldwork. However, these theoretical frameworks did not dictate a conceptual structure for engaging with the field or for interacting with our participants. It is impossible to ignore the theoretical literature that

Submitted 19/02/2025 – Accepted 21/10/2025

addresses the circulation of ideas and global management practices, a theme that has been central to many of Barbara's reflections over the past three decades (Czarniawska-Joerges 1988a; 1988b; Czarniawska and Joerges 1996), without acknowledging the notion that these practices can be understood as an epiphenomenon of colonial relations. One of us, Hugo Gaggiotti, studies the expatriation of managers. In his work, postcolonial theory significantly influences his approach to understanding multinational expatriation (Gaggiotti 2006; 2013; 2024). From this theoretical perspective, the expatriate is conceived as a colonial agent. Similarly, postcolonial theory plays a key role in Peter Case's research on management practices, leadership, and organizing in international development contexts but were never explicitly "present" during the participative fieldwork and shadowing activities that formed the data reported in subsequent publications (Case et al. 2017; Case and Śliwa 2020; Greenhalgh et al. 2019; Alexander et al. 2017).

In both cases, and without denying the significant influence these perspectives have had on our way of imagining and understanding organizational practices in these contexts, this influence does not *determine* or sway our moment-by-moment fieldwork experiences. On the contrary, considering this perspective allows us to engage with what Barbara emphasized throughout much of her reflections: recognizing the distinctions between the role of the researcher and the role of the actor. This is not to suggest that one should approach the field with the assumption of "being different" simply because one is a university researcher and the actor is not; rather, it is precisely because of the multitude of ideas, concepts, images, and even ideologies that one brings from another context and position to the field—ideas and dispositions that the actor does not necessarily possess or share—that it becomes possible to *translate* observed practices into ethnographies. We understand this possibility as central to Barbara's ethical approach to field-working. Drawing inspiration from Clifford Geertz's symbolic anthropology and Richard Rorty's philosophical pragmatism, Barbara stated that:

> Knowledge of other practises and other interpretations, indeed … awareness of other thought worlds, can only deepen the understanding of the phenomena at hand (Geertz, 1988) and increase our solidarity both with the community we live in and communities that are alien to us (Rorty, 1989) (Czarniawska-Joerges 1991: 295)

This approach to elucidating what is brought to the field, and what is done within it, stands as one of the most productive axes in the thinking and methodological reflections that Barbara shared with us. However, just as observation proves difficult to define, so too does the concept of the "field", particularly when it comprises spaces as complex and dynamic as "organizations". *Being in the field*, according to Barbara's perspective, is not merely a matter of presence but also entails "participating" in organizational practices that are in constant flux, even as the fieldwork is being conducted.

Barbara's interest in shadowing and her rationale for why it became the ideal method for studying organizations (Czarniawska 2014b) has a strong intuitive appeal for us when considering not only one's theoretical stance but also when reflecting on the more mundane, routinized work of the ethnologist in the field. Shadowing represents a quintessential dimension of her ethnological method, the most effective way to engage with organizing. Her perspective on shadowing is heavily influenced by the work of linguist Marianella Sclavi who inspired her approach to the method, something she explicitly confides:

Submitted 19/02/2025 – Accepted 21/10/2025

> I had learned about "shadowing" from Italian sociologist Marianella Sclavi … The main attraction of this approach for me was my ability to tackle the peculiarities of contemporary management and organizing: the coeval and multiple times, the simultaneity of events occurring in various settings, the non-simultaneity of experience, and the virtualization of a growing number of practices (Czarniawska 2014b: 91-92).

Barbara is well aware of the antecedents of the concept of shadowing, particularly in the work of Wolcott ([1973] 2003), but she argues that it is Sclavi's contributions that truly systematized and refined its application. For Barbara, as with ethnology, shadowing is not merely a technique or method; it embodies a deeper, more nuanced attitude or disposition to fieldwork.

Shadowing offers Barbara an opportunity to reflect on the indeterminate nature of being in the field. It enables her to critically examine the issues she identifies with participant observation in organizations, particularly their ephemerality and spatial/temporal specificity. In traditional participant observation, one engages in and observes activities that occur at a particular moment and location, such as rituals, ceremonies, or the celebration of an event. With her characteristic sarcasm and sharp irony, Barbara often suggests that this static approach to fieldwork is emblematic of archaic anthropology. As she perceptively points out:

> Most of us who attempted such an "anthropological" approach to organization studies were influenced by traditional anthropology, a´ la Malinowski: watching native dances during the day and going at five o'clock to the British Embassy (Malinowski that is, not the organization scholars). But we, in fact, sat in the secretary's office or in a coffee room and observed. What became clear sooner than later, however, is that there were long periods when the observer was left alone until five o'clock. No dances, no rituals: people went in and out, seemingly always on their way (Czarniawska 2014b: 91).

Barbara consistently advocates for fieldwork practices that are adequate to representing the nature of modern organizing, emphasizing the need to study "on the move". She views shadowing as a form of ethnological practice in motion, one that aligns with her vision of being in the field, writing, collecting, producing a written corpus (ethno-*graph*)—as a fluid and adaptable approach to organizational sensemaking (ethno-*logos*) (Czarniawska 1999). The point is made emphatically in the following quote:

> I believe that there is an urgent need for a mobile ethnology: ways of studying the work and life of people who move often and quickly from place to place (Czarniawska 2007:17).

Being with Barbara in the field entails inhabiting a *third space*: a dynamic space within which the socio-material world is manifesting in constant motion and variation. In this space, we shadow actors (both human and non-human) and, in turn, actors and actants shadow us. We learn from them as they learn from us. These two essential characteristics of Barbara's approach to fieldwork can combine to offer fascinating and original insights. Together they constitute a perspective that reveals similarity with, and difference from, the actor. The researcher's responsibility is to *translate* everything observed: what is seen, what happens, and what is experienced. Simultaneously, however, it means being a participant in a deeper sense (*logos*) and requires surrendering to and immersing oneself in the unfolding organizing. In this way, the researcher is not merely an observer and a collector, but a companion, someone who chooses to be present rather than absent, walking alongside the actor and, as Marianela Sclavi

Submitted 19/02/2025 – Accepted 21/10/2025

suggests, finding enjoyment in the experience. Humour, as Sclavi and Czarniawska say, plays a vital role in the research process, as it serves as a means of offering explanations, creating meaning, and navigating the complexities of what is observed.

7. Conclusion

By highlighting Barbara's outstanding contribution as a *methodologist*, we aimed to provide a clearer understanding of the stance in the field that any ethnologist of organizing, following her guidance, should adopt. Through Barbara's advocacy of ethnology, we discover a range of nuanced and multifaceted research practices. We are able to view organizing as interconnected and relational sets of ongoing processes which can be narratively recovered by engaging and learning with actors and actants. Such participative and engaged field research involves moving, translating, transfiguring, and constantly scrutinizing what we think we know, as well as discovering what we have yet to understand. This is the essence of what Barbara meant by *learning in the actor's shadow.*

It is sad to reflect that we will no longer be able to discuss these and other topics with Barbara in person but, nonetheless, through her prolific and prodigious writing, we are still afforded the opportunity of *being in the field with her*. We can read and reread her remarkably insightful and revealing ethnological work. We can ponder her reflections and the analyses she teases out, appreciate her ironic wit, and smile with her. So, let us end with an invitation to "shadow" Barbara and, in that shadow, learn to learn from actors. This methodological exercise involves developing what could be described as a practical "toolkit"—recommendations similar to those produced by Marianella Sclavi (2007), in her ethnological masterpiece *La signora va nel Bronx* [An Italian Lady Goes to the Bronx]. What follows is Hugo Gaggiotti's reconstruction of this toolkit, distilled from years of shadowing Barbara and following her guidance:

1. Do not rush to conclusions. They are the most perishable parts of research; what endures are the stories you tell and retell about how you arrived there.
2. What you see is always shaped by your standpoint. To understand your own perspective, you must be willing to step outside it and adopt another's viewpoint—preferably through engaging with quality academic and non-academic literature.
3. To truly grasp what another person is saying, begin by assuming they are right. Then ask them to narrate the reasoning that sustains their truth, not yours.
4. Emotions are not "disturbances." They speak a relational language through metaphor, and learning to read this language is fundamental to conducting research.
5. Listen—and try to "shut up." A listener becomes an ethnographer of possible worlds. The most revealing signals are often those that appear marginal, irritating, or resistant to your expectations, because they disrupt your assumptions and invite you into new narratives.
6. Do not fear contradiction, whether in yourself or others. Misunderstandings are not "failures" but opportunities to engage in the vital work of translating practices into livable stories.
7. To become skilled in listening, cultivate irony and humour—not as decoration, but as method. Once you learn to listen narratively, humour emerges naturally, because the multiplicity of stories is always simultaneously tragic and comic.

Submitted 19/02/2025 – Accepted 21/10/2025

The seventh principle encompasses all others: narrative listening is at once serious, ironic, and humorous. These guidelines offer more than methodological advice, they provide a window into what it means to be in the field with Barbara herself.

Keywords

ethnology, ethnography, shadowing, organizational research, narratives of organizing, Czarniawska

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