

# **Swarm research in service of researching publics**

*Floor Basten*

*Campus Orleon, floorbasten@orleon.nl*

## **Abstract**

Many have grown accustomed to the idea that academe is the sole source of significant scholarship. When it comes to knowledge about the social, society is still largely unheard. Campus Orleon is a campus of independent researchers who want to change this monopoly. 'The public' is not silent nor ignorant. Therefore, the divide between public and private sociology can be challenged, with consequences for public decision making and democratic arrangements in knowledge creation. The public has research capacities that this campus wants to bring out. To do so, we are developing swarm research as a methodology. In this paper I describe the four principles that underpin it. First, it is narrative. We use events and the stories we collect there as our data and input to create meso stories that give the events their logic. In turn, our meso stories focus our attention to relevant events. Second, it is networked. We collaborate in the swarm as a learning environment in which we invite others to participate. Third, we assume complexity and look for patterns that help us, part of these patterns, to make sense of what is happening. Fourth, we deconstruct the event and its context, deliberately seeking a breakdown of the normal to open up new perspectives and reach new insights. Bricolage as methodological negotiation is pivotal. With swarm research, we not only develop knowledge about the social, but also about the methodologies with which we research the social. With this, we offer a model for counterexpertise in researching publics.

## **Keywords**

Swarm research, bricolage, researching publics, narrative, network, complexity, deconstruction.

## **Introduction**

There was a time before what Jencks and Riesman (1968) called "The Academic Victory" that took place in the sixties: "Academe had assumed a dominant role in our culture and society. That dominance blinded us to independent scholarship, of the vast amount of intellectual work that goes on, and had always gone on, outside the academy" (Gross, 1982/1993, p. xvii). That was the time of the so-called Invisible University, "what universities were before the ivy had centuries to grow: people learning together. There is no central quad, since the approach is to learn everywhere, from the infinite variety of databases, information sources, and materials that exist" (Gross, 1982/1993, p. 29). Academia's victory and subsequent monopoly on gate keeping intellectual work and serious research started to preclude great thinkers who "achieved intellectual prominence without benefit of a faculty position. Forgetting them, we assumed that doing serious intellectual work entailed being a professor. Academe seemed the sole source of significant scholarship" (Gross, 1983/1992, p. xvii). There is good reason to reconsider this Invisible University, as social, environmental, economic and other issues reach a degree of complexity that no single institution can fully understand nor grasp. As Jasanoff (2003) puts it, we need to set aside our technology of hubris, in which policy makers and experts are involved in an exclusive and closed circuit of problem solving. Instead, we need to move on to a technology of humility, in which citizens work together with policy makers and experts. In such a context they collaboratively frame the issue at hand, define vulnerability and consequent vulnerable groups, reflect on the consequences of distributed technologies and/or other solutions, and learn (Jasanoff, 2003). A technology of humility advances step by step in the private/commercial sphere as open innovation unlocks the way to consumer loyalty and helps corporations to better attune to (new) markets' needs (Chesbrough, 2006 and 2011). However, although there are small-scale experiments at the municipal level, a technology of humility in the public realm is still in its infancy. Politicians, policy makers and professionals in social work do listen to 'the public' more and more, yet still tend to seek some form of neutrality and therefore look at universities when it comes to 'truth' and 'knowledge'. Academics themselves are often hard pressed to participate in innovation outside of their research community. For instance, the reception of Mode 2 (Gibbons et al., 1994) was mostly positive, but also revealed universities' reluctance to fully engage in public private partnerships for technological innovation (Nowotny, Scott, & Gibbons, 2003). As in sociology, the resistance that new concepts and methods such as public sociology (e.g. Burawoy, 2005), public research (Mahony, Newman, & Barnett, 2010) and the flipped academic (Bruton, 2012) meet with, suggests that the field itself is divided about its position in society and readiness to be involved. Of course, as a

ritualized form of philosophical exchange dispute has always been inherently present in science (Shapin, 1994), but the positioning of researchers in society also touches upon issues of social responsibility, taking sides and, as some would say, activism (e.g. Letherby, Scott, & Williams, 2013).

When it comes to knowledge about the social, society is still largely unheard. It is considered a responsive body that can be polled or even asked to offer its wisdom (e.g. Surowiecki, 2004), but it is not valued as a knowing body that initiates its own theorizing and problem solving. Its analyses and solutions are still largely perceived and received as folklore and common sense. But while policy makers, experts and academics predominantly remain hesitant in involving society, that same society is better educated than ever. For instance, Cyranoski et al. (2011) note that the expansion of higher education has boosted the number of PhD graduates, but that most of them never get a chance to take full advantage of their qualifications because the (academic) job market is tight. With increased candidates and decreased vacancies, it is safe to say that there are more academics (PhDs) outside than inside universities. ‘The public’ is by no means a silent mass (Baudrillard, 1986) nor an ignorant one. Therefore, the divide between public and private sociology can be challenged (Butler, 2009). Butler (2009) acknowledges Buroways’s effort to draw attention to the potential of public sociology, but criticizes the suggested divide between public sociology, focused on social justice, and professional sociology that is more a private affair of academia. Instead, she argues, it “is neither completely public nor completely professional” (p. 2) and in “everyday life, as well as in academia, the separation of private and public is an illusion” (p. 2). She draws on the approaches of governmentality, critical realism and second modernity to “question the automatic usage of age-old sociological concepts such as race, gender, and class in traditional social work” (p. 2) and stresses the need to re-examine and re-structure these so-called zombie categories. This, we believe, has consequences for public decision making and democratic arrangements in knowledge creation.

This paper is about a network of independent researchers who believe that the research potential of a society is larger than that of all its universities together. These researchers are organized as a campus, called Campus Orleon. The reference to ‘campus’ is not coincidental, as this term indicates a place of knowledge and a place of practice. As I am one of the members of this campus, where appropriate I will write in the first plural. I describe here a research method that emerged from our conversations about research methodology in open societies and that we are testing today. This method, swarm research, also turns out to be an organizing principle for our own learning. First, I describe how swarm research came up in our campus dialogues. Second, I outline how we have researched as a swarm so far. Then I theorize about this kind of research and the epistemology that grounds it.

## **A brief history of the campus and its swarm research**

In 2008, I initiated Campus Orleon as a network in service of researchers. In the six years that followed, the campus has evolved both quantitatively and qualitatively. The major transformation is that of a loosely coupled network into a researchers’ university in creation. In quantitative terms, some six hundred people (mostly located in the Netherlands ) are connected to the campus today. Of them, 107 are professors of universities (of applied sciences), an additional 138 members have a PhD and 167 prepare for a PhD. Also, 188 are entrepreneurs and 225 are professionals in a variety of fields. These numbers add up to more than six hundred. This is because the campus is a researchers’ university in creation to which people relate in a special way. Alboher (2007) uses the notion ‘slash career’ to describe the trend that people have multiple occupational activities and personal pursuits. When asked, less and less people can tell what they do in one single description. They are manager AND student, artist AND researcher, scholar AND activist. Our campus is for managers, administrators, policy makers, artists, professionals, entrepreneurs, consultants and many others, who ALSO research. What is behind their slash and what brings them together on the campus, is their lust for research and their ambition to organize research in society.

In qualitative terms, the campus has developed from a rather non-committal social group to a lively network in which more and more members actively participate. One of the driving forces for this change was a differentiated membership. Originally, membership was a matter of either/or: either one was a member, or not. Today one can opt for two forms of membership. A free membership is available for everyone who is curious about the campus, wants to stay informed about its progress and wishes to make use of the expertise it develops. Members with a paid subscription invest in the campus financially and morally. They are actively involved in strategic planning and the development of new products and services. All members are important links in our ambition to bring out the research capacities of our society, but it was a change in how we organized ourselves as entrepreneurs in research that brought about the development of a new research method, swarm research.

It all started when one of the members expressed the desire to co-create a curriculum in postmodern studies. The invitation to the campus network to participate met with a lot of enthusiasm. In three months time, twenty five

members worked together to create a two-years curriculum for professionals and PhD candidates, and to express the didactical and pedagogical principles that underpin the methodological content. The joint effort and intense discussions that entailed our work, created an appetite for more collaboration. To satisfy this need, I organized ongoing-dialogue sessions with an interval of five or six weeks, meant to continue the inspiring conversations we had had so far and to distil from them a jointly told story about the campus: what does it stand for in terms of researchers' commitment, methodologies of choice and our role in society? In the first dialogue session, one of us stressed that what had been attractive in the curriculum building collaboration, was that we were actually producing something. Therefore, she said, we should not only talk, but also act. She suggested to participate in an event on sustainability and we came up with the idea to do so as researchers, to collect data real time and report back to the organizing party. To make it more interesting than an elaborate evaluation of the event, we decided to all use different kinds of methods, so in the end we could compare our results and see what method produces what findings. In the second session - the event we were going to research had not yet taken place - we had a brainstorm to explore images and metaphors that would capture the campus spirit. One of us came up with the word 'nest', because he saw the campus as a breeding place for researchers who take time to hatch their eggs, but also have a particular taste for what is smouldering in society. From that point on, the 'nest' concept guided our thinking about the campus and ourselves as independent researchers. The sustainability event was our pilot for what we got to call swarm research. Below I describe how we put it into practice.

## The swarm as an organizing principle

The curriculum building collaboration had already made clear, and the ongoing dialogue reconfirmed that we were dissatisfied with detached ivory-tower research and technologies of hubris, and that we wanted to engage with the practices in which we research and with policy making about those practices. We felt this was a part of our citizenship. We also wanted to show our engagement in our writings and other manifestations of our analyses and interpretations by differentiating between our own voices and those of others, both within the practice (co-participants) and beyond (theories, models, previous experiences and findings). Recurrent themes in our dialogue were

- narrative and the desire to a) hook up with current events and social issues, and b) create meaningful meso stories that connect individual micro stories with abstract macro stories, thus giving sense to them both.
- networks and the desire to a) find ways to organize ourselves starting from what we all are committed to, and b) connect as a campus with others, work together in a diversity of partnerships and be visible as an active party in a larger movement.
- complexity and the desire to uncover the parameters between which social processes move, so we can identify meaningful patterns and look beyond simple explanations and solutions.
- critical theorizing and the desire to deconstruct smooth - and therefore determinist or fatalist - stories in order to uncover potential alternatives.

We translated these themes as the core principles of how we want to operate into the method of swarm research. Up to now, we have performed swarm researches in events about sustainability and/of environmental education, non-university career perspectives for young PhDs, networks for social entrepreneurs, emotionally regulated learning processes, the idea of university, and circular economy. I do not go deeper into the content of the events as this is beyond the scope of my paper, in which I aim to describe the method. Next, I describe the procedure we developed in the course of our swarm researches.

### How swarm research works

The steps we have taken in the above-mentioned researches were:

- 1 One of us spots an event of potential interest and invites the network to create a swarm.
- 2 Those of us who take an interest in the theme and have the opportunity to visit the event, respond positively and form an initial swarm. One or more editors step forward. Those unable to attend the event, can join later as essayist or (co)editor. So far, the size of the swarms varied between four and eight participants.
- 3 The initiator of the swarm contacts the organizing party and arranges a meeting (face to face or by telephone), in which he or she explains the purpose of swarm research and asks if it is possible to do one during the event at hand (so far, all swarms were welcome). Arrangements are made, so that the swarm can do its work (for instance, free entrance, an announcement of the swarm in the opening words). The organizing party agrees to distribute our report in its own network, regardless of our findings. We offer the possibility to contribute to the report with a joint introduction and/or joint conclusion and/or proper essay.

- 4 We meet (face to face or via Skype) to prepare our visit. We all formulate a preliminary research question we would like to answer based on the event. We also choose a method, making sure that there is a variety of methods. So far, we had participatory observation, short interviews and small surveys.
- 5 The swarm visits the event and collects data. In between programme components, we meet and share our preliminary findings, thus attuning our data collection based on refinement of our research questions. We actively invite participants of the event to contribute to the report (in some cases, they have).
- 6 After the event, there is a deliberation in which we pick an angle for our essay. Usually this is the one thing in the event we found the most exciting, surprising, annoying or unusual.
- 7 Everyone, including those not present at the event, drafts an essay and shares it in the swarm. In the essays, we link our observations to broader theoretical notions and concepts and/or to other events we visited as a swarm and/or other observed trends in the broader context of society. There are no clear guidelines for style and the essays range from one or two pages that invite readers into what-if territory to ten to fifteen pages that give voice to the unheard or uncover a hidden logic and provide substantiated claims.
- 8 We peer review the essays by email and Skype, which helps us to better make our point.
- 9 The chief editor writes a foreword, a section on the process of swarm research and one on the empirical data. He or she also writes a final section, in which angles from the individual essays are put into a broader, encompassing framework that allows the reader to see how the sometimes diverging parts make sense in a coherent whole. This section also includes recommendations for how the organizing party can move beyond the event as a single happening and make its effects longer lasting. These new texts are again peer reviewed.
- 10 All texts are bundled in a report, that is firstly emailed to the organizing party and secondly offered in person by the initiator and editor(s). Here we enter a negotiation about the findings of the report. Essays can be critical about the organizing party and/or its clients and thus harm vested interests. Because the organizing party has promised to distribute the report nonetheless, there is room in the report for the organizing party to respond to our criticism and this room is usually taken.
- 11 Both the campus and the organizing party distribute the final report in their respective networks.

We endeavour to keep the time between 1 and 11 as short as possible because we do not want to lose the topicality of the trend of which the event is a concrete manifestation and of which it derives its legitimacy for the participants. So far, we have delivered between one and four months after the event.

### **Campus principles in the swarm**

How does swarm research as a method fit in the core principles that emerged from our ongoing campus dialogue? It is congruent on all four points, as I will explain below.

It is narrative, as a) swarm research is event based, b) the stories of those involved (organizing party, participants, ourselves) are as data the most important starting point, and c) we create meso stories connecting angles per event and between events as well as theories and empirical observations. With our reports, we aim to provide a broad perspective in which all angles make sense. We do not strive for consensus as this would lead to the suppression of small, dissonant observations for sake of a cohesive, compelling 'grand narrative'.

It is networked, because we create small, temporary networks on campus (the swarm that is attracted to the event) that reach out to other networks (the organizing party, the participants of the event, their networks) and try to connect the networks in order to render visible a larger movement in which the individual events take place and make sense. When others accept our invitation to join, the diversity in the swarm grows and we draw from more disciplines and types of knowledge (academic, professional, by experience). This is supported by the meso stories we create, which provide an underlying logic.

We embrace complexity, as we choose a diversity of methods to research one and the same event and demonstrate how different perspectives provide different data and different conclusions, that yet are all valid. In the peer review processes we explore how we can connect the dots and look for recurrent patterns, so we can see what the parameters of our analysis are and define the field in which the event in particular and adjacent events take place. In other words, we abstract from the particular (the researchers' perspectives, the event at hand, what the organizing party adds) and create a perspective that encompasses all analyses.

In order to be able to change perspectives ourselves, we apply deconstruction. This reminds us of asking relevant what-if-questions. What if there was no keynote speaker or what if the speaker was someone else? What if there were no parallel sessions in closed rooms but an open space? What if the catering was different, what does the host want to express with these food and beverages? An event can be seen as a narrative, a story that the organizing party wants to tell and a context that reflects this story, but that also shows subtle clues about what the organizing party does not want to or cannot tell. What-if questions help us to stay keen on these subtleties. In most cases, they are the starting points for our essays. We also deconstruct our own discourse, for instance when we tend to get too self-conscious and forget that paradigms other than our own can be valid in their own right. This is when our peer review discussions become most vivid, which in turn helps to be more

articulate about what we as a campus stand for. In this sense, all swarm researches are also inputs for a meta swarm research about the campus.

This is what we have been doing in the past fifteen months as a network for people with ‘lust for research’ behind their slash. But why? Most of us have lots of activities and passions before the slash and we are still looking for ways to make swarm research profitable in financial terms. So what is it that we are willing to make this investment for? ‘Lust for research’ itself is a strong motivator, but we want more. We want to bring out the research capacity in our society by inviting the public to research its issues by itself. Our swarm research is how we exemplify one method for this. In the next section I discuss how we learn from this all, because our own learning is another reason why we invest in swarm research.

## Theorizing in and about the swarm

A first theoretical framework for the research capacities in and of a society was developed for a conference on knowledge democracy (Basten, 2010). Key in this framework was the notion of ‘public’, defined as “all of those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for” (Dewey, 1927, pp. 15-16). Narratives about the event would be a necessary input for researching social issues, I reasoned, as they reveal the experiences of all those concerned and map how they make sense of what happened. I acknowledged the importance of transdisciplinary research (e.g. Regeer & Bunders, 2006), but found its connotation with university research too explicit:

Events create publics and all those involved can initiate research, inviting others to join. Therefore I propose to rename transdisciplinary practices to ‘researching publics’. If the pattern is that existing institutional forms don’t provide an adequate framework for the settlement of issues and a public subsequently arises to remedy this failing, then there’s no reason to limit this pattern to politics and to not extend it to science. In the latter case, one can think of science institutions that don’t provide an adequate framework for understanding the social and a public that arises to correct conclusions that derive from categorical thinking and a priori groupings. (Basten, 2010, p. 83)

The symposium I hosted at this 2009 conference can be seen as a swarm research *avant la lettre*, as I invited several people to reflect on the notion of ‘researching publics’ from their respective perspectives. It is often in hindsight that our actions follow a logical sequence. It is also often in the course of action that theoretical notions become relevant as we tag along. These two last remarks point at how we construct swarm research as a learning environment. This begs for some remarks about our epistemology as it repeatedly turns up in our dialogue. Bricolage as a collective endeavour turns out to be a key concept. Like Kincheloe and McLaren (2005), we see theory as a cultural and linguistic artefact, not as a way of understanding that operates regardless of the context:

The task of the bricoleur is to attack this complexity, uncovering the invisible artifacts of power and culture, and documenting the nature of their influence on not only their own works but on scholarship in general. [...] In its hard labors in the domain of complexity, the bricolage views research methods actively rather than passively, meaning that we actively construct our research methods from the tools at hand rather than passively receiving the ‘correct’, universally applicable methodologies. Avoiding modes of reasoning that come from certified processes of logical analysis, bricoleurs also steer clear of preexisting guidelines and checklists developed outside the demands of the inquiry at hand. [...] Researchers’ interactions with the objects of their inquiries, bricoleurs understand, are always complicated, mercurial, unpredictable, and, of course, complex. Such conditions negate the practice of planning research strategies in advance. In lieu of such rationalization of the process, bricoleurs enter into the research act as methodological negotiators. (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 317)

Bricolage challenges us to articulate our social theories and so we flutter between our individual observations and social theories on the one hand and our attempts to collaboratively create meso stories on the other. Methodological negotiators have to deal with epistemological issues as well, so our ongoing dialogue always includes theorizing about what knowledge is and how we obtain it. Developing and discussing the method of swarm research has enabled us to reflect on this. As bricoleurs, we did not start with planning a research strategy, but we came up with one that made sense. This paper is intended to explain why this is so, using theories we had and theories we learned about along the way. In a sense then, writing this paper is for me exemplary for what I do in a swarm research. There is an event (a call for papers) and I respond (this paper). I

make an observation (there is a campus of researchers who want to bring out the research capacities of their society, for which they developed a method that they call ‘swarm research’) and I theorize about why there could be a valid logic for what I observe (the legitimacy of swarm research). Below I discuss how the campus principles apply.

### **Narrative learning**

Our learning is narrative, as it is event based. We notice something in particular and research it further to substantiate the legitimacy of what we noticed, and its consequences. Moreover, the stories we collect are in themselves sources of knowledge. Further, we deliberate on the meso story that recasts the individual observations into a shared logic. It is also narrative in two other ways. First, we respond to events. This is a naturalistic attitude: things happen in the world out there and we can describe them (representation of empirical data). Second, we also create stories. This is a constructivist attitude: we notice things happening because they fit the stories we have spun so far (the essays in which we make our perspective explicit). As Culler (1981) states, these attitudes are mutually exclusive, but using both adds depth to the analysis.

### **Networked learning**

Our learning is also networked, as we enlarge the public in which we share our observations (the organizing party, participants who want to contribute, their networks). As said before, networking with social actors resembles the creation of jointly told stories, what we call meso stories. A rationale for research as the collective project swarm research is, can be found in Scott’s discussion of relativism and relationism (in Letherby et al., 2013). Sociology has to abandon ‘the methodology of the positionless account’ (a term of Dorothy Smith), and

there is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective ‘knowing’; and the more effects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘object’ be. (Nietzsche in Letherby et al., 2013, p. 27)

For the social position of the intellectual, Mannheim envisions a ‘relativ freischwebende Intelligenz’, “a relatively classless stratum which is not too firmly situated in the social order” and “capable of experiencing concomitantly several conflicting approaches to the same thing” (Mannheim in Letherby et al., 2013, p. 53):

Relatively impartial intellectuals, then, are an ‘interstitial’ category that exists ‘between’ the major social groups. Their solidarity derives solely from their intellectual interests and concerns and not from any pre-existing class, gender, ethnic, or other social constructs. They do not, therefore, align themselves with any particular party or political programme. [...] Their relative detachment enables them to take a broader outlook and make a more considered and better-thought-out response that takes account of a wide range of viewpoint. (Letherby et al., 2013, p. 53)

Whenever we create a swarm, we create a learning environment in which we can research together. Our peer reviews ensure that we produce knowledge as a collective. As for partisan causes, we do have political views, but the diversity on campus ensures that our political choices are not party specific, but rather orientated towards open, inclusive and democratic societies. Thus, we identify ourselves with Bourdieu’s ‘collective intellectual’ (2010), a model for counterexpertise that fulfils negative functions as it “works to produce and disseminate instruments of defence against symbolic domination that relies increasingly on the authority of science (real or fake)” (p. 181). But the collective intellectual can also fulfil a positive function “by helping to create the social conditions for the collective production of realistic utopias” (p. 182), for instance with joint research on novel forms of action, mobilization and collaboration, or as a midwife who helps with “the reappropriation and accumulation of the immense social stock of knowledge on the social world with which the social world is pregnant” (p. 182). Bourdieu’s intellectuals define their own research agendas and come up with their own policy solutions. Based on their own scientific research, they take their political stands. In other words, they learn, as we do, by taking part in society as researching citizens or, in our words, in a researching public.

### **Complexity oriented learning**

Our swarm research is a form of lively science. Lively science is concerned with research on humans in their social worlds by other humans (Agar, 2013). The methodology Agar (2013) proposes is to collect evidence that is already out there and organize it by a logic or plausible description to reach a conclusion or explanation that is then tested by trying to prove it wrong. It involves a rational reconstruction of “something that already happened based on the evidence it leaves behind. Then that reconstruction, in turn, becomes a hypothesis to test against new data” (Agar, 2013, p. 80). The goal is figuring out patterns. This, he suggests, is a way of learning. Finding

a pattern is understanding which parts interact and understanding their interaction is knowing what matters in a pattern. But human social systems do not sit still and therefore, says Agar, one must also discover how they move and change through time:

What we can do is show how several events interact to produce a system that emerges and then changes from one time to the next and sometimes produces surprises. [...] The result? We can predict a space of possibilities, and we can show how if you were at one point in that space you could make a good guess about the next nearby point and react accordingly. (Agar, 2013, p. 52)

In our swarm, learning is complexity oriented as we look for patterns that are obvious and not so obvious. We try to identify the parameters of patterns and so define the space in which the patterns move (path dependency). Deconstruction and what-if questions help us to prelude to changes within the possibilities of that space: “Prediction becomes a description of the limits of the space within which different paths can occur” (Agar, 2013, p. 59). Complexity has consequences for the validity of our findings. In a lively science, researchers are a legitimate part of the data as they are part of the field they research. Regarding the evidence-based rational reconstruction, they do not “have to claim that it represents anything other than [their] hard work to learn, test and make clear how a third-person outsider can understand a first-person inside’s intentionality” (Agar, 2013, p. 83), and show “how subject intentionality is part of a larger lived experience pattern” (ibid., p. 89). Their research is also path dependent, as their activities progress their insights and these, in turn, inform what needs to be learned next. Because a lively science is research on humans by other humans, it is done between subjects, intersubjective: “Different results in an intersubjective science mean an opportunity to learn more about the space that a human social world might travel, more about paths not taken and possible paths it may take in the future” (Agar, 2013, p. 129). This resonates with the dialogues we have on campus and in our swarms.

### **Critical learning**

Finally, our learning is critical, as we look for a breakdown of the normal. As Brinkmann (2012) argues, everyday life is a rich source of data. He offers a theoretical frame based on Mills’ ‘intellectual craftsmanship’ and ‘sociological imagination’ and on Maffesoli’s threefold adagio: the researcher is an active participant in the social life she researches, the research is focused on understanding the human experience, and the researcher displays conceptual audacity by making the mundane intellectually interesting and challenging. This frame is also grounded in pragmatism and hermeneutics: everyday life absorbs and makes unreflective, until the normal loses its meaning and one is stimulated to experiment and develop new understandings that can help with new ways of handling. Brinkmann offers two strategies to recognize the self-evident in everyday life or, as we do, in events. The first is alienation. Sometimes a breakdown emerges out of everyday life, otherwise one can create a breakdown by alienation and taking a different stance, for instance (Noblit & Hare in Brinkmann, 2012)

- a phenomenological stance (make the obvious obvious): describe a phenomenon as if you experience it for the first time or to someone who has never experienced it before.
- a critical stance (make the hidden obvious): look beyond the surface and demonstrate the working mechanisms underneath.
- a deconstructive stance (make the obvious dubious): show that meanings and understandings are unstable and ambivalent by presenting alternative versions of the truth.

The second strategy is Peirce’s abduction (also used in Agar’s lively science). With abduction we learn about an object through its effects. What makes the unexpected effect meaningful has to be related somehow. In this jump the sociological imagination plays its part.

### **Discussion**

The metaphor of the swarm is limited and we are well aware of that. For instance, compared to birds we as humans have a capacity to learn much faster. Also, we do not only attune our fluttering based on a small set of simple rules (join if you want to, choose a question and a method, share, discuss, revise), but we involve theoretical notions and observations that are not grounded in the particular event, and our memories. Still, a swarm of sparrows is a fascinating sight that attracts the eye. How a few birds fluttering attract others that join until a critical mass is reached, that is an image we like to hold on to for ourselves: a campus of independent researchers who flutter between theory and action that attracts other to join until a critical mass is reached and our society is a network of researching publics. Whomever is attracted to that idea can consider this paper as an open invitation to join.

## References

- Agar, M. (2013). *The Lively Science. Remodeling human social research.* Minneapolis. Mill City Press.
- Alboher, M. (2007). *One person/multiple careers. A new model for work/life success.* Warner Books.
- Basten, F. (2010) *Researching Publics.* In 't Veld (ed.) *Knowledge Democracy – Consequences for Science, Politics and Media.* Heidelberg: Springer.
- Baudrillard, J. (1978). *A l'ombre des majorités silencieuses ou la fin du social.* Paris: Utopie.
- Beck, U. (1992) *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity.* London: Sage.
- Bourdieu, P. (2010). *Sociology is a martial art. Political writings by Pierre Bourdieu.* Edited by Gisèle Sapiro. Translated by Parkhurst Ferguson, Nice., & Wacquant. New York: The New York Press.
- Brinkmann, S. (2012). *Qualitative Inquiry in Everyday Life.* Los Angeles: Sage.
- Butler, K. (2009). *Blurring Public and Private Sociology: Challenging an Artificial Division.* *Sociological Research Online* 14(4)2. [doi:10.5153/sro.1970]
- Bruton, A. (2012). *The flipped academic.* <http://theinnographer.com/flipped-academic/> [viewed 30 September 2013].
- Burawoy, M. (2005). *For public sociology.* *American Sociological Review*, 70, 4.28.
- Chesbrough, H. (2006). *Open Innovation: The new imperative for creating and profiting from technology.* Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press.
- Chesbrough, H. (2011). *Open services innovation. Rethinking your business to grow and compete in a new era.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Culler, J. (1981). *The pursuit of signs. Semiotics, literature, deconstruction.* London: Routledge.
- Cyranoski, D., Gilbert, N., Ledford, H., Nayar, A., & Yahlia, M. (2011). *Education: The PhD factory.* *Nature* 472, 276-279.
- Gibbons, M., Limoges, C., Nowotny, H., Schwartzman, S., Scott, P., & Trow, M. (1994). *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies.* London: Sage.
- Gross, R. (1982/1993). *The independent scholar's handbook. The indispensable guide for the stubborn intelligence.* Berkeley, CA, USA: Ten Speed.
- Jasanoff, S. (2003). *Technologies of humility: citizen participation in governing science.* *Minerva*, 41, 223–244.
- Jencks, C., & Riesman, D. (1968). *The academic revolution.* New York, NY, USA: Doubleday.
- Kincheloe, J. & McLaren, P. (2005). *Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research.* In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research.* (pp. 303-342). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications (third edition).
- Letherby, G., Scott, J., & Williams, M. (2013). *Objectivity and subjectivity in social research.* Los Angeles: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Mahony, N., Newman, J., & Barnett, C. (2010). *Rethinking public research. Innovations in research, theory and politics.* Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Nowotny, H., Scott, P., & Gibbons, M. (2003). *Mode 2 revisited: the new production of knowledge.* *Minerva*, 41, 179-194.
- Regeer, B. & Bunders, J. (2009). *Knowledge co-creation: Interaction between science and society. A transdisciplinary approach to complex societal issues.* VU University Amsterdam/Athena Institute.
- Shapin, S. (1994). *A social history of truth: civility and science in seventeenth-century England.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Surowiecki, J. (2004) *The wisdom of crowds: why the many are smarter than the few and how collective wisdom shapes business, economies, societies and nations.* Toronto: Random House, Inc.